CHAPTER-VI
CONCLUSION

Social and religious reform movements among the Sikhs in the Punjab during the late 19th and early 20th century have drawn the attention of a number of scholars. The major concerns of these movements that are the Nirankari, the Namdhari and the Singh Sabha have been religious reform, identity, education and removal of social evils. The Singh Sabha movement, however, was the most important and widespread among the Sikhs. It fostered and kindled an outlook on the world around. The first Singh Sabha was founded in Amritsar in 1873 followed by a Lahore Singh Sabha in 1879. Within the two decades, there were Singh Sabhas in nearly all the towns and cities of the Punjab. It is remarkable that each Singh Sabha catered to a small area in practice but in theory believed itself as the representative of the whole community. For better coordination among them the Khalsa Diwans came into existence during 1890s followed by Chief Khalsa Diwan in 1902. Sikh Educational Conference was one of the important subsidiary organizations of the Chief Khalsa Diwan. Its major concerns were to co-ordinate and accelerate activities related to education among the Sikh men and women. Scholars have already contributed significantly towards our understanding of Singh Sabha movement and have underlined the significance of the activities of the Sikh Educational Conferences. However, there has been only a few attempts to understand fully the contribution of individuals and activists of the Singh Sabhas and the Sikh Educational Conferences towards the propagation and spread of education among women in the Punjab.

Singh Sabha movement besides the programme of religious revival laid great emphasis on the spread of modern education among the Sikhs. Singh Sabha leaders were keen to teach their boys and girls western sciences and languages in combination with Sikh beliefs and practices. This they realized would lead to the progress of the community. In this context the programme of education among women became one of the central issues of the movement.
Conclusion

To kindle the spirit for women education many Sikh activists founded Sikh Istri Conferences, Sikh Istri Vidyak Conferences in their areas. They propagated the girls education among the community. They visited various places and delivered speeches and took serious note of illiteracy among Sikh women. To a large extent they used Punjabi newspapers, periodicals to awaken the people about the importance of women education. For example the Khalsa Samachar showed serious concern for improving the position of the women in society. Most of the leading scholars of the movement like Bhai Jodh Singh, Bhai Mohan Singh Vaid, Bhagat Lakshman Singh and Principal Teja Singh were associated with this paper. From the very beginning the paper started a special column entitled ‘Istri Sudhar’ in 1899. It launched a crusade to emancipate women from the social evils and ignorance and advocated women education as the only remedy. The reformers felt that uneducated mother would be superstitious and would not be able to culcate moral and religious values among their children. For the progress of the Khalsa qaum, therefore it is required to educate and enlighten the women.

The Khalsa Tract Society of Bhai Vir Singh published some tracts which portrayed the concept of an ‘ideal Sikh woman’ and encouraged the women to walk on the same path. The tracts like Nisang Kaur Kikur Laj Kaur Ban Gai, Istrian Layi Amrit De Lorh, Jo Patti Suadaun Patti Arthat Qaum Nu Ghun Kehra Lag Gaya Hai? warned Sikhs against the influence of Christian and Hindu religions. On the other hand tracts namely Ik Kanya De Dukhary, Hai Hai Bachchi Tun Kithon? Bal Viah De Dukh, Tin Kunjian, Sushila, Bibi Bhain, Ghar Vich Suarg, Kharach De Tin Dhang and Gareeb Kaur dealt directly and indirectly with the necessity of women education.

Bhai Mohan Singh Vaid used ‘Hand Bills’ as a mean of propagation of religion and education. He wrote 42 hand bills in four years touching every aspect of society in form of short stories, queries with examples. These attracted a large number of readers. There was some newspapers and periodicals which were meant only for women. These were the Istri Satsang (1904), Amritsar, Punjabi Bhain (1907) Ferozepur, Istri Samachar (1908) Quetta, Bhujangan Patar (1917) Kairon and Istri Sudhar (1924) Amritsar. There were some short lived periodicals such as
Sughrh Sahali and two papers of Panch Khalsa Diwan of Bhasaur namely Khalsa Suani (1927) and Par-Upkari Mata (1929).

Sikh scholars Bhai Vir Singh and Mohan Singh Vaid gave references in their novels from the Sikh scriptures and history to promote gender equality. They depicted the idea of ideal Sikh women dedicated to the cause of *panth* in their writings. Bhai Vir Singh's novels Sundari, Bijay Singh and Satwant Kaur convey the message to women to be staunch believer of Sikh faith. Mohan Singh Vaid's novels Sushila Nunh, Sukhi Parwar, Sukhdev Kaur, Istrian Di Ajadi and Kammai Di Barkat present the idea of reform through the question of women education.

The efforts of Sikh reformers through writings, the press and conferences had awakened the Punjabi society. Simultaneously, they individually and collectively made efforts to establish educational institutions for women. Some of them founded educational institutions with boarding houses exclusively for women. These activists deserve to be discussed separately and individually because of their distinctive and substantial contribution to the cause of women education. Their commitment to the cause was absolute. Though, part of the large Singh Sabha movement, they were far ahead of the organization in the utilization of their personal resources as well. Prominent among them were Baba Khem Singh Bedi, Bhai Takhat Singh and Bhai Nihal Singh Kairon.

Baba Khem Singh Bedi, the main representative of the Amritsar Singh Sabha was the first man in the Punjab who started Gurmukhi *pathshalas* for girls. He was a man of wealth and influence in the west Punjab. He, therefore, opened and financed schools for women in Rawalpindi, Jhelum, Dhanni and Gujarat. He also gave liberal grants to these schools. Till his death, he spent 50000 rupees in total for the task. In Rawalpindi Baba Khem Singh Bedi founded 12 schools for girls partly supported by him and partly from the district fund. These schools were known as Baba Khem Singh Bedi Girls’ schools. There were more than hundred schools in Dhanni, Pothuhar and Suyaan. Among them more than fifty schools were recognized by government. In the beginning these schools were opened in the premises of *dharmsalas* or Gurudwaras and also in some rented portions. Gurmukhi was taught there. Baba Khem Singh Bedi’s contribution towards the
cause of women education was immense. He was popularly known among Punjabis as ‘Punjab da Rattan’.

The most passionate champion for women education was Bhai Takhat Singh. He is also known by the epithet of Zinda Shaheed (The Living Martyr). After completing his education, he started a school for boys in an old dharmsala of Ferozepur in 1890. Some prominent lawyers and members of Singh Sabha Ferozepur Sardar Chanda Singh, Bishan Singh and Babu Tek Singh came forward and supported him for the cause. Bhai Takhat Singh also started classes for women under same roof with the partition of a cloth. On the issue of girls' education, two groups emerged in Singh Sabha Ferozepur, one in favour of and one against it. Those who were against it raised many objections. They objected that educated women would become irreligious which would further lead to the erosion of Punjabi traditions and customs.

With the help of the supporters of women education, Bhai Takhat Singh opened the Sikh Kanya Pathshala in 1892. A woman teacher ‘Jeuni’ was appointed to teach them. After sometime, Bhai Takhat Singh got married with Jeuni who was later on known as Harnam kaur. To encourage people to send their daughters to school, Bhai Takhat Singh and Harnam Kaur went door to door. The opposition group of Singh Sabha many times created hindrances in their way. Bhai Takhat Singh, therefore, left the Singh Sabha in September 1900 and started to run the Sikh Kanya Pathshala privately with the help of his wife.

The Kanya Pathshala became popular and took its new name the Sikh Kanya Mahavidyala. The Mahavidyala began to attract students from neighbouring areas. To adjust them the Mahavidyala acquired a boarding house in 1904. Boarding house was called ashram, a respectable term. Bhai Takhat Singh served as manager and Harman Kaur as teacher there. The controversies that accompanied their venture were many and indicative of the anti-women education attitude of people. To calm the fears of the parents a hand bill, with the explanation of objectives of the boarding house was distributed in 1905 which had positive effect. People started sending their daughter to the ashram.
Many visitors came to the ashram and praised its functioning. Prominent among them were Maharaja of Nabha, Lieutenant Governor of Punjab, Tehal Singh, Nawab Nazim of Patiala and Bhai Mohan Singh Vaid. Bhai Mohan Singh Vaid visited the ashram on April 24, 1910 and praised the arrangement of langar, morning walk and other exercises. On January 18, 1911 the Lieutenant Governor of Punjab visited Sikh Kanya Mahavidyala with his wife and two daughters. Mrs. Lady Dane became very impressed by watching the girls speaking English.

The ashram became famous not only in India but abroad also or wherever the Sikhs had settled because it was the only high school for girls. The Sikh sangat sent their daughters to Mahavidyala from far off area like Peshawar, Gujarat, Hyderabad and other countries like China. The popularity of the ashram could not check the paucity of funds. The financial crisis of 1911 was the worst. To overcome the crisis there was an immediate requirement of 50,000 rupees. Bhai Takhat Singh did not have enough resources. He, therefore, left the ashram with a pledge that he would either collect 50,000 rupees or would never return. It was then believed by his friends and well wishers that he would never be able to collect that amount and therefore he would never return. It was in this context that he came to be called as ‘Zinda Shaheed’.

Bhai Takhat Singh visited many places like Malaya, Kualalampur, Shangai, Hong-Kong, Japan and was successful in collecting 58,170 rupees in total. He did face several odds in his endeavours but he remained firm and steadfast in his resolve. The ashram was benefited by the tours of Bhai Takhat Singh. People of far away areas of Peshawar, Rawalpindi, Gujarat, Kangra, Shimla, Ambala, Hisar, Burma, Bharatpur, Lucknow, Jhang, Aligarh, Nanital, Balochistan, China, Hyderabad, Madras and of princely states started to send their daughters to ashram. Along with Gurmukhi and Hindi, English was also taught in the Mahavidyala. It encouraged the people of other communities to send their daughters in the ashram. Bhai Takhat Singh’s efforts were distinct in this field when he introduced Science and teacher training courses for women. His school produced a good number women teachers.
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Another educationist who worked for the cause of women education in a village of majha was Bhai Nihal Singh Kairon. At young age, he realized that his village Kairon was backward due to the lack of education. People particularly women of the area were ignorant about the ideals of Sikhism. This situation was not much different from other parts of Punjab. He was exposed to new influences while he has in Hong-Kong. He after his return opened Kanya Pathshala under the District Board.

It became so popular that girls from far and near villages started coming to Kairon for education. Nihal Singh started boarding house to meet the demands of girls. It became famous as first village boarding school, named Bhujangan Ashram, Kairon. He also went to different places to meet the requirements of finance for the school building. He organized a jatha including girls of the ashram and visited many places like Malaya, Ipoh (Malaysia), Taiping, Kula Kangsar, Kualalumpur, Singapore, Hong-Kong and Burma to collect money. Facing many problems the jatha successfully returned home with financial aids. The Maharaja of Patiala extended his patronage to the ashram which was christened as Mata Sahib Kaur Bhujangan Ashram. Bhujangan Ashram was affiliated with District Board. In all classes the study included Sikh scriptures, Hindu scriptures, study of Gurmukhi, Grammer, Maths, Geography, History of India and English language. Hindi and Urdu was also taught to the students. Bhujangan Ashram became famous with in short time. The girls started to come from far areas like Lahore, Gurdaspur, Amritsar, Patiala, Rajasansi, Ferozepur and Hyderabad. Bhai Nihal Singh raised the status of women in society by establishing Khalsa Bhujangan Diwan, Bhujangan Council, Bhujangan Patar and organized them on a large platform to work for themselves.

As women education was given the ample space, the discussions and debates started on the syllabus of their study. The Sikh reformers were conscious about the objectives of women education. They wanted to produce ‘Ideal Sikhs Women’ who could fulfill the responsibilities towards society and their religion accordingly. The issues related the necessity of women education and their study courses raised widely in the Sikh Educational Conferences of Chief Khalsa Diwan.
The Diwan held Educational Conference every year by its Educational Committee founded in 1908.

The conferences have been divided into three phases on the basis of issues taken. During the first phase (1908-1918) Sikh reformers tried to make community conscious about the relationship between education among women and progress. It was the formative phase of the formulation of the subjects to be taught to women. For example at the 2^{nd} Sikh Educational Conference in 1909, reformers while emphasizing on the need to educate their women formulated a special study scheme for girls. The subjects like needle work, cooking, stitching were introduced in this study scheme. Another important aspect of this phase was that some women activists like Bibi Savitri Devi, Agaya Kaur and Ripudaman Kaur occupied prominent positions as the champions of women education. They spoke on the issues relating to women education at different forums at the Educational Conferences. The most important aspect of this phase, however, was to make woman a _gurmat kanya, gurmat bhain, gurmat istri_ and _gurmat mata_. The reformers declared that the future of the community lay in the hands of learned and talented women.

Major concerns during the second phase (1918-1928) was to organize Sikh Women Educational Conference. The activists achieved success when a resolution was passed on March 17, 1928 by the Educational Committee to hold Women Educational Conference with Sikh Educational Conference. Another important aspect of this phase was that the reformers started to point out the difficulties faced by them in spread of education like the lack of good books and scarcity of women teachers.

The third phase begins with 1928 when a new beginning was made. From 1929 onwards, the women protagonists Kuldeep Kaur, Bibi Pritam Kaur (D/o Bhai Takhat Singh), Bibi Amrit Kaur started to hold Women Educational Conferences regularly. 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...
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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.

The first Sikh Women Educational Conference was held at Sargodha in 1929. During the Women Educational Conferences the women activists pointed out the poor conditions of women at homes, less number of girl schools, apathy of government and local bodies towards their education. They also demanded to increase the number of women in the services of Educational Department. Continuing their efforts for the development of women education, they demanded a women college for Sikh girls during the 1934 and 1935 conference sessions. They fixed it as a target in 1935. As a result of their efforts, a Sikh women college was established at Lahore in 1940.

There was an expansion of educational institutions for boys and girls. The concerns of the Sikh reformers was to impart religious and moral education to girls at initial state of learning so they worked more vigorously to open primary schools for girls. There were 60 primary schools for girls in 1913. This number increased to 145 in 1935. The reformers were extra careful in preparing the syllabi for girls at the primary level. They always kept in mind the future utility of it for them. They always laid stress on religious education for women to transmit religious and moral values to the children. They also advocated that the skills of home science like cooking, nursing and tailoring should also be taught to women. So in addition to basic literacy, the syllabus of primary girls’ schools also included sewing, embroidery, cooking, music, poetry, hygiene and literature of Sikh religion.

The number of middle schools for girls’ remained less but equal stress was given to the religious education at middle level too. The books on religious literature like Guru Singh Itihas, Sukhmani, Japuji Sahib, Hanuman Natak, Vidaya Ratnakar were taught the girls at middle schools. In higher education, the Sikh Kanya Mahavidyala Ferozepur remained only high school till 1932. In 1936 Guru Nanak Kanya Pathshala, Amritsar, Gobind Girls High School, Abbotabad and Shri Guru Hargobind Ujagar Hari Sikh Girls School, Sidwan Khurd, Ludhiana reached
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up to high school level. Besides these, there was an Industrial School at Amritsar named as Khalsa Dastkari School or Teka Devi Industrial School. It imparted training to women in cutting, tailoring, embroidery and other handicrafts.

There were some persons who believed that to impart *gurmat* and elementary education to the children more primary schools should be establish, attached with village *dharmsalas*. But it was not always possible to open schools exclusively for boys and girls due to the lack of finance and shortage of trained women teachers. To solve the problem Sardar Dharam Singh, a contractor from Delhi came forward with the idea of co-education. It was the most economical method of educating girls. He started a number of schools in the neighbouring villages of Amritsar under a trust, Guru Nanak Vidaya Bhandar in 1926. These schools were affiliated with Chief Khalsa Diwan. In 1939, the number of co-educational schools under the trust went upto 58. They covered the districts of Punjab, U.P and Delhi. In these schools special emphasis was given to the handicraft works. Dyeing, printing clothes and leather work were taught the students. All these handicraft items were exhibited at the Sikh Educational Conferences.

In retrospect the Sikhs of the Punjab responded to the challenges thrown by Christian missionaries, Sanatanists, Arya Samajes and others by re-inventing themselves in the first place. They realized that in the scheme of social reform, modernization and progress the place and role of women was of crucial importance. Sikh periodicals, in general and the women focused among them in particular, contributed towards spreading awareness about the role of women in the processes of reforms. Opening of a number of schools for girls was a consequence of these efforts. Existence of Gurdwaras in school premises aimed at imparting modern education with traditional cultural and spiritual values. In this context the role of Baba Khem Singh Bedi, Bhai Takhat Singh and Bhai Nihal Singh Kairon was exemplary. The Educational Committee of Chief Khalsa Diwan by holding Educational Conferences annually brought the spirit of collectivity in the community for the expansion of women education in the Punjab.