

Religious Issues as Reflected in Khalsa Samachar Newspaper (1899 -1925)

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Abstract

Khalsa Samachar was started on November 17, 1899 at Amritsar. Bhai Vir Singh edited this paper till 1914 and thereafter Sardar Sewa Singh took over as its editor. Bhai Vir Singh, however, remained associated with this periodical till his death in 1957. Through this periodical, he wanted to give a concrete shape to the ideology of Singh Sabha movement and infuse a collective spirit among the protagonists of this movement. 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.

Keywords: Singh Sabha, Sikh Panth, Nihang Singhs, Arya Samaj, Chief Khalsa Diwan.

Introduction

In the issues of *Khalsa Samachar* Bhai Vir Singh tried awaken to society degrading the condition of Sikhs¹. He expressed his concerns about the state of mind of the community in medical terminology. He said if people react when their ills are exposed, it means that they are alive to the concerns and are ready for the treatment. No reaction would mean that they are satisfied with the condition in which they are.

No doubt that the *Khalsa Samachar* was basically formed for the preaching and protection of the Sikhism but it never ignored the activities and the performances of the other religions of Punjab and the other states of India. All the incidents, events, fairs, festivals and religious gatherings of many religious groups are very well presented in the various issues of *Khalsa Samachar*.

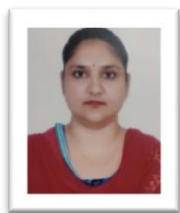
Aims and Objectives

1. To highlight the religious issues touched by *Khalsa Samachar* newspaper.
2. To trace the importance of festivals in Sikhism during first half of the twentieth century.
3. To discuss the special qualities and features of the various communities at that time.
4. To find the role of *Khalsa Samachar* newspaper to aware the Society regarding the teachings of the Sikhism

The news given below is about the celebration of the birth of Lord Rama who is the hero of Ramayana. Ramayana is an epic of India which depicts the Hindu ideology in a very good way. The news of Ram Naumi celebration in Amritsar is published in the *Khalsa Samachar* on 28th April, 1910. It gives the pleasure of the Hindus for the celebration of this festival. The whole celebration is worth praising. As this is the festival of the Hindus but many Muslims are seen participating with great enthusiasm.²

Holi is the festival which is celebrated by the Hindus. This festival is the celebration of the change of winter to the summer season. People throw water and put color on each other. This is the good sign of the celebration of the welcome of summer season in a colorful way. Guru Gobind Singh was the founder of the Khalsa Panth. He made his set up in Anandpur Sahib. In Anandpur Sahib Guru Gobind stated the celebration of Holi in a new way and the next day of the Holi. It was called the Holi Mahalla.

The news given below is published in the *Khalsa Samachar* on 17th March 1910. It gives information to the Sikhs about the celebration of



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Hola Mohalla in Anandpur Sahib with great enthusiasm of the large number of people. Anandpur Sahib is supposed to be the birth place of the Khalsa Panth. The writer of the news is urging the Sikhs to be the part of this Hola Mahall celebration in Amritsar in next time and to visit the birth place of Sikhism at least once a year.³

The punjabis especially the Sikhs had migrated to many countries of the world. They not only migrated themselves but they also took Sikhism with them to various countries of the world. In these days hardly any country of the world is not having any Punjabi and Gurudwaras. Other wise if we say that all the countries of the world have some Sikhs and the Gurudwara it will not be a wrong statement.

The news given here is published in the *Khalsa Samachar* on 17th Feb 1910 is about the celebration of the birth of the founder of Khalasa Panth Shri Guru Gobind Singh in London. It was started with the Gurbani Recitation of Asa Di War at the home of Professor Teja Singh's house in the early morning. In the evening there was a Kirtan Darbar in a hotel opposite to the West Minister Palace. It lasted from 5pm to 7pm in the evening. In this celebration Sikhs, Hindus, Muslims, Christians and ladies also participated.⁴

This news is about the about the foundation of a Gurudwara in Rangoon the capital of Burma. Burma is a big coastal area and populated with many Punjabis especially the Sikhs. The Sikhs help the poor people and always stay ready for the humble support to the needy. The Gurudwara established in Rangoon was established and Bhai Anakh Singh was appointed as the Granthi (priest).⁵

The news also published about the disrespect of the Gurudwaras by the ignorant persons. This act of the disrespect of the Gurudwara is criticized by everyone. The news published in the *Khalsa Samachar* on 27th January 1909 is about the letter sent by Bhai Mohar Singh from Kemalpur. The letter gives the shocking news of the ignorant people putting tables and chairs inside the Gurudwara and also using abusing language to each other in side the Gurudwara. He has further requested all the Sikhs to stop this kind of violence of the rules of Sikhism otherwise the Sikh people will lose all their religious places to nothing.⁶

Community Distinction

There was a major role of the communal system in India throughout the ages. This community system was also a better part of the Sikhism. There were the special qualities and features of the various communities.

Bhatras

The news given below is published in the *Khalsa Samachar* on 1st July, 1909 which gives the difference of the Bhatra community of the Sikhs from the Nihag Singhs⁷. There was a complaint by some common people that the Nihangs are involved in the beggary and stealing in the various cities of Punjab. The news is about the clarification of the matter that the person who are seen begging and stealing while wearing the religious dress are not the Nihangs actually but they are the Bhatras who tell that they are

the religious performers of Sikhism and ask for money and even do beggary in the name of religion in some cases the stealing acts were also done by them. The news is regarding the query that the people should be conscious that the beggar in Sikh Religion are not the Nihangs but they are the Bhatras who are totally involved in the beggary or in the other acts like this. They earn money by these wrong ways for seven months and rest of the months in the year they just enjoy the luxuries with this money earned by the spurious methods.⁸

Radha Soamis

Radha Soamis are one of the sects of the Sikhs. This sect was originally started by the educated persons especially the bankers in Agra. This sect was started to enlighten the people about the fake superstitions. They wanted their community to follow the modern and good education to avoid any kind of the slavery. There was a split in the sect then the sect got two branches. One is in Bias Punjab and other is at the same original place that is Agra. They have large number of followers in both the branches as of their progressive views.

The news below is published in the *Khalsa Samachar* on 7th of December, 1899. The mantra to be recited by the Radha Soami community is given here. This mantra is that Satnam (Name of God) is graceful, almighty, without name, without boundaries and endless always. This mantra is the success giver to the people who keep faith in these words.⁹

Arya Samajis

A branch of Arya Samaj was established by Swami Dayanand Saraswati in 1877 in Lahore. It was very popular among the people of Punjab. Later on there was split in the party after the death of Swami Dayanand Saraswati. One party people were in favour of the old Hindu cultural values and the ethnic educational system of India and the other party was in favour of the English culture to be mixed with the Hindu cultural values and educational system for the promotion of the society in the coming future. The party with ethnical views was called the Gurukul Party (Ghas Party) and the party with the modern values was called the college party (Mas Party).

The news given below published in the *Khalsa Samachar* on 7th December 1899 is about the meeting of the two parties of the Arya Samaj in the capital of Punjab in the last week of November. It was a big gathering. As Lahore was the capital city so it was always a bit crowded as there was the office of the chief of Punjab, the major institutions of medical sciences, training colleges and Ashrams were in Lahore. The get together of the Arya Samaj was witnessed by a large number of people belonging to the different areas of India.¹⁰

Istari Samaj

The news given below published in the *Khalsa Samachar* on 26th August 1909 is about the establishment of a temple by the Istri Arya Samaj by the women with their own collection. No men has contributed in this collection.¹¹

Istri Arya Samaj was a branch of the Arya Samaj meant for the women followers. This was first started in Maharashtra and later on one branch was

established in Lahore punjab. The special thing of this group is whenever there is a gathering the minimum number of the women participantes is around 300 which is very high. This group has started a widow home and an old age home for the women. They are taking care of the health and education of the widows and the old women. There is a plan for the starting of a scholl for the young girls with complete amenities of accomodation and food.

Lubanas

Lubanas are the community of Sikhs popular with the name of Makhhan Shah Lubana. Makhhan Shah Lubana was a great follower of Sikhism. So the community feel proud to be the sikhs. The news given belwo is published in the Khlasa Samachar on 6th January 1910 is about the information of Bhai Harnam Singh the leader of the Lubana Community. It shows that Bhai Harnam Singh along with his team is going for the propaganda in the 48th Pioneer Battalian Allahabad, 12 Pioneer window Batallian, Battalian 107 Jhansi and 128 in Meerut. There is an urge to the chiefs of these Battalians of the Army to greet and help Bhai Harnam Singh whole heartedly. The urge is by Subedar Major Mehtab Singh.¹²

There was always a comparison for the spread and popularity of Sikhism with Hinduism and Islam. The news given here is also showing the same stress for creating a central fund for the promotion of the Sikh Education.

This news is published in the *Khalsa Samachar* on 7th December 1899 is about the regreation of the Sikhs for the lesser contribution and less promotion in the national level. It is started with the statement that the Hindus and Muslim brothers of the Sikhs have already established their worn universityies by collecting large amounts like ten lakhs, even the Arya Samajis have colleged five lakh Rupees and established the university of Gurukul Kangri. The problem of the Sikhs to be the minority community leads to the lower promotion rate and les collection. An ruge has been done to all the sikh people for the generous contribution towards the funds for the promotion of the religion and Sikh education.¹³

The news given below is published in the *Khalsa Samachar* on 11th February, 1909 is a letter from the priest of the popular and very reputed Sikh temple Gurudwara Manji sahib. This is supposed to be the seat of the four sons of Guru Gobind Singh the tenth guru of the Sikhs. The names are given Baba Ajit Singh, Baba Jujhar Singh, Baba Zorawar Singh and Baba Fateh Singh. All the instructions of this Gurudwara are readily accepted by all the Sikhs as it is the very important place for them. Here is an urge by the priests Mahant Kartar Singh, Bhagwan Singh Pujari and Lal Singh to the British Government regarding the renaming of the Anand Marriage act as the Sikh Marriage Act because all the traditions followed in this system of marriage are already followed in the Sikhism. Another request is to pass it as Sikh Act as early as possible.¹⁴

The news given below is published in the *Khalsa Samachar* on 6th January 1909 is a congratulatory message to all the Sikhs for completion

of the constuction of a Gurudwara in the Island of Shanghai in time without any problem.¹⁵

The news given belwo is published in the *Khalsa Samachar* on 5th January, 1899 is regarding the Press conference organised in Allahabad. The purpose of the conference is to make a tie up between the Hindus and the Muslims. The conference was organised on 1st January 1899.¹⁶

The chief Khalsa Diwan was the chief administrative body of the Sikhism which was formed in 1925. This was formed to manage all the Sikh Historical temples in a good way and for the preaching of the Sikh religion through education, newspapers, journals and books. Even the khalsa samachar was the product of the Chief khalsa Diwan which was initially started for the popularity and preaching of the Sikhism in punjab and the other states of India.

The new given below is published in the *Khalsa Samachar* regularly in almost all the issues. This is an advertisement of the books published by the Chief Khalsa Diwan alsong with the rate list. The rate list of the paper back and hard bound books is different. These books are mostly in punjabi language and for the enlightenment of the sikh youth about their own religion.

Untouchability and Sikhs

Caste system and the untouchability are the bigger problems of the Indian society. It led to many disputes and even bigger strikes and massacres were the result of the untouchability. While laying the foundation of the khalsa panth Guru Gobind Singh instructed all the persons going to be the part of Sikhism will never do untouchability and caste distinction. Equality will be the first principle.

The news given below is published in the *Khalsa Samachar* on 6th April, 1899 is regarding the untouchability and the Khalsa. This gives information about the Mahatams a brave community of Hindus in the district of Multan. The hindus were used to avoid these community people as they were supposed to be untouchables. The total population of these members is fifty thousand only. A fair was organised in a Gurudwara in village Chawli Msaikha. There were two wells of this gurudwara which were taken for the Mosque of Baba Farid. Later on a person named Singh Safiye from this community filed a case in the court and got back the charge of the wells with the same Gurudwara.¹⁷ The news published in the *khalsa Samachar* on 5th july 1923 is regarding the start practice of untouchability among the sikhs. The title of the news is a "Hush bush among the Sikhs". It is written in the news that the practice of untouchability is not done in sikhism. All the sikhs are supposed to be very equal and every body can go to the Gurudwara any time without any restriction of caste, colour and creed. It is very much clear from the that the sikh religion is free from all the disputes regarding discrimination. But in some cases it is seen that the practice of untouchability and discrimination on the base of caste is already started among the Sikhs which should be immdately stopped otherwise the sikhism will lose its purity and popularity.¹⁸

Downfal of Sikhs in Kashmir

Sikhsim was started by Guru Gobind Singh while the foundation of the Khalsa Panth in 1699 in Anandpur Sahib. A new community was formed which was having a different appearance and very liberal principals. The news given below published in the *Khalsa Samachar* on 6th January, 1910 is regarding the deterioration of the Sikh religion in Kashamir.¹⁹

The sikhs of the area of Punsh and other districts of Jammu are very well versed in Gurmukhi script of punjabi language and they know the whole Gurbani but hardly any person receite the Gurbani. This is under the influence of the Hindu Brahmins who are attacking the Sikhs towards Hinduism and trying to get the downfall of Sikhism. There is further request to the members of the Chief Khalsa Diwan for the special help in Kashmir to get back the prestige of the Sikhism in Punjab. As the person who is urging for the preaching of Sikhism in Kashmir is very well known to the financial condition of the chief khalsa Diwan even then he humbly request to them for sending their representatives to Kashmir for the spread and preaching of Sikhism.

Importance for Sikhism

The news given below is published in the *Khalsa Samachar* on 6th March 1919 is regarding seeking importance of the Sikhism and the Sikh festivals.²⁰

The example of the Hindu festivals is given for which there is a grand celebration and the people participate on mass level as the government holidays are declared on these festivals. For the Id festivals of the Muslims there are holidays. Even Christianity which was very less in India the Christmas Holidays were announced from four to eight days. The Sikhs thought it to be injustice and they urge for the announcement of the holiday on the Gurupurabs of Guru Nanak Dev and Guru Gobind Singh otherwise they will go in the court for the justice.

Punishment for violating the religious values

The news published in the *khalsa samachar* on 2nd August 1923 is regarding the punishment to a person for breaking the idol of mother goddess of Hindu temple. A man Balram wanted to marry a girl of his choice but the girl was married to some other person with the reference her parents. Balram got angry and tried to marry the girl.²¹

All his efforts were useless and he could not marry the girl in condition of anger he broke the idol of the female diety of Hindu temple. He was to get punishment for this act of religious violence.

Gurudwara Reform Act

When the gurudwaras were under the supremacy of the Mahants. The Mahants were misusing their powers and prestige with the big incomes of the lands in the name of the Gurudwaras. Later on the Sikh association revolted against this and a demand for the Reform in the Gurudwars management to be done. The news published in the *Khalsa Samachar* on 23rd November 1922 is regarding the passing of the Gurudwara Bill where there were some oppositions by the Hindus and the Sikhs. The report of the Gurudwara bill was presented

by Fazal Hussain which shows that all most all the provisions are according to the demands of the Sikhs.

Religious Conference

Holding the religious conference is to promote the religions and to spread the good ideas of the various religions from time to time. The religious conference is very good for the healthy discussions of the religious values and put the ideals of religious importance in the new generation. Religious values are required to avoid any kind of the disturbance in the mental health of the humans. Here is a news published in the *Khalsa Samachar* on 1st July 1909 is reading the organization of a Religious conference for the promotion and preaching of the Sikh religion.²²

The Sikh religion was very young so there was a great requirement for the preaching of this religion by preaching the good ideas of the Sikh religion among the people. The people who do not have enough knowledge of Sikhism should be given knowledge about Sikhism to attract them towards the Sikhism. There should be the conference discussion in the first day and on the second day there should be a programme where the delegates should give their views on the various aspects of Sikhism.

Conclusion

All these religious news are the good source for the religious issues of the various religions popular in India and the other countries of the world. The role and importance of religion is very well depicted in the different news of the *Khalsa Samachar* in the issues from 1899-1925. The religions are good for the growth of the person is clearly visible in the various publications of the *Khalsa Samachar*. A person regularly reading *Khalsa Samachar* could be very well versed with the religions of the other countries and our own country.

Endnotes

1. Joginder Singh, *Punjabi Journalism (1900-1945), Issues and Concerns*, p. 4.
2. *Khalsa Samachar* on 28th April, 1910
3. *Khalsa Samachar* on 17th March 1910
4. *Khalsa Samachar* on 17th Feb 1910
5. *Khalsa Samachar* on 17th Feb 1910
6. *Khalsa Samachar* on 27th January 1909
7. *Nihang Singhs are the persons supposed to be the part of the Army of Guru Gobind Singh and they have some weapons with them. They wear blue colour clothes and have big turban on their head. Generally all the matters of the Sikhs religion are done through these Nihang Singhs. They have their big associations.*
8. *Khalsa Samachar* on 1st July, 1909
9. *Khalsa Samachar* on 7th of December, 1899
10. *Khalsa Samachar* on 7th December 1899
11. *Khalsa Samachar* on 26th August 1909
12. *Khalsa Samachar* on 6th January 1910
13. *Khalsa Samachar* on 7th December 1899
14. *Khalsa Samachar* on 11th February, 1909
15. *Khalsa Samachar* on 6th January 1909
16. *Khalsa Samachar* on 5th January, 1899
17. *Khalsa Samachar* on 6th April, 1899
18. *khalsa Samachar* on 5th July 1923

19. *Khalsa Samachar on 6th January, 1910*
20. *Khalsa Samachar on 6th March 1919*
21. *khalsa samachar on 2nd August 1923*
22. *Khalsa Samachar on 1st July 1909*