

The Matrimonial Advertisements published in the vernacular Punjabi print media of the Colonial Punjab: a hunt for an ideal match

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The advent of British in India in general, and Punjab in particular, led visible changes in social, economic and political fabric of the country. The colonial policies especially related to education, tried to alter and modernize the traditional social perceptions. Later the socio-religious reform movements in different parts of the country revived and amalgamated older humanitarian impulses and initiated the processes of saving the weak and the help people of their country. The new intelligentsia established various organizations, opened schools, *ashrams* and many more to help their fellow beings especially, the women. They even utilized the medium of vernacular print media to express their views on the then social and political conditions. With passage of time, that vernacular print media too got transformed into a platform which helped people of particular area to advertise and publicize about the commodities and their sale. Another important usage of those vernacular newspapers, magazines and journals was that it became a forum for searching a suitable and an ideal match for marriage of the boys and girls by publishing matrimonial advertisements

The institution of marriage occupies a vital place in human society. Marriage as an institution not only defines and regulates the relationship of parties in marriage and their families but also prescribes rules which determine who can marry whom. The process of marriage may be divided into a number of stages; first, selection of mate, second *mangni* or *kurmai* (engagement ceremony), third marriage and fourth *muklava* (the change of residence and consummation of the marriage).¹

K. M. Kapadia stated that “the selection of mate in marriage may be considered from three points of view, namely the field of selection, the authority of selection and the criteria of selection. The field of selection was restricted in two ways - endogamous and exogamous.² The second important consideration in the process of mate selection was the authority of selection. Among most of Indians during the period under study, the authority of selecting bride or groom was rested with the elders, barbers or priests. The process of arranging marriage generally began with the parents alert their kin network to be on the lookout for a suitable match.³ Generally, the first step in any marriage proposal was taken by the brides' side. The guardian of the girl sent his family barber or priest to search for a suitable boy. The barber or priest was sent to assess the suitability of a potential match.

¹ Surinder Kaur Jyoti, *Marriage Practices of the Sikhs*, Deep & Deep Publications, New Delhi, 1983, p.109.

² K. M. Kapadia, *Marriage and Family in India*, Oxford University Press, Calcutta, 1955, p. 117.

³ Paul Hershman, *Punjabi Kinship and Marriage*, Hindustan Publishing Corporation, Delhi, 1981, p. 161.

Proposals for a suitable boy were discussed in the family. Close relatives may also give their opinion in this matter. Finally, the barber or priest negotiated with the boys' family on the behalf of the girls' family. After this process, the criteria of mate selection came into play. Broadly, there were three main considerations for choosing the mate; family, caste, individual. These could be further divided on the basis of their social, economic and personal characteristics. The family criteria refer to family background, family reputation, size of family, educational level of the family, socio-economic status and dowry consideration. The individual criteria included age, physical appearance, health, character, temperament, education, occupation, income and capacities and capabilities including the knowledge of house hold.

In the traditional marriage practices, marriage was considered not only a union between the two members of opposite sex but a linkage between two families, kin's group and communities. Thus, elders played an active role in the marriage of their children. In such marriages, no considerations were given to individuals' liking and disliking, his or her temperament, age and earning capacity. Because marriage was not performed only for individual's happiness but to fulfill certain social and religious responsibilities.⁴ While selecting a groom, the main consideration of the father was to see that the selected partner did not suffer from any disease and was not deformed.⁵

In the colonial period, due to education, economic independence and urbanization some families used the matrimonial advertisements published in the columns of the vernacular print media especially newspapers for finding suitable and ideal matches for their children. In this research paper, a critical analysis of the matrimonial advertisements is done as to see what was the criteria of mate selection which prevailed in the colonial Punjab especially in the Sikh community. In this present research paper, an effort further has been made to understand the direction and trend of change in mate selection during the period under study. Usually, it can be seen that trend of change in the mate-selection was according to the preferences of the families. Some families gave importance to family background and reputation, and others were more concerned about an individual's personal qualities and achievements.

A deep insight has been made of some matrimonial advertisements which were published in the issues of Punjabi vernacular newspapers of the colonial Punjab viz. The *Khalsa Samachar* (Amritsar), *Istri Satsang* (Amritsar), *Bir* (Amritsar), *Vishkarma* (Amritsar) and *Akali Patrika* (Lahore). The *Khalsa Samachar* was a weekly newspaper started by the Singh Sabha protagonist, Bhai Vir Singh in the Punjabi language from Amritsar on 17 November, 1899.⁶ It was widely circulated newspaper and articles on social evils, female education, religious education, serialized novels and stories, commercial and matrimonial advertisements and other content appeared in the

⁴ Surinder Kaur Jyoti, *Marriage Practices of the Sikhs*, p. 109.

⁵ K.M. Kapadia, *Marriage and Family in India*, p. 136.

⁶ The *Khalsa Samachar* is still published from Delhi by Bhai Vir Singh Sahitya Sadan, New Delhi.

columns of The *Khalsa Samachar*. Another fortnightly published from Amritsar was *Istri Satsang* meaning female congregation. It started its publication in 1904 and dealt with writeups on social, political and cultural issues of the colonial Punjab. The crusade for widow re-marriage by the newspaper showcased number of matrimonial classifieds for the widows. The *Akali Patrika* published from Lahore in 1930, later from Amritsar and presently from Jalandhar and which is presently in circulation, was committed to the cause Sikh community and country ('*qaum*' and '*watan*'). The *Akali Patrika* originally started under the name of the *Akali* which was started by Master Sunder Singh Lyallpuri and due to regular conflicts with the British government, it suffered forfeiture and suppression. With main focus on political agenda, the newspaper too tried to sensitized people about the political happening along with social evils pertaining to women and even kept a separate space for matrimonial ads. The other two newspapers - *Bir* and *Viskarma* were too published in the Punjabi language from Amritsar and catered to issues pertaining to the Sikh community of the colonial Punjab. In these newspapers, regularly there was appearance of matrimonial classifieds which basically dealt with search for an ideal spouse. It is necessary to note that generally it was the literate class of the society who used to advertise in newspapers for a suitable a bride or a groom.

The matrimonial advertisements, in general, encapsulates the expectation of a person irrespective of gender, of an ideal spouse. Here in this paper, a deep insight is made about the androcentric and gynocentric norms prevalent in the society through the matrimonial advertisements published in vernacular print media of the Colonial Punjab. Matrimonial classifieds were usually found in two variants – first were the announcer ads: which described the qualities and worthy characteristics of the person who was giving advertisement and it what was the expectation from the would-be spouse were missing. And second were the seeker ads, which demonstrated an appealing profile of the advertiser along with a set of requirements of the advertiser. In both the cases, the paramount components that helped to make a decision for a marriage were - age, caste/religion, social status, occupation, education, personal skills, married or widow/widower and sometimes salary as well. These public declarations and requirements by both the sides - boys' and girl's, initiated the process of marriage in the families during later period of the Colonial Punjab. The ads no doubt tried to fix few expected attributes of both the genders who were supposed to get into matrimonial alliance in near future. Without any doubt one can say that those pre-requisites mentioned in the classifieds reflected the mirror image of the prevalent socio-economic, cultural and religious patterns of the then society.

The next question is that who advertised these ads in the newspapers? Generally, advertising was done by the parents or the guardians. Sometimes, the grooms who wanted to marry for the second time, they themselves exhibited ads for requirement of the '*Kanya*' – here expected bride. Even friends did not lag behind to get advertisement published for their friends. During earlier times, the

marriage was concern of the whole community in a particular area, but due to impact of education which led awareness amongst people or individualism, there was a transition in the institution of marriage. Now it was becoming more and more affair of a particular family rather than of an individual.

These matrimonial advertisements manifested two kinds of attributed linked to both males and females –acquired traits which constituted “education” viz. religious, art of embroidery; “devoutness”, expertise in “house hold chores”, “intelligence” and others. Whereas, the other type was personal which was mainly related to the family as in “reputation”, “caste”, “economic background” as type of house-single or multi storeyed, and many more. These attributes were either announced or demanded by the brides and grooms respectively. Surprisingly, the print media in 1930's also published matrimonial advertisements which asked for virgin brides, talented in art and house hold chores along with, who could bring decent dowry.

Some of the classifieds which were given by the groom for the brides need a worth mention in this research paper. “*Kanya di lor: Ramgariya ladka 25 saal, naukari shuda, Khaandani, layi 12 saal jaan uston ghat umar di ladki jaan vidhwa padi likhi ghar de kam kaaj jaandi hove di lor hai.*”⁷ This matrimonial advertisement had a title ‘A Bride required’ which exhibited that a 25 years old Ramgarhiya caste boy, serviceman belonging to a reputed family, seek to marry a 12 year or less or child widow, educated and homely girl.

Another classified said “*Kanya di Lor hai: Ik change khaandani ramgarhiya 30 saal layi ik nek, ghar de kam – kaaj ton jaanu padi likhi singhni di lor hai. Singhni di umar 20 saal tak hove. Singh Koobsurat jawan hai, makaan do manzala hai, kuwari hove taan changa hai.*”⁸ This advertisement said that a Bride was required for well reputed family's Ramgarhia Singh, handsome, 30 years old, owner of double storey – house. He was interested to marry an educated Sikh girl from a good family, well versed with the house hold chores, whose maximum age preferred was up to 20 years and also preferred if found an unmarried girl

Another similar ad stated that “*Sikh war layi kanya di lor: Ik Sikh Naujawan jis di umar 23 saal pakki sarkari naukari te lagga hoyeya hai. waaste ik susheel khoobsurat padi likhi, ghar de kam – kaar ton jaanu khandani kanya di lor hai*”⁹ A Sikh Bride was required for Sikh lad, aged 23 years who was a permanent government employee. He seeks to a marry a courteous, beautiful, educated girl belonging to a renowned family and of course trained in household activities.

“*Kanya di Lor: Mera ik 22 sallan aroara Sikh dost rahat- bahit wich pakka adhiyapak layi susheel, paddi likhi, changge gharane di kanya di lor hai jo kam-kaar ton jaanu hove. Daaj babat koi*

⁷ Vishkarma, Amritsar, 1 Sep. 1910, p. 10.

⁸ Bir, Amritsar, 10 June 1919, p. 11.

⁹ Akali Patrika, Lahore, 16 June 1934, p. 11

pabandi nahi”¹⁰ This matrimonial is very interesting as it was given by the grooms’ friend and highlighted that a ‘bride’ was required for 22 years old Arora Sikh boy who was teacher by profession. He wished to marry a well-mannered and an educated girl from a reputed family who should also be fully-conversant in household affairs. And specially was mentioned that there was no restriction of dowry .

“*Var layi Kanya di lor: Ik jatt Sikh, 23 saal, jis di pehali singhni hunne mari hai layi kanya di lor hai. Vidhwa nu tarjih, jaat- paat koi nahi, tankhah 80 rupaye mahina*”¹¹ This add seek to have a bride for 23 years old jatt Sikh ‘widower’ whose first wife has died recently. He was earning Rupees 80 per month and he too preferred a widow to remarry.

“*Vidwa viyah: Sehajdhari, Singh Naukari Pesha, aamdani mahwaar 30 rupaye, Gurmukhi, Angrezi, Urdu pardeya hoyeya layi khaandani vidwa di lor, umar 14 ton 16 tak gurmat ghar di pari hove.*”¹² The matrimonial advertisement asked for a widow-remarriage. The boy was a sehajdhari Sikh with a salaried job of Rupees 30 per month. He had knowledge of Gurmukhi, Urdu and English language. He wanted to marry a widow belonging to a reputed family who needed to be between 14 and 16 years. She must have attained gurmat education.

A matrimonial ad with a catchy title ‘requirement of a partner’ was given seeking an unmarried or a child widow having knowledge of Gurmukhi and without any caste restrictions. “*Saathan di lor: mainu ik Gurhmukhi parri – likhi, kuaari jann baal vidwa di lor hai. Jaat-paat nahi.*”¹³ Another similar classified was given by a friend, mentioning a requirement of bride for a granthi (a person who performed religious practices in the Sikh religious place – gurudwara) whose age was 60 years. It was stated that he was earning 60 rupees per month and he seek to marry an un-married girl or a child widow girl without any Caste restriction. “*Var layi kanya di lor: Sade ik mittar granthi Singh nu umar 60 saal, 60 rupaye mahina tankhah layi kuari jann child widow di lor hai. Jaati bandhan koi nahi.*”¹⁴

The matrimonial advertisement mentioned below in columns of the *Khalsa Samachar* was for 40 years old officer (Havaldar) of the Burma Infantry Hong Kong. His monthly salary was Rupees 55 and had a life insurance policy of Rupees 2000. He preferred either child widow or unmarried aged between 20 and 30 years. Another pre-requisite was knowledge of *Gurbani* and follower of *Sikh Rahit Maryada* (Sikh religious code of conduct). “*Var layi Rahityian di kanya di jaroorat: daas di umar 40 bars di hai patan wich mulazam hai, tankha kareeb 55 rupaye mahvaar milda hai, sarir karke tandrusat hai jindagi da do hazzar da bema hai. Jaat da arora singh hai. Par watan da pran dhari hai is kaaran rahityian singhan wich saak karna manga haipattar vivhaar siddha daas naal karo ji.*

¹⁰ *Akali Patrika*, Lahore, 13 June 1937, p.37

¹¹ *The Khalsa Samachar*, Amritsar, 24 Jan 1929, p. 4.

¹² *Istri Satsang*, 10 Jan 1909, p.6

¹³ *Ibid*, 28 March 1940, p. 8.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, Amritsar, 25 April 1940, p.8

*Kanya baal vidwa hove jaan kwari hove. Umar bees tees de andar hove. Gurbani bi wakif hove. Khalsa dharam anusar rahit babak wich pakki hove. Daas Autaar Singh Kallar Hauldar Burma Infantry Hong Kong.*¹⁵

Another engrossing matrimonial classified appeared in the same newspaper as listed above, was for a Khatri Singh (here Sikh boy) aged 20 years and who was about to sit for Bachelors in Arts examination in coming months. Another quality was that he was son of a Deputy and he seek to marry an educated girl. It was written that further correspondence was to be done through the manager of the *Khalsa Samchar*. This is mentioned as “*Var layi Kanya di lor: ik wade (khatri) Singh gharane de naujawan di jisdi umar 20 saal di hai jo kujh mahenyan nu B.A. da imtehaan devega arr dipty da supatra hai yog kanya di lor hai. Lardki parri-likhi hove. Hor likhat padat heth likhe pate te hove.*

*Maarfat manager Khalsa
Samachar Amritsar.*¹⁶

It is evident from the aforementioned matrimonial advertisements that the religious education and expertise in house-hold activities for the females were the predominant demand of the grooms. Widow- remarriages were quite prevalent in the Colonial Punjab due the efforts of the socio-religious reformers, so the second demand figured around was to marry either a child widow or an un - married girls. The next point to be taken in consideration that the demand of the grooms sometimes was not caste- oriented but few ads described a girl of same caste as vital expectation. Materialistic attributes in form of big houses, government jobs (like in army, academic and religious teaching) and even life insurance policies were publicly stated in the advertisements to give an initial background of the seeker.

The matrimonial advertisements for seeking a groom were also published in the columns of Punjabi newspapers in the British Punjab.

“*Kanya layi var di lor: ladke di umar 15 ton 20 saal hove, padeya – likhiya hove. Ladki 12 saal, susheel chauthi jamaat wich pardi hai, layi Ramgariya var di lor hai .*”¹⁷ The advertisement stated that a groom was required for a well - cultured girl who of 12 years of age who was studying in fourth standard. The demand for age of the groom was between 15 and 20 years. Another requirement was to be educated and of Ramgarhiya caste.

“*Var di lor hai: Ik bhujangan di umar 14 saal hai, jaat -paat de bandhan tor hai ki shadi karan wale di jalad lor hai.*”¹⁸ This advertisement was for a girl aged 14 who seeking to marry a groom without any caste restrictions.

Hence, it can be seen that the matrimonial by girls’ side were given by describing their

¹⁵ The *Khalsa Samachar*, Amritsar, 29 June, 1904, pp.11-12.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* p.12

¹⁷ *Vishkarma*, Amritsar, 1 Oct 1910, p. 11

¹⁸ *Bir*, Amritsar, 15 Jan. 1911, p. 1

personal behavior like cultured, well-mannered and education. Caste specifications were similar as in case.

Furthermore, on the basis of the above matrimonial advertisements, a charter of demands has been prepared. The most desirable pre-requisite for marriage were: religion, caste, educational qualifications, age, personal appearance, family status, occupational status, health and domestic accomplishment. Religion and caste came to first and second position respectively for a groom but given less weightage for a bride. The third most frequently mentioned factor in the selection of mate was his or her age. There was no fixed limit for the age of marriage. The usual age of marriage for brides was six to eleven years. Usually, brides were eight to ten years younger than the grooms. Although the Child Restraint Marriage Act came into force by 1 April 1930,¹⁹ yet infants were being married in their cradle. Advertisements of child marriages did not found at all. Due to the impact of education, the changing attitude of the parents towards their wards can be seen in these matrimonial advertisements. They wanted almost equally qualified spouse for their wards. By publishing such advertisements, it can be observed that it was not only the demand of bride's parents but this was also the same growing demand to the educated young men of the middle-class families who wanted drawing room companions and not traditions bound illiterate wives. Thus, it came to fourth position for a groom and second for a bride according to the matrimonial advertisements.

The personal appearance had been given much weightage under the period of study. It came to first position for a bride. Here, it is notable that personal appearance was neglected in the selection of groom. Brides' look was much more highly valued than of groom. Manners, accomplishments, temperaments were equally important in soliciting a bride though these were feminine traits.

Family status was most often listed. Men and women were equally concerned with this attribute. It came to fifth position for a groom and fourth position for a bride. Widow remarriage was of the sensational concern during those days. Widower men and women were willing to marry into another caste. Thus, caste consideration was forbidden in widow remarriage cases.

In a nut shell, it can be stated that the criteria of selection of mate through the matrimonial advertisements showed the changing trends of marriage institution under the period of study. This research paper revealed that people preferred economically independent spouses, particularly the male. Economic status of family of the individual was considered more important for the selection of bride or groom. Individual criteria though kept in mind but was given less weightage. Sometimes personal details like economic independence, education, character and physical appearance were ignored in widow remarriage cases. Here, it is necessary to remember that it was the literate class who gave matrimonial advertisements in newspapers. But these literates were hopelessly in a minority. These people belonged to mainly urban areas or highly placed people of the villages. Most of the

¹⁹ J.H. Hutton (ed.), *Census of India 1931*, Vol. 1, Manager of Publications, Delhi, 1933, p.229.

advertisements were from middle class traders, teachers of schools or government officials. Illiterates who were in majority in number did not use this system for acquiring mates because they could not read the newspaper and poor avoided that for economic reason as well. The fact is that some of the upper middle-class people used this method for arranging marriages. At last, it can be said that these advertisements provided an opportunity to establish contacts with the concerned parties and from these contacts one might get bride or groom according to his specification or desire. But individual partners both bride and groom did play any role in the selection of mates due to the greater control of their parents on them.