

WOMEN AND WORSHIP THE SIKH PERSPECTIVE

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1. Introduction

To study the status of women in any religion and her participation in religious worship and religious life, it is pertinent to go through its scriptural basis as well as its past history to evaluate its theological perspective and past and present practices about the contributions of women.

The Sikh Religion is a historical religion which emerged on the Indian soil with the advent of its founder, Guru Nanak Dev, in the fifteenth century. Regarding the position of women in religion and religious life in the period prior to Guru Nanak, we cannot make a passing reference in the total negative sense. There is no denying the fact that women, during the Rigvedic period enjoyed almost an equal position along with men in the performance of sacrificial rites.¹ Nevertheless, conflicting views are found in the later literature which is based on *smṛtis*. The dignified position of women is apparently clear in the passages of *Mahabhartā* which states that 'women are to be honoured and adorned by fathers, brothers, husbands and also brother-in-laws'² and a similar expression is found in the passage, stating, "where women are honoured, the gods rejoice, where they are not honoured, 'all religious rites are of no avail.'³ But in another place, it deprived women of the right to worship and performance of religious rituals by saying that 'sacrifice by women displeases the gods'⁴ and 'the woman who burns oblations will sink into hell'.⁵ Hence the condition of women, in the medieval period, was deplorable due to the dominance of priestly class of both Hindus and Muslims. The Hindu priests preferred to celibacy and despised women during the period of menstruation and child-birth. They were not allowed to read scriptures and to participate in the religious rites. She was compelled to die on the funeral pyre of her husband, in accordance with the custom of *sati*, as it was considered impious to remain widow, and she was not allowed to remarriage. The

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Muslim women's condition was more miserable, as she was instructed to keep herself in veil or *purdah*.

The present paper is an exclusive study of the status and role of women in the Sikh religion. It will analyse and highlight: first, the views of the Sikhs Gurus about the dignity of women, as are incorporated in the Holy Scripture, *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*; second, the contributions of the Sikh women in the socio-religious sphere; and third, the participation of Sikh women in the religious worship and religious rites.

2. Theological Perspective

In the fifteenth century, Guru Nanak, through his holy compositions, raised his voice against the injustice done to women and treated them not only as equal to men but also accorded to them a very high and venerable position in society. He criticised emphatically the prevalent priestly class of both Hindus and Muslims for their maltreatment of womenfolk and made them aware of the status and dignity of woman. He says:

From the woman is our birth, in the
woman's womb are we shaped.

To the woman are we engaged; to the
woman are we wedded.

The woman is our friend and from the
woman is the family.

If one woman dies, we seek another,
through the woman are the bonds of
the world.

Why call woman evil who gives birth to
kings and all?

From the woman is the woman; without the
woman there is none;

Nanak : without the woman is the One True
Lord alone.⁶

Admittedly, this verse clearly reflects that all the social relationships and social bindings can exist only due to woman. Man's birth, his engagement, marriage, life-long friendship and survival of race is possible

only because of woman. The passage is an explicit attack on the prevalent system and elevates the status of woman at the social level.

At the theological level, Sikhism makes no distinction between man and woman. The Sikh religion believes in One God Who is both transcendent as well as immanent. The aim of man's life is to attain communion with God, which is possible by meditating on the Divine Name, by eliminating one's ego and by surrendering with loving devotion to God. This loving devotion or *prem bhakti* is symbolically presented through the husband-wife relation. God is conceived as husband or spouse and the individual soul i.e. *jivatma* is presented as bride:

There is only one Spouse in the world;
the others are all His brides.⁷

In this way, the Sikh religion has 'idealized the love of a wife for her husband and held it up as an example for a devotee of God. By doing so, the Gurus greatly exalted the status of the woman.'⁸ All the human beings are symbolically taken as women or brides who are always eager to meet their Lord, the God:

We all are the brides of the Lord, and bedeck
ourselves (for His pleasure),
But if we are proud of our beauty, no use
then are our red robes.
We find not love through deceit; the false
show avails not (with God).
The Spouse enjoys the bride, whom He likes,
And she alone is His bride, whom He
honours by His Grace.⁹

A similar type of description is found throughout the Holy Granth. Guru Amardas illustrates the selfless devotion of the devotee towards the Lord through the symbol of a bride:

As in the house of the groom is the devoted
bride who longs for him with utter devotion,
And she prepares many delicacies for her man,
sweet and sour and all.
The devotees of God too are dedicated likewise to the
Lord's praise and are attuned to His Name.¹⁰

Apparently, such expressions depicting woman's feelings, emotions, her devotion, her qualities, her yearning for union and her pangs of separation are frequently found in the Holy Scripture. Thus by making use of the metaphor of husband-wife relationship, to define the mystic experience of union with Lord, the Sikh Gurus have added a spiritual dimension to the personality of woman. To attain communion with God, one must develop woman-like virtues:

If one embroiders the skirt (of God's Love)
 for oneself, then alone is one a true bride:
 Yea, if one arranges well one's household and
 tastes not vice, one is then beloved of one's Spouse.¹¹

In this way, those human beings are the true brides of God who obey the will of God and love their Lord, by meditation on the Divine Word.¹² A similar expression is found in the (*shalokas*) verses of Sheikh Farid :

What words to utter, What merits to gather,
 What precious charms to master,
 Pray, What wears shall I wear to make my
 love wholly mine?
 Humility is the word, forgiveness the merit;
 Sweetness of tongue the precious charm,
 Wear these three, O bride; and the Lord is thine.¹³

However, the mystical way of living is also defined through the symbol of husband-wife relationship. Guru Nanak's two compositions in *Rag Suhi* under the caption '*Kuchajji-Suchajji*' are spiritual imagination, portraying the condition of mind of two women, one who enjoys the company of her husband due to her merits and the other who is deprived of the union due to her demerits. The meritless bride is, in fact, a ego-centred person who being in illusion, remains away from God and then feeling a strong yearning for union repents:

Thou hast blest all Thy brides with Thy
 Company for all these Nights: Isn't
 there a night also for me?¹⁴

On the other hand, the true devotee, due to his merits remains ever contented and surrenders himself to God's will like a true bride, saying:

What shall I ask, pray, what shall I utter,

Save that I hunger and thirst for Thee.
Through the Guru's Word I attain unto the Lord,
and for this alone do I pray to my God.¹⁵

Hence the mundane relation of man and woman is transcended to the level of spirituality to portray woman as an emblem of virtues and if she behaves in a real sense, she becomes 'beauteous, glorious, brilliant, wise and awake.'¹⁶ The yearning of the individual soul for reunion with God and agony of her separation are beautifully portrayed through the symbol of marriage. The pangs of separation are vividly expressed through the sentiments of a lonely woman:

The Lord comes not into my home and
I am sighing to death and the lightning
flashes and terrifies me.
My bed is lonely and I am in real pain:
O mother, death is here.
Without my Lord, where is sleep for me:
I can suffer not even my clothes.
Nanak: Blessed is the bride who merges
In the being of her Lord.¹⁷

In a similar tone, the blessing and the joy of communion with God is defined:

And He, who decked me, loved me too, and
Meeting Him I enjoyed Him too:
And my bed became glorious when the Lord
Enjoyed me, and my destiny was awakened
through the Guru's grace.
Nanak: I then enjoy my Lord ever, night
and day, for, the Lord, my Groom
stayeth for ever.¹⁸

In the last stanza of *Bara-Maha*, a bride (*jivatma*) is ever *suhagan* (married woman) who perpetually enjoys the presence of her Lord. At the climax of mystical experience, there remains no difference between man and woman. Though they appear to be two bodies yet one single soul or Divine light prevails through them:

The bride and the groom are not those

who, though together in body, are in
spirit alone.

It is when the two bodies have a single soul,
That they become one.¹⁹

In fact, the difference between man and woman is apparent and at the mystic level, no duality remains:

Through man's sperm is the woman born;
through the woman is the man; know ye,
O, wise men,
And be attuned to the Word that ye know
The unutterable verity.²⁰

Apart from the theological equation, the Gurus, through their holy compositions and examples of practical life, have taken steps for the socio-religious equality of women. They condemned vehemently the unethical practices of immolation of the widow with the deceased husband, female infanticide, adultery and wearing of veils (*pardah*).

The Sikh religion commends the life of a householder and holds that a householder who disciplines his sense-desires, begs for contemplation, austerity and self-control is as pure and chaste as the Ganga's water.²¹ In fact, the marriage rite is not the union of two bodies only, but it is a spiritual bond of souls. It has been given religious sanctity and is regarded as the relationship of God with the devotee. In *Rag Suhi*, the four stanzas, *Lavan* (circling), which were initially composed by Guru Ramdass to describe a seeker's union with God, are now sung at the wedding ceremony, as the bride and the groom move in circle four times round the Holy Scripture to solemnize their wedding. These four verses have a double significance. On the one hand, they provide advise to the couple and on the other hand, place their union within the deeper content of union with God.²² The last line of the each stanza is as:

Sayeth Nanak: In the first round, the Lord
Himself initiates His marriage with thee.

Sayeth Nanak: In the second round, the unstruck
Melody of the Word ringeth in thy mind.

Sayeth Nanak: In the third round, divine
Detachedness wells up in thy mind.

Sayeth Nanak: In the fourth round, thou
Attainest to thy eternal Lord.²³

Here again, the union of man and woman in marriage is symbolically elevated to the mystic union of the devotee with the Divine Being.

Stressing on the equality of women, the Sikh religion condemns dowry-system. According to the Sikh code of ethics, a Sikh's daughter should marry a Sikh and neither a girl nor a boy should be married for financial purpose. It is stated in the Holy Scripture that all other dowry of the self-willed is false egoism and a vain show and the real dowry is blessings with Lord's Name.²⁴ The basis of householder's life depends upon the strength of marriage partnership. So divorce is discouraged in the Sikh religion, though it is made possible by law.

The emphatic condemnation of adultery is regarded as more than a moral injunction. The Sikh code of conduct states that a Sikh should respect another man's wife as he would his own mother, and another man's daughter as his own daughter. A Sikh theologian, Bhai Gurdas observes:

Having one woman as wife he (the Sikh)
is a celibate and considers any other's
wife his daughter or a sister.²⁵

Again it is mentioned:

The Sikh ought to treat beautiful women
of others as his mothers, sisters and daughters.²⁶

Among the first four major prohibitions (*kurahts*) one is adultery and among the lesser prohibitions (*tankhahs*) is arranging one's son's or daughter's marriage for financial gain.

The Sikh Religion explicitly rejects the notion that women could be regarded as the legitimate spoils of war. Guru Nanak was miserable to see the tyranny unleashed on women and their humiliation during the invasion of Babar. Here a few extracts are given from the long composition, in *Rag Asa*²⁷, which portray a pathetic scene:

They whose lustrous hair shone in plaits and
 were filled with vermillion in the parting
 Their hair was sheared with the scissors
 and their mouths were choked with dust.
 Yea, they who revelled in their palaces, now
 find not a seat even in the common.[1]

 A hundred thousand coins were offered to
 them when they sat and also when stood,
 And they chewed nuts and dates, and
 enjoyed the bridal couch.
 (But), today round their necks is the noose,
 and their necklaces of pearls are broken into bits.[3]

 The Hindu and Muslim and Rajput women
 had some their veils torn off, while
 others were licked by the flames.
 And they whose loved ones returned, not
 to their homes,
 O, how did they pass their nights?[6]

Even in *Rag Tilang*²⁸, it is stated:

The Muslim women read the Quran, and, in
 misery, pray to their God:
 And also pray (in distress) to Him the Hindu
 women of all castes.
 Yea, the wedding song reeks with blood,
 And (not with saffron, but) with blood, are
 the wedded ones annointed!

In the Sikh history, it is evidently made clear that the Muslim women were not to be treated in this fashion. The mention of the forbidding of sexual relation with the Muslim women was the necessity of the time, because some Sikhs (during Mughal invasion) approached to the Guru for retaliation due to the savage behaviour of the Muslims.²⁹ The Sikh Gurus stood against the practice of seclusion of women by wearing veil (*purdah*) and encouraged their participation in socio-religious activities.

The widely prevalent custom of *sati* i.e. voluntary immolation on the funeral pyre of the husband, was strongly checked by Guru Amardas who reinterpreted it in a mystical way that *sati* means devout living rather than courageous or desperate dying.³⁰ In other words, 'a *sati* is one who lives contented and embellishes herself with good conduct and serves her Lord with all her heart and cherishes Him ever.'³¹ Repudiating the notion of *sati*, Guru Arjan Dev observes that the relation of man and woman is ordained in accordance with the Divine will, and the union with her Loved Lord is not possible by burning (on his pyre) and by becoming *sati* through the effect of wrong deeds. In fact, *sati* in the real sense is one who has self-control, pious conduct, who submits to God's Will and who looks upon the Lord as her spouse.³² Commenting upon this custom, Kabir has also pointed out that *sati* is one who while living, burns herself and dies to attain perfection amidst the allurements of lust, wrath and *maya*.³³

Nevertheless, the reference to this custom of *sati* is found in the Holy Scripture to denounce it with its different interpretation in the spiritual terms. But in the later Sikh codes of conduct, the mention of this custom is rarely found as a custom rejected in Sikhism. The Sikh Gurus permitted the remarriage of widows as a practical step to abolish the custom of *sati*. It is also stated in the moral code that just as in the case of widower, permission of remarriage of widows to be given.³⁴ Besides, the female infanticide is outrightly rejected in the Sikh religion. The social and moral disapproval of this practice is done in terms of social dissociation and excommunication. It is clearly stated:

Female infanticide should not be practised and social relation with persons indulging in it should not be maintained.³⁵

At other place it is mentioned:

Persons indulging in it are to be excommunicated from Sikhism permanently and those having any social relation with them are termed punishable.³⁶

Admittedly, the Sikh religion makes no distinction between man and woman from the theological perspectives and to implement this conceptual equation, the Gurus raised their voice through their holy writings. They felt the need for the reconstruction of society on the ontological basis of

One God and for which the equal participation of women is of utmost importance.

3. Contribution of Women to Sikh Spirituality

If we analyse the contributions of the Sikh women to the development of religious life and spirituality, there remains no doubt that they are the foundational basis of the Sikh religious life. The great works and achievements of the Sikh women in the social, religious and administrative spheres cannot be undermined, while evaluating the religio-historical progress of the Sikh religion. The prominent women who occupied a conspicuous place in Sikhism, belonged largely to the Guru's family either as mother or daughter or wife or sister. They have contributed for the Sikh religion in several ways viz., looking after the domestic affairs of their family during the missionary tours of the Gurus; assisting them in the implementation of ideals; accompanying with the Gurus during their preaching; helping the Gurus in making an impartial choice of successor for Guruship; doing works of social welfare; offering sacrifices of the Guru-husband, of son and of grandsons for the cause of the *panth*; and serving as baeconlights to the *panth*. The most significant roles such as Bebe Nanaki's sisterly affection, Mata Khivi's Langar organisation, Bibi Bhani's spirit of service, Mata Gujri's sacrifice, Mata Sundari's guidance to the Sikh community, Mata Sahib Kaur's designation as the mother of Khalsa, Mai Bhago, the first woman general, Bibi Deep Kaur, the warrior, Bibi Sharan Kaur's devotion for religion, Bibi Rup Kaur, the first author of Sikhism, Sardarni Sada Kaur, Sardar of the Kanhiya Misl's patriotism and bravery, etc. are unparalleled instances in the history and development of the Sikh religion.

Here we may mention about some illustrious Sikh women who did spectacular deeds in the Sikh religious life and are well-known and are remembered with devotion and honour in the Sikh history.

Bebe Nanaki, the elder sister of Guru Nanak, is recognized as the sister and the mother of the Sikhs. She perceived with her keen sensibility the prophet like qualities of Guru Nanak and became the first disciple of the Guru. Speaking about Bebe Nanaki, a famous historian writes:

The sister, from the very beginning, has great attachment to her brother and was probably the first to discover the promise of future greatness in him. She is reverently remembered by the Sikhs as Rebe Nanaki.³⁷

The contribution of Mata Sulakhni, wife of Guru Nanak, cannot be ignored. She looked after the domestic matters during her husband's thirty years of preaching and has actually implemented the ideals of Guru Nanak.

The basic ideal of the Sikh Religion is to establish equality irrespective of caste, creed and race. For the implementation of this ideal, one important institution is the community kitchen or *Langar*, where people of all castes, high or low, male or female sit together in rows on the floor and eat together. The wives of the Gurus contributed in their own ways to give a practical shape to this ideal. No one can ever be oblivious of the name of Mata Khivi, wife of Guru Angad, who was not only administrator of the *langar* but also cooked and served. Due to her dedication, she was praised and her name occurs in the Holy Scripture:

Says Balwand: "Blessed is Khivi, the Guru's
wife, whose dense leafy shade gives shade to all.
In the Guru's kitchen, food is served abundantly,
Yea, the rice-pudding, mixed with ghee,
which is nectar-sweet."³⁸

The process of elevation of women in the socio-religious milieu was carried on by Bibi Amro, daughter of Guru Angad, who inherited the noble traits of her parents and contributed in uniting the two great souls of Guru Angad and Guru Amardas. Guru Amardas could have met Guru Angad only on hearing the hymns sung by Bibi Amro.

In the religious history of Sikhism, women served as missionaries in the fifteenth century. No doubt, women started taking part in singing of hymns (*kirtan*) and in missionary work since the period of Guru Nanak. But the third Guru, on the initiation of his wife, Mata Mansa Devi, who used to accompany the Guru, raised voice against the custom of *sati* and installed women as missionary preachers, by offering them official seats. He started the *manji* tradition, which refers to the seat of the provincial

Sikh leader and offered two seats to women whose names in the list of *manjis* (given in the Haveli Sahib Picture) are Mai Sewa of Kabul and Mai Bhago of Kashmir. In addition, fifty two other missionaries were selected, the prominent names are Bibi Rajni and Mai Sabhraee.³⁹

An embodiment of devotion and humility was Bibi Bhani, who was the daughter of Guru Amar Das and who spearheaded the task of organizing *langar* and started the tradition of hereditary guruship by asking for blessings from Guru Amardas, her father, whom she served like a son. She was granted a *jagir* (estate) by Emperor Akbar, when the latter visited the Guru and shared food in the community kitchen (*langar*). The Guru said, "All right, as you wish, O King Akbar! But your contribution will be utilised for the welfare of the widows under the supervision of Bibi Bhaniji."⁴⁰

However, the names of Mata Gujri, Mata Sahib Dewan, Mata Sundari are well-known in the Sikh religious history for their participation in political and war affairs. Mata Gujri, the wife of Guru Tegh Bahadur, held the position of wife of a martyr, mother of martyr and the grandmother of martyrs and herself a martyr. She organized the *langar* and played a keen role as administrator of army. She, alongwith her grandsons, was captured by Subedar of Sirhind, who tortured and compelled her to accept Islam, which she refused and faced dire consequences. She was kept in captivity, alongwith her two grandsons and on hearing the news of the execution of her grandsons, she laid down her life and that place is now known as Gurdwara Burj Mata Gujri.

Mata Sundari, the wife of Guru Gobind Singh, was known not only to the Sikhs of Punjab, but also to the Sikhs of India. They used to visit Mataji to seek her blessings and willingly obeyed the orders (*hukamnamas*) issued by her. Even after the death of Guru Gobind Singh, she guided the Sikh community for forty years. The Sikhs used to gather in the Haveli of Mata Sundari to celebrate the festivals of Diwali and Baisakhi. This Haveli is known as Mata Sundari Gurdwara.

The involvement of women in the religious activities is visible in the case of Mata Jito, who was initiated into the Khalsa in the beginning and who also put the sugar crystals into the water to ensure the sweetness of

the water to be given as *amrit* to the first initiated five beloved ones. Even Mata Sahib Kaur was bestowed with the status of mother of Khalsa, which Guru Gobind Singh has given her on her desire for a son. It is said that Guru Gobind Singh got married to Mata Sahib Dewan on the request of the congregation (*sangat*) and had no physical relation but only spiritual relation with her. Even today, it is said to the initiated members of Khalsa that they are the habitants of Anandpur Sahib, and Guru Gobind Singh is their father and Mata Sahib Kaur is their mother.

Apart from the achievements of these women, belonging to the families of the Gurus, there are many other women who contributed in the Sikh religious history by their participation as warriors in the battlefield. No one can forget the name of Mai Bhago, the first women General, who took the command to fight with enemy, when the forty men of Guru Gobind Singh's army had withdrawn themselves. On seeing her dauntless courage, they felt ashamed of their disloyalty to the Guru and joined him. Another warrior Bibi Deep Kaur, showed faith, courage and bravery and refused to yield to the enemy, even when she was bitterly injured in the battlefield. Another important instance of fearlessness and bravery is Sardarni Sada Kaur, who was the head of *Kanhiya Misl* and who fought in the battlefield in disguise and served Punjab for thirty-three years.

The above mentioned instances of the achievements of women in the Sikh history clearly indicate their contribution as social reformers; as warriors; as missionary preachers and as an emblem of patience and service. She is helpful in the character building and in the attainment of spiritual heights. From the temporal and spiritual point of view, women is half man's body and she always assists him to the door of deliverance.⁴¹

4. Participation of Women in Religious Worship

The Sikh religion makes no distinction between man and woman at the theological level, as well as at the social level. The contributions of women in the socio-religious sphere of the Sikh history clearly indicate to their equal status with man. When the tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, created the *Khalsa*, he made no distinction of caste, race, creed and sex and admitted the women in the fold of *Khalsa*. Even today, whenever any person, man or woman is baptised, they are treated as one. The Guru, after

baptism, granted each male Sikh the surname, 'Singh' or Lion and each female the surname 'Kaur' or princess. They are supposed to wear the five symbols of *Khalsa* viz., *Kesh* (uncut hair), *Kangha* (comb), *Kara* (steel wrist band), *Kirpan* (sword) and *Kacch* (a pair of breeches).

The *Sikh Rahit-Maryada* (a guide to the Sikh way of life), approved by *Shiromani Gurdwara Parbhandak Committee* (S.G.P.C.) on 3 Feb, 1945, makes no difference between man and woman in the definition of Sikh which is given as below:

A Sikh is that woman or man, who believes in One God, in the ten Gurus and their teachings and in the *Adi Granth*. In addition, he or she must believe in the necessity and importance of *amrit* (initiation) and must not adhere to any other religion.

Therefore, the obligatory duties of *Khalsa* are similar for both man and woman. They are supposed to recite some hymns in the daily routine viz., *Japji Sahib*, *Jap Sahib* and *Ten Swayyas* of Guru Gobind Singh, *Sodar*, *Rahiras* (evening prayer) and *Sohilla* (late evening prayer before retiring).

The modes of worship in the Sikh Religion can be performed by reading the Holy Scripture, *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, singing of hymns of Gurus in the holy congregation (*kirtan*), listening to sermons or discourses based on the teachings of the Gurus (*ketha*). Any man or woman, who is a Sikh according to the above mentioned definition of *Sikh Rahit-Maryada*, can participate in any mode of worship and no prohibition is laid down for women.

Besides the normal reading of the Holy Scripture which is to be installed at a specific place in the house, the Sikh women can also participate in the *akhand path*, i.e. (uninterrupted complete reading of the Holy Scripture) which is undertaken on specific occasions of joy and sorrow, and the complete reading is to be carried out by a relay of Sikhs, may be family members, and takes approximately forty eight hours.

Another essential part of the Sikh worship is prayer (*Ardas*), which should be offered regularly. The Sikh women are fully entitled to participate in prayer and can herself recite the prayer. It is most significant

to note that in the prayer (*ardas*), there comes reference of those great men and women, who wore arms and practised charity and suffered for the cause of the panth:

Those men and women who, keeping the Name in their hearts, shared their earnings with others; who plied the sword and practised charity; who saw other's faults but overlooked them: think of their deeds and call on God! (Wonderful Lord!).⁴²

After the prayer, *Karah Parsad*, made from plain flour cooked with equal quantities of ghee and sugar is served to the congregation. No inhibition is imposed on the Sikh women for the preparation of *prasad*. The Sikh women are allowed to prepare food at the community kitchen and to serve it in *langar*. The religious worship, in any form, can be performed by the women, with the only condition that like men, they should be *amritdharis* or members of the Khalsa and they must abide by the rules of *Sikh Rahit-Maryada*. It is most relevant to note that at present, the post of president of *Shiromani Gurdwara Parbhandak Committee* (a most important religious body of the Sikhs) is held by a woman, Bibi Jagir Kaur who was appointed on this post on 16 March, 1999 and was selected (by general voting) again for the same post on 10 Nov., 1999. This clearly indicates that women, in Sikhism, have full freedom to participate in religious worship and religious activities.

5. Conclusion

To recapitulate, we can say that the Sikh religion accords an equal status to women in all spheres of life viz., religious, social and political etc.

- i. From the theological perspective, no distinction is made between man and woman and it is vividly clear in the holy compositions of the Sikh Gurus as well as in the creation of Khalsa and in the definition of the Sikh as given in the *Sikh Rahit-Maryada*.
- ii. To add spiritual dimension to the personality of women, all the individual souls (*jivatma*), are symbolically taken as women or brides of Lord who always yearn for union with their Lord and who must develop women like virtues to attain communion with God.

The loving devotion of the individual souls is presented through the symbol of husband-wife relationship and a *jivatma* is ever *suhagan* (married women) who enjoys the presence of Lord-God due to her merits.

- iii. To elevate the status of women, the Sikh Gurus, through their holy compositions and through the examples of their practical life, have taken steps for the socio-religious equality of women. They condemned the custom of *sati*, female infanticide, forced widowhood adultery and seclusion of women by being in veils (*pardah*). On the other hand, they commended married life by giving it religious sanctity and allowed the remarriage of widows.
- iv. The implementation of the ideals of the Sikh Gurus has been carried on by the participation of the Sikh women in the socio-religious field, as is evident in the Sikh history of past and present. They have made great contributions in serving and organizing of the community kitchen (*langar*), working as missionaries, sacrificing themselves and their families for the Sikh community, fighting bravely in the battlefield and offering guidance to the Sikh community in the critical periods.
- v. In the religious sphere, no prohibition is imposed on women for participation in religious worship and religious rituals. They can become members of significant religious bodies.

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