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***Women and Education: A Case Study of the Sikh Kanya
Mahavidyalaya***

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**‘Women and Education’:
A Case Study of the Sikh Kanya Mahavidyalaya,
Ferozepur, Punjab¹**

Abstract:

In the early nineteenth century, education mostly remained a distant dream for the majority of women. Amongst early institutions that opened portals of education to women is the Sikh Kanya Mahavidyalaya at Ferozepur. This paper, through an institutional history, seeks to underline the social milieu of women’s education in Punjab.

Keywords: *Women and education, Religious socialization, Sikh women*

INTRODUCTION

Women’s education in India, as an idea as well as practice, is a recent phenomenon. Although there are references of some learned women in ancient times, there is no doubt that women as a category remained deprived of education for centuries. The lack of their access to education, being reflective of women’s general position in society, caught the attention of social reformers and colonial government in the 19th century, who made attempts to ameliorate the condition of women’s education and their status more generally. Women’s subordinate position to men was perceived to be linked with their lack of education. Thus it was during the 19th century that women’s education became an agenda of social reform. Believing that education can change women’s status in society, efforts were made, both by the reformers as well as the colonial government, to establish schools and colleges for girls. Since women’s condition was used as a yardstick to measure the level of progress a community made, it was urgently addressed. Various remedial measures were introduced to enable women to become dexterous in their domestic responsibilities.

¹This paper is a revised version of the lecture delivered at Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi on 9 February 2018.

As education is always political, different community groups had different ideas on the education of girls. On the whole, education was meant to socialize girls in the respective values of different communities. Therefore, different communities set up their educational institutions to socialize girls in their cultural values. This was also important to 'protect' such women from the influence of 'others'. Women's education thus became a site of identity politics.

One such communitarian response was the Sikh Kanya Mahavidyalaya, established at Ferozepur, the subject of the present thesis. It was an initiative which made education accessible to Sikh girls/women, who in the early 19th century Punjab (like women elsewhere), were relegated to the household. By making education available equally to boys and girls, the school challenged many gender-based stereotypes. The school nurtured girls as 'dutiful daughters', 'obedient wives' and 'good mothers', yet at the same time, it also motivated them to join different professions such as teaching and medicine, among others. This thesis focuses on the Sikh Kanya Mahavidyalaya, its institutional history and early educational vision and institutional practices. It goes onto study the contemporary context of the SKM, changes that have taken place and the implications of the interface between education, religion and gender. It aims to highlight the past and present of this now forgotten reputed educational institution to understanding how it played a critical role in the history of women's education in Punjab.

Women's Education in 19th Century

Various forms of social restrictions prevented women from getting educated in the nineteenth century. Spatial segregation, the institution of *parda*, early marriage and a focus on household kept them away from education (Chanana 2001). Superstitious beliefs like an educated girl become a widow were meant to deny them even a modicum of education. Women thus served as a useful link in the 'patrilineal and patriarchal structure' and reproduced the status quo (Forbes 1998: 33).

The effort to improve girls' education came from three quarters: the missionaries, the colonial government and the Indian social reformers. The missionaries started coming to India in the second half of the nineteenth century. Thus, the American Presbyterian Mission started the first all-girls' school in Ludhiana in 1836 (Jakobsh 2003: 129).

Initially, it educated its women-folk and the well-privileged Christian converts. Gradually, missionaries started schools for Sikh, Hindu and Christian girls respectively (Chanana 2001: 131).

Secondly, the colonial government started to invest in women's education from the second half of the 19th century. The Wood's Despatch of 1854 was a watershed moment in this regard. It inaugurated a shift in government policy away from elite education to mass education in the vernacular (Forbes 1998: 40), focusing on both boys and girls. The Punjab Education Department started in 1856 with a special focus on the education of women. Since it did not get a positive response, the British approached the upper classes thinking that they might favour women's education. In those times, women in the elite Hindu/ Muslim families received '*zenana* education' (education within the household) (Kishwar 1986: WS-9; Jakobsh 2003: 82-83,129).

However, much remained to be done and it was left to the Indian social reformers to fulfil the expectations of the colonial state. Societal attitudes were still not conducive to girls' education. Even the financial assistance by the government could not convince parents to send their girls to schools. Where boy's education guaranteed pride to the family, girl's education did the obverse. The practice of segregating girls from boys demanded separate schools for girls where female teachers would instruct them. Moreover, Indians were not comfortable sending girls to schools and *zenana* education was expensive. These dilemmas had to be addressed by social reformers in deciding a course of action for educating girls (Forbes 1998: 40).

The British government provided various measures to promote girls' education such as scholarships for girls and grant-in-aid to girls' schools (Holroyd 1886: 5). However, initiatives of the colonial government in the field of girls' education were not as successful. Upper castes did not send their daughters to the girls' schools established by the government. There was an all-pervading fear that these schools would convert their daughters to Christianity. Moreover, due to the low availability of female teachers, lower caste women were recruited as teachers on very low salaries. This meant that only low caste girls used to go to these schools because upper castes were not willing to send their daughters as they did not like the idea of lower caste women teaching their daughters (Kishwar 1986: WS-9). The 'costing factor' was another reason for lack of interest of the government in establishing girls' schools.

Not as many students got enrolled in girls' schools as compared to boys' schools. Female teachers also were difficult to find (Bhattacharya 2001: xv-xvi). Within the Sikh society, women were earmarked for reform both by the colonial authorities and social reformers (Jakobsh 2003). Before we discuss the institution under study, it is important to underline the city where it got established and flourished for almost fifty years before its decline in the post-partition period.

The City and the School

The Sikh Kanya Mahavidyalaya (SKM) was among the first girls' school of the Ferozepur district. It started as a middle school and became a high school in 1911 (Sharma 1983: 358). The Dev Samaj Higher Secondary School established by Dev Atma in 1901 became a higher secondary school in 1910. The Hindu Girls' Higher Secondary School (1907) was started with the assistance of the local Hindu communities. The D.A.V Girls Higher Secondary School (1869), started by Swami Dayanand as a primary school, became a higher secondary school in 1961. The SKM, which started as a *Gurdwara* school, located within the precincts of the Jubilee Gurdwara, expanded into an acclaimed institution of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Ferozepur city '*shahidon ka shahr*' (city of martyrs) is where Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev were cremated. It is located in the Ferozepur district.² It is the biggest district of Punjab with 9.58 percent of the State's area.³ Ferozepur is 11 kilometres away from the Hussainiwala border, close to Kasur on the west while on its east lies the district of Ludhiana (Sharma 1983:17). The partition of Punjab in 1947 brought Ferozepur on the international border with Pakistan. Hindu and Sikhs migrated into the district from western Punjab districts of Bahawalpur State, Montgomery, Lahore,

² Ferozepur is southwest of 'Malwa region of Punjab. Based on larger cultural features, Punjab is distinguished into three areas- Majha, Doaba and Malwa. Rivers mark these folk regions with unique physical milieu, economic organization and cultural practices. Majha is in upper Bari Doab comprising districts of Amritsar and Gurdaspur. Doaba or Bist. Doaba comprises districts of Hoshiarpur, Nawanshahar, Kapurthala and certain sections of Fazilka. Malwa region is south of river Sutlej. It includes eleven districts of Punjab and so is the largest region of Punjab. In contrast to Majha and Doaba, Malwa is thinly populated and is bound by rivers Sutlej in the North, Ghaggar in the south, Shivalik hills in the east and Pakistan in the west (GOP 2004: 26-29).

³ The Ferozepur district comprises of 5 sub-divisions/tehsils- Abohar, Fazilka, Jalalabad, Ferozepur and Zira, 10 Community Development Blocks- Abohar, Fazilka, Ferozepur, Ghall Khurd, Guru Har Sahai, Jalalabad, Khuian Sarwar, Makhu, Mamdot and Zira (Available at <http://agripb.gov.in>).

Sindh, Lyallpur, and Multan while Muslims migrated to eastern Punjab (Sharma 1983: 17; Dhillon 2000: 7).

Historically, the city was founded by Firoz Shah Tughlaq III (1351-1388 A.D). It was earlier an important centre between Delhi and Lahore (Sharma 1983: 17). Firoz Shah III erected the Ferozepore fort around 1370 (PG2000: 13). The *Ain-i-Akbari* also refers to Ferozepore as the capital of Multan province. After a series of successions by Sidhu Jats and the *Bhangi Misl* confederacy, the British took control. In 1839, the district became “the advanced outpost of British India in the direction of the Sikh power” (Imperial Gazetteer of India 1908: 440-441). Finally, in 1846, it formally became part of the British Empire.

Ferozepur city comprises of the old city and an adjacent southern extension of the cantonment. During the colonial period, the cantonment not only served as a ‘station for troops’ but also embodied the power of the ‘new British rulers’ (Vandal and Vandal 2006:60). Ferozepur town has localities around its ten gates- Delhi and Ludhiana gates towards the South, Makhu gate towards the east, Bansawala gate towards the north, and Kasur and Multan gates on the west. The town is enclosed by twelve suburbs- Basti Rahman Tiharia, Basti Tankanwali, Basti Shaikhanwali, Basti Kambojan, and Basti Bhattian (PG2000: 95).

In 1901, the district population included 47 percent Muhammedans, 29 percent Hindus and 24 percent Sikhs. According to the 1941 Census, 55.2 percent of the population was Muslims and 24.3 percent were Sikhs (Fazl-I-Ilahi 1941). The consequent mass migration of population from both sides altered the social profile of the region. Despite this, the localities of Ferozepur continue to bear Muslim names like Habibke, Alike and Dulchike (PG2000: 21-22). Before 1947, recalls an SKM alumna, Ferozepur was primarily Mohammedan city whereby Muslims lived in areas from Kasuri gate up to Balochan Basti, near Amritsari gate (Interview, Bhatia, 2010). In the pre-partition days, Ferozepur district “was a grain-producing agriculturally prosperous district of Punjab”. Wheat was exported to Karachi, and Europe also (PG2000: 97).

In the early twentieth century, the literacy rates in Ferozepur were dismal. Overall, literacy rate was 3.8 percent. It was 6.7 percent for males and 0.3 percent for females.

According to 1901 census, in literacy, Ferozepur ranked fourteenth among twenty-eight districts of undivided Punjab (*Imperial Gazetteer of India* 1908: 448). The proximity of Ferozepur to Lahore had a positive impact on the sphere of education. In the 19th century, several girls' schools were established by various Christian missions, Dev Samaj, Arya Samaj and Sanatan Dharam Sabha (Kaur 1969: 14).

A Heritage Institution: The Sikh Kanya Mahavidyalaya

The Singh Sabha established the Sikh Kanya Mahavidyalaya at Ferozepur in 1892 as a school for girls. Even before it formally came into existence, efforts were made to motivate parents to send their daughters to gain education in schools (Kanga 1996). Earlier, the School 'Sikh Kanya Mahavidyala' was also referred to as 'The Ferozepore Khalsa Girls' School' (Singh 1915: 55-59). Caveeshar (1915) poetically called this institution as a 'repository of knowledge' that turned his dreams of witnessing an institution of learning into real (Caveeshar 1915: 7). In the early nineteenth century, this was considered as an important pilgrimage centre for the Sikhs, since it offered to ground in religious learning and knowledge to the young generation of girls. It was a centre that transmitted Sikh history, religion and culture among women. The institution provided the basis for future social changes to set in. In many ways, it revived the social and cultural capital of the Sikh community and differentiated them from other communities within Punjab.

In 1892, Takht Singh and Harnam Kaur started Sikh Kanya Mahavidyalaya in Ferozepur. It aimed to "prepare Indian women for "complete living" as a good wife, a good mother and the good accomplished lady that will sweeten any respectable educated Indian home" (Singh 1915: 57). Sikh reformers initiated girl's education to shield them from the influence of Arya Samajis and Christian missionaries (Jakobsh 2003: 133). Overarching fear that missionary schools would convert girls to Christianity translated into putting in place institutions where Sikh girls would be free to practice and profess their religious beliefs. Women, though educated, were not motivated to become 'memsahibs' who were uninterested in household chores (Malhotra 2002: 148).

The objectives of the school highlight the 'attitudes of the educated elite and cultural values of the Sikhs'. Sikh girls followed the ideals of 'duty' and 'service' (Jakobsh

2003: 145-146). Ajit Singh (1915) argued that ‘religious education and moral instruction’ were special features of the school. All the students gathered every morning and evening to recite *Guru Granth Sahib*, the Sikh scriptures and offered prayers. These students were also in-charge of ‘kitchen economy’ and cooked and served meals by turn. To instil ideas of hard-working, efficient women, the school deliberately did not keep any servant. The girls living in the hostel included unmarried maidens over twenty, married women with children, widows above forty and infants below three as well as orphans. In 1904, the school managed to open a boarding house for girls coming from native Sikh states, Bikaner, Hyderabad, among others, to gain an education suffused with Sikh culture and heritage (Singh 1915: 56).

After the demise of Harnam Kaur, Takht Singh married Agya Kaur who then actively worked for the school. By 1910, standards IX and X were also started in the school. By 1911, the school consisted of girls’ school and hostel and Ditt Singh Library. After the death of Takht Singh his daughters, Pritam Kaur and Gurbaksh Kaur were involved in the school administration. Later his son, Gurbaksh Singh became school manager (till 1970) (Interviews 2010). Subsequently, for the management of the School, a governing body of 9 members was set up. It was registered on February 4, 1939 under the Societies Registration Act XXI of 1860 (SKM 1943). Although the founders’ vision of seeing this school upgrade into reputed women’s University of Punjab remained unfulfilled, the Report on the Progress of Education in Punjab especially mentioned the contribution of the Sikh Kanya Mahavidyalaya for the work done to promote girl’s education (1920: 42).

Pre-Independence Institutional History

This section seeks to explore the process of institutionalization of the Sikh Kanya Mahavidyalaya, Ferozpur to examine how it addressed the question of women’s education. It is divided into two sub-sections ‘the early period’ from 1892-1920 that marks an era of struggle for establishing this institution and ‘the established period’ from 1921-1947, which explores how the institution and its alumnae flourished.⁴ The discussion that follows seeks to explore the interrelations between gender, education and the process of social reform.

⁴ This style of classification has been borrowed from Maskiell’s study (1948) on the Kinnaird College at Lahore.

Early Period (1892-1920)

The Sikh Kanya Mahavidyalaya at Ferozepore emerged as a corollary to the Singh Sabha's social and religious reform movement (Jakobsh 2003: 95; Barrier 1970: xxvi). The Lahore Singh Sabha or *Tat Khalsa* ("true" or orthodox Sikh") initiated changes in the Sikh code of conduct (*Sikh Rahit Maryada*) which called for the creation and consolidation of the Sikh identity. Sikh women were seen as crucial in propagating a true or pure Sikh identity. One of the founders of the Sikh Kanya Mahavidyalaya was Takht Singh. He realized how women as role models could act as catalysts in moral amelioration of the Sikh community. The Sikh Kanya Mahavidyalaya aimed to socialize students in such religious and moral values (Mohan 2007: 79).

The state of girls' education was quite dismal in the early twentieth century. Various socio-religious reform organizations started girls' schools to counter the alleged proselytization activities of Christian schools. These were Dev Samaj Girls' School (1901) and Hindu Girls' High School (1907) (Chandra 1995-96: 13). The Sikh Kanya Mahavidyalaya initially referred to as '*Kanya Pathshala*' (Girls' School) under the aegis of Ferozepur Singh Sabha to "socialize students in Sikh religious beliefs and practices" (Panaich 1931: 72). The aim of school in nurturing educated wives and mothers grounded in indigenous culture was in consonance with that of the Kanya Mahavidyalaya (established in 1890 at Jalandhar) (Maskiell 1948: 22; Kishwar 1986). The institution aimed to nurture students to become good wives (*achchi supatniyan*) and well-mannered mothers (*nek ate uttam svabhav vali maavan*) (*Khalsa Advocate* 1907:5).

In the next eight years from 1892 to 1900, the School was directly under the local Singh Sabha. In September 1900, Takht Singh separated from the Singh Sabha due to ideological differences and afterwards became the caretaker and manager of this school. The *Tat Khalsa* ideology was nevertheless the main ideology of the school. Karam Singh (1907) calls the separation of the school from Singh Sabha an important event in the history of the school. Another landmark was the decision to open a boarding house for girls in 1904 (Singh 1907: 40). Harnam Kaur, the co-founder of the school, felt the need of a boarding house to accommodate girl students from distant places within Indian sub-continent and from foreign countries (*SKM* 1911: 2;

Singh 2003: 62). She advertised in *Khalsa Samachar* to publicize this boarding house. The unique feature of the boarding house was that the boarders and warden 'lived like a family'. Initially, apart from religious education, household tasks and handicrafts were also taught (Singh 1908: 49-50).

The SKM grew in popularity and those living in distant lands sent their daughters to gain education (SKM 1911: 9). In 1901, Takht Singh established a library in the name of Ditt Singh, a Sikh scholar and Singh Sabha reformer, with an initial amount of sixteen rupees. It had rare books related to Sikh history in English, Hindi, Punjabi, Urdu and Persian⁵ (SKM Admission prospectus, 5; Singh 1936: 7). The collection of this School library was quite impressive. The founder Takht Singh was fond of collecting rare books and made special efforts to enrich this library. Kaanu Singh Nabha, a famous Sikh historian, also referred to this library for writing books on Sikh history (Kanga 1996: 51). He used to donate royalty earned from authored books to this School (Singh 2003: 138-139). Takht Singh wanted this library to expand to serve Sikhs keen to write on Sikh historiography, especially on Sikh history, culture, religion and philosophy. He accorded importance to the documentation of the Sikh community's history (Kanga 1996: 9-10). In 1937, this library had 4000 books related to Sikh history. The number of books in this library subsequently arose to 5000 (Kanga 1996: 9-10).

The Punjabi correspondent of the *Bengalee* reported "the institutions which have risen to the public attention and success, the Sikh Girls' school of Ferozepore stands perhaps the highest. It has no less than five hundred girls boarders, drawn from all parts of India" (*The Khalsa Advocate*, September 9, 1916). The staff of the Sikh Kanya Mahavidyalaya was dedicated, which led this institution to become as important as the Chief Khalsa Diwan and the Khalsa College then (Singh 1907: 65).

In traditional Indian society, parents were wary of enrolling girls in schools. They did not hesitate to admit girls as boarders, observes Singh (1936: 4). By 1916, the Sikh Kanya Mahavidyalaya was a prominent institution imparting girls' education to

⁵ The School library was established in the memory of Ditt Singh who died in 1901. Takht Singh was a disciple of Professor Gurmukh Singh and Ditt Singh, lecturers at the Government College, Lahore. Both of them played a prominent role in the Singh Sabha reform movement.

students from various parts of India.⁶ The boarders belonged to various regions of undivided Punjab as well as other provinces of the Indian subcontinent such as Haryana (Ambala, Karnal, Rohtak), Kashmir, United Provinces, Sindh, Central Provinces, Itawah, Gujrat, North-Western Frontier province (Malakand), Jammu and Kashmere. Some students belonged to foreign countries like Nepal, Burma, Africa, Baluchistan, Kabul, Canton, Malaya, Thailand, China, Hong Kong, Gilgit, among others (*PB*, April 1909; June-July 1910; June 1913). Nearly 70 percent of the students were boarders. In 1907, the school strength was 162 students, which included 115 boarders. There were 27 Hindus and 135 Sikh students (*Shivdayal, SKM Prashansa Patra*, 25).

The boarding house of the school was unique in terms of student composition. It had married women, unmarried girls, orphans and widows. The boarding house had four categories of students:

- those whose expenditure was borne by their parents
- orphans and child widows whose expenditure was borne by the school
- poor and deprived girls whose parents were unable to bear such expenditure
- some middle class girls part of whose expenditure was given by their parents and the remaining amount was raised by the School.

In January 1933 issue of the *Panjabi Bhain*, an appeal was made to subscribers to send woollen clothes for orphan and poor girls of the boarding house (Kanga 1996: 8; *PB* January 1933). Some orphanages admitted girls at the Sikh Kanya Mahavidyalaya to enable them to pursue education. Students from Patiala came from the Rajinder Pratap's orphanage, which provided expenses for subsistence (*SKM Prashansa Patra*: 23, 24; Panaich: 66-67). A few girls from the Chief Khalsa Diwan's orphanage were admitted and the School took responsibility of maintaining them (Interview, Alumna, 2010).

A member of the Legislative Council of Ferozepur said that 'this wonderful institution reminds me of what I have read about Tuskegee Institute in U.S.A' (Singh 1915). The Tuskegee University was founded on 18th December 1832, for the education of

⁶ Singh (1943) states that Sikh religious missionaries of the school visited many villages publicizing this School, besides singing the praise of Guru Nanak (*The Vidyala: Its Past and Present*: 2).

African-Americans in the rural Macon county of Alabama. An earlier slave, Lewis Adams and 'slave owner' George W. Campbell envisioned establishment of such an institute for the empowerment of excluded groups. From its humble beginnings, it ascended to an institution of national prominence. Similarly, the Sikh Kanya Mahavidyalaya catered to hitherto marginalized sections of society, girls. Like Tuskegee University was for blacks, this School was for women, particularly orphans and widows.

Various case studies were frequently mentioned in the *Panjabi Bhain* to encourage the Sikh community to promote girls' education. It was highlighted that the progress of Europe began with the growth of women's education. These articles cited exemplars of successful boarding houses (*ashrams*) across the world. In England, Barnardo Home was treated as an ideal to emulate. In Italy, Magdalene of Canossa began '*Italian Kanya Ashram*' to serve poor and destitute girls. She opened five branches of this ashram and by 1910 it had close to 115 branches in Italy (*PB*: April 1910).

The Sikh Kanya Mahavidyalaya was often referred to as 'Ferozepore *ashram*' in the newspaper articles of the '*Khalsa Akhbar*' and the school journal '*Panjabi Bhain*'. Another popular phrase used for the school was 'Barnardo's Home'. The *Barnardo Home* of London⁷ had two thousand four hundred and twelve students, mostly orphans. It was not just a school but also a home to many neglected girls. Many girls rescued from the streets were provided with a home along with a learning environment (Kanga 1996: 85). Vaid (1910) drew similarities between the Sikh Kanya Mahavidyalaya and the Barnardo Home of London. The Sikh community was encouraged to generously fund institutions of common welfare by citing instances of Barnardo Home. In 1910, when it required funds, people immediately responded (*PB*, December 1912).

Most boarders were orphans, widows and poor girls. According to an alumna Bhatia (1942), ten to fifteen orphan girls of Chief Khalsa Diwan's Amritsar orphanage studied and resided free of cost in the boarding house (Interview, 2010). Nearly more than half of the boarders were orphans and girls from deprived contexts. These included women with children, girls over twenty, widows of more than forty years

⁷ Thomas John Barnardo (1845-1905) was a philanthropist known for 'rescuing children from streets' in the final half of the nineteenth century. Available at <http://infed.org>.

and infants below three. No fee for school or boarding was taken from them (SKM 1911:6). Student enrolment increased with the intake of orphans (Singh 1937: 102; SKM 1911: 3-4). If Takht Singh and Harnam Kaur got to know about any orphan girl in need of support they brought her to this School (boarding house). They also adopted quite a few orphan girls. For instance, they read about a neglected four and a half months old orphan girl in Bans Bareilly (presently in Uttar Pradesh) in a magazine. This girl was subsequently adopted by Harnam Kaur.⁸ Thus, this institution took responsibility of orphan girls in the pre-Independence period and tried to sponsor their education.⁹

Various sections of the society admitted daughters to study in the Sikh Kanya Mahavidyalaya. They included modern professionals like civil surgeons, engineers, doctors, contractor, schoolmasters, railway officials, superintendent jail, editors, police inspector, sub-registrar, lawyers, tutors of princes, forest rangers, among others. Additionally, landlords, subedar, moneylenders (*sahukar*) and shopkeepers also sent daughters to this school. The caste of students then was quite a sensitive issue. On being asked about that, the founder refused to share any details since he believed that it would adversely affect the Sikh community. However, the school provided opportunities to 'untouchable' girls to gain education. Sweeper (*zamandar*) as a category appeared amongst occupations of parents. The founders were social reformers who were anti-caste and admitted girls from across different sections of the society (*PB*: April 1909).

The activities of the SKM expanded over the years. English education was seen as crucial to pursue higher education. In 1902, English classes for girls were begun at the primary stage and in 1906 at the middle stage. A male teacher Sardar Kahn Singh was found with great difficulty to teach English. All girls were asked to seek written permission from their parents to learn English to avoid any sort of resistance to the learning of a foreign language (Singh 1907). Conscientious teachers of ideal and chaste character (*uchche ate suchche achran vale*) were chosen for its transaction so that girls could gain fluency in this language without becoming fashionable (*PB*: April

⁸ Sardul Singh interacted with that orphan girl whom Harnam Kaur had reared since the time she was a baby. She was entrusted to Harnam's care by the village folk (Singh 1908: 50-54; SKM 1911: 3-4).

⁹ The Sikh community was encouraged to sponsor the upbringing and education of orphan girls. It was frequently advertised in the *Panjabi Bhain* that monthly expenditure of six rupees could be sponsored for an orphan girl (Manager SKM 1913).

1917; SKM 1911: 2). The Government Report of 1906 and 1907 applauded Takht Singh for the dissemination of education among women in Punjab (Panaich: 64-65).

In 1908, the school got affiliated to the Punjab University (SKM Admission Prospectus, 1950). Teacher training classes were also started. The beginning year of teacher training classes could not be ascertained in the documents. These classes facilitated basic literacy skills among girls in tandem with a religious orientation. They became skilful in *Gurmat* education (Singh 1931:79-80). Special Gurmukhi classes provided adult education to average girls. Those girls sought admission in junior training classes who had qualified standard V. In middle training classes were those who had passed VIII standard. This course was for two years. Some students also received scholarships. The Department of Education (*Mahkama Taalim*) held examinations and students got certificates. Teacher-education was viewed as a welcome initiative to train female teachers and reduce their deficit in the schools. As school teachers, they were able to earn a good remuneration (Editorial, 'Training classan', *PB*: February 1920). The Sikh Kanya Mahavidyalaya was a High school and focused alongside on teacher-training. The Sikh Kanya Mahavidyalaya offered First in Arts (F.A.) course.

The original site of the school was inadequate to address the requirements of the students. In order to construct a new building, the founders travelled abroad to gather funds. In 1911, a team from the Sikh Kanya Mahavidyalaya, led by Takht Singh and Agya Kaur, left for thirteen-month long visit to the South-East Asian countries like Rangoon, Malaya, China, Singapore and Japan on 16 February to collect funds for the new school building (Singh 1936: 3; SKM 1943: 1-2). They recited holy hymns, did *kirtan* (congregational singing) and made fervent appeals for donations at Sikh gatherings and *divans* (religious meetings) in the Gurdwaras of the countries mentioned above (Singh 2002: 18)¹⁰. This team returned on 3rd March 1912 and soon the new building was erected outside Amritsari gate.

SKM Curriculum 1916

In the early years, education was transacted in an informal (*dharamsala*) mode. The focus was on nurturing girls to learn aspects essential to the religious domain as well

¹⁰ Telephonic Interview with Amarjit Singh, the family of Takht Singh, 2010.

as those that were crucial to efficiently lead daily lives. Singh notes that Harnam Kaur chalked out the curriculum suitable for girls.

...Is of a nature calculated to fit the pupil to be a good housewife in addition to being a cultured companion to her husband and a useful member of the Church as well as society in general (Singh1912: 20).

A scheme of studies was prepared on the guidelines suggested by Takht Singh. It was altered several times before being accepted. All students took examinations on the basis of which they were divided into five standards (SKM 1911: 5-6). The 1916 curriculum tried to combine tradition and modernity (Manchanda 2014: 136, 129). Traditional texts like Bhai Vir Singh's novel *Sundri*, *Dulhan Darpan*, *Nakli Sikh Parbodh* by Ditt Singh, *Saruktawali* by Giani Pratap Singh (which discussed the relevance of religion in leading a pious and happy life), *Sundran Puran* by Bhagat Bakshi ji and *Bhai Mahnga* were a part of the syllabus. From the third standard, books were on feminine themes like on how to become a perfect wife (*Sushila*, *Ghar Sowar*, *Arogyanamwalee*, *Sughar Bibi*), acquire good conduct and stay healthy (see Annexure). Aspects related to women's medicine, nursing of people with ill health and administration of first aid to the wounded, among others were also taught. Science was taught through innovative methods using concrete material. Geography was introduced early at the second lower primary stage. History was taught first middle standard onwards up to the Mughal period later till Warren Hastings, and finally a history of India. Domestic economy comprising needlework¹¹ was taught in 1st standard itself (SKM curriculum 1916). During the First World War, the Sikh Kanya Mahavidyalaya students stitched seven thousand clothes contributing to the Lady O' Dwyer's Punjab Comforts' Fund (SKM 1943: 5). The Sikh Kanya Mahavidyalaya students also participated in a national exhibition of handicrafts held at Lahore in 1909 and won first prize (*PB*: 1909). Physical exercises like swinging and rope-skipping, dumbles (IV upper primary standard), tug of war (V Upper primary standard) were also included in the curriculum.

¹¹ In standard I, students learnt to twist threads and put them into needles. They learnt elementary stitching and fixing buttons, cross-stitching, hemming, knitting, sewing, darning, making button-holes, putting on gold lace and all kinds of stitching, cutting and sewing *Paijama* and *Kachh*, knitting of crochet handkerchief/ bag/ shirt, Indian embroidery, use of sewing mechanic, cutting and sewing a shirt by hand, among others at the primary stage. At the middle stage, students learnt advanced work in embroidery, crochet, and lace-work, and cutting and sewing shirts and frocks of babies. They learnt to tailor a full dress by hand as well as by machine. They could do sophisticated knitting and crochet work.

Simultaneously, English was taught from IV upper primary standard onwards (PB: April 1917). As discussed in the *Panjabi Bhain*, 'it was not to let them become fashionable since western influence was much strong then and it did not matter whether one was educated or not, to be influenced by it. Such a thought acted as an obstacle with regard to the progress of women's education. In fact, learning of English was thought to promote the Punjabi language. Otherwise, it was thought that with the joining of Hindi and Urdu teachers and inspectors in the schools, only these languages would gain significance' (PB, April 1917). Reading and writing skills, spelling and dictation, easy written composition, conversation, recitation and grammar were taught at the primary stage. Translation skills from English to vernacular and vice-versa were developed at the middle stage. The course was designed to prepare students to pursue English at the University level later.

According to the Government scheme of studies, at the primary level, only one local language was to be taught. However, at the Sikh Kanya Mahavidyalaya, Gurmukhi, Hindi and English were taught (Shivdayal, SKM: 26). Punjabi, the medium of instruction, was taught first standard onwards honing both reading and writing skills. Dictation, letter-writing, grammar, paraphrasing and composition, essay-writing in Punjabi was done. Hindi was taught third lower primary onwards till the middle stage while Arithmetic was taught first standard onwards.¹²

In the early years, thus both religious and secular education was taught at this School. However, in 1909 when Attar Singh¹³, a Sikh social reformer, interacted with the students he realized that in the religious sphere they knew much more than what he expected. They knew five *banis* of *Nitnem* (*Japuji Sahib, Jaap Sahib, Tav-prasad Savaiyye, Chaupai and Anand Sahib*) and recited *Rahiraas Sahib* in their daily schedule in the evening. Before sleeping, they recited *Kirtan Sohila* and five *Shabads*. He highlighted that, like Sikh men, Sikh women also could get baptized, imbibe *Rahit*

¹² In 1907, the nature of Arithmetic transacted was considered to be unsatisfactory. Perhaps, with changes introduced later, this curriculum became appropriate (Shivdayal, SKM: 26). In 1916, at the lower middle stage, figures and notation up to one lakh were done. Use of concrete examples was made in learning of addition and subtraction. Mental mathematics as well as G.C.M, L.C.M, vulgar fractions, reduction of weight, measure and time were taught at the primary level. At the middle stage, decimal fractions and recurring decimals, compound interest, percentage, average, profit and loss, square root, along with questions of work and time, speed and distance were transacted (SKM: 26).

¹³Sant Attar Singh (1866-1927) of Mastuana promoted modern education among Sikhs. He was considered an inspiration behind the *Tat Khalsa* reform movement. He was an active member of the Sikh Educational Conference and helped establish many schools and colleges in Punjab (Singh 2002: 212-214).

Maryada to the full, and perfect all five *banis* to popularize the religion and its doctrines amongst the larger community. Sikh women and men could become partners in this mission of proselytization, which would increase members of the Guru's family. Not only this, the institution was expected to continue its contribution in modelling such women who could further such enterprise. The mission of '*amrit parchar*' (baptism) was to be promoted with vitality. The female author of this article in *Panjabi Bhain* repents that till then the Sikh community had ignored women's participation in this exercise (*PB*, July 1909). In 1907, the Director of Public Instruction critiqued the emphasis assigned to religious education since at times it led to the neglect of other academic disciplines. According to him, 'religious education is mostly given orally... the transacted scheme of studies is extensive and lengthy such that if it is followed then fulfilling requirements for other subjects appears to become difficult' (SKM, *Prashansa Patra*: 26).

A few alumnae of the school reported that some Hindu and Muslim girls also gained education in this School. It seems all had the freedom to study their religious texts. Muslim girls recited the Holy *Quran*, Hindus read the *Ramayana* and Sikhs the *Guru Granth Sahib*. Many Muslims who lived in areas adjacent to the school from Kasuri gate to Balochan Basti near Amritsari gate sent daughters to gain education here. Some Muslim students in reverence embroidered new scarves (*Rumala Sahib*) for the holy book *Guru Granth Sahib* (Interview, Kaur, 2010).

Notions of femininity and masculinity are central to the discourse of patriarchy. Uberoi suggests that the social reform movements were mainly "contestations over sexuality" (1996: xvi). The ideology reflected sharp distinctions between the responsibilities and tasks of men and women. In the refurbished vision of the Lahore Singh Sabha, drawing from Hindu patriarchy, women were to internalize male-constructed symbols and values. Mohan (2007) states

Entrusted with the responsibility of socializing the girl-child to internalize the male-constructed symbols, images, codes of behaviour and dress and other values conducive to the patriarchal control of social and economic structures, institutions and resources, women had to be co-opted to defend religious tradition and their roles as nurturers of family, community and nation.

The *Tat Khalsa* ideology reinforced the *pativrata* ideal through various processes. Women were encouraged to become pure *Sikhnis*. Sikh girls were discouraged from piercing the nose and ears to wear nose-rings and ear-rings. Such practices among Sikhs were referred to as pollutants (*dushan*). It was considered similar to Chinese girls practicing foot binding to maintain a standard of beauty. Women were asked to reform themselves and undo with such ideas of beauty that stood in opposition with the religious ideology (*PB*: June-July 1910). Girls' education was considered a means to acquire 'chaste' qualities like *pativrata dharam*. It was considered essential for both household and community to progress (*PB*: August, 1908). The social reform deliberations also wanted to 'generate a masculine generation, both in terms of physique and intellect, for which it was important to reinvent the notion of motherhood at the same time to idealize it' (Mohan 2007: 39). Women, expected to bear the responsibility of child-rearing were socialized to 'become educated, religious, and pious to ensure parallel qualities in their off springs' (*PB* August, 1908).

The ideal of 'moral woman' was underlined for the community to gain a superior position within Indian society (Mohan 2007: 79). The purpose of education was to serve myriad goals. Education was also to assist in acquiring qualities that would be admired after her marriage. It was like "an ornament that even parents wanted to see their daughter adorned with" (*PB*, May 1912). The Punjabi proverb "girls with good qualities reside happily at their in-laws' place" (*jo gun hove pale vasan sauhre*) was quoted (*PB*: April 1914). "Like a pious wife, girls were expected to educate children and advice relatives" (*PB*, March 1912). Anshu Malhotra (2002) asserts that to underline the notion of *pativrata*, 'Hindu' legendary characters like 'Sita' and 'Savitri' were given equal significance along with the new Sikh personalities to perpetuate a distinct Sikh identity. Notes from a log-book of the School recorded the visit of Mohan Singh Vaid in 1910. On seeing photographs of famous men displayed in the School Hall, he appears to have commented that pictures of "cultured, chaste and *pativrata* women" also be displayed to inspire girls.

...in front of girl students photographs of good natured and pious women look better... photographs of women who are chaste, well-natured, pious like Saraswati, Savitri, Draupadi, Mata Gujri should be displayed. Mohan Singh Vaid appreciated students' progress in English. He suggested that students be given books related to women's education to read. He committed to regularly mail

literature related to women's education, including monthly magazines like *Stri dharam Sikhyak*, *Grah Laxmi*, *Laxmi Bhandar*, *Stri Prabodhini*, *Stri Subodh*, *Grah Dharam*, *Grahni Kartavya Dipka*, *Stri Bharta*, *Grah Sikhiya*, *Grah Prabandh*, *Bhojan Prakash*, *Nariratan*, *Anandi Bai*, among others (Kanga 1996: 86).

In 1920, the impetus for girls' education increased and girls' schools opened in various places. The Sikh Kanya Mahavidyalaya was 'central point' in strengthening of the Sikh community ('Louis Dane's address', *PB*: January 1911). The school not only educated girls, trained teachers but also played an important role in the maintenance of Sikh girls' schools in the region. The Sikh Kanya Mahavidyalaya celebrated news of the establishment of girls' schools (*PB*: August 1908). Harnam Kaur indirectly assisted the setting up of Guru Nanak Kanya Pathshala at Quetta. This girls' school encouraged education among Sikhs settled in Baluchistan. However, resistance to send girls to schools was then a major hurdle. To overcome this, the manager of the school suggested the introduction of stipends for girls, which would act as a motivating factor for parents to enrol girls. This also, it suggested, would curtail girls going to madarsa to gain education (*PB*: August 1908).

The efforts of the Sikh Kanya Mahavidyalaya also led to the establishment of girls' schools and boarding houses at various places bringing about a spurt in the education of girls (*PB*: August 1916). According to the editorial team of the *Panjabi Bhain* "of the stream called the Sikh Kanya Mahavidyalaya, various rivulets flowed which were like its branches. The students of the Sikh Kanya Mahavidyalaya illuminated the light of education in various regions of the Indian sub-continent". The Sikh Kanya Pathshala at Chuniya (Lahore) hailed its association with this School (*PB*: August 1908). The SKM often had scarce financial resources yet it continued to extend monetary assistance to various girls' schools. For instance, the SKM at Batala was about to be closed down due to shortage of funds until the SKM assisted it. The Ditt Singh Kanya Pathshala at Ropar also received assistance in many ways (*PB*: September 1910).

The financial position of the School was dependent on grants from the royal families, non-resident Sikhs staying abroad, sale of books from the School counter and on other

contributions from the larger Sikh community (*PB*: October 1913).¹⁴ The school was functioning because of the philanthropy shown by various sections of the community. Various Sikh princely states like Patiala, Jind, Nabha, Kapurthala, Faridkot and Kalsia were generous in extending donations (*PB*: December 1916).

Scarcity of funds, however, remained a perpetual problem. Caveeshar notes that according to manager Takht Singh, the expenditure was often beyond receipts and it became difficult to pay salaries to the staff, which often got delayed. Two main reasons for underfunding was lack of a fixed grant and the absence of fees levied on students. Most Sikh students belonged to economically weak backgrounds and were not able to afford education. Thus, the school avoided introducing fee fearing that it might hinder enrolment of students. The founders struggled hard to sustain this School. They faced various challenges yet were caring towards students. To illustrate, it is believed that 'Takht Singh washed clothes and his wife mended the ragged clothes of the students' (Singh 1915: 55-56). The Government grant imposed various restrictions on the School. The appointment of special staff along with other infrastructural requirements proved burdensome hence was not accepted. Help extended by the princely states reduced public subscriptions because of public perception that what was provided was enough though that was not always the case (Caveeshar 1973: 104).

Appeals were made to the Sikh community to contribute by either bearing the cost of education and residence of orphan students; or through sale of published booklets of the Sikh Kanya Mahavidyalaya; by contributing for a day's *langar* which was thirty-five rupees or in-kind through grains; by donating money to the school on any family occasion like marriage; getting a memorial stone inlaid in the classrooms for rupees five hundred; taking a resolution that one would collect rupees hundred or thousand

¹⁴ Sardar Ajit Singh (1915) implored the Sikh educational conference to donate to this School. He suggested certain measures to raise funds for the school: (a) district and other local representatives and leaders of agriculturist Sikhs could arrange for the contribution of a portion of land-revenue as was done for Khalsa college in 1904; (b) non-agriculturist Sikhs could pay ten percent of their monthly income, even as instalments; (c) deputation of representative Sikhs to the Sikh maharajas, Rajas, and *jagirdars*; a preaching party of Sikhs led by Takht Singh, and others like Sant Attar Singh could gather grain during rabi time; (d) the Singh Sabhas could contribute towards this noble cause; (e) Sikh regiments could raise donation of a nominal amount; (f) and the Mahanths of gurdwaras and Deras could contribute an amount out of their reserves (Singh 1915: 55-59). It could not be ascertained whether these suggestions were ultimately followed.

for the institution and then on the fulfilment of it get a stone laid in the School to remind the community of one's work (Caveeshar 1973).

Many articles were published motivating the Sikh community to donate generously for the school and the boarding house, as mentioned already. Various contributions of this school were highlighted like training of teachers, quality of education transacted and socialization of ideal Sikh girls (SKM: *PB Samachar*). Agya Kaur, an alumna of the school, who married the founder four years after Harnam Kaur's death, encouraged students to learn from the experiences of students and teachers of the Kanya Mahavidyalaya and the D.A.V. College, Jalandhar and to similarly collect funds for their School. Students were encouraged to get funds for the school. Many students responded positively (*PB*: April 1914). In 1912, a reference is made to how students collected rupees five thousand for the school (*PB*: July 1912).

Established Period (1921-1947)

This period saw rapid development of the School. In 1915, when Caveessieur visited the SKM he referred to it as a monument articulating the glory of Sikhs in the civil life not unlike the Saragarhi memorial that showcased their courageous acts in the battleground. The simple brick-red walls of the School which 'gird like a belt the whole of the compound' (Caveeshar 1915: 7-8) were designed to keep girls safe. Monumental glory also exemplified virtues of the Sikh community in providing education to girls, particularly Sikh in a cultured and refined manner.

Alumnae recollect the past glory of the School. A respondent who had shared multifarious relationships with the School was Bhatia. An alumna and retired Principal of this School, born on 10th December 1936 at Pavan Chakval (Peshawar) in West Punjab (Pakistan), she shared how earlier, there was a craze to study in this School. Her father, a stationmaster with the railways, shifted from Peshawar to Ferozepur because he wanted to educate his daughters at SKM (Interview, 2010). Another alumna, Devinder Kaur did F.A from the SKM in the late 1920s. In 2010, at the age of 102 years, she remembered names of a few of her classmates like her friend Harnam Kaur (mother of Professor Nargis Panchpakesan). Devinder specifically remembered wearing thick clothes made out of *khadi* stitched by her grandmother (Interview, Kaur, 2010).

Bhatia said that she was a witness to this 'shining phase' of the School. This School began when educating girls was perceived as a crime. It was believed that educated girls ultimately lost all virtue. Though education was considered a curse for women yet the community appreciated the sort of education that was made available in this School. In fact, 'none refused an alliance in marriage with girls educated here since they were considered to be of pure character who knew how to lead a righteous life' (Interview, Bhatia, 2010).

The Punjab University Enquiry Committee 1932-33 (1933) notes the contribution of Sikh Kanya Mahavidyalaya in imparting secondary education to the girls of Punjab. The committee that visited schools under private management appreciated the role of SKM in acting as a base for higher education.

"The schools under private management which they have visited, the Kanya Mahavidyalaya and the Madrasa-tul-Benat, Jullundur, and the Sikh Kanya Mahavidyalaya, Ferozepore, and the Mathra Das School at Moga, are good illustrations of the laudable efforts which private agencies are making towards the better education of girls. The University foundation of girls' education in the Punjab can therefore be said to have been well and truly laid, though much still remains to be done for the building of superstructure" (Punjab University Enquiry Committee Report 1932-33 (1933): 225).

The Sikh schools were seen as bastions for propagating Sikhism. Sikhs were motivated to send their children to such schools set up by the *panth*. Around the 1930s, these schools as sites of reform played an important role in shaping up the Sikh identity rather than the popular Singh Sabhas. The community was encouraged to admit girls in these 'sect' schools' (*Panthak Vidyale*) rather than the government and mission schools (where religious lives were destroyed). In the *panth* schools, they learnt religious education along with practical knowledge (*Vyavharik vidya*) (Panaich 1931: 80).

Singh (1997) observes that schools were viewed not only as "...dispensers of education but they also served as strongholds of Sikhism...the Singh Sabhas formed to propagate reform, were not as popular as these schools" (Singh 1997: 41). Those students there were learning to lead life 'the Sikh way' was reported as early as 1911-12 in the Department of Education (*Mahkama Taalim*) Report. Students carried out daily rituals along with cooking without any help (Panaich: 66). Service to the nation was also considered important given the larger context as can be seen in the words of an alumna:

Dear God,
Bless me that I may get up early morning to take a bath,
First I should take your name then think of other things,
I may bring happiness in the lives of my brothers and sisters, and to those who are
in need, I may be able to become educated, earn goodwill and bring honour to my
community, In the service of nation, I may sacrifice my body, soul and wealth...
(Singh 2003: 317)

In the mid-1930's, the aim of the school in the words of the then Principal Gurbaksh Kaur was to ensure "a perfect fusion of cultures of the East and West" among all students. Girls were expected to turn modern without relinquishing their traditional roles. The school wanted to "produce women who would make happy homes and serve their country and not adorn the drawing rooms alone". The institution promoted 'plain living, early rising, regular prayers, cleanliness of person and clothing, vocal and instrumental music' (SKM 1943: 6).

The school made provision for the transaction of Compulsory Science at the Entrance stage in April 1934 under the supervision of Gopal Singh, M.Sc. It was an important initiative for those who wanted to pursue medical stream subsequently but found a lack of science education a big hurdle. In the whole of Punjab, except the SKM, there was barely any school, which had such classes, claimed the editors of the School magazine. The IX standard students were inducted in these medical classes (SKM 1934). The School prepared students for Matriculation and the Intermediate Examinations. Science was taught at the Matriculation level and all art subjects were taught at the Intermediate stage. In 1936, twelve poor orphan girls and in 1943 seven orphan girls were educated free of cost (Singh 1936: 7; SKM 1943:5). During the period 1939-43, nineteen students secured scholarships- 2 students were at the intermediate stage, 2 at the matriculation stage, 13 at the middle stage and 2 at the primary stage (SKM 1943).

Challenging barriers, some girls pursued Science from the R.S.D College and later took admission in the M.B.B.S program at the Amritsar Government Medical College. In 1916, an alumna joined the Lady Hardinge Medical College. Thirty alumnae were School Inspectress who later attended the Lady Hardinge's Medical College, Delhi and the Brown's Medical College, Ludhiana (Singh 1936: 6). In an issue of *Panjabi Bhain*, the school applauded an untouchable girl for becoming a

doctor. In 1934, Basant Kaur, daughter of a sweeper Daan Singh, qualified to become a doctor from the Ludhiana Medical College and gained appreciation (SKM: 1934).¹⁵

SKM Curriculum 1929

Even during this phase, the School followed its own curriculum and prepared students to appear for the Punjab University examinations in standards IX and X. In Geography, innovations like moving from concepts situated in the local context onto the global ones were introduced. For instance, in standard III, map of the Ferozepore district was discussed. In the successive grades, Punjab and the North-Western Frontier Province were learnt along with the land and water distribution in the globe (SKM Curriculum 1929).

Ethics or *Sadachar* became a crucial element of the 1929 curriculum (see annexure Table on 1916 and 1929 curriculum). It agreed with the much-admired ‘Victorian housewife’ model (Manchanda 2014: 136). The Singh Sabha emphasized on women becoming ‘*pativrata*’ and tried to regulate women’s sexuality and reproduction to attain social prestige (Malhotra 2002: 43-44). In each standard, certain aspects of moral ethic were discussed which students then had to abide. Malhotra (2002: 43-44) states that in the Singh Sabha uncertainty regarding the question of caste persisted despite emphasis was laid on the practices of community eating (*langar*). This was reflected even at the SKM. The main emphasis was on certain crucial dimensions. First was to outgrow caste distinctions. Efforts were made to abide by the principles of the Sikh Gurus. Guru Gobind Singh’s belief that humanity had a single identity (*manas ki jaat sabhe ek hi pahichan bo*) was practiced. Students were expected to purify thoughts and adopt right practices becoming followers of *Gursikhi*. They were to restrain from stealing and speaking lies and were expected to serve congregations. The second was to foster love amongst school peers as well as the community and the third dimension was to cultivate ideal feminine qualities like showing respect, obedience to parents and elders, thinking about the welfare of all and maintaining order and discipline. Finally, fulfilling a woman’s duty (*stri dharm*) as a daughter, sister, wife and mother were held primary.

¹⁵ Forty-five teaching staff, both male and female were employed. Nineteen teachers including eleven male and eight female teachers taught. Three clerks, four musicians, seven preachers, a doctor and eleven non-teaching staff performed unskilled work (SKM 1934).

Many alumnae who studied in this period stated that religion was earlier an important feature of women's education. They recollects that competence in reciting *gurbani* was a precious gift from the School. The diaries of Singh, school alumni, revealed that she resorted to *gurbani* for solace in all times, be it sorrow or joy. She felt that being embedded in the religious practices offered her strength in life. In her diary, she also expressed that Guru Nanak's way of happy life includes singing kirtan (*kirat bani*), reciting God's name (*naam japna*) and sharing food (*vand chakna*) which all should imbibe in life (Interview, Kaur, 2010). In a letter, an alumna in the Delhi College expressed her gratitude towards the school for the gift of *Gurbani* “. I feel proud to be a Sikh. The beauty that I see in the Sikh religion is not visible in any religion” (Singh 2003: 309-310). Like her, many students followed almost all religious practices like reciting *Sukhmani Sahib*, *Japuji Sahib* and *Hazare de Shabad*. Bhatia recollected how ‘all memorized *gurbani*’. Even at the age of seventy-four years, Bhatia was actively engaged with some local Gurdwaras teaching *Gurmat* education to the school children (Interviews, Alumnae, 2010).

Alumnae Achievements

Many of the School's alumnae were in distinguished positions as teachers, school inspectors and doctors in the mid-nineteenth century, states Singh (1936). The school encouraged many girls from disadvantaged backgrounds to gain education and join certain professions. Around ninety percent of girls became teachers. After finishing the higher secondary stage, many girls pursued Junior Basic Training (JBT) course (two years) from the Ram Sukh Das (R.S.D) College to get a government job in teaching. Around ten percent pursued graduation along with a B.Ed. degree from the Dev Samaj College for Women (Singh 1936).

Some girls pursued higher education. As mentioned earlier, the School acted as a source of strength for students even after they qualified. Davinder Kaur Grewal was first among Sikh women to qualify Master's level. In 1929, she came first in M.A. (Psychology) in the whole of Punjab. In 1930, the Government of India gave her scholarship to pursue a Doctoral degree at the London University (Panaich: 67). The first woman minister in independent Punjab, Doctor Parkash Kaur, was an alumna of this School. Born in 1914 at Khara village, after schooling, she studied medicine at the Medical College, Amritsar in 1937. Later, she joined the Lady Emerson Red Cross

Hospital, Amritsar. In 1949, she introduced the resolution to make Punjabi as the provincial language of Punjab. On 29 December 1967, in a formal declaration, Punjabi became an official language of Punjab.¹⁶

Challenging barriers, some girls pursued Science from the R.S.D College and later took admission in the M.B.B.S program at the Amritsar Government Medical College. In 1916, an alumna joined the Lady Hardinge Medical College. Thirty alumnae were School Inspectress who later attended the Lady Hardinge's Medical College, Delhi and the Brown's Medical College, Ludhiana (Singh 1936: 6). In an issue of *Panjabi Bhain*, the school applauded an untouchable girl for becoming a doctor. In 1934, Basant Kaur, daughter of a sweeper Daan Singh, qualified to become a doctor from the Ludhiana Medical College and gained appreciation (SKM: 1934).¹⁷

After Takht Singh's demise in 1937, a Governing Body of nine members was set up for the management of the school. It was duly registered on February 4, 1939, under Societies Registration Act XXI of 1860. The dream of the founders to upgrade this institution into the first Women's University in Punjab like the Bombay University, however, remained unfulfilled (SKM 1943: 6).

Partition and the SKM

In the pre-independence period, the School witnessed remarkable growth and expanded to cater to the educational needs of girl students of Punjab. However, in the post-independence phase, the School had to face many challenges to sustain as an institution. This was not only due to the School-related factors but it was also influenced by the city where it was located.

The School as a Godown

¹⁶ In 1945-46, she contested as a Congress candidate after Amritsar was reserved for a woman candidate. She won the election with the biggest margin in the whole of Punjab. In 1956, she became Social Welfare and Health Minister in the State Cabinet. Available at <http://www.tribuneindia.com>.

¹⁷ Forty-five teaching staff, both male and female were employed. Nineteen teachers including eleven male and eight female teachers taught. Three clerks, four musicians, seven preachers, a doctor and eleven non-teaching staff performed unskilled work (SKM 1934).

In the late sixties, due to lack of funds, for nearly three to four years, the school management decided to rent out some rooms to the Food Corporation of India to store food-grains (Interviews, Retired Teachers, 2010). The School almost became an FCI godown and only some rooms were operational to continue with the teaching-learning process. An alumna described how the school was partially converted into a godown that housed food grains (Interview, Singh, 2010). To ensure free passage for the movement of trucks, the big gates at the entrance of SKM were demolished. The Children's park including seesaws, swings and play-related structures were razed to ground since they obstructed the free movement of heavy vehicles. Earlier, the entrance of the school had two big iron gates followed by a cement wall with the painting of the Bhakra Nangal Dam. One alumnus recollected how trucks came within the school premises with labourers carrying quintal-by-quintal the sacks of wheat in and out of the school. Nearly, ten to twelve trucks entered into the school to load/unload rucksacks of wheat, which were stored in nine rented rooms. As students, they disliked seeing it scattered all around. The school environment was hazardous for students with phosphorous pills, used to preserve grains, strewn everywhere (Interview, Singh, 2010). According to some retired teachers and alumnae, this was the 'worst phase' of the school.

The SKM struggled hard to exist in the face of potential closure. Schools in Punjab were affected by the changing socio-economic context. Growing prosperity in agriculture leading to large scale production of food grains affected some schools adversely. Punjab occupies only two percent of India's area but produces fifty percent of rice and sixty percent of wheat. In mid-sixties, with the adoption of new technology and the onset of Green Revolution, production increased manifold for which the government was not logistically prepared. In 1967, the first year when high-yielding varieties of seeds were used for the production of wheat, output increased from 12 million tons to 17 million tons. Kumar et. al. (2007) state that some schools in rural Punjab were closed to store food grains in godowns. This proved to be a great setback for students (Ibid., 2007: 94). The philosophy of promoting girls' education that had kept the SKM alive almost disappeared. It turned into any other neighbourhood school accommodating children of nearby localities. The fact that many classrooms were rented out to the Food Corporation of India (FCI) to store food grains underlines how during the Green Revolution, certain domains like education received

low priority. In 1970s, with a new school managing committee, FCI contract was nullified and these godowns were vacated and turned back into classrooms for the continuation of school education.

One of the reasons for the deterioration of the SKM then was also the paucity of funds. The Report of the Education Commission (1964-66) stated that to enhance the status of teachers it was imperative to substantially upgrade teachers' remuneration, especially at the school level (1966: 47). Punjab accepted this principle of pay parity at all levels of school education. The Commission recommended that salaries of teachers operating under different managements such as government, local bodies and private organizations should be at par (1966: 49). Three scales of pay for school teachers were introduced: first was for teachers who had completed secondary course and were trained and who formed a majority at the primary stage, second were trained graduates who constituted small proportion of those at the primary stage and were largely at the lower secondary stage, third were postgraduate teachers who formed a small proportion at the lower secondary stage and were basically at the higher secondary stage (1966: 53).

To meet the disbursement of salaries to teachers according to new norms, the school required funds. The government contributed 95 percent grant and the managing committee disbursed remaining 5 percent to meet salaries of teachers. According to a retired principal, this was a major reason for the school management deciding to rent out rooms to the FCI. The funds received enabled payment of salaries to the teaching staff. On December 1, 1967 recommendations of the commission were implemented in this school. The school received a sanction of 16 teachers. The salaries of both JBT¹⁸ and B.A./B.Ed. (graduate teachers) and M.A and B.Ed. (post-graduate teachers) increased manifold (Interview, Gautam, 2010).

SKM in Contemporary Context

¹⁸JBT is a teacher-training programme. This diploma level course prepares trainees to teach at the elementary stage of education.

The main objective of the SKM, as discussed in the earlier sections, was to immerse students in the Sikh rituals and observances, both through school processes and classroom practices. The school ethos with symbols and signifiers depicted its association with norms and values of Sikhism. Being Sikh, both teachers and students celebrated and transferred these aspects to the curriculum and its transaction. These features persisted even after the SKM became a government-aided school.

The SKM functioning as a government-aided school caters predominantly to the children of rural milieu and those living on the outskirts of the city. The School's catchment area includes the rural border villages (*pind*) like Dulchike, Habibke, Macchhiwada and Barike. These villages are within six to seven kilometres of the school radius. In the border villages like Ghatti Rajoke, students had to cross the *dariya* (river) and then commute for around two kilometres to reach the school. Most students come to School from working-class settlements such as Amritsari gate, Macchhimandi, Bathianwali basti, Borianwali basti, Sunvan basti, Aava vali basti and Gole bagh. All these areas are within two and a half kilometres radius of the School.

The school relied heavily on contractual teachers for the transaction of education. In 2010, there were 21 teachers. Out of these, only ten were permanent while the rest were contract teachers and there was one *gurmat* teacher. The senior-most teacher, appointed in 1975, had almost 35 years of teaching experience in this School. The last appointment was in 2002. All permanent teachers were upper caste Punjabi *Khatri*. They were formally appointed and received the salary from the state government. Of the ten teachers, two had JBT (Junior Basic Training), six were graduates with B.Ed and two were post-graduate with B.Ed appointed in Lecturer grade. The teaching experience of these teachers varied from a maximum 34 years to minimum of 7 years.

The changing student composition affected the school significantly. Whereas earlier the school catered to girls from elite families, today the school caters mainly to Dalit (scheduled caste) and OBC students. Both within the Sikhs and non-Sikhs, it was the lower castes which outnumbered the general category students. Data reveals that student composition in the SKM comprises of the scheduled caste students, followed by the OBC and finally a few general category students. Hindu students belonging to the scheduled castes outnumber the Sikhs primarily belonging to the general category and OBCs. The general category comprises of castes like Aroras, Khatri, Narang,

Monge, Kataria, Pandat, among others. Sikh students belonging to socially and economically dominant Jatt Sikhs were relatively few since most studied in private English medium schools. The OBC students comprise of Kamboj Sikhs, *Nai*, *Dhobi*, Kurmi, Lohar, among others. The Scheduled caste students include Balmiki, Mazhabi Sikhs, Sansi, Sirkiband, Rai Sikhs, Ravidasia, Mochi, among others. Irrespective of caste distinctions, almost all students belonged to economically vulnerable sections (*arthik pakhon pichde*) of Ferozpur society. The caste profile of students provides an understanding of the community to which the school caters (Fieldwork 2010).

Within this shift of student composition towards lower castes, there is a gender dimension also. The strength of girls is diminishing but the proportion of Scheduled caste girls compared to OBC and general category girls is far greater. Even among scheduled caste girls, participation reduces at successive stages of the school education. Many scheduled caste girls tend to drop out after elementary education and only a few continue onto secondary education. The strength of boys admitted in the elementary stage has increased, particularly scheduled caste boys. Thus SKM plays a crucial role in promoting the education of Dalit students, especially girls that get reflected in the rising enrolment over the years. The official aim is to ensure quality education for extremely poor sections of the society. However, as discussed, the quality of education is a lower standard. Parents being aware of this situation resolve it by allowing their wards to go for tuitions from an early stage.

The major continuity, which we see through the history of this school, is in the field of religious education. *Gurmat* remains an essential component of formal curriculum. It pervades the School and influences a regular curriculum. The sacred and the secular spheres intertwine with each other and the sacred emerges out of this as a leading influence on the school. A minority school, the SKM carries on the tradition of imparting Sikh religious tradition as it has been doing since many decades. At times a cause of friction arises because students from other religious traditions also study in this school. Thus one can safely assume that while much has changed the expectations from and function of religion has not changed much. It promotes education that holds model values and behavioural norms as primary. The SKM nurtures religion and its values amongst students. Religion as an instrument is utilized to shape the identities of girls in desired ways. This study then also tells us how schools are products of

society and in turn, contribute to society by fulfilling the functional prerequisites essential to achieve larger goals. They work in both manifest and latent ways to craft education for girls in relation to their perceived roles in society.

School *Gurdwara*

Since the initial years of its establishment, the school has had a *Gurdwara*. Alumnae and retired teachers recalled that the *Gurdwara* existed since the inception of this school in the early twentieth century. In a corner of the quadrangle, adjacent to the school hall, is a large room with dilapidated walls that houses the *Gurdwara*. Wooden cupboards were used to store books. Students use the tap near the corner to wash their feet and hands before entering this sacred space. The *Gurdwara* has a wooden chamber to rest the holy book (*Sukh asan*) after the school gets over.

As mentioned earlier, the school started within the *Jubilee Gurdwara* and later shifted to the new school building The *Gurdwara* became an inseparable part of the school processes and practices. Most government schools in Ferozepur do not possess a *gurdwara*, which is why this school stands apart. The School and the *Gurdwara* were inter-connected. The school provided secular education and the *Gurdwara* made religious education available to all. In this School-cum-*Gurdwara*, both secular and religious education interfaced in multiple ways and influenced life at School.

This *Gurdwara* in school precincts, operational during school hours, is the centre of religious activity. Students during recess and teachers in free periods read handbooks of prayers (*gutke nitnem*¹⁹ *de*) or did ‘*Sahaj path*’ that is, slow reading or recitation of the whole Sikh scripture incessantly without interruptions (Gill and Joshi 1994: 73). The *Gurdwara* at SKM is what connects students and teachers to the sphere of religious education. Almost all student respondents were attached and connected to this sacred space. After the morning assembly, the *gurmat* teacher took out *Hukumnama* or “royal decree” (hymn randomly selected from the Guru Granth Sahib that conveys a message from the gurus) along with the students.

¹⁹Nitnem refers to certain prayers that Sikhs are supposed to say on a daily basis. These five prayers are- Guru Nanak’s *Japuji Sahib* in early morning, Guru Gobind Singh’s *Japu* and Ten *Savaiyye*, *SodaruRahrasi* in the evening and *Kirtan Sohila* at night. Each prayer is concluded by *ardas* that indicates end of a religious ceremony (Singh 2001: 241-243).

Most students referred to the Guru Granth Sahib housed in the school *Gurdwara* as 'Babaji'. Every day, the *gurmat* teacher, along with a few students, cleaned the *Gurdwara* (Daily observations). Around 8:30 am, she opened the Guru Granth Sahib and after reciting *ardas*, did *prakash* of the holy *granth*, i.e. she randomly chose any *shabad* or *vak* and read aloud it's meaning to everybody present, including some teachers and senior secondary students. During the day, most students came once at least to pay reverence to the Guru Granth Sahib. They wash their feet in a corner near the entrance and cover their heads with a cloth. They came towards the Guru Granth Sahib and bowed by kneeling down. They also recited 'waheguru ji da Khalsa, waheguru ji di fateh'.

At least once in a day, usually during recess, most students and teachers visited the *Gurdwara*. They offered prayers regularly and on special occasions like the conclusion of *path*, after *ardas* distributed 'consecrated food' (*parshad*). The Principal as well as some students stated during interviews that before examinations teachers offered prayer in the *Gurdwara* for soliciting students' good performance in the board examinations. The students read the holy *Anand Sahib* (Interviews, 2010).

At two in the afternoon, students or *gurmat* teacher recited *Rehras Sahib* and then closed (*Sukh asan*) the holy book (*Babaji da sukh-asan karde han*). The scarf (*Rumala Sahib*) with which this holy book was covered was changed daily and incense stick was lighted. In the absence of the *gurmat* teacher, students (standard XI) voluntarily did this ritual under the supervision of the Principal. The *gurmat* teacher or other senior girls recited *Ardas* before carrying the Guru Granth Sahib from one place to another within the *Gurdwara*. Those who constituted *sangat* (congregation) stood in reverence of the holy Granth (Interview, Principal, 2010).

In the *Gurdwara*, students along with the *gurmat* teacher sang *kirtan* (congregational singing). *Kirtans* are *gurbani* set to ragas. The *gurmat* teacher taught *Gurmat* music to the students using harmonium. The students and teachers organized sessions on stories (*katha*), lectures (*vyakhyan*) and recitation of holy verses (*path*). The *gurmat* teacher taught students how to perform *Hukumnama*. They recited the Guru Granth Sahib daily by reading certain stanzas of the Anand Sahib, followed by *ardas* and finally took *hukam* from the Granth Sahib (Observations, 2010). *Gurmat* teacher

conducted all prayers and religious ceremonies in the *Gurdwara*. Students offered flowers and also sometimes lighted incense sticks (Field notes, 2010).

The role of *gurmat* teacher was crucial since she was solely responsible for transmitting religious values among students. The school *Gurdwara* with *gurmat* teacher acted as the nucleus for the observance of religious practices. She touched the lives of students in many ways acting as a role model who taught them about religion and ways to imbibe it in their daily lives. Most student respondents emphasized that the school is for religious education. Some teachers believed that the presence of *Gurdwara* in the school premises generated religious aura within the school. The teachers and students thought it as their responsibility to maintain the sacredness of this sanctum of worship. During the group discussions, some students of standard XI shared how school *Gurdwara* socialized them in Sikh rituals and practices. They enter the *Gurdwara* barefoot and kept their heads covered. They said that they had learnt how to conduct themselves in the *Gurdwara* (Interview, Sukhbir and Jyoti, 2010). Another standard X student remarked 'we got to know about Sikh religion from our school *Gurdwara*' (Interview, Daisy, 2010). The Principal ascertained that many parents sent daughters to the school for character-building facilitated by the religious environment in the school (Interview, Principal, 2010).

Since the school transacted religious education, its students were called to participate in various Sikh events. *Mata Kaulaji Bhalai Kendra Trust* of Amritsar to commemorate three hundred years of Khalsa wanted students from various Sikh schools to share their experiences and learnings. The Khalsa tercentenary celebrated in 1999 commemorated founding of Khalsa order in 1699 by the tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh (Grewal and Banga 1999: 93).

An alumna said that she visited the school *Gurdwara* every day to recite the *Japuji Sahib* and *Nitnem*. Early Sunday morning, hostellers recited *Asa di Var* and *Sukmani Sahib*. A student *jatha* along with some school teachers visited certain families to recite holy verses on the occasions of joy and sorrow. This group recited verses from the *Sukhmani Sahib* on the marriage of their classmate held in the local *Gurdwara* (Interview, Kaur, 2010). However, over the years, the vice-principal felt that the attachment of students and teachers towards the *Gurdwara* underwent some change. The school *Gurdwara* used to remain open for a longer duration. The *Granthi*

occasionally recited religious texts to the school gathering. A retired principal said that the *Guru Granth Sahib* (Holy Scripture) was recited till late in the evening but was subsequently discontinued (Interview, Gautam, 2010). Teachers shared responsibilities, got *rumala sahib* as well as prepared *parshad* to be offered (Interview, Bhatia, 2010).

Discipline and Punishment

In the early years, at the SKM, girls were encouraged to lead a disciplined life. That is how these girls turned out to become excellent home-makers with a profound knowledge of the Sikh religion which also was the aim of the School. Schooling in many ways disciplined their lives also since most of the students earlier were boarders so they followed the scheme of a curriculum devised by the school authorities. The schooling process nurtures good students. The morning assembly popularly referred to as the '*khalsa* prayer' was religiously oriented. It portrays the school's inclination towards Sikhism. The prayer comprised of recitation of sacred hymns in the remembrance of Sikh Gurus. The assembly space virtually took form and shape of the *Gurdwara* where students were like Sikh disciples. This ritual not only emphasized the need to stay connected to this religion but also wanted its tenets to be incorporated in the persona of the ideal students. Discipline at the SKM was to socialize students to become 'good' students. The process of enforcing discipline through various methods presents variations across the stages of education.

Discipline constituted a key component of the schooling process in the SKM. The school authorities and teachers saw discipline primarily as crucial for students to evolve as 'good citizens'. This notion acquired relevance given the deprived socio-economic milieu of students and the perception among teachers that such children required to be 'civilized' so that they become conscientious citizens.

Regularity and punctuality in attending the school was also an integral feature of discipline. 'Good' students were expected to be regular, punctual and silent. Those regular in attending the school were often appreciated among others. Values related to compliance, orderliness and obedience were emphasized. Teachers enforced rules and regulations which students abided. The Principal had instituted a monitorial system in which a few students of standards IX to XII were selected as monitors. These student

monitors had the authority to enforce rules. Observations suggest that discipline meant 'being polite, soft, obedient, unquestioning, punctual, regular, and being able to memorize the assigned text'.

The SKM promoted the idea of a 'good student' as a 'disciplined student'. The Principal of the School defined a school's code of discipline by which students were to remain 'docile' and 'submissive'. The School expected students to obey the instructions of the teachers. 'They could follow own religion, keep faith in God and be simple, disciplined and punctual' (Interview, 2010). These ideas were transacted to the students in various forums. Such ideas were reinforced in the morning assembly, in the official curriculum transactions as well as in the 'hidden curriculum' of the school. The idea of a 'model student' was also invoked among the students of the school. The 'model student' was also an 'all-rounder' whose achievements in different fields (academic and co-curricular) were highlighted to inspire other students towards similar goals.

Teachers also played an important role in promoting the idea of a disciplined student win the classroom. A key ideal for girls was to become 'good' in their domestic roles. In a classroom observation, a senior teacher expressed as follows: "You should become 'good citizens', inculcate 'good manners' and 'behave well'. You should know how to conduct yourself since after marriage you have to shift to in-laws house. This School nurtures all-round development- mental, physical and financial (independence)".

Discipline is enforced through both manifest and hidden ways. The fear of corporal punishment loomed large over students most of the time. Students are persuaded to follow the 'official code of conduct' and are given threats when they try to challenge the same. The 'hidden' manifestation of discipline assumed that the students belonging to deprived caste and class milieus needed special attention. Students were encouraged to maintain personal hygiene, follow the dress code, be regular and punctual in attending school, be respectful and obedient to teachers and elders, and most importantly be religious. Teachers exercised control in manifold ways in the School - over students, by senior students over junior ones, and also by non-teaching staff over students.

Discipline, including corporal punishment, was internalized not just by the teachers but also by the students and the parents. Many students felt that the stick was better than going back to the drudgery of their homes. Many parents felt that corporal punishment was the only way to enforce discipline among students. However, there were few parents resented it but were unable to protest because of their vulnerable social and economic situation.

A disciplined student was termed as a 'good student'. Discipline was seen as a precursor to attaining 'goodness'. A good student also showed possibilities of turning into a 'good citizen' by acquiring good manners and behaviour. Within the school processes, a student was categorized as an 'ideal' by being regular, punctual and by maintaining silence. Likewise, teachers identified 'model students' as those who were 'all-rounders' in curricular and extra-curricular activities. Most teachers especially highlighted how important it was for girls to be 'all-rounders'. According to them, this quality ensured success later in marital life, which was thought to be very important for girls. At one level, these categories seem distinct while at another level, they are fused. Thus a 'disciplined student' is also a 'good student' and a 'good citizen'. An 'ideal student' retains qualities of a good student at the same time also subscribes to teachers' expectations of regularity and punctuality. Finally, a 'model student' is not only good and close to the ideal student but also learns to be an all-rounder attaining success in all aspects.

School Culture

The school culture focuses upon what Bernstein calls the 'instrumental order' (Bernstein 1975: 38-39). This order nurtures behaviour essential for acquiring certain specific skills. It is more concerned with the process of 'formal learning'. The school tries to transmit various 'facts, procedures, practices and judgments that are essential for the acquisition of certain skills' (Bernstein 1975: 38-39). These can be skills related to the humanities or sciences. As discussed already, these skills can be examined and measured through objective methods. The transmission of the instrumental order may be such that it may lead to a distinction between groups of students. The pupils may be distinguished from one another based on ability so that they can develop certain special skills. Thus, Bernstein calls this order as essentially "divisive in function" since it is a source of cleavage between pupils, and also

between the staff based on subjects taught, the age, sex, social class and stream of pupils. As the instrumental order dominates the school system, it results in the system becoming 'examination-minded' and also causes divisiveness in the social organization. The instrumental order is also affected by the technological changes happening in society. New subjects may be introduced into the curriculum and the earlier ones may forego their position. Even the means employed for the transmission of the instrumental order may change. This may include teaching methods, which may lead to instability within the school (Bernstein 1975: 38-39). Concerning to the SKM particularly, since apart from secular education, religious education is also transacted, the instrumental order was shaped in specific ways.

Much of religious education associated with the affective domain constitutes what Bernstein (1975) calls 'the expressive order' of the school. Formally and informally students took out time from the normal routine of teaching and learning to observe practices intrinsic to the Sikh religion. Interactions and discussions with them revealed that it was often a matter of pride to have contributed in some way to such religious affairs. Those dexterous in the practice of such rituals were often called to not only guide juniors but also assist the *gurmat* teacher in correct observance of the rituals.

In the early decades, most teachers of this school were grounded in Sikh religious thought so they guided students on the religious path. They socialized students in the sphere of Sikh religion and helped them learn *gurmat* music. Now, this task was assigned to the *gurmat* teacher of the Satnam Sarab Kalyan Trust (SSKT). The *Gurmat* teacher as a role model, preacher and communicator of religious ideas and thoughts performed an important responsibility. During regular classes, she shared what new literature had come that later students issued to read at home (Interviews, Teachers, 2010).

The expressive order of the school not only nurtures Sikh values and religious ethics among the students but the fact that the students had a prescribed formal curriculum which they were expected to read and learn and were assessed as is associated with the instrumental order. Innovative pedagogic methods made learning of Sikh religion interesting to the students. Somehow, the instrumental and expressive orders were not distinguished but intermingled such that socialization related dimensions became

much more prominent. The spread of religious education was not only to cater to the expressive domain but also was to fulfil certain instrumental goals. The divide between expressive and instrumental orders became blurred in such a situation.

Bodily comportment is an essential constituent of the ritualization process (Bernstein 1975). The students were expected to maintain right body postures during chanting while standing or seating in reverence. In the making of Sikh child, the school and its teachers played a crucial role. In *gurmat* classes, the teacher told students to adopt right body postures before beginning to recite religious verses like seating cross-legged with folded hands and covering the head. Bodily discipline is believed to strengthen the practice of religion (Observations, 2010). Students actively learnt to participate in rituals and activities of the *Gurdwara*. They are socialized to carry out tasks associated with the *Gurdwara*. It not only allowed them to affirm to the image of a good student but also was in much continuity with what they practiced at home. Students on rotation basis came to assist *gurmat* teacher in her performance of tasks. These students not only were responsible and sincere but also were liked by students. They gained social and cultural capital through their engagement in these processes.

Bodily comportment of religious symbols, such as keeping uncut hair and abiding by practices that were part of *amrit chakna* process, was considered an important indicator of adherence to principles and traditions of the Sikh faith. The *gurmat* teacher motivated students to undergo initiation ceremony, usually held in the Wazirpur *Gurdwara*. It is important to record progress of students in these various religious practices. She recorded half-yearly progress of those who were initiated to *amrit chakhna* (*Khalsa* baptism ceremony) and *kes rakhana* (maintaining uncut hair).

‘Looking Sikh’ is considered as important as ‘being Sikh’. They both complement each other and especially for women, as carriers of culture and its practices, embodiment of religion is integral for they also are thought to transfer such values to the family and kin. The office bearers of Sikh religious organizations, like SGPC, Sukhdev Singh Khalsa stated that girls’ appearance should correspond to the image of Sikh women. Unmarried/virgin Sikh girls were expected to maintain uncut hair, cover head with dupatta (*dupatta le lena siga!*) and not pierce nose/ear (personal interview). Religious ideas were transferred to the students through dictums of prescribed and proscribed behaviour. The students were introduced to main philosophical principles

of the Sikh religion. The *gurmat* teacher conveyed to the students to treat the holy Guru Granth Sahib as real guru and to serve the community (*Aatma Granth vich, sharir panth vich*).

Conclusion

The SKM was a prominent institution of the nineteenth century Punjab. It played a significant role in promoting women's education at a time when portals of education were not available or accessible. This institution not only created favourable conditions for sustenance but also created goodwill amongst community members for girls' education. In the beginning, the school reared girls in the domains of culture and religiosity. Gradually, it started education in secular disciplines as well. It encouraged girls to join the professional sphere both as teachers and doctors. The contribution of the school in charting the progress of women's education in Punjab cannot be neglected.

In the contemporary period, the past glory of the school is lost. As a government-aided school, it caters to girls from rural areas of Ferozepur as well as from marginalised urban settlements. The school subscribes to the Punjab School Education Board (PSEB) curriculum. It also transacts *gurmat* education under the aegis of Satnam Sarab Kalyan Trust (SSKT). Other Sikh religious organizations like Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) and Sikh Missionary College (SMC) also send representatives from time to time to interact with the students.

The *Gurdwara* and *Gurmat* education form the nucleus of the school processes. The school's *gurmat* teacher played a pivotal role in orienting students to not only gain interest in religious studies but also to qualify for diploma program from these organizations through correspondence. The school *Gurdwara* maintained an aura of religiosity and sacredness such that many students were attracted to not only visits it regularly but also participated in specific rituals with much interest. The *gurmat* lectures instilled among students the idea of deciphering religious codes and maintaining religious symbols. *Gurmat* education in many ways defines the central values of the school. Education is not supposed to question the established tradition rather good education is one which reinforces the traditional values enshrined within

society. Religion emerges as the master signifier to which all other instrumental orders of the school (Bernstein 1975) correspond.

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