

# Position of women in Punjab as Reflected in Khalsa Advocate Newspaper(1903-1947)



**Ramandeep Kaur**

Research Scholar,  
Dept. of History,  
Punjabi University, Patiala,  
Punjab, India

## Abstract

Print media is one of the oldest and basic forms of mass communication. It includes newspapers, weeklies, magazines, monthlies and other forms of printed journals. The very important phase for newspaper was from 1885 to 1947, when the Indian press, both English and regional language was the ally of the freedom fighter. Punjabi Journalism is roughly one hundred years younger than Indian Journalism. In 1903, the Chief Khalsa Diwan started the publication of their weekly newspaper 'The Khalsa Advocate' under the guidance of Bhai Jodh Singh. Another English periodical and renamed Khalsa Te Khalsa Advocate in 1923. The latter periodical was published in Gurmukhi Script. Whereas the Khalsa Advocate was published in English. This paper deals with the time period 1903 to 1947 because during this time period the Social evils in Society had become a serious issue. Indian has its own customs and traditions because of its oldest form of structure. Some of the useless customs turned into social evils and these evils are affecting the Indian culture and blocking the growth of the Society. Mostly, these evils are effected the position of Women in Society. The status and position of women has always been a subject of attention and Khalsa Advocate published many articles and news related to that topic. At that time the many newspapers started discussion that if the status of its women in society.

**Keywords:** Chief Khalsa Diwan, Indian Society, Social Evils, Child Marriage, Social Consciousness.

## Introduction

Social evils in Indian society have become a serious concern in the present days. Because Indian society is one of the oldest society and it has its own customs and traditions. Some of the customs of Indian society are very useful and helpful for the progress of society, but some of the useless customs turned into social evils. These evils are affecting our culture and blocking its growth. These evils are mostly connected to women. The status of Indian women has always been a subject of great concerns since ancient period. The prosperity and growth of every nation depends on the status of its women as they not only constituted nearly half of its population but also influence the growth of the remaining half.

## Aim of the Study

The main objective of this research paper is to trace the Position of women in Punjab As reflected in *The khalsa Advocate* newspaper and to trace the social evils related to women such as dowry system, child marriage, domestic violence and prostitution. The study aims to concern itself with the time period of 1903 to 1947 because momentous events of great historical importance like the struggle for political independence from British imperial rule and the demand and creation of separate Nation unfolded during this time. So this time period considered as a era of political consciousness as well as social consciousness also. To make the study effective and meaningful every effort has been made to go through the relevant and important sources available in English and Punjabi, both primary and secondary sources have been used. On the basic of contemporary newspaper and books an effort is made in this research paper to critically analyze the prospective of the *Khalsa Advocate*.

*The Khalsa Advocate* showed serious concern for improving the position of the make them conscious about the prevailing evils related to women like Women harassment, widowhood, mismatched marriage and polygamy.

## Remarking An Analisation

Woman is an important member of society. In fact no society is complete without female members. The print media had significant impact on gender relations and encouraged the re-examination of women's roles and place in society. *The Khalsa Advocate* published an article of Mehar Singh Rawel on 1<sup>st</sup> November 1941.<sup>1</sup> This article showed serious concern for improving the position of the women in the society. Same like as Guru Nanak Dev Ji said in *Asa Di Var* "why call woman evil, who gives birth to kings". From women is our birth. In the women's wombs are we shaped and without the women there is none. Women are our friend and from women is the family. If one woman dies, we seek another. This weekly paper related to Sikh religion and follow the guru's concept and beliefs for women honoring.

At that time the marriage of children had been considered as a duty of their parents. There was no fix limit for the age of marriage, people favoured on early age marriage. The *Khalsa Advocate* presented the picture of people's outlook who were considered that girls should be married at tender age. The Parents gave matrimonial for the same purpose in this newspaper.<sup>2</sup> The advertisement indicates that the parents had botheration of the future of their girls so they demanded earning boys for their girls but they did not demand the same age partner for their girls.

By working on the aims of the Sikh Educational Conference did great efforts to expand women education in Punjab. From 1908 to 1947, thirty three sessions of the conference were held and all the issues dealing with female education were regularly discussed. The main aims of the *Khalsa Advocate* of women education in terms of producing good wives, good mothers and good members of the community. This newspaper stated that It is not necessary that girls should be taught and enable for outdoor life or service the field in which men are engaged and for which the nature had made them comparatively more worthy but capable to improve other aspects of family life which are no way less important. For example for mothers, it is necessary to know literature and history as for men but for different purpose. For a mother to instill her knowledge among children. This periodical focus on girl's education for this purpose published the news to enhance the awareness about qualified girls schools and colleges. In this regard *Khalsa Advocate* published news as follow.<sup>3</sup>

(Increase the honors of Sisters and Daughters only one way that their admissions in Kanya Maha Vidyalaya Amritsar under the Management of Educated, experienced, scholars women, where in studying English, Gurmuki, Mathematics, Religious Education, education fingers on home education from First Class. Scholarships are also given to the poor, orphans, widows and intelligent women.)

Where this newspaper gives the advertisement of school or colleges for girls there is give the examination results also to encourage the girls and her parents.

(Excellent result of Sikh Kanya Maha Vidyalaya in Ferozepur City, Now this time the middle exams of

Vidyalaya in 22 women were gone, where in Kirpal Kaur with 627 numbers got in First Division, 20 are passed in second divisions. The result was 96 percent.)<sup>4</sup>

Today, women are being gradually recognized as important, powerful and meaningful contributors to the life of men; but till a few decades ago, their condition was miserable. This weekly Punjabi newspaper is protective for girls his protective behavior shows in published issues and appeal to the government for constitution of a law for the protection of girls.

(The assaults of goons are increasing on the ladies, especially in Lahore. So there is need to constitute a law, for the protection of Punjabi girls from goon's attacks)<sup>5</sup>

Where this newspaper appeal to the government for protection of girls there also inspired to girls for self protection by published the news of girls bravery for self protection. For example given below:-

(In Lahore, a Tounga driver did vulgar language with two young girls, for this the girls flogged him with slippers)<sup>6</sup>

This weekly newspaper published another evil related to women like mismatched marriage. That time marriage of girls had been considered as the foremost duty of the parents, sometime because of helplessness and greediness they married their girls with mismatched bridegroom without girl's permission. The *Khalsa Advocate* gives the description of early marriages.<sup>7</sup>

*The Khalsa Advocate* inspired society take efforts against like these marriages by published the various articles and news like that news as follow:- (A girl refused to marry with 45 years old man that was fixed by her aunt. After that by the help of villagers she married with a young man.)<sup>8</sup>

Similarly, another example of same situation is given below:-

(When a sixty years old man was going to marry with the sixteen years old girl, for favoring herself the girl comments on him that, you are like my father. I would not get marry or love with you, don't take benefit of my father's poorness Bless me like your daughter, by inspired from girl he accepted and refuse to marry with her)<sup>9</sup>

Domestic violence against women is increasingly recognized as major social problem in India. Domestic violence occurs when a family member, partner or ex-partner to attempts to physically or psychologically dominate or harm the other. Domestic violence includes all actions/behavior of family members which causes either physical injury or emotional trauma, or both to a woman<sup>10</sup>. The periodical emphasized the equality between man and woman. For instance, in its comments on the relationship between husband and wife, the newspaper describes woman as '*ardhangni*' or '*ardsariri*'- a half of man.<sup>11</sup>

The prostitution is one of the crucial evil in society. To discontinue this evil the periodical published the news about prostitution and create

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awareness in the society to protect the girls. Like these news are below:

(In Amritsar one sub-inspector of police got a bagger's fifteen years old girl from the prostitute's house by the raiding. The prostitute used her for lewd work and prostitute is arrested for this blame.)<sup>12</sup> than again published a news :

(Municipal board has made a rule against prostitutes to go outside from the limits of municipal board.)<sup>13</sup>

Marriage of a girl led her parents into financial debt as a lot of extravagance was expected by the boy's family. The problem of giving large dowry arose subsequently. Because of dowry system, a daughter was considered as an economic burden by her parents. Jewelry was the most important item in dowry as it was considered to be a security in times of crisis. The nature of dowry varied according to the economic standard and the social status of the parents. It consisted of presents like ornaments, clothes, furniture, animals, household articles and other articles of luxury<sup>14</sup>.

The *Khalsa Advocate* adopted a tough stand against the practice of dowry and lavish expenditure incurred at the time of marriage<sup>15</sup>. Similarly The *Khalsa Advocate* states that the Singh Sabha prohibited the use of Purdah<sup>16</sup>.

To abolish the dowry system the periodical published the news like that:-

(Specially, request to the Sikhs via the *Khalsa Advocate* try to dispel the dowry system out of the Sikh community. Every Sikh to confess for that not being "dowry donor or dowry receiver")<sup>17</sup>

(In Sind the condition of dowry system is to hurtful then the others states of Hindustan. In Sind sometimes the dowry demand compel the girls and girl's parents for suicide. *The Khalsa Advocate* appreciate the Sind Government for constitute a law against dowry system, in which the dowry demanded is the felon not a dowry donor)<sup>18</sup>

The greatest tragedy in the life of a woman was death of her husband. After the death of her husband, she completely lost her respect in the society. Her life became more miserable and survival was most painful for her. To improve the lifestyle of widows the following news this periodical inspire the people to charities for widows.

(Amritsar – Rai Bahadur Girdari Lal had donated 1 Lakh rupees for helps of widows, it decided used of this amount for one Widow Ashram and open domestic craft school.)<sup>19</sup>

The Chief Khalsa Diwan after forming Central Khalsa Yateemkhana also worked for forming Central Vidya Ashram for the welfare of widows. In 1904, the Chief Khalsa Diwan opened a widow Ashram at Amritsar. In 1912 the number of widows admitted in this Ashram was fifty-four<sup>20</sup>. The paper made passionate appeals to give financial support to the institutions for widows.<sup>21</sup>

The Diwan wanted to tackle the problem of child marriage and widow remarriage. This weekly periodical published the news about these Yateemkhana and Widya Ashrams which were

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running by Chief Khalsa Diwan for the welfare of Orphans and widows.

(Orphanage - Required Match for Girl - Needs to be a boon for one lady 14-15 years old, educated, good known for home work. Whose age 18 to 25 years older, should be educated, cured and the breadwinning.)<sup>22</sup>

On 11 April 1904, Chief Khalsa Diwan opened Yateemkhana in Amritsar for taking care of orphans (both males and females). On 18 November 1906, the Executive Committee of Khalsa Diwan passed resolution number four for opening Central Khalsa Anathalaya (YateemKhana), the Chief Khalsa Diwan. There orphans and needy people were helped, their care was taken, religious, professional practical and commercial education was imparted to them which could help them in earning their living. The organization even had the right to marry girls and boys staying in the orphanage whom they thought eligible and all the expenditure of the wedding was the responsibility of the YateemKhana.

Such news indicated that the British Government tried every possible efforts to passed some Acts. On 25, July, 1925 Khalsa advocate Published a news regarding tackle the problem of early marriage by the government as follow:

### Bill to prohibit the marriage of child girls;

Sarda's bill to prohibit the marriage of girls under the age of twelve and boys under the age of fifteen was first debated in the legislative assembly on 15 September 1927. The act as passed in its final form as the Child Marriage Restraint Act on 28 November 1929, provided penalties for the solemnization of marriages of male children under eighteen and of female children under fourteen years of age<sup>23</sup>.

### Conclusion

An account of the position of women in Punjab has been given in this newspaper. A lot of evils and practices like early marriage, dowry, mismatch, marriage, prostitution and selling of girls were prevalent in Punjab were described in the *Khalsa Advocate*. All these evils indicated that the man tried to prove himself that he was superior than woman and he tried to suppress the voice of woman. Early marriage was the root cause of many evils after the passed of Sarda Act this evil continued to exist. Due to mismatch marriages many girls became widows before they had attained maturity. The newspaper published those type of news which proved that these evils are very harmful for our society. These news attracted the attention of readers towards reform. The British government made their best effort to tackle all the evils related to women. By publishing such news this periodical had not only sensitized people to women's issues but had also generated a public opinion for upgrading image of women.

### Endnotes

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4. *The Khalsa Advocate, 10 May 1941, p3.*

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5. *The Khalsa Advocate*, 16 March 1940, p.5.
6. *The Khalsa Advocate*, 28 June 1941, p.1
7. *The Khalsa Advocate*, 7 July, 1925.p.6.
8. *The Khalsa Advocate*, 23 May 1942, p.1.
9. *The Khalsa Advocate*, 28 July 1945, p.2.
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