

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

GENDER EQUALITY: SIKH IDEOLOGY AND PRACTICE

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CERTIFICATE


This is to certify that this thesis entitled "**GENDER EQUALITY: SIKH IDEOLOGY AND PRACTICE**" embodied the work carries out by Gurpreet Kaur herself under my supervision and that is worthy of consideration for the award of the Ph.D degree.

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CHAPTER – 1 INTRODUCTION

Democracy is the most popular form of government in the contemporary world as it is based on the will of the people. The important principle on which an ideal democracy is founded is that it should be inclusive, representative and participatory. An ideal democracy aims essentially to protect and promote the dignity of both men and women. Gender equality is an inalienable part of democratic constitutional framework. In recent past, gender justice and gender equality have been essential components of women liberation movements all over the world. In fact, abolition of gender discrimination is a paramount requirement of democratic system.

The twentieth century has been termed as the age of democracy. However, it can be argued that till now democracy has made only a limited and perfunctory entry in the political domain and has not penetrated into the social order. Social democracy still remains a mirage for millions of women in every part of the world. Today the fundamental democratic values equality, liberty, justice and fraternity have no meaning. It is important to realize that a full-fledged social democracy must complement political democracy. Consolidation of political democracy, social democracy necessitates equal status, equal rights, equal opportunities and respect for identity, choices, capacities and abilities of every member of the society is inevitable. It should not be forgotten that democracy is not a mere form of government but a set of values and a way of life. Neglect of half of the humanity is bound to have a crippling impact on the progress of human civilization. Equal guarantee of all human rights is vital not only for women's own development but also for the development of the whole society.

A woman is an integral part of society. She is a vital element in family life. The status of women largely depends upon social traditions, norms and customs. The position and status of women reflects the true image of cultural, social and spiritual character of a society. Jawaharlal Nehru, once

¹ Swarn Lata Sharma, *Gender Discrimination and Human Rights*, K.K. Publications, New Delhi, 2000, p. 10.

stated, "You can tell the condition of a nation by looking at the status of its women."² Despite her invaluable significance to the family and society, woman has been a victim of chronic forms of gender inequalities and discrimination over the centuries.

It is ironical that whereas women have been depicted as goddesses in Indian mythology, the socioeconomic condition in contemporary times is a matter of grave concern in India, where Lakshmi is considered to be the goddess of wealth, women are suffering from agonizing poverty. It is a place where Saraswati is the goddess of learning, but except for Kerala, women are mostly illiterate. This is the country where goddesses Durga and Kali signify strength, power and personality, however, it is quite appalling to read about female foeticide and dowry deaths in the newspapers with alarming frequency. Each of these inhuman crimes casts a dark shadow on the lives of women.³ In fact the history of gender discrimination is as old as history of mankind. In the last few decades, women's issues have been debated widely. The most urgent concern in recent times has been equality. Though the contribution of women in different economic, social and political activities is very well recognized, yet the idea of equality is still a distant dream. Today, women all over the world are overwhelmingly concerned with the issue of gender equality.

Women's quest for equality has become a global phenomenon. The movement for gender equality seeks genuine equality among human beings the premise that neither man is superior nor inferior. The notion of gender equality envisages equality of sex in every sphere. Its object is to eradicate the man-made differences in the areas of economic as well as social, cultural and political realms of experience.⁴

Sociologically the word 'gender' refers to socially constructed role behaviour, activities and attributes. Gender which derives from Latin word

² Manvinder Kaur and Ameer Sultan, *Gender Realities*, Abhishek Publications, Chandigarh, 2005, p.172.

³ Virendra Dayal, *Human Rights and Women in Richa Tandon*, *Women, Human Rights, Religion and Violence*, Nirmal Book Agency, Kurukshetra University, 1998, p. 4.

⁴ Sushma Yadav and Anil Dutta Mishra, *Gender Issues in India: Some Reflections*, Radha Publications, New Delhi, 2003, p.13.

gender is more a sociological reality than a purely biological or anatomical one.⁵ The term gender is generally used as synonym of sex. However, they are distinct concepts. Sex is a physical and biological distinction while gender is a social and cultural one. In other words, the word gender refers to the socio-cultural definition of man and woman; the way societies distinguish men and women and assign them social roles. Gender is closely related to the roles and behavior assigned to women and men based on their sexual differences. As soon as a child is born, families and society begin the process of gendering. Particularly, in orthodox societies like India, the birth of a girl is celebrated, the birth of a daughter is denounced in several explicit and implicit ways and is not shown with love, respect, better food and proper health care. Boys are encouraged to be tough and outgoing; girls are encouraged to be homebound and shy. All these differences are gender differences and they are created by society. In short, sex of an individual is largely determined by biology whereas their gender is socially constructed and comes with a complete set of roles, rights and obligations that attach to them on the basis of their sex.

The concept of equality has been adopted in almost all the constitutions of various countries, especially after the Second World War and India is no exception to that. Right to equality has worked out for a woman in all the democratic countries. Equality has been an integral part of the study of political inquiry since the beginning of political discourse in the ancient world. The famous historian Herodotus (485 BC) referred to the concept of equality under the law as early as 443 BC, and the idea is prominent in both the writings of the Stoics and ancient Judaism and Christianity. Stoic philosophers, in a manner atypical of the ancient world, asserted that all human beings are in their essence equal, each possessing a divine spark of reason that dissolves all barriers of rank and social affiliation or membership.⁸

The term equality incorporates several meanings. Equality is based on the idea that no individual should be less equal in any way.

⁵ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gender>, Retrieved on October 10, 2013

⁶ Swarn Lata Sharma, *Op cit.*, p. 22.

⁷ K. Ramashankar, *Gender Disparity in India: The Nature and Extent*, Abhijeet Publications, Delhi, 2011. p.iii.

⁸ Scott John Hammond, *Political Theory: An Encyclopedia of Contemporary and Classic Terms*, Rawat Publications, Jaipur, 2010, p.112.

human rights than any other. First and foremost, equality means, absence of legal discrimination against any one individual, group, class or race. Secondly, it upholds equal claims to adequate opportunities for all, recognition of the fact that there can be no difference inherent in nature between claims of men to happiness and especially, that no one person or group may be sacrificed to another. Finally, it also asserts rights to a minimum of education, housing, food, and guarantee against economic insecurity and deprivation. Universal Declaration of Human Rights shows a deep concern with the notion of equality throughout the document, claiming that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights, and later makes explicit references to equality before the law, equal pay for equal work, equal access to public goods and services, equality is ensuring individuals or groups of individuals are treated fairly and equally and no less favorably, specific to their needs, including of race, gender, disability, religion or belief sexual orientation and age.

Thus, gender equality defines equal conditions for both men and women for realizing their human rights and potential to the fullest extent. Gender equality refers to a social order in which women and men share the same opportunities in both economic and the domestic realm. Gender equality implies elimination of all forms of gender discrimination so that all women are able to enjoy their rights and freedom at par with men on all spheres of experience like political, social, cultural and economic.

The status of women is an effective yardstick for assessing the standard of culture of any age of any nation. The term status denotes the position of an individual in a social system. In the context of women, status implies her position in particular system or society.

Historically speaking, the position of women has continued to change from time to time. The general position and status of women in society was much more exalted as compared to the present day. In the post Vedic period, the status of women started to decline. As time passed their social prestige deteriorated rapidly. In the post Vedic times, they came to be equated with drums or cattle that could be beaten at will. Their presence in religious,

⁹ A.C. Kapur, *Principles of Political Science*, S. Chand, Delhi, 1996, p. 280.

¹⁰ Arvinder Singh, Guru Nanak : As Champion of Gender Justice *The Sikh Review*, Vol. 58:9, No. 681, The Sikh Culture Centre, Calcutta, September 2010, p.49.

political, social, cultural and economic affairs almost nonexistent. The birth of a female child was considered as a bad omen and was looked upon with disfavour. The parents began resorting to the infanticide or killing infants mercilessly. Women were forced to veil their faces, and to perform household chores and labour duties. They were in essence slaves.¹¹ A woman was referred to as the root of all evils and a temptress and having her brains in her heels. Generally speaking, female sex was considered less intelligent. The Gujaratis and Punjabis specifically alluded to women's inferiority by citing the metaphor that women's intelligence is in her heels. It is maintained that no matter how educated a woman is, her intelligence is always of the lower order. According to Malayalam, who heeds the advice of a woman, will be reduced to beggary. In the male-dominated society, the only contribution required of women was to perpetuate the race, do the household work and serve male members of the society.¹² The customs of jauhar, sati, female infanticide, child marriage, purdah etc. had created a virtual hell on earth for the female sex.

Sikhism, the youngest religion over five hundred years ago had made a radical departure in its attempt at removing the unequal barriers between men and women. Guru Nanak the first Sikh Guru took the notice of plight of helpless women in India and advocated the cause of women's right and gender equality forcefully and single handedly. He and his succeeding Gurus articulated a distinct spiritual doctrine based on their own spiritual and mystical experiences. This included their message of equality between the five sexes. The principles of this new religious ideology promoted the outlook that man being male or female, Brahmin or Sudra, a better or worse, higher or lower than any other, is only the deeds which determine one's position in society as well as in the divine eye.¹³ Sikh Gurus have given due attention to the spiritual and moral development of both men and women. They led a way of life which is based on humanitarianism and respect for dignity of both man and woman. It was the time when divine contemplation of Guru Sikh

¹¹ www.documents.mx/documents/understandingsikhismbyTejasinghgurmatveechar.compdf.html, Retrieved on July 12, 2014.

¹² Gulcharan Singh, Women Lib in Sikh Scriptures and Sociology, The Sikh Review, Vol. XXXVI, No.411, The Sikh Cultural Centre, Calcutta, March 1988, p.33.

¹³ Meenakshi Rajan, *Spiritual Warriors: Eminent Sikh Women*, Waris Shah Foundation, Amritsar, 2011, p.8.

transformed the religion and society. The Sikh concept of equality transcended the narrow consideration of caste, creed, sex and colour.

Sikhism had not only liberated the female section from discriminatory traditions but also opened the path for progress. It is one of the first religions that addresses the issue of women rights in its religious ideology and makes attempts to accord women an equal status with men. The concepts of equality, liberty and justice are the hallmarks of social ethics of *Guru Granth Sahib*. Divine compositions enshrined in this Holy Scripture contain glorification of womanhood. Woman is called a devoted soul and is addressed as the female spouse of the Supreme. Thus, in Sikhism, effective, comprehensive and pragmatic steps are taken for religious equality of woman.

In Sikh history, many Sikh women have played a very prominent role. They proved themselves worthy in every sphere they chose to serve. Their sacrifices adorn the pages of Sikh history and they have contributed a lot towards the welfare of the community as a whole. These heroic stories of courage and untold sacrifices are a matter of pride. It can be said that Sikh women played a highly constructive role in the society. Bibi Nanaki, the elder sister of Guru Nanak was the first woman recognized as the Guru. The role of Mata Sulakhni, wife of Guru Nanak cannot be overlooked because she had actually supported and implemented the ideas of Guru Nanak. Besides these there are innumerable examples of Sikh women who have left indelible marks through their invaluable contributions. Among the great Sikh women the most prominent contributions are those of Mata Khivi's service towards the propagation of Langer tradition, Bibi Bhani's spirit of service, Mata Ganga boundless spirit who is also known as wife of the first martyr, Mata Gujri's untold sacrifice and Mata Sundri's guidance to the Sikh community. Mata Sahib Kaur possesses the designation as the 'mother of' Khanda, the first woman general, Bibi Deep Kaur, the warrior, Bibi Rup Kaur, the first author of *Sikh Sada Kaur* and Maharani Jind Kaur etc. have also played an exemplary role in Sikh history.¹⁵ Sikhism has recognized and glorified the immensely significant role

¹⁴ O.S. Prem, Womanhood in Sikhism, *The Sikh Courier International*, Vol. 28, No. 65, *Journal of Sikh Cultural Society*, London, Spring/ Winter, 1988, p.17.

¹⁵ Shashi Bala, Sikh Spirituality and Contribution of Women, *The Sikh Review*, Vol. 49:11, No.575, The Sikh Cultural Centre, Calcutta, p.25.

played by these women. However, it is unfortunate that the passage of time the position of Sikh women suffered a setback. This happened mainly because of social pressures persisting male chauvinistic attitudes and disregard of the essence of the writings and ideology of the Sikhs. In Sikh ideology, though the notion of gender equality is still in existence but unfortunately when the question of practice comes the situation is quite opposite and deplorable.

Many efforts have been made at national level as well as international level for the upliftment of the status of women. At international level various conferences have been held in this direction. Indian constitution also grants equality to women and this principle has been enshrined in the Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles of the State Policy. Apart from these provisions various policies, programmes and laws have also been enacted which are oriented in the direction of safeguarding the rights of women. Some of these are the Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961; The Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act India, 1987; Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act, 2005 and Domestic Violence Act, 2006. In spite of all these efforts there has been a phenomenal increase in violence against women during the last few years.¹⁶

Today, the Indian society is extremely male dominated and biased against the female gender, resulting in all kinds of exploitation and discriminatory practices. For instance, female foeticide and female infanticide spread. Now days, the menace of Honour Killings is a very high prevalence in our society. Barbaric killing of young women take place frequently. Persecution of women often takes place on the ground of insufficient dowry. Hundreds of women commit suicide either due to humiliating sexual abuse perpetrated on them or because of unbearable tortures from the husband and/or in account of dowry. The majority of Indian women who play a faithful, obedient wife and a sacrificing mother are often forced to live a passive, powerless and slavish life throughout. Widows lose their status and become inauspicious to everyone in society.¹⁷

¹⁶ Rameshwari Pandey, *Women Welfare and Empowerment in India: Vision for 21st Century*, New Century Publication, New Delhi, 2008, p.606.

¹⁷ Sebastil L. Raj, S., *Quest for Gender Justice: A Critique of the Status of Women in India*, T.R. Publications, Madras, 1993, p. XI.

Punjab which is the land of Gurus and Saints, unfortunately is under the grip of gender violence. The position of women in Punjab is not better than the rest of India. An evidence of this is the sex ratio of Punjab, which is declining very fast. In Punjab sex ratio was 891 females per 1,000 males in 2010¹⁸. The national ranking of Punjab in terms of sex ratio now is 21st place, even teasing, kidnapping, abduction, dowry deaths, torture, molestation, sexual harassment, sexual slavery, forced pregnancy, enforced prostitution, sterilization and forced abortion, prenatal sex selection and female infanticide, importation of girls have become frequent occurrences. Women continue to be marginalized and discriminated. The discrimination is spread widely and is visible everywhere in all spheres such as social, economic, political. Although the Constitution of India guarantees right to equality and universal adult suffrage (Article 326) very few women are able to participate in the political process. Only those women who belong to elite class are active in the election process. By women have fewer representatives under representative in elected bodies. Their participation in elections as candidates and as voters is as low as compared to their male counterparts. Thus, women suffer devaluation at home, workplace, literacy, matrimony, inheritance and allied rights economic opportunities, public life and power process.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

No doubt, a number of theoretical and empirical studies relating to status of women have been undertaken by various scholars. There are scholars who have produced works of significance on the issue of equality on the basis of gender. The present study is significant as it proposes to study the issue of women's status and gender equality in conjunction with a religious ideology which enjoys an all pervasive influence on the social and religious belief system in the context of Punjab. Punjab is the birth place of Sikhism. As the youngest religion of the world, Sikhism is a unique blend of ancient wisdom and very rational and pragmatic world view. Moreover, Sikhism has had a profound influence on the people of Punjab. It is successful in altering the religious dynamics of Punjab in a big way. There are some very lucid and pronounced

¹⁸ *Census of India, 2011.*

observations on the issue of the status of women in the writings of the Sikh Gurus. Rather than being an abstract study of the question of gender equality; the study finds its theoretical justification in the relationship of gender equality with a particular socio-religious context and a religious ideology. The basis of such a study rests in the fact that little or nothing has been done in the context of Gender Equality: Sikh Ideology and Practice. In order to gain an understanding of the various dimensions of the problem published material having direct, indirect or oblique relation with the study has been analyzed below. Whereas some of the works have a specific focus others deal with the issue at a general or macro level perspective.

The Position of Women in Hindu Civilization by A.S. Altekar (1959)¹⁹ surveys the position of Hindu women during the last four thousand years. It indicates the general view from which the present day problems confronting them should be solved.

Guru Nanak in History by J.S. Grewal (1969)²⁰ 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 fully the significance of his life and work. It also deals with the response of Guru Nanak to the political, social and religious conditions of his times.

The authors Roopa Vohra and Arun K. Sen (1986)²¹ in their book *Status Education and Problems of Indian Women* make a modest effort to give a composite picture of the life of an Indian woman throughout the ages and the nature of problems with which she has been confronted with her entry into the working world of outside. The authors also try to establish that the educational working aptitude can alone stabilize the status of women in India.

Facets of Guru Nanak's Thought by Ajit Singh Sikka (1988)²² is a reflection of different facets of Guru Nanak's ideas like the concept of a perfect man, concept of *idya*, women and equality etc.

¹⁹ A.S. Altekar, *The Position of Women in Hindu Civilization*, Motilal Banarasisdas Publishers, N Delhi, 1959.

²⁰ J.S. Grewal *Guru Nanak in History*, Publication Bureau, Panjab University, Chandigarh. 1969.

²¹ Roopa Vohra and Arun K. Sen *Status Education and Problems of Indian Women*, Akshat Publications, Delhi, 1986.

²² Ajit Singh Sikka *Facets of Guru Nanak's Thoughts*, Sikka Publishing House, Ludhiana, 1988.

J.L. Gupta (1988)²³ in his book *Challenges to the Fair Sex: Indian Women: Problems, Plights and Progress* has put forth very interestingly the different facets, which are in one way or another responsible so far as the upliftment of the women concerned. In this book, the author also presents the various factors or challenges such as occupational illiteracy, dowry, rape, sati, child marriage, molestation, teasing or general neglect etc. which can be considered as factors impeding women's growth.

The book *Status of Hindu Women* by Madhu Shastri (1990)²⁴ comprehensively deals with the various facets of the status of Hindu women. He has investigated the historical realities related with the status of women through old Hindu texts (the Vedas, the Upanishads, Dharm Shastras etc.) and has succeeded in bringing out new facts to light. He also examines the constitutionality of specific protection for women under the criminal laws (the Indian Penal Code and the Criminal Procedure Code). Various family law matrimonial lapses have been thoroughly discussed with the help of important judicial pronouncements. The property right of women which has been a part of the status of women is the focal point of the work. The social welfare legislation, which gives special protection to Indian women, has also been adequately dealt with. For reaching changes have been effected in various laws related with the status of Hindu women by various judicial decisions, therefore important pronouncements have been introduced in appropriate places.

Gurdev Singh Hansrao (1990)²⁵ his book entitled *Ideology of Sikh Gurus* highlights the social thoughts of Sikh Gurus regarding the issues of casteless society, life of householders, moksha and the liberation of women. It is a valuable source to understand the view of Sikh Gurus regarding liberation of women.

The book *Sikhism and Guru Granth Sahib* by Surinder Singh Kohli (1990)²⁶ presents a brief study of various fundamental aspects of Sikhism. The author S.S. Kohli follows the method of explaining the most difficult concepts in

²³ J.L. Gupta, *Challenges to the Fair Sex: Indian Women: Problems, Plights and Progress*, Gian Publishing House, Delhi, 1988

²⁴ Madhu Shastri, *Status of Hindu Women: A Study of Legislative Trends and Judicial Behaviour*, RBSA Publishers, Jaipur, 1990.

²⁵ Gurdev Singh Hansrao, *Ideology of the Sikh Gurus*, Hansrao Publishers, Ropar, 1990.

²⁶ Surinder Singh Kohli, *Sikhism and Guru Granth Sahib*, National Book Shop, Delhi, 1990.

the simplest possible style. The book has been divided into two sections. In the first section, various misunderstandings about Sikhism have been dispelled. These misconceptions pertain especially about its origin and about the constant unity of Sikh thought. In the first part of the book the position of Sikhism is discussed through allusion to quotations from the Sikh scriptures. The second section of the book highlights the unique position of Sikh scripture Guru Granth Sahib.

The book *Status of Women in India* by H.C. Upadhyay (1991)²⁷ discusses all the different issues related to women's development and the role played by women in the development of the nation state. The book also presents the significant role of women towards the country's socio development.

Harbans Kaur Sagoo (1992)²⁸ her famous book *Guru Nanak and Indian Society* discusses the conditions during the period of Guru Nanak. The book maintains its focus on the economic conditions, caste system, religious ceremonies and customs, position of women and the concept of ideal society. In this book the author also discusses the contribution of Guru Nanak in elevating the status of women and giving them a respectable position and equal status in society and religion.

Fundamental Issues in Sikh Studies by Kharak Singh et al. (1992)²⁹ provides an authentic exposition of the basic concepts and doctrines of Sikhism besides an in-depth study of some current issues of major significance, about which there is considerable disinformation. The book contains three sections: first Sikh ideology, second Sikh history and third general section.

The book *Quest for Gender Justice* edited by Sebesti L. Raj, S.J. (1993)³⁰ brings out vividly the various inequities between the theory and practice and between profession and the actual situation of the status of women. Various articles of this book have offered concrete suggestions to improve the status of Indian women. At least a good number of these suggestions only deserve careful examination and favourable consideration by all those who are interested in or responsible for the welfare of women's emancipation.

²⁷ H.C. Upadhyay, *Status of Women in India*, Anmol Publications, New Delhi, 1991.

²⁸ Harbans Kaur Sagoo, *Guru Nanak and the Indian Society*, Deep & Deep Publications, New Delhi, 1992.

²⁹ Kharak Singh, Gobind Singh Mansukhani and Jasbir Singh, *Fundamental Issues in Sikh Studies*, Institute of Sikh Studies, Chandigarh, 1992.

³⁰ Sebesti L. Raj, S.J., *Quest for Gender Justice*, T.R. Publication, Madras, 1993.

from present situation. The articles included in this book have something new to offer as they deal with the status of women from different perspectives philosophical, theological, religious, empirical and real life situations.

The book *Educational Philosophy of Guru Nanak* by T.S. Sodhi (1993) describes the life, work and educational philosophy of Guru Nanak. It highlights the role of education in the upliftment of women and how education can play an effective role in improving the status of women and making them empowered. Some topics like methods of teaching, teachers and discipline have also been discussed.

Kiran Devendra (1994) in her book *Changing Status of Women in India* presents legal and other problems of Indian women in the post-independence period. In the course of the analysis, the book tries to bring out that institutionalization of various laws for Indian women is not complete and many important laws have still not been internalized. All the laws passed for women have been discussed, particularly the passage of the Hindu Code Bill. The difficulties faced by the government to get it passed in Parliament and the social repercussions have also been discussed.

Subrata Mukherjee and Sushila Ramaswami (1995) edited book *Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778)* is a representative selection of the known and scholarly writings on Rousseau's political philosophy. All the major interpretations varying from attributing Rousseau as an individualist to a collectivist and an extreme democrat to a forerunner of totalitarianism have all been included. His views on the negative side of human civilization, the causes of the fall of man from a situation of rough equality to extreme inequality and dependence and the way out from the present predicament have all been dissected. It is generally agreed that Rousseau is an incomparable spokesman for human equality and essays on this important aspect have also been incorporated. It also contains an introduction and a short biography of Rousseau.

³¹ T.S. Sodhi, *Educational Philosophy of Guru Nanak*, Bawa Publications, Patiala, 1993.

³² Kiran Devendra, *Changing Status of Women in India*, Vikas Publishing House New Delhi, 1994.

³³ Subrata Mukherjee and Sushila Ramaswami (Eds.), *Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778)*, Deep and Deep Publications, New Delhi, 1995.

Ritu Kohli's (1995)³⁴ book *Kautilya's Political Theory: Yogakshema – The Concept of Welfare State* covers all the important dimensions by Kautilya's concept of Yogakshema relating to the welfare of the citizens. This book contains seven chapters which deal with the concept of the welfare state, Yogakshema and its political, social, economic and administrative dimensions. Chapter fourth of this book elaborates the status of women in Kautilyan society. The last chapter of the book concludes with Relevance which highlights how the ancient policy of Kautilyan Yogakshema can be useful or non-useful in bringing out the modern welfare state out of crisis.

The book *Sikhism and Women* by Raj Pruthi and Bela Rani Sharma (1996)³⁵ throws light not only on the significant role of Sikh women in Indian society but also the multidimensional aspects of Sikhism and Sikh women. The author identifies a number of major issues and combines empirical materials with theoretical insight and discusses the actual position of women in Sikh society.

Equality of Women in Sikh Ideology and Practice by Valarie Kaur (1998)³⁶ is an important research article. The article is an attempt to trace the position of women during the time period of Sikh Gurus. She also discusses the efforts of Sikh Gurus to uplift the status of women. The author discusses the present status of Sikh women and highlights the various points, on which the Sikh women are being discriminated against.

The research paper *Women in Sikhism* by M.K. Gill (1998)³⁷ is a valuable tool to obtain knowledge about the role played by prominent Sikh women. This article highlights the fact that the women related families of the Sikh Gurus did not only work for religion, but besides the Gurus, they also did missionary work. The essay also underscores the fact that in Sikh religion no distinction has ever been observed between male and female.

³⁴ Ritu Kohli, *Kautilya's Political Theory: Yogakshema – The Concept of Welfare State*, Deep and Deep Publications, New Delhi, 1995.

³⁵ Raj Pruthi and Bela Rani Sharma, *Sikhism and Women*, Gopal Parkashan, Hisar, 1996.

³⁶ Valarie Kaur, *Equality of Women in Sikh Ideology and Practice*, *Journal of Sikh Studies*, Vol. I, Issue 3, Institute of Sikh Studies, Chandigarh, 1998.

³⁷ M.K. Gill, "Women in Sikhism", *The Sikh Courier International*, Vol. 38, No. 85, The Sikh Cultural Society, London, 1998.

S. Vats and Shakuntala Mudgal (1999) their book *Women and Society in Ancient India* try to trace the status of women, their education, marriage and family system in ancient India.

Shashi Prabha Jain and Mamta Singh (1999) their book *Violence against women* express the view that women are facing various types of violence in contemporary society. Violence against women is increasing day by day. Although women are victims of many cruelties, yet most are unreported due to cultural norms, apathy or ignorance.

Mohinder Kaur Gill (1999) in her famous book *The Guru Consorts* explains the role and contribution of the Guru's consorts in the propagation of the Sikh religion. This book is one of the best sources to learn about the role of the consorts in the lives of the Sikh Gurus.

The book *Women's Equality in India: A Myth or Reality* by K. Uma Devi (2000) focuses on the various problems of discrimination against female agricultural labourers in light of their general status. The status of women implies women's position in particular sub system of the society. This book most of the aspects relating to the women's status of women involved in agricultural labour.

The book *Gender Discrimination and Human Rights* by S.L. Sharma (2000) is an effort in the direction of women development. It aims to awaken the conscience of mankind to the rights and the wrongs done to women so far. The work looks for ways through which women establish her identity as equal partner of man, enable her to develop herself as a complete human being and contribute her best to the development of human civilization and to the creation of an egalitarian, happy and peaceful society.

³⁸ S. Vats and Shakuntala Mudgal, *Women and Society in Ancient India*, Om Publications, Faridabad, 1999.

³⁹ Shashi Prabha Jain and Mamta Singh, *Violence Against Women*, Radha Publications, New Delhi, 1999.

⁴⁰ M.K. Gill, *The Guru Consorts*, National Book Shop, New Delhi, 1999.

⁴¹ K. Uma Devi, *Women's Equality in India: A Myth or Reality*, Discovery Publishing House, New Delhi, 2000.

⁴² Swarn Lata Sharma, *Gender Discrimination and Human Rights*, K.K. Publications, New Delhi, 2000.

G.S. Dhillon's (2000)⁴³ research article *Sikh Gurus: Harbingers of Social Equality* focuses upon the egalitarian character of the Sikh ideology as preached and practiced by the Sikh Gurus. The author compiles and presents the Sikh Gurus' views upon caste system through which they strongly criticized the caste system. They also raised the banner of human equality by establishing *Dharmshalas* (later on called Gurudwaras) as the centres of a new society, which played a significant role in maintaining the life of the community.

The book *Violence Against Women* by Yudhishtar Kohol (2003)⁴⁴ conducts an analysis of the various dimensions of violence such as causes, roots of violence and victims of violence. Equal status of women in fundamental rights and the constitution has also been discussed. In the end, the author also discusses the legal protection of women and offers suggestions for improvement in existing laws.

Shashi Bala's (2003)⁴⁵ article *Women and Worship – The Sikh Perspective* deals with women's position in Sikh ideology. It highlights the importance of life of householder and *Advan* according to Sikh religion. It explains the real meaning of *dowry* and *sati*. In this article, the author also discusses the views of the Sikh Gurus regarding remarriage of widows as a practical step to abolish the custom of *sati*.

Aruna Goel (2004)⁴⁶ in the book *Organization and Structure of Women Development and Empowerment* argues that gender equality is an issue of primary importance to the welfare and progress of all nations. It provides the framework of the world which would free from all types of discrimination and exploitation. The book covers all aspects of violence and discrimination against women and also deals with the major problem of gender biases.

Anjali Rana's (2004)⁴⁷ research paper *Violence against Women* examines the problem of violence against women and analyses types of violence against women, reasons of violence and suggests certain law provisions to protect the women against them.

⁴³ G.S. Dhillon, 'Sikh Gurus : Harbingers of Social Equality', *Sikh Courier International*, Vol. 40, No. 9, The Sikh Cultural Society, Britain, 2000.

⁴⁴ Yudhishtar Kohol, *Violence Against Women*, Reference Press, New Delhi, 2003.

⁴⁵ Shashi Bala, 'Women and Worship – The Sikh Perspective', *The Sikh Review*, Vol. 5: 5, No. 593, The Sikh Cultural Centre, Calcutta, 2003.

⁴⁶ Aruna Goel, *Organisation and Structure of Women Development and Empowerment*, Deep and Deep Publications, New Delhi, 2004.

⁴⁷ Anjali Rana, 'Violence Against Women', *Third Concept*, No. 213, November 2004.

The book *Social Status of Women in India* authored by Maya Majumdar (2004)⁴⁸ covers not only the historical background and significant issues related to women's marriage, divorce and conditions at home and work place, but also discusses in detail the various protective measures for women's empowerment, modernity and self-sufficiency. The book is a modest effort with an aim of stirring the calm waters, making the society aware of women's problems and their pitiable state.

The book *OBC Women: Status and Educational Empowerment* by S.K. Singh and A.K. Singh (2004)⁴⁹ contains six chapters. The chapter first provides detailed analysis of social status and reviews the policies and programmes of government. Chapter second is related with recommendations of various commissions and committees. Chapter three deals with the status and empowerment of women. The next chapter deals with the socio-economic status of respondents. Chapter four deals with educational empowerment and social change and the last chapter is in the form of conclusion. The author carries out a comprehensive analysis of socio-economic and educational empowerment of women.

Yashpal Kaur (2005)⁵⁰ in her article *What Rights Does A Sikh Women have Today?* while outlining the rights of Sikh women, stresses that she is to man. Although, she has religious rights as well as right of independence, these basic rights are denied to many women today. In some cases, even before a girl born she is killed by abortion because of desire for male child. Upon birth, many relatives are not even informed for days that a daughter has taken birth. On the other hand, the birth of a male child is celebrated as an occasion of revelry and celebration.

The author Eroj Siddiqui (2005)⁵¹ the book *Women Marriage and Family* offers a deep insight into all the aspects related to women. It discusses the position of women in a rapidly changing society of the 21st century.

⁴⁸ Maya Majumdar, *Social Status of Women in India*, Dominant Publishers, New Delhi, 2004.

⁴⁹ S.K. Singh and A.K. Singh, *OBC Women: Status and Educational Empowerment*, New Royal Book Co., Lucknow, 2004

⁵⁰ Yashpal Kaur, *What Rights Does A Sikh Women Have Today?* *Panthic Weekly*, Khalsa Press, April 2005.

⁵¹ Eroj Siddiqui, *Women Marriage and Family*, Mark Publishers, Jaipur, 2005.

The book *Women's Empowerment in India* by Sarojini Nayak and Jeevan Nair (2005)⁵² traces the evolution of Indian women through the mists of history to the present. The historical trajectory of women's empowerment is traced as part of the author's endeavour to empower them and give them their rightful place in society. This book therefore presents a picture not only of the changing status of women in India.

Manvinder Kaur and Ameer Sultana (2005)⁵³ in their book titled *Gender Realities* attempts to locate the 'space' of women through an analysis of gender disaggregated data in the fields of demography, health, education, work, decision-making, violence etc. The work also identifies the gaps and suggest some possible intervention strategies for empowerment of women.

The book *Universality of Sikh Religion* by Jaspal Singh Mayell (2006)⁵⁴ is very informative for Sikhs and others who have an interest in Sikh religion. The language of this book is very simple and stress on the importance and universality of the Sikh religion. Chapter ninth in this book deals with the principle of equality for all. In this chapter the condition of women during the time of the ten Gurus (1409 to 1708) is discussed. It also elaborates the equal status of women in Sikh religion through the teachings of Gurbani. At last the role of prominent Sikh women in the propagation of Sikh religion is also taken up for discussion.

Rameshwari Pandya's (2007)⁵⁵ edited book *Women in India: Issues, Perspectives and Solutions* contains 20 theoretical and research contributions related to women issues. The book addresses various aspects of women's welfare in India like health, economic status, education, governance and political participation. It presents a comprehensive and systematic account of issues, activities, programmes, projects and experiences from different parts of India.

The author K.S. Duggal (2009)⁵⁶ in his book *Sikh Gurus: Their Lives and Teachings*, apart from telling the fascinating life stories of the Sikh Gurus, has

⁵² Sarojini Nayak and Jeevan Nair, *Women's Empowerment in India*, Poniter, Publishers, Jaipur, 2005.

⁵³ Manvinder Kaur and Ameer Sultana, *Gender Realities*, Abhishek Publications, Chandigarh, 2005.

⁵⁴ Jaspal Singh Mayell, *Universality of the Sikh Religion*, Mayell Publishers, USA, 2006.

⁵⁵ Rameshwari Pandya, *Women in India: Issues, Perspectives and Solutions*, New Publications, New Delhi, 2007.

⁵⁶ K.S. Duggal, *Sikh Gurus: Their Lives and Teachings*, UBSPD Publishers, New Delhi, 2009.

translated afresh selections from their popular hymns. He starts from the birth of Guru Nanak and closes with an account of the compilation of the Holy Granth and its consecration. The manifest corpus of all the Sikh Gurus' teachings of Sikh Gurus have been discussed in detail.

The book *The Sikhs: Ideology, Institutions and Identity* by J.S Grewal (2009)⁵⁷ is a highly commendable work. The first three parts deal with ideological underpinnings, the evolution of political institutions and Sikh literature. The author also explores political issues concerning Sikhism norms of equality, caste and gender along with topics like the contest over sacred space, cultural reorientation under colonial rule

The research paper titled *Status of Women: A Moral Obligation: Perspectives from Guru Granth Sahib* by Shashi Bala (2010)⁵⁸ is an attempt to study and highlight the elevated status of women as well as their moral obligations towards the family and the society for the preservation of cultural heritage and for spiritual resurgence of mankind.

Dharm Singh's (2010)⁵⁹ research article on *Status of Women: A Sikh Perspective* is one of the best resources to gain information about the status of women in ancient India, in medieval times and in the time period of Sikh Gurus. The author also discusses the evils such as female foeticide, dowry, alcohol domestic violence etc. which are prevailing in Sikh community at present.

The article *The Status of Women in Sri Guru Granth Sahib* by Gurwinder Kaur (2010)⁶⁰ is very informative and throws light on the position and equal status bestowed on women in *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*. The author dwells on the concepts of grahastha, dowry, impurity, female infanticide, sati chaji (*sabh parwarai mahi sreshat*) in order to understand their treatment in Sikh religion.

⁵⁷ J.S. Grewal *The Sikhs: Ideology, Institutions and Identity*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2009.

⁵⁸ Shashi Bala, Status of Women : A moral obligation : Perspectives from Guru Granth Sahib *The Sikh Review*, Vol. 58:9, No. 681, The Sikh Cultural Centre, Calcutta, September 2010.

⁵⁹ Dharm Singh Status of Women : A Sikh Perspective *The Sikh Review*, Vol. 58:9, No. 681, The Sikh Cultural Centre, Calcutta, September 2010.

⁶⁰ Gurwinder Kaur Status of Women in Sri Guru Granth Sahib *The Sikh Review*, Vol. 58: 9, No. 681, The Sikh Cultural Centre, Calcutta, September 2010.

The book *Spiritual Warriors: Eminent Sikh Women* by Meenakshi Rajan (2011)⁶¹ is quite informative and focuses on the role of Sikh women in history. The first two chapters deal with the position of woman in Sikh society, her dreams and visions, hopes and aspirations and commitment to the faith. The chapters that follow are brief life sketches of prominent women from Sikh history from the Guru households to the post-Guru period. The author studies the role of the ladies from the Gurus' household in the evolution of the early Sikh tradition. The contribution of Mai Bhago and Sada Kaur has also been discussed in the right perspective.

The book *Women Liberation: Through the Prism of Sikh Faith* is an influential work of Prabhjot Kaur (2012).⁶² The book highlights the contribution of Sikh Gurus in ameliorating the status of women in society. It also focuses on the issues raised during the Women Liberation Movement in the United States of America in the second half of twentieth century, their impact on women in particular and society in general, and the treatment of these issues in Sikh thought. A comparative study of both the movements, the Sikh movement and the Women's Liberation Movement, has been made, keeping these issues in mind. Place of women in Sikh religion, Sikh theology, Sikh culture and the role played by women in the making of Sikh history too has been discussed.

Gender Equality in Sikh Practices is a research paper by Birendra Kaur (2012).⁶³ In her paper, the author has been tried to explain the equal status bestowed on women in Sikh scriptures. The author has special focus to the notion of equality of man and woman in their Anand Karaj ceremony.

Religion and Women: A Sikh Perspective is a research paper by Gurveer Singh and Tejinder Pal Singh (2012).⁶⁴ In their paper they trace the condition of women in Hinduism, Manusmriti, Buddhism and Jainism. Further they elaborate the position of women in Sikh ideology and highlight the equal status of women through the composition of the Sikh Gurus.

⁶¹ Meenakshi Rajan *Spiritual Warriors: Eminent Sikh Women*, Waris Shah Foundation, Amritsar, 2011.

⁶² Prabhjot Kaur *Women Liberation: Through the Prism of Sikh Faith*, G.S. Distribution, Ludhiana, 2012.

⁶³ Birendra Kaur *Gender Equality in Sikh Practices*, *The Sikh Review*, Vol. 60: 9, No. 705, The Sikh Cultural Centre, Calcutta, September 2012.

⁶⁴ Gurveer Singh and Tejinder Singh, *Religion and Women: A Sikh Perspective*, *The Journal of Religion and Sikh Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1, Unistar Publishers, 2012.

The article *Status of Women in Sikhism* by Upinderjit Kaur⁶⁵ makes an indepth study of the philosophical concepts of Sikhism and status of women in Sikhism and brings with clarity the ethos of progress envisioned in it. It also examines the Sikh Gurus' views about position of women and relevance of their teachings in the present scenario. The author explores that women have equal rights with men and a glorious place in Sikh history.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Gender equality is an essential component of human rights and a pre-condition for justice, peace and prosperity. Gender equality is intimately linked with the process of democracy. Through the Indian Constitution, women have been accorded equal status, yet there is a wide gap between constitutional status granted to women and their actual position of women in society.

Today the issue of women rights and gender equality is one of the most important and contentious issues at national and international levels. Debates and seminars on the subject of feminism and feminist consciousness are organized all over the world. However, it is quite noteworthy, that the Sikh Gurus even before notions like human rights, law, justice and constitution came into circulation voiced their opposition to the social subjugation and of women. Almost 500 years before the evolution of legal terminology, the Sikh Gurus demonstrated a highly evolved consciousness about such issues. Guru Nanak in one of his *anyotis* and oft quoted hymn recorded at 473, *So kiyon manda aakhiye jit jameh rajan*" accords a high status to women. The present study has its basis in the indisputable fact that inequalities and discrimination are antithetical to the ethos. The Sikh religion advocated equal status for women in all spheres of life during the 15th and 16th century. Religion is a powerful social institution that shapes gender role in society. It contributes to how society understands relationships between men and women. It is one of the most outstanding features of Sikhism. Sikh Gurus have honored women as a symbol of domestic harmony and happiness, social and unity. This concern for the rights and dignity of women can be understood as an early and very important form of feminism. The Sikh Gurus introduced a

⁶⁵ Upinderjit Kaur, *The Status of Women in Sikhism*, www.allaboutsikhs.com, Retrieved on March 10, 2013.

revolutionary dimension in religious thought by asserting the rights of women who were facing subjugation in the medieval period. This can be held as an example of the deep social consciousness in Sikh philosophy and ideology. The need for the study such as the one arises from the realization of a dilution of values and precepts upheld by the Sikh Gurus through their ideological interventions. It seems, the highly evolved and conceptually refined expression of gender equality interwoven in the verses and poetic enunciations of the Sikh Gurus has not been followed in letter and spirit in day to day life. The teachings of Sikh Gurus have never been fully realized is clearly evident in the treatment of women even in the Sikh society today. Either of the influence of the majority community on the Sikh minority or the Sikh male's unwillingness to give up his dominant position, women continue to suffer prejudices. The so-called liberal society shows feminist tendencies that are evident through the problems such as domestic violence, female foeticide, dowry deaths and low sex ratio etc. The study thus aims to focus on this paradoxical lack of correspondence between the persistence of gender biases in the Punjabi society at large and the Sikh particular and the feminist and reformist spirit of Sikhism.

Unfortunately Punjab which is known as the land of Saints and Gurus is no exception when it comes to subjugation, exploitation and suppression of women. Grounds of gender discrimination like domestic violence, female foeticide, dowry deaths, rape, kidnapping, molestation, harassment etc are taking place at an alarming rate. Sex ratio of Punjab is skewed and is further declining day by day. Gross violations of women's human rights are common. People measure women's value as a bride by the size of her dowry not necessarily by her character and integrity. The study gains relevance as it aims to understand the status of women in the context of various ideological concerns for gender equality in Sikh ideology which arguably are the ruling theological and ideological ideals of the society. The study also aims to explore the reasons and causes that have led to the deterioration in the condition of women in contemporary society and to explore the factors that are responsible for the deviation from the values and messages which have been promoted by the Sikh Gurus.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

There is no doubt that the position of women in present day society is nothing short of precarious. Official reports and unofficial sources of information reveal that crime against women is increasing day by day. The present study is confined to the state of Punjab. Demographically, of the total population of Punjab 60% are Sikhs, 37% are Hindus, 1.57% are Muslims, 1.20% are Christians, 0.17% are Buddhists, 0.16% are Jains and 0.04% are others respectively. Punjab is the birth place of Sikhism. It is known as the land of Saints, Sages and religious Gurus. It is quite ironical that gender discrimination in acute forms has come to be prevalent on such a sacred land. In the recent past Punjab has had to grapple with the scourge of worst forms of gender persecution. The incidence of female foeticide is probably the most inhuman and manifest crime against women. It is unfortunate that it has been practiced in Punjab by people in recent times.

The study has been conducted in the Patiala district of Punjab. 300 women respondents have been taken. The respondents include housewives and working women belonging to rural and urban areas. Rural areas referred to in the study includes Sahibnagar, Theri, Raipur, Mandla, Shermajra, Bathla, Naseerpur, Majri, Kheri Bhattian, Seel, Kheri Mandla, Chappar, Jindalpur, Lubana Karmo, Siduwa, Shamshpur, Ablawal, Jalalpur, Harpalpur, Fragn Majra, and the Urban area includes Patiala city (Lahori Gate, Khalsa Mohalla, Anand Nagar, Vikas Colony, Arya Samaj) Sanaur, Samana, Nabha, Rajpura. has been mentioned the justification and need of the study in the realization that even though the governing principles of social life in Punjab as found in the teachings of the Sikh Gurus uphold the importance of treating women with respect and according them an equal status in the society menace of gender discrimination has assumed threatening proportions. The present work aims to carry out an in-depth study of the ideology of Sikh Gurus in relation to the concept of gender equality. It focuses upon the challenges being faced by women in the present society. A study of both these aspects can throw light on the reasons for the conflict in the religious orientation of the teachings of the Sikh Gurus and the social challenges faced by women in the present society.

OBJECTIVES

Following are the main objectives of the study:

1. To form a conceptual understanding of the term 'Gender Equality'.
2. To describe the status of women (earlier times) in the historical perspective.
3. To analyze the orientation and perspective of the Sikh Gurus on the issue of gender equality and examine the role of prominent Sikh women in history.
4. To analyze and list the challenges to gender equality in the new millennium with special reference to Punjab.
5. To find out the relevance of Sikh ideology regarding gender justice in the present context.

HYPOTHESES

1. Religious traditions, social and cultural norms always played a vital role in elevating and deteriorating the condition of women in society.
2. Sikh Gurus are the true harbingers of gender justice. They have not only preached the ideals but practiced them in the true sense.
3. Sikh women have played a heroic and courageous role against various challenges in the Indian society.
4. In spite of several constitutional provisions and legal efforts, the issue of gender justice, women still are facing many challenges in their day to day life.
5. Implementation of the teachings of Sikh Gurus in true spirit is required in the present context in order to attain the goal of gender equality in the new millennium.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research is always linked with proper and well defined methodology. For the completion of the research various methods and techniques have been used such as study and analysis of historical sources, questionnaire cum interview schedule method, survey and utilization of analytical methods.

Historical methods are used mainly for detailed study of the position of women in the past. Survey and questionnaire method has been used to collect the data and analytical method has been used for the analysis of data.

For the purpose of the study total sample of 300 Sikh women respondents has been selected on the basis of random sampling from Punjab. Out of the total sample of 300 women respondents, 150 are from urban area and 150 belong to rural area. Both urban and rural categories are further divided into two groups i.e., 75 are working women and 75 are non-working (Housewives) women. From this selected sample the data has been collected through questionnaire cum interview schedule method. A detailed questionnaire consisting closed and open ended questions has been prepared keeping the objectives in mind. Observation method also has been employed in order to arrive at the facts which sometimes, respondents may hide. The questionnaire was designed in both English and Punjabi language for the convenience of the respondents. All the respondents are married women belonging to Sikh religious community. There are many respondents who come from Hindu or Muslim families. However, after their marriage in Sikh families they are to be considered as Sikh women.

The study had been completed with the help of both primary and secondary sources. The primary data has been collected from the field with the help of structural questionnaire. The primary sources also include the text of Guru Granth Sahib and Census of India, whereas the secondary data had been collected through relevant books, journals, articles, encyclopedias, dictionaries and newspapers, etc. After the collection of data from various sources, it was systematically tabulated and analyzed.

CHAPTER SCHEME

Chapter – I: Introduction

This chapter includes the introduction of the study, review of existing literature, objectives, hypothesis, significance of study, study and research methodology.

Chapter – II: Gender Equality: A Historical Perspective

This chapter deals with the meaning of the Gender Equality, origin of the term gender equality, western and eastern perspectives on gender equality.

Chapter – III: Question of Gender Equality in Sikh Ideology and Role of Prominent Sikh Women in History

This chapter throws light on the philosophy of the Sikh Gurus regarding the concept of gender equality and highlights the role of prominent Sikh women in history.

Chapter – IV: Socio-Economic Profile of the Study Area and Women Respondents

This chapter deals with the socio-economic profile of the Patiala district. It also includes the study of socio-economic status of women respondents.

Chapter – V: Issues and Challenges to the Gender Equality in the Context of Punjab: An Empirical Study of Patiala district

The study deals with the actual status of women in society. It attempts to analyse the challenges being faced by women in the present context.

Chapter – VI: Conclusion and Suggestions

This chapter deals with the findings of the study. It also includes suggestions which are useful to be followed up in order to meet the challenges being faced by women in the contemporary world.

CHAPTER - 2

GENDER EQUALITY: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Gender equality is a constituent as well as an instrument of development. No country can be deemed developed if half of its population is severally disadvantaged in terms of basic needs, livelihood options, access to knowledge, and political voice. Gender equality is an instrument of development because its absence leads toward difficulties to achieve the national goals of poverty alleviation, population planning, family welfare and environmental sustainability. Over the years, efforts have been made to empower women socially, economically and politically. However, due to lack of synergy and coordination, the outcomes are not satisfactory. It is imperative that an integrated policy and strategy be formulated that can help accomplish the goal of economic, social and political empowerment of women along with the requisite programmes and schemes.¹

Gender equality seeks genuine equality among human beings where neither man is superior nor women inferior. Gender justice envisages equality of sexes in every sphere. Its primary object is to eradicate man-made differences in areas of economic, social, cultural and political experience. It is a strategic component of social justice. Social pressure to broaden female equality can surely bring up new vistas of gender justice. It has to be conceded that gender equality is a human cause, not just a women's cause and women's rights are ultimately subsumed under human rights.²

What is gender?

The primary dictionary meaning of the word 'gender' is 'the grammatical classification of nouns and related words' roughly corresponding to the two sexes and sexlessness' (**Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English, 8th Edn., 1990**). In the social sciences, the term 'gender' is commonly employed to refer to differences between women and men without strict biological connotations. The term gender refers to socially constructed differences between the two sexes although they may not be caused by biological sexual differences. Gender relations

¹ Rameshwari Pandya, *Women in India : Issues, Perspectives and Solutions*, New Century Publications, New Delhi, 2007, p. 1.

² Sushma Yadav and Anil Dutta Mishra, *Gender Issues in India : Some Reflections*. Radha Publications, New Delhi, 2003, p. 13.

are the rules, traditions, and social relationships in societies and cultures which together determine what is considered 'feminine' and what 'masculine', and how power is allocated between, and used differently by, women and men. Gender refers to a social construction of femininity and masculinity which varies over time and place and is enacted through learned, rather than innate, behaviour.³ All this implies that gender is not a fixed and monolithic term. It is characterized by fluidity and may be altered and differently interpreted in different cultural and social milieus.

The most common of all anti-feminist arguments, most commonly advanced by conservatives, asserts that gender divisions in society are 'natural'. As per the logic of this argument, women and men merely fulfill the social roles that nature designated and ordained them for. A woman's physical and anatomical make up thus suits a subordinate and domestic role in society. In short, 'biology is destiny'. Feminists have traditionally challenged the idea that biology is destiny by drawing a sharp distinction between sex and gender. 'Sex', in this sense, refers to biological differences between females and males; these differences are natural and therefore are unalterable. The most important sex differences are those that are linked to reproduction. 'Gender', on the other hand, is a cultural term; it refers to the different roles that society ascribes to men and women. Gender differences are typically imposed through contrasting stereotypes of 'masculinity' and 'femininity'. As Simone de Beauvoir (*The Second Sex*, 2011), pointed out, 'Women are made, they are not born'. Patriarchal ideas blur the distinction between sex and gender, and assume that all social distinctions between men and women are rooted in biology or anatomy. Feminists, in contrast, usually deny that there is a necessary or logical link between sex and gender, and emphasize that gender differences are socially, or even politically, constructed.⁴

Thus, the struggle for women's equality with men – and its terminological description as the struggle for gender equality – is based on the recognition that gender inequality is caused by structural and institutional discrimination. Gender awareness involves understanding the difference between sex roles and gender roles, and understanding that the latter, being socially and historically determined and

³ Mandy Macdonald and Ellen Sprenger and Ireen Dubel, *Gender and Organizational Change: Bridging the Gap Between Policy and Practice*, Kit Publications, The Netherlands, 1997, p.10.

⁴ Andrew Heywood, *Political Ideologies: An Introduction*, Third Edition, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2005, pp. 247-248.

constructed, can be changed. Gender perspective and gender awareness are based on the principle of gender equality as an objective.⁵

What is Equality?

The term ‘equality’, ‘equal’ and ‘equally’ signify a qualitative relationship. The value of equality has been central to our political discourse over the last 250 years. Equality is a complex concept. It means sameness in terms of rights and privileges in the social-political and economic spheres and is inseparably linked to the idea of justice. The demand for equality does not, however, mean a demand for absolute equality.⁶

Equality in general terms can be defined as the ideal of uniformity in treatment. Almost as a rule, acknowledgement of the right to equality often must be coerced from the advantaged by the disadvantaged.⁷ Equality usually refers to how humans are equal, the same, and deserving of equal treatment by the society and government or equal conditions in life. The basis for this modern notion of human equality is found in John Locke’s materialist philosophy that emphasizes equal treatment to members of the same species. This egalitarian theory emphasizes “humanness” over individual differences in race, colour, sex, religion, nationality, disability, education, culture, talents, abilities, accomplishments, or interests. From this biological/materialist basis of equality, the concept of *equality before the law*, or governmental treatment of all on an equal basis (rather than discrimination) is advanced. Equality of individuals leads to equality of their opinions and ideas. Thus, democratic equality tends to regard all views (religious, political, ethical) as of equal value.⁸ Equality is not the enemy of human diversity, nor is its goal to make everyone alike. Indeed, egalitarians (from the French *egalite*) may accept the uniqueness of each human individual, and perhaps also acknowledge that people are born with different talents, skills, attributes and so on. Their goal, though, is to establish the legal, political or social conditions in which people will be able to enjoy equally worthwhile and satisfying lives. Equality, in other words, is not about blanket uniformity, but rather is about ‘leveling’ those conditions of social existence

⁵ Mandy Macdonald, Ellen Sprenger and Ireen Dubel, *op.cit.*, p.10.

⁶ Sushila Ramaswamy, *Political Theory: Ideas and Concepts*, Macmillan, , New Delhi, 2003, p.326.

⁷ *Britannica Concise Encyclopedia*, Tokyo, 2002, p. 614.

⁸ Garrett Ward Sheldon, *The Encyclopaedia of Political Thought*, Viva Books Private Limited, Kolkata, 2005, p. 96.

which are thought to be crucial to human well being.⁹ The preamble of the Constitution of India sets certain objectives to be achieved. It is an embodiment of the ideals and aspirations of the people of India. One of the most fundamental ideals is equality of status and opportunity. This objective of the Constitution can be legally and constitutionally achieved through provisions for equality clauses. Part III, Fundamental Rights and Part IV, the Directive Principle of State Policy, which are considered to be core and spirit of the Constitution are of immense significance. The equality clause prohibits discrimination on the grounds of race, religion, caste, sex, and place of birth and lays down two principles viz., Equality before law and Equal protection of laws within the territory of India.¹⁰ In short, equality means protection of people from discrimination on the grounds of group membership, sex and giving everybody equal opportunities for development.

Thus, the notion of gender equality denotes and prescribes equal conditions for both men and women for realizing their full human rights and potential. The concept of Gender Equality envisages a social order in which both men and women enjoy equal opportunities in both domestic and the public spheres. Gender equality engenders elimination and removal of all forms of gender discrimination which would create an environment which is conducive for the enjoyment of one's social, political and economic rights apart from a life of dignity which is free from all forms of persecution. In short, the quest for gender equality reflects the belief that sexual differences have no social and political significance.

Gender based discrimination is a form of discrimination on the basis of gender. It is as old as history. In fact, right from ancient times, women have faced gender based discrimination in almost every society all over the world. In China, there was a practice of advising husbands to disregard the counsel of their wives. In Russia gender prejudice was reflected in the common saying that there is only one soul in ten women. On the other hand in Spain, the warning was that "we shall save ourselves from wicked women, and should never be captivated by any that have good look". The Italians voice their bias in a more severe and sterner pronouncement: As a horse, whether good or bad, requires spurs, women whether

⁹ Andrew Heywood, *op.cit.*, p. 285.

¹⁰ K. Uma Devi, *Women's Equality in India: Myth or Reality*, Discovery Publishing House, New Delhi, 2000, p. 32.

good or bad, require thrashing. In older times in Japan, women were not allowed to pray or take part in religious exercise. In Arabia, in earlier times there was a practice among the Pagan Arabs to bury their daughters alive as the birth of a daughter was considered to be a great misfortune.¹¹

GENDER EQUALITY: PHILOSOPHICAL ASPECT (WESTERN PERSPECTIVE)

As a political term, 'feminism' is a twentieth-century coinage and has been a familiar part of everyday parlance since 1960s (Feminist was first used in the nineteenth century as a medical term to describe either the feminization of men or the masculinization of women). In the modern usage, feminism is a term associated with women's movement. It connotes organized attempts to promote and advance the socio-political stature of women. In addition to this, in its more advanced manifestations it can also be an assertion of feminine identity or an assertion of their difference in terms of biology, cultural practices and individual preferences.

Feminist theory seeks to analyze the conditions which shape women's lives and to investigate the cultural implications and underpinnings of womanhood. It spurred out of the political aims of the women's movement – the need to understand women's subordination and exclusion from, or marginalisation within, a variety of cultural and social domains. In their most basic premise, feminists refuse to concede that inequalities between women and men are natural and inevitable and insist that they should be interrogated and challenged.¹² Feminist social theory has been concerned with understanding chronic and persisting inequalities between women and men. It is a programme aimed at raising gender consciousness in order to dismantle the patriarchal structures which systematically legitimize the persecution and repression of women.¹³

Feminist theory has never been monolithic and absolute. This is one reason why it has proved so difficult to capture all the numerous nuances of the term within classifications such as 'liberal', 'Marxist', or 'radical'.¹⁴ Feminism studies why women have played a subordinate role to men in human societies. It is also

¹¹ Shama Shamsuddin, *Women, Law and Social Change*, Ashish Publishing House, New Delhi, 1991, p. IX.

¹² Stevi Jackson and Jackie Jones, *Contemporary Feminist Theories*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 1998, p.I.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

concerned with how women's lives have changed through the passage of history. Feminist theory undertakes to assess the reasons for the differences in human experience on grounds of gender. Theoretical interrogation under feminism begins with a basic question. Do the vastly different experiences related to male and female identity have their basis in some essential ontological or psychological difference or are they a result of historical imprinting and social construction? According to feminist theory, the subordination of women originated in primitive societies in which women served as objects of exchange between father-dominated families that formed alliances through marriage. Whereas, such crude objectification of women that had prevalence in rudimentary forms of societies have been discarded; capitalist societies have invented more pernicious and insidious methods of propagating patriarchal values in ever new forms.¹⁵

By the end of the 19th century, however, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* had achieved recognition as one of the foundational documents of feminism. Thus, feminist theory or feminism is not a static phenomenon. As a theoretical practice and mode of social and political intervention it is characterized by a high degree of dynamism. It has been related to 'liberal', 'Marxist', 'Radical', and 'Socialist' modes of thought. If in the west, the status of women changed with the conditions created by the industrial movement, in the East, women had to contend with orthodox, conservative and feudal structures for a long time before being doubly marginalized in a colonial dispensation. Thus, feminist needs and challenges are not a given set of adversities but are different in different places and times. Primarily, the main emphasis of feminist movement is on the demand for emancipation, equality and liberation of women. It places equal stress on the need for a social transformation of law, culture and social patterns which help in exploiting and realizing women's potential.

Concern for women's position is not a modern concept. Resistance against gender bias and discrimination has been going on in different forms since time immemorial. Socrates, Plato and Aristotle are the first names that can be indirectly associated with earliest expressions of resistance. Socrates' reason or individualism, Plato's Republic and Aristotle's philosophy have inspired thinkers all over the globe

¹⁵ Michael Ryan, *Literary Theory: A Practical Introduction*, Blackwell Publishers, U.K., 2004, p. 101.

for centuries. None of them directly pursued women's rights, but the kind of system they propounded could easily be appropriated for similar ends. Essentially, these philosophers were more concerned about the state and its unity.¹⁶

Some of the averments of these philosophers can be taken as evidence of the unorthodox character of their thought and ideas. For Socrates, a person's nature, the inward character that is determined by psyche, determines social function. Thus for Socrates, social function is not predetermined nor is it specific to man or woman. Plato in his famous work "Republic" explains that the freedom and equality for women (as females) are a mark of the excessive licence of the democratic state.¹⁷ Plato is in favour of the same type of education for both boys and girls. In Plato's scheme of ideal state, women play the same role in the state as men do, and are eligible to hold the same office as the latter do.¹⁸ But this equality was just confined to the guardian class. Natural abilities (the respective dominance of reason or spirit) of the sort required for leading, functional roles in the state are, for Plato, similarly distributed in each sex, 'although in all, women will be the weaker partners' and at this point in the text this usually means in physical strength or stamina regarding military activities. A woman's psyche may be philosophic or high-spirited and should she demonstrate these qualities she will be fitted to be a Guardian.¹⁹

A similar blend of orthodoxy and radicalism can be found in Aristotle. According to Aristotle, husbands rule their wives by a kind of rule, *political rule*. This political rule of husband over wife is contrasted with the kingly rule of father over child, and the despotic rule of master over slave. According to Aristotle, women should be ruled as fellow citizens. As individuals, they have independent interests and have independent values. They exist for their own sake and not for the sake of another. However, in a situation where fellow (male) citizens take turns in ruling and being ruled, women are never to rule. As per Aristotle, within the household, men have unquestioned authority. Women and men in households are equal in some respects but not in all. Aristotle in his *Historia Animalium* and *De*

¹⁶ T.A. Sinclair and Routledge, Kegan Paul, *A History of Greek Political Thought*, London, 1961, pp. 156-157.

¹⁷ Janet Coleman, *A History of Political Thought : From Ancient Greece to Early Christianity*, Blackwell Publishers, USA, 2000, p. 101.

¹⁸ Pardeep Sachdeva, *Plato and Aristotle: The Utopian and The Realist*, Kitab Mahal, Allahabad, 1992, p.57.

¹⁹ Janet Coleman, *op.cit.*, p. 101.

Generazione Animalium presents a list of natural (emotional) differences in order to establish that women are more sensitive to heat and cold than men. They are more affectionate towards their children than men, so they are better fitted to life indoors.²⁰

Hobbes attitude to women was also a mixed one. Hobbes believes that humans are by nature equal. In particular, humans are all equally possessed of reason, the desire to preserve their own life above all things, and the capacity to preserve it. Yet unlike Aristotle, he does not deny that women are men's equals. Nor does he claim that marriage is natural. Hobbes makes a very meaningful departure towards feminist thought when he states that men and women are equals and that any authority that husbands have over wives is the result of civil society.²¹ Hobbes' denial of generative origins of government authority of fathers is also an important intervention in the discourse of social hierarchies and the nature of social authority. Hobbes' doctrine draws sustenance from the proposition that no status among men was natural. Subordination was due to conventions and human consent.

Locke holds that familial authority belongs to the mother as much as to the father. He believes that women have unequivocal right over basic freedom and equality characteristic of all members of the species. Women are capable of rational thought. Apart from this, they could enter into contracts and acquire property. Thus, it appears that women were capable of satisfying Locke's requirements for political life.²²

Rousseau is another one of the philosophers of the classical school who advances a strong case for human equality. It is a personalized philosophy but it is equally modern and complex.²³ In his position on the question of gender, Rousseau reserves only functional role for women. Many critics hold the opinion that in assigning a functional role to women, Rousseau was reiterating the views held by men of all ages. However, it would be erroneous to brand Rousseau as anti-feminist. Rousseau held that women were the same as men and had the right to happiness and fulfillment. Furthermore, Rousseau maintains that women's biology is never a

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 208-209.

²¹ Karen Green, *The Woman of Reason: Feminism, Humanism and Political Thought*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1995, p. 45.

²² Melissa A. Butler, "Early Liberal Roots of Feminism: John Locke and the Attack on Patriarchy", in Subrata Mukherjee and Sushila Ramaswamy (Eds.), *John Locke (1632-1704)*, Deep and Deep Publications, New Delhi, 1994, p. 648.

²³ Subrata Mukherjee and Sushila Ramaswamy (Eds.), *Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778)*, Deep and Deep Publications, New Delhi, 1995, p. XI.

handicap in their development in society. Nature has compensated them with gifts like modesty and flirtatiousness for their perceived tenderness.²⁴

Bentham argument is more politically uninhibited. He made a case for an almost total emancipation. He advocated political freedom that would allow women to vote and to participate as equals in the legislative and executive branches of the government. He argued for a personal freedom that would allow women to obtain a divorce and a correction in chauvinistic and prurient social attitudes in matter related with sex. Like his utilitarian forerunner, Helevtius, Bentham was an avowed feminist. His attitude toward women is a logical extension of his happiness principle. Bentham repeatedly asserts in a number of contexts that he could see no reason why the female sex had fewer claims to happiness than the male. Perhaps woman's claim to happiness was better than man's.²⁵

It is well known that Bentham's influence, attitudes, and words helped to shape the mind and thought of John Stuart Mill. In the 20th century Mill appeared as the most vocal pioneer and champion of women's rights. In the Victorian times, Mill espoused the cause of women's rights. His essay, *On the Subjection of Women* (1869) is arguably the first important formal piece of writing on the issue of women's rights.²⁶ It is apparent that John Stuart Mill, in his ideas about women, was simply "arguing from Bentham's formula that every human being, whether man or woman, ... was the only proper judge of his own interests" (Michael St. John Packe, *The Life of John Stuart Mill*).²⁷ Like Bentham he is in favour of giving men and women equal political rights. He contended that there should be no social impediments in the path of women's education and employment. He is in favour of giving the women free will to follow the career of their choice and they should not be forced into marriage through economic necessity. Mill held age old customs responsible for lower status of women.²⁸

²⁴ Roma Mukherjee, *Women, Law and Free Legal Aid in India*, Deep and Deep Publications, New Delhi, 1998, p. 2.

²⁵ Miriam Williford, "Bentham on the Rights of Women", in Susbrata Mukherjee and Sushila Ramaswamy (Eds.), *Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832)*, Deep and Deep Publications, New Delhi, 1995, p. 477- 478.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 486-487.

²⁸ Vidyawati Agarrwal, "Feminist Thinking and Women in India", in I. Sarkar (Ed.), *Women in Changing Society*. Serial Publication, New Delhi, 2008, p. 18.

Mary Wollstonecraft in her most famous work, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, in 1792 protested against the unjust and unequal treatment of women. She rejects the assumption that the subordinate position of women is an immutable feature of the natural order. Human beings are rational creatures. It is upon their rationality that their claim to rights of liberty and self-determination depends. Women are human beings. As human beings, they are also rational creatures and, as rational creatures, they must be entitled to the same rights of liberty and self-determination as male rational creatures claim for themselves. Femaleness is not a morally relevant criterion of discrimination.²⁹

Thus, it is evident that there has been a long tradition of feminist thought in the west. This also proves that the status of women has been a subordinate one not only in the East but also in the West. The various feminist paradigms emerging in the west addressed the issue of women's equality in their own specific ways. Moreover, all these paradigms had their specific points of origin and foci. The emphasis on the social and political rights of women and on right to self-determination has informed most of feminist interventions.

STATUS OF WOMEN IN INDIA: EASTERN PERSPECTIVE

India is the land of sages and saints. The centrality of religion can be assessed from the fact that Indians worship 33 crore deities and devtas. India is the land where most of the religions were born. It is also the home of most of the ancient civilizations. People from all over the world came, stayed and adopted India as their homeland, the land whose culture is as old as civilization itself. One can get adequate knowledge about the society of the Vedic Aryans, who dominated India after the downfall of the Indus Valley Civilization from literature which is known as 'Vedic'. The Sanskrit texts like *Samhitas*, *Brahmanas*, *Aranyakas* etc. are the main constituents of Vedic literature.

As a matter of fact, the Rigveda contains the seeds and sources from which the entire course of Hindu thought through the ages has been derived. The crystallized wisdom of the Rigveda through the ages got transposed into multiplicity of religious thought and was interpreted variously. It may be noted that the Rigveda is considered to be a product of the highest religious thought. It is the fruit of the

²⁹ Ian Adams and R.W. Dyson, *Fifty Great Political Thinkers*, Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, New York, 2003, p. 100.

contemplation of saints and seers and the philosophical reward of their contemplation in a life of complete asceticism and penance. They give expression to the Truth revealed in impassioned prayers called *suktas*. The entire Rigveda is made up of such *suktas* and *hymns*.³⁰

Rigvedic Time Period:

The Rigveda gives ample evidence of the fact that in ancient times women were treated as equals of men as regards access to and potential for acquisition of knowledge. A woman was considered fit to acquire the knowledge of the Absolute or Brahma and to participate in religious rituals. The nature and extent of their freedom is reflected in the fact that women had the freedom to choose their husbands through the institution of *Swayamwar*. Women were even worshipped and deified. During the times of Mahabharata, men were often known by the name of their mother as is the case of *Kunti putra and Radhey*.³¹

Man is incomplete without a woman, she is nucleus of the family and forms half of the human society. Down the ages, the woman's role in society has constantly changing. In ancient times, women enjoyed a high status in all walks of life in the society. In Vedic times, Indian women were looked upon as "Sahadharmini". She was considered shy and weak creature.

According to Rigveda, daughters were affectionately loved and brought up by parents. They were lovingly treated by their mothers and shielded by the strength of their father and brother.³² In fact, Rigvedic daughter was born with good stars. She proved by her behaviour that she was a worthy daughter. She was a great helper in domestic chores.³³ They also received a liberal education. Rigvedic period was a glorious period for women. During this period lady seers have also been credited with the composition of hymns. Lapamudra, Ghosha, Apatha, Romasa, Surja, Savitri, Juhu, Yami, Visvavara, Sachi and Ratri were all famous women, whose verses are included in Rigveda. There are elaborate instances when most of these women participated in public debates and discourses.

³⁰ S. Vats and Shakuntala Mudgal (Eds.), *Women and Society in Ancient India*, Om Publications, Faridabad, 1999, p.1

³¹ Manvinder Kaur and Ameer Sultana, *Gender Realities*, Abhishek Publications, Chandigarh, 2005, p. 11.

³² Bhagwat Saran, *Women in Rgveda*, S. Chand and Co. (Pvt.) Ltd., New Delhi, 1974, pp. 43-45 .

³³ Sucheta Paranjape, "Position and Role of Women in Rgveda", in Mena Kelkar and Deepti Gangavane (Eds.), *Feminism in Search of an Identity: The Indian Context*, Rawat Publications, Jaipur, 2004, p. 40.

The Rigvedic system showed greater sensitivity to the rights and susceptibilities of the woman. The daughter in a Rigvedic family was thus not a meek, shy and tender creature like her modern counterpart in the Hindu family, but she was bold, free and strong. A Rigvedic woman was characterized by individualism of thought and action. Confinement or restriction of any form was absolutely unknown, and a maiden was free to move anywhere she liked.

In a Rigvedic society, girls married by free choice. It was a right they enjoyed and marriage was not a question of compulsory imposition. Ordinarily the young maiden was free to choose the man with whom she married. The above statement can be slightly conditioned by saying that her freedom was qualified by parental advice to some extent. It was the duty of the father or, in his absence, of the brother, to assist the maiden to obtain a worthy husband.³⁴ In the Vedic age, the theory approved by the Hindu civilization was that the husband and wife would be the joint owners of the household and its property. The husband was required to take a vow at the time of marriage that the rights and interests of his wife in economic matters shall not be transgressed. There are numerous instances of joint right over property in *Rigveda* and the *Atharvaveda*.³⁵

There are many references of widow remarriage in Rigveda. Normally after the death of the husband, the widow was married to another man. It is significant that in the whole range of stories, tales and allusions in the Rigveda, there is not a single reference to the burning of the widow. It is apparent that the widows were absorbed in the community by remarriage. Thus it is clear that unlike the widow of today, the most miserable creature of society about whom the great Urdu poet writes feelingly:

*Jisne hai randepa jhela,
Dar use hai dozakh ka kya?*

Thus, in the post-Vedic societies widowhood was made synonymous with bad luck and social rejection. But Rigvedic widow enjoyed liberty and was free to lead her life according to her conscience, and when remarried, she was a full-fledged wife meant 'for love, progeny and prosperity'.³⁶

³⁴ Bhagwant Saran, *op.cit.*, p. 56.

³⁵ Madhu Shastri, *Status of Hindu Women: A Study of Legislative Trends and Judicial Behaviour*, RBSA Publishers, Jaipur, 1990, p. 35.

³⁶ Bhagwant Saran, *op.cit.*, pp. 102-107.

Thus, it can be said that in the Rigvedic society, the status of the wife and mother was one of remarkable importance. The society gave women proper respect and freedom. Moreover, there was very little restriction on women and gender equality was an important social norm. Women occupied a high position in religious functions. They could even participate in wars at that time. Thus, women enjoyed considerable freedom in political, social, regional and educational activities.

Status of Women in the Post Vedic Period

Literally speaking, 'post-Vedic period' means a period post (after) the Vedic age. Post-Vedic period is an amorphous and ambivalent term as it can endlessly subsume all the periods of history that occur after it. It may stretch endlessly to include even the present time. However, historically speaking, the beginning of historical period (326 B.C.) should be treated as the end of post-Vedic period. There are so many records and sources which help us to understand the post-Vedic age including Smritis, Epics, Buddhist and Jain canons etc.³⁷ Broadly speaking, during this period, the status of women was on a decline. The condition of women was deplorable due to the dominance of priestly class. Women's rights began to be curtailed. Naturally, the importance of gender equality was faded.

Smritis are important records which reveal the nature of society that existed in the post-Vedic period. However, Smritis give evidence of clearly conflicting commands. At one place in the *Manusmriti* (about 200 B.C.), it is laid down that 'Women are to be honoured and adored by fathers, brothers, husbands and also brother-in-law'. Where women are honoured, Gods reside; but where they are not honoured, all religious rites are of no avail. But at another place in the same *Smriti* a lower status has been accorded to women. Many of the remarks in this *Smriti* are directed towards depriving women of the right of worship and of performing other religious rites. At one place the *Manusmriti* says, "Yagna by a woman displeases Gods," and "The woman who burns oblation will sink into hell".³⁸ The text of *Manusmriti* thus becomes a very important document which is symptomatic of the shifts that occurred in the general attitude of society towards woman. It is arguably the first record of an organized attempt to prescribe rules imposing some kind of restrictions on the basis of gender.

³⁷ Madhu Shastri, *op.cit.*, p.41

³⁸ Gurdev Singh, *Punjab Politics: Socio-Political Orientations of the Sikh Gurus*, B.R. Publishing Corporation, Delhi, 1986, p. 23.

The code of Manu (a famous law giver) prescribes, ‘By a girl, by a young woman or even by an aged one nothing must be done independently even in her own house. In childhood, a female must be subject to her father, in youth to her husband, when her lord is dead to her sons, so woman must never be independent.’³⁹ The well-known dictum of Manu reveals the position of women.

*fi rk j {kfr dlkij} HhRhz j {kfr ; kbus
i qks j {kfr ok/nbl; ku] j =h Lokull=; k egfu*⁴⁰

Thus, from a largely open and liberal society of the Vedic period whose rules were descriptive; there is a transition towards a rigidly prescriptive society.

For Manu, woman is a perpetual minor. Manusmriti, thus marks the beginning of the era when inflexible gender rules impose inferiority on women. Manu prescribes that the wife must always worship her husband as God even if he is debauch, immoral and lacks good qualities. It is the bounden duty of the wife to obey and follow the dictates of her husband. The woman’s salvation lies only in the devoted service to her husband. He refers to her duties in the following words:

*“She must always be cheerful, clever in the management of her household affairs, careful in cleaning her utensils, and economical in expenditure”.*⁴¹

Manu favoured the domestic and religious education and training in music and dance to the woman. So that she may be able to please her man. Such injunctions are clearly aimed at transcending natural biological differences and making them the basis of complicated social set of artificial rules governing gender roles – in a way endorsing the views of the later day feminists that woman is not born but she is made.

In the time of Manusmriti, on account of the practice of early marriage of the girls, female education suffered a set-back. According to the new social code, maintenance of the house was the foremost duty of a woman. There is a marked shift from the Vedic times when there was uninhibited participation of women in outdoor activities, religious ceremonies and even in the vocational domain. Unlike in the Vedic period, according to the new set of rules, woman’s role was limited to looking

³⁹ Harbans Kaur Sagoo, *Guru Nanak and The Indian Society*, Deep and Deep Publications, New Delhi, 1992, p. 131.

⁴⁰ Surbi Sheth, *Religion and Society in the Brahma Purana*, Sterling Publishers, Delhi, 1979, p. 103.

⁴¹ Maya Majumdar, *op.cit.*, p. 11.

after the income and expenditure of the house, cleanliness of the house, and the nourishment of children. This type of domestic education was considered suitable for her. Manu does not allow *Upanayana* of a girl, yet he is in favour of performing other ceremonies without uttering Vedic incantations. It can be seen that gradually women are distanced from Vedic knowledge. During this period, they did not possess knowledge of Vedic texts. Neither a girl nor a married young woman could perform an *Agnihotra*. As a wife, woman had no access to her husband's property. Mother's personal property could be shared only by her unmarried daughters. A woman had the right of personal property. Her property was protected by the state in the days of Manu. Manu does not allow divorce in normal conditions.⁴²

Manu also prescribes an elaborate set of rules governing gender relations particularly marriage. According to Manu, a man should marry a woman of the same Varna. Monogamy was considered normative for a man but polygamy was prevalent in practice. Manu also laid down certain duties for a widow. After her husband's death she was forbidden from uttering the name of another man. He is not in favour of a second marriage for widow. While, the term *Niyoga* is also referred to in the Manusmriti, yet it is mentioned with reluctance. In the absence of a child by her husband a woman was authorized to have a child by a brother-in-law or a close relative (of her husband). The woman was authorized either by her husband or after his death by his relatives for *Niyoga*.⁴³

There is more evidence of how the idea of inferiority of women was reiterated in text after text to make it an established fact of social reality. Tulsidas's in a verse equates women with drums, morons, shudras and cattle as objects fit to be beaten. His verses reflect the low status of women in the public perception during those days. In one of his verses in *Ram Charitas Manas* he writes:

*Yb, rtko, Pdo, gPq Bkoi, ; eb skVB e/nfXekoi*⁴⁴

Pilu, a famous Punjabi Kissa poet condemns women in an open and unrestrained manner. To him women are neither trustworthy nor wise. He said it is sin to look towards a woman even if she is made of paper. It can be said that Pilu's *Kissa* is replete with acerbic criticism of the basic character of women. It is a poem

⁴² Rajendra Nath Sharma, *Ancient India According to Manu*, NAG Publishers, Delhi, 1980, pp. 115-119.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 116-120.

⁴⁴ Arvinder Singh, "Guru Nanak: As Champion of Gender Justice", *The Sikh Review*, Vol. 58:9, No.681, The Sikh Cultural Centre, Calcutta, September 2010, p. 49.

which glorifies manhood and masculinity and sings some deplorable fallacies about women. It clearly smacks of the popular aversion towards female gender during those times. In the *Kissa* of Mirza Sahiba he said:

*Fie on the friendship of women,
Who are short of wisdom.
They enchant men with their smiles,
But weep when questioned.*⁴⁵

Similarly Muqbal in *Kissa* “Heer Ranjha” has put the following lines in the mouth of Ranja:

*Ranjha says that there is no gain in meeting women,
No one should make friends with them
These women exhibit the true men as liars,
None should make a sacrifice for them.
The snakes do not hesitate to sting
Even if they are presented with milk at all times.*⁴⁶

It is quite ironical that these *Kissa* poems after being rendered by some Punjabi singers became a part of popular culture and these compositions are in circulation in the form of songs even today. Thus it is clear that the position of woman was gradually witnessing a decline.

Kautilya was an eminent Indian philosopher. He has also given his views about the status of woman. He was basically a liberal thinker, who believed in more freedom for women. In Kautilyan society, much thought and planning was devoted to the formation of social norms regarding marriage, divorce and family. There is very little difference between the status of man and woman in Kautilya’s time. Kautilyan society is based on the concept of gender equality.

The supreme importance given to *Grihastha Ashrama* for sustaining social life in the Kautilyan society emphasized the responsibility of women in building up society. Marriage was considered to be one of the necessities of a man or a woman. Kautilya was of the view that the relation between a man and a woman should be of a reciprocal nature. He forbids the practice of cruelty towards each other. The limits of personal freedom hinged on the nature and extent of *Shulka* (maintenance).

⁴⁵ Surinder Singh Kohli, *Sikhism and Guru Granth Sahib*, National Book Shop, Delhi, 1990, p.86.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

Kautilya permits re-marriage of women under special circumstances. Those whose husbands were abroad for a long time, or who suffered from terminable diseases or were sterile, could re-marry. Kautilya permitted any form of marriage as legal, if it is accepted by the parties involved. Re-marriage was also permitted in the case of husband turning ascetic or being dead or leaving no issue.⁴⁷

During the Kautilyan period, a woman was considered to attain majority at twelve years and a man in the sixteenth year. Their obligation to carry out marital duties commenced with at this age. Failure to carry out marital duties was punishable.⁴⁸ According to Kautilya, a person who defiles a maiden of equal caste before she has reached her maturity shall have his hand cut off or shall have to pay a fine of 400 panas. If the maiden died in the consequence of defilement, the offender was to be put to death.⁴⁹

However, society had a more compassionate attitude towards widows. There is reference to *Chandavasini Vidhawa* (a widow living according to her will) in the Kautilyan text. The interpretation is that the widows could lead an independent life. They were allowed to re-marry with or without the consent of their in-laws under certain conditions. The choice of re-marriage or of leading a pious life was of the woman's own. Adultery and rape were cognizable offences, in spite of the prevalent polygamy. The husband had to obtain not only the sanction but also pay a substantial amount to the first wife in case he wanted to get married the second time. Kautilyan *Arthashastra* was quite comprehensive on this issue.⁵⁰ From the above facts it is quite clear that Kautilyan society had an elaborate set of clearly defined rules related with the institution of marriage. Marriage was not conditioned by patriarchal prejudices. Moreover, these social codes were formulated with the intention of preserving the dignity of women in marriage as well as in all other situation involving men and women.

Thus, women were given equal status in the social system promulgated by Kautilya. It is evident that Kautilya was a liberal thinker who had no reservations about widow re-marriage. He has dealt with the social issues in minute details. He

⁴⁷ Ritu Kohli, *Kautilya's Political Theory Yogakshema – The Concept of Welfare State*, Deep and Deep Publications, New Delhi, 1995, p. 42-43

⁴⁸ L.N. Rangarajan, (Ed.), *Kautilya: The Arthashastra*, Penguin Book, India, 1992, p. 396.

⁴⁹ R. Shamasastri, *Kautilya's Arthashastra*, Mysore Publishing House, Mysore, 1967, p. 261.

⁵⁰ Ritu Kohli, *op.cit.*, p. 44.

laid down laws against cruelty towards women. Molestation, rape or any other outrageous conduct was treated as criminal offence. The Kautilyan text contains references to women living separately even when they were not divorced from their husbands. This clearly shows that estrangement was not a taboo and separation for valid reasons was acceptable. The concept of single woman was not unheard of nor was it something scandalous as in the present society. There is no mention of wife's immolation on husband's funeral pyre. There is not even a hint of bride burning or other atrocities towards women which are a menace in the modern Indian society. Thus, it can be said that Kautilyan society was based on the principle of gender equality. The formulation of social codes and rules was carried out with a high degree of concern for gender equality.

Status of Women During The Age of Ramayana

These two epics of Ramayana and Mahabharata have been the mainstay of Hinduism throughout its period long history on the Indian subcontinent. It is impossible to fix the date of the epic from the evidence of its contents. Ramayana was written by Valmiki. In comparison with Mahabharata, it is without doubt a more compact work. It is relatively limited in volume. Though temporally it deals with an earlier period, it is in all probability a later work than the Mahabharata. It can be taken as a turning point towards Vaishnavism from the earlier Shaivism. It deals with events supposed to have taken place in the 'Threta Yuga' (the second of Hindu mythical ages).

The *Ramayana*, when compared with the earlier Mahabharata tradition shows a general degeneration of the freedom of women. The *Swayamvara*, which was the pride of the Kashatriyas in the bigger epic; was going out of fashion and child marriages was becoming popular. According to the existing version of the Ramayana, Sita was six years of age at the time of her marriage. The authority of the father over that of the mother has been well established in the Ramayana. Purdah was prevalent in royal households, though it was not very strict. Some cases of *Sati* are mentioned in the Ramayana but it was not general even among kings.⁵¹ While being an epic of momentous importance, Ramayana is also testimony to the change in the status of women. It carries evidence that the institutions that were supportive of the freedom of women were gradually beginning to erode and the general condition of women was subject to deterioration. Sita is an important symbol in

⁵¹ S. Vats and Shakuntala Mudgal, *op.cit.*, pp. 27-28.

Hindu mythology. She is an embodiment of female sacrifice and fortitude. She perfectly symbolizes the subservient position that women were supposed to occupy in a male dominated society.

Some implications that can be drawn from the Ramayana are that the joint family was becoming a norm and within it patriarchal institutions were gaining strength. Education was banished. Thus, the epic Ramayana trace the story of the rise and fall of the status of women in Hindu society.

Image of Women in Mahabharata

The *Mahabharata*, like most other Indian scriptures, is mainly concerned with the activities of god, sages and kings and seldom interests itself in the affairs of the common folk. Among text-books of Puranic religion, *Mahabharata* is the most voluminous, running into some 10,000 verses. It is the longest single poem in the world. It deals with Aryans and non-Aryans and all the major problems of life - social, domestic, political, religious and philosophical are dealt through its various stories and tales. Mahabharata is revered as the fifth Veda. The Mahabharata, as it stands at present, is the work of that period in Indian history which intervened between the collapse of the Mauryan Empire in the second century B.C. and the rise of the Guptas in the fifth century A.D. This was a period of political instability and confusion but from literary perspective it was characterized by fecundity. It was an age of war and romance, of invasions and revolutions, of shifting frontiers and racial fusions, the formative period of Puranic Hinduism famed for its brilliant literary output.⁵²

It is noteworthy that *Mahabharata* represents a flexible tradition in marriage. There are numerous references to Swayamvaras being organized for marriages. The literal meaning of Swayamvara is choosing the groom of one's own choice. It is one of the most liberal means of endowing women with freedom. There are very clear allusions to the fact that all the main feminine characters of the *Mahabharata* were married after reaching puberty. Panchali, Gandhari, Kunti, Madri, Devyani, Samishtha and many other princesses mentioned in the epic were married after they were fully grown, and many of them selected their husbands.⁵³ Devotion to her husband is the greatest virtue of married women. Women have no more duties except her duties as daughter, a wife and a mother.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 258

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 300.

An institution mentioned in the *Mahabharata* and widely prevalent among the ancient Indo-Aryans was Niyoga or 'appointment'. The term refers to an agreement for raising sons to dead or impotent men. During that time period, widow marriage and divorce were becoming unpopular among the Indo-Aryans, but the need for sons remained paramount.⁵⁴ Purdah tradition was very restricted and not in the nature of an imposition. It was done through voluntary choice by queens who wished to protect themselves from the eyes of the commoners. The women belonging to the lower strata of society did not practice purdah. Sati was not widely prevalent. The overall approach of the *Mahabharata* towards the institution of Sati is characterized by neutrality. It was again a question of voluntary choice. If any widow thought that she would not be able to live without her husband she could choose to be a sati. However, the practice was neither compulsory nor generally recommended. Sati was confined to certain royal clans only.

A perusal of the epic *Mahabharata* clearly reveals that the social conditions prevailing during those times did not encumber women with any special disabilities. The extent and nature of freedom enjoyed by women did get altered with their social and economic status. Women belonging to high class enjoyed a comparatively more privileged status, whereas women of lower class were deprived of dignified status.

Women and Buddhism

The religion and ideology founded by the Buddha is known, in English as Buddhism. A Buddha is one who has attained Bodhi; and by Bodhi is meant wisdom, an ideal state of intellectual and ethical perfection which can be achieved by man through purely human means. The term Buddha literally means the enlightened one or a knower. Buddhists believe that a Buddha is born in each aeon of time, and our Buddha – the sage Gautama who attained enlightenment under the banyan tree at Buddh Gaya in India was the seventh in succession.⁵⁵

Buddha propounded a full-fledged ideology of ideal living and attaining enlightenment. Buddha believed that seven factors lead to wisdom: inner mindfulness, searching of the norms, energy, zest, serenity, concentration and mental balance. However, the focus of Buddha religious averments and professions was man. Mahatama Buddha initially was averse to the admission of women into the

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 264.

⁵⁵ Suman Chatterjee, *Buddhism : The Way to Wisdom*, Cyber Teach Publications, New Delhi, 2009, p. 1.

Sangha system but later on agreed to the formation of the order of the nuns- these nuns were imparted religious and spiritual education.⁵⁶

The education given to female novices and nuns was not different from that imparted to their male counterparts. The female lay devotees also received their training into the deepest problems of philosophy as also into the subtle mystical experiences attainable through intense meditative exercises. There are instances of *bhikshunis* reciting the texts and elucidating the deep problems of the Buddhist philosophy.⁵⁷ A life of celibacy austerity and strict mental discipline was expected of them. Education for the women was introduced at the later stage in order to help them to acquire the knowledge that would enable them to lead a fuller life. But the end of Buddhist era in India also resulted in the end of female education for many generations.⁵⁸ It is quite apparent that although Buddhist stress on rigorous philosophical training through meditation may have been a male oriented programme in the beginning but was opened for women with the passage of time. Women had an equal participation in the Buddhist order and practiced the various ascetic codes with equal dedication and commitment.

It can be said that Buddhist days were happier for women. Buddha's outlook towards life was full of compassion and encompassed the whole of humanity. It was mainly owing to this that the status of women was raised. Buddha proclaimed that all human beings were equal and could attain *Nirvana* (Mukti) if they so wished.

Thus, Buddhism as a liberal reaction against orthodox Brahmanism helped to dismantle the gender based polarization entrenched in the Brahminical order and to build a society where women were looked upon as human being first. The great emphasis on humanity, kindness and humaneness in the Buddhist ideology was highly conducive for creating a climate of gender equality. However, after a modicum of equality, the scales have tipped in favour of the monk. Soon monks began to dominate. This becomes clear from such evidence as: that value of a donation to the Sangh of monks is more than that of a donation to the Sangh of nuns. There is the rule that women cannot preach to the order of monks as well as the rule that a Bhikuni, even though older, should bow down even before a younger Bhikhu.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Maya Majumdar, *op.cit.*, p. 14.

⁵⁷ S. Vats and Shakuntala Mudgal, *op.cit.*, p. 213.

⁵⁸ Maya Majumdar, *op.cit.*, p. 14.

⁵⁹ Afsar Bano, *Indian Woman: The Changing Face*, Kilaso Books, New Delhi, 2003, p. 43.

During the Buddhist epoch, the status of unmarried girls was higher than that at any other time in history. Buddha gave expression to his highly advanced views in the words “a girl may prove even a better offspring”. This shows Buddha’s liberal approach towards women and girl child. The cases of infanticide were almost non-existent. Also there is rarely any mention about child marriage in the canonical literature. But dowry system was prevalent during the time of Buddha also. Visakha brought to her husband’s family countless wealth and property including fifteen hundred female slaves. Anathapindika had given splendid presents to his daughter. It is difficult to say anything with certainty about the condition of widows. There are very few references to them in the Buddhist literature. However, the practice of *Sati* was forbidden as widows were barred to end their lives on the funeral pyre of their dead husband. There is no evidence to suggest that *Sati* system was prevalent in Buddhist India. There is, however, a suggestion in the last Jataka says that widowhood might be fraught with cruelty and hardship.⁶⁰

Though it is claimed that the status of women was raised in the Buddhist period it has to be conceded that in monastic order the place accorded to the nuns was lower than that of the monks. Some of the restrictions imposed on nuns might have been necessary for their physical weakness, but there are few which cannot be justified by any extension of logic.⁶¹

Women and Jainism

Mahavira is reckoned the founder of Jainism. He was a forceful personality belonging to a heterodox sect founded by a sage named Parasvanatha. Jainism had much in common with Buddhism. It rejected the sanctity of the Vedas, the superiority of the Brahmins, and the sacramental notions of marriage and considered all sex relations in or out of wedlock, as inferior to celibacy.

As Jainism is religion which primarily has its spiritual basis in self-imposed privations and asceticism – women are perceived as a kind of a threat. All the terms and names used to denote a woman are signifiers of woman’s power to distract. In Jainism, woman is called Nari (Na-ari) because there was no worse enemy for man than she; she is called Mahila, because she charms by her wiles and grace, she is called Padma, she is called Mahitiya because she creates dissension; she is Rama

⁶⁰ Gayatri Gupta, *Status of Women in Ancient India*, Niwas Publications, Jaipur, 2012, p. 252-253.

⁶¹ S. Vats and Shakuntala Mudgal, *op.cit.*, p. 213.

because she delights in coquetry; she is called Angana because she loves the Anga (body of men); she is Josiya because by her tricks she keeps men under subjection; she is Vanita because she caters to the taste of men with her various blandishments.⁶²

As has been stated above in Jainism, great importance is placed on self-denial, restraint of passion and a life of renunciation. A life of extreme temperance and one devoid of passion used to be the norm for both men and women. The women were also admitted into monasteries and given full facilities to get the best possible education. As far as the system of education was concerned the set up was one which did not discriminate between boys and girls. The Jain system of education had depth, was universal in nature and applicable to all alike, irrespective of caste, creed or sex. Jainism was divided into two main sects *Digambaras* and *Shwetambaras*. The Digambara sect believed that women must be reborn as men before they could get true deliverance. This is a highly conservative idea and once again reveals the association of women with desire and indulgence in Jainism.⁶³ On the other hand, the *Shwetambaras*, made no distinction between the sexes and freely admitted aspirants of both the sexes into their order.⁶⁴

All Jains, whether Digambaras or Swetambaras, maintain that in the monastic life, the nun is inferior to the monk. In this followers of Jainism seem to be replicating the hierarchical structures of most other religions “They (nuns) are prohibited to study chapters of *Mahaparijnana* and *Arunopapata* and *Drishitivada*. It is stated that the *Drishitivada* deals with magical formulae and as women are not firm but fickle, they are not allowed to study the above mentioned scripture. The climax reached in the rule lays down that a monk of three years’ standing can become a teacher of a nun of thirty years standing”.⁶⁵

There is evidence that of polygamy was common. There was no sanction for widow remarriage, for a life of self-restraint was generally valued. However, among some sections of Jains both divorce and widow remarriage were quite customary. There is evidence that widows were not subjected to acute forms of isolation and denial. They could lead a pious life of Shravika within the family setting. A widow

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 241.

⁶³ Gurveer Singh and Tejinder Pal Singh, “Religion and Women: A Sikh Perspective”, *The Journal of Religion and Sikh Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1, Unistar Publisher, Chandigarh, July 2012, p. 135.

⁶⁴ Maya Majumdar, *op.cit.*, pp. 14-15.

⁶⁵ S. Vats and Shakuntala Mudgal (Eds.) *op.cit.*, p. 236.

was expected to lead a unadorned and austere life. However by following a pious way of life she could become an object of reverence. She could also become a nun.⁶⁶ Thus, widowhood was not exactly a curse in Jainism. At the same time, widowhood did become grounds for imposing restrictions and conditions in order to make widows behave according to the prescribed code.

Child marriage had almost become a fashion among the Jains as among high caste Hindus. At the time of Mahavira *Sati* does not appear to have been prevalent in India but later Jain texts mention *Sati*. Some sort of *Purdah* was observed by ladies of royal clans who did not wish to be seen by vulgar eyes. As most of the writers of Jainism were monks who believed in the superiority of the celibate life to that of the married state, they considered woman as the temptress that perpetuated the misery of the mundane world. As the yoke on women was firmly fixed in Hinduism, and Brahmin moralists lectured on the wiles of women, the Jains too toed the line.⁶⁷

Women had to face chronic forms of persecution in the post-Vedic brahminical order. They were a disadvantaged lot as religious masters began to postulate their inferiority and sanction their marginalization. A similar pattern can be deciphered in Jainism. As the logic of the religion rests in restraint and abnegation women became objects of derision and dread as if by default.

STATUS OF WOMEN IN JUDAISM, CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM

Women in Judaism

Judaism like Hinduism, is not founded by single prophet. Many prophets appeared at different times and made their contributions to the evolution and development of the religion. Judaism is considered to be the religion which is the predecessor of the two great Semetic religions of Christianity and Islam. Judaism is essentially a religion of a particular people, the Jews and of a particular land, the Israel, also known as Palestine in mid Asia.⁶⁸

Women cannot be understood to have enjoyed unfettered freedom in Judaism. In Judaism, woman was a maiden in the house of her father; she was to be ruled by him. She could be bartered. Women were not given authority in religious, social or

⁶⁶ Afsar Bano, *op.cit.*, p. 42.

⁶⁷ S. Vats and Shakuntala Mudgal (Eds.) *op.cit.*, pp. 240-241.

⁶⁸ Ishar Singh, *The Philosophy of Guru Nanak: A Comparative Study*, Ranjit Publishing House, New Delhi, 1969, p.63.

political affairs. She was considered to be impure for participating in religious affairs, and she was insignificant from a political point of view. Her life revolved around household duties beyond which she was neither expected nor allowed to tread. She could not help her husband even if he happened to be attacked by his enemy. Judaic system concedes no discretion to women even in regard to marriage. The extent to which she was treated like a commodity can be judged from the fact that she was treated like a Chattel, and could be inherited. "If", says Deuteronomy XXV. 5, "brethren dwell together, and one of them die, and have no child, the wife of the dead shall not marry without unto a stranger; her husband's brother shall take her to him to wife".⁶⁹

In Judaism, it was considered base to be born a woman. The very conception of woman in the Old Testament as reiterated in the New seems to be very low. It is said that a modern Jew in his daily prayers says, "Blessed are Thou, O Lord our God! King of the Universe, who hath not made me a woman". According to another scholar: "She could go to the synagogue but she had to sit in a separate area, from the men or, if she were in the temple at Jerusalem, she was restricted to its outer portion, the women's court, which was five steps below the men's courts".⁷⁰ Judaism, no doubt, gave some latitude to women by allowing a daughter to inherit from her father, "And thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel, saying, if a man die, and have no son, then ye shall cause his inheritance to pass into his daughters". (Number xxvii. 8, 9).⁷¹ As is evident, this inheritance was to be permitted only in the absence of male heirs.

In relation to the question of divorce there was clear lack of consensus. One sect held the opinion that divorce was permissible only on account of some grave fault or adultery on the part of woman. The other held that a woman could be divorced on trivial grounds like not preparing the meals well. Polygamy was authorized and practised by the wisest men on an enormous scale. Like Parsis, Jewish people are very exclusive people. Even today, they do not recognize marriages between Jews and non-Jews.⁷² This is indicative of their tenacious desire for a distinct and unalloyed identity.

⁶⁹ Shaikh M.H. Kidwai, *Woman : Under Different Social and Religious Laws (Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam)*, Seema Publications, Delhi, 1976, p. 14.

⁷⁰ Gurwinder Kaur, "Status of Women in Sri Guru Granth Sahib", *The Sikh Review*, The Sikh Cultural Centre, Calcutta, Vol. 58:9, No. 681, September 2010, p.62.

⁷¹ Shaikh M.H. Kidwai, *op.cit.*, p. 15.

⁷² *Ibid.*, pp. 15-16.

Women in Christianity

There is a clear reflection of Judaist conservatism on the question of women in Christianity. In Christianity, women are considered to be essentially a base and inferior gender. Man is considered to be the cardinal principle and woman an aberration or an appendage. As per Christian mythology woman was created from one of the ribs of man. No doubt Catholics revere and worship Virgin Mary but both Protestants and Catholics feel that the women brought the evil to the earth. The original sin, as told in the Bible was committed because of the intemperance of Eve. She was the one who was tempted by Satan in the disguise of a snake. Hence the pious and saintly Christians like St. Bernard, St. Antony, St. Bonaventure, St. George the great, all cursed women. The woman was described by them as the organ of the devil, 'a scorpion ever ready to sting', 'the poison of an asp', 'the malice of the dragon', and 'the instrument which the devil uses to get possession of our souls'.⁷³

The Biblical image of woman as the temptress and seducer has strengthened the husband's right to control the wife and her property.⁷⁴ The high degree of conservatism in Christianity can be seen in the fact that woman is not given an independent status. She is dependent and subordinate first to her father and then to her husband. The eminent scholar Dr. Radhakrishnan explains the subordination of women very succinctly, "Christian Europe has been brought upon the belief that death would have been unknown but for the unkindness of woman. She was accused of treachery, backbiting and tempting men to doom."⁷⁵

However, some degree of liberal approach can be seen in the Christian idea of man woman relationship in the conjugal set-up. The pronouncement which forms a part of the marriage rites prescribes that: "Man shall leave his father and mother and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall be one flesh". As against Islam, Christianity forbids polygamy. The strong espousal of monogamy stands out as the one enduring factor which has raised the status of women in Christianity. However, women have never been given full ecclesiastic responsibility in the Church organization.⁷⁶

⁷³ Maya Majumdar, *op.cit.*, pp. 15-16.

⁷⁴ Eroj Siddiqui, *Women Marriage and Family*, Mark Publishers, Jaipur, 2005, p. 232.

⁷⁵ Gurwinder Kaur, *op.cit.*, p.62.

⁷⁶ Afsar Bano, *op.cit.*, pp. 38-39.

Like many other religions celibacy is glorified in Christianity. Celibacy as a doctrine has its basis in the belief that it is wrong, unethical and depraved to enter into physical relations with women. Glorification of celibacy is an indirect indictment of women. Apart from this, education which is an instrument of social and economic uplift has been monopolized by the rich and the priestly class. Initially women were completely excluded but with time the missionaries started imparting education to women. However, even then they segregated boys and girls and prescribed different courses of study to the two sexes. The idea was that boys should be prepared for life outside home and the girls for life inside the home.⁷⁷ However, in India in the later nineteenth and early twentieth century, Christian girls were way ahead of others in education and employment.

There are some components of Christian religion which attenuate the charge of gender discrimination. The practice of child marriage is not found among Christian communities and widowhood is not a curse. A woman is not confined to the home. Her participation in congregational prayers, absence of purdah, no rigid insistence on segregation of sexes, monogamy, emphasis on husband – wife relationship, value of charity and service to others – all these features highlight the gender equality in Christianity and place women in a relatively better position than in other religions.

Women in Islam

Islam is very categorical in the statement of directions and rules. It is the only religion in which the universal laws for all walks of human life are laid down including that for women. There are directions regarding social, political and property rights of women.

Islam gives equality to women in relation to men in many respects. It makes a case for the dignity of women. In Holy Quran it is mentioned that “Women are the twin halves of men”. “The world and all things in it are valuable but the most valuable thing in the world is virtuous wife”, God enjoins upon you to treat women well for they are your mothers, daughters and aunts”.⁷⁸

Going beyond these basis and fundamental articulations, there are several laws and prescriptions which tend to create discrimination between men and women. A woman cannot be priest, nor can she lead the prayers. She has no place in the

⁷⁷ Maya Majumdar, *op.cit.*, pp. 16-17.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

formal religious organization and legal affairs of the community and cannot be a Kazi.⁷⁹ Moreover, the stress on seclusion of women is probably the strongest in Islam. Women have to practice Purdah and there are innumerable restrictions on their engagement with male members other than the closest relatives. Other areas of discrimination are man's right of divorce, the right of men to practice polygamy, have four wives at a time and similar other provisions like "the testimonies of two women are equal to one man".⁸⁰ The purdah system was most effective in subjecting women to a denial of full enjoyment of a normal life.

There are clear instances of inequality in the Islamic institution of marriage. The bride's consent to the marriage is a mere formality, and the institution of marriage guardian places her in a subordinate position. Religion makes the husband the family head, and enjoins a wife to unswerving obedience and service. Widow remarriage and divorce, though permitted for women, are generally frowned upon, especially among the middle classes. Though some security for women against the possibility of divorce is provided by 'Mehr' very few women are able to assert this claim, and while Islam recognizes women's right to inherit property in practice these rights are not upheld.⁸¹

In the medieval period, women education was by and large ignored. The result was that most of the women remained illiterate and unlettered. In the absence of education, Muslim women remained ignorant and suppressed. Women were not allowed to attend Madrassas or Mosque schools. Islam does not allow women in Masjids as it is perceived that they are unclean. Based on all this it can be said that although the Islam accords women an important position in its fundamental tenets, it also promulgates laws and codes with severely compromise the position of women

Women and Sikhism

Sikhism marks a very important departure from the conservatism of the other religions. Sikhism in its basic ideology is a reaction against the brahminical orthodoxies and superstitions. Thus, Sikhism condemns obsolete rituals, idolatry and superstition and emphasizes on simple devotion to God. The Sikh Gurus adopted a two-fold approach to gender issues. They adopted a positive attitude towards women in order to enhance their status and prestige. They also condemned the practices

⁷⁹ Eroj Siddiqui, *op.cit.*, p. 232.

⁸⁰ Maya Majumdar, *op.cit.*, p. 18.

⁸¹ Eroj Siddiqui, *op.cit.*, p. 232.

prevalent in Indian society, which undermined the status of women. There are very pronounced feminist intimations in the averments of the first Guru of the Sikhs. Guru Nanak, the earliest of the Sikh Gurus, condemned the man made notion of the inferiority of women and argued for the women liberation. Sikhism considers woman as worthy of respect as man's helpmate and a partner in his domestic life. Guru Nanak opposes the traditional aversion towards women expressed in all religions. For the first time, women are not looked upon as evil or perpetrators of sin, or simply the objects of men's pleasure.

In Sikhism, pragmatic and meaningful steps are advised to be taken for the socio-religious equality of women. In the various moral codes of the Sikhs, a large number of injunctions deal with the rejection and stringent disapproval of the following unethical practices : (1) female infanticide (2) immolation of the widow with the deceased husband, and (3) wearing of veils by women.⁸²

Sikh Gurus advocated equality among all the human beings. The social equality of the women is ungrudgingly recognized. The Sikh Gurus championed the cause of women not only ideologically but also practically. This is established by the fact that women were given an equal role in important religious functions like *Langar* and *Kar Sewa*. The consorts of the Sikh Gurus played an important role in promoting religion. The militant brotherhood of the Sikhs, the *Khalsa* founded by Guru Gobind Singh in the seventeenth century was open to both sexes and all classes. The women were initiated into the *Khalsa* by taking the name of Kaur and were expected to perform the same duties as men. Thus, the Sikh concept of equality transcended the narrow considerations of caste, creed, sex and colour and the Sikh Gurus held women equal to man in every field of life.

STATUS OF WOMEN DURING BRITISH RULE AND POST-INDEPENDENCE ERA

During the advent of the British Empire the status and the position of the Indian women were very low. In the general Indian set up and in a rather backward social context women were regarded as inferior species. From the social point of view they were kept in a state of utter subjection, denied any rights, suppressed and oppressed. The customs of polygamy, the Purdah system, the denial of woman's

⁸² Avtar Singh, *Ethics of the Sikhs*, Publication Bureau, Patiala, 1983, p. 175.

rights over property, child marriage, the custom of Sati and denial of remarriage to widows – all these practices in this period undermining the identity of women.⁸³

Considered from the perspective of gender, the British influence was in the positive direction. Such irrational practices engaged the immediate attention of almost all social reformers. The leaders and the social reformers who were in the forefront of the struggle for women emancipation were Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidhyasagar, Keshab Chandra Sen, M.G. Ranade, Aurobindo Ghose, Rabindranath Tagore, M.K. Gandhi, Swami Dayanand Saraswati, Swami Vivekanand, Jawarharlal Nehru, Annie Besant, Sucheta Kripalani, Sarla Devi, Margaret Cousins and many others.⁸⁴

Raja Ram Mohan Roy was the first Indian who had initiated social reform movement and championed the cause of women. He fought against social evils like sati, child marriage etc. To him, women did not belong to weaker sex and she was not inferior to man morally and intellectually. He collected lot of material from the Hindu religious literature in support of his attempts at ending the evil custom prevailing in the Hindu society.⁸⁵ Raja Ram Mohan Roy's efforts led to the abolition of the Sati practice under Governor General William Bentinck in 1829. Historians have called him 'Father of Modern India' and The Champion of Women's Rights.

The Brahma Samaj, the Arya Samaj and all other such socio-religious reform movements did commendable work to curb social evils. As modern outlook spread its reach, it was felt that a law should be passed to prevent child marriage and the Widow Remarriage Act of 1856 was passed. Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar did pioneering work on the issue of child marriage and his efforts met with success when in 1860 the Indian Penal Code prohibited intercourse with a wife who was below ten years of age. The marriageable age for a girl under Brahma Samaj rites was 14.⁸⁶ Swami Vivekanand was also a great social reformer. He also lent his voice to the pressing issues related with women's rights. He said, "The ideal woman in India is the mother, the mother first and the mother last". He suggested that the women should be empowered through a sound system of education. For him the ideal of womanhood was not only Sita or Savitri but that of an ideal mother. He said,

⁸³ Maya Majumdar, *op.cit.*, p. 20.

⁸⁴ Kiran Devendra, *Changing Status of Women in India*, Vikas Publications, New Delhi, 1994, p.5.

⁸⁵ Kalpana Shah, *Women's Liberation and Voluntary Action*, Ajanta Publications, Delhi, 1984, p. 32.

⁸⁶ Kiran Devendra, *op.cit.*, p. 6.

“Motherhood is the beginning. Motherhood is the end of Indian womanhood”.⁸⁷ Thus, it can be said that such reformers attempted to transcend orthodox ways of thinking.

In 1854, The Educational Dispatch also known as Woods Dispatch sought through liberal grant-in-aid to support and to encourage women’s education in India. It is the positive effort in the direction of women education in India. Subsequently a number of schools and training institutions were opened up for women education.⁸⁸

It was a period when almost all the socio-religious reformist and progressive movements of the Hindus and Sikhs showed resistance against the system of Purdah. In North India, the Arya Samaj, Dev Samaj, Singh Sabha and Bramo Samaj worked to create public opinion against this evil practice of Purdah. A large number of articles, papers were published by social- religious reformers in various magazines in order to aware the people. Thus, there was a definitive and irrevocable shift towards women emancipation. As a result, since 1947 mostly women have moved out their homes to work.

There was a women agitation for female franchise under the leadership of Sarojini Naidu in 1917. The first women’s delegation met the secretary of state to demand women’s political rights, supported by the Indian National Congress in 1947. An immediate result of this was that the Montague Chemesford Reform Act of 1919 gave women the right to vote in elections to all state legislatures. The reforms of 1919 enfranchised about 1 million women. This was without doubt a major leap in the direction of political empowerment. It is owing to this first step that the later day participation in politics could be made possible.

Early marriage, however, continued to be a scourge despite the sincere and earnest efforts of the reformers. They were successful only when the Government of India passed the Child Marriage Restraint Act, popularly known as the Sarda Act of 1929.⁸⁹

From 1920, Mahatma Gandhi shaped the Indian National Congress as a party of the masses. He favoured major reforms to raise the status of Indian women – and sought their total emancipation through education. His struggle was not confined to

⁸⁷ Maya Majumdar, *op.cit.*, p. 21.

⁸⁸ Padmalaya Mohapatra and Bijoyini Mohanty, *Elite Women of India*, APH Publishing, New Delhi, 2002, p. 58.

⁸⁹ Kiran Devendra, *op.cit.*, p. 6.

any particular group or class but to Indian women as a whole.⁹⁰ In 1942, the women's wing of All India Congress came into being. Gandhi said, "Women are not dolls to be adored like goddesses, our salvation can be achieved only when our women become to us what Uma was to Shankar, Sita to Ram joining us in our deliberations". He also believed that salvation of India was in the elevation of her women.⁹¹ It is clear that Gandhi was conscious of the importance of an inclusive social system in which women would play a constructive role.

India gained freedom in 1947. Its Constitution was adopted on 26th January, 1950. The participation of women in India's struggle for freedom established beyond doubt that without them India may not have been a free nation. The story of the struggle for freedom had a sub-plot. This sub-plot was the consciousness raising the long and grueling struggle for freedom brought among women. India's fight for independence also made them conscious of their own rights. Moreover, all the champions of freedom were in equal measure social reformers also. While fighting for political rights from British rulers they also propounded a liberal outlook towards questions of gender. Lastly, Imperialism in some senses was also a blessing in disguise. The entry of the British helped to introduce some very important Western notions connected with the freedom of women. After Independence, the Constitution gave full and equal rights to women as compared to men. Thereafter the programme of women empowerment has been an important issue in the social discourse. Independence and India's partition gave an opportunity to Indians to frame a secular, democratic constitution which advanced the cause of women. The Constitution of India, laid emphasis on the development of an egalitarian society. After India became a free country several legislative initiatives have been taken to guarantee freedom to women. For the elimination of discriminatory practices against women Articles 14, 15, 16 39(e) and 51 were introduced. These guarantee equality and special protection for women.

The Article 14 provided for equality of all before the law. Article 15 emphasized that the "State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them". Article 16 of the Constitution of India also explicitly mentions equality of opportunities for all and

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 20

⁹¹ M.K. Gandhi, *Women and Social Injustice*, Navjivan Publishers, Ahmedabad, 1942, p. 246.

prohibits the discrimination against women. It clearly states, no citizen shall, on ground only of religion, race, caste, sex, descent place of birth, residence or any of them, be ineligible for, or discriminated against in respect of, any employment or office under the state.⁹²

According to Article 39, the state shall, in particular, direct its policy towards securing (a) That the citizens *men and women* equally have the right to an adequate means of livelihood; (b) that there is equal pay for equal work for both men and women; (c) That the wealth and strength of workers, *men and women* and the tender age of children are not abused and that citizens are not forced by economic necessity to enter avocations unsuited to their age or strength. Article 51-A was newly added to the Constitution by the 42nd Amendment 1976. Article 51-A (e) is related to women. It states that “It shall be the duty of every citizen of India to promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of India transcending religious, linguistic and regional or sectional diversities; to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women”.⁹³

Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted on December 10th, 1948. The article I of the declaration declares that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. In the same way article 2 of the declaration provided for equality of sexes. So the declaration clearly indicates that everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms without any kind of distinction of sex.

Legal Provision for Women

- **Factories Act, 1948:** Under this Act, a woman cannot be forced to work beyond hours and prohibits employment of women except between 6 A.M. and 7 P.M.
- **Maternity Benefit Act, 1961:** A women is entitled 12 weeks maternity leave with full wages.
- **The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961:** Under the provision of this Act, demand of dowry either before marriage, during marriage and or after the marriage is an offences.
- **The Equal Remuneration Act, 1976:** This Act provides equal wages for equal work. It provides for the payment of equal wages to both men and

⁹² S.R. Myneni, *Women and Law*, Asia Law House, Hyderabad, 2005, pp. 15-16.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 19-22.

women workers for the same work or work of similar nature. It also prohibits discrimination against women in the matter of recruitment.

- **The Child Marriage Restrain Act of 1976:** This act increased the age of marriage of a girl to 18 years from 15 years and that of a boy to 21 years.
- **Indian Penal Code (IPC):** Section 354 and 509 safeguards the interests of women from unnecessary and compulsory abortions.
- **Amendments of Criminal Laws 1983:** It provides for a punishment of 7 years in ordinary cases and 10 years for custodial rape cases.
- **73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Act:** Reserved 1/3rd seats in Panchayat and Urban Local Bodies for women.
- **The National Commission for Women Act, 1990:** The commission was set up in January, 1992 to review the Constitutional and legal safeguards for women.
- **The Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993:** This Act protects women from their fundamental rights.
- **Protection of women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005:** This Act protects women from any act/ conduct/ commission that harms, injuries or potential to harm is to be considered as domestic violence. It protects the women from physical, sexual, emotional, verbal, psychological, economic abuse.
- **Protection of Women against Sexual Harassment of Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013:** This Act protecting the women at workplace not only to women employee but also to female clients, customer, students, research scholars in college and universities, patients in hospitals.⁹⁴

On International Level

Women empowerment is not a national discourse but an international discourse. Although, Western societies adopted democratic dispensations much earlier, yet, they cannot be posited to be ideal societies. Even in advanced societies, women have been discriminated against in one way or the other. Thus, establishment of democracies is no guarantee against gender based discrimination and exploitation. Rape and sexual exploitation are as much a reality of the first world as the third

⁹⁴ Sohan Raj Tater, *Empowerment: As You Think*, English Book House, Jaipur, 2015, p 87-88.

world. Apart from this, capitalism and consumerist societies have systematically market women as commodities. Thus, organized global effort by national and international organizations has been a continuous affair. Conferences and international seminars have focused on new challenges to enact laws and ordinances in the direction of woman empowerment and emancipation.

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1966 urges every covenant state to respect and ensure to all individuals within its territory the rights recognized by that covenant without distinction of sex. Article 3 of this document emphasizes that covenant states should undertake to ensure equal rights of men and women. In 1979 the convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women reiterated “that discrimination against women violates the principles of equality of rights and respect for women’s dignity and is an obstacle to the participation of women on equal terms with men in the political, social, economic and cultural life of their countries, hampers the growth of prosperity of society and the family and makes more difficult the full development of the potentialities of women in the service of their countries and of humanity and urges that change in the traditional role of women as well as role of women in society and in the family is needed to achieve full equality between men and women”.⁹⁵

The UNO declared 1975-1985 as International Women’s Decade for deliberation on problems of women in the light of the charter of Human Rights and other previous decisions of the international community. 8th March is celebrated as “International Women’s Day” all over the world. The first world conference of the international year on the status of women was convened in Mexico City in 1975. The Mexico City conference was called for by the United Nations General Assembly to focus international attention on the need to develop future oriented goals, effective strategies and plans of action for the advancement of women.

Second world conference of women was held in Copenhagen in 1980. In this conference many resolutions of vital significance were adopted on specific issues of the interest of women. In 1985, Third World Conference of Women was held in Nairobi. A significant UN document addressing gender violence in relation to development goals ‘Forward Looking Strategies’ was produced at the 1985 Nairobi World Conference to review and appraise the achievements of the UN Decade for

⁹⁵ Maya Majumdar, *op.cit.*, p. 30.

women. The major themes of the conference were equality, development and peace. The fourth world conference on women held in Beijing in 1995 first time in the history of UN recognized that “Women rights are Human Rights”. The optional protocol to CEDAW was approved by General Assembly in 1999 and went into force in 2000. It refers to the principles of equality and non-discrimination as embodied in the UN charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and other international human rights instruments, including the convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

In December 2006, General Assembly adopted a comprehensive resolution to intensify efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women.

Thus, at national as well as international levels various laws and conventions have been passed for equal social status of women. The issue of gender equality has become a dominant concern in the public discourse and has emerged as a major policy objective at the global level. In the Indian context, the principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Indian Constitution in its Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles. The Constitution not only grants equality to women, but also empowers the state to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women. Within the framework of the Indian Constitution, various development policies, plans and programmes have been implemented towards achieving equality between men and women. A marked shift in the approach to women’s issues has been witnessed in the plans from welfare to development and then to empowerment. The National Commission for Women was set up by an Act of Parliament in 1990 to safeguard the rights and legal entitlements of women. The 73rd and 74th amendment (1993) to the Constitution of India have provided for reservation of seats in the local bodies, for ensuring women’s participation in decision making. India has also ratified various international conventions and human rights instruments committing to secure legal rights for women. The women’s movement and a wide-spread network of non-government organizations which have strong grass-roots presence and deep insight into women’s concerns have contributed in inspiring initiatives for the empowerment of women. But there still exists a wide gap between the goals enunciated in the Constitution, legislation, policies, plans, programmes and related mechanisms on the one hand and the situational reality of gender disparity on the other.

CHAPTER – 3
QUESTION OF GENDER EQUALITY IN SIKH IDEOLOGY
AND
ROLE OF PROMINENT SIKH WOMEN IN HISTORY

Religion has remained the bedrock of almost all social and cultural frameworks. It has provided ideological moorings to all forms of life. It has been mostly through religion that man has attempted to construe life. Religious outlook has often subsumed man's understanding of larger philosophical, social and cultural issues. Moreover, religion is inextricably linked with man's perception of self, his identity and his social, cultural and political orientation. More importantly, it is through religious ideology that human beings have also built up their perspective about gender relations. Most of the religions do not only define how men and women participate in religious activities but also reinforce and legitimize the gender roles assigned to them in the community. Thus, it can be said that the interpretation and understanding of gender roles in the society is often carried out through religious ideology. Although, the positive value and role of religion in sustaining balance and harmony cannot be questioned, yet, at the same time, religions have with equal force engendered violence, acrimony and communal hatred. Similarly, in most of the cases discrimination against women enjoys religious sanction. In purely political scientific terms, equality refers to equal opportunities for men and women in every walk of life. It depicts the level of development among men and women. It indicates the need of recognizing their different needs and interests and requiring a redistribution of power and resources. The concept of gender justice can only be realized in society which is based upon the ideas of equality and fairness. Thus, on the basis of all this, it becomes important and imperative to approach the question of gender equality through religion.

Four religions originated in Indian sub-continent viz. Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism. Sikhism is one of the younger faiths of the world as compared with religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity or Islam. Being one of the youngest religions in the world, Sikhism possesses a revolutionary character and a very strong desire for social reform. At the time of the advent of the Sikh religion, the condition of the society was almost execrable and deplorable. There was a general climate of extreme orthodoxy in religious practice on the one

hand and chronic forms of repression, intolerance and oppression on the other. Pernicious forms of prejudices and corruption prevailed everywhere. It was a period marked by tyranny, injustice, religious fanaticism, political chaos, oppression and all kinds of corruption and high-headedness in all spheres of life.¹ Sikh ideology is rooted in a reaction against all such evils and social problems. Sikhism was a revolt against tyranny of Brahmanism. Sikhism in its essential character is a blend of spiritual values, a belief in simple and pure faith in God and a pragmatic social ideology.

Sikhism is a monotheistic faith, preaching the existence of only one God, and teaching ideals that may be universally accepted today and in the future: honesty, compassion, humility, piety, social commitment, and most of all tolerance for other religions. Sikhism was founded by Guru Nanak Dev in the 15th century. The succeeding nine Gurus nurtured and developed his ideals and teachings. The tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, brought to an end the line of human Gurus and in 1708. He proclaimed *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, as the eternal Guru of the Sikhs. The teachings of the Sikh Gurus, enshrined in the Sikh Holy Scripture, *Guru Granth Sahib* embody the religious, metaphysical and spiritual beliefs propounded by the Gurus as well as their ideas about social life including the need for resistance against what are perceived to be social evils and all forms of injustice. Sikhism, right from the time of Guru Nanak Dev is a beautiful fusion of spirituality, resistance and reform. Like other religions Sikhism does not promote withdrawal and submission. In fact, it is a spiritual quest for an ideal existence within social reality not outside it. The Sikh Gurus stood for the basic values of freedom, brotherhood, charity, obedience, understanding, sympathy, patience, simplicity and piety and outlined the path to spirituality in life.² Sikhism also played a revolutionary role in the sociological field in restructuring society on equalitarian basis. Sikhism is unique in its strong espousal of women's dignity. This idea is central to Sikh philosophy and is in favour of the equality of men and women. Even before the term Gender Equality was coined Sikh Gurus both in their ideological convictions and pronouncements as well in practice stressed the need of giving women a place of dignity and respect.

¹ Gurdev Singh Hansrao, *Ideology of Sikh Gurus*, Hansrao Publishers, Ropar, 1990, p.3.

² S.R. Bakshi, *Guru Nanak and Development of Sikhism*, Book Enclave, Jaipur, 2008, p.V.

Affirmation of the dignity of the human being, male as well as female, is inherent to the hymns of *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*. The testimony of a liberal outlook can be found in the poetic idiom. The narrative voice is female. The narrator embraces the identity of a wedded woman or a maiden who yearns for God – who is seen as her love. Thus, the narrative style involves a valorization of androgyny. There is no essential separation possible between the two sexes. They are seen as two manifestations or principles of the Eternal One. A thorough study of Gurbani reveals that equal status of man and woman in society has been firmly emphasized. In reality, *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* is the only scripture of the world's scriptures, which advocates strongly and forcefully the equality of woman. The philosophy and hymns of Sikh Gurus are quite clear about the equality of Humans in general, and of genders specifically.

Until Guru Nanak's time, women in Indian society had played a subordinate role and generally considered to be inferior. Their position was very demeaning, derogatory and continually deteriorating. Their presence in religious, political, social, cultural and economic affairs was almost non-existent. While their social status was much inferior to men, their condition was worsened because of oppressive practices unchecked by any legal mechanism. Their plight was miserable and they were at the mercy of men. They were often seen as easy targets by the invaders who took women away as slaves and sold them as cattle in foreign markets or raped and ravaged them and made them work as prostitutes. They were also tapped in cruel, inhuman and callous social customs. The leaders and patrons of the society erected a rigid labyrinth of restrictions. Women were encouraged and sometimes forced to become *Sati* (to immolate herself on her husband's funeral pyre). This was probably the greatest evidence of the insignificance of a women's life in those days. She was a nonentity, whose only purpose of living was to serve her husband. Widowhood was a curse and the remarriage of widows was taboo. *Purdah* or wearing of the veil was thought to be a protective shield for her, against man's lustful eyes. Such things were not only physical handicaps they had disastrous psychological effects. Women over generations were reminded of their helplessness. They were defenseless against various kinds of threats. Apart from this the birth of a son was welcome as it would clear the way for the father's salvation, whereas the birth of a girl was anathema to

the parents. She was contemptuously called a misfortune and female infanticide was commonly practiced.³

Thus, it can be said that during the days before the advent of Sikhism, inferiority of women was an important part of the received social wisdom. Violence and discrimination against women were deeply entrenched. Imbalanced and unequal gender roles had acquired chronic and immutable forms. At this time, Sikh ideology came as a new reformist spirit and through combination pragmatic and liberal ideas with profound spiritualism held a new hope for the downtrodden and the misguided.

At the time when Babar invaded, great atrocities were perpetrated on the people. Guru Nanak Dev described Babar's invasion as "The bridal procession of sin". He was pained by the devastation wreaked by the marauding Mughals. He observed how had rushed down from Kabul at the head of the marriage party of sin and plundered the people. Women and children were languishing in dust. The ladies hair that were adorned in plaits and filled in their partings with vermilion, the symbol of wedded life, was now sheared with scissors and dust had darkened their necks. A large number of women were captured and abducted by the Mughals. Guru Nanak cried in anguish when he saw the people being tortured by Babar and his troops.⁴ Guru Nanak defended the rights of women and there is clear assertion of human rights of women. He said:

*Those of the ladies who dressed hair in plaits,
And worn vermilion in them and to look very beautiful.
Their hair are cut with scissors and dust are falling
around neck.*⁵

Thus, in those days it was agonizing to be a woman. They were considered to be lesser mortals. They were subject to double persecution. They were treated as less evolved human beings and many social customs (jauhar, sati, female infanticide, child marriage, purdah) had been devised to keep women under a heavy yoke. They could not have thought of receiving education at the feet of a Guru or to otherwise to

³ Nikky Guninder Kaur Singh, *World Religions: Sikhism*, Chelsea House, InfoBase Publishing, New York, 2004, p. 118.

⁴ Jagroop Kaur, "Babarvani: An Exposition of Human Rights", *The Journal of Sikh Studies*, Vol. XXVIII, No. 2, Amritsar, 2004, p.21.

⁵ *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, p.417. (Gurmukhi Text, Roman Transliteration and English Translation by Darshan Singh, Sikh University Press, Belgium).
*Jin sir sohan patee-aa maangee paa-ay sandhoor
Say sir kaatee munnee-anih gal vich aavi dhoorh.*

be treated fairly. Given the divine and benevolent light that shone in him, the Guru was deeply pained to see the ill treatment being meted out to female half of the humanity. He felt compelled to do something to rectify the situation and put an end to the prevalent bias against them. He raised a strong and passionate voice in favour of women. In his divine hymns, women got emancipation and equal rights. His interventions are probably the first highly cogent and persuasive plea for gender justice and equality. Guru Nanak's ideas on gender justice paved a way for women to develop ability to organize and influence the direction of social and economic order.

Gender equality is the cornerstone of Sikh ideology. Guru Nanak stresses equality not only between men and women but also universal equality among all human beings. According to the Sikh ideology, God judges people by their actions. It makes no difference what religion one practices or the religion that is carried over from one's parents. Guru Nanak made it clear that no one is high or low. There is no difference between man and woman. All are equal in the eyes of God.⁶

*Everyone is called big, none appears to be low
All pots (bodies) are fashioned by One the light
of the same is in three worlds.⁷*

Guru Nanak believed that men must accept, respect and protect the rights of every woman. He asserts that every human being should accept that as an individual a woman too has dreams, desires and aspirations. One should respect her dreams and protect her rights, stand for her rights not only at home but outside in society at large. The beauty of Guru Nanak's message was that he established equality in male and female⁸ through his poetic genre and creed. He said:

*In this world Man is only one,
everyone else is a woman.⁹*

Thus, Guru Nanak looks at gender from a new perspective. He makes femininity as the universal condition and not merely a social construct. By

⁶ Jaspal Singh Mayell, *Universality of the Sikh Religion*, Mayell Publishers, USA, 2006, p. 123.

⁷ *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, p. 62.
*Sabh ko oochaa aakhee-ai nech na deesai ko-ay.
Iknai bhaanday saaji-ai ik chaanan tihu lo-ay.*

⁸ Bhawna Malik, "Women in Sikh History: A Study of their Multi Dimensional Persona" *The Sikh Review*, Vol. 61:5, No. 713, The Sikh Cultural Centre, Calcutta, May 2013, p. 20.

⁹ *S.G.S.S.*, p. 591.
Is jag meh purakh ayk hai hor saglee naar sabaa-ee.

visualizing all seekers of God as women he is glorifying female attributes of gentleness and unconditional love and looks at them at something we should crave for.

Guru Nanak raised his voice to get women an equal status with men in the domain of religion and society. Unlike some other religions, Guru Nanak did not envisage Sikhism as a masculinist doctrine which would impose restrictions on women and perform the social function of containing and controlling them. On the other hand, he opened all possibilities of their equal participation in religion. The sons and daughters are all the creation of God, with the same light of God in them, says Guru Nanak. He enabled women folk to win recognition as independent social entity and laid the foundation for their educational and social development. At *Kartarpur*, doors of his Dharmshala were opened for all men and women. Women not only listened to the hymns of the Gurus but they could also sing the hymns and participated in the preparation of *langer*.¹⁰ With His message of one God, in place of the prevalent belief in trinity, He gave a theology of unity, the unity of man and God and of all creation. All are born of the same light:

*In everyone light is same.*¹¹

Guru Nanak promoted gender justice both logically and with great force. In one of his famous pronouncements, he declared in eloquent terms that it would be unfair to condemn those who give birth to kings and Rajas. How can we have ill-feelings for women who are endowed with divine honour to be the mothers of great men? Except God, no one can assume this humanly from without women. Human birth is from woman and human body is shaped in her womb. All social relations and social bindings exist due to women. Survival of the race is possible only because of women. Kings, the rulers are born from women. Why should the mother of a king be called sinner? When the king himself is considered to be above all blame. As Guru Nanak said:

We are born of women and brought up by her.

We are engaged to woman and we marry her,

¹⁰ Harbans Kaur Sagoo, *Guru Nanak and The Indian Society*, Deep and Deep Publications, New Delhi, 1992, p. 158.

¹¹ *S.G.G.S.*, p. 13.
Sabh meh jot jot hai so-ay.

*We befriend a woman, and our worldliness is by her.
 If woman dies, we find another one.
 Our relationships are through her.
 Why should she be called bad, she gives birth to kings.
 Woman is also given by another woman, none is without her.
 Nanak says, "Only True one is not born of women." ¹²*

Guru Nanak declined to wear the *janeu* as a mark of caste distinction. *Janeu* was also an important symbol that was worn by men only. It discriminated against women. This action of Guru Nanak was the earliest protest against discrimination of women.¹³ The uninhibited championing of the rights of woman and the importance of woman in human life was unprecedented at that time. It was almost inconceivable for a person in those times to think in such terms. Guru Nanak makes Gender a divine question and renders sex as incidental.

*All beings have the same feelings.*¹⁴

Guru Nanak came out strongly against one of the most disingenuous devices used for subjugation. This was the notion of *Sutak* or impurity. It held that women, due to physiological differences, were most prone to impurity, during child birth etc. His downright rejection of all superstitious practices relating to child birth finds its voice in *Asa ki Var*:

*If we believe in impurity, then it is from everything.
 The insect is in cow-dung and wood.
 No foodgrain is without life.
 First the water is life which keeps everything green.
 How can we escape impurity, it is just in our kitchen.*

¹² S.G.G.S., p. 473.

*Bhand jammee-ai bhand nimmee-ai bhand mangan vee-aah.
 bhandahu hovai dostee bhandahu chalai raahu..
 bhand mu-aa bhand bhaalee-ai bhand hovai bandhaan.
 So ki-o manda aakhee-ai jit jameh raajaan.
 Bhandahu hee bhand oopjai bhandai baajh na ko-ay.
 Nanak bhandai baahraa ayko sachaa so-ay.*

¹³ Dimpay Gurvinder Singh, "As Equal Status for Sikh Woman Mere Rhetoric?", *The Sikh Review*, Vol. 55: 9, No. 645, The Sikh Cultural Centre, Calcutta, September 2007, p. 6.

¹⁴ S.G.G.S., p. 24.

Aykaa surat jaytay hai jee-a

*Nanak says, "Impurity cannot be removed thus,
only knowledge can wash it off."*¹⁵

By challenging such notions Guru Nanak made a very serious attempt to transform the concept of purity. He proposes a new way of understanding purity by breaching the rigid and narrow polarity of pure and impure. While the traditional gender/caste based notion of purity and impurity is rooted in physical or materialistic purity; Guru Nanak upholds the importance of inner purity which lies in acceptance and pursuit of God. If a woman is impure during child birth etc. then the concept of purity can be endlessly stretched to include most other human actions. Moreover, Guru Nanak elaborates that the cow dung cake and wood, which is used for burning, has small organisms which make them impure. Grains of food used in the world also have some living organisms within it as nothing is without life. Water itself has life and it renders everything into green and lively. Kitchen is also affected by these impurities. So Guru Nanak emphasized that these entire impurities can only be eradicated with true knowledge and purity of mind. In this way, Guru Nanak condemned the brahminical notion of 'Sutak' through a combination of rationalist and spiritual ideas. The Guru also explains what actual impurity is:

The impurity of mind is greed, the impurity of tongue is lie.

The impurity of eyes is in greed for other's women and wealth.

The impurity of ears is in disbelief in honest saying.

*Nanak says, "Impure man is driven in chains to hell."*¹⁶

Expanding the notion of purity further, Guru Nanak defines moral goodness as the best form of purity. Parochial conception of purity which is reflective of social biases is clearly rejected. Actually, He achieves a very important objective. As the notions of purity and impurity are supportive of social hierarchies they help to retain

¹⁵ S.G.G.S., p. 472.
Jay kar sootak mannee-ai sabh tai sootak ho-ay.
Gohay atai lakrhee andar keerhaa ho-ay.
Jaytay daanay aan kay jee-aa baajh na ko-ay.
Pahilaa paanee jee-o hai jit hari-aa sabh ko-ay.
Sootak ki-o kar rakhee-ai sootak pavai raso-ay.
Nanak sootak ayv na utrai gi-aan utaaray dho-ay.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*
Man kaa sootak lobh hai jihvaa sootak koorh.
Akhee sootak vaykh-naa par tari-a par dhan roop.
Kanee sootak kann pai laa-itbaaree khaahi.
Nanak hansaa aadmee badhay jam pur jaahi.

class/caste and gender based divisions. They also preclude the possibility of revolution or threat to the caste and gender based groups that are in dominant positions. Guru Nanak's writings are revolutionary and progressive precisely because of these reasons.

Infact, from the following hymns, it is indeed significant to note that the Guru has not just equated women with men, but he rather equates men with women, when he calls the entire humanity as *naar*.¹⁷ In this way he foregrounds the feminine principle as the core of existence.

- *Master (husband) is one, everyone else is a wife.*¹⁸
- *Master is not away, He is pervading all bodies , everyone is His wife.*¹⁹

Further still, the Guru not only equates entire humanity as *naar*, but includes himself too in this category, when he refers to Almighty as his *Kant, Khasam*.²⁰

- *The Creator, all pervading is my Master.*²¹
- *My Master is such, in a moment, He can model and remodel.*²²
- *Because my Master is, imperishable, indivisible, unknowable, and ever living.*²³
- *Nanak says, "My Master is unweighable, inaccessible, unshakeable".*²⁴

Through these and similar enunciations, He achieves a radical reversal as far as the question of gender is concerned. Only God is held as the male principle. Moreover, God is the bridegroom/husband/master. The entire humanity is equated with the female principle and looks up to and showers unconditional love on the *Kasam*.

¹⁷ Birendra Kaur, "Gender Equality in Sikh Practice", *The Sikh Review*, Vol. 60: 9, No. 705, The Sikh Cultural Centre, Calcutta, September 2012, p. 26.

¹⁸ *S.G.G.S, Ibid.*, p. 933.

Thaakur ayk sabaa-ee naar

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 765.

Parabh door na ho-ee ghat ghat so-ee tis kee naar sabaa-ee.

²⁰ Birendra Kaur, *op.cit.*, p. 26.

²¹ *S.G.G.S., Ibid.*, p. 609.

Antarjaamee karnaihaaraa so-ee khasam hamaaraa.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 212.

Asio hai re khasam hamaaraa,

Khin meh saaj savaaranhaaraa.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 376.

Avinaasee avigat agochar sadaa salaamat khasam hamaaraa.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 884.

Atul athaah adol su-aamee naanak khasam hamaaraa.

Almost every important socio-religious tradition in Sikhism is supportive of women's uninhibited participation in social life and their integration in the mainstream. Guru Nanak introduced the concept of *Sangat* and *Pangat* which means holy congregation where both men and women can sit together and participate equally in reciting the praises of the Divine and *Pangat* – sitting together, irrespective of caste or social status difference, to eat a common meal in the institution of *Langar*. Inclusivism is one of the most important and founding characteristics of Sikh ideology. Women were never excluded from any specific task. Both men and women took equal part in essential task, i.e. drawing water from wells, reaping and grounding corn, cooking in the pitch and cleaning of the dishes. As has been brought out above, while Sikhism challenged established traditions which camouflaged and supported social and gender based divisions; Sikh Gurus promulgated new traditions which encouraged a participative social set up. As a progressive philosophy, Sikh ideology attempted to demolish the divisions of caste and gender. As Guru Nanak said:

Come my friends, sisters, have me in embrace.

Joining together, tell me the stories of my powerful dear.

*O! True Master all virtues are yours, and all vices are of me.*²⁵

Socially woman was given the status of equality by Guru Nanak. Guru Angad went a step further by encouraging his wife, Mata Khivi, to actively participate in the *pangat*, *langar*. Ever since the introduction of the *langar* by Guru Nanak and its consolidation and institutionalization by Guru Angad, one comes across women freely participating in it. Due credit goes to Guru Angad, who encouraged Mata Khivi to participate whole heartedly in the *langar* preparations as well as in its servings to the *pangat*.²⁶

During the period of the Guruship of Guru Angad Dev, He paid special attention to the education of children. He used to take their classes regularly after the morning congregational prayers. Nobody dared to disturb him at that time. The girls had the same right to education as the boys had. History records that his daughter

²⁵ S.G.G.S., p. 17.
Aavhu bhainay gal milah ank sahayrhee-aah.
Mil kai karah kahaanee-aa samrath kant kee-aah.
Saachay saahib sabh gun a-ugan sabh asaah.

²⁶ Dimpay Gurvinder Singh, *op.cit.*, p. 7.

Amro learnt everything very fast and was quite proficient at whatever was taught to her. He gave the whole charge of the community kitchen to his wife Khivi. She is the first Sikh woman to hold any public office.²⁷

Bhai Gurdas, the Sikh missionary whose writings gained the status as the key to Sri Guru Granth, said: “*From temporal as well as spiritual point of view, woman is man’s other half and assists him to salvation. She assuredly brings happiness to the virtuous*”. Women came to be recognized, in one sense, as even the spiritual support of men. Sri Guru Hargobind referred to women as the *conscience of man*. There are many examples of Sikh women helping their men to keep themselves on the right path when the latter showed a tendency to go astray.²⁸ Bhai Gurdas, the Sikh theologian, in Var V. 16 has given an exegesis on the life of women from her parental home to the home of in-laws. He highlights the central place of woman in the spiritual and material success of a man.

Further, Bhai Gurdas admonished men in no uncertain terms to be faithful to their spouses.²⁹ He said:

*Consider beautiful women of others
as your mothers, sisters and daughters.*³⁰

Marriage

The Gurus exalted the status of woman by regarding her as indispensable for man’s spiritual growth and morality and gave the highest dignity to married life. Those who seek salvation need not keep themselves aloof from women and treat their company as sinful barrier to spiritual efforts.³¹ Thus, there is a categorical shift in the approach towards women. One, Sikhism dissociates spirituality from ascetic practices and two; it does not allow female degradation to become a legitimate subplot of spiritual pursuits and ascetic practices.

Guru Nanak and his successors took practical steps to ameliorate the condition of women. They focused their attention on the family considered to be the

²⁷ Prabhjot Kaur, *Women Liberation: Through the Prism of Sikh Faith*, G.S. Distribution, Ludhiana, p. 45.

²⁸ Surjit Kaur, “Place of Women in Sikhism Unequal Partners?”, *The Sikh Review*, Vol. 44: 4, No. 508, The Sikh Cultural Centre, Calcutta, April 1996, p. 38.

²⁹ Surinder Singh Johar, *The Universal Faith*, National Book Shop, Delhi, 1987, p. 125.

³⁰ Bhai Gurdas, Var 29, Pauri 11.
dfy gokJhɔk urhɔk wtk GDk Xhɔk i kD]

³¹ Anil Chandra. Banerjee, *Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh*, Rajesh Publications, New Delhi, 1978, p. 86.

citadel of women. Every Sikh is commanded to lead a married life and all the Gurus (with the exception of Guru Harkrishan the 8th Guru who died at the tender age of eight) led married lives with their families and set up homes. The love of one's family, which leaders of other religions derided as a negative quality that hindered spiritual growth of man, was glorified, elevated and sanctified by Guru Nanak. His love for his elder sister, which has become legendary in Sikh chronicles, had sacred overtones. He advocated the primacy of family life and idealized the love of a wife for her husband by equating it with the love of the devotee for the Lord, thus elevating the status of women.³² Thus, as per this logic renunciation, self-abnegation and withdrawal are not the preconditions for the attainment of truth and God. Sikhism makes spirituality a part of conjugal life.

According to Sikh ideology, man and woman complement each other. They are indispensable to each other. Marriage is a sacred union since the foundation of marriage is not simply a physical unification. It is an eternal bond. Man and woman are co-partners in their life as both command the same respect and equality.³³ The Gurus have tried to build a road for couples on which both could walk hand and hand. It is for this reason that Sikhism is a very revolutionary creed. Most of the other religions create an irreconcilable chasm between the two genders.³⁴ The Gurus were opposed to such beliefs and saw a kind of divinity in man woman relationship.

According to Sikh religion, marriage is not merely a civil or social contract, but that its highest and most ideal purpose is to fuse two souls into one. Man and woman become spiritually inseparable by means of this institution.³⁵ The relation of man and woman is not of polarity but of complementation and reciprocity. They are not said to be husband and wife who merely sit together. They alone are called husband and wife, who have one light in two bodies. As Guru Amardas said:

They are not man and wife, who only sit together.

*One light (life) in two bodies, they can be called man and wife.*³⁶

³² Prabhjot Kaur, *op.cit.*, pp. 44-45.

³³ Gurwinder Kaur, "The Status of Woman in Sri Guru Granth Sahib", *The Sikh Review*, Vol. 58:9, No. 681, The Sikh Cultural Centre, Calcutta, September 2010, p. 65.

³⁴ Nirmal Kumar Jain, *Sikh Religion and Philosophy*, Sterling Publishers, New Delhi, 1979, pp. 105-106.

³⁵ Eleanor Nesbitt, "Sikhism", in Peggy Morgan and Clive Laurton (Eds.), *Ethical Issues in Six Religious Traditions*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 1999, p. 107.

³⁶ *S.G.G.S.*, p. 788.

Dhan pir ayhi na aakhee-an bahan ikthay ho-ay.

Ayk jot du-ay moortee dhan pir kahee-ai so-ay.

Thus, Sikh woman was given equal treatment in all institutions that Gurus established such as *Sangat*, *Pangat* and missionary work. Out of 146 missionaries appointed by Guru Amardas, 52 were women. Women had never participated in religious practices and propagation with such openness. Significantly, the whole of Kashmir and Kabul were under women provincial missionary heads.³⁷

For Guru Hargobind, the sixth Guru, woman was the conscience of man and for Bhai Gurdas, the Sikh bard; she was 'a gateway to salvation'.³⁸ A pious life of householder is the best course for a man on spiritual journey. Bhai Gurdas says

*Life of a householder is the best of all
religions to be lived.*³⁹

The Sikh Gurus, by preaching equal partnership of man and woman in married life, gave a higher value to renunciation- the real renunciation of selfish motives, which would produce actions of self denial, love and sacrifice. Men and women living in the world ought to be above the worldly pettiness. Guru Nanak's preference for the married life and of a family man was reinforced in his choice of Angad, a family man, as his successor. It was a revolutionary and also a decisive step. He made Sikhism a householder's religion.

Guru Angad, advised his disciple Jagga to remember God by living in his home. Jagga said to Guru "If you allow me, I may renounce my family. A yogi has told me that the family is like fetters on your feet. First free yourself of those fetters then I shall bless you with instruction". The Guru replied, "If one could get emancipation by yoga and renunciation then why should all these faqirs and beggars be not happy? They go to the door of the family - men and quarrel amongst themselves for alms from them. Look at the lotus. It grows in water but keeps its face directed towards the sun. Similarly a Sikh lives in his home but remains devoted to God".⁴⁰

Guru Ram Das, the fourth, Sikh Guru lays emphasis on the family in *Rag Suhi*, in his four hymns called 'Lavan' which is read at the time of marriage

³⁷ Baljit Kaur, "Sikhism and Women", in Gajinder Singh (Ed.), *Sikhism and Women*, Institute of Sikh Studies, Chandigarh, 2012, p. 11.

³⁸ Bhai Gurdas, *Var 5, Pauri 16*.
ੴ ; ओहो व्य द[ਰ]ਕੋਹ]

³⁹ Bhai Gurdass, *Kabit 376*.

; eb Xow w? frj ; s g[ਕ]B j ?]

⁴⁰ Bhagat Ratanavali by Bhai Mani Singh quoted by Sher Singh, *Social and Political Philosophy of Guru Gobind Singh*, pp. 164-165.

ceremony. In a marriage ceremony the bride and the groom move in circles round the Holy Scripture four times to solemnize their wedding.⁴¹ The hymn *gb? s&/ bkrh* is sung prior to the Lavan hymns. First of all, the *Rehat Maryada* does not ascribe this hymn to the Anand Karaj ceremony. The *palla* being referred to his hymn is the *pallo* of Almighty.⁴² It means, on the one hand, they provide advice to the couple and on the other hand, place their union within the deeper content of union with God.

In the first 'Lav' Guru Ramdas says "In the first round, God confirms the principle of active life, O! lovable".⁴³ It stresses the importance of married life, lived for the service of God and truth. By invoking the name of God this 'Lav' rather than looking at marriage as a worldly affair formalized through the efforts of man; looks at it as something ordained by God. It also dissociates marriage from pejorative associations. The second 'Lav' compares the joy experienced by the soul of or mind or human personality in realizing the presence of God in our lives. Third 'Lav' signifies that just as the love experienced by the couple surpasses love for all other things, for a person devoted to God all pleasures are irrelevant and insignificant. Fourth 'Lav' tells us that the marriage is now complete in the same way as the soul gains a perfect union with God.

Sikh Guru's view of marriage is monogamous, whereas Islam advocated polygamy. 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. Guru Gobind Singh prescribed special code of discipline for man and laid stress on fidelity.⁴⁴ He said:

Regard another's daughter as your own daughter

Deem another's wife as your mother

He who loves his own wife

*Is the honoured disciple of the Guru.*⁴⁵

⁴¹ Shashi Bala, "Women and Worship - The Sikh Perspective", *The Sikh Review*, Vol. 5: 5, No. 593, The Sikh Cultural Centre, Calcutta, May 2003, p. 36.

⁴² Birendra Kaur, *op.cit.*, p. 28.

⁴³ *S.G.G.S.*, p. 773.

Har pahilarhee laav parvirtee karam drirh-aa-i-aa bal raam jee-o

⁴⁴ Surinder Singh Johar, *op.cit.*, p.126.

⁴⁵ Rehatnama Bhai Desa Singh, Piara Singh Padam (Ed.), *Rehatname*, 1978, p.147.

go pNh e' pNh i kB? go fJ; sh e' wks pykB? rkgfB fJ; sh ; l ofS j'Jh, oj sts f; x j?; Jh

Bhai Nand Lal too corroborates the same idea when he says:

*Guru Gobind Singh does not love a
Sikh who takes food without remembering
God; visits a prostitute or loves
another's wife.*⁴⁶

Guru Arjun Dev, the fifth Sikh Guru strongly believed that husband and wife should remain faithful to each other. The husband should be faithful to his wife and should fulfill all his responsibilities and respect other women. As Guru Arjun said:

*Whose eyes do not see the beauty of other's women.*⁴⁷

Sri Guru Granth Sahib contains unequivocal dissuasion against any form of extra-marital liaisons. As Sikh ethos looks at marriage as a spiritual union having divine sanction, husband and wife are not partners in a marital fealty but are spiritual companions. Bhagat Namdev said:

*The blind discards his own wife.
Keeps relation with other's women.
Like a parrot blooms seeing bombax tree.
But, in the end, engrossed he dies.*⁴⁸

There is an episode in the life of Guru Gobind Singh which corroborates this principle. Guru Gobind Singh refused to marry Sahib Devi, the daughter of Ram Basi, who had vowed to be the Guru's wife from childhood. When she was brought to the Guru by her father, the Guru explained that he was already married to Sundri and it would be unethical for him to marry again. It would be a betrayal of his wife and a desecration of the institution of marriage. On her refusal to go back, the Guru accepted her on the condition that she would not have any conjugal relationship and was declared the 'Mother of the Khalsa'.

⁴⁶ Tankhahname Bhai Nand Lal, Piara Singh Padam (Ed.), *Rehatname*, 1978, p. 58.
*tkfj rp{fpB ej?i|gktfj . t/ tk d/nko/f; y i' i ktffj . go fJ; sl f; T[Bj] brktfj . rfpd f; ly
tj[f; y B Gktfj]*

⁴⁷ S.G.G.S., p. 274.
Par tari-a roop na paykhai naytar.

⁴⁸ S.G.G.S., p. 1164-65
*Ghar kee naar ti-aagai andhaa.
Par naaree si-o ghaalai dhandhaa.
Jaisay simbal daykh soo-aa bigsaanaa.
Ant kee baar moo-aa laptaanaa.*

Sati

'Sati' is a feminine noun formed from the verbal root 'Sat', meaning what is real, true, good or virtuous. In Hindu culture, a 'sati' signifies a woman, who is considered good and virtuous if she seeks to immolate herself on the funeral pyre of her dead husband. The word 'sati' denotes a lady who thus immolates herself. Sati is an embodiment of traditional Indian religious belief system which equated ideal womanhood with selflessness and unconditional sacrifice. It can be said according to this tradition, a woman forfeited her right to live on the death of her husband in order to be called chaste.⁴⁹ Sati system could have been a ploy to prevent the widows of upper caste from marrying men of lower castes and vice versa. The tradition was also a means of saving Hindu women's honour from abduction as the Muslim invaders used to forcibly carry women back to their country.⁵⁰

Sikh ideology opposed the practice and looked upon it as unjust and cruel. Guru Amardas declared sati to be absolutely wrong and pressed for its discontinuation. According to him, there was no reason that could justify that a widow should burn herself alive with her dead husband. Guru Amar Das even persuaded Emperor Akbar to stop this barbaric and inhuman practice among the Hindus and succeeded in having a directive issued banning the custom.

Guru Amardas denounced sati by saying that love and remembrance and not flames should consume the body of a widow. According to him, real sati is one who bears the shock of her husband's death, remains humble, serves humanity and prays daily. Thus, sati is one who sublimates her pangs of separation.⁵¹ As Guru Amardas said:

*They should not be called sati, who cremate themselves
with the dead husbands.*

*Nanak says, "They would be known as sati, who die
(in life) suffering the pangs of separation."*

They also are sati, who live with character, in contentment.

⁴⁹ Prabhjot Kaur, *op.cit.*, p. 84.

⁵⁰ Jaspal Singh Mayell, *op.cit.*, pp. 128.

⁵¹ Sahib Kaur, "Role of Women in Sikhism", *The Sikh Reviews*, vol. 42:10, No. 490, The Sikh Cultural Centre, Calcutta, October 1994, p.19.

*Who serve their husband (when alive) and, remember Him
rising every morning (when dead).⁵²*

Guru Arjun went a step further and said:

*Nanak says, "One who accepts her husband as God
She is great Sati, accepted in His court."⁵³*

The condemnation of sati system was also found in "Twarikh Guru Khalsa" authored by Giani Gyan Singh. He has quoted in his writing " Twarikh Guru Khalsa" with the past incident when the widow of a dead Sikh Khatri wanted to become *Sati*, then some Sikhs came to the Guru to seek advice, then Guru told them that killing oneself is the worst sin, human life is supreme and we do not get it again. We do all noble deeds as a human being only and become entitled to *moksha* (Baikunth). Therefore, there is no other greater sin than destroying our human body by torturing it.⁵⁴

Thus, Sikh Guru Strongly condemned sati and to urge or force women to become sati for the sake of custom or tradition was utterly useless.

Sikh ideology right from its inception had its basis in pragmatic approach to life and faith unencumbered by hollow rituals and superstitions. The Sikh Gurus could find no justification for a voluntary act of suicide and its social acceptance and glorification. They understood that this tradition was merely one of the several machinations aimed at exploitation and abuse of women for socio-economic reasons. The Sikh Gurus had moral, spiritual and practical objections to this practice. This opposition to the tradition of Sati was a very meaningful intervention in socio-cultural discourse in favour of one of the most victimized and oppressed sections of the society.

⁵² G.S.G.S, p.787.

*Satee-aa ayhi na aakhee-anih jo marhi-aa lag jalannih.
Nanak satee-aa jaanee-anih je birhay chot marannih.
Bhee so satee-aa jaanee-an seel santokh rahannih.
Sayvan saa-ee aapnaa nit uth samhaalannih.*

⁵³ S.G.G.S., p.185.

*Kaho naanak jin pari-o parmaysar kar jaani-aa.
Dhan satee dargeh parvaani-aa.*

⁵⁴ Giani Gyan Singh, *Twarikh Guru Khalsa*, Part-1, Language Department, Punjab Parkashak, Patiala, p. 1092H

*fJe f; y ysoh wo frnk Tj dh fJ; sh; sh j Dk ulj dh; h; pxh j NkTld/; / TMe i d Tj rp(i h
gk; gSB nkJ/ sk wj koki i h B/ nkfyk Gkjh f; y' nksw xksh wjk gkgh j jk j? wBly dj
pkopo jZE Bj h nkTdh Jj Bo BkokJDh dj j b; ko/i hnk i s dh; odko j? J/ /ftu PG eow
i g sg eoe/; or d/ Gr Gr/ i kd/ j B, s/ J/ / Bkb Grsh TgkPBK eoe/ eo pefn d/ Gkrh pD
i kJhdk j? pkeh; s; r eoe/ pj w frnkB dhok Bdh d/; wd ftu; wkTD tKc/ Jj i ht gvwPo
ftu nGd j' i kdk j? fi; dh ewkjh eoh j'jh fsBK bek ftu Grh i kdj j? n? / nfs Tsw; ho Bf
nsh ePN d/ eo BPN eo dDk J/ pj w j zfsnk sl tXe/ j b eN/ wj k gkg j?*

Widow Remarriage

During the time of Sikh Gurus, widows lead a pathetic life. As the trend of child marriage was prevalent, some girls become widows at a very young age. Normally, such girls were considered to be cursed. They were blamed for the death of their husbands and were strictly prohibited from remarrying. Such girls were forced to cut their hair, wear dirty clothes and live a very uncouth life and do the meanest work in the household.⁵⁵ Such girls were subjected to a life of isolation and seclusion. They were almost treated as outcasts and were forced to snap all connections with public life. Alberuni says, '*if a wife loses her husband by death, she cannot marry man. She has only to choose between two things- either to remain a widow as long as she lives or to burn herself, and the latter eventually is considered the preferable, because as a widow she is ill- treated as long as she lives*'.⁵⁶

There are no direct references to widow re-marriage or re-marriage of a separated woman in Guru Nanak's Bani, but on the basis of one verse in His bani, where it is stated that a widow woman can get satisfaction only from her husband and from none of else, it can be surmised that Guru Nanak did favour the idea of widow remarriage and resettlement in a honourable family life. In the following verse, the characteristic trait of a widowed woman is given as 'submitting her body to a stranger to gratify lust to obtain money'. Without any implication for widow's position, the legitimate matrimonial relationship is mentioned as praise worthy. Thus, Guru Nanak was of the view that in order to prevent a widow from falling a victim to temptation, opportunities should be created for widow remarriage, so the widowed women are able to lead normal and socially respectable lives.⁵⁷

Like an unchaste woman, gives her body to someone else.

Keeping mind in sex or money, she submits herself to others.

*She can never be satisfied with other than her husband.*⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Gurdeep Kaur, *Political Ideas of Sikh Gurus*, Deep and Deep Publications, New Delhi, 1990, p.7.

⁵⁶ Harbans Kaur Sagoo, *op.cit.*, p.142.

⁵⁷ Harinder Kaur Sekhon, "Women in Sikhism", in *Seminar* 476, April 1999, p. 34.

⁵⁸ SGGS, P. 226.

Jio-o tan bidhvaa par ka-o day-ee.

Kaam daam chit par vas say-ee.

Bin pir taripat na kabahoon sho-ee.

The Sikh Gurus were pained to see the plight of the widows and their exploitation at the hands of people, in the name of religion. Guru Amardas stood for the right of the widows to live as human beings in their own right after the death of their husbands. He could not bear the grave injustice against the unfortunate widows. He strictly prohibited the practice of immolation of the widow on the pyre of the dead husband, and encouraged widow remarriage. Guru Arjun Dev also arranged the wedding of his disciple Bhai Hema with a widow.⁵⁹

Sikh code of conduct by SGPC explicitly states that a widow, if she so desires, has the right to get married again: *"If a woman's husband has died, she may, if she so wishes, finding a match suitable for her, remarry. For a Sikh man whose wife has died, similar ordinance obtains."*⁶⁰

Female Infanticide/ Female Foeticide

In technical term female infanticide means intentionally killing of the girl child after her birth. The practice is as old as most of the cultures in the world and is prevalent all over the world in varying degrees. With the advancement of science and technology the practice of aborting a foetus or foeticide has become more common. Technology aided sex determination and killing of a girl child before birth has assumed alarming proportions and emerged as a new way of depriving females of the right to life.

Various socio-cultural factors were responsible for female infanticide. During medieval times, Hindus adopted the practice of female infanticide because of feudal mindset in which women were equated with the honour of a household. With a desire to save themselves from the risk of their girls losing chastity at the hand of their enemies and foreign invaders, families with feudal and conservative patriarchal values resorted to infanticide. Marriage of a female in another family produced a sense of inferiority among the parents of the female. The Rajputs resorted to this practice due to the prohibition of marriage between families of the same clan, endless wars and feuds with neighboring tribes together with the sentiment that an

⁵⁹ Prabhjot Kaur, op.cit., p.88.

⁶⁰ *Sikh Rehat Maryada*, Shiromini Gurudwara Parbandhak Committee, Amritsar, p.21
"fi ; fJ; soh dk Gosk ekb^tL; j' i kJ/, Tj ukj/sk : r to dy e/gBo ; i r, eo bt/ f; ly dh fJ; soh wo i kJ/sk Tj bJh Gh fJj 'j jw j? "

unworthy match lowers the prestige of the bride's father. Dowry system is also counted as one of the reasons behind female infanticide.⁶¹

Sikh Gurus were strongly against such criminal elimination of small girls. Given the stress on humanity in Sikh ideology, girls were not seen as unwanted burden. Sikh Gurus stood for a healthy balanced society with equal rights for all members, girls as well as boys. Sikh philosophy and culture does not discriminate between a girl child and a male child. A girl's legitimate human right to be born and to live a decent life finds full recognition in Sikh culture.

Guru Hargobind Sahib, the sixth guru, realizing the positive role played by daughters in the family setup, requested his mother to pray for the birth of a daughter: "A family without a modest girl is doomed"⁶² One account in Sikh history records that when Guru Har Rai, the seventh Sikh guru, found an abandoned baby girl, he brought her home, adopted her and brought her up like his own daughter. The girl named Roop Kaur grew up to be an academician, a writer, the first Sikh woman historian who put on record everything the guru said.⁶³

The Sikh gurus gave specific instructions that no one of their disciples will indulge in female infanticide. Guru Gobind Singh ordained them not to have any social relationship with a person who kills his daughter. Sikh code of conduct clearly states the Sikh position on the issue: "A Sikh shall not kill his daughter, nor shall he maintain any relationship with the killer of a daughter." Bhai Kahan Singh Nabha, The noted author of Sikh encyclopedia, puts on record: "In Sikhism a daughter enjoys equal status with a son. A killer of a daughter is to be excommunicated from the community." But unfortunately, disregarding the dictate of the guru in this regard, the Sikhs too have started indulging in the evil practice of female foeticide. Taking notice of this unhealthy trend, *Akal Takhat* (The highest spiritual body of the Sikhs) issued a stricture against this evil practice vide memo no. 998, dated 18th April, 2001, declaring female feticide/infanticide to be a practice that has no place in the Sikh socio-religious milieu, and anybody indulging in the practice should be socially boycotted.⁶⁴

⁶¹ *Women in India/en.wikipedia.org/wiki/*, Retrieved on April, 22, 2013.

⁶² Prabhjot Kaur, *op.cit.*, p.93.

⁶³ Simran Kaur, *Parsidh Sikh Bibiyan*, Singh Brothers, Amritsar, 1991, p.126.

⁶⁴ Prabhjot Kaur, *op.cit.*, p.93-94.

Dowry

The word 'Dowry' has been derived from the Latin word 'Dos' which means to give, to offer. Dowry has been recognized as one of the biggest social menaces linked with the oppression of women. Moreover, the practice is deep rooted and deeply entrenched and people fail to discern that it is morally unjustified. Dowry is a form of property, but it is a specific kind of property that a woman brings with her when she gets married. Land, cash, jewellery are perhaps more traditional forms of dowry- 'dahej' or 'daaj' as it is called in Punjab.⁶⁵ The term dowry subsumes all the expenses that the parents of a bride are expected to lavish on the bridegroom and his family. Mostly dowry rather than being a part of the marriage ceremony is a lifelong obligation of the parents of the girl towards the family of the bridegroom.

It is clear that the custom of dowry has been prevalent in all times and cultures in one or the other form. In fact, the dowry system, which started as a safeguard for the rights of women, has assumed menacing proportions. Insatiable greed for acquiring more and more money and a false sense of social prestige is at the root of the problem. In recent years, the dowry system in India has widely spread both horizontally and vertically. Horizontally, in the sense that it has spread to such regions and communities, which until recently, did not have it, and which followed the bride price system. Vertically, because that there has been a sharp increase in the amount of dowry demanded and given.⁶⁶

The Sikh Gurus recognized the fallaciousness and false pride associated with the practice of giving and taking dowry. Such a practice was unacceptable to them as it violated the principles of spiritual harmony in the institution of marriage. The Sikh Gurus were open in their denouncement and condemnation of the dowry system as it was a manifestation of greed, ostentation and wanton display of wealth and false pride. According to the Sikh code of ethics, a Sikh's daughters should marry a Sikh and neither a girl nor a boy should be married for financial gain. It is stated in the Holy Scripture that the devotee supplicates for Divine name-as the rare gift to be given by the father to her daughter in marriage, because all other things offered as dowry are false egoism and a vain show and the real dowry is blessing with the

⁶⁵ Dowry, <http://www.asias-ource.org/asip/dowry.cfm>. Retrieved on March 10, 2014.

⁶⁶ Fatima Entesham Siddiqi and Sarla Ranganathan, *Handbook on Women and Rights*, Kanishka Publishers, New Delhi, 1999, p. 602.

Divine name.⁶⁷ The forth Sikh Guru, Guru Ramdas expressed in clear terms about the nature of dowry, a daughter should ask from her father. He said:

O! my father, my Master is God, give me to Him as gift in my dowry

*Give me clothes of God, the grandeur of God, which will fashion my marriage.*⁶⁸

He condemned the ostentatious display of dowry in strong words:

*If Manmukh displays and shows the dowry of other times, that would be ego, the false pretension.*⁶⁹

Thus it is clear that the Sikh code of conduct and ethics does not endorse any wasteful show of wealth in the marriage ceremony. These codes forbid the parents of the groom to encumber the parents of the bride with unreasonable demands. Marriage is a union of souls as per the will of the God and it should be solemnized with the purest spirit without any extraneous or material conditions.

*The marriage party should have as small a number of people as the girl's people desire. The two sides should greet each other singing sacred hymns and finally by the Sikh greetings of Waheguru Ji ka Khalsa, Waheguru ji ki Fateh.*⁷⁰

On the other hand, the instruction is that:

*No Sikh should accept a match for his/her son or daughter for monetary considerations.*⁷¹

Thus, the Sikh Gurus linked marriage with piety and not with vulgar exhibition of wealth. For them marriage is the most sacred and pious social bond. Marriage must have its basis in love, affection and worship of God through whose will the union has come about. In this way, not only did the Sikh Gurus try to purge

⁶⁷ Shashi Bala, "Status of Women: A Moral Obligation: Perspectives from Guru Granth Sahib," *The Sikh Review*, Vol. 58:9, No. 681, The Sikh Cultural Centre, Calcutta, September 2010, p.27.

⁶⁸ S.G.G.S., p.78-79.

Har parabh mayray babulaa har dayvhu daan mai daajo.

Har kaprho har sobhaa dayvhu jit savrai mayraa kaaajo.

⁶⁹ S.G.G.S., p.79.

Hor manmukh daaj je rakh dikhaaleh so koorh ahankaar kach paajo.

⁷⁰ *Sikh Rehat Maryada*, Shiromini Gurudawara Parbandhak Committee, Amritsar, p.19

"fi sB/EV/rkdwH bVeh tkbk wrkt/ TjB/Bkb b?e/bVek ; j p/xo i kt! dJ hI gk; hI r?ppkDh d/ Ppd rkJ/i kD s/csJ ri kJh i kt! "

⁷¹ *Ibid*, p.21.

"bVe/i k bVeh dk ; z r g? k b?Bk eo! "

the institution of marriage of evil and corrupt practices but also made an effort to lay a foundation of an egalitarian social set-up in which social customs do not sanction financial exploitation of one set of people at the hands of another.

Purdah

‘Purdah’ is a Persian word which literally means ‘a curtain’. The basic purpose of the purdah or curtain is to cover something and save it from exhibition. However, in the Indian context, Purdah has very deep socio-cultural and religious connotations. Purdah, which was widely prevalent in Islam, has been an institutional and religiously sanctioned tradition of keeping covered. The Purdah system restricted women from interacting with other members of her clan. A woman who confined herself to her home or remained in Purdah was appreciated by the society. It was a common saying of those days. *Andar baithi Lakh di, Te bahar gayi kakh di* (one who stays at home is worth a lakh, but the one who wanders out is worth a straw). To quote Amir Khusrau, “*The good woman is one who habitually observes purdah and wears Burqa (mantle) on her face. A woman who used to wander about in streets is not a woman, rather she is a bitch. The woman should maintain Purdah (privacy) in their houses even being as narrow and as constricted as eye of a needle ...*” The unmarried girls were perhaps not expected to observe Purdah. The Muslim women observed purdah with greater rigidity than the Hindu ones.⁷² Thus, Purdah system was another highly common social evil which was adopted by the society of those times. It was a violation of a basic human right of freedom. Apart from this it was an imposition and not a choice made of free will. Purdah can also be taken as a very important symbol of the lack of freedom and restrictions which were imposed on women in those days.

Guru Amar Das, made it a condition that no woman wearing a veil could come to see Him because wearing a veil by women meant that they were the property of their husbands – a concept strongly disapproved by Guru Sahib.⁷³ He did not even allow the queen of Haripur to come into the congregation wearing a veil. Guru Nanak and Saint Kabir have both condemned the practice of keeping women

⁷² Harbans Kaur Sagoo, *op.cit.*, p. 133.

⁷³ Devinder Singh Sekhon, *Philosophy of Guru Granth Sahib*, Anmol Publications, New Delhi, 2005, p. 301.

veiled. Both Saint Kabir and Guru Nanak had a progressive consciousness and were critical of purdah system and gender based discrimination. Saint Kabir says, false pride has been attached to it by the people.

*Stop, stop O! my wife, one who wears veil.
At the last time, you will not be even near me.
Your predecessor also used to veil her face.
You ought not to be like her.
This veil-wearing thus is useful, that for
five or ten days, it is said, that good
bride has come. .⁷⁴*

These lines clearly indicate that the saint- poet of medieval India did not see any merit in the prevailing custom of wearing a *ghoongat* or *purdah* but to please the members of one's in-laws or people in general. Very few married women could take the bold step of casting aside the *ghoongat* which had become a symbol of respectability in the society. Still some women in the society could challenge the custom of wearing a *ghoongat* and make themselves free, as is clear from the following couplet of Guru Nanak.

*My dying chastity has died, and I live with unveiled face.
My mother-in-law is mad and crazy my head, my doubts
in head are over.⁷⁵*

Although, the lines have a metaphoric import, yet the allusion to the married woman discarding her veil does affirm the possibility of doing away with it. Guru Nanak and Guru Amar Das had preached extensively against purdah, the women of their disciples generally discarded it and moved freely without a veil. Freedom from the restrictive disadvantages of Purdah opened endless possibilities for women. Those who abjured the veil became proactive in the social sphere. These women

⁷⁴ S.G.G.S., p. 484.
*Rahu rahu ree bahuree-aa ghoonghat jin kaadhahi.
Ant kee baar lahaigee na aadhahi.
Ghoonghat kaadh ga-ee tayree aagai.
Un kee gail tohi jin laagai.
Ghoonghat kaadhay kee ihai badaa-ee.
Din das paanch bahoo bhalay aa-ee.*

⁷⁵ S.G.G.S., p. 931.
*Laaj marantee mar ga-ee ghoonghat khol chalee.
Saas divaanee baavree sir tay sank talee.*

made very meaningful and constructive contributions to the society and worked for its reconstruction. Among these women first and foremost were the consorts of the Gurus. There were others who acted as religious leaders and even as warriors and social reformers.

Child Marriage

Although, there is no hymn which indicates the explicit rejection of Sikh Gurus against the child marriage in *Sri Guru Ganth Sahib*, yet in their general opinion and overall approach, Sikh Gurus were strongly against this custom of early marriage. The injunction against child marriage forms a part of the *Rehat Maryada*. The Gurus by urging their Sikhs not to marry their children at an early age, helped women attain a better standard of life. This particularly ensured that the childhood of girls did not come to a premature closure. The parents were advised to arrange the marriage only when the boys and the girls had attained maturity and could understand the significance of a marriage.

Saint Kabir has expressed his views on the equality of women when he disapproving the custom of circumcision among the Muslims. According to him, if conversion into Islam requires circumcision, then what can be done about women as they cannot be circumcised? So, (because of this inability), it is better to stay as Hindu.⁷⁶

Guru Gobind Singh's contribution to the cause of gender equality is immense. Guru Gobind Singh advocated equality of men and women in all walks of life. He emphasized this aspect of equality particularly at the time of the birth of the Khalsa. He not only established equality of all men but also brought women on equal footing with men. He said that the woman was to be considered neither intellectually nor physically inferior to men. She was baptized in the same way as the men and her obligations were also same as that of man. She was allowed to read and interpret the scriptures. She was given the right to participate as well as lead religious congregations. It was a complete departure from the traditions of all world systems and social concepts prevailing at that time.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Devinder Singh Sekhon, *op.cit.*, p. 299.

⁷⁷ Amarjit Singh Narang, "Sikhism and Human Rights", *Studies in Sikhism and Comparative Religion*, Vol. XXX, No. 1, New Delhi, January-June 2011, p. 34.

At a time when it was common for marauders and invaders to victimize women, Guru Gobind Singh forbade his men from in any way disrespecting or hurting the women of the enemies. The Sikhs had commands from the Guru to treat them with as much respect as they would give to their own womenfolk. Guru Gobind Singh had told the Sikhs that respect for women had to be integral to their values. He had planned to take the *Panth* (Sikh community) to the pinnacles of glory and for that it was important that they had a strong moral character. The community that does not respect women cannot achieve any degree of glory.⁷⁸ The author Niranjan Singh Sathi relates an incident when the Sikhs complained to Guru Gobind Singh that the Turks had abused the Hindu women. The Guru replied that they may do whatever. The Sikhs must learn to respect all women. It was imperative for them to give utmost respect to women, as without their imbibing this quality, it was not possible for him to fulfill his mission of taking the *Panth* to its highest glory.⁷⁹

Guru Gobind Singh emphasized equality particularly at the time of the birth of *Khalsa*. He invited Mata Sahib Deva to put sugar bubbles in the nectar when he had created *Khalsa* at Anandpur Sahib during 1699.⁸⁰ Guru Gobind Singh gave Amrit to men and women alike. At the time of *Amrit* every woman is given the name 'Kaur' meaning princess. Through this overture of inclusion Guru Gobind intended to enhance the status of woman in the eyes of all men. A Sikh woman is an independent entity. She is merged with her husband and at the same time keeps her independence. She is an individual in her own right. She does not lose herself by ending her identity. She remains Kaur till death and does not lead her life as Mrs. so and so as in the west.⁸¹

Guru Tegh Bahadur, in an unprecedented step, in the sixteenth century, purchased the land of village Mukhailpur to build what we today know as Anandpur Sahib, in the name of Bebe Nanki. The former name of Anandpur Sahib was Chakk

⁷⁸ Prabhjot Kaur, *op.cit.*, p. 49.

⁷⁹ Niranjan Singh Sathi, *Charan Chalyo Marg Gobind: Sri Guru Gobind Singh Ji De Safran Da Prati Din Itihas*, Lahore Book Shop, Ludhiana, 2010, p.10H

gB f; xB pM? rB ykBl. fppI sbe GrI fj dtkBl.
f; y pdbk b/Gbk i BkI. e: I rB Pk; sqpoi j NkJK
; fB ; fsrB pb/fs; pbl. j w b/i kBl gE Tuko/
Bj m nXrs fpy?gukt? : k s/ebwb eoB j Nkt?

⁸⁰ Gurcharan Singh Jaito, "Equal Status for Women in Sikhism", *The Sikh Review*, Vol. 58: 9, No. 681, The Sikh Cultural Centre, Calcutta, September 2010, p. 84.

⁸¹ Diwan Singh, *The Highway of Sikhism*, People Publishing House, Chandigarh, 1995, p. 121.

Nanki. By doing so, the Ninth Master asserted two rights: One, to gender equality and secondly, a woman's right to property. In comparison, British women obtained the right to property in the 19th century. In India, women do have this right, but equal rights of succession to property are still to be fully and properly codified.⁸²

ROLE OF PROMINENT SIKH WOMEN IN HISTORY

Sikh ideology has laid a lot of emphasis upon the educational and economic empowerment of women on an equal footing with men. The Sikh Gurus opined that everyone has a right to get education and work according to his or her capacities without any discrimination on the basis of sex. Education enlightens the people and the Sikh Gurus gave it utmost importance in the building up of a healthy character. They placed a great emphasis on equal education for men and women because both are the basis of family life and are responsible for the smooth running of the family. The Gurus appointed women as preachers by bestowing '*Manjis*' and '*Pirris*'. All this is evidence of the modernity of the Sikh Gurus and of their ideology. The liberalism of the Gurus and their progressive ideals particularly on the question of gender were unprecedented in contemporary times. The Sikh Gurus gave women an equal place by assigning important religious duties to them. It is quite possible that the Gurus encouraged women to teach *Gurmukhi*, singing of hymns and preaching the Gurus message to women in particular. Such participation was important for emancipation of women from the patriarchal and feudal restrictions.

Role of Sikh Women in Decision Making

The important traditions of Sikhism were not conceived in exclusion to any of the two genders. They were inclusive in spirit. Guru Nanak welcomed women to '*Sangat*' and '*Pangat*'. Sikh women were given the authority to issue and receive the *Hukamnamas* and voice their opinion in political deliberations and important political matters. It is a unique feature of Sikh ideology that the wives of the Gurus made very important contributions in the evolution of the Sikh Panth. In its basic and essential character, Sikhism does not consider religious practices to be monopoly or exclusive domain of men. In many cases women even acted as

⁸² Jagmohan Singh, "Sikh Women in Seva: An Unbiased Perspective", *The Sikh Review*, Vol. 51: 9, No. 597, The Sikh Cultural Centre, Calcutta, September 2003, pp. 46-47.

administrators and managers. Mata Khivi was the sole administrator of the very important institution of 'Langar'. The entire history of the Sikhs is replete with instances of women engaging themselves in socio-religious activities. Unlike other religions the visibility and presence of women in Sikh history is conspicuous. Moreover, Sikhism was successful in dismantling the gender based barriers. Women did not contribute in the running and organization of community kitchen only but also acted as missionaries and warriors in the critical periods and by doing so they proved their leadership qualities.

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. While the Gurus were busy helping people in their spiritual progress the Guru-Mahals were actively involved in creating an appropriate atmosphere for religious propagation. The consorts of the Gurus have contributed to the Sikh religion in several ways. They looked after the domestic affairs of their family during the missionary tours of the Gurus; assisted them in the implementation of ideals; accompanied the Gurus during their preaching; helped the Gurus in making an impartial choice of successor for Guruship; did works of social welfare; gave sacrifices of the Guru – husband, of son and of grandsons – for the cause of the *panth*; and served as beacon lights to the *panth*.⁸³ In the building up of the character of the Sikh nation, women connected with the Guru families played a very important role directly or indirectly in the propagation of Guru's message. Invaluable contributions made by those women are discussed below:

The mother of Guru Nanak Dev and his sister Bebe Nanaki (1464-1518 AD) were two Godly inspired women, who recognized and adored supreme divinity in Baba Nanak. They played very important role in encouraging young Guru Nanak to pursue his lifelong mission. Bebe Nanaki's contribution goes back before the inception of Sikh religion even in the most incipient form. She was the first to recognize Guru Nanak's saintliness. It was Bebe Nanaki who recognized the prodigious talent of the Guru for music and bought him a *rabab* (a stringed musical instrument). Guru Nanak's hymns set in musical compositions composed in the course of his travels with his companion Mardana have enriched the spiritual lives of the common people with their divine quality and wisdom.

⁸³ Shashi Bala, "Sikh Spirituality and Contribution of Women", *The Sikh Review*, Vol. 49:11, No. 575, The Sikh Cultural Centre, Calcutta, November 2001, p. 25.

There is another aspect of Bebe Nanaki's role. When Guru Nanak was away travelling the whole region, sister Nanaki took care of his family. She proved to be a highly supportive sister. Bebe Nanaki took care of her brother's family even after her marriage. She showed equal responsibility towards her in-laws and the family of her brother. Given the nature of society and the times in which she live, this can be considered to be a great contribution to society. It was because of her support and commitment that Guru Nanak could succeed in his mission and Sikh ideology to the glorious heights. Bebe Nanaki is a perfect model of independent, caring, intelligent and highly sensitive female sensitivity. Her influence on Guru Nanak was profound. The presence of Bebe Nanaki in Guru Nanak's life can be seen in terms of the presence of a friend, philosopher and guide. Guru Nanak and Bebe Nanaki's relationship is a model of trust, love and care in a brother sister relationship. Brother sister relationship is one of the most beautiful relationship in Punjabi culture and the credit goes to Bebe Nanaki. On the other side, the role played by Mata Sulakhani (1473-1560) wife of Guru Nanak Dev, is also unique. When Guru Nanak Dev was all set to leave his house for the dissemination of his teachings, Mata Sulkhani's patience bore the will of her Guru husband with fortitude and patience. She played a very prominent role in religious and social reformation initiated by Guru Nanak. He travelled far and wide to spread his revolutionary message of religious liberation and purity. His travels would not have been possible if Mata Sulkhani had not taken care the home and hearth in his absence.

Mata Khivi (1506-1582), Wife of Guru Angad Dev is quite possibly the first woman of her era who ever worked outside her immediate family home and obligations at a time when her children were very young. She handled both roles admirably well. It is time that Sikhs acknowledge her very important contribution.⁸⁴ She possessed exemplary management power. She was a tireless worker who managed the affairs of the 'Langar' (common kitchen) and set an example of 'Seva' (Voluntary service). She helped the Guru in establishing the infant Sikh community on a stronger footing.⁸⁵

The contribution of Mata Khivi in propagating the tradition of *Langar* of community kitchen is outstanding. In Sri Guru Granth Sahib, only praises of God

⁸⁴ Meenakshi Rajan, *Spiritual Warriors: Eminent Sikh Women*, Waris Shah Foundation, Amritsar, 2011, p. 56.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

are find. But it is owing to Mata Khivi's commitment and untiring spirit that her name finds a mention in Sri Guru Granth Sahib. She has the honour of being the only lady from Guru's family whose name is recorded in the Holy Scripture.

*He is the husband of mother Khivi,
Who is sustaining the earth.*⁸⁶

Mata Khivi's claim to glory also rests in the pious traits that she possessed. When Guru Angad decided to bestow Guruship on Baba Amardas, the most devout of his Sikhs, his son Datu protested. He considered himself to be the rightful heir. She instead of favouring her son or swerving from the path of duty because of maternal impulses – exhibited firmness and resolve. She counseled her son and saved the situation from becoming acrimonious. Mata Khivi can be held as a model of dedication and service. It was her indefatigable efforts and zeal that established the institution of Langar as one of the most important Sikh traditions. Through her wisdom she could understand the meaningfulness of the tradition in promoting brotherhood and amity.

Bibi Amro also has a very important place in the perpetuation of Sikh heritage. Bibi Amro was the daughter of Guru Angad, who was pivotal 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. It is a very important contribution of Bibi Amro to the Sikh community.⁸⁷ Thus, she was considered as the first women preacher of Sikh religion. She through her personal devotion and love for the Guru's teachings helped Guru Amar Das to achieve salvation and did a great service by introducing the future third Guru to the Panth.

Guru Amar Das's Mahal, Mata Mansa Devi (D.1569) worked for the removal of all discriminations against women like Purdah and Sati were very common and prevalent in those days. Mata Mansa Devi, used to accompany the third Guru on pilgrimages. Because of her encounter with the society she could empathize with the victims of Purdah system and Sati. She also saw the plight of the child widows. On witnessing the atrocities against women, the couple did endeavour to put an end to all the evils. In short, Mata Mansa Devi took up the responsibility of generating awareness among women's world. Guru Amardas was convinced that

⁸⁶ S.G.G.S., p.967.

Maataa kheevee saho so-ay jin go-ay uthaalee.

⁸⁷ Shashi Bala, Sikh Spirituality and Contribution of Women, *op.cit.*, p. 26.

no teachings can take roots until and unless they are accepted by the women folk. When Guru Amardas established 22 centres (*Manjis*) for the propagation of religion, he honoured several women and made them incharge of the centres. It is only the Sikh religion which has the credit for making women responsible for spreading the faith.⁸⁸ Thus, Guru Amardas acknowledged the administrative ability of the women and made them politically empower.

Bibi Bhani (1535-1598) the daughter of Guru Amar Das was an embodiment of devotion and humility and who spearheaded the task of organizing Langar and started the tradition of hereditary Guruship by asking the blessings from Guru Amardas, her father, whom she served like a son. Bibi Bhani also proved by the way she cared for her father that there was no difference between a son and a daughter. Both can equally serve their parents. There is superstition in Punjabi culture that a father does not get any service done from her daughter. However, Bibi Bhani set an example and she used to serve her father before marriage and kept serving him even after her marriage. Like this, Guru Amardas broke away from a social practice of disowning girl's service after they were married. In Hindu tradition, it was considered to be incorrect even to drink water at the home of one's married daughter. The relationship of Guru Amardas with his daughter is clear departure from the conservatism of such beliefs. Bibi Bhani and Guru Amardas worked in close association with each other for a constructive social cause. Like this they rejected the social practice of treating boys and girls differently

It was a time of crisis when Guru Arjan Dev was taken into custody on the order of Jehangir. Bibi Bhani maintained her composure. When the Guru was tortured and the news of his martyrdom reached the family, she did not let her daughter-in-law Mata Ganga, lose heart. Instead, she very calmly prepared herself for her son's martyrdom and taught her eleven year old grandson, Hargobind, to abide by God's will. Bibi Bhani gave an ample proof of her emotional strength at a time when women were considered to be weak.

Mata Ganga (D. 1621) the consort of Guru Arjan Dev, the fifth Guru, has a very unique lesson to teach by her heroism. She was the wife of the first martyr of the Sikh faith. She was the living example of bravery. She demonstrated heroic spirit in the face of crisis. She received another blow when her young son, who had taken

⁸⁸ M.K. Gill, p.29- 30.

on the mantle of Guruship after the martyrdom of his father, was taken a prisoner in the Gwalior fort by emperor Jehangir. She guided the Sikhs in his absence and managed the affairs with great dexterity. This is clear evidence of highly cogently crisis management skills possessed by Mata Ganga. She handled the crisis in a very able manner and dealt with the situation with the help of her strong will power and leadership abilities. When Jehangir realized his mistake in nursing enmity with the Guru's family, he personally came to seek her forgiveness. His mind did not rest in peace till she clearly told him that she had forgiven him. Jehangir offered to get *Akal Takhat* constructed out of funds from the royal treasury, but she declined his offer of contribution, saying that only *sangat* was empowered to contribute for this cause. That she could confidently engage in a dialogue with the emperor of the time and make her stand very clear to him, speaks of her independent personality, her awakened mind and her firm commitment to the principles of Sikhism, of which she had a deep and thorough knowledge.⁸⁹

Mata Nanaki (1598-1678) was the consort of Guru Hargobind and the respected mother of Guru Tegh Bahadur. After the death of Guru Hargobind, the family of Dheermall became the arch enemies of Guru Tegh Bahadur. Dheermall used to think that *Gurgaddi* was their hereditary right and he should get it. Mata Nanki wanted to save her child from the enmity of Dheermall. She brought her saintly son to her parents' house and lived in great poverty.⁹⁰ This once again clearly proves that it was the astute and intelligent handling of the situation by Mata Nanaki which helped in dealing with a very challenging crisis. Gur Har Rai's Mahal, Mata Kishan Kaur (Estimated b/w 1590-1646) was the mother of the Eighth Guru Harikrishan. When Guru Har Rai left for his heavenly abode she took care of her son. When the child Guru became afflicted with small pox, she ensured that the programme of the remembrance of God (Nam-Simran) was regularly followed. In this way, Mata Kishan Kaur took care of Guru Harkrishan's health and also discharged all the social responsibilities. She proved to be excellent organizer and a very balanced personality. She maintained a balance in her approach to her family problem and community service.

Mata Gujri (1624-1705) was the consort of the ninth Guru and the mother of Guru Gobind Singh. She is the first woman martyr in Sikh religion, and she retains

⁸⁹ Prabhjot Kaur, *op.cit.*, p. 119.

⁹⁰ <http://www.sikh-heritage.co.uk/personalities/sikhwomen/prosikhwomen.htm>, Retrieved on June 6, 2014.

this honour to this day. Mata Gujri inspired many women. She was a great educationist. She taught her family and everyone around. She propagated the teachings of the Gurus and infused the spirit of courage in the followers of Sikhism. She inspired the Guru's followers to lay down their life for principles. After the martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur in 1675, the responsibility of looking after the education of the nine-year old Guru Gobind Singh and the leadership of the Sikh community, at that crucial and dangerous time, fell on the shoulders of Mata Gujri. She demonstrated strong ability to cope with crisis. She discharged her duties superbly and showed remarkable astuteness and far sightedness in dealing with external and internal dangers to the Sikh community and proved her leadership qualities.⁹¹ She was a very good administrator. *Hukamnamas* issued by her, proved her wisdom in handling the political matters. She was also the pivot of the family. She imbibed the values based on Sikh ideology in her younger grandchildren Baba Zorawar Singh and Fateh Singh. It was Mata Gujri's teachings of courage, conviction and steadfastness that infused the spirit of sacrifice in them. Mata Gujri holds an unenviable position as wife of a martyr, mother of a martyr, grandmother of martyrs and of being a martyr herself. She has set an example of courage and patience which every woman should strive to follow.

Mata Sundari (1667-1747), wife of Guru Gobind Singh, provided leadership to the Sikh Panth in both religious and political affairs, after Guru Gobind Singh. She played very active role in managing political matters. In this, most crucial period of history, Mata Sundri dealt with the pretenders and aspirants of Gurudom very strictly and preserved the Guruship given to *Guru Granth Sahib*. She also resolved the internal political squabbles that were threatening to disintegrate the entire *Khalsa Panth* and united and inspired the *Khalsa* which became a formidable force. She guided the destiny of the Panth with great courage and resolution. Thus, at that time she played a very prominent role as a strong political leader.

After the evacuation of Anandpur fort in December 1705, Mata Sundri, along with Mata Sahib Kaur, was escorted by Bhai Mani Singh to Delhi. She rejoined Guru Gobind Singh in 1706 at Talwandi Sabo, where she heard the news of the martyrdom of the *Sahibzadas* as also of the passing away of her aged mother-in-law,

⁹¹ www.globalstudies.net, Retrieved on April 5, 2014.

Mata Gujri. Guru Gobind Singh directed her to stay at Delhi when he left for the South. After passing away of Guru Gobind Singh at Nanded in October 1708, the Sikhs looked up to her guidance. She appointed Bhai Mani Singh to manage the sacred shrines at Amritsar and also commissioned him to collect the writings of Guru Gobind Singh. She also issued under her own seal and authority a number of edicts (*Hukamnamas*). There are nine *Hukamnamas* issued by Mata Sundri and these edicts were respected by the entire *Khalsa*.⁹² The most significant task completed by Mata Sundri was that she conducted a thorough search for Tenth Guru's works and writings, and thus compiled the *Dasam Granth*. She also persuaded the devout Sikhs to prepare copies of the holy hymns of the Great *Adi Granth*. She preserved the Sikh heritage for the future generations.⁹³

It can be said that Mata Sundri was a highly capable woman who exemplifies fortitude, sacrifice and intelligence. It was her astute leadership that saved the Sikh religion from disintegrating in one of the gravest crisis. She was well equipped with the qualities of leadership. She is even today revered as an epitome of strength, moral resolve and firmness. She taught generations to come how to show forbearance in the face of tragedy and keep the Sikh spirit of 'Chardi Kala' (optimism in all circumstances) ablaze.

Mata Sahib Kaur (1738-1747), spiritual consort of Guru Gobind Singh, called 'Sahib Devan' before partaking of Amrit, is the spiritual mother of the *Khalsa*. She pursued the ideal of bowing before the Divine Will. Modesty and affection were the unique qualities through which she ably guided the *Khalsa* in their times of crisis. After the death of Guru Gobind Singh, Mata Sahib Kaur helped Mata Sundari to conduct the affairs of the Sikh Panth and provided the leadership whenever necessary. She also helped Mata Sundari in compiling the creative works of Guru Gobind Singh. She issued nine *Hukamnamas* during her period. Most of her edicts pertain to the organization of langar and other issues of general welfare. These edicts were respected by the whole *Khalsa*.⁹⁴ Her skill of issuing *Hukamnamas* is the proof

⁹² Prabhjot Kaur, *op.cit.*, p. 126.

⁹³ M.K. Gill, *Mata Sundri: The Great Mother*, Progress Publishers, Delhi, 1988, p. 88.

⁹⁴ www.sikh-heritage.co.uk/personalities/sikhwomen/prosikhwomen.htm. Retrieved on June 6th, 2014.

that she was politically active and possessed excellent management abilities to tackle the political matters.

It becomes amply clear from the discussion above that the consorts of the Sikh Gurus played a mammoth role in eradicating the prevalent social evils in order to make the society a better place. The practical aspect of the Guru's Mission was looked after by the efforts of the Guru Mahals. Along with these valiant and highly capable consorts of the Sikh Gurus, there were numerous examples of other Sikh women who contributed immensely in the perpetuation of Sikh ideology.

Role of Sikh Women as Warriors and as Politicians:

Sikh women have been active in the public as well as private sphere right from the start of the Sikh movement. In fact, no area of public activity has been left untouched by them. Though in Guru's time, the role of women was more focused in socio-religious sphere; they were not debarred from any activity that required their attention. During the Guru period, Mai Bhago answered the call when her services were required in the battlefield, and gave a turn to Sikh history by challenging forty men, who in a weak moment had deserted the Guru. She demonstrated exemplary leadership qualities and persuasive methods. She was able to bring the forty deserters back to the Sikh fold. Mai Bhago was the pioneer of Sikh women fighters.⁹⁵

Bhag Kaur popularly known as Mai Bhago, was from the family of Bhai Pero Shah of Jhabal, a devout Sikh of the fifth Guru. Mai Bhago, the first women General, who took the command to fight with enemy in the battlefield proved herself as a strong political leader. She is the example of selflessness, courage and leadership. In 1704 forty Sikhs of Majha had left Anandpur Sahib putting their signatures on the disclaimer and left the fort. Guru Gobind Singh reached Khidrana. The forty men were ashamed to come to the Guru (as they had renounced his Guruship in writing). They gathered at Jhabal. Mai Bhago was determined to wipe out the badge of infamy. She wore man's dress, rode a horse and collected all the forty persons.⁹⁶ In this way Mai Bhago was instrumental in bringing the forty men back in the Sikh fold.

⁹⁵ Prabhjot Kaur, *op.cit.*, p. 135.

⁹⁶ Diwan Singh, *op.cit.*, p. 122.

By them, it was known that the Guru had left Anandpur and was somewhere in the Malwa region. So the band of forty (including Mai Bhago) went into Malwa. They had almost caught up with him at the village Khidrana, where they clashed with the forces of Wazir Khan, Nawab of Sirhind, who was in hot pursuit of Guru Gobind Singh. In the ensuing battle, all of the forty were killed or wounded. Guru Gobind Singh was not only watching the run of the battle from a high place nearby, but also aiming arrows on Wazir Khan's men from his perch. As the Nawab had also withdrawn from the battle-field, the Guru came down from his high place to nurse the dead and dying Sikhs. He came upon the severely wounded Mai Bhago who had just a spark of life left in her. Guru ji restored her back to full health. This was in 1705. Thereafter she remained in attendance of the Guru. She always accompanied him in a warrior's dress. When the Guru died at Nanded (Maharashtra) in 1708, she went to Bidar (Karnataka), some distance away, and spent her last years there preaching the Sikh way of life.⁹⁷ Thus, even though she was a woman Mai Bhago acted as a martial leader. Her selfless service during the time of the tenth Guru is noteworthy.

Another important instance of fearlessness and bravery is Bibi Deep Kaur. Great warrior Bibi Deep Kaur showed faith, courage and bravery and refused to yield to the enemy, even after being mortally injured in the battlefield.⁹⁸

Harsaran Kaur was the nursing sister of the sons of the Guru. When she came to know about the martyrdom of the elder sons of the Guru and about their bodies lying unattended in the battlefield giving hope to the Mughals to claim cash prize from the emperor for killing the sons of the Guru, she decided to cremate the bodies with the honour they deserved. She stealthily went to the battlefield at midnight, piled all the wood she could collect, prepared the pyre, placed on it the bodies of the sons of the Guru and other martyred Sikhs and lit the pyre. Light from the pyre woke up the sleeping Mughals who were surprised to see a female silhouette in the middle of the night. They could understand the whole story. Their hopes of getting the cash award were dashed to the ground. They could not contain themselves and out of rage, threw the lady in the fire. Thus Harsaran Kaur attained martyrdom on 23rd of December 1704 and was consigned to the flames along with the sons of the tenth

⁹⁷ Sahib Kaur, *op.cit.*, p.21.

⁹⁸ Shashi Bala, "Sikh Spirituality and Contribution of Women", *op.cit.*, p. 27.

Guru and other martyrs.⁹⁹ She proved that a Sikh woman is capable of dealing with conspiracies and machinations of the enemy. Such valour and spirit was instilled in women by virtue of Sikh ideology and values. It was owing to propagation of Sikh ideology that the potential of women was acknowledged and recognized.

Bibi Sharan Kaur, was a valiant lady of courage and faith. She joined the army of Hari Singh Nalwa and was trained in the art of espionage. Whatever work was assigned to her was very efficiently executed by her. Unfortunately, Hari Singh Nalwa fell seriously ill. Taking advantage of the situation, the Pathans rebelled. Hari Singh Nalwa, who could not fight because of his illness was hit by a gunshot while he was watching the scene from a balcony and died shortly afterwards. The situation turned serious. There was danger of the Sikh kingdom being dismembered. The whole army was in a despondent mood. Sharan Kaur did not lose heart and without any delay she disguised herself as a Pathan lady and left for Lahore to inform Maharaja Ranjit Singh of the situation. The dangers of the arduous journey that she had decided to undertake did not deter her from the determination towards the performance of her duty. She reached Lahore in time to enable the Maharaja to immediately send the forces to contain the rebellion. Thus brave Saran Kaur, with her presence of mind and grit was able to save the Sikh kingdom from being dismembered, for which honours were bestowed on her.¹⁰⁰ She has strong will power to do anything without any fear.

Rani Rajinder Kaur, daughter of Bhumia Singh, and granddaughter of Maharaja Ala Singh, the ruler of the Patiala state, possessed all the virtues which men claim to be theirs, to serve the state of Patiala with courage, perseverance and boldness, without any weakness normally attributed to women.¹⁰¹ She has strong political abilities to tackle the problem.

Rani Sahib Kaur was the daughter of Raja Amar Singh, a grandson of Maharaja Ala Singh of Patiala. Rani Sahib Kaur, the sister of Sahib Singh, the teen-aged Maharaja of Patiala, is another example of the important role that the Sikh women played in history. Having conquered much of India, the Marhattas, who had become a huge force, attacked the regime of Patiala in Punjab in 1793. Sahib Singh,

⁹⁹ Prabhjot Kaur, *op.cit.*, pp. 137-138.

¹⁰⁰ Prabhjot Kaur, *op.cit.*, pp. 138-139.

¹⁰¹ O.S. Prem, "Womanhood in Sikhism", *The Sikh Courier International*, Vol. 28, No. 65, *A Journal of Sikh Cultural Society*, Spring-Summer, 1988, p. 17.

who was not prepared for such a surprise attack, requested his sister, Rani Sahib Kaur to help him. Rani Sahib Kaur took part in the battle herself, and displayed such courage and organizational skills that despite the much smaller number of soldiers in the army under her command, she repulsed the attack by the Marhattas and drove them out of her state.¹⁰² Thus, she was successful in overcoming the enemy even when the strength of her army was very less. This is an example of good management, wise administration and courage.

After the death of Baba Banda Singh Bahadur, Punjab was fragmented into small regions, called Missels, ruled by Sikh chiefs. At least one of the missels, kanhayya, was headed by a woman – Sardarni Sada Kaur (Wife of Gurbaksh Singh), who later became the mother-in-law of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. On her husband's death, she assumed the leadership of the kanhayya missel, donning the dress of a warrior. In 1797 assisted by other Sardars, she repelled the invasion of Shah Zaman's army. The ruler of Afghanistan was still thinking of Punjab as the fief of the Durrani dynasty. Sada Kaur with other Sikh Sardars, relieved him of such dreams. In July 1797, she guided her son-in-law, Ranjit Singh, the upcoming Maharaja of Punjab, in taking Lahore. Later, she participated in the campaigns which brought Hazara and Kashmir under Maharaja Ranjit Singh's domains. In 1821, owing to some misunderstandings with the Maharaja, she was divested of all her territories and privileges and eleven years later she died at Amritsar as an interneer. But she lives in history as a shining example of a great champion, wise and determined political administrator, who gave her people long years of unforgettable leadership.¹⁰³

Rani Jindan, the widow of Ranjit Singh, played an important role in the Lahore Durbar polity, after her son, Dalip Singh was made the Maharaja of Punjab. As Queen mother, she showed considerable energy and skill in conducting the state business and did it with the courage and determination never before demonstrated by any woman in the Sikh history. She commanded the obedience of the regimental council as well as the Sardars. Jindan was doubtless a notable figure during the golden period of the Sikh Raj. She set the example of strong political leader. She was a brave and patriotic lady who fought stubbornly against the cunning and

¹⁰² Devinder Singh Sekhon, *op.cit.*, p.302.

¹⁰³ Sahib Kaur, *op.cit.*, p. 21.

powerful British rule till her last breath. She raised her voice against the tyranny and treachery of the English. She underwent unbearable troubles, but did not lose heart. She gave up the comforts of palaces and spent many years of her life behind bars, in exile, craving to restore the glory of the Sikh kingdom. Thus, she will be remembered for her leadership quality, fearlessness, self-confidence, self-respect, steadfastness and patriotism. She is probably the first female freedom fighter in the history of India.¹⁰⁴

The role of Daya Kanwar of Ambala, in shaping the destinies of her territories is noteworthy. Daya Kaur, wife of Gurbakhsh Singh, the ruler of Ambala, succeeded her husband after his death in 1786. She ruled the state remarkably well till 1823, when it was annexed to the British. Captain Mathews who passed through her territory in 1808, highly praised her administration. Not to speak of any dacoity or murder, even theft or pilfering was a rare occurrence. The British treated her with great courtesy and consideration.¹⁰⁵

In the late years of the 19th century and early times of the 20th century enlightened Sikh women jumped into the independence movement. The names of Bibi Gulab Kaur, Mata Kishan Kaur Kanke, Bibi Amar Kaur, Bibi Harnam Kaur, Bibi Dalip Kaur and many more are well known. They played a momentous role in the struggle for independence. They all were political conscious and proved their leadership qualities. They were helpful in the character building and in the attainment of spiritual heights. Even today Sikh women are prominent as social workers, doctors, teachers, religious leaders, business women, artists and politicians. They have proved their mettle in whatever sphere they choose to serve.¹⁰⁶

Sikh Gurus gave women positive encouragement to make best use of their talents in all fields of life. Women were at liberty for the first time to show their ability not only in the domestic field but in the religious, political and administrative fields as well. All these steps taken by the Sikh Gurus completely revolutionized the lives of women in the northern part of India. Fully confident of themselves, the Sikh women put their whole might in the making of a new history. Every brick laid bears

¹⁰⁴ Sawan Singh Gogia, "Maharani Jind Kaur: The Tragic Queen of Punjab", *The Sikh Review*, Vol. 58:9, No.681, The Sikh Cultural Centre, Calcutta, September 2010, pp. 76-81.

¹⁰⁵ Hari Ram Gupta, *History of the Sikhs*, Vol. IV, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, Delhi, 1982, p. 115-116.

¹⁰⁶ Diwan Singh, *op.cit.*, p. 123.

the name of one or the other woman who contributed in a big way, in the events leading to the construction of the imposing structure called 'Sikhism'.¹⁰⁷ Thus, Sikh women played a prominent role in history which is deserving of the highest praise and honour. After the centuries, women were able to overcome oppressive social restricts and proofs that they could easily breach male bastions. Thus, the perception of difference between men and women was considerable reduced. Sikh women gave concrete examples of their potential by dealing with crisis single handedly.

As a result, women in Sikh ideology proves beyond doubt that there was no area of Sikh endeavour, be it social, religious, political or administrative where the participation of Sikh women has not been considerable. Thus, a marked change in the fortunes of women after the Sikh Gurus both in ideology and practice addressed the issue of women's status in society. The Sikh Gurus demonstrated a keen and urgent consciousness of the chronic, systematic and deep rooted forms of subjugation which women had bear. Sikhism is the first religious ideology which espoused the cause of women and facilitated their integration in the socio-economic and cultural mainstream. The teachings of the Sikh Gurus and path breaking and revolutionary traditions paved the way for upliftment of women in the social, religious, political or administrative fields. Using the weapon of enlightenment, the blessed Sikh ladies swept away the dirt of fearfulness out of their minds and making their bodies the abode of forbearance and tranquility, had become courageous enough to face all the challenges successfully, thus turning the dream of Guru Nanak into reality. Thus, it can be said that from the 15th century, the social scenario related to gender issue was changed because of the impact of Sikh ideology. Although, Sikh ideology has numerous progressive, liberal and democratic elements yet, its greatest contribution lies in acting as a champion of the rights of women.

¹⁰⁷ Prabhjot Kaur, *op.cit.*, p. 53.

CHAPTER – 4

SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROFILE OF THE STUDY AREA AND WOMEN RESPONDENTS

The present chapter has been divided into two parts. The first part of the chapter deals with a brief socio-economic profile of the study area that is Patiala District, the second part is related to the socio-economic profile of the respondents. Total sample of 300 women respondents has been selected from Patiala district randomly. The collected information and data were classified on the basis of age, caste, marital status, educational status, and annual income of the family.

An objective study cannot be undertaken without an intimate and objective profile of the study area. A familiarity with the socio-economic conditions of the study area goes a long way in achieving the theoretical goals. This is primarily because the social setup and economy of a particular region exercises a sustained and tangible effect on the quality of social and political life of that area. The present study is delimited to one district, namely, Patiala in the state of Punjab. It is in line with the overall theoretical objective and design of the study to form a conceptual framework of the socio-economic situation in Punjab and then that of the Patiala district.

PART – I

SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROFILE OF THE STUDY AREA

Punjab is a state of India located in the northwestern part of the subcontinent. It is bounded by the Indian states of Jammu and Kashmir to the north, Himachal Pradesh to the northeast, Haryana to the south and southeast, and Rajasthan to the southwest and by the country of Pakistan to the west. Punjab in its present cartographical form came into existence on November 1, 1966, when most of its predominantly Hindi speaking areas were separated to form the new state of Haryana. The city of Chandigarh, within the Chandigarh union territory, is the joint capital of Punjab and Haryana.¹

The word Punjab is a compound of two Persian words, ‘panj’ (five) and ‘ab’ (water), thus signifying the land of five waters, or rivers, namely - Beas, Chenab, Jhelum, Ravi and Sutlej. As applied to the present Indian state of Punjab, however, it

¹ *Ssapunjab.org/subpages/state-profile.html*, Retrieved on, December 12, 2014.

is a misnomer: Since the partition of India in 1947, only two of these rivers, the Sutlej and the Beas, lie within Punjab's territory, while the Ravi flows, only along part of its western border.² Punjab is located in northwestern India, and has an area of 50,362 km. It extends from the latitudes 29.30° North to 32.32° North and longitudes 73.55° East to 76.50° East. As per Census 2011, Punjab has a total population of 2,77,43,338 out of which 1,46,39,465 are males and 1,31,03,873 are females. Population density of Punjab is 551 persons per sq.km. Literacy rate in Punjab has been upward trend and is 75.8% as per 2011 population Census. Of that, male literacy stands at 80.4 percent while female literacy is at 70.7 percent.³

Table 4.1
Population Statistics of Punjab State

Description		Total	Rural	Urban
Total Population	Persons	2,77,43,338	1,73,44,192	1,03,99,146
	Males	1,46,39,465	90,93,476	55,45,989
	Females	1,31,03,873	82,50,716	48,53,157
Sex Ratio	-	895	907	875
Child Sex Ratio	-	846	844	852
Literates	Persons	1,87,07,137	1,09,97,657	77,09,480
	Males	1,04,36,056	61,58,807	42,77,249
	Females	82,71,081	48,38,850	34,32,231
Workers	Persons	98,97,362	61,79,199	37,18,163
	Males	80,74,157	49,95,819	30,78,338
	Females	18,23,205	11,83,380	6,39,825

Source: Census of India, 2011.⁴

Economy

Punjab holds place of pride among the Indian states for its outstanding achievements in agricultural development. Punjab is widely acknowledged as the "Granary of India". Green revolution significantly contributed to making it one of the richest states in the country. In 2013-2014 agriculture and allied activities

² *Ibid.*

³ *Census of India 2011.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

contributed 21.39 percent to the GSDP. As per 2011, 36 percent of the total workers depend on agriculture. At present, 82 percent of the total geographical area of the state is under cultivation and the cropping intensity is around 191 percent with over 99 percent of the cultivable area being under assured irrigation. The State is among the highest ranking states in the country in terms of productivity of wheat and rice. Major crops include wheat, rice, sugarcane, cotton and oilseeds. Industrial growth in recent years has been a major contributor of the state's economy. Major industries include the manufacturing of scientific instruments, agricultural goods, electrical goods, financial services, machine tools, textiles, sports goods, starch, tourism, bicycles and the processing of pine oil and sugar. Punjab also has the largest number of steel rolling mill plants in India, which are located in "Steel Town" – Mandi Gobindgarh in the Fatehgarh Sahib district.⁵

Climate and Rainfall

The climate of Punjab is mainly influenced by the Himalayas in the north and the Thar Desert in the south and south-west. The presence of Himalayas in the north greatly modifies the temperature. The highest temperature (between 44.2° and 44.7° C) in the state is recorded in the month of June and the lowest (between 0° and 2.2° C) in December. Day temperatures are more or less uniform over the plains except during winter and monsoon season. State receives about 648.8 mm of average annual rainfall. 75 percent of rainfall is received during monsoon months from July to September. July and August are the rainiest months in Punjab.⁶

Language

Punjab is a multi-lingual state but the Punjabi language, written in the Gurmukhi script, is the official language of the state. Punjabi is the ninth most spoken language in the world and fourth most spoken language in Asia. Most of the people residing in the state are polyglot. Hindi, Punjabi and English are the most common spoken languages in Punjab.⁷

⁵ *Economic Survey 2014-2015*, Economic Adviser, Government of Punjab, Chandigarh.

⁶ *nidm.gov.in/PDF/DP/PUNJAB.pdf*, Retrieved on December 19, 2014.

⁷ *En.wikipedia.org/wiki/Punjab_India*, Retrieved on December 20, 2014.

Religion

Punjab is the land of great Gurus and saints. It is the land where a number of religions exist in perfect harmony with each other. Religions like Islam, Christianity, Buddhism and Jainism are also practiced in the state though the percentage of the followers of these religions is comparatively low in proportion. Sikhism forms the main religion of Punjab. Founded by Guru Nanak Dev and other nine Gurus, it forms the fifth largest religion in the world. Sikhism is the predominant faith in Punjab, followed by more than 60 percent of the population. Hinduism is the second most practiced faith in Punjab forming 37 percent of the population. Muslims constitute 1.57 percent of the total population of Punjab. Other religions such as Christianity, Buddhism and Jainism form 1.20 percent; 0.17 percent and 0.16 percent of the population respectively. 0.04 percent people of Punjab are those who worship other faiths.⁸

Table 4.2
Administrative Set Up of Punjab

S. No.	Description	Total
1.	Divisions	5
2.	Districts	22
3.	Sub-Divisions	82
4.	Tehsils	82
5.	Sub-Tehsils	85
6.	Blocks	146
7.	Seats in Rajya Sabha	7
8.	Lok Sabha Constituencies	13
9.	Vidhan Sabha Constituencies	117
10.	Towns - \$- Census, 2011	143
11.	Cities- Census, 2011	74
12.	Villages - Census, 2011	12581
13.	Zila Parishads	22
14.	Municipal Committees	143
15.	Municipal Corporations	10
16.	Improvement Trusts	23

Source: Economic Survey (2013-2014).⁹

⁸ www.bharatonline.com/Punjab/culture/religion.html, Retrieved on December 5, 2014.

⁹ *Economic Survey (2013-2014)*, Economic Adviser, Government of Punjab, Chandigarh.

There are total 22 districts in Punjab and Patiala is one of them. It is quite evident from the figure related with the administrative set up of the state that in cartographic terms and demographically, Punjab is one of the smaller states of India. The reorganized Punjab is not huge in its dimensions like some of the central Indian states. Punjab has a fairly cohesive character as far as its religious and cultural composition is concerned. Most of the people are followers of Sikhism and Hinduism

PROFILE OF PATIALA DISTRICT

Patiala, an erstwhile Princely state, capital of PEPSU and a district head quarters of Punjab is situated in the Malwa region of Punjab. Malwa has the largest number of districts in the reorganized Punjab. It is significant that many of these cities are very ancient and historic in character. Patiala too is a historical city. It was once the capital of a princely state and there after the capital of PEPSU. The district ranks fourth among the cities of Punjab. It also enjoys the status of a mini-capital of Punjab as it is next only to Chandigarh in terms of important. It is the seat of the head-quarters of the largest number of government departments and state undertakings. It is also headquarter of the Punjab Public Service Commission, Punjab State Electricity Board (and, therefore called the Power City of Punjab), State Bank of Patiala and Punjab Pollution Control Board. In addition, Punjab State Archives, Government Department of Languages, North West Zone Cultural Centre are also situated here. As such, it is rightly called also the Cultural and Sports Capital of Punjab.¹⁰

History of Patiala

Patiala has immense historical importance. Although Patiala today can be called a fairly modern city, yet it is a place where history and modernity coexist. The city is believed to be built on an ancient site where once a settlement named 'Prasthala' or 'Pastyavant' flourished in the Vedic age. According to the Professor S.N. Banerjee, formerly Director of Archives, Patiala State, there is a mention of a place named Pasthavant in the Rig Veda. Professor Banerjee believed that PASTHAANT

¹⁰ Pardeep Sachdeva, *Dynamics of Municipal Government and Politics in India*, Kitab Mahal, 1991, p. 35.

was situated in the vicinity of the site of Patiala from which the town has acquired its name. The popular view also is that the town 'Pati-ala' literally meaning 'the share of Ala' took its name from Baba Ala Singh.¹¹

The founder of the town was Baba Ala Singh (1714-1765) who belonged to the Phulkian family and had risen to power during the forties of the eighteenth century with his headquarters at Barnala.¹² Baba Ala Singh died in 1765 and was succeeded by his grandson, Amar Singh, who received the title of *Raja-i-Rajgan Bahadur* from the Durrani King. Maharaja Amar Singh largely expanded his territories and successfully pulled through his struggles with the Bhattis, the Marathas and his neighbouring adventurers. Patiala made steady progress during the times of Amar Singh. After his death in February, 1781, Maharaja Amar Singh (1781-1813) was succeeded by his seven year old son, Maharaja Sahib Singh.¹³ Sahib Singh was a weak ruler. Seeing this, a big Maratha army under Rao Mankeshwar and Lachhman Rao invaded Patiala in 1794. It was due to the indomitable courage and will of Sahib Kaur, the sister of Ruler Sahib Singh, that the invasion was repulsed. It was during the time of Sahib Singh that the Patiala state entered into the well-known alliance with the British Government in A.D. 1808. Sahib Singh died in 1813 and was succeeded by his son Karam Singh who was only 15 years of age at that time.¹⁴

Maharaja Karam Singh (1813-1845) helped the British government greatly during their war against the Gorkhas in 1814. He was well rewarded for this service by the British who transferred to him the territories of Bughat, Jagat Garh and fourteen other districts. He advanced to the British a sum of twenty lakhs of rupees as a loan, in 1827. Maharaja Karam Singh made a declaration of an all-out aid to the British during the first Sikh War in 1845 and helped them to the utmost extent.¹⁵ After the death of Maharaja Karam Singh on December 23, 1845, Narinder Singh (1845-1862) became Maharaja. He was known for having rendered services to the British Government in quelling the revolt of 1857-58. Maharaja Narinder Singh

¹¹ Fauja Singh Bajwa, *Patiala and Its Historical Surroundings*, Punjabi University, Patiala, 1969, p. 21.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Ganda Singh, *Patiala and East Punjab States Union: Historical Background*, Archives Department, Patiala, 1951, p. 46.

¹⁴ Fauja Singh Bajwa, *op.cit.*, p. 19.

¹⁵ Sohan Singh Seetal, *The Sikh Missals and the Punjab States*, Lahore Book Shop, Ludhiana, 1981, pp. 107-109.

made the greatest contribution towards the development of the Patiala town. Mohinder Singh (1862-1876) succeeded as Maharaja after his father's death. And after him, Rajinder Singh (1876-1900) became Maharaja. Both Maharaja Mohinder and Rajinder Singh were well educated and known for their patronage of learning. The Mahendra College, which is one of the oldest educational institutions of northern Indian, established in 1870, came into existence during the reign of Maharaja Mohinder Singh.

Maharaja Bhupendra Singh born in October, 1891, was only nine years old when he succeeded his father. He ruled from 1900 to 1938. He developed into a first class sportsman, an astute politician and an able administrator and it was he who was mostly responsible for giving Patiala a prominent place on the political map. He remained the chancellor of the chamber of princes for many years. In the field of sports, Maharaja Bhupindra Singh was an international figure and was known all over the world for his skill in polo and cricket. He died in 1938 and was succeeded by his illustrious son, Maharaja Yadvinder Singh.¹⁶

The last ruler, Maharaja Yadvinder Singh ruled till 1948. He was one of the first princes who acceded to the Union of India and helped in the integration of the country with the formation of State Unions on the lines of British Indian provinces. The covenant of Patiala and East Punjab States Union was signed on May 5, 1948, and it was inaugurated on July 15, 1948, by the Hon'ble Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel with His Highness as its life-Rajpramukh. His Highness took over the administration of the Patiala Union on August 20, 1948.¹⁷ After the independence with the merger of Princely states of Punjab, PEPSU was created. Patiala becomes the capital of PEPSU. Later on PEPSU was merged into Punjab. Patiala became an important town of Punjab and seat of the district and divisional head quarters. The new state of Punjab was later in 1966 divided into Hindi speaking states of Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and the Punjabi speaking state of Punjab.

Location

Patiala district is one of the famous princely states of erstwhile Punjab. Patiala is a city in southeastern Punjab, in northern India. It is the fourth largest city

¹⁶ Ganda Singh, *op.cit.*, p. 51-52

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

in the state and is the administrative capital of Patiala district. Forming the Southern-Eastern part of the state, it lies between 29°49' and 30°47' north latitude, 75°58' and 76°54' east longitude. It is surrounded by the districts of Fatehgarh Sahib and Rupnagar and the Union Territory of Chandigarh in the north, Sangrur district in the west, Ambala and Kurukshetra districts of neighbouring state of Haryana in the east and Kaithal district of Haryana in the south.¹⁸

Climate and Rainfall

The climate of Patiala district can be classified as tropical, semi-arid and hot which is mainly dry with very hot summer and cold winter except during monsoon. There are four seasons in a year. The hot weather season starts from mid-March to the last week of June followed by the south west monsoon which lasts up to September. The transition period from September to October forms the post monsoon season. The winter season starts late in November and continues up to the first week of March. The normal monsoon and annual rainfall of the district is 547 mm and 677 mm, respectively which is unevenly distributed over the area and takes place for 29 days approximately. The south west monsoon sets in from the last week of June and withdraws in end of September, contributing about 81 percent of annual rainfall. July and August are the wettest months. Rest 19 percent rainfall is received during non-monsoon period in the wake of western disturbances and thunderstorms. Generally rainfall in the district increases from southwest to northeast. The mean minimum and maximum temperature in the area ranges from 7.1°C to 40.4° during the months of January and May or June respectively.¹⁹

Area and Population

Patiala district with an area of 3325 sq. kms. was the 5th largest district of the Punjab (area wise) after Ferozepur, Amritsar, Sangrur and Ludhiana as per 2001 Census.²⁰ The initial provisional data released by Census of India, 2011, shows that density of Patiala district for 2011 is 570 people per sq. km. In 2001, the density of population in Patiala district was at 499 people per sq. km. In 2011, Patiala had a

¹⁸ www.patiala.nic.in/Industry&Agriculture, Retrieved on December 19, 2014.

¹⁹ cgwb.gov.in/District_profile/Punjab/Patiala.pdf, Retrieved on September 6, 2014.

²⁰ www.patiala.nic.in/industry & Agriculture, Retrieved on December 19, 2014.

population of 18,95,686 of which male and female were 10,02,522 and 8,93,164 respectively. Out of the total population of Patiala as per 2011 Census 40.26 percent of the population lives in urban regions of the district. In total 7,63,280 people live in urban areas of which males are 4,03,722 and females are 3,59,558. As per 2011 Census 59.74 percent population of Patiala district lives in rural areas or villages. The total population of Patiala district living in rural areas is 11,32,406 of which males and females are 5,98,800 and 5,33,606 respectively.

Table 4.3
Population of Patiala District 2011

Description	2011	
Population	Total	18,95,686
	Males	10,02,522
	Females	8,93,164
Urban Population	Total	7,63,280
	Males	4,03,722
	Females	3,59,558
Rural Population	Total	11,32,406
	Males	5,98,800
	Females	5,33,606

Source: Census of India, 2011.²¹

Sex Ratio

Sex ratio in Patiala according to 2011 Census stood at 891 per 1,000 male (rural and urban) compared to 2001 Census figure of 875. The average national sex ratio in India is 943 as per latest reports of Census 2011. In 2011 Census, child sex ratio of Patiala is 837 girls per 1,000 boys compared to figure of 776 girls per 1,000 boys of 2001 Census. According to the Census of 2011, child sex ratio in rural is 827 and in urban area is 852.

²¹ *Census of India, 2011.*

Table 4.4
Sex Ratio and Child Sex Ratio

S.No.	2011	Total	Rural	Urban
1	Sex Ratio	891	891	891
2	Child Sex Ratio (0-6)	837	827	852

Source: Census of India, 2011.²²

Literacy Rate

Total literacy rate in Patiala district as per Census 2011 is 75.3 percent of which are 80.2 percent males and 69.8 percent females are literate respectively. Literacy rate in rural and urban areas of Patiala district is 69.0 percent and 84.4 percent as per Census data 2011. In total 6,88,838 people are literate of which males and females were 3,93,440 and 2,95,398 respectively in rural area. In actual number 5,77,953 people are literate in urban region of which males and females are 3,17,612 and 2,60,341 respectively as indicated in table 5.4.

Table 4.5
Literacy Rate in Patiala

S.No.	Patiala	Person	Male	Female
1	District Total	12,66,791	7,11,052	5,55,739
2	Rural	6,88,838	3,93,440	2,95,398
3	Urban	5,77,953	3,17,612	2,60,341

Source: Census of India, 2011.²³

Administration

The deputy Commissioner, an officer belonging to the Indian Administrative Service is the overall in-charge of the General Administration in the district. He is assisted by a number of officers belonging to Punjab Civil Service and other state services. Patiala district consists of five tehsils viz. Patran, Nabha, Patiala, Rajpura and Samana. The tehsils have been converted into sub-divisions and each placed under the control of Sub-Divisional Officer (Civil), who is also in the rank of Assistant Commissioner. He is responsible for the overall administration of the sub-division. So, Patiala district is sub-divided into 5 sub divisions/tehsils, 3 sub-tehsils and 8 blocks. There are 9 Punjab Vidhan Sabha constituencies located in this district: Patiala urban, Patiala rural, Rajpura, Nabha, Samana, Ghanaur, Shutrana, Sanaur, Patran.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

Table 4.6
Administrative Sub Divisions²⁴

S.No.	Sub-Divisions/Tehsils	Sub-Tehsils	Blocks	No. of Villages
1	Patran	-	Patran	76
2	Nabha	Bhadson	Nabha	174
3	Patiala	Dudhan Sadhan	Patiala, Sanaur, Bhunerheri	358
4	Rajpura	Ghanaur	Rajpura, Ghanaur	277
5	Samana	-	Samana	61

Economy of the District

The economy of the Patiala district can be divided into two sub headings- Agricultural and Industrial.

Agriculture

Out of geographical area of 3,72,000 hectares in Patiala district, 3,03,000 hectares (81 percent) is cultivable. 93 percent of the area is irrigated through tube wells and 3% by canals. The crop density of the district is 197 percent. There are 62,090 agricultural families in the district. Wheat, barley, paddy, maize and sugarcane are major crops of the district. To break the wheat-paddy cycle, contract-farming has been started in the district by the Agriculture Department and PAFC for crops like basmati, maize, barley, etc. Agriculture is the single most important economic activity in the district. With over 65 percent of the population living in rural areas, 38 percent population depends on agriculture either as labourers (17 percent) or cultivators (21 percent).²⁵

Industry

Patiala is fast emerging as an important industrial growth centre on the industrial map of the state. Besides traditional goods, high quality and sophisticated items are now produced including small cutting tools, power cables, vanaspati ghee, bicycles and agriculture implements including harvester combines and threshers,

²⁴ [www.patiala.nic.in/Industry and Agriculture](http://www.patiala.nic.in/Industry_and_Agriculture), Retrieved on December 19, 2014.

²⁵ patiala.nic.in/html/district_economy.html, Retrieved on September 8, 2014.

milk products, pesticides etc. The industrial units are scattered all over the district mainly at Rajpura, Patiala, Samana and Nabha. There are large and medium industrial units located at Rajpura producing Vanaspati ghee, power cables, bicycles and bicycle components and at Dera Bassi producing spun-yarn and alcohol. Among the small scale industry in the district are those producing agriculture implements, rice shellers, cutting tools, electrical goods and bakeries. There are industrial focal points at Patiala, Rajpura, Nabha and Dera Bassi and three industrial estates at Rajpura, Patiala and Banur.²⁶

Educational Institutions

Educationally, Patiala has been in the forefront not only in the state of Punjab but in the whole of India. Patiala was the first town in this part of the country to have a degree college-the Mohindra college – in 1875. Since Indian independence in 1947, Patiala has emerged as a major education centre in the state of Punjab. The city houses the prestigious Yadavindra Public School, set up by his Highness Maharaja Yadavindra Singh in 1948 which is now among the top run schools of the country. There are very famous educational institutions in Patiala district such as:

- Thapar University
- Punjabi University
- Rajiv Gandhi National University of Law
- General Shivdev Singh Diwan Gurbachan Singh Khalsa College
- Multani Mal Modi College
- Rajindra Hospital
- Government Medical College, Patiala
- Government College for Girls
- Government Bikram College of Commerce, one of the premier commerce colleges in Northern India.²⁷ Table 4.7 indicates the total educational institutions in Patiala district.

²⁶ *en.wikipedia.org/wiki/patiala-district*, Retrieved on December 20, 2014.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

Table 4.7
Educational Institutions in Patiala

S.No.	Education Institutions	Total
1	Primary schools	1105
2	Middle schools	377
3	High schools	351
4	Senior secondary schools	300
5	Arts, Science, Commerce and Home Science Colleges	11
6	Engineering, Technology and Architecture Colleges	9
7	Medical Colleges Allopathic only	2
8	Teachers Training Colleges (B.Ed.)	13
9	Polytechnic Institutions	11
10	Technical Industrial Art and Craft School	28
11	Universities	3

Source: Statistical Abstract of Punjab, 2013.²⁸

Netaji Subhash National Institute of Sports, Patiala is a sports hub of north India. Rajiv Gandhi National University of Law, Patiala was the first national law school of north region established under Punjab Government Act of 2006. Patiala city has many playgrounds, including the Raja Bhalindra Sports Complex, more commonly known as Polo Ground on Lower Mall road, which houses an indoor stadium. Other sports facilities include Yadavindra Sports Stadium for athletics, Rink Hall for roller skating, and National Institute of Sports, Patiala. The latest addition to sports is the state-of-the-art shotgun shooting ranges housing New Moti Bagh Gun Club at village Maine. Founded by the royal family of Patiala, these ranges are home to the Indian Shotgun Shooting team that routinely trains here. It has recently hosted the 2nd Asian Shotgun Championship.²⁹

Livelihood

In order to live in the world, work is very important for the livelihood. The work participation rates of males and females were 53.3 and 18.0 respectively in 2001. In 2011 the work participation rate of males is 54.8 and females is 12.4 in the Patiala district.

²⁸ *Statistical Abstract of Punjab*, Issued by Economic Advisor, Government of Punjab, 2013

²⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/patiala_district, Retrieved on December 20, 2014.

Table 4.8
Work Participation Rate in Patiala

S.No.	Work Participation Rate	2001	2011
1	Male Work Participation Rate	53.3	54.8
2	Female Work Participation Rate	18.0	12.4

Source: Census of India, 2001 and 2011.³⁰

Transport

Patiala has one of the highest numbers of vehicles per capita in India. There are wide, well-maintained roads and parking spaces all over the city. It is connected by road to cities like Chandigarh, Amritsar, Delhi etc. Patiala is well connected to cities like Ludhiana, Jalandhar and Amritsar, on NH1 via state Highway no. 8 till Sirhind, which is on NH1. Patiala is well connected to Delhi by road as well as by rail. NH 64 (Zirakpur-Patiala-Sangrur-Bhatinda) connects Patiala with Rajpura (on NH1 and very well connected to Delhi) and Zirakpur. Patiala has both a railway station and Patiala Airport. The nearest domestic airport is Chandigarh Airport, which is approximately 62 km from the city. Patiala is connected by road to all the major towns.³¹

Religion

Jatt Sikhs, Hindus, Christians and Muslims reside in urban and rural areas of Patiala. People belonging to other religions are only a fraction of the whole. Sikhism is the most practiced faith in Patiala. According to 2001 and 2011 Census of India-religion wise population in Patiala district is given below in the table 4.9.

Table 4.9
Religion wise Population in Patiala

S.No.	Year	Sikhs	Hindus	Christians	Muslims
1	2001	56%	42%	1%	1.88%
2	2011	55.91%	41.32%	.30%	2.11%

Source: Census of India, 2001 and 2011.³²

Language

People generally speak Malwai Punjabi. The official work is done in Punjabi and English both. Few other languages like Hindi and Urdu are also being spoken by a small percentage of population.

³⁰ *Census of India, 2001 and 2011.*

³¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/patiala_district, Retrieved on December 20, 2014.

³² *Census of India, 2001 and 2011.*

Health

In Patiala district, there are number of hospitals, dispensaries for the health care and treatment. Table 4.10 shows that there is good number of health centers in Patiala district in urban as well as rural areas.

Table 4.10
Medical Institutions in Patiala

S.No.	Medical Institutions	Total
1	Allopathic Hospital	8
2	Ayurvedic Institutions	32
3	Homeopathic Institutions	7
4	Community Health Centers	10
5	Primary Health Centers	28
6	Dispensaries	84

Source: Punjab-At-A- Glance (District wise) 2011.³³

Banking Sector

Banking facilities are also in good number in the Patiala district as table 4.11 indicates

Table 4.11
Banks in Patiala

S.No.	Banks	Total
1	State Bank of India	14
2	State Bank of Patiala	82
3	Punjab National Bank	32
4	Other Commercial Banks (Including R.R. Banks)	177
5	Co-operative Bank	42

Source: Statistical Abstract of Punjab, 2013³⁴

Communication Facilities

In the Patiala district there is a highly well-developed network of communication facilities which has been provided for the people.

³³ Punjab-At-A – Glance (District wise), Government of Punjab (India), 2011

³⁴ Statistical Abstract of Punjab, Economic Advisor to Government Punjab, Chandigarh, 2013

Table 4.12
Communication Facilities in Patiala

S.No.	Communication	Total
1	Telephone Connection	59465
2	Post Offices	194
3	Telegraph Office	2
4	Telephone Exchange	113
5	Public Call Offices	926

Source: Statistical Abstract of Punjab, 2013³⁵

Infrastructure

All the villages and towns/cities in the Patiala district are well electrified. All villages and towns have been connected with roads (length per 100 square kilometers is 98).

Elected Members (MP's and MLA's) from Patiala District

DharmVeer Gandhi is the elected Member of Parliament belonging to the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) from Patiala parliamentary constituency and following are the names of Vidhan Sabha Members elected from Patiala during the election in March, 2012.

Table 4.13
Electoral Statistics of Patiala District

S. No.	Name of the Constituency	Name of the Elected Members	Party Affiliation
1.	Nabha (S.C.)	Sadhu Singh	Indian National Congress
2.	Patiala Rural	Brahm Mohindra	Indian National Congress
3.	Rajpura	Hardyal Singh Kamboj	Indian National Congress
4.	Ghanaur	Harpreet Kaur Mukhmailpura	Shiromani Akali Dal
5.	Sanour	Lal Singh	Indian National Congress
6.	Patiala	Vacant	-
7.	Samana	Surjit Singh Rakhra	Shiromani Akali Dal
8.	Shutrana	Vaninder Kaur Loomba	Shiromani Akali Dal

Source: Statistical Abstract of Punjab, 2013³⁶

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

PART-2

PROFILE OF THE RESPONDENTS

An objective study cannot be undertaken without gaining adequate knowledge about the socio-economic background of the respondents. For the purpose of the study, a sample of 300 Sikh women respondents has been taken from rural and urban areas including working and non-working (house wives) respondents. All the respondents are married. It needs to be clarified that all the women respondents do not belong to Sikh community. There are a small percentage of respondents who originally belonged either to Hindu or Muslim communities. But, now they have own Sikh identity because they are married to Sikh families. Thus, inter-community marriages have led to their change of religion and they embraced Sikhism, as it is custom for women to adopt the religion of the families in which they are married. The socio-economic profile of respondents has been compiled in terms of age, caste, religion, area, marital status, education of self and spouse and income. A brief description of these variables is given below:

Age

Age by itself can be a significant variable. Age is an important social factor which is linked to several things. First and foremost it is a sign of maturity. Age can also contribute to the extent and nature of a person's exposure to life and his or her overall outlook. Lipset emphasized that:

*“Different ages imply variations in the life experiences and affect left or right political behavior in two ways: through generational differences; and through differences in the typical patterns of social experience associated with different age groups.”*³⁷

Thus, it is important to ascertain the age of the respondents in order to theoretically conceptualize the group wise distribution of the respondents. Age is also one of the important variables in the understanding of women's status in society. With the change in age, the women's status and role also changes. The younger women as compared to older have different social and familial functions to perform. Moreover age signifies experience, attitude, mental set up and behavior pattern. So, it is necessary to classify the respondents on the basis of their age group.³⁸

³⁷ S.M. Lipset, *The Political Man: The Social Base of Politics*, Heinemann, London, 1960, p.264.

³⁸ S.K. Singh and A.K. Singh, *OBC Women Status and Educational Empowerment*, New Royal Book Co., Lucknow, 2004, p. 143.

Table 4.14
Age-wise Distribution of Women Respondents

Age of Respondents	Urban Area (150)	Rural Area (150)	Grand Total (300)
21 to 30 years	24 (16.00%)	42 (28.00%)	66 (22.00%)
31 to 40 years	51 (34.00%)	44 (29.33%)	95 (31.66%)
41 to 50 years	43 (28.66%)	43 (28.66%)	86 (28.66%)
51 to 60 years	26 (17.33%)	12 (8.00%)	38 (12.66%)
61+	6 (4.00%)	9 (6.00%)	15 (5.00%)

Source: Field Survey

Table 4.14 indicates that a majority of women respondents belong to the age group of 31-40 i.e. 34.00 percent from urban and 29.33 percent from rural area. The second age group is of 41-50 years and it includes 28.66 percent urban respondents and 28.66 percent rural respondents. The age group of 21-30 is represented by 16.00 percent urban respondents and 28.00 percent rural respondents, whereas the age group 51-60 includes 17.33 percent urban and 8.00 percent rural respondents. The age group of 61+ forms the smallest group as it consists of only 4.00 percent urban and 6.00 percent rural respondents. The above analysis highlights that respondents belonging to 31-40 and 41-50 age group together constitute a very high majority. The percentage of respondents above 61 years is marginal. Moreover, all the age groups taken as sample can be assumed to be conscious and mature citizens having experience of both domestic and social lives.

Caste

Caste in India is an age-old system which can, undoubtedly, be regarded as one of the most pervasive social institutions of Indian society. In Punjab, caste factor is very significant. India has been a caste based societies and inter-religious caste based divisions, have continued to determine the nature of social fabric. Caste

system is responsible for sustaining and promoting social inequalities and discrimination. However, caste has remained an important aspect of an individual's perception of his social and cultural status. Srinivas notes that:

*“Caste is so tacitly and so completely accepted by all, including those most vocal in condemning it, that it is everywhere the unit of social action.”*³⁹

Most of the political parties in India as well as Punjab have capitalized caste divisions for political dividend. This is mainly because caste system is deeply entrenched and people even today attach inordinate importance to their caste and caste related practices. Caste is an important factor in measuring socio-economic status of women also. Indian society is hierarchically divided on the basis of caste. Caste system is deeply entrenched in the rural community. Caste has traditionally determined an individual's social and economic status as well as their prospects of personal, social and economic growth. Caste also plays a significant role in moulding and individual's outlook and world view.

Table 4.15
Distribution of Respondents by Caste

Caste of Respondents	Urban Area (150)	Rural Area (150)	Grand Total (300)
General	76 (50.66%)	53 (35.33%)	129 (43.00%)
B.C.	33 (22.00%)	54 (36.00%)	87 (29.00%)
S.C	40 (26.66%)	39 (26.00%)	79 (26.33%)
O.B.C	1 (0.66%)	4 (2.66%)	5 (1.66%)

Source: Field Survey

Table 4.15 shows the caste-wise composition of respondents. In Punjab, there is a clear domination of the Jat Sikh community. Out of 300 respondents from Patiala district, majority of respondents belong to Jat caste. In general category, 50.66 percent respondents are from urban area and 35.33 percent belong to rural area.

³⁹ M.N. Srinivas, “Caste in Modern India”, Quoted in V.B. Singh, *Profile of Political Elites in India*, Ritu Publishers, Delhi, 1984, p. 39

General category comprises castes like Jat, Brahmin and Khatri etc. 29.00 percent respondents are from backward class, which includes 22.00 percent urban and 36.00 percent rural respondents. Backward castes mainly comprise Kamboj, Tarkhan (those associated with the profession of carpenters), Lohar (or blacksmiths) and Nai (associated with the trade of barbers) 26.33 percent respondents fall in the third category of scheduled caste. This category comprises 26.66 percent urban and 26.00 percent rural respondents. Schedules castes mainly comprise Baajigars, Ramdasia Sikh, Valmiki Sikh and Kabirpanthi etc. There is a small percentage of respondents i.e., 0.66 percent urban and 2.66 percent rural respondents who belong to OBC category.

Marital Status

Marital status is important variable in considering overall status of women in society which implies conjugal life and role conflict in family. Moreover, it also signifies experience, respect and responsibilities at home and outside.⁴⁰ The marital status of respondents is shown in table 4.16.

Table 4.16
Marital Status of Respondents

Marital Status of Respondents	Urban Area (150)	Rural Area (150)	Grand Total (300)
Married	95 (63.33%)	102 (68.00%)	197 (65.66%)
Widow	29 (19.33%)	37 (24.66%)	66 (22.00%)
Divorced	26 (17.33%)	11 (7.33%)	37 (12.33%)

Source: Field Survey.

Table 4.16 represents that 65.66 percent respondents are married and still enjoying their married life. Among them 63.33 percent urban and 68.00 percent are rural respondents. In urban area, there are 19.33 percent widow women respondents and in rural area there are 24.66 percent respondents. The percentage of divorced women respondents is low as compare to married and widow respondents. There are

⁴⁰ S.K. Singh and A.K.Singh, op.cit., p. 144

total 12.33 percent divorced respondents. Among them 17.33 percent are living in urban area and 7.33 percent respondents are living in rural area.

Educational Status (Self)

Education means any process formal or informal that helps to develop the potentialities of human being, including their knowledge, capabilities, behaviour patterns and values. Education is an important factor leading to empowerment. It is the first step towards empowerment. Education augments an individual's awareness and understanding of the existing state of affairs and opens a new world of knowledge and information⁴¹ Education has been regarded both as an end in itself and as a means of realizing other desirable goals. It develops the personality and rationality of individuals, qualifies them to fulfill certain economic, political and cultural functions leading to an improvement in their socio-economic status. It has been recognized as a major instrument, which societies can use to direct the process of change and development towards desired goals. Attaining education is the fundamental prerequisite for empowering women in all spheres of life. Education of women helps them in becoming better human beings and mothers; it makes women capable of raising better families and ultimately, in this way, it helps in the attainment of the goal of an ideal society and a progressive nation. Without educated women a nation cannot realize its distant dreams, as women as mothers contribute in the progress and prosperity of a nation.

Hence Mahatma Gandhi rightly pointed out that '*confinement of women to routine household jobs and the denial of opportunities for productive work and decision making would do irreparable damage to the nation. Education helps to transform the status of women*'.⁴²

Thus, education is most important variable which is directly related to the empowerment and uplift of women in all societies.

⁴¹ Anita Dighe, "Women's Literacy and Empowerment: The Nellore Experience", in Rao Digumarti Bhaskara (Ed.), *Women Education and Empowerment*, Discovery Publishing House, New Delhi, 1998, p. 57.

⁴² J. Nirmala and V. Dhulasi Birundha, *Empowerment of Women*, Serials Publications, Delhi, 2005, p. 88.

Table 4.17**Distribution of Respondents by their Educational Status**

Educational Status of Respondents	Urban Area (150)	Rural Area (150)	Grand Total (300)
Illiterate	15 (10.00%)	23 (15.33%)	38 (12.66%)
Primary	9 (6.00%)	24 (16.00%)	33 (11.00%)
Middle	18 (12.00%)	22 (14.66%)	40 (13.33%)
Matric	48 (32.00%)	47 (31.33%)	95 (31.66%)
Graduation	24 (16.00%)	19 (12.66%)	43 (14.33%)
Post Graduation and Above	36 (24.00%)	15 (10.00%)	51 (17.00%)

Source: Field Survey.

Above table shows that out of 300 respondents, highest number of women respondents is matriculates, out of which 32.00 percent are from urban and 31.33 percent are from rural area. Among urban respondents, 10.00 percent respondents are illiterate and in rural area there are 15.33 percent illiterate respondents. So it is clear that the percentage of rural illiterate respondents is more as compared to urban respondents. The number of primary and middle level women respondents is more in rural area at 16.00 percent and 14.66 percent respectively as compared to urban area which is, 6.00 percent and 12.00 percent respectively. The percentage of graduate and post graduate and above respondents is more in urban areas as compared to rural area. Total 14.33 percent women respondents are graduates including 16.00 percent urban and 12.66 percent rural respondents. The greatest difference can be seen between urban and rural area respondents with respect to post graduation and above level. Total number of these respondents is 17.00, among them 24.00 percent are from urban and only 10.00 percent are from rural area.

The analysis of above data reveals that the dream of universal literacy is still far away. In Punjab, the literacy rate is lower in rural area as compared to urban area.

The highest level of education is received more by urban women as compared to the rural one. The reason behind that is, in most of the cases, is the prevalence of orthodox views about women's education and patriarchal and feudal attitudes.

Table 4.18

Distribution of Respondents by the Educational Level of their Husbands

Educational Status of Respondents	Urban Area (150)	Rural Area (150)	Grand Total (300)
Illiterate	11 (7.33%)	15 (10.00%)	26 (8.66%)
Primary	6 (4.00%)	13 (8.66%)	19 (6.33%)
Middle	8 (5.33%)	31 (20.66%)	39 (13.00%)
Matric	62 (41.33%)	58 (38.66%)	120 (40.00%)
Graduation	34 (22.66%)	21 (14.00%)	55 (18.33%)
Post Graduation and Above	29 (19.33%)	12 (8.00%)	41 (13.66%)

Source: Field Survey

Table 4.18 shows the educational status of respondents' husband. Out of total sample, majority of the respondents' husbands are matriculates. Out of these respondents 41.33 percent from urban and 38.66 percent from rural area are matriculates. Comparatively, rural area has more percentage of illiterate men i.e., 10.00 percent as compared to 7.33 percent of urban area. Again Primary and middle level respondents are more in rural area 8.66 percent and 20.66 percent respectively than in urban area which stand at 4.00 percent and 5.33 percent respectively. Higher education is more accessible in urban area as compared to rural area. The percentage of graduates in urban area is 22.66 percent and in rural area it is 14.00 percent. In the same way post graduation and above level respondents are more in urban area with 19.33 percent as compared to rural area with 8.00 percent only.

Thus, tables 4.17 and 4.18 collectively show that women are more illiterate as compared to their husbands. The total percentage of illiterate women is 12.66 percent and the percentage illiterate males are 8.66 percent. It indicates that the

general level of education among men is better than women. The overall percentage of higher level education is also in favour of male respondents rather than women respondents.

Income

Income is, generally, taken as an index of social status and influence of a person particularly in India, where social status goes hand in hand with the income of a person. Income means the amount of money which one earns from his/her job, business, agriculture and pension. Money determines the status of a family in the society. Wealth is one of the most important criteria for empowerment. According to Oscar Lewis:

*“Wealth is the basic criterion for leadership. Although leaders are found among all the three socio-economic classes, they come from the upper levels of each and the correlation between wealth and leadership is highest as we move up the scale.”*⁴³

It is also an important indicator of the level of economic independence that the family enjoys. Income based distribution of respondents is given below:

Table 4.19
Distribution of Respondents by their Family Annual Income

Family Annual Income	Urban Area (150)	Rural Area (150)	Grand Total (300)
1,000-1,00000	68 (45.33%)	55 (36.66%)	123 (41.00%)
1,01,000-2,00000	25 (16.66%)	44 (29.33%)	69 (23.00%)
2,01,000-3,00000	13 (8.66%)	16 (10.66%)	29 (9.66%)
3,01,000-4,00000	5 (3.33%)	10 (6.66%)	15 (5.00%)
4,01,000-5,00000	15 (10.00%)	7 (4.66%)	22 (7.33%)
Above 5 Lakhs	24 (16.00%)	18 (12.00%)	42 (14.00%)

Source: Field Survey

⁴³ M. Francis Abraham, *Dynamics of Leadership in Village India*, Indian International Publication, Allahabad, 1974, p.53.

Table 4.19 represents the family annual income of respondents. It indicates that maximum number of respondents i.e., 41.00 percent have an income ranging between rupees 1,000 to 1,00,000 per annum. The people falling in this category primarily belong to the unorganized sector. Such people are either irregularly employed labour or very small scale traders or self-employed persons. From the total number of respondents, 18.66 percent are from 1,000 to 50,000 income category and 22.33 percent respondents are from 51,000 to 1,00,000 income category including both urban and rural respondents. In the other income categories, i.e., 1,01,000 to 2,00,000 and 2,01,000 to 3,00,000, there are 23.00 percent (urban 16.66 percent, rural 29.33 percent) and 9.66 percent (urban 8.66 percent, rural 10.66 percent) respondents respectively. Out of all the respondents 3.33 percent of urban area and 6.66 percent from rural area earn more than 3,00,000 but less than 4,01,000. Total 7.33 percent respondents earn 4,01,000 to 5,00,000 per annum including 10.00 percent urban and 4.66 percent rural respondents. 16.00 percent respondents of urban area earn above 5,00,000 per annum as compared to the rural respondents i.e. only 12.00 percent. It can be deduced that those falling in the highest income group of more than 5 lakh per annum are either big land owners or highly well placed government employees.

Moreover, the overall per annum income of urban area is better than rural area because it has a larger number of organized sectors of employment. On the other hand, rural people engage themselves more in agricultural work as compared to outside jobs. It is also a fact that females are paid even lesser than males in unorganized sectors.

The above mentioned data elaborates the different aspects related to the socio-economic profile of the respondents. As has been stated all the respondents are women comprising married, widow and divorced. Some of these women are housewives and others are working women employed in organized and unorganized sectors. They all represent different age groups, castes and income groups. This information has proved very helpful to study the mindset of the respondents regarding the gender equality.

CHAPTER - 5

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES TO THE GENDER EQUALITY IN THE CONTEXT OF PUNJAB: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY OF PATIALA DISTRICT

A woman is an indispensable component of our society. Despite her tremendous significance for the society, she has been the worst victim of chronic forms of gender inequality. Women have been facing neglect and prejudice on the basis of gender in many forms the world over since times immemorial. The Indian society is basically a patriarchal society, in which women have traditionally faced acute deprivation and discrimination. Despite it being a democratic and modern Indian State, gender discrimination continues to persist despite the fact that legal equality is guaranteed by the constitution. There is a difference between the treatment meted out to women in societies like India and the philosophical and religious principles as enshrined in the moral and social codes of such societies.

Punjab might be passing through the 21st century, however, when it comes to the condition of women and gender issues; the situation is far from satisfactory. Even today, women in Punjab are subjected to many deplorable forms of discrimination. Gender issue can be termed as those issues which affect women directly or indirectly. Any law or custom that reinforces and institutionalizes women's inferior status in society, or any event or series of events that affect a large number of women adversely can be understood as instances of discrimination on the basis of gender.¹ In the 21st century, women continue to be a vulnerable section of society. Gender crimes, dowry deaths, domestic violence, female foeticide and honour killing have exposed the hollowness and ineffectuality of constitutional, legal, social and political institutions and provisions that were brought into existence to counter gender discrimination.

For the purpose of present study, urban and rural areas of district Patiala in Punjab have been selected as the area of study. The entire population of Patiala district has been treated as the universe. The random sample of 300 women respondents has been taken comprising 150 urban and 150 rural women. The urban and rural segments were further divided into working and non-working women (75 each).

¹ Sushma Yadav and Anil Dutta Mishra, *Gender Issues in India: Some Reflections*, Radha Publications, New Delhi, p. 9.

Table 5.1
Awareness about Women Rights

Opinion of Respondents	Urban (150)		Rural (150)		Grand Total (300)
	Working (75)	Non-Working (75)	Working (75)	Non-Working (75)	
Yes	63 (84.00%)	52 (69.33%)	57 (76.00%)	44 (58.66%)	216 (72.00%)
No	12 (16.00%)	23 (30.66%)	18 (24.00%)	31 (41.33%)	84 (28.00%)

Source: Field survey

Table 5.1 indicates that out of 300 respondents, the number of urban working respondents who profess awareness of their rights is 84.00 percent and non-working respondents is 69.33 percent, which is more than that of working and non-working respondents in rural area i.e. 76.00 percent and 58.66 percent respectively. The remaining 16.00 percent urban working and 30.66 percent urban non-working respondents have no awareness about their rights. Compared to this 24.00 percent rural working and 41.33 percent rural non-working respondents are ignorant of any such term that has been enacted to safeguard women's rights.

On being asked whether they have ever heard about the term 'gender equality' and do they know the meaning of gender equality, only 68.51 percent respondents from both areas rural and urban (working and non-working) responded saying that they are aware about the term gender equality and know the meaning of gender equality. However, it is evident that the awareness level is lower in rural areas as compared to urban areas. The remaining 31.48 percent respondents in both areas are unaware about any such term. They do not have any knowledge of the term gender equality which is integral to all levels of social discourse today. The study also revealed that even in situations where women have reasonably good level of information and are aware of the concept of gender equality: it often happens that their circumstances and family environment do not allow them to enjoy the benefits as well as rights with which the concept of gender equality is related.

On the basis of above data, it can be said that women from urban areas are more aware about their rights and status as compared to their rural counterparts. The

most obvious reason is that urban women are more educated and have greater access to education. Moreover, as they mostly live in nuclear families, they are not constrained by traditional laws and customs which inhibit the freedom of women. This is because, in a nuclear family, the wife is not subordinate to any other elderly woman. They take their decisions independently with the consent of their husbands. On the other hand, in rural areas, mostly where the joint family system is prevalent, normally, the elders in the family like the male members or the mother-in-law take all the major decisions and the women have to agree with the decision.

Table 5.2
Freedom of Choice in Education

Opinion of Respondents	Urban (150)		Rural (150)		Grand Total (300)
	Working (75)	Non-Working (75)	Working (75)	Non-Working (75)	
Yes	45 (60.00%)	39 (52.00%)	35 (46.66%)	29 (38.66%)	148 (49.33%)
No	30 (40.00%)	36 (48.00%)	40 (53.33%)	46 (61.33%)	152 (50.66%)

Source: Field Survey .

A study of the table 5.2 indicates that 49.33 percent in all and 60.00 percent urban working and 46.66 percent rural working respondents acquired the education of their own choice as compared to 52.00 percent urban and 38.66 percent rural non-working counterparts. On the other hand, 40.00 percent urban working and 53.33 percent rural working respondents were not allowed to acquire education of their own choice as compared to 48.00 percent urban and 61.33 percent rural non-working respondents. The most common reason cited by those who feel deprived of is that the school was at a far off place from the house and there was no source of conveyance for to and fro journey to school.

The analysis of data clearly reveals that women are still far behind the men in terms of their access to educational facilities, especially in rural areas. It is quite evident from the data that in urban areas, women's education is far better as compared to the rural areas during. However, the gap has been reduced the post-independence period, between the higher education of boys and girls. Further, in the

rural area, education of girls from the upper middle class families has also witnessed an encouraging trend, but among the low income families, the gap still continues to persist partly due to certain traditional prejudices and partly because of sustained poverty. Right from the childhood, girls are brought up in the manner that makes them economically dependent on men. In childhood, a girl remains constantly under the dominance of her father or elder brother. It depends upon their sweet will whether they allow her to get education or not.

A large segment of rural people is not supportive of higher education for girls. The reason behind this is male dominance and lack of awareness. Some of the illiterate respondents were of the opinion that it is natural for a girl to get married and go to her in-laws house on getting young. Because of this conservative thinking, they do not spend much on a girl's education. Rather, they keep on saving money for her marriage and dowry. On the other hand, according to them, a son takes care of them in old age and so he should be well educated and well settled. Some of the respondents expressed the view that dowry is very important for girls. When the girl is in her childhood, majority of the Indian families begin saving money, maintain jewelers, clothes, household commodities etc. to give as dowry to the groom on her marriage. It is believed that without dowry the girl finds it difficult to find a respectable place for her in next family. It doesn't matter how much educated she is. Thus, emphasis is given on saving money for spending lavishly on her marriage rather than spending on higher education. Further, another reason behind this is also the poverty among the common masses. In some families, when a girl is supposed to be playing with dolls and living in a fantasy world and studying in schools, her family makes her to work for economic livelihood to make both ends meet. Thus, majority of the respondents are of the view that the other major obstacle in getting the education of their choice is: prejudices of the parents about sending grown up girls to the schools, especially co-educational schools; shortage of women teachers at schools, poverty of rural parents who need the children to work at home or to look after their siblings while their mothers are away at work and due to the tradition of early marriage etc.

Table 5.3

In-Laws Support for Higher Education of Girls

Opinion of Respondents	Urban (150)		Rural (150)		Grand Total (300)
	Working (75)	Non-Working (75)	Working (75)	Non-Working (75)	
Yes	63 (84.00%)	52 (69.33%)	50 (66.66%)	45 (60.00%)	210 (70.00%)
No	12 (16.00%)	23 (30.66%)	25 (33.33%)	30 (40.00%)	90 (30.00%)

Source: Field Survey.

Table 5.3 indicates that out of total, 70.00 percent respondents in all, urban and rural including working and non-working respondents expressed the view that their in-laws know the importance of higher education and they are very supportive for girls' higher education. The percentage of the various sections of respondents is 84.00 percent urban working and 69.33 percent urban non-working and 66.66 percent rural working and 60.00 percent rural non-working. Comparatively 30.00 percent respondents have admitted that their in-laws family is not in favour of higher education especially for girls. The percentage of such respondents is 16.00 percent working and 30.66 percent Non-working in urban area and 33.33 percent rural working and 40.00 percent rural Non-working respondents.

On being asked whether they would support the higher education of their daughters against the family decision, 68.88 percent respondents said they would support their daughters. Comparatively 31.11 percent respondents from both areas said that they support their girls for higher education by going against the family decision. They expressed the apprehension that they do not want to create a problem in their family by opposing the family decisions. Some other respondents were of the view that there is a command of their mother-in-law in their family and there is a trend in their families that the girls cannot go for study to big cities or abroad. Many of the respondents expressed their views by saying that ; kv/gfotkok *u ; l; pVh j h dominating j ? fi lE/g'sh dh Tµbh gVUJh dh e'Jh rñ kfJP Bj hñ s/Bk j h Bj dh B'oh

dh² (In our families the position of mother-in-law is very dominating. In such a place there is no scope for the higher study of granddaughter or of daughter-in-law pursuing job) Thus, because of the patriarchal nature of Indian society, 100 percent literacy rate is still a distant dream for women.

It can finally be said that whereas the situation is undergoing a change slowly and steadily, the level of resistance is still high. Conservative thinking with regard to female education coupled with poverty still poses formidable challenge in the way of achieving healthy standards of female literacy. It is particular to mention here that lack of literacy is directly responsible for low standards of awareness and absence of consciousness about social and economic rights of women.

Table 5.4
Freedom of Choice in Profession

Opinion of Respondents	Urban Working (75)	Rural Working (75)	Grand Total (150)
Yes	55 (73.33%)	48 (64.00%)	103 (68.66%)
No	20 (26.66%)	27 (36.00%)	47 (31.33%)

Source: Field Survey.

Table 5.4 relates to 150 working respondents only. Out of 68.66 percent in all, 73.33 percent urban working and 64.00 percent rural working respondents are in a particular jobs/profession by their own choice. There is no pressure from their parents or in-laws family on them. They can even do jobs far away from their homes. Comparatively 26.66 percent urban and 36.00 percent rural working respondents are not free to do jobs as per their own choice. One urban respondent of Patiala district said that, "ukj / feB/ woi h ekBB pD i kD, ; wki gVlfby i kt/ ns/ GkA dBhrk uB s/ gj lu i kJ/ go ; kv/ ; wki dh n'bs Bf b? e/ ; u ed/ Bj hA pdb ; edh. wA M.A., B.Ed jk ns/ Job eoBk ukj bh ; h. go wb/ fgsk i ' fe Police line *u job eod/ j B s/ wbk Gok i ' fe PCS Officer j? go wBf job eoB dh nkfrnk Bj hA fdZsh. ; kv/ xo ftlu sk gVUJh dh th e'Jh ewh Bj hA ; h sk fJIE/ n; hA fe; uhl Bf fl wtko wBkr-k"³ (We may

² Personal Interview, September 19, 2014.

³ Personal Interview, September 19, 2014.

enact a number of laws, our society may become highly literate and we may reach the highest stage of scientific advancement but the thinking of our society towards women can never undergo change. I possess the academic qualification of M.A., B.Ed. and want to do a job but my father who serves at police lines and my brother who is a PCS officers do not allow me to do a job. There was no problem of education in our family then who is to be held responsible for this state of affairs).

Some of respondents are of the view that they are allowed to take up only teaching job. Others are of view that their parents/in-laws family allow them to do jobs near to their home even on low income but they are not allowed to do job at a distant place from their homes. They feel that if they work at a place which is far away from their home, they will not be able to fulfill their domestic responsibilities efficiently. They are of the view that job is your choice. It is not compulsion on you. Nobody will co-operate you in this regard. Other respondents contended that working close to one's home is almost a compulsion as it is not by choice but in many cases because of economic needs of the family that they have to work near home or away from home. In many cases, due to poverty of rural parents who need the children to work at home or in the fields or outside the home and due to the tradition of early marriage, disapproval of nursing jobs and jobs in companies are also considered to be unsuitable for girls.

On the other hand, when the same question was asked to the Non-working respondents in both areas, it was revealed that 55.33 percent respondents are not interested in pursuing a job. But 44.66 percent non-working respondents in both urban and rural areas expressed a desire to pursue a job. However, most of them are restricted either by their fathers-in-law and mothers-in-law mainly because of their patriarchal or conservative values. They said that in the opinion of their in-laws, the primary duty of a woman is to discharge her domestic responsibilities. It is the responsibility of the male members to look after the outdoor duties. Only by staying at home, a woman can look after the children properly, discharge her family responsibilities and take care of the elderly. These are considered to be her main duties. One respondent of rural area stated that, "wBf e'Jh B'eoh tkbh Bj Bj hl ukj hdlh feTffe Tj wbh eh ; tk eorh Tbnk wBf Tf d/ ; kj wD/ gkDh dk frbk; b? e/ yVbk

*gU s/Bkb/jlE dh i pkB j' i kdj j?B'oh tkbhrK Bf K dh. "*⁴ *(I don't need a working daughter in law because what type of service she will render to me? Conversely, I shall have to stand before her offering a glass of water. Moreover, it becomes unavoidable to tolerate the comments of the serving daughters in law).*

Thus, the data revealed that quite a good number of women who were employed before marriage had to give up their jobs after marriage in order to be able to devote their time to the family obligations. This renders them economically dependent on their husbands. Very few rural respondents revealed that because of living in joint family, sometimes they have hardly any control even on certain important aspects of their own life such as taking up or continuing a job or education, planning one's family, etc., because there is a lot of interference by the elder members in making important decisions in joint families.

Freedom to Select Life Partner

Marriage in the Indian social set up is more of a social or a religious obligation as its main purpose is observing one's *Dharma* through the perpetuation of the institution of family as well as the continuance of the group through progeny.⁵ Marriage is bonding of two partners, coming from different backgrounds. So, consent of both partners is required. In India, the system of joint family is quite common especially in rural areas in which, ordinarily three generations used to live together in a patriarchal system which administers the various affairs of the entire family. Thus, the elders are held in high esteem and enjoy almost irrefutable authority. Young family members who fail to adhere to their advice and take independent decisions are subjected not only to the displeasure of the elders but to social excommunication as well. In the Indian society, there is a well established notion that the honor of the family rests with the women who can violate it by any social misconduct that is against the principles of the concept of ritual purity. Sometimes marriage within caste becomes a matter of prestige for parents and any violation of traditional marriage related convention may also become the reason of 'honour killing'.

⁴ *Personal Interview*, September 25, 2014.

⁵ Niranjna, *Status of Women and Family Welfare*, Kanishka Publishers, New Delhi, 2000, p. 78.

Table 5.5
Freedom to select their own Life Partner

Opinion of Respondents	Urban (150)		Rural (150)		Grand Total (300)
	Working (75)	Non-Working (75)	Working (75)	Non-Working (75)	
No	27 (36.00%)	35 (46.66%)	39 (52.00%)	43 (57.33%)	144 (48.00%)
To a limited extent	25 (33.33%)	16 (21.33%)	20 (26.66%)	18 (24.00%)	79 (26.33%)
Yes, to a great extent	23 (30.66%)	24 (32.00%)	16 (21.33%)	14 (18.66%)	77 (25.66%)

Source: Field Survey.

Table 5.5 reflects that the majority of respondents, in the case of their own marriage, got married according to the will of their parents and no weightage were given to their own choice. 48.00 percent in both the areas taken together, 36.00 percent working and 46.66 percent of urban Non-working respondents have had no say in the decision regarding the selection of their life partners. In the same way, in rural areas 52.00 percent working and 57.33 percent rural Non-working respondents have had no freedom to choose their life partners. Only 26.33 percent respondents including urban working (33.33 percent), non-working (21.33 percent) and rural working (26.66 percent) and non-working (24.00 percent) were allowed freedom to a limited extent by their parents when the decision of their marriage was taken. But at the same time, parents of 30.66 percent working respondents and 32.00 percent urban non-working respondents have given proper consideration to their decision to choose their life partner. However, the overall percentage of respondents who were given freedom to choose their partners in rural region is very low. It is only 21.33 percent and 18.66 percent respectively. Thus, the data reveals that the urban respondents enjoy more freedom in choosing their life partners as compared to their rural counterparts. Moreover, the position of working respondents in the matter of selecting their life partners is better than their non-working counterparts in both areas.

Indian society is essentially patriarchal, where boys are mostly free to choose their life partners but the girl's choice does not often matter much. Inter-caste, inter-religion weddings are not universally acceptable in the Indian society even today. The data clearly indicates that majority of the respondents in the case of their own marriage had to go with their parents' decision regarding selection of their marriage partner. The main reason behind this situation is the prevalence of patriarchal values. Important decisions related to women's life are taken mostly by male members and women are not allowed to have their say. The reason for this is that some families still hold the view that only male members are capable of taking the right decisions. Male members are considered to be more mature and it is believed that their understanding of the outside world is much better. A woman, on the other hand, is not considered to be an ideal person for taking decisions connected with affairs outside the domestic sphere.

Table 5.6
Freedom to Daughters in selecting their Life Partner

Opinion of Respondents	Urban (150)		Rural (150)		Grand Total (300)
	Working (75)	Non-Working (75)	Working (75)	Non-Working (75)	
Agree	48 (64.00%)	43 (57.33%)	30 (40.00%)	33 (44.00%)	154 (51.33%)
Disagree	27 (36.00%)	32 (42.66%)	45 (60.00%)	42 (56.00%)	146 (48.66%)

Source: Field Survey.

Table 5.6 shows that 51.33 percent respondents, in the case of their daughters' marriage, are in favour of their daughters' decision for choosing their life partner independently. Some of the respondents are of the view that they would even favour their daughter, if she chooses her life partner out of caste. But some women argue that they would support their daughter only if she selects her life partner from within the caste only and the economic status of the prospective groom matches their family standard. Comparatively 48.66 percent respondents in both areas, hold that they would not allow their daughters to select their life partner independently. They are of the view that it is the privilege as well as the responsibility of the parents to

find a suitable match for their daughters. In comparison to urban women, the number of rural women who disfavor their daughter's own decision is more. They are of the opinion that the adolescent children are not mature enough to take important decisions like that of their marriage independently. It is the responsibility of their parents only.

Thus, during the field survey, it has been observed that no doubt our society is advancing day by day but even today, girls are expected to marry the boy chosen by their parents. It is still not a socially approved custom for girls to marry boys of their choice. It is common for parents to disown their daughters and to bring an end to all their relations with them, if they do not approve of the boy chosen by the girl. But, there are no hard and fast rules regarding the marriage of their sons. It shows that the conditions of patriarchal system apply to women especially.

On being asked whether their husbands help them in domestic chores, a majority of 50.33% respondents in both areas expressed disagreement. Among them most of the respondents were of the view that ; *odkoh\$wodkBrh dk mlgk pj s wkvk j? i' wodk Bf xo dk ew Bj hl eoB fddk. fJ; *u TBK dh j th j th j?*⁶ (*The stamp of landlord or he-man is very bad which compels the males not to help in any pursuit of the house as doing so downgrades their status*). In the case of non-working women, most of the husbands think that women should remain confined to the domestic sphere whereas men should take care of the outdoor duties. During field survey, it was found that in case where a husband lends a helping hand to his wife, his conduct is generally disapproved of. Such husbands are often considered to be henpecked husbands. In order to maintain their dignity and honour in the society, men often avoid helping their wives. Only 49.66 percent respondents in both urban and rural areas have agreed that they get help from their husbands in the domestic chores. The data reveals that, in the case of working wives, normally husbands assist in domestic work. However, despite all the assistance, a wife gets from her husband or children, the ultimate responsibility of household management rests with her only.

Level of Participation in Decision-Making on Family Matters

It is pertinent to mention here that despite the fact that women do much more work than men yet their contribution is not recognized. Their say in the major

⁶ *Personal Interview*, October 7, 2014.

decision-making processes of the family is also negligible. All the major decisions like education of their children, their marriage, and property matters etc. are taken by the men. The say of their parents-in-law in the family affairs is much more than the say of respondents. The former enjoy autonomy because of their age as well as the patriarchal nature of the society.

Table 5.7

Participation in Decision-Making at Home

Opinion of Respondents	Urban (150)		Rural (150)		Grand Total (300)
	Working (75)	Non-Working (75)	Working (75)	Non-Working (75)	
Yes, to a great extent	53 (70.66%)	49 (65.33%)	43 (57.33%)	38 (50.66%)	183 (61.00%)
Not at all	22 (29.33%)	26 (34.66%)	32 (42.66%)	37 (49.33%)	117 (39.00%)

Source: Field Survey.

Table 5.7 indicates that total 61 percent respondents of both areas (70.66 percent working and 65.33 percent urban non-working as well as 57.33 percent working and 50.66 percent rural non-working) have admitted to full participation in family decisions. It is clear from the table that as compared to urban area, more respondents of rural area have no participation in family decision-making. In rural set up, women are generally not considered capable of taking independent decisions. Normally, the elders in the family like the male members or the mothers-in-law take all the major decisions. 42.66 percent working and 49.33 percent rural non-working respondents have no participation in their family decisions as compared to their urban counterparts i.e. 29.33 percent working and 34.66 percent urban non-working respondents. In the process of decision making, the position of working respondents in both areas is better than non-working respondents.

On being asked whether their suggestion carries equal weightage in their family, majority of respondents (60.10 percent) in both areas said that their suggestions are equally respected. But 39.89 percent respondents in both areas expressed the view that their opinion has no value in their family matters. Among them most of the respondents were of the view that *Bj j wPk nkgD/ ; j fonk bJh*

gokJh j h ofj dh j? Tf; Bf pNh ; kps j D bJh ek/h ; wK s/ eJh epkBhrk eoBhrk gdhk j B⁷ (A daughter-in-law always remains alien to her in-laws. In order to establish her as a daughter, she has to spend long time and give many sacrifices.)

Some of the respondents expressed the feeling that male members are more capable of taking right decisions and that their opinion does not matter much.

The normal role of a woman in Punjabi family is confined to the performance of household chores including bearing and looking after the children with varying degrees of participation in the decision-making process in the family on matters of collective interest. The analysis of the data shows that respondents of urban areas are comparatively much more participative in decision-making of family matters in comparison to respondents from rural areas. The participation level of rural non-working respondents is very low. In the case of rural area, mostly the opinion of women is not taken into consideration even in the matters related to their dignity, the educational career of the children, their marriage and other family matters like purchasing or selling of property etc. There is no denying the fact that their opinion is of no significance and if they try to assert their opinion, it may disturb the atmosphere of the family. Prevalence of illiteracy and male dominance in rural area can be held as major factors responsible for discrimination against women.

Table 5.8

Awareness Regarding Reproductive Rights

Opinion of Respondents	Urban (150)		Rural (150)		Grand Total (300)
	Working (75)	Non-Working (75)	Working (75)	Non-Working (75)	
Yes	47 (62.66%)	40 (53.33%)	34 (45.33%)	28 (37.33%)	149 (49.66%)
No	28 (37.33%)	35 (46.66%)	41 (54.66%)	47 (62.66%)	151 (50.33%)

Source: Field Survey.

The analysis of data as per above table displays that 62.66 percent urban working respondents and 45.33 percent rural working respondents have proper knowledge and awareness of their reproductive rights at the time of their marriage.

⁷ Personal Interview, November 27, 2014.

Comparatively 53.33 percent urban and 37.33 percent rural non-working women also claim to have proper knowledge about their reproductive right, but their number is low as compared to their working counterparts. On the other hand, 37.33 percent working and 46.66 percent urban non-working respondents are totally unaware about their reproductive rights and in rural area 54.66 percent working and 62.66 percent rural non-working respondents fall in this category. On being asked whether they gave equal consideration for planning a child, 63.75 percent respondents from both areas claim to have the freedom of equal consideration, while 36.24 percent respondents do not have any such freedom. When they were asked the reason for this, most of them expressed the reason that they were married at an early age of around 18 years. Such things have not given great importance at that time. Some respondents even expressed the view that they did not have the right to decide whether they should continue with the pregnancy or get it terminated.

It is well known that the average Indian woman has no choice in relation to important events in her life such as marriage, parenthood, family planning etc. The reason is that majority of Indian women are not married in the nuclear families and elder members of the family continue to have a very important role in such decision making. In traditional Indian families, the in-laws, especially the mother-in-law, play major part in the decision about the number of children that the couple should have.

Birth of Girl Child

Victimization of women in India begins right from the time of their birth. Boys are preferred to girls. In most of the cases, the birth of a girl child in the family brings gloom even for the parents of the child, not to speak about other members of the family. On the contrary, the birth of a son is enthusiastically celebrated with blessings showered on the couple by all the members of the family, friends and neighbours alike. If two or three daughters are born successively to a woman then she is subjected to abuses and all sort of ill-treatment especially by her in-laws. There are innumerable instances where the parents have deserted the newly born girls at the door-steps of some orphanage or temple or hospital or in a park and abandoned little girls at the time of birth.⁸ In the Punjabi society, it is still common with the people to express their preference for boys in saying like “*Jad ghar janmi*

⁸ Yudhistar Kahol, *Violence Against Women*, Reference Press, New Delhi, 2003, p. 10.

*dhi ve babula, sochee pai gye jee ve babula, jad ghar janme putt ve babula, kothe char ke buk ve babula.”*⁹

Table 5.9
Favour of having a Girl Child

Opinion of Respondents	Urban (150)		Rural (150)		Grand Total (300)
	Working (75)	Non-Working (75)	Working (75)	Non-Working (75)	
Yes	57 (76.00%)	50 (66.66%)	54 (72.00%)	52 (69.33%)	213 (71.00%)
No	18 (24.00%)	25 (33.33%)	21 (28.00%)	23 (30.66%)	87 (29.00%)

Source: Field Survey.

With the spread of education among masses and rejection of orthodox thoughts, the balance in society has tilted in favour of girl child. The table given above shows that 76.00 percent urban working and 72.00 percent rural working respondents are in the favour of having at least one girl child. 66.66 percent and 69.33 percent non-working respondents in both areas are also in favor of having a girl child. But 24.00 percent working and 33.33 percent urban non-working respondents do not prefer the birth of girl child. The percentage of rural respondents who disfavour the birth of girl child is 28.00 percent and 30.66 percent respectively. Among them many of the urban and rural respondents were of the view that, *"nzi ebl dk wj b pj s yokp j? n; h Bj h ukj d/ fe ; kv/ e/ h j t/, feT/ fe ekBB th e/ h/ nk dh okyh eoB bJh fYl bk g? frnk j? i d/ s/ e ndkbsk d/ c? b/ nkT/ d/ j B T/ d/ s/ e pdk w/ e i kdk j? nzi e/ bl g? / d/ dw s/ ; lu B/ pVh ; |k/ h Bkb dpk fd/ sk i kdk j? feT/ fe dkw pDk/ ekw"*¹⁰ (*Environment of today is very much vitiated. We do not want that we have a daughter because law is not fully capable to provide protection to the girls. Till the time decisions of the courts are pronounced, the petitioner does not survive. In today's time, money does not allow the truth to come on the surface because money makes the mare go*).

⁹ The folk song mentioned by the elderly ladies during the survey conducted for the research purpose.

¹⁰ Personal Interview, October 5, 2014.

The data reveals that majority of women favour the birth of a girl child. Regarding it, when we compare the non-working respondents, the percentage is high in rural area. The data shows that the non-working women of rural area prefer the birth of girl child more as compared to urban non-working respondents.

Table 5.10
Husband's Support for having a Girl Child

Opinion of Respondents	Urban (107)		Rural (106)		Grand Total (213)
	Working (57)	Non-Working (50)	Working (54)	Non-Working (52)	
Agree	42 (73.68%)	31 (62.00%)	43 (79.62%)	35 (67.30%)	151 (70.89%)
Disagree	15 (26.31%)	19 (38.00%)	11 (20.37%)	17 (32.69%)	62 (29.10%)

Source: Field Survey

On being asked whether their husbands support their decision of having a girl child, majority of 70.89 percent respondents in both urban (working 73.68 percent and non-working 62.00 percent) and rural (working 79.62 percent and non-working 67.30 percent) areas, said that their husbands are very cooperative and they support their decision for a girl child. But 29.10 percent respondents in both areas (urban working 26.31 percent, non-working 38.00 percent and rural working 20.37 percent, non-working 32.69 percent) expressed the view that their husbands do not support their decision. They don't want a girl child. The main reason for this is the prevalence of dowry system and the increasing crime against women in the society. Moreover, all the important and orthodox rituals are performed by the son, i.e., only a son can light his father's funeral pyre. It is because of such factors that girls are projected as second rate human beings. But some respondents say that their husbands show preference for the girl child as a second child rather than as a first child. As a first child, they prefer only a male child. It is quite clear that as compared to urban area, the respondents of rural area get greater support from their husbands for giving birth to a girl child.

On being asked whether they are pressurized by their in-laws to abort the girl child, majority of 48.38 percent respondents preferred to remain silent. It has been

observed that often the husband and the mother-in-law compel women to undergo abortion in order to get rid of the female child. However, such women are wary of expressing the truth because of the fear of in-laws. As such, most of the women did not give candid answer. Some of the respondents are of the view that having a boy is essential for them in order to gain respectful place in their in-laws family as well as in the society. They raised a point that nobody likes and respects a lady who has not borne a male child. They believe that only the birth of a son gives them respect and acceptance in the family of the in-laws and also the right to express their opinion. 30.64 percent respondents from both areas said that they were never compelled by their in-laws to abort the girl child. 20.96 percent respondents from both areas expressed the view that they have been forced by their in-laws for ultrasound scan to determine the gender of foetus during pregnancy and abort the foetus, if it was a girl. There is normally dominance of husband or the mother-in-law in such families. In these families, it is the primary duty of the daughter-in-law to give birth to a son, even if the girl has to undergo several abortions and ruin her health. During field survey, one respondent from urban area, said that, "n; m fe; nkl kdh dh rlb eod/ jk< pjš ; kohnk nbsk nzi th nkgDh wol h Bkb nkgD/ plu/ Bf i Bw Bj hm d/ ; edhnrk, feTife Tj pluk fJle bVeh j? feZEI nbs wod d/ pokpo j? i dfe nbs dh nkl kdh dh rlb ; kv/ Gkjhuko/ ftlu f; o| ekri k sle j h ; hws j?"¹¹ (What type of freedom do we talk about? So many women are unable to give birth to their child if the child happens to be a girl. How we can say that women enjoy a status equal to the men. Talk of freedom of woman in our community is just limited to the papers only).

During field survey, it is noticed that daughter-in-law is often blamed, ostracized and even divorced for her inability to produce a son. Majority of the respondents expressed the view that in the Punjabi community, the first girl child is generally not welcomed; whereas on the other hand, even the birth of fifth consecutive son is a matter of celebration. It was also found that although most of the respondents were in favour of having a girl child but it is also true that most of them never took a second chance for the girl child if the first child was male. But, if they have girl as the first child then it becomes inevitable to try for a baby boy.

¹¹ Personal Interview, November 18, 2014.

Many respondents expressed the view that if they have first male child, they don't want to go for the second child, because during the second chance if they again give birth to male child, the whole property will have to be divided into two parts and it would reduce their status. They don't want two sons or two daughters. Some women were of the view that at least one son was also necessary because after marriage the girls had a lot of support from their parents but after the parents' death, their role could be played by their son. The reason behind all such problems is dowry system, illiteracy and lack of awareness. It has also been observed that the pressure to abort the girl child is more in urban areas as compared to rural areas because of the materialistic nature of the urban people.

Another reason that can be attributed to such attitudes among urban people is that they want only one child (male child) in order to keep the family size small where most of the women use sex selection techniques to know the gender of the foetus. If the foetus is found to be of female, then some of them prefer to abort the foetus of girl. However, some unscrupulous medical practitioners still continue with such practices in a secret manner. On the other hand, rural people are not as advanced as the urban people are. They know and fear the legal provisions against illegal abortions. However, most of them use these methods in a clandestine manner to keep their families small.

Table 5.11
Access to Health Facilities

Opinion of Respondents	Urban (150)		Rural (150)		Grand Total (300)
	Working (75)	Non-Working (75)	Working (75)	Non-Working (75)	
Always	68 (90.66%)	56 (74.66%)	60 (80.00%)	49 (65.33%)	233 (77.66%)
Never	7 (9.33%)	19 (25.33%)	15 (20.00%)	26 (34.66%)	67 (22.33%)

Source: Field Survey.

Table 5.11 indicates that majority of 77.66 percent respondents in both urban and rural area (working and non-working) have access to medical facilities at the time of their illness. At the same time 22.33 percent urban and rural respondents do not have any such facility or an easy access to medical facilities when they need them. Some respondents are of the view that at the time of their illness, they are not

allowed to go to the hospitals but they get medicines at home through their family sources. But in comparison to rural area, more respondents of urban area receive timely and proper medical treatment. The main reason behind this is their enhanced consciousness about health. So, the study reveals that there is greater concern about health and medical facilities among the urban people when compared to rural people.

In Indian families in general and in families of Punjab in particular, one can easily notice a traditionally implicit and explicit discrimination between boys and girls over food, education and medical care. In many families, the birth of a girl child brings a feeling of sadness in the family rather than joy. Male child is showered with love and care and given rich diet but the girl is burdened with domestic chores and given stale food. During field survey, it was noticed that there is still practice of preferential treatment for boys. In some families meals are served first to the male members and then to the women who have to remain contented with the residual food only.

On being asked whether they are provided with nutritious food, majority of 58.33 percent respondents in both areas including working and non-working respondents have access to proper diet or nutritious food. They never notice any nutritious food discrimination against the girl child in their families. However, 27.00 percent respondents in both areas noticed that there is food discrimination in their families to some extent. On the other hand, 14.66 percent respondents in both areas expressed that there is practice of food discrimination in their family to a large/great extent. They said that their grandmother/mother-in-law served nutritious food to the male members and the females were mostly deprived of it. They reasoned that male members work harder than females, so they need proper diet and nutritious food. The other reason for food discrimination is that most of these women live in poverty. A general paucity of nutritious food for females means that male members use to eat nutritious diet at the cost of females. This becomes the main reason for poor diet and lack of nutritious food to females. In the course of field survey, it was also noticed that the food discrimination among rural women is higher as compared to urban women. The main reason behind this is the ignorance, superstition and anti-daughter bias of rural women and paucity of resources with the rural people.

From the above data, it can be deduced that there is a difference in health standards in rural and urban areas and also in the intake of nutritional food by

women. The general access to health facilities is reasonably good in urban areas particularly in the case of working women. Access to health facilities in rural areas is not up to the requirement but it is now improving due to public awareness. This overall improvement can be attributed to increased expenditure on health services by national and international bodies and a rising consciousness about the need to provide quality and broad based health facilities for underprivileged sections of the society including women. In terms of nutritional food intake, the rural women are at a clear disadvantage because of orthodox and outdated social attitudes and women are still treated as unproductive members who do not deserve to be well fed.

Dowry

The term 'dowry' signifies a payment (in cash or in kind) made to the son-in-laws or to his parents. Dowry also includes enormous wasteful expenses incurred on entertaining the bridegroom's marriage party. Dowry giving families are obliged to continue with the practice of giving gifts on festive and ceremonial occasions and on child birth, marriages, etc. This practice goes on for long time and is usually considered to cover the dowry given at the time of marriage.¹² Now in India, especially in Punjab, giving dowry has become a mandatory practice as it is related, to the prestige of the family. Most of the people prefer and only concentrate on the value of dowry items rather than the merits of the girl. Education of the girl also doesn't matter much for them.

Table 5.12

Role of Dowry in Enhancing Women Position in the family of In-laws

Opinion of Respondents	Urban (150)		Rural (150)		Grand Total (300)
	Working (75)	Non-Working (75)	Working (75)	Non-Working (75)	
Yes	45 (60.00%)	35 (46.66%)	38 (50.66%)	45 (60.00%)	163 (54.33%)
No	30 (40.00%)	40 (53.33%)	37 (49.33%)	30 (40.00%)	137 (45.66%)

Source: Field Survey.

Table 5.12 depicts that 60.00 percent urban working and 50.66 percent rural working women are of the view that heavy dowry has enhanced their status in their

¹² Sarojini Nayak and Jeevan Nair, *Women's Empowerment in India*, Pointer Publishers, Jaipur, 2005. p. 357.

in-laws family. On the other hand, 46.66 percent urban non-working and 60.00 percent rural non-working respondents approve the dowry system and agree that dowry has definitely enhanced their status. Among them some respondents of rural and urban area expressed the opinion by saying that, "dki sk eMh Bf dDk j h gldk j? Bj hll sk eMh tkfbrnk dk nsl ; jfonk dk, dj k fXok dk, Pohek *u Bze Bj hll ofj dk."¹³ (It is a compulsion of the parents to give dowry to their daughters. The absence of dowry is taken by the parental family as well as in-laws family as a blot on their dignity). Comparatively 40.00 percent urban working and 53.33 percent urban non-working respondents negate or do not approve of the practice of taking or giving any type of dowry and in this regard, the percentage of rural respondents working and non-working is 49.33 percent and 40.00 percent respectively. These respondents expressed the view that dowry did not play any role in enhancing their status in the family. They are of the view that it is only the girls' good habits, educational qualification and ethical values which help them to adjust in the next family.

The analysis of data shows that in comparison of housewives and working women in urban and rural areas, the percentage of urban working women who favour the dowry system is higher as compared to rural working ladies. They consider dowry as a necessary convention because it is a symbol of prestige for both the families. Majority of 54.33 percent respondents approve the dowry system. They are of the view that dowry enhances their status and without dowry they have no 'vaseba' in their in-laws family. They believe that howsoever much educated a girl may be and howsoever a good job she may be having, but a handsome dowry is the only thing that can help her to get a respectable place in her in-laws family. Her academic qualifications and her job are considered to be less important than the assets of dowry.

Some other reasons given by respondents are also mentioned here. Some respondents have given the reason that dowry has become an issue of prestige or a status symbol and in the present days it has also become a compulsion to give dowry in order to marry the daughters in well to do families. Some respondents are of the view that they have the right to take dowry from their parents' house because they

¹³ Personal Interview, October 27, 2014.

have left their share of property in favour of their brothers. They don't demand their share in property except a substantial dowry on their marriage. The study reflects that the custom of giving gifts to girls at the time of marriage as a token of love has assumed the proportions of institutionalized social evil and in turn has become the cause of harassment and persecution of those girls who bring insufficient dowry. It is also one of the main reasons that the girl child is perceived as a burden and is construed to be bad luck. Leading newspapers of India, almost daily publish several news items relating to crimes against women in various terrifying and horrendous forms, i.e., bride burning, poisoning the brides, divorcing the wife or wife battering etc. The reason behind all this is the greed for money or materialistic nature of the dowry seekers. The very big reason behind this entire problem is the lack of proper implementation of Dowry Prohibition Act. The law is deficient and weak. Moreover, people themselves are also responsible for this problem. They do not cooperate with government. Despite strict laws, rules and regulations in place, many of them give dowry to their daughters without any demand. Another reason behind this problem is the decline of cultural and moral values in the society. Moreover, there are some radical groups of young employed boys who have decided not to take any dowry but some other people still force them to take dowry. However such youth is rarest of rare in number.

Victimization on the Basis of Gender

Ironically in a country where womanhood is used to worship as a symbol of goddess, incidents of discrimination against women like rape, eve-teasing, abduction, wife beating, and bride burning keep on multiplying day by day. Women find no security be it home, where they are ill-treated by husbands and in-laws, in the streets and work place where they were vulnerable and fall prey to anti women and antisocial elements, and male colleagues and bosses and they are subjected to innumerable indignities, perhaps at a higher frequency than in most of the civilized society's world over. Indian women thus can be described as the underdogs of a society where theoretically, the law of equality is supposed to be fully applicable and women are considered to be at par with their male counterparts, but in practice the men remain powerful and thrive at the expense of women.¹⁴

¹⁴ Yudhishtar Kahol, *op.cit.*, p. 9.

Table 5.13**Victimization on the Basis of Gender**

Opinion of Respondents	Urban (150)		Rural (150)		Grand Total (300)
	Working (75)	Non-Working (75)	Working (75)	Non-Working (75)	
Yes	72 (96.00%)	63 (84.00%)	68 (90.66%)	70 (93.33%)	273 (91.00%)
No	3 (4.00%)	12 (16.00%)	7 (9.33%)	5 (6.66%)	27 (9.00%)

Source: Field Survey.

Table 5.13 reveals that majority of the respondents i.e., 91.00 percent in all, 96.00 percent urban working and 90.66 percent rural working respondents admit that they face victimization on the basis of gender in the society. Comparatively 84.00 percent urban non-working and 93.33 percent rural non-working respondents fall in the same category. Only 9.00 percent respondents in both areas including working and non-working women have expressed the view that they never face any type of abuse/discrimination on the basis of gender in their family or in the society. The data indicates that majority of working respondents in both the areas face exploitation or intimidation in the form of verbal abuse or in the form of numerous other ways. Majority of respondents admit having faced eve teasing but the percentage of such respondents is more in rural area. Rural non-working women face such problem in society as well as in their family. It is in the form of verbal abuse by male as well as female members. Thus, the comparative analysis of the two areas conducted above reveal that rural area is chiefly agrarian and less developed. Urban area is comparatively much more economically advanced. Moreover, rural area continues to harbour, patriarchal and feudal values. There could be reasons that women are subjected to low forms of abuse like eve-teasing and other forms of gestural or verbal abuse. Thus, it is clear that majority of the respondents of both areas are facing this problem. The main reason is that women are not considered to be a human being but an object of sex only.

The above table has some very significant and important implications. In most of the tables in the present study, there is an intimation of progress and change. In the tables dealing with consciousness of rights, access to education and freedom within the family, almost half the respondents came up with positive answers even if the other half shows the negative side of the picture. However, the figures dealing with victimization on the basis of gender clearly suggest that the situation is very deplorable. Almost 91.00 percent of the respondents acknowledge that victimization and persecution of women continue to exist in the society. This is clear evidence of women's life. They do not feel secured and safe. Moreover, it shows that common women have accepted persecution and indignity in their day to day social life. This is the greatest evidence that even though some cosmetic changes may have been enforced by the provisions of law and order, yet the mindset of the people has not changed.

On being asked that when they face instances of such discrimination what the response of their family is, majority of 59.34 percent respondents from both areas expressed the view that their families fully stand by them. They fully support them if there is any problem. On the other hand, 11.35 percent respondents revealed that their family reproaches them. The family accuses them of being too bold in case they face harassment. In this regard, the percentage of rural respondents is more than urban one. On the other hand 29.30 percent respondents said that their family chooses to remain silent in such situations. The main reason for this can be the social stigma that the society brings upon the victim of sexual offences (i.e., rape, molestation, uttering wrong word, making gesture etc.). Secondly, in such cases, parents do not want to take the issue to the extreme as the future of the victim can get affected. Thirdly, the parents and family are afraid of earning disrepute because of the media. Fourthly, in certain societies (lower class people/tribal) such crimes are not viewed with concern. During field survey, it was observed that the concept of '*izzat*' is very much prevalent in Punjabi society. Parents don't want to highlight any issue related to their daughters.

Table 5.14**Role of Women is confined only to the Domestic work**

Opinion of Respondents	Urban (150)		Rural (150)		Grand Total (300)
	Working (75)	Non-Working (75)	Working (75)	Non-Working (75)	
Fully Agree	-	-	-	4 (5.33%)	4 (1.33%)
Not at All	75 (100%)	75 (100%)	75 (100%)	71 (94.66%)	296 (98.66%)

Source: Field Survey

Table 5.14 shows that out of the total sample, only 1.33 percent respondents who belong to the age group of above 50 are of the view that the role of a woman is limited only to the household activities, child bearing and rearing. Most of these respondents are illiterate. They said that male's responsibility is to see the outdoor duties. They are of the view that women's jobs are confined to the four walls of the house. On the other hand, majority of 98.66 percent respondents from both areas are of the view that women are not made for household activities. They believe that they have equal rights and can do everything that men can do. They are of the view that the mindset of the society should be changed in this regard.

On being asked about the nature of change they expect and desire, 46.00 percent respondents from both the areas have expressed the opinion that women alone should not be assigned all the domestic responsibilities and other family members should also co-operate with them and help them in discharging the domestic duties. On the other hand, 54.00 percent respondents are of the view that a change in the outlook of the family and society is needed to be brought about. Even rural and illiterate women can perform so many other duties useful for society. It is important to organize seminars at village and city level in order to bring about a change in the thinking of society. Effective and practical steps are needed to be taken as consciousness raising measures. Women do not consider themselves to be made only for domestic chores or only the duties of bearing and rearing the children. Their aspirational tendencies are witnessing a gradual change. Almost all the

respondents assert their independence and say that they have also a role in the world outside home and hearth.

Table 5.15
Consciousness of Pride in being a Woman

Responses Respondents	Urban (150)		Rural (150)		Grand Total (300)
	Working (75)	Non-Working (75)	Working (75)	Non-Working (75)	
Yes	53 (70.66%)	48 (64.00%)	39 (52.00%)	30 (40.00%)	170 (56.66%)
No	22 (29.33%)	27 (36.00%)	36 (48.00%)	45 (60.00%)	130 (43.33%)

Source: Field Survey.

The given table 5.15 indicates that most of the working respondents, 70.66 percent urban and 52.00 percent rural, feel proud to be women. Compared to this 64.00 percent urban and 40.00 percent rural non-working respondents also feel proud that they are woman. However 43.33 percent respondents in all don't think so. They feel that woman is exploited, maltreated and humiliated in our society. The 43.33 percent respondents who don't like to be women gave different reasons for thinking so. Firstly, 36.92 percent respondents from both areas expressed the view that there are a large number of social inequalities which women have to face daily. The most popular epithet used for girl/woman is 'homely'. The epithet is both offered and demanded. They said, the word 'homely' (taken as home-loving) symbolizes the very quintessence of what an Indian male and his family would want of the woman; at the minimum it denotes a good homemaker, a devoted housewife, an obedient daughter-in-law, and would be doting mother-in short, a giver and not a taker. And the homely part is not to be pared down, irrespective of her being engaged in out-of-home work. Some respondents were of the view that the hangover of the pre-19th century period is very much in existence even today and is often used to exploit a girl and extract dowry. Even today, married women are required to observe fasts on different occasions and pray for the long life and benefits of their husbands, whereas, there is no such obligation on the part of the husband towards his spouse.

Secondly, out of 43.33 percent respondents, 30.76 percent respondents from both areas confess that the reason for the feeling of inadequacy is the result of economic dependency on the husband and or the family. Mostly, the non-working and some of the working respondents have expressed that they being economically dependent upon their husbands, not having any property in their names not receiving any financial assistance from their families inability to maintain alone; inability to do shopping alone, and inability to go outside the city alone – all these reasons are responsible which contribute to the inferior position of woman. Thirdly, 32.30 percent respondents expressed the reason of lack of social security to women. They said, the general perception today is that the crime against women has increased to such a great extent that women cannot move freely and participate in the community affairs all alone. There is no safe territory left for women, not even in their '*mohallas*'. Apart from being badly harassed, women are also being assaulted and raped before the eyes of their family members. Thus, the study emphatically highlights that many of the respondents want to change the mindset of the society. They are of the view that woman is not safe anywhere. Significantly, female victims of violence have not been given due attention in the literature on social problems or in that of criminal violence. Nor any attempt has been made to explain why both the public and private sector agencies have ignored for so long the varied instances of women exploitation in society.

ECONOMIC RIGHTS

Economic rights are those rights which are related to the economic independence of women. Economic independence of women is a modern phenomenon in Indian society. It is considered as the most important pre-requisite to ensure an equal status to women. In recent years, with the breaking down of traditional barriers, women segment of society is emerging in a new role of working class women. The rising cost of living has made it imperative for most of the women to take some form of employment in order to supplement the family income. As a result, a large number of women have entered into manual and white collar jobs and professions. This has certainly brought a radical change in women's status owing to many legislative measures enacted in recent years to provide equal opportunity to

women in matters of employment and for prevention of sex discrimination.¹⁵ Government of India has passed “Equal Remuneration Act” in order to safeguard the interests of women from economic exploitation. But it is also true that in the present socio-economic set up the contribution of labour by women is not adequately recognized. Now a day, majority of Indian women are participating in the family earning efforts to cope with the rising expenses and prices. Women’s efforts in running the household and in helping their spouses are laudable. Now, they have entered in every job or profession which used to be the domain of men only in the past.

In this present study, the respondents were asked whether they were given the independence of spending their salary, the opinion of respondents was as given below:

Table 5.16
Independence to Spend Salary

Opinion of Respondents	Urban Working (75)	Rural Working (75)	Grand Total (150)
Yes	40 (53.33%)	29 (38.66%)	69 (46.00%)
No	35 (46.66%)	46 (61.33%)	81 (54.00%)

Source: Field Survey.

Table 5.16 relates to 150 working respondents only. Out of total 150 working respondents, only 46.00 percent respondents feel free to use their income as they desire. There is no interference by their family. But 54.00 percent respondents have expressed the view that they do not have any freedom to spend their income as they desire. They have no control on their earned income. It is taken over by their husbands or mothers-in-law etc. Some of the respondents told that their income has been used by the head of the family for the common cause of the family. In comparison to rural area, more respondents of urban area are free to use their income as they desire because they are living in nuclear families consisting of husband and wife and/or child. In such families, the family utilizes their income for subsistence and maintenance of their family budget in consultation with each other. However, in

¹⁵ Prabhat Chandra Tripathy, *Crime Against Working Women*, APH Publications, New Delhi, 1998, p. 165.

rural areas mostly the joint families are under the charge of the head of family or in the hands of the husband. The respondents from such families told that in joint families it was difficult for them to take decisions to spend their salary independently. In many cases, during the field survey, it was disclosed by the respondents that their husband or mother-in-law were not in favour of their doing job. However, they have no hesitation in snatching the salary at the end of the month. It shows that in their opinion a woman has no right to take care of her own expenses. The husband and mother-in-law of such respondents insist that money should be spent with their permission only. Otherwise, they feel bad and create problems in their family.

The data given in the above table is indicative of a very common and prevalent social trend. The study revealed that though such women are earning hands, despite all that they do not feel themselves free to use their earnings independently. They have to seek prior permission from their husbands or elders. This problem is very visible among the rural women where the old culture is still prevalent. It is a sad satire on the working of joint family system in rural areas where working women have no emancipation from restrictive patriarchal practices. When an earning member has to forfeit her income before the family chieftains, the level of frustration can be inconceivable.

Table 5.17
Availability of Sufficient Money for Household Expenses among
Non-working Women

Opinion of Respondents	Urban Non-Working (75)	Rural Non-Working (75)	Grand Total (150)
Yes	46 (61.33%)	39 (52.00%)	85 (56.66%)
No	29 (38.66%)	36 (48.00%)	65 (43.33%)

Source: Field Survey.

The above table 5.17 relates to 150 non-working respondents only. Majority of them (56.66 percent) in both areas say that they get sufficient money from their husbands to pull on the family affairs. But 43.33 percent respondents say that they do not get sufficient money. They economically depend upon their husbands or in-

laws family for all their family affairs. In comparison to urban area, more respondents of rural area depend upon their family even for their day to day expenses. Some respondents have given the view that their family heads are not sure that a woman can run the family budget efficiently. Some others hold the view that throughout history, society has assigned the role of bread winner to man and expected him to provide for himself and his family. Woman has all along been assigned the role of a helpmate and to look after the family. This is symptomatic of the mind set of our society which treats woman as a very unwise and inferior creature.

Table 5.18

Economic Independence enhances their status in family

Opinion of Respondents	Urban (150)		Rural (150)		Grand Total (300)
	Working (75)	Non-Working (75)	Working (75)	Non-Working (75)	
Agree	62 (82.66%)	44 (58.66%)	58 (77.33%)	50 (66.66%)	214 (71.33%)
Disagree	13 (17.33%)	31 (41.33%)	17 (22.66%)	25 (33.33%)	86 (28.66%)

Source: Field Survey.

The analysis of data reveals that majority of the respondents i.e. 71.33 percent in all, 82.66 percent urban and 77.33 percent rural working respondents are strongly in agreement with the assumption that economic independence plays a significant role in improving the status of women. Comparatively 58.66 percent urban and 66.66 percent rural non-working respondents also agreed with the same version. Some of the respondents expressed the view that if the earnings of women members bring about any significant improvement in the economic condition of the family, it naturally brings greater respect for them. So the majority of respondents in both areas strongly corroborate the view that economic independence plays a great role in improving the status and image of woman at home and this opinion is mostly supported by the working respondents. On the other side 28.66 percent respondents in all, including 17.33 percent urban and 22.66 percent rural working and 41.33 percent urban and 33.33 percent rural non-working respondents seem to believe that economic independence alone is not helpful in empowering women. They have firm

belief in the notion that women are always second to men, whether they earn equally with their male counterparts or not. All major social and economic decisions are made by the husbands. Some respondents also stated that the parents-in-law often intervene in the family matters which consequently adversely affects the women's role in the decision making process of the family. In some orthodox families, even the working women remain confined in shackles of slavery of the husband or mother-in-law which is to the disadvantage of such women.

Thus, the study of the above table reveals that mostly women feel that economic independence is a great tool for their development. They believe that it cannot be denied that economic empowerment does give women a sense of completeness and self-respect. But there are still considerably small group of women (28.66) who feel that their financial contribution to the family sources may not be commensurate with their social independence. They are given very little autonomy in terms of managing the money they earn through their hard efforts. They believe that not money, but a positive attitude towards women is extremely essential for improving the status of woman in the family.

Table 5.19
Awareness Regarding Property Rights

Opinion of Respondents	Urban (150)		Rural (150)		Grand Total (300)
	Working (75)	Non-Working (75)	Working (75)	Non-Working (75)	
Yes	52 (69.33%)	39 (52%)	46 (61.33%)	30 (40.00%)	167 (55.66%)
Partially	22 (29.33%)	28 (37.33%)	20 (26.66%)	19 (25.33%)	89 (29.66%)
No	1 (1.33%)	8 (10.66%)	9 (12.00%)	26 (34.66%)	44 (14.66%)

Source: Field Survey.

The above table 5.19 indicates that most of the respondents (55.66) from both urban and rural areas are completely aware of the existence of law bestowing property rights on them. On the other hand, 29.66 percent respondents from both areas claim to have partial knowledge about their property rights. However, 14.66 percent respondents are totally unaware of any such property rights. The percentage

of urban respondents regarding the awareness of their property rights is more as compared to their rural counterparts. The reasons responsible for this are the prevalence of illiteracy, lack of awareness, patriarchal nature of rural society which does not allow women to come forward in matters of ownership of land and property etc.

On being asked whether their parents are ready to give them the due share from their property, only 11.66 respondents in both areas affirmed that this is possible. They asserted that their parents are prepared to give them their share. The largest part of 88.33 percent respondents of both areas expressed the view that their parents would never be prepared to give them their share from the property even if they wanted to get it. Almost all the respondents agreed that if they demanded their share in the property it could only happen at the cost of their relationship with their parents or brothers. In Indian society, girls usually never stake their claim because if they do so, their parents shall treat it as a breach of faith and often snap relations with them. Some respondents have expressed that for the sake of continuing the relationship, they often relinquish their property share for their brothers. It is crucial for girls to maintain cordial relations with their parents because parents are required to fulfill several obligations even after their daughter's marriage. Some others feel that their parents have to spend a lot on their marriage, so they cannot claim part of parental property as their share after marriage. Above all, Punjabi society has also a low or bad opinion about those women who demand their share in property after marriage. During field survey, it has been observed that there are many live examples where the parents had broken all relations with such daughters who had claimed their share in the parental property.

Table 5.20

Sharing of Property equally between Sons and Daughters

Opinion of Respondents	Urban (150)		Rural (150)		Grand Total (300)
	Working (75)	Non-Working (75)	Working (75)	Non-Working (75)	
Yes	44 (58.66%)	32 (42.66%)	25 (33.33%)	15 (20.00%)	116 (38.66%)
No	31 (41.33%)	43 (57.33%)	50 (66.66%)	60 (80.00%)	184 (61.33%)

Source: Field Survey

Table 5.20 shows that out of total sample, 58.66 percent urban and 33.33 percent rural working respondents are in favour of equal division of property between their son and daughter. Comparatively, 42.66 percent urban and 20.00 percent rural non-working respondents are also in favour of doing the same, but their number is low as compared to their working counterparts. All of them are of the opinion that both the son and the daughter have an equal right on parental property. On the other hand, majority of respondents i.e., 61.33 percent including urban 41.33 percent and 66.66 percent rural working and 57.33 percent urban and 80.00 percent rural non-working respondents are not in favour of sharing property by them equally between their son and daughter. They have given different reasons for their choice. Many respondents are of the opinion that bequeathing property to women is not in line with our cultural and social values. It is believed that if property is divided equally between son and daughter, the family ties of the daughter with her brothers will be eroded or broken. In such cases, property disputes are common and sometimes these family disputes are taken to the courts of law. Large number of respondents expressed the view that a brother shoulders the responsibilities of the sister even after her marriage. He fulfils all the expectations and requirements of the sister and her in-laws after her marriage. According to such respondents, brother-sister relationship is based on love and trust. This love and trust is partly sustained by the sister's surrender of her claim over property and maintained by brother by helping her in marriages of her children and other social ceremonies. Most of the respondents believe that the question of a girl taking a share of ancestral property does not arise as this property has been the rightful legacy of male members of family over generations. According to them, this is an established social custom. Dogmatic thinking, illiteracy, preference to son is responsible for such conservative and partial approaches towards women.

Table 5.21

Purchase of Property in the name of Women

Opinion of Respondents	Urban (150)		Rural (150)		Grand Total (300)
	Working (75)	Non-Working (75)	Working (75)	Non-Working (75)	
Yes	35 (46.66%)	18 (24.00%)	20 (26.66%)	15 (20.00%)	88 (29.33%)
No	40 (53.33%)	57 (76.00%)	55 (73.33%)	60 (80.00%)	212 (70.66%)

Source: Field Survey.

An analysis of the above data shows that only 29.33 percent respondents from both areas have admitted of the case of property having purchased directly in women's names. However, on the other hand majority of 70.66 percent respondents from both areas have disclosed that no property was ever purchased in their names. One respondent from rural area blatantly stated that ; kv/ BK l whB fe; B/ br tkTDh j? ; kvK sk ; kv/ xo d/ fe; /; Nhb d/ frbk; s/ BK sle Bj hl⁶ (What to talk of giving us ownership of land, our name does not appear even on a steel glass of the house). During field survey, it has been observed that in such families, there is a culture of male dominance and patriarchal bent of mind among elder members in the family. The thinking of such people is that there is no need to purchase any property in the name of women. The other reason behind it may be that if some property is purchased in the name of woman, than the property automatically goes to her children instead of her husband if she dies untimely. If a man dies, the property automatically goes to his wife and children. This is why that our society does not prefer to purchase any property in the name of a woman of the family.

The patriarchal desire to retain property in the male domain of the family is clearly revealed through these responses. It may be pointed out that the state governments all over India offer concessions in land revenue and stamp duty if the property is purchased in the name of women. However, despite such attempts at promoting gender equality, the rigid social attitude and bias against women do not change. Moreover, farmer community is not forthcoming in favour of property being purchased in the name of women of the family.

¹⁶ Personal Interview, December 8, 2014.

Table 5.22**Reasons for Purchase of Property in the name of Women**

Opinion of Respondents	Urban (53)		Rural (35)		Grand Total (88)
	Working (35)	Non-Working (18)	Working (20)	Non-Working (15)	
For your economic empowerment	15 (42.85%)	7 (38.88%)	9 (45.00%)	4 (26.66%)	35 (39.77%)
For legal reasons (paying less stamp duty)	17 (48.57%)	8 (44.44%)	9 (45.00%)	10 (66.66%)	44 (50.00%)
For up-gradation of family status	3 (8.57%)	3 (16.66%)	2 (10.00%)	1 (6.66%)	9 (10.22%)

Source: Field Survey.

Table 5.22 reflects that a total 88 respondents have confessed that some property was purchased in their names, but they have given different reasons for the purchase of property in their names. 39.77 percent respondents from both urban and rural areas have expressed the reason that their economic empowerment was the main reason for the purchase of property. Further, 10.22 percent respondents from both areas admitted that the reason for the purchase of property was up-gradation of their family status. But majority of 50.00 percent urban and rural respondents have informed that there were only legal reasons for the property having been purchased in their names. They said that the property purchased under the name of a woman is charged less stamp fee by the government which is 50 percent as compared to purchase of property in the name of a male for registration. Thus, during the field survey, it was observed that there are very few families in the society that buy property in the name of women to make them financially strong. Mostly men take pride in buying property in their own name.

POLITICAL RIGHTS

The political status of women in a nation is reflected by the extent of freedom granted to women to participate in political activities. Article 326 of the Constitution of India guarantees political equality through the institution of universal

adult franchise, a revolutionary departure from the socio-cultural norms of tradition-bound Indian society and a major step towards political evolution. However, the right to vote for women can, at best, be a starting point in the struggle for their political equality.¹⁷ Political rights cannot be limited to voting rights only and must cover all areas of social, economic and political ramifications.

Table 5.23

Politics is the Game Made for Males Only

Opinion of Respondents	Urban (150)		Rural (150)		Grand Total (300)
	Working (75)	Non-Working (75)	Working (75)	Non-Working (75)	
Yes	23 (30.66%)	30 (40.00%)	25 (33.33%)	18 (24.00%)	96 (32.00%)
No	52 (69.33%)	45 (60.00%)	50 (66.66%)	57 (76.00%)	204 (68.00%)

Source: Field Survey.

Table 5.23 elaborates that only 32.00 percent women in both urban and rural areas have admitted that politics is the game made only for males. Some respondents hold that politics is a responsible and important activity and it demands a lot of free time to do something for the society and ultimately for the nation. But women involved in politics are not fully mature and they are also busy in their domestic functions. So, they do not have free time as men have. During field survey, some respondents expressed the view that “*nbsk dk oki Bshh *u nktD eoe/xob(i htB Zero j' i kdk j?*”¹⁸ (*The domestic life of women becomes useless after joining the politics*). On the other hand, there are cultural barriers to participation of women in the political activities. A large number of women in both areas, for instance, continue to be guided by considerations which say that their role outside the family circle was neither ‘respectable’ nor ‘healthy’. Some others say that politics is a dirty game and no one can salvage good moral character in this morass of evil. It is surprising that a male leader of high political standing (Ex MLA of Samana Constituency) who was politically active still had the notion that politics is not good for females. He said: “*oki Bshh rdh y/v j? fJj nbsk bJh Bj hl pDh. wbh gsBh*

¹⁷ Sarojini Nayak and Jeevan Nair, *op.cit.*, p. 201.

¹⁸ *Personal Interview*, September 23, 2014.

xo jh ofj dh j? f; o| Tj wb/Bkb ft nkj Pkdh s/jh Bkb i kdj j? Tj xo nkj/ wfj wkBK Bf ukj ^gkdh fgbkTD sle ; hws j? ”¹⁹ (Politics is a dirty game. It is not meant for women. My wife stays back at home and she accompanies me only to a marriage party. She is bound to attend to the guests at home and serve them tea). Comparatively majority of 68.00 percent respondents in both areas are of the view that politics is not the game made only for males. Their opinion is that women can also play useful role in the politics. This is not a surprising finding in view of the fact that politics is still perceived as a male domain, but women can also play their role as best as males.

Thus, the figures are indicative of both, stagnation and paradigm shift. While a reasonably good number of women do feel that politics is not a domain of male members of the society, there is very little change in the ground reality. Women still hesitate to become active members of political parties and have serious reservations about joining politics as a full time profession.

Table 5.24
Use of Right to Vote

Opinion of Respondents	Urban (150)		Rural (150)		Grand Total (300)
	Working (75)	Non-Working (75)	Working (75)	Non-Working (75)	
Yes	70 (93.33%)	66 (88.00%)	66 (88.00%)	61 (81.33%)	263 (87.66%)
No	5 (6.66%)	9 (12.00%)	9 (12.00%)	14 (18.66%)	37 (12.33%)

Source: Field Survey.

Table 5.24 shows that majority of 87.66 percent respondents from urban and rural areas exercise their right to vote. They know the importance of their right to vote. Mostly, all these respondents are educated who belong to the age group of below 50 years. The percentage of working respondents is more in favour of using their right to vote because they know the importance of vote. Comparatively 12.33 percent respondents do not use their right to vote. They mostly belong to the age group of above 50 years. The study shows that most of the respondents exercise their

¹⁹ Personal Interview, December 15, 2014.

right to vote barring very few only. These respondents explained that they don't feel any necessity of casting their votes because no one helps them after the elections. Politics is not the game for *votes*, in fact it is the game of *notes* only. Nobody comes forward to solve their problems in the hours of need. Selfish leaders make false promises before elections and forget to fulfill them after the elections. The reason behind such thinking is their illiteracy and unawareness etc. Thus, all these reasons are responsible for 100 percent voting target not being achieved by the government.

Table 5.25

Family Pressure for Casting Vote in Favour of a Specific Candidate

Opinion of Respondents	Urban (150)		Rural (150)		Grand Total (300)
	Working (75)	Non-Working (75)	Working (75)	Non-Working (75)	
Yes	36 (48.00%)	49 (65.33%)	52 (69.33%)	57 (76.00%)	194 (64.66%)
No	39 (52.00%)	26 (34.66%)	23 (30.66%)	18 (24.00%)	106 (35.33%)

Source: Field Survey.

Table 5.25 indicates that 35.33 percent urban and rural respondents are never pressurized by their family to cast vote in favour of any particular candidate in the elections. They take their voting decisions independently. Mostly these are the educated women, who take their decisions independently. The number of these respondents is high in urban area among working respondents as compared to rural one. On the other hand, 64.66 percent respondents asserted that they are pressurized by their family to cast a vote in favour of a specific candidate. Mostly these are lowly educated women and belong to mainly the male dominating families. In such families, the male members take the vital decision to cast the vote in favour of a specific candidate and others follow the same. Mostly these are the joint families, and nobody dares to disobey the head of family.

Political Participation

Political participation does not mean simply casting the vote. Besides taking part in voting, there are many other activities like campaign related acts (membership of parties, working for a party during elections, attending rallies and

meetings), contacting officials and leaders for community-related problems and finally, contacting them for personal needs. All these acts are conceptualized as different dimensions of political participation.²⁰ Like all other parts of India, in Punjab also women are hardly visible in decision-making bodies and consequently many issues are left unattended. An analysis of the scant political participation of women, either as legislators or as voters, highlights women's subordination to men in the field of politics.

Table 5.26
Interest to take Part in Politics

Opinion of Respondents	Urban (150)		Rural (150)		Grand Total (300)
	Working (75)	Non-Working (75)	Working (75)	Non-Working (75)	
Yes	48 (64.00%)	36 (48.00%)	45 (60.00%)	29 (38.66%)	158 (52.66%)
No	27 (36.00%)	39 (52.00%)	30 (40.00%)	46 (61.33%)	142 (47.33%)

Source: Field Survey.

Table 5.26 shows that majority of 52.66 percent respondents in urban and rural areas are fully interested to take part in politics. However, 47.33 percent urban and rural respondents do not show any interest in politics. In comparison to rural area, urban respondents are more interested in joining politics. In reality, only a few urban women who are educated and those few from rural families are interested in politics. Political participation of women is a sign of healthy and liberal society. Although, at a theoretical level, women are evincing interest in politics yet the apprehensions about the bad culture in political realm remains a big hurdle in the way of their active participation in politics.

These 47.33 percent respondents gave so many reasons for not taking part in politics which are presented in table 5.27 below.

²⁰ Sarojini Nayak and Jeevan Nair, *op. cit.* p. 206

Table 5.27

Reasons for not taking Part in Politics

Opinion of Respondents	Urban (66)		Rural (76)		Grand Total (142)
	Working (27)	Non-Working (39)	Working (30)	Non-Working (46)	
Not interested in politics	4 (14.81%)	9 (23.07%)	2 (6.66%)	8 (17.39%)	23 (16.19%)
Pre-occupied with family problems	8 (29.62%)	7 (17.94%)	6 (20%)	10 (21.73%)	31 (21.83%)
Too busy in work	9 (33.33%)	10 (25.64%)	11 (36.66%)	10 (21.73%)	40 (28.16%)
Politics is only for professional politicians	-	3 (7.69%)	2 (6.66%)	5 (10.86%)	10 (7.04%)
Due to family restrictions	6 (22.22%)	10 (25.64%)	9 (30.00%)	13 (28.26%)	38 (26.76%)

Source: Field Survey.

Table 5.27 elaborates that out of 142 respondents who are not interested to take part in politics, 16.19 percent respondents from both urban and rural areas have given the reason of ‘not interested in politics’. They are of the view that politics is a game of criminals. Nobody can save his/her moral character after joining politics. Some others have expressed that politics is not any type of service. It is only a money minting game. It is a game of *notes for votes*. So they don’t want to indulge in this corrupt game. 21.83 percent respondents have expressed the reason of ‘pre-occupied with family problems’ for not taking part in politics. Other 28.16 percent respondents gave the reason of ‘too busy in work’. Mostly they are busy in their domestic work or in their jobs. So, they said, they have no time for politics. Only 7.04 percent respondents explained the reason of ‘politics is only for professional politicians’. They asserted that women in general are not too mature to handle the problems of their homes as well as the country simultaneously. Politics is only run by experts and professional people. 26.76 percent respondents from both areas explained the reason of ‘family restrictions’. They told that their family does not

allow them to take part in politics. They are of the opinion that the game of politics suits only males. Woman is safe only at home. Mostly these respondents are illiterates or lowly educated and have narrow thinking about women.

Thus, the analysis of the data shows that so many women do not want to take part in politics. The most prominent reason behind this is their busy schedule at home and the family restrictions on them. This may be one of the reasons why 100 percent voting target is not achieved by the Government.

Out of total 300 sample 42 (21 urban and 21 rural) respondents are taken as elected members in different bodies like panchayats and municipalities, MLAs, MP's, Chairmen, Presidents of the associations etc. On being asked whether they take their decisions independently related to their post, only 45.23 percent respondents in both areas admitted to the same. They admitted that they took their decisions independently without the interference of the male members of their family. The number of urban working respondents is more likely to take their decisions independently as compared to rural respondents. But majority of 54.76 percent respondents from both areas expressed the view that they take decisions with the help or in consultation with male members of family. They are only nominal heads of their post or in other words, they are just rubber stamps in the hands of their husbands. The actual decisions are taken by their husbands or family heads. The reason behind this again is male supremacy and social taboos which do not allow women to participate in various social activities.

The study shows that almost all the elected women are not fully politically empowered. The decision of contesting the election by most of the respondents was the decision of their husbands. Most of them expressed the view that they are in politics because of reservation or they participated in elections on behalf of their husbands and other male members in family like their father-in-law. Their husbands enjoy de facto power through their wives. They are only meant for putting their signatures on the papers. In comparison to the respondents of urban area, mostly the respondents of rural area take their decisions according to the will of their husbands. The reason behind the excessive interference of men in the affairs of elected women is again the traditional male dominance in Indian politics and especially the patriarchal system where the empowerment of women is not easily tolerated. Thus, it is a fact that only reservation is not sufficient, supporting environment is also

required for their effective participation. There is a dire need to change the mind set of society concerning women, so that they can participate with liberty in politics in the real sense.

Both the tables given above can be taken as evidence of the fact that the political decisions and choices of women who are active in politics are conditioned by the preferences of the family. Most of the times, their participation is not a matter of personal convictions.

Table 5.28
Government is taking Suitable Steps to make the term
‘Gender Equality’ a Realistic One

Opinion of Respondents	Urban (150)		Rural (150)		Grand Total (300)
	Working (75)	Non-Working (75)	Working (75)	Non-Working (75)	
Yes	45 (60.00%)	32 (42.66%)	31 (41.33%)	28 (37.33%)	136 (45.33%)
No	30 (40.00%)	43 (57.33%)	44 (58.66%)	47 (62.66%)	164 (54.66%)

Source: Field Survey.

Table 5.28 shows that only 45.33 percent respondents in both areas admit that government is taking suitable steps to make the term ‘gender equality’ a realistic one. They support their views by saying that the government is providing equal facilities in educational field. In job providing matter, both men and women are treated equally. There is no discrimination on the basis of gender. The number of urban working respondents is more as compared to rural respondents regarding the government jobs for women. But most of the respondents 54.66 percent from both areas disagree by saying that the government is not taking suitable steps to make the term ‘gender equality’ a realistic one. They argued that both sexes (male and female) are not equal in election seats. There are only 33 percent reserved seats for women. There is also scope for affecting change in the curriculum at the school and college level in order to generate more healthy gender relations. Thus, right from childhood, both the boys and the girls are prepared for equality in all respects. Gender sensitization units in all educational institutions, along public and private institutions

should be set up so that women can easily appeal against any violation of their rights. Majority of respondents also explained that the crimes against girls are increasing day by day. So it is necessary that the offender should be punished as early as possible. But in our system, due to our government or judiciary, there is inordinate delay and delayed justice is denied justice. So the crime is increasing day by day. Majority of respondents are of the view that still our government is slow and is not taking suitable steps to safeguard the fairer sex as quickly as required.

Table 5.29
Gender Equality Prevails more in Punjabi Community rather than Other Communities

Opinion of Respondents	Urban (150)		Rural (150)		Grand Total (300)
	Working (75)	Non-Working (75)	Working (75)	Non-Working (75)	
Yes	60 (80.00%)	45 (60.00%)	30 (40.00%)	25 (33.33%)	160 (53.33%)
No	15 (20.00%)	30 (40.00%)	45 (60.00%)	50 (66.66%)	140 (46.66%)

Source: Field Survey.

Table 5.29 shows that majority of 53.33 percent respondents agreed that gender equality prevails more in Punjabi community rather than other communities in the society. Sikh Gurus advocated the concept of gender equality in theory and practice. Some of the respondents also mentioned that our Sikh Gurus have enshrined the principle of gender equality even in *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*. However, 46.66 percent respondents expressed that gender equality is not more in Punjabi community than other communities. They gave different reasons. Among them, 41.66 percent respondents opined that in Punjabi community women are suppressed because it is mainly a male dominating community. The command of the family is mainly in the hands of the head or any other male person. In Punjabi community, it is frankly speaking that '*kuri ghar di chardiwari andar hi fabdi har*' means the woman is graceful within the four walls of the house. In Punjabi community the relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law is not as cordial as it should be. Mother-in-law is mostly found dominating her daughter-in-law. 31.2 percent

respondents believe that the condition of women in Punjabi society is not very good because the depiction of women even in Punjabi culture is not very much dignified. Even in Punjabi Songs/ Bolian, references of wife bettering are found. Most of the references to women are derogatory. As the respondents said “1. *Marda Amdiyeh Marda ni, Kehdiyan gallan to dheeye maarda ni, Mukka ni maarda Daffa ni marda, Marda panjali wala hatha, Panjali tut jaogi Murkha ve jatta, Panjali navi lailoga par bhannu Tera Matha* 2. *Maye ni maye mainu jutti dawa de, Heth lawa de khuriyaan, Eh din khedan de, Sassan nandan buriyaan*”²¹ On the other hand, 27.1 percent respondents are of the opinion that irrespective of the distinctions of different communities, the attitude of men towards women is almost the same everywhere, whether it is Punjabi, Hindu or Muslim community, male dominance and gender discrimination has become a part of their cultural practices and the condition of women is quite pathetic everywhere.

Table 5.30

Reasons Contributing most to Sad Plight of Women

Opinion of Respondents	Urban (150)		Rural (150)		Grand Total (300)
	Working (75)	Non-Working (75)	Working (75)	Non-Working (75)	
Lack of effective implementation of laws	3 (4.00%)	-	5 (6.66%)	9 (12.00%)	17 (5.66%)
Lack of Political will and insensitive attitude of political leadership	19 (25.33%)	21 (28.00%)	15 (20.00%)	15 (20.00%)	70 (23.33%)
Moral downfall of the society	26 (34.66%)	28 (37.33%)	30 (40.00%)	26 (34.66%)	110 (36.66%)
Impact of westernization	14 (18.66%)	16 (21.33%)	9 (12.00%)	12 (16.00%)	51 (17.00%)
Lack of understanding and true implementation of Gurbani	13 (17.33%)	10 (13.33%)	16 (21.33%)	13 (17.33%)	52 (17.33%)

Source: Field Survey.

²¹ The folk songs mentioned by the elderly ladies during the survey conducted for the research purpose.

Table 5.30 details that majority of respondents 36.66 percent, from both areas gave the reason of ‘moral downfall of the society’ which contributes the most towards the sad plight of women. 23.33 percent respondents in both areas have expressed the reason of ‘Lack of political will and insensitive attitude of political leadership’. They say that Sikh political leaders make false promises and do nothing for the people. 17.33 percent urban and rural respondents say that there is ‘lack of understanding and true implementation of Gurbani’ among the people who remain misguided and that if all people follow the teachings of Sikh Gurus or their universal message, all problems of community will be automatically solved. There will be no gender discrimination in such situation. 17.00 percent respondents gave the reason of ‘impact of westernization’ for the sad plight of women. The ingress of western culture in our culture has diluted our moral values and cultural norms. That is the reason that crime rate against women is increasing day by day. As against the above 5.66 percent respondents mentioned the reason of ‘lack of effective implementation of laws’ being responsible for the pitiable condition of women. If the religious teachings of our Gurus are preached in true sense and spirit, then it will lead to positive results to improve the condition of women.

An analysis of data reveals that there is not only one reason responsible for poor condition of women, these are manifold. Some are of the view that there is a lack of strict punishment to the wrong doers against women. The offender must be punished as early as possible so that it may become a lesson for others. Some other respondents attribute it to the wrong impact of media. It spoils the cultural values and norms of the society. And ultimately the result is the moral downfall of the society. Some other respondents expressed their view by saying that, "*ੳੁ ਏਜ਼/ ਸਕ ; ਕੁਹ ; ਓਕੋ ਠਿ ਫੇਸ/ ਭਕ ਫੇਸ/ ਨਭਸਕ ਠਿ ਕੁਵੁਹਿ ਜਕਬਸ ਭੁਹਿ ਫਿਕੁਠਕੋ ਜ? ਫੇਟਫੇ ; ਓਕੋ ਗੁਠਫਬੁਃ ; ਰ ਕੁਠ/ ਨਸ/ ਏਠਿਨਕ ਭਠ; ਕੁਠ ਫ; ਓ ਭਏਹ ਭੁਠ ਫਠਠ. ਫਿ ; ; ਠੇਕ ਠੁਠ ਭੁਠ/ ਨਸ/ ਕੁਠ/ ਏਕੁ ਫੁਠ ਭੁਠ ਫਿ ਕਠ/ ਜ ਭ. ਠੁਠ ਭਠ; ਜੁਠ ਨਸ/ ਰਭਸ ਠਕ | ਓ ਠੁਠ ਫਿ ਕਠਕੁ ਜ? ਸ/ ਠੁਠ ; ਰਠਭ ਨਗੁਠਕੁ ਠੁਠ ਫਿ ਕਠ/ ਜ ਭ. "*²² (*Truly speaking our Government is also somewhere or the other, responsible for pitiable condition of women because Government does not provide jobs timely to the boys and girls who are educated and*

²² Personal Interview, December 29, 2014.

able to do jobs. As a result of it they become addicted to drugs and indulge in bad habits. They are not able to distinguish between right and wrong path and they become staunch criminals). So there are so many reasons which are responsible for the pitiable condition of women and the government should take pre-emptive steps in this direction as early as possible.

On being asked as to how gender equality can be achieved in the society, majority of respondents 26.66 percent, say that a new law should be enacted which makes it mandatory that the parents who have only daughters should be taken care of by them. This law should be implemented very strictly. It will provide them social security in their old age. 24.66 percent respondents are of the opinion that female foeticide should be completely banned so that sex ratio is improved and the standard of gender equality is upgraded. 20.66 percent respondents are of the opinion that the different areas of work, public and private (domestic work) assigned to men and women should be done away with. There should be greater flexibility in the society and men and women should be allowed to do the work of their choice. 18.00 percent respondents in both the areas believe that girls should be given more independence so that they can support their parents. Only 10.00 percent respondents are of the view that parents should be educated about the importance of gender equality and they should be urged to change their narrow outlook towards women. They should be educated about the fact that the girl can also play an important role in lifting the image of the family. Girls can also financially support their parents. In a nutshell, the view point given by these respondents is that they want a constructive approach towards the female gender in the society.

On the basis of empirical study of Patiala district, it becomes clear that by and large, women are deprived of their basic rights and they don't enjoy the real freedom in getting education, career benefits etc. Sikh Gurus advocated the principle of gender equality and advised the people to uplift the status of women in all spheres of life. As a result, women played a very prominent role in Sikh history. But the present study has revealed that the traditional mind set of society and rigid patriarchal system have suppressed the female segment of the society. Most of the women face discrimination on the basis of gender or owing to the prevalence of dowry system at the level of family and society. Women face physical and mental harassment because of fewer dowries, domestic chores, due to inability to bear male

child etc. Most of the women cannot cast their votes according to their own choice. They cast their vote according to the will of their husbands or other male members of the family. Even if they are economically independent, they cannot take decisions related to their own life, like number of children, job career, their right to vote etc. Still most of the women holding responsible posts as MLA, MC, Sarpanch, Panch etc. are just rubber stamps in the hands of their husbands or the head of the family. In India, girls are considered as a big economic liability because of the tradition of dowry at the time of their marriage. It creates gender bias against the girl child and discrimination between the rights and privileges of a daughter and a son. Despite the fact that Sikh Gurus gave Hon'ble place to women and advocated gender equality but unfortunately the situation is totally reverse. So the dire need of hour is that government should make efforts to aware the people and change their mindset, and ensure proper implementation of laws.

CHAPTER - 6

CONCLUSION

Religion has remained a powerful institution in shaping and moulding the thinking of its adherents. Religion has also been the bedrock of almost all social and cultural frameworks. It has provided ideological moorings to all forms of life. It has mostly been through religion that man has attempted to construe life. Religious outlook has often subsumed man's understanding of larger philosophical, social and cultural issues. Moreover, it has been through religious ideology that human beings have developed their different and differing perceptions about gender relations. Religion has also determined gender roles in the society. Religion not only defines how men and women participate in religious activities but it also reinforces and legitimizes the gender roles assigned to them by the community. Gender equality is the corner stone of the Sikh ideology. It can be affirmed that Sikh religion has played a revolutionary role in the sociological field in restructuring society on egalitarian basis.

Gender equality has always been a challenging issue connected with human rights and social justice. Women comprise half the human resources and half the potential in all the societies all over the world. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights provides in its preamble that civil and political rights are available equally to all men and women. In sociological terms, the word gender refers to the socio-cultural definition of man and woman; the way societies distinguish between men and women and assign them different social roles. In recent times, the distinction between sex and gender has been formalized and foregrounded to deal with the general tendency to attribute women's subordination to their anatomy. Gender is seen closely related to the roles and behaviours assigned to women and men based on their sexual distinctions. On the other side, the term equality is based on the idea that no individual should be less equal in opportunity or in human rights than any other. The demand for equality is aimed at mitigating large number of existing social and economic inequalities and to bring about definite social improvement without obliterating natural differences. Thus, the term 'gender equality' primarily means that men and women should enjoy equal conditions for realizing their full human potential. It is the foundation stone of the new world order. Accordingly, men and

women are seen as complementary to each other. The virtues of gentleness, chastity and compassion are as essential for men as these are for women, while the equality of strength, courage and enterprise are as much to be cultivated by women as by men.

In the last few decades, issues and concerns of women have been debated widely; the major issue being equality. Though the contribution of women in different economic, social and political activities is very well recognized, but the idea of equality still remains a distant dream. Women, all over the world are overwhelmingly concerned with the issue of 'gender equality' through women empowerment. Status of women in Indian society is a reflection of unequal relationship sustained by patriarchy built on male superiority and dominance and female inferiority, sex stereotyped roles, expectations and economic, social and political conditions. Women's movements have the credit of articulating the issues confronting women and enabling them to participate in different spheres of life. Women's journey from survival to dignity and empowerment has not been an easy one. Though a lot of ground has been created in achieving the objectives of empowerment and development of women yet, a lot remains to be achieved.

Despite the fact that humankind has entered the new millennium and has made tremendous advancement in the field of science and technology, which has completely revolutionized everyday life; the mindset of men towards their counterparts has not changed much. Although, Indian constitution has accepted the principle of equality and the preamble of the constitution ensures the equality of status and opportunity and of social, economic and political justice, yet the rising incidents of crime and violence against women are indicators of a decline in the status and dignity of women in society. India has been a land of rich religious, cultural and social heritage. The ancient Indian civilization has shown the way to rest of the world in religious philosophy and Indian culture has stood as an example of rich and pristine culture. However, owing to some depraving influences, this ancient richness is getting eroded and contaminated by cultural pollution and moral degradation. This is visible on the face of contemporary society. The protection of the rights of women in general and of working women in particular is now a challenge for the society. Increasing violence against women in the form of rape,

eve-teasing, kidnapping, abduction, dowry deaths, torture, molestation, female foeticide, sexual harassment, preference to male child against the girl child are indicative of the fragile position of women.

The hypothesis that, in spite of several constitutional provisions and legal efforts for the achievement of the goal of gender justice and equality, women still are facing many challenges in their day to day life is validated because it has been observed that crime graph against women is increasing day by day.

In the Indian context, the position of woman is not very good. There have been several stages of rise and fall in the status of women. The problem of gender injustice against women dates back to the Biblical story of Adam and Eve, according to which Eve is responsible for all the problems which human kind is facing today. In the early Indian tradition, woman was looked upon as a temptress and an impediment in the spiritual life of man. Accordingly the position of women was undermined in the social and religious fields. In the Vedic period, women had both freedom and respect in society. She had equal opportunities with men in getting education and social role. Women used to participate in literary functions and at times, also in wars. They struggled against the political as well as social problems freely with men. Women were allowed to recite Vedic *verses* and perform *Yajna*. In spite of the tradition of patriarchy, there existed no inequality in the rights of men and women. Thus, in *Rigvedic* period, women enjoyed almost an equal position along with men in the performance of sacrificial rites. Dowry system was by and large unknown to masses and widow remarriage was common.

However, the post Vedic period of Indian history, was a witness to a very rapid slide and deterioration in the socio-cultural status of women. The ideas of Manu (also the father of caste system) as inscribed in *Manusmariti* can be seen as the beginning of an organized attempt through a set of socio-religious prescriptions and codes to denigrate the social status of women. Manu was partial to men folk in many respects. He placed them on an exalted pedestal as the source of daily *sukh* or comfort for the wife. Manu accorded a very vulnerable status to women. A devoted wife should serve even a bad and adulterous husband as a God or as a *Devta*. She was not expected to remarry after widowhood whereas the husband was free to remarry, after the wife died, after performing her last rites. The code of Manu

prescribes that nothing must be done independently by a girl, by a young woman or even by an aged one even in her own house. Thus, the Hon'ble status earned by Indian women in Vedic period became considerably undermined during the period of *Dharmashastra* and *Smrities*. She was expected to be a subordinate to and dependent on male.

The position of women during Muslim rule in India was all the more pitiable and women were confined to the four walls of home. Woman was considered to be an object of man's sexual satisfaction. The men of religion termed her enchantress and thus condemned her. Child marriage and Sati became the order of the day. Due to the insecurity and uncertainty with regard to women's chastity, purdah became more rigid and female infanticide was commonly practiced. The Yogis considered woman a she wolf. Tulsidas, the author of *Ramacharit-Manas* dubbed her as worthy of warning and thus decried her. Peelu, a famous Punjabi *Kissa* poet, said that it is a sin to look towards a woman even if she is made of paper. Shankaracharya described woman as the gateway to hell. For Ramanuja, woman is sin-born. However, with the advent of Sikhism, the dignity and respect of the noble Indian woman was restored.

The hypothesis that, religious traditions, social and cultural norms have always played a vital role in elevating and deteriorating the position of women in the Indian society is fully validated.

Even Christianity has not accorded equality to women. In the West, women got the right to property as late as in 1882 and the right to vote even later in 1918. Shakespeare has also criticised woman by writing "Frailty thy name is woman". Even today, women cannot become bishops of the Church of England.

The present study holds that Sikh religion as one of the youngest religions in the world, apart from being an expression of pious and divine spirituality, is also a revolutionary mode of resistance against chronic forms of oppression against women. Sikhism possesses highly cogent elements of reformatory and modern ideas. The present study has attempted to bring out the fact that whereas the notions of equality and gender equality have a very contemporaneous character and have been developed in the recent past, Sikhism exhibited a consciousness of these ideas much before they became a part of socio-political and cultural discourse all over the world. Sikhism stands apart as the practical religion in the world with a comprehensive

framework of notions and ideas attached to equality of all human beings irrespective of caste and gender. By giving full-fledged expression to intimations of social good of the dispossessed gender, Sikhism has displayed an almost unprecedented motivation and desire for sociological correction with regard to belief about women.

Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikh religion, was in fact the greatest emancipator of women. He fought for the liberation of women. He repudiated the prevalent notion that women were inherently evil product or evil doers. He denounced celibacy and the idea of renunciation of the world. He redefined celibacy in the framework of spiritual chastity. Guru Nanak advocated and allowed much more equality for woman. He pleaded the cause of women and strove for their liberation in the 15th century, whereas women's emancipation movements in Europe started much later, in the 18th and 19th century. Guru Nanak's ideas on women liberation paved the way for women to develop their own ability and to organize and influence the direction of social and economic order. Guru Nanak and His successors adopted a twofold approach to gender related issues. He adopted a positive attitude towards women in order to enhance their status and prestige. And, he also condemned the practices (Infanticide, Sati, Purdah, Dowry etc.) prevalent in Indian society. He clearly expressed that *Sikhi* does not teach us to raise our hand on a woman. It teaches us to respect them. Sikh Gurus championed the cause of women not only ideologically but also practically. This is established by the fact that women were given parity with men in important religious functions like *Langar* and *Kar Sewa*. Women have not only contributed in the running and organization of community kitchen, but have also acted as missionaries and warriors in the critical periods. Even the Gurus appointed women as preachers by bestowing *Manjis* and *Pirris*. Thus, it was owing to propagation of Sikh ideology that the potential in women was well acknowledged and recognized. In Sikhism, she is not only a better half of man but she is also soul mate of man. The teachings of Sikh Gurus have, indeed, restored the dignity and self respect of woman.

Sikh history has prominently recorded the role of women as equal to men in the matter of service, devotion, sacrifice and bravery. Examples of various women's moral dignity, sense of service and self sacrifice are a source of inspiration to the mankind. According to Sikhism, man and woman are partners of a system of inter-

relation and inter-dependence in which man takes birth from a woman, and woman is born of a man and a man can never feel secure and complete during his life without a woman, and a man's success depends upon the love and support of the woman who shares her life with him, and vice-versa. Sikhs, therefore, have had an obligation to treat women as equals, and there is no place for gender discrimination in Sikh society.

Thus, the hypothesis that the Sikh Gurus are the true harbingers of gender justice and they have not only preached these ideals but also practiced them in the true sense is validated because it has been found that due to the teachings of the Sikh Gurus, Sikh women have played a heroic and courageous role in the society against various challenges in the Indian history.

The model of women liberation/equality as envisaged by Sikh Gurus is quite comprehensive, universal and ever applicable. However, with the passage of time, people have also deviated from the message of Sikh ideology. This has resulted in disastrous implications in all spheres of life. In the present day context, women have become soft targets of anti social elements. Various kinds of heinous crimes are being perpetrated on them. There are instances of large scale gender disparities in the matter of basic human rights, distribution of resources, economic opportunities and political rights. Women are desisted from joining the national mainstream; they are being harassed in the family, in the society and at the work place as well. Discrimination and exploitation on the basis of gender amounts to great injustice with women meaning there by that half the human race is unable to realize its potential and is condemned to suboptimal standards of existence. Punjab, which is the land of great Gurus and Saints, is unfortunately at present in the grip of gender bias and gender violence. The hymn of Guru Nanak, *So kiqu manda aakhiye, jit jameh rajaan'* which accords a high status to women seems to have been discarded by the people. This seems the erosion of Sikh values and ethos. Thus, the study reveals that now a day there is a lot of gap between theory and practice of Sikh ideology on the issue of gender equality. Theoretically, the notion of gender equality is still in existence but practically, the situation is quite pitiable and deplorable. In present society, the message of Sikh Gurus seems to have withered away due to the cult of violence, oppression and discrimination with women. It is evident from the

fact that crime against woman is increasing day by day. Today, the instances of acid attacks, dowry deaths, rape cases, emotional blackmail, sexual assaults, sexual harassment at work places, molestation cases, bride burning, female genital mutilation, human trafficking, sexual slavery, kidnapping and abduction of women etc. are occurring frequently all over. Unfortunately, sex ratio is also declining very fast. Women continue to be marginalized and discriminated against. Gender discrimination is escalating to alarming proportions and is visible everywhere in the fields of education, employment and health etc.

The need of the hour for women is to emerge from the web of male dominance and exercise the privileges accorded to them by Sikh ideology. Women being the worst victims of atrocities, it is high time for them to be vocal about their due status and place in society. After all, it is the woman who, in the relation to of a mother, a sister, a wife or a grandmother, is gifted to give birth, to nurture and to guide the future generations on the path of spirituality and ultimately to establish a balanced and healthy society and nation.

MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The study has been conducted in Patiala district of Punjab. Patiala, which is known as the royal city, is in the forefront educationally. Patiala is the first town in the country to have a degree college, the Mohindra College established in 1875. Apart from this, there are a large number of educational institutions in all streams in Patiala district making it an educationally developed district. A sample of 300 Sikh women respondents has been taken comprising 150 each from urban and rural areas respectively. It is further divided, into working and non-working women (75 each).

During the process of conducting the field survey, it was observed that age is a major determinant in one's overall orientation and in the decision making process. Decision-making ability is directly related to age. The data compiled during the study highlights the fact that the nature and scope of decision making power depends upon the age of the individual. It was found that the women, below the age of 45 years, have a liberal outlook on social, economic and political issues as compared to the women who are above 45 years of age. As for the level of education is concerned, it has been found that general standard of education is higher among the

urban women as compared to the rural ones. However, when compared to their male counterparts, the level of education is lower among women. This shows that society is still biased as far as the question of girl's education is concerned. As per Sikh tradition, women's right to education is considered something very natural. We find reference in Sikh history which shows that women were very aware, keeping abreast of current affairs and fully participating in the community affairs; social, educational as well as political.

So far as the question of women's awareness about their rights is concerned, the study reveals that urban women are more consciousness and sensitive about their rights than the rural ones. This state of affairs can be linked to their family set up and the level of their education. Women residing in urban areas possess better standards of education. Moreover, most of them live in nuclear families. Thus, they enjoy more freedom. On the other hand, just because of the continuance of joint family system in rural areas, the extent of freedom enjoyed by women is widely restricted. There are still several restrictions and curbs on their decision making power which continue to reflect orthodox aspect of the society. Most of the decisions pertaining to education and career choice are taken by the elders and other family members.

Analysis of data also shows that maximum number of respondents from both areas agree that their in-laws support higher education for girls. The percentage of urban respondents is higher as compared to their rural counterparts. In rural area, the boys are given preference over the girls to pursue higher education. It is still customary for the girl child to perform household chores and to contribute in agricultural work in rural areas. Such domestic preoccupations act as a hindrance in the process of education of girls. In most of the cases, girls are expected to cook food, look after their younger siblings, and nurse the elderly and the sick members of family apart from performing domestic. In such a situation, sending the girl out to school is like relinquishing an active worker. Besides this, there are reservations about sending girls to schools. Members of the rural society have apprehensions about sending girls to schools which are situated at a distance from their place of residence. They also fear sexual harassment at places of education. Such problems do not exist in urban areas resulting in a discernible difference in the nature and

scope of opportunities available to girls for getting educated. The study reveals that although the proportion of girls having access to education is low as compared to boys, yet wherever girls have got an opportunity, they have proved that they can do better in terms of performance. Moreover, urban respondents are more supportive for their daughter's education even against their family decision as compared to their rural counterparts.

The study reveals that in the Indian social set up in general and Punjabi community in particular, women do not enjoy freedom, even in their personal matters. In the decision making process, majority of the Punjabi girls do not have the freedom in the matter of selection of their life partners. As compared to rural women, urban women enjoy little bit more freedom in selecting their life partners. The study also shows that despite the fact that girls are highly educated, still it is being expected from the girls to marry the boys chosen by their parents. The reason behind this situation is our cultural values and social customs. The so called notion of *Izatt* is still very much prevalent in Punjabi community and that is the main reason for it, why the menace of 'Honour Killing' is very much prevalent in the society even today, especially in rural area. The study reveals that in the Punjabi community, especially among the rural people, the issue of 'family honour' is very important and in the name of this honour, they even do not hesitate to kill their own daughters just for the sake of false prestige. This shows how much patriarchal instincts are ingrained in them. On the other hand, caste has also deep roots in the Punjabi society. The study reveals that in few cases, the love marriage of the son is not taken as a big issue, mainly when the girl belongs to an upper caste, but it is not easily accepted in the case of girls. Inter-caste and inter-religion weddings are not universally acceptable in society even today. Jatt Sikhs constitute dominant caste in Punjabi community. They are very particular about the thing that their daughter should get married only in their own caste. When they feel that their daughters are not accepting their decision and going against their will, then they opt to kill them in the name of 'honour killing'.

Furthermore, the study reveals that women respondents in urban areas are comparatively more participative in decision making in family matters and their decisions carry equal weightage as compared to their rural counterparts. They play

an important and considerable role in the family affairs as well as in the decision making process at home. Working women are more-participative as compared to their non-working counterparts. Their participation level is high because they are economically independent and they have equal say in all the family matters. Other members also give equal respect to their view points.

It has also been found during the course of the present study that majority of women respondents are in favour of the birth of a girl child. The percentage of rural non-working respondents who prefer the birth of a girl child is higher as compared to urban non-working respondents. The reason behind this is that urban people prefer one child norm. As such they prefer for a male child in an obviously given situation. In order to provide good education to their child, they prefer only one child i.e., male child. Another reason for a one child norm among the urban areas is that these people have to manage their family budgets and maintain good standard of living. It was also noticed that it becomes important for the couple to plan another child if the first child is a girl. However, this may not be the case if the first child is a male one. Apart from this, it is also observed that there is pressure to undergo abortions after illegal sex determinations comparatively more in urban areas than in the rural areas. The culture prevailing in urban areas tends to be materialistic and people are swayed by ulterior economic considerations which have a large bearing on their personal choices like aborting an unwanted child. It is a well-known fact that in spite of the efforts of the government to curb illegal sex determination, the practice still continues in a concealed manner. One of the major findings of the present study is that both in urban and rural areas, the daughter-in-law is often blamed, ostracized and even divorced for her inability to bear a son. It was observed that in the Punjabi community, the first girl child is generally not welcomed; whereas on the other hand, even the birth of the fifth consecutive son is a matter of celebration. To be more pertinent, analysis of data shows that women face discrimination right from their childhood. Gender disparities in the matter of provision of medical facilities and nutrition are evident from infancy to adulthood.

The main reason of the female foeticide among the parents is insecurity. The people are becoming materialistic day by day. The rich people, in order to establish their overt reputation in the society are spending a lot of money on the so-called

social functions like marriages (especially of girls) and parties etc. Such type of demonstrations become necessary rituals for the poor or middle class families also. Giving dowry to the girl, hosting of costly receptions have become customary. The trend also forces the middle class to follow the suit. The parents have a notion that the girls right from their birth up to marriage are a heavy drain on the purse of the family. Parents give education to a girl, pay a heavy amount on her marriage; it becomes a social obligation that on every occasion, the in-laws of girls are to be given gifts. On the other hand, after the marriage, girls have no responsibility towards their parents. If a girl is in service, all the emoluments earned by her go to the family of her in-laws. It depends on the wish of in-laws that the girl should go to meet her parents or not, even in some cases the girl cannot even talk to her parents on phone or contact them to discuss any personal matter. She cannot keep her parents with them in their old age. These can be some of the major reasons for female foeticide in the society. If the girls are given equal responsibility and rights to take care of their parents in their old age, the menace of female foeticide can be controlled. The mindset of the people can be changed if the parents can live with their daughters in their old age. The other factor in favour of male child is the security of parents as a son has to live with his parents in old age. The young generation has to understand these problems to keep up the status of the women in the society.

Thus, the study reveals that in Punjabi community, the evil of female foeticide is much more prevalent. It is very much disturbing that the trend for male child is far stronger among literate rather than illiterate, exploding the myth that spread of education puts an end to gender bias. The problem has assumed alarming proportions in recent times, in spite of increasing literacy rate among women. The sex ratio has consistently been in favour of boys. Thus, female foeticide is a manifestation of violence against women. On the other hand, Sikh philosophy and culture stand for as much love and affection for girl child as the male child receives. Girl child is being deprived of her legitimate human rights to be born and to live a respectful life. Even Sikh code of conduct clearly states that not to have any social relationship with a person indulging in female foeticide/infanticide, in other sense

'Kuri Maar'. Thus, Sikh philosophy gives full recognition to the rights of girl child. This seems to be certainly violence of Guru's injunction in this regard

The study depicts that amidst increasing consumerism and commercialization of society, marriages have become a profit making venture for people and death-trap for women. Most of the respondents have endorsed that dowry contributes in enhancing their status in their in-laws family. Some respondents have confessed that their in-laws demand dowry at the time of marriage and some others have expressed that they are being harassed because of dowry. So, the study holds clear evidence that the evil of dowry is still rampant in the society, especially in Punjabi community. Women are still burnt for bringing insufficient dowry, tortured for not providing money to their alcoholic husbands and raped by men to satisfy their lust. The trend to demand and give dowry is widely prevalent among the high income class and the highly educated people also. Among this section of the society, the social status of the boy's family, his economic position and the nature of his job are of paramount importance. The expenditure on the daughter's wedding is thus determined by these factors. It leads to the inference that education and professional status of women does not necessarily reduce the incidence of dowry. This remains one of the most chronic reasons of crime against women and its persistence is symptomatic of the continuation of social bias against women. Thus, in spite of a number of Acts, especially Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961, dowry continues to be the most vicious form of exploitation of women in the society.

Thus, the study reveals that the Sikh ideology condemned the ostentatious display of dowry items. Even Sikh code of conduct and ethics do not endorse any wasteful show of wealth in marriage ceremony. Sikh ideology linked marriage with piety and not with vulgar exhibition of wealth in other sense of dowry. Sikh Gurus have defined dowry in terms of mental richness in place of material richness but the mind sets of people who have accepted it in the form of material richness. Nowadays, dowry has become a status symbol and increasing day by day. It has assumed alarming proportions. With the variety of household gadgets flooding the market, the demand for dowry too has increased manifold. The spread of consumerist culture has brought morality to the lowest ebb and all kinds of pressures for hefty dowries are put by the groom's family on the parents of the girl. Infact, the dowry system,

which was started as a safeguard for the rights of women has grown into a monster which has gobbled the lives of many innocent girls. Insatiable greed for acquiring more and more wealth and a false sense of social prestige are at the root of the problem. Moreover, Punjabi community has started with a wrong trend of spending huge money on lavishly marriages. It is creating problems for those who are not in position to afford such lavish marriages. It has resulted into many social problems like dowry deaths, divorces, suicides by parents failing to repay loans taken from banks for marriages etc.

The present study has tried to clearly enumerate in objective terms that majority of women face victimization on the basis of gender in the society. It is in the form of eve-teasing, molestation, domestic violence, sexual harassment etc. Today, eve-teasing has become a recalcitrant problem as there is no strict punishment for such crime. Furthermore, the data shows that in such situations, many of the people choose to remain silent or to blame their own daughters when they are confronted with such crimes. The reason behind causal reporting of the crime is social stigma which keeps victim women quiet for her own sake and for the honour of her family. In Punjab, the girl who is the victim of sexual harassment is haunted for entire life by one single crime committed against her and it puts her in an embarrassment at almost every step of her life. Parents do not want to highlight any such issue related to their daughter. They fear that it could create problem in their marriage. So, the study reveals that due to our slow judicial system and corruption, victimization on the basis of gender is increasing day by day. Many of the women are facing this problem silently because of the fear of delayed justice. They feel that delayed justice is justice denied. On the other hand, keeping in view the dignity of woman, Sikh Gurus have condemned those who treat woman as a commodity and are proud of intoxication of pleasure with woman and consider themselves powerful.

Moreover, another finding of the study is that less than fifty percent of the women do not feel proud or possess a sense of dignity in being a woman. The basic problem is the perception of social inequality, lack of social security and economic dependence. Women also suffer from a sense of insecurity in social and public life. Their gender discrimination and sexual harassment leads to a very poor sense of

self-esteem for women. Women often have to struggle for their very existence. The reasons behind persistence of these crimes are tardy and ineffective legal procedure in the judicial system, highly insufficient law enforcing agencies and lack of strict and exemplary punishment. This becomes the major reason for almost complete absence of deterrence and a silent suffering from crime by women. So, the study reveals that women have no problem as they belong to the female gender. But the problem is the social inequality and social insecurity which force them to realize that they are the vulnerable section of the society. Moreover, their economic dependency on men also hurts their sentiments.

Among the working respondents in both areas, majority of respondents are not free to use their earned money as they wish. On the other hand, less than fifty percent respondents do not get sufficient money from their spouses or family to carry on the family affairs. This is mainly because their families do not repose faith in them. It is thought that they cannot manage the family budget efficiently. Thus, all the major decisions regarding expenses are taken by the head of the family. Thus, the study reveals that it does not matter much whether women are working or non-working; they are always secondary to men even if they earn equal to their spouses and supplement the family income. But in our society, especially in Punjabi community, the mindset of the society towards the feminine gender cannot be changed. In majority of the cases even today, women are considered incapable of taking important decisions. Moreover, It is also noticed that majority of the women feel that economic independence plays a great role in determining their position at home. It provides respect to women. Some other respondents were of the view that economic independence alone is not helpful to empower them. In addition to it, a supportive environment and attitude of family members are also required. So, the study reveals that although there are a large number of factors that are related to the self-esteem and dignity of women but among them economic independence which is considered to be more important than other factors, plays an important role in the empowerment of women. Economic independence of women leads to their social freedom/security.

So for as the property rights are concerned, it has been found that urban women are much more aware than the rural women. It has also been observed that

despite their awareness, majority of respondents admit that they cannot even think of claiming their share in the property because they do not want to strain their relations with their brothers. It is generally assumed that huge amount of money has already been spent on their marriage. Even majority of them would not allow their daughters to take share in their property. They are of the view that only their brothers and in future their sons should hold right on their parent's property. So the study reveals that the deprivation of female from property rights is a matter of traditional practices in Punjab, especially among Punjabi community. It is part of the conventional social wisdom that women neither demand nor are they given any right in parental property. It is the sole prerogative of the male descendants. It is a very strong evidence of social bias against women as well as a proof of their exclusion from their equal share in their ancestral property. In addition to this, the study also reveals that majority of respondents confessed that no property was ever purchased in their names. There were very few respondents who expressed the view that some property was purchased under their names. Among them the legal reason is expressed by most of them as the main reason for the purchase of property. Thus, the study shows that even today women have little or no role in the matter of buying and selling or proprietorship of property. Parents avoid buying property in the name of the daughters as they have to leave one day for ever to the house of their in-laws. The in-laws also avoid purchasing property in the name of their daughters-in-law as they apprehend that if the matrimonial relationship does not go well, they may end up losing their property.

So for political rights are concerned, the study shows that majority of respondents feel that they are being deprived of their equal political rights also. It is worth mentioning here that most of the respondents are not free to cast their vote in favour of a particular candidate whom they like. They are rather pressurized by their family to cast their vote in favour of the specific candidate of the family's choice. The reason behind this is male supremacy or dominance. The study reveals that nearby majority of respondents who have no interest in politics. The main reason behind this general lack of interest is that most of them are busy with their work. This is also due to family restrictions and many of them are pre-occupied with their family problems. Some respondents are of the view that politics is only for

professional politicians. Common man cannot play a constructive role in politics. This is the main reason that the 100 percent voting target is not being achieved by the government. As for the elected female respondents are concerned, it has been revealed through the present study that majority of the respondents take their decisions with the help of the male members of their family. They are only nominal heads. The actual power is exercised by the male members of the family. In such cases women act as proxies for the male members. Neither their entry nor their continuance in position of elected member is solely a matter of choice emerging out of their independent volition. Thus, the study finds that in real sense, even elected women are not fully empowered. Their actual political power is exercised by the male members.

Moreover, the analysis of the data shows that majority of respondents are of the opinion that the government is not taking suitable and effective steps to make the term 'gender equality' a reality. There are only 33 percent seats reserved for women. Crimes against women are increasing day-by-day. Offender is not punished efficaciously. So majority of respondents are of the view that the government is slow and is not taking suitable steps for prevention of crime against women. On the other hand, majority of the respondents have admitted that gender equality prevails more in Punjabi community rather than in other communities in the society. But large number of respondents has expressed the view that in Punjabi community women are suppressed because it is mainly a male dominated community. Even, the folk songs and lyrics undermine the status of a woman. So, the study helps to conclude that condition of women is quite pathetic and miserable everywhere. She has to (virtually) struggle for her existence even today. Although we live in a scientifically advanced society and the level of political consciousness is quite high, yet, so far as the status and rights of women are concerned, things leave much to be desired.

The significant dimension of the findings of the study leads to the conclusion that there are several reasons which are responsible for the sad plight of women. These reasons are – moral downfall of the society, lack of political will and insensitive attitude of political leadership, lack of understanding and true implementation of Sikh ethos and values, impact of western culture and lack of effective implementation of laws. All these reasons contribute much towards the

pathetic condition of women in the present day society. Moreover, the negative role of media is also responsible for the present sad state of affairs of women. Media down lays our cultural values, ethics and norms of the society.

Another interesting aspect that has been brought out by the study is related to the question that how can gender equality be achieved in our society. Majority of respondents are of the view that there should be legal binding on the children, irrespective of gender to take care of their parents. In other words, legally, it should be obligatory for the parents who have only daughters should be taken care of by them. It will provide them social security in their old age. By and large, respondents expressed the view that there should be change in the mindset of the people and the social- cultural values should be re- oriented.

It can be concluded that major findings of the study are that gender discrimination is the patriarchal attitude of the Punjabi society which treats woman as a physical object rather than a living-breathing entity. It gives her lower status than man in the society. Patriarchy is a major perpetrator and force, which legitimizes violence against women. In male dominated society, customs, laws and norms-all support patriarchal behaviour, which in turn perpetuates violent behaviour. Indian culture glorifies the image of woman who is tolerant and receptive to whatever is imposed or bestowed on her by her husband. So the basic reason for gender inequality is the inferior status of woman in a male dominated society. In most of the cases, a girl is not welcomed in the parental home even if she is ill-treated by the husband or the in-laws. The result is that she has to tolerate ill-treatment, battering, harassment on any account whatsoever including dowry all alone. If she tries to react or retaliate, she has to face dire consequences. In the absence of any alternate support system, she is left with no option but to continue in the marital home and tolerate the torture meted out to her. Economic dependence adds to this situation, and when the circumstances are intolerable, she is pushed to the brink of desperation. This is the reason that there is a high rate of suicides among married women. Not only the uneducated and economically dependent women become the victims of this form of exploitation but highly educated and working women are also subjected to such victimhood.

Thus, the present study has clearly revealed that this certainly is not the picture of the society that the Sikh Gurus had carved out. They stood for a healthy balanced society with equal rights for all individuals irrespective of any gender, a society where every human could live a life of dignity, free from all kinds of fear; where no one was denied as basic right as to be born. But in present times, social evils like female foeticide, dowry deaths, honour killings and domestic violence are very much rampant in Sikh society. This shows that there is wide gap between theory and practice of Sikh ideology. Thus, something is needed to be done to put the unhealthy trends in the reverse gear.

Suggestions

- The root cause for all the problems of women community lies in illiteracy. Illiteracy among women is rampant and endemic. So, first and foremost, women should be given education. Education will broaden their outlook and make them aware of their rights, duties and responsibilities in the society. Women should be encouraged to go in for higher education.
- There should be positive change in the curriculum at the school and college level in order to generate more healthy gender relations.
- In order to improve the status of women and to eradicate social evils, there is also a need to bring about a change in the mindset and psyche of parents, teachers, leaders, etc. towards girl child and woman.
- Legal education to fight against injustice must be imparted to girls at school level itself so that they learn to stand up and fight for their rights.
- Moral education should be imparted in schools. Children should be taught to uphold moral values and refrain from practices of dowry, female foeticide and gender bias and others.
- In a country, where women are put on a high pedestal and are worshipped as Mother Goddess but crimes against women seem to be on the rise which is very much tragic. Recently, several Acts have been passed to safeguard the interests of women. More such Acts should be passed, and possible loopholes should be blocked as these have far-reaching implications for women in the country.

- Legal empowerment approaches should be adopted as part of the solution to advance women's access to justice. Investing more resources to identify and design effect, context-specific strategies to promote gender equality.
- Women should be encouraged to participate in politics. There should be reservation of seats for women both in the State Assemblies as well as in Parliament. Women should independently join politics, so that they can have a voice in nation building and can help the cause of women in general.
- Long delays of decisions in law courts are responsible for a spurt in crimes. It has been seen that often it takes years together for the cases to reach the final stage of disposal. To prevent such a happening, cases like dowry deaths and rapes must be summarily tried by special courts to be set up for this purpose. These courts will certainly ensure speedy justice to victims not otherwise possible under the normal process of law which is not only time-consuming but also humiliating.
- The law enforcing machinery should be made really effective with efficient monitoring vigilant system to implement the constitutional and legislative provisions.
- The fee concessions granted to single girl child should also be extended to those families having double or triple girl children.
- Skill oriented courses should also be encouraged at school and college level to make them able to earn their livelihood or to make them self-dependent.
- N.C.C., N.S.S., girl guiding and other multi-dimensional co-curricular units which help to boost up the confidence of women should be established in all educational institutions.
- A number of welfare programmes for women have been initiated during the last few years but their implementation at the grassroots seems to be weak. The focus has, therefore, to be on the implementation and strengthening of machinery at various levels.
- Child care centres of Balwadis as part of the elementary education system are necessary to keep siblings (for whom the girls are able to attend classes in the schools).

- As social evils like dowry, child marriage, caste system and other practices deprive rights of education for girls belonging to poor and underprivileged families and communities, these evils should be should eliminated through well-designed packages of mass awareness programmes and social welfare measures with full support of public, political parties, NGOs and government agencies.
- More women teachers should be employed and separate schools for girls should be established wherever there is a demand for them.
- Along with education, incentives like free supply of books, stationary, uniforms, mid-day meals, attendance – scholarships and stipends should be provided at least to the 50% of the girls who hail from the poorer sections of society.
- The electronic and print media can play a significant role in building a good and positive image of girls and women in the society posing resistance to advertisements and news items that represent women as objects and try to obtain commercial gains by doing so. This would help in changing the society's attitudes towards girls and that every girl and woman is treated as human being with self-respect and dignity.
- Equal accessibility of health care and medical treatment for all is required.
- The government has to take the suitable steps to promote the simple marriage without dowry. So the mindset of our society towards 'girls are burden for their parents' can be changed.
- Offenders of women crimes should be punished as quickly as possible. Their cases should be decided by courts as the first preference. Then it will be the lesson for others.
- Suitable steps must be taken to realize the importance of vote to those women, who have no interest in politics and do not cast their vote.
- In our society, women often stand in the way of other women's development. So it is also necessary to change the mindset of woman towards woman. Necessary steps should be taken in this direction.
- There is need to organize programmes for celebration of leading Sikh women to remember their role/contribution in building Sikh society, service to

humanity and active participation in improving the condition of women on all fronts. In fact, such events should involve women to the maximum so that a gradual feeling of importance in the society is felt amongst them.

- Printing of Calendars- All calendars printing organizations like SGPC/DSGMC/Others and may be requested to include atleast one leading woman from history/current role models with brief background. Besides aiming at awareness, this shall inspire our youth in the right direction.
- Let us realize that both the parents are equally responsible for bringing up the child and their responsibility to establish themselves as a role model. For this purpose, they should resolve to spend sufficient time with them and taught them Sikh cultural values in order to promote more healthy gender relations.
- It is most essential that the mothers should pledge to give “Sikhi Sanskar” and Sikh ethos and values to their children, so that they should remain connected with Sikh ideology that is the symbol of equality of men and women.
- In the present scenario, it is unavoidable and important for the women to come forward to devote more time than their counterparts for bringing up their children from womb to world, cultivating the spiritual and temporal qualities (*Dharam* and *Duniya*) to protect their children from the evil effects of the society.
- The socio-cultural ethos needs to be reinterpreted, redefined and reformed in the light of religion and not vice versa.
- In this crucial time, the need of the hour is to implement the Sikh ideology in true spirit.

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APPENDIX

QUESTIONNAIRE-CUM-INTERVIEW SCHEDULE PART-1 SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROFILE OF THE RESPONDENTS

1. Name of the Respondent:
2. Age:.....
3. Caste:
4. Religion: Sikh Non Sikh
5. Area: Urban Rural
6. Marital Status:
Married Widow Divorced
7. (a) Educational Status:
Illiterate Primary Middle Matric
Graduation Above
- (b) Husband's Educational Status:
Illiterate Primary Middle Matric
Graduation Above
8. Occupation:
Working Non-working
9. Family Income (Annually):

PART-2 (SOCIAL RIGHTS)

1. Are you aware about women's rights?
Yes No
If yes, have you ever heard about the term 'gender equality'?
Yes No
2. Have you been provided education of your own choice?
Yes No
3. Do your in-laws support higher education for girls?
Yes No
If no, would you support your daughter against your family decision?
Yes No
4. Have you chosen your profession according to your own choice?

- Yes No
5. Have you got the freedom while selecting your life partner?
 No Yes, to a great extent
 To a limited extent
6. Would you allow your daughter to take independent decision in selecting her life partner?
 Yes No
7. Does your husband help you in domestic chores?
 Yes No
8. Do you participate equally in the decision making process of your family?
 Yes No
 If yes, do you feel that your decision carries equal weightage in your family?
 Yes No
9. Are you aware about your reproductive rights?
 Yes No
 If yes, do you get equal choice for planning a child?
 Yes No
10. Are you in favour of having a girl child?
 Yes No
 If yes, does your husband also support your decision?
 Yes No
 If no, are you pressurized by your in-laws to abort the girl child?
 Yes No
11. Do you get proper medical facilities at the time of illness?
 Yes No
12. Do you notice any type of nutritious food discrimination against the girl child in your family?
 No Yes, to a great extent
 Yes, to a limited extent
13. Do you think that dowry has enhanced your status in your in-laws family?
 Yes No
14. Do you feel any type of victimization on the basis of gender in the society?

Yes No

If yes, then what is the response of your family?

Remains silent Fully stand by you

Scolds you for such behaviour

15. Do you agree that the primary role of a woman is confined only to the performance of household chores, bearing and rearing of children and Job is not necessary for her?

Fully Agree Not at All

If you are fully agreed, do you want any change in this condition?

Yes No

If yes, then what type of change do you want?

.....

16. Do you feel honoured to be a woman?

Yes No

If no, what is the possible reason ?

- (a) Social inequality (b) Economic dependency
(c) Lack of social security (d) Any other, specify.....

(ECONOMIC RIGHTS)

17. Are you economically independent?

Yes No

If yes, do you have the freedom to spend your salary or income independently?

Yes No

If no, do you get the full financial support from your husband/family for managing the household affairs?

Yes No

18. Do you feel that economic independence plays a great role in determining your position at home?

Yes No

19. Are you aware about your right in your parental property?

Yes No

Partially

If yes, then would your parents be ready to give your due share to you?

Yes No

20. Are you yourself ready to share your property equally between your sons and daughters?

Yes No

21. Was ever any property purchased on your name?

Yes No

If yes, then what is the main motive for purchasing property in your name?

- For your economic empowerment.
- For legal reasons (Paying less stamp duty).
- For up gradation of your family status.

(POLITICAL RIGHTS)

22. Do you think that politics is the game made for males?

Yes No

23. Do you use your right to vote?

Yes No

24. Are you pressurized by your family to cast your vote in favour of a specific candidate?

Yes No

25. Are you interested to participate in Politics?

Yes No

If no, what is the reason?

.....

26. If you are an elected member, then who would exercise your political power in taking decisions?

Husband /parents or other male members

My self

27. Do you know that the government is taking suitable steps to make the term 'gender equality' a realistic one?

Yes

No

28. Do you think there is more gender equality in Punjabi community rather than other communities in the society?

Yes

No

If no, specify the reason/s.....

29. Which reason contributes the most towards the sad plight of women?

- Lack of effective implementation of laws.
- Lack of political will and insensitive attitude of political leadership towards gender issues.
- Moral downfall of the society.
- Impact of westernization.
- Lack of understanding and true implementation of Gurbani.

30. How can gender equality be achieved in the society? Give your opinion?

.....

DECLARATION

I **Gurpreet Kaur** certify that the work embodied in this Ph.D thesis is my own bonafide work carried out by me under the supervision of **Prof. and Head Dr. Jagroop Kaur** from 5-02-2012 to 21-12-2015 at Department of Political Science Punjabi University, Patiala. The matter embodied in this Ph.D thesis has not been submitted for the award of any other degree/diploma.

I declare that I have faithfully acknowledged, given credit to and referred to the research workers wherever their works have been cited in the text and the body of the thesis. I further certify that I have not willfully lifted up some other's work, para, text, data, results, etc. reported in the journals, books, magazines, reports, dissertations, thesis, etc., or available at web-sites and included them in this Ph.D thesis and cited as my own work. I also declare that I have adhered to all principles of academic honesty and integrity and have not misrepresented or fabricated or falsified any idea/data/fact/source in my submission. I understand that any violation of the above will be cause for disciplinary action by the University.

Date: 27.5.2016

Place: Patiala


Signature of the Candidate

Gurpreet Kaur

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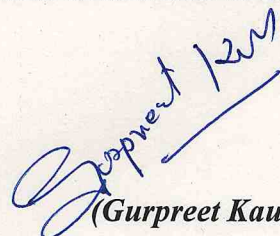
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(Gurpreet Kaur)

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

1. AD : After Death
2. BC : Backward Class
3. BC : Before Christ
4. CEDAW : Convention to Eliminate All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
5. DSGMC : Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee.
6. IPC : Indian Penal Code
7. Kms. : Kilometers
8. MLA : Member of Legislative Assembly
9. MP : Member of Parliament
10. N : Number
11. NCC : National Cadet Corps
12. NGO : Non Governmental Organisation
13. NH : North Highway
14. NSS : National Service Scheme
15. OBC : Other Backward Class
16. PAFC : Provincial Agricultural and Fisheries Council
17. PEPSU : Patiala and East Punjab States Union
18. SC : Schedule Caste
19. SGGS : Sri Guru Granth Sahib
20. SGPC : Shiromini Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee
21. UN : United Nation
22. UNO : United Nations Organization