PREFACE

The present work deals with the role of Sikh institutions in educating the Punjabi women during the late 19\textsuperscript{th} and early 20\textsuperscript{th} century Punjab. With the annexation of Punjab in 1849, the Punjab became a part of the British Indian Empire. As a part of the British Empire, the Punjab came to witness those innovations in the political, administrative, economic and social spheres which had already swept the rest of India. With the development of roads, railways, post, telegraph and the press, the Punjab came much closer to the rest of India than ever before. It opened new vistas for the Punjabis. New administrative policies and system of education meant the dissemination of new ideas particularly through the press. Various segment of the Punjabi society responded and reacted differently to the new opportunities in services and profession.

With the influx of the Bengalis in the new administration of the province, the ideas and programmes of the Brahmos entered the Punjab. Punjabis was also exposed to the ideas and programmes of Arya Samajists as well as Sir Syad Ahmed Khan. Such changes posed a challenge to all the communities of the Punjab. The activities of the Christian missionaries like the spread of education, the idea of social equality and the conversion of low castes further obliged the leaders of the Punjabi society to set their own religion houses in order. Re-evaluation of religious traditions, systematic formulations of religious beliefs and practices, propagation of the ideas through printing press and adoption of an educational system geared to social religious objectives became the common concerns of the Punjabis.

The Sikhs of the Punjab responded to the new situation in the form of Singh Sabha movement. Major concerns of the Singh Sabha were to arouse love for religion among Sikhs; to propogate the true Sikh religion everywhere; to print books on the greatness and truth of the Sikh religion; to propogate the words of the Gurus; to publish periodicals to further the Punjabi language and
Sikh education; individuals who oppose Sikhism, who have been excluded from Sikh holy spots and who have associated with other religions and broken Sikh laws cannot join the Sabha, if they repent and pay a fine, they can become member; English officers interested in Sikh education and the well-being of Sikhism can associate with the Sabha, also those who support the Punjabi language and do not speak against other religion; the Sabha don’t discuss matters relating to the government; the Sabha will respect well-wishers of the community those who love Sikhism and those who support truth and education in Punjabi.

Several scholars have focused on the social and religious reform movements among the Sikhs in the Punjab during the late 19th and early 20th century. Some of them do refer to the educational programmes of Sikh Sabha movement of Sikhs during this period but it is not their major concern. Published in 1970, N.G. Barrier’s pioneering work *The Sikhs and Their Literature*, had opened up new opportunities in extensive research on so far unexplored area of activities and impact of the Singh Sabha movement in the Punjab. This work is useful to us as it provided the context of the emergence, spread and evolution of the Singh Sabha movement. It serves as a starting point for our understanding of the socio-religious, cultural and political context of the Punjab in general and of the Sikhs in particular.

Barrier’s work was supplemented in the form of essays published in *Panjab Past and Present*, vol. VII, in 1973. These essays explored further the activities of Singh Sabha movement in its various forms and also dealt with the debates on various issues related to the community including the women education. However, the reference to the women education does not fall within the major focus of his works.

Joginder Singh’s work on *The Sikh Resurgence* published in 1997 is to study the dynamics of the resurgence among the Sikhs in the early decades of the twentieth century. The work deals with the origin, demarcation and standardization of the socio-religious and cultural beliefs and practices in the
context of the interaction between the Sikh scholars and British administrators. Covering familiar ground the author is concerned with the role of Punjabi language in the reconstruction of the Sikh history. The question of education among women, however, has been addressed only in passing in a chapter entitled ‘Socio-Cultural Reponses’. This work is useful for introducing us to the sources particularly in Punjabi language of this period.

Joginder Singh, addressed this question in another article published under the title “Women Education and Sikh Reformers: A study of Sikh Newspapers and Periodicals in the early 20th century” in the Journal of Regional History in 2001. It deals with issues related to women education. It is based on the newspapers and periodicals of Singh Sabha period. The paper based only on one category of sources introduces us briefly to the issues related to women education and gives us a lead to focus on these issues further.

Joginder Singh’s recent work Punjabi Journalism (1990-1947) Issues and Concerns published in 2012 focuses on the issues and concerns which were expressed and debated by the Punjabi newspapers and periodicals in the first half of twentieth century. He touches the issues related to women education only in passing.

Harjot Oberoi’s work The Construction of Religions Boundaries, Culture, Identity and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition, published in 1994. He focuses more on the sudden and striking expansion of the Sikh Sabhas in 1880s. Briefly he takes the question of creation of a print culture and a radically changed system of education. But women education was not his major concern.

Some scholars, however, have dealt with the question of women education in the larger context of gender issue of this period. Doris R.Jakobsh’s Relocating Gender in Sikh History published in 2003 is an important contribution to the study of gender construction in Sikhism. Jakobsh
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has divided the discussion into two phases, one the Guru period and the second the colonial period. In the first phase the work concentrates on the development of gender ideals under the Sikh Guru and in the second phase focuses on the Singh Sabha as a reform movement. The author analyses the adaptation of gender ideals and in some cases their transformation by the English educated intellectuals. The work also explores the educational initiatives that were meant to produce reformed Sikhs and the development of new rituals, identities and redefinition of the Sikh ‘Code of Conduct’. Jakobsh considers the question of women education in one chapter entitled ‘Education, Gender Codes and Politics’ and reflects that the educational initiatives of Sikh community for women were primarily meant ‘to make Sikh woman conclusively separate from their Hindu and Muslim counterparts’. Their effort, in fact, was to promote ‘a true female Sikh identity’. However to examine and highlight the programmes of the Singh Sabhas and other Sikh institutions with particular focus on women education is not the main concern of the author. The work, however, is useful and provides us a historical understanding of the role of women in Sikhism during our period.

A new dimension to the existing studies on women in colonial Punjab is added by Anshu Malhotra in her work, *Gender, Caste and Religious identities: Restructuring class in Colonial Punjab*. The study though does not focus on the Sikhs alone examines how the notion of being ‘high caste’ as it developed and transformed during the colonial period contributed to the formation of a ‘middle class’ among of the Hindus and the Sikhs. The main concern of the study is to show how a specific understanding of caste grew in colonial Punjab and the manner in which a people labeled as ‘high caste’ ‘casteist’ and ‘unmanly’ by colonial state, interacted dynamically with the institution in order to preserve the ‘inherited’ social advantage that followed from it, even as they took on the challenges of ‘modernity’. It has been further argued that the way in which caste became a significant ingredient of class formation had very serious implications for redefining women’s role in society. The treatment by the Punjabis with their girls and women was taken up as indicative of their
caste status. She has emphasized that women were classified as ‘high’ and ‘low’ as per the norms being invented by the patriarchal elite. They appropriated to themselves task to take decisions regarding the role of woman in home and society. For them it was an honorable task.

Amrit Walia’s *Development of Education and Socio-political Change in the Punjab 1882-1947* published in 2005 is a recent addition. It is a comprehensive study of the various aspects of education in the Punjab during British period in the wider perspective of developments at all India level. It deals with the growth of primary, secondary, higher, technical and female education and examines the social, political awakening achieved by the education in the country. The major concern of the author was the British policy towards education. She has also briefly outlined the role of private socio-religious organization including the Singh Sabhas in the development of education among women. The author has also made a point regarding the efforts of socio-religious institutions to change the public opinion for the education of women. It is, nevertheless, clear that there is a need to focus further on the efforts of Sikh organizations towards the spread of education among women in the Punjab.

The work is divided into six chapters. The first chapter deals with the historical background of mid 19th century when the movements among Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs aimed at to revive and revitalize their respective communities were started to face challenges that western influences had thrown particularly after the annexation of the Punjab in 1849.

Second chapter deals Singh Sabha movement and its literary works for social awakening. Singh Sabha was the first body of the Sikhs which took the question of education along with identity issue of community. The leaders of this movement realized the education as a road to progress in social and religious affairs. They began to establish schools and colleges for the children. The women education was considered equally important. Infact, it became a need of the hour. They realized that to impart religious education to the Sikh
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youth nothing could be more useful than education of their women who transmitted moral values and religious traditions among children at tender age. To awaken people about women education they made extensive use of the printing press to foster the cause of women education.

The third chapter deals with the Sikh activists who established institutions exclusively for women. Among them Baba Khem Singh Bedi in Rawalpindi, Bhai Takhat Singh in Ferozepur and Bhai Nihal Singh Kairon in a village in Amritsar district were prominent. They committed themselves to the cause of women education to the extent that they utilized their personal resources for the purpose. They propagated the cause by undertaking personal tours, door to door campaigning and through the various other means such as newspapers and periodicals.

The fourth chapter focuses on the issues and debates which were raised in Sikh Educational Conferences on the question of women education and their subjects of study. The emergence and role of Sikh Women Educational Conference which gave a platform to women for debating the issues concerning them has been highlighted in this chapter.

The fifth chapter examines the expansion of educational institutions for women during the period. The protagonists of women education were more interested to impart primary education to girls. They, therefore, opened a number of Kanya pathshalas in number of towns and villages of the province. In higher education there was only one high school, the Sikh Kanya Mahavidyala Ferozepur till 1932. The other high schools Guru Nanak Kanya pathshala, Amritsar; Gobind Girls high school, Abbotabad and Sri Guru Hargobind Ujagar Hari Sikh Girls School, Sidwan Khurd, Ludhiana started in 1936. This chapter also includes the co-educational schools working under the Guru Nanak Vidaya Bhandar Trust, Amritsar. There are some persons who believed that to impart gurmat and elementary knowledge to the children a number of schools should be opened, attached with village dharmsalas. Sardar Dharam Singh, a contractor from Delhi was one of them. It was not always
possible to open schools exclusively for girls and boys. Lack of finances and shortage of trained women teachers were the main hindrances. Dharam Singh solved the problem by starting co-educational schools under a Trust.

The sixth chapter forms the statement of findings in the previous five chapters. It is followed by appendices, a glossary and detailed bibliography. Non-English terms are explained in the glossary.

The study is based on contemporary sources in Punjabi, literary sources, newspapers and periodicals, official records, private papers, personal interviews and official publications like Gazetteer and Census Reports. Besides the primary sources, a number of secondary sources have been consulted including encyclopedia, books, research articles. Ph.D. Thesis and M.Phil Dissertations have also been found useful for this study.

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(Amandeep Kaur)