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## **GENDER RELATIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF EQUALITY**

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# Gender Relations in the Context of Equality

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**Abstract – The very article aims at "Gender Equality" means that man and woman have equal condition for realizing their full human potential and rights to contribute to national political economic, social and cultural development and benefit equally from the results. Equality is essential for human development and peace<sup>2</sup>. Gender relations in the context of equality involve a new way of thinking wherein stereotyped roles of women and men give way to a perspective of gender, as essential agents of change.**

**Keywords: Equality, Discrimination, Violence, Women, Oppression, Empowerment, Gender, etc.**

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The importance of ensuring gender equability has been highlighted throughout the world. In society man and woman should have equal opportunities for their development in different all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.<sup>1</sup>

The term "Gender Equality" means that man and woman have equal condition for realizing their full human potential and rights to contribute to national political economic, social and cultural development and benefit equally from the results. Equality is essential for human development and peace<sup>2</sup>. "Gender Equality" involve a new way of thinking wherein stereotyped roles of women and men give way to a perspective of gender, as essential agents of change.

According to the Human Development Report 1995, gender equality is not a technocratic goal; it is a political process, which requires firm political commitment and not enormous financial wealth.

The resolve of battle discrimination on the basis to gender and the recognition of equal rights for women have been considered as important as abolition of slavery.

Colonialism and establishment of equal rights for social and ethnic minorities. The international conference on population and development in Cairo in September 1994 under lined the principal, "that advancing gender equality and equality the empowerment of women and the elimination of all kinds of violence against women and ensuring women's ability to control their own fertility are cornerstones of population and development related programmes"<sup>3</sup>.

Gender justice in a society will be possible only when all human beings have equal rights, dignity and

freedom in all stoppers of life and society<sup>4</sup>. It not only gave to women an identity of their own, but also tended to free them from all kinds of letters to which she was bound in society.<sup>5</sup>

"Gender **Equality**" is the foundation stone of the new world order. The virtues of gentleness, chastity and compassion are as essential for men as they are for women are complementary to each other.

While the equality of strength, courage and enterprise are as much to be cultivated by women as by men<sup>6</sup>.

Religion is a powerful social institution that shapes gender role in society. Religion contributes to how a society understands relationships between men and women. Religion generally serves to support society's patriarchal views about the roles of men & women. In society so doing, religion supports and even endorses discrimination against women on the basis of gender.

The oppression of women through religion is one reflection of the main human societies have been ruled by men and have tended to denigrate the feminine. The vast majority of the world's religions are male centered and male dominated with few exceptions; human societies exclude women from and most sacred religion function<sup>7</sup>.

Sikhism had made a radical departure in removing the unequal barriers between men and women. It has developed its own Guru Nanak Dev, the founder of Sikhism, gave the concept of gender equality in 15th and 16th century. He raised his voice against gender biases.

When women were severely degraded and oppressed by their society, no freedom to make

decisions, their presence in religious, political, cultural and economic affairs was non-existent<sup>8</sup>.

Guru Nanak Dev Ji preached against the social evils like veiling, dowry, female feticide, etc. Thus he became the prophet of gender equality as well. According to him, men and women both are equal in the eyes of God. Guru Nanak Dev said that women are endowed with as much reason and conscience as men are; therefore they should be treated at par with men. He also asserted that a strong social structure requires women's participation in society and religious activities. He was one of the greatest emancipators of women<sup>9</sup> and was much of his time in this endeavor.

Guru Nanak Dev, who had given his views on gender equality in 15th and 16th century whereas the movements for women equality and emancipation was stated in Europe in 18th and 19th century.

The universal declaration of Human Rights toilers in its preamble that civil and political rights are available equally to all men and women<sup>10</sup>. Despite the ascendancy of the feminist movements over past fifty years, backed by U.N. International.

Women's decade (1976-85) during which three UN conferences in Mexico City, Copenhagen and Nairobi were held, gender equality still is nowhere near realization in the true sense of the expression<sup>11</sup>.

The then UN secretary General Kofi Annan, on the occasion of International woman's Day said, "International women's Day is the day on which women of all countries bridge national, ethnic, cultural, economic and political divides to come together to celebrate their efforts towards the goal of equality, development and peace. It is the day on which we applaud the struggle of ordinary women's movements has become a truly global phenomenon<sup>12</sup>.

Indian constitution has also made certain provisions, to ensure "Gender Equality". But this kind of equality has never been fully realized in society because of gender satisfaction important events in her life and community activities<sup>13</sup> and that shadows her sex<sup>14</sup>. There are various obstacles in the path of securing "Gender Equality".

There is need to abolish obstacles to secure the equality on the basis of gender in society. It can be possible only. When the society understands the true spirit of the Hymns of Guru Nanak and accepts them and adheres to them in its day-to-day life.

Contemporary Feminist Theories<sup>15</sup> by Stevi Jackson and Jackie Jones, contains the different contemporary feminist theories. The position of women in Hindu Civilization<sup>16</sup> by A.S. Altekar, surveys the position of Hindu women during the last four thousand years. It also indicates the general lines on which the present day problems confronting them should be solved.

Indian women, society and law<sup>17</sup> by Anita Arya, makes sincere efforts to bring to light the real issues concerning women in the context of society and law and discussed in an empirical manner. A great effort has been made to study various problems of women in the right perspective, with the legal aspects in view.

Status of women in India<sup>18</sup> by H.C. Upadhyaya, critically examines the different issues related with women. The author has analyzed the role, which is being played by women in the development of nation's state.

Violence against women: Women against violence<sup>19</sup> by Shirin Kudebodkar and Sabina A-Issa, covers different aspects of the violence, domestic, prostitutions, sexual abuse of the girl child, perhaps in its more vicious and perverted manifestation.

Women and society in Ancient India<sup>20</sup> by S. Vats and Shakuntla Hudgal, therefore, tries to trace the status of women, their education, marriage and family system in ancient India.

Social justice in India<sup>21</sup> by C.P. Barthwal is an attempt to explain the concept of social justice and unfolds its scope. It examines the provisions of Indian constitution, which directly or indirectly related to social justice. Having done so the volume attempts to present the extent of implementation of the concept of social justice in its various aspects. It also discusses the provisions and policies regarding reservation.

"Guru Nanak and the Indian society"<sup>22</sup> by Harbans Kaur Sagoo, discusses the existing state, the political institutions and their functioning character of the ruling class. The law and order situations various professions and vocations in the terms of Guru Nanak. It also contains the caste system social-religious ceremonies and customs, status of women and early the concept of an ideal society envisioned in the precepts and practices of Guru Nanak and his followers.

Guru Nanak in History<sup>23</sup> by J.S. Grewal is a study of the role, which Guru Nanak assumed for himself and the legacy which he left to his successors. The study is devoted to the political social and religious milieu of Guru Nanak on the assumption that it is necessary to know something of his times in order to understand the full significance of his life & work. It also deals with the response of Guru Nanak Dev to the political social and religious conditions of his times.

Political ideas of the Sikh Gurus<sup>24</sup> by Gurdeep Kaur brings out the political ideas of the Sikh Gurus from Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh and enlightens the reader development of Sikhism as apolitical hence. It tries to trace the political force of the Gurus and brings out the proposition that there was no basic change in Sikhism from Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh.

"Guru Nanak Dev His Life and Bani"<sup>25</sup> by Harbans Lal Agnihotri, contains Guru Nanak's Bani along with its exposition and explanatory note in English. After making an in-depth study of Guru Nanak's teachings against the background of socio-religious conditions of the day. The author has projected rationally Guru Nanak's life of Talwandi, now called Nanakana Sahib, education marriage service at Sultanpur and explanation of the complete text of Japji Sahib, Asa di Var Sidh Goshati, Bara Maha and Babar Bani.

Economic thought of the Sikh Gurus<sup>26</sup> by J.R. Ass is based on the assumption that materialism represented by economics and spiritualism represented by religion, are after to be conflicting philosophies, but are not so, they have a common goal, welfare of man. So there exists a close relationship between the two. Thus it identifies economic ideas in spiritual literature. The book explains the social, economic and religious conditions prevalent during the times of the Gurus and discusses as the contribution of each Guru to society in the economic field. The author explains the ideas relating to consumption production, exchange, distribution of public finance. In the end he discusses the relevance of the economic ideas of the Sikh Gurus in the context of modern times.

Social; and political philosophy of Guru Nanak Dev and Guru Gobind Singh<sup>27</sup> by Gurdev Singh Deol, is especially designed to meet the requirements of the readers who wish to study social and political philosophy of Guru Nanak Dev and Guru Gobind Singh. This seems only to be a segment of total philosophy of these two Gurus.

Educational Philosophy of Guru Nanak<sup>28</sup> by T.S. Sodhi describes the life work and educational philosophy of Guru Nanak. It contains the role of education in the upliftment of women and how education can play an effective role improving the status of women and make them empowered in the light of value system topics like methods of teaching teacher and discipline have also been discussed.

Guru Nanak his life and teaching<sup>29</sup> by Roopinder Singh studies the life and teaching of Guru Nanak, as reflected in his compositions. Special stress has been laid on discussing the Morning Prayer "Japji" the establishment of the institution of "Sangat" and "Langer" and the Guru's message for improving the status of women.

"Sikh Religion and Economic Development"<sup>30</sup> by Upinderjit Kaur makes a depth study of the philosophical concepts of Sikhism and brings out clearly the ethos of progress envisioned in it. It is addressed to finding out

Whether the relationship between Sikhism and economic development is productive or otherwise. It

examines Sikh religion in terms of three basic dimensions: spectral value system. The study is interdisciplinary and tries to present a critical evaluation of the basic tenets of Sikh Religion and its institutions, the attitudes of the provide for economic development.

Guru Nanak's relationship with the Mughals and the Mughlas,<sup>31</sup> by Gurmit Singh, contains the relationship between the Sikh Gurus and the Delhi rulers which was of a mercurial nature. This has been discussed in detail to show that Sikhism from the very times of Guru Nanak aimed at awakening political consciousness in people to prepare them for obtaining political ascendancy or Liberation.

Political Ethics of Guru Granth Sahib by Gurdeep Kaur<sup>32</sup> make it possible to know the linkages between ethics and politics in the Gurbani while the trend of modern political theory is to establish firmly a secular's ground for an inevitable divorce between religion and politics.

Facets of Guru Nanak's Thought,<sup>33</sup> by Ajit Singh Sikka is reflection of different facets of Guru Nanak's ideas like, the concept of creation, concept of man, concept of Vidya, women, equality etc. The book is very fruitful for the present researcher.

Guru Nanak Dev<sup>34</sup> by O.P. Ralhan, discusses the biographical sketches of Guru Nanak's life and his travelogue, but also discusses his teaching of social, political religious conditions in the time.

Ideology of Sikh Gurus<sup>35</sup> by Gurdev Singh, Hansarao contains the social thoughts of Sikh Gurus like Human Life, life of House-holder, Moksha establish a casteless society, an liberation of women. The author also discusses the political thoughts of Sikh Gurus study concluded that Sikhism is supportive of the forces of progress.

"Gender Equality" has become one of the very important issues in contemporary society. Modern state is a welfare state and it is based on the concept of democracy, freedom, justice and equality. Without the realization of these concepts no society, in principles can claim itself to be a just, civilized and people oriented society. Most important objections of modern states are to establish social justice and social harmony in the society. The concept of social justice implies that everybody should be treated equally<sup>1</sup>. Among a group of equals, thus should be no special provisions or privileges for any individual or some individual, as it would negate principle of equality and would give rise to discontent and resentment. It means that there should not be any discrimination between human being on any false or extraneous ground such as race, religion, caste, colour, creed or gender.

The principal of "Gender Equality" constitutes the most vital part of social justice as it establishes a between men and women and give them equal opportunities in society. Justice is sought to be established in society by granting certain fundamental freedoms and rights to all individuals without any discrimination, It implies that all individuals should be treated and equal human beings<sup>2</sup>.

Women constitute almost one half of the total population of the world. They have a number of roles to play in society. Peace and progress of the society would be possible only when, one half of the population i.e. women will be a position to enjoy their rights on equal footing along with their male counterparts. The development of any society depends more on less upon the status of women<sup>3</sup>. Gender Equality is essential condition for the establishment of just society, which ultimately leads to the establishment of successful democratic institution.

Understanding gender relations in the context of equality has become a subject of much discussion, discourse and debate. Powers is seen as the central characteristic of gender relations; Traditional values give men proprietary right over women. Gender relations are formed through Social Institution, cultural practices ascription of status.<sup>4</sup>

Religions are also powerful social institutions that shape gender role in society. They not only define how men and women participate in religious activities but also reinforce and legitimized and gender roles assigned to men and women in society<sup>5</sup>.

Gender equality allows men and women to fully develop their human qualities, their talents and use their intelligence to satisfy their spiritual and other need in society.

Women oppression is part of gender relations. Violence against women includes physical, social, psychological and economic abuse, it is often known as gender based discrimination because at evolves in part from women's subordinated status in society<sup>6</sup>.

In contemporary feminist literature the word women has been replaced with the term of gender as a new category<sup>7</sup>. Gender, which drives from the Latin gender, is more a sociological phenomenon rather than biological reality. Although the terms gender and sex are often used to refer to social and cultural distinctions between males and females, while the term sex is used to highlight biological and therefore ineradicable difference between men and women.

Gender is therefore a social construct, usually masculine behaviors. Feminist theories typically highlight the destination in order to demonstrate that physical or biological differences need not mean that women and men must have different social roles and position. In short, the quest for gender equality reflects

the belief that sexual differences have no social or political significance<sup>8</sup>.

#### Meaning & Definition of Gender:

Gender identifies the relation between men & women. Gender relation varies from place to place and over time, they often change in response to altering circumstances. (Sex by contrast, identifies the biological difference between men and women which does not change<sup>9</sup>. " A person's biological sex as constructed understood interpreted and institutionalized by society<sup>10</sup>".

The oxford English dictionary refers:

"Gender founded on the distinction of the two sexes can only find, place in the names of living creatures, which admit, the distinction of male & female<sup>11</sup>.

#### Meaning of Equality:

Meaning of Equality is essential for the overall development of human beings. It is necessary that every human being should have right to equality. Equality stands for equal opportunities of all human beings irrespective of any consideration on the basic of caste, creed, colour or sex. No one should be forced to suffer any kind of social or political disabilities merely on the ground of his caste, creed and sex<sup>12</sup>.

Ernest Barker, Defined whatever conditions are guaranteed to me in the form of rights, shall also, and in the same measure, be guarantees another, and that whatever rights are given to other shall also be given to me."<sup>13</sup>

According to the oxford Dictionary," The conditions of having equal dignity rank or privileges with the fact of being on an equal footing"<sup>14</sup>.

To conclude, equality stands for equal conditions for all human being irrespective of any consideration on the basis to race, colour, creed or sex.

"Gender Equality" means that men and women should have equal conditions for realizing their full human rights and potential to contribute to national, political economic, social and cultural development and benefit equally from the results. Equality is essential for human development and peace<sup>15</sup>.

It is an action to promote equality that requires ambitions approach which presupposes the recognition of male and female identifies and the whiling ness to establish a balanced and distribution of responsibilities between men and women<sup>16</sup>.



"It also means incorporating equal opportunities for men & women into all community, policies & activities"<sup>17</sup>.

"Gender Equality refers to an equal visibility, empowerment & participation of both sexes in all spheres of public & private life. Gender equality is the opposite of gender inequality, not of gender difference, and aims to promote the full difference and aims to promote women in society"<sup>18</sup>.

Keeping the above means in mind, it may be said that gender equality stands of equal opportunities to both men and women in society. It establishes a balanced distribution of responsibilities between men & women. It also provides the equal empowerment, visibility and participation of both sexes in all spheres of life.

Social scientists and women activities both accept the main postulate that woman is not biologically inferior and her lower social status to that of man is manmade. Although their approaches to the course of women's liberation differs yet these of approach have resulted in the formulation of different theories to explain how women's position was related to a lower status in the course of so called development of civilization.

Broadly speaking there are these theories:

1. Moderate or women's rights Feminism
2. Radical Feminism
3. Socialist Feminism<sup>19</sup>

They all maintain that the social inequalities between man and women are a creation of socio cultural milieu. And in turn, these theories have inspired several women's liberation movements all over the world. The inferior position, according to moderate theory is due to cultural and psychological factors. John Stuart Mill, one of the earlier thinkers of this school championed the cause of women"<sup>20</sup>

Mill further added that the subjection of women was the product of age long custom and was not the proof of any inherent inferiority in them. Mill believed that men and women have their peculiar superior or inferior but they are reciprocal. He believed that equality between the two sexes can be brought about by moral reforms, education and legal measures<sup>21</sup>.

Mahatma Gandhi also said that women should have equal status with man<sup>22</sup>. Early feminism, particularly the first wave of the women's movement was deeply influenced by the ideas and values of liberalism. The first major feminist text, Wollstonecraft's vindication of the Rights of women, argued that women should be entitled to the same rights and privileges as men on the ground that they are human beings. Mill proposed that

society should be organized according to the principle of reason and assistants of birth such as sex should be irrelevant. Second wave feminism also has a significant liberal component.

Another approach to the status of woman's is historical materialism or socialist feminism. Socialist feminism becomes prominent in the second half of the twentieth century. Socialist feminists argue that the relationship between the sexes is rooted in the social and economic structure, itself change, some would say a social of genuine emancipation.<sup>23</sup>

Liberal and socialist ideas had already been adopted to throw light upon the position of women's in society.

During the 1960s and 1970s however, the feminist movement sought to uncover the influence of patriarchy not only in politics, public life and the economy but in all aspects of social, personal and sexual existence<sup>24</sup>.

Since the 1960s it has become increasingly difficult to analyze feminism simply in the terms of three field divisions

1. Liberal
2. Socialist
3. Radical traditions

Since some new forms of feminism have also emerged. Although these new forms draw upon a wide variety of influences. These new feminist traditions include postmodern feminism, black feminism and lesbian feminism has taken up issue with some forms of feminism, such as cultural feminism which proclaim that there are essential differences between women and men. In their view, there is no such thing as a fixed female identity, the notion of women being nothing more than a fiction.

However in calling the male/female divide into question/postmodern feminism perhaps compromises the very idea of a women's movement<sup>25</sup>. Black feminism has challenged the tendency within feminism to ignore racial difference and to suggest that women endure a common oppression by virtue of their sex. Lesbian feminism however.

Stress the difference between of homosexual women and heterosexual women. Lesbian feminists may therefore regard the struggle against homophobia as every bit as important as the struggle against patriarchy.

The militant and revolutionary wing of the movement has been increasingly marginalized and feminist literature reflects clear evidence of revisionism.

However, feminism's Chief challenge in the twenty first century is to establish a viable and coherent 'third wave' that capable of making sense of the changing nature of gender relations and of exploding the myth of postmodern feminism<sup>26</sup>.

Lord Denning referred that "A woman feels as keenly, things as clearly, as a man she in her sphere does work as useful as man does. She as much right to her freedom to develop her personality to the full as a man. When she marries she does not become the husband's servant but his equal partner. If his work is more important in her life of the community. She is more important in her life of the family. Neither can do without the other. Neither can do without the other. Neither is above the other or under the other, they are equals"<sup>27</sup>.

Various leaders, politician thinkers and scholars agree that no society however, well organized, can ever be well set in motion properly unless a justified status is granted to women.<sup>28</sup>

At the international level, the UN efforts to promote the principle of equal rights of men and women were initially directed towards securing equality of men and women in law. UN charter and Universal Declaration of Human Rights ensure freedom of women from social, sexual religious discrimination in a variety of ways. Many international conventions are held for the objectives of prohibiting discrimination between men and women<sup>29</sup>.

India is a sovereign, socialist secular democratic and republic composed or union of states. Preamble of the constitution resolve to secure all its citizen justice and the constitution guarantees certain fundamental rights and freedoms. Indian women are the beneficiaries of these rights in the same manner as Indian men on basis of part III of the constitution.

- Article 14 of the Indian constitution guarantees equality before law and equal protection of law to all men and women within the territory of India<sup>30</sup>.
- Article 15 prohibits discrimination against any citizen on ground of caste, race or sex<sup>31</sup>.
- Article 15 (2) declares that no citizen shall be subjected to any other grounds, with regard to
  - (a) Places of Public
  - (b) The use of wells, Tanks Bathing, Ghats, roads and places of public resort, maintained wholly or partly out of state funds or dedicated the use of the general public.
- Thus while clause (i) of Article 15 prohibits discrimination by the state; clause (2) prohibits both the state and private individuals from

making any discrimination. However, the provision of non-discrimination on this account does not prevent the state from making any special provisions for women as has been laid down under.

- Article 16 of the constitution guarantees equality of opportunity for to any office under the state. It also forbids any discrimination in respect of any employment of office under the state on grounds only of class. Color, creed and sex. The obligation not to be discrimination in matter relating to employment or appointment to any office under the state has thus at least normatively ensured a significant position and status to Indian women.
- Part iv of the Indian constitution which deals with Directive Principles of the state policy directs to the states her formulated the policy keeping in view the largest interest of women, works section of the society<sup>32</sup>. Articles 38, 39, 43, 44, 51-AJ.
- The right of Franchise for which the women of west struggled hard was granted to Indian women by constitution. Article 325 and 326 of the constitution ensure adult franchise for both men and women. Women have right not only to vote, but contest the elections and participate actively in Indian politics. Thus, constitutionally there is provision of political rights for women on the basis of equality.

Some constitutional Amendment, which also refer to women. Such as the 42nd amendment of the constitution, which contains a clause referring specifically to women declaring that: It shall be the duty of every citizen of India to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women.

The 73rd constitutional Amendment also provides for the reservation of 1/3 seats in all tiers of local government for women. The 74th constitution or amendment of 1993 is a watershed for the advancement of Indian women. It ensures 1/3 of the total elected seats and position of chairperson in rural and urban local elected bodies to women. The purpose of these amendments in the constitution is to make women empowered.

The amendment in the Indian penal code and introduction of section 314 B or 498 A is deeply committed to the object of elimination of all forms of discrimination against women<sup>33</sup>.

A large number of laws have been passed, so as to protect the interest of women and uplift their status and position<sup>34</sup>. The basic purpose of all these above-mentioned provisions is to ensure the dignity of women and promote them equability in status along with their male counterparts. Despite the fact that

various commissions and laws have been made by the government in order to secure women's equality have been taken up but still the realization of the concept of "Gender Equality" as a big question seeking answers in the positive.

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