

# Educational Issues as Depicted in Khalsa Samachar Newspaper (1899-1925)

## Abstract

Khalsa Samachar was started on November 17, 1899 at Amritsar. The major concerns of this paper were to arouse love of religion among the Sikhs while interpreting the Sikh history, to propagate Sikh religion in and outside Punjab, to educate the Sikh masses using Punjabi as the medium, to establish separate socio-religious and cultural identity of the Sikh Panth. The Khalsa Samachar was organ of Singh Sabha before merging both Amritsar and Lahore Singh Sabhas and organised under one Sikh organisation Chief Khalsa Diwan in 1902 after it this was published under the patronage of Chief Khalsa Diwan.

**Keywords:** Chief Khalsa Diwan, Sikh Panth, Sikh Organisations, Newspapers, Women Education.



**Ramandeep Kaur**  
Research Scholar,  
Dept. of History,  
Guru Kashi University,  
Talwandi Sabo, Punjab  
India

## Introduction

Early twentieth century was the growing time for the age of education because people become aware that Education can raise the standard of the community. Among the means of education and of national and religious advancement, the newspaper ranks very high. The present newspaper Khalsa Samachar supplied this need. The changes and improvements the newspaper has brought into the world are commonly known. All of Europe's progress is due to the awareness through newspapers. Most of the people in those countries might for go some of their temporal wants, but not their newspaper. In our nation, however, this taste for the newspaper has not yet developed and this is the reason of our backwardness. For the promotion of our language and script it is necessary that good journals are started, for every advanced language has been in the newspaper columns.<sup>1</sup>

## Aims of the Study

1. To trace the importance of education in Punjab in early twentieth century.
2. To discuss the role of press for the awareness of education.
3. To investigate the female education system at that time.
4. To find the role of Sikh Educational Conference for the development of education in Punjab.
5. To discuss the position of schools in Punjab in early twentieth century.

## Main Text of the Study

In the issue of Khalsa Samachar of December 18, 1901, Bhai Vir Singh tried to awaken them on the degrading condition of Sikhs. Khalsa Samachar guided Sikh organizations to establish their own educational centres to educate youths in Sikh principles as Christians and Arya Samajists were doing. It many times warned the parents that their children would go off track from the Sikh way of life and become non-Sikhs if they were sent to non Sikhs educational institutions. To prove its contention it quoted statistics regarding the conversion of the Sikh youth either to Arya Samaj or Christianity. It made an appeal to Sikh leaders to establish Khalsa institutions in which Sikh history and theology would be taught. Celebration of birth and death anniversaries of the Sikh Gurus and martyrs would include as an essential part of their curricula.<sup>2</sup>

Education was main issue in British Punjab for every community to achieve their communal rights. Propaganda of modern thoughts was also necessary point to develop any community. Newspaper advocated that if a community wants healthy, upright and unselfish member, the quickest, surest and the easiest way is to educate that most powerful of all influences- the mothers at home. The hand, head and heart of Punjabi girls

## Remarking An Analisation

and women should be evenly and harmoniously cultivated, so that they may discharge with grace and efficiency the duties of whatever stations of life they belong to, as wives or mothers or responsible members of society.<sup>3</sup>

Khalsa Samachar explains that the foundation of Sikh Educational Conference of Chief Khalsa Diwan was a important phase in the history of Sikh educational movement. The ideal of the Sikh Educational Conference was to impart education to every Sikh Girls , Boys and Adults, whether rich or poor. It has not only worked for the education of boys but also of girls for whom a large number of educational institutions were established. The one of the aims of Sikh Educational Conference was to further the cause of women education among the Sikhs. By working on its aim the conference did great efforts to expand women education in the province. At the very first session of the conference, held at Gujranwala in April 1908, Sardar Shivdev Singh Oberoi emphasized on 'education of Sikh women'.<sup>4</sup>

Sikh Educational conference takes initiatives for education to Sikh Women .In the session of April 1908 Sikh Leaders emphasized that education for Sikh women is necessary. At that time seven Khalsa Schools were in Punjab but in 1447 number of Schools increased upto 340.Sikh activist started appealed to the people for come forward in the field of education.

Newspaper informs us, sometimes, appeals were made publicly from specific area for opening of the school for girls. Such kind of appeal was made from the uneducated girls of doaba in 1910s. As result a Sikh Kanya Pathshala was opened at Doshanj Kalan, district Jalandhar. There were eight to ten schools for boys in the area but not a single school for girls. The protagonists of girls' education, therefore, took debt for the building of the pathshala. The Sikhs living outside the country contributed rupees 8000 for the building. Maharaja of Patiala Sher Singh who was a contractor, also contributed rupees 1000 from each. Bhai Kartar Singh left his permanent job and actively participated for collected money for the same purpose. Mr. Hemraj<sup>5</sup> visited on October, 13, 1916 for conduct examination to Patshala, he was very impressed from the location, Boarding House for girls and says that Girls studied regarding needle work and kooking besides education.<sup>6</sup>

It is clear from the above with the reference of Khalsa Samachar that these institutes were playing crucial role in the upliftment of girls special Sikh girls. Many things were learning by girls in these institutions like stitching, weaving and cocking. Morality and religious teachings were another ideological topic to learn for these students.

It can be noticed that the percentage of literate women among Sikhs had increased from 1.2 to 2.7 in 1921 and further to 4.9 in 1943.<sup>22</sup> The intellectuals from other communities started attended the sessions of Sikh Educational Conferences and noted their achievements. The Lieutenant Governor of Punjab stated about the success of Sikhs in education in 1913. The Khalsa Samachar noted the statement of Lieutenant Governor as below:<sup>7</sup>

"It is the result of these important Sikh institutions that education spread widely among the Sikhs. Most important thing in education is they provide good position to women of their religion which has not given by other community."<sup>8</sup>

Director of Education Department of Punjab Reported in 1914-1915 that

"In all the districts of Punjab the activities of the Sikh Educational Committee were being felt. The Educational Committee of the Chief Khalsa Diwan was working strenuously to disseminate education among the Sikh community."<sup>9</sup>

In 1920 Lieutenant Governor of Punjab Sir Edward Maclagan stated as below:

"I have been much struck on my return to the province after an absence of some years to see how generously the Sikh community now supports the cause of education. Wherever I go I see Khalsa schools almost all quite new, well-built and well-founded which have been provided by the liberality of the panth."<sup>10</sup>

The Guru Nanak Vidya Bhandar Trust was actively contributed in the education for untouchable children.<sup>11</sup> The Bhandar schools successfully provided co-education. In 1939 there were 52 schools worked in Punjab at the 9 districts. Among 52 schools 8 were night schools where adults were given instructions. The total number of students of these schools was 3135. They were 1990 boys, 968 girls and 177 adults. The students admitted without any distinction of caste and creed. 2557 Sikhs, 205 Hindus, 320 Muslims and 53 untouchable children were studying in these schools.<sup>12</sup>

The Khalsa Samachar showed serious concern for improving the position of the women in society. From very beginning it started a special column entitled 'Istri Sudhar' in 1899. No other periodical or paper had done it earlier. It was Bhai Mohan Singh Vaid who introduced this special column and delineated upon the type of characters, issues and problems related to the daughters, wives and mothers.<sup>92</sup> He and other reformists launched a crusade to emancipate women from the social evils and ignorance and advocated women education as the only remedy. In an article of the first publication of the Khalsa Samachar he stated that family life is run with the mutual co-ordination and co-operation of husband and wife. Each is an equal partner. A woman is considered as 'ardhangni' or 'ardsariri' - a half of the man. Tendency of disruption appears only when the balance between the two is lost. For a smooth run of a family both partners should be equally educated and awakened about their 'code of conduct' and the principles of their religion. The reformers further felt that uneducated mothers would be superstitious and would not be able to teach moral and religious values to their children. For the progress of the Khalsa qaum, there for it is required to educate and enlighten the women.<sup>13</sup>

Literacy gap between husband and wife was bound to disturb family atmosphere as an illiterate wife may find difficult to adjust with the literate husband temperamentally. Moreover, if her husband happened to be a reformist and committed to

propagate Khalsa Dharam, and the wife being ignorant and superstitious, the reformist husband was bound to react to find that his mission is being defeated in his own house. If such a situation prevailed in each Sikh house, then future of the Khalsa Dharam would also be bleak. If the educated Sikh boys did not find suitable matches within the community, they would renounce Sikh religion to find suitable matches outside community. Besides, a high rate of illiteracy among the Sikh women would retard the programme of social upliftment of the community.<sup>14</sup>

By using the fiction, the Khalsa Samachar gave reasons for the degrading condition of women. Living as dishonored member of the family for centuries together, the women lost their analytical faculty to distinguish good from bad things. The Khalsa Samachar noted that women themselves are responsible for their degrading condition in the society. The position of women fall from the golden age in which they were the recipients of learning and respect because of the rapacious darkness introduced by the Turkish rule. The social evils like purdah and child marriage were imposed on them and they were reduced to the position of shudras.<sup>15</sup>

Newspaper presented articles for women reforms. It presented an example of a new married bride who was nearly 12 years old and not educated and trained to behave in society. When she entered in the house of his in-law family, she faces a lot of problems regarding her married life. Newspaper suggested that the in-law family should behaved with her like their own child, she has same as their own children and a mother in-law should never ignored the position of her situation when she was also a new married bride in her in-law family. She should teach her not condemned and criticised her domestic assignments.<sup>16</sup>

Education of women was considered important element for the upliftment of them. Many times the columnists of the Khalsa Samachar made the women responsible for their degrading condition and motivated them to educate their daughters. Under the title of 'Merio Bhaino Pado', (Learn! my sisters) the author advocated women education as a mean of emancipate them from the social evils and making them instrumental in the betterment of the family and society. The author called upon the mothers that if they had given education to their daughter sand treated them equally as their sons the condition of the women would have been different and better. The author noted that it was thought necessary only for the sons of the family to get educated as it helps them to get employment. They lamented that the daughters were not sent to school because they were not to be sent away from home to earn livelihood. It was thought sufficient for them to have knowledge of sewing, embroidery and cooking.<sup>17</sup>

Without educating woman the task of educating the children of the community might prove ineffective as basic changes in lifestyle or values would not take place without changing woman who could link the present to the future through her

influence over the children. Writer of the 'Merio Bhaino Pado' made some suggestions to improve the condition of women. She directed to mothers to educate their daughters on equal ground of sons. She also appealed women to collect funds for the establishment of girls' schools and to appoint women teachers and preachers.<sup>18</sup>

The newspaper persuaded the Sikh institutions and Sikh leaders to open Pathshalas exclusively for girls to improve their condition. The writers of the newspaper thought that their very task of educating the Sikhs could be defeated without the education of women. The primary aim was to impart religious instructions to the Sikh youth as nothing could be more useful for the propagation of Sikhism than educating women.

Khalsa Samachar espoused a common educational curriculum for men and women and emphasized gender equality of Sikh religion. A writer of the Khalsa Samachar commented on the existing syllabus of girls' schools. He advised that women should be made conversant with general knowledge, history of the country, geography and politics.<sup>19</sup>

#### Conclusion

The role of this newspaper cannot be ignored due to which the improvement in education could not be possible. This newspaper was the first newspaper who directly concerned with the important internal issues of the Sikh community. It was the main source of information to the Sikhs even those had little concern with the education. It was also a source of found collections for the Sikh educational institutions. Newspaper further improve the level of the Sikhs to learn about the British system of that time.

#### Endnotes

1. *Khalsa Samachar*, Vol. I, No.1. November 17, 1899. p.1
2. Joginder Singh, "Transition from socio-religious to political concerns: Sikh periodical of the early 20th century", 154.
3. Amrit Walia, *Development of Education and Social-Political Change in the Punjab 1882-1947*, ABSPublications, Jalandhar, 2005, 174.
4. *Khalsa Samachar*, 23 November, 1911, Amritsar.
5. Mr. Hemraj was District Inspector of Jalandhar.
6. *Khalsa Samachar*, 23 November, 1916, Amritsar.
7. *Khalsa Samachar*, 24 April, 1913, Amritsar.
8. *Khalsa Samachar*, 24 April, 1913, Amritsar.
9. *Khalsa Samachar*, 4 May, 1916, Amritsar.
10. *Khalsa Samachar*, May 12, 1920, Amritsar.
11. *Khalsa Samachar*, 21 April, 1932, Amritsar.
12. *Khalsa Samachar*, 20 July, 1939, Amritsar.
13. *Khalsa Samachar*, November 17, 1899 (first issue), 7.
14. Joginder Singh, *Punjabi Journalism (1900-1947); Issues and Concerns*, 39.
15. *Khalsa Samachar*, November 27, 1899, 6.
16. *Khalsa Samachar*, 23 January, 1900, Amritsar.
17. *Khalsa Samachar*, November 25, 1903, 8-9.
18. *Khalsa Samachar*, November 25, 1903, 8-9.
19. *Khalsa Samachar*, February 8, 1905, 7-8.