

GURU NANAK DEV'S TEACHINGS AND WOMEN'S EQUALITY: A CONTEMPORARY STUDY

INNARA GULL*,

Research scholar, Department of history, university of Kashmir.

Abstract:

Human beings have made great strides on the economic parameters and the world is much more progressive than ancient times. The world has emerged a global village these days. Some noteworthy steps have been taken for social upliftment of hitherto prejudiced sections of society as well. There are number of initiatives in place for realization of social equality based on inborn human rights concept irrespective of Sex, Cast, and Race etc. However the concept of social equality based on gender is still unrealizable for women. They are still facing notions of men's slave, man's enjoyment, patriarchy, property claim disputes, dowry issues, trafficking, inequality in executive, legislative and judicial branches, inequality in business etc. Although some progress has been made on certain fronts like women being PM, Defense Minister, business tycoons, activists, writers etc but the dream of social reformers like Guru Nanak (fonder of Sikhism) is still infant. The teachings of Guru gee that "All human beings are equal regardless of sex" is yet to be fully realized. He once quoted about the role and importance of women as "women as well as men are borne from women; there is none without her. Only the one true lord is without women" (Var Asa. Guru Nanak). Therefore everyone is equal before Lord why inequality before men.

Guru Nanak jee rose to prominence on concept of progressive thinking towards women. He always insisted upon the recognition of women's role in social development. Since they were not given any freedom or rights, like inheritance of property, right to worship and economic independence, Guru Nanak preached that women are equal to men to claim all rights for their welfare.

The paper will discuss what Guru Nanak preached for the equality of women socially, economically and how still after five hundred years women are fighting for the rights that were preached and encouraged by Guru Nanak Dev. Since our society is yet to come out of the ancient mentality of this front, the renaissance of Guru Nank Dev jee's teachings is need of hour. There is need to revive the teachings and sayings of Guru Nanak jee to evolve progressive and pragmatic society. The paper will further prop up the claim of women based on teachings of Guru Nanak. It will focus on the importance of teachings and morels to deal with the contemporary morel crisis prevailing in our society for the evolution of compassionate society based on equality for women in society and to cure prevailing evils against women in society. The paper will further discuss how nowadays people are awakening about the reality of fundamentals like gender equality, women empowerment etc. that were preached by Guru Nanak Dev. In the end focus will be would be the role of teachings in contemporary period to realize the dream of Guru Nank jee.

Key words: Guru Nanak, Teachings, equality, women, empowerment.

Introduction:

India is the country of multi-lingual, multi-religious, and multi-cultural society. But there are number of initiatives in place for realization of social equality based on inborn human rights concept irrespective of Sex, Cast, and Race etc. However the concept of social equality based on gender is still unrealizable for women. This diversified society always shows religious inferiorities, social injustices and gender equality. Our society always shows unequal treatment for women and shows them very inferior as compared to their opposite gender. Upbringing of our society is made like female gender always means inequality in every culture in every religion. [1]

Social reformers always tried to reform the notion of such religious dogmatism and inferiority towards women. One such great reformer is Guru Nanak Dev Ji, born on April 15, 1469, at Rai Bohi Ki Talvandi (present day Punjab, Pakistan). Guru Nank Dev teaches that everyone is equal and taught his followers to serve mankind. In Indian society women were always depriver of dignity and self-respect and are always oppressed. Before the times of Guru Nanak Dev Ji they were not even able to get education and freedom of any decision making. They were not part of space within the vicinity of religion, culture and other affairs. In fact women dose not even exist in our ancient society. They were only meant for house hold and to extend and prolong the race.

Before the Guru Nanak dev Ji female infanticide and Sati were common and were encouraged in our society. He raised his voice against such notions in our society and says that everyone is born from women and women should not be deprived of her rights. [2]. Guru Nanak Dev Ji teaches not to believe in the notion of inferiority and doomed this gender based inequality and inferiority. He dissent against the subordination of women by me. According to the teachings of Guru Nanak Dev Ji women hold the same state as that of men. His ideology stated that men is born from woman, within woman, he is conceived to a woman, he is engaged and married to a woman and only through women generations exist. So why to differentiate among men and women and why to treat her unequally as compared to men ; without women there would be non at all. So according to Guru Nanak Dev Ji there is no difference between human beings on base of gender, there is only physical difference. He allowed women to practice religion along men and allow them to work in common Lunger (kitchen). He broke all the restrictions of women and force and admitted them equally in society without any force and suppression. He changed and revolutionized the trend of treating women as servant of society and made them able to take decisions and to fight for themselves. [3]

Guru Nanak Dev Ji glorifies the role and status of women in society by giving them good position similar to men in all respects. He values more the humanity rather than gender, cast, colour etc. and give the verses for the role and specialty of women in SGGGS. Guru Nanak Dev proved Sikhism as great pyramid for the status of women. Sikhism became the religion of respect and peace for women as well as society. Women enjoyed opportunities and participated in various social, political, economical and cultural activities after the Guru Nanak Ji condemned the gender inferiority in society from which they were previously deprived. This is the result of reforms of Guru Nanak Dev ji that women occupy a status in society as a worker, employer, teacher and other positions in society. But our society still needs to understand that reforms given by Guru Nanak Dev Ji, as thousands of women are still deprived of their rights and equality against their opposite gender. Though women in our society get some power and prestige because of such great social reformers but this reform is not yet completely followed. Women still get tortured by their husbands and in-laws due the issues like dowry, not giving birth to the male child and for taking any decision etc. [4] Sikhism and the greatest philosopher and the social reformer give the concept of society without any discrimination and inferiority on the gender basis. He greatly rebuked and reprimand religious and social notions and the activities that degraded women's image in society. In ancient society women was living a life that was imposed on her by considering her foolish, less important, incapable, having no intelligence, having no decisive power and not having powerful muscles etc. She was under the control of male dominance and always seen obeying and tolerating every decision and torture of men. Birth of male child was welcomed and the presence of male was made mandatory in most of the occasions and customs. Female were got married once they attain puberty and had to sacrifice themselves at the funeral prayer of her husband "Sati" most crucial and inhuman practice, earlier historians dated the performance of Sati from A.D 510. Guru Nanak Dev Ji opposed this practice and tried hard to deconstruct this evil in society through the awareness and his preaching. [5]

Girls were also deprived from the share of property of her father. In later times the pre-puberty marriages were also adopted in India. Dr Upindarjit wrote in her article "Role and Status of Women in Sikhism" that women were always treated like servants since the domination of Brahmanism and enforcement of Manu code. [6]. Guru Nank Dev Ji hymns highly advocate rights of women and shows that women must get equality and dignity as a member of society equal as male members of society. Guru Nanak Dev Ji's successors equally advocate the equal privileges in the society. But still women in various aspects are hanging in secondary position. Mata Khivi direction for the supply of Lunger of Kheer with her supervision as she continuously served Lunger for 30 years even after the death of Guru Angad shows the importance given to the women's status by Guru Nanak and successor Gurus. [6]. By knowing

about the noble and brave Sikh women we can understand the importance, equality and prestige given to the women by Sikhism through the preaching, influence and reform of Guru Nanak Dev Ji and successors. Bibi Nanki is of great prestige, Bibi Bhani and Bibi Amro did remarkable work of spreading Sikhism, thus shows the freedom of religion given to women by Guru Nanak Dev Ji. The sacrifices of Mata Gujri and the guidance of Mata Sundri to Sikhs in complicated times is the result of Guru Nank Dev's hard work. Bibi Rajinder Kour's and Bibi Sahib Kour's bravery in betel field and their administrative skills that saves state from the ruins is the example how Guru Nank and successors gave equally political freedom and rights to the women. And the wonder of Bibi Harman kour of spreading education is the great example of equality and right to education women got because of the great Guru- Guru Nank Dev Ji. [7]. Thus women's freedom and equality has a historical background supported and advocated by Guru Nanak Dev Ji and our society must inspire by the teachings of Guru Nanak Dev Ji and the period of great women of Sikhism, but it is the thing of regret that still young women and girls are not given their due respect, power, place and superiority as that of men. [8]. The module and life of Guru Nanak Dev Ji can seriously become the solution and will help to deal with the daily problems and difference found by the women in present-day society in India. The understanding teachings of Guru Nanak Dev Ji can help us to deal with the suppression and evils like dowry, women are facing nowadays. Guru Nanak Ji spends most of his life in travel and travelled major religious places of those days and at theological level he declared that world is God's world and no one is more or less powerful in this world. Everyone is equally created and created by one creator and both genders belong to same species.[9].

Ignorance and inferiority about the women was thick and far reaching in Indian society and such trends worsened the conditions of women. But Guru Nank Dev renounced such society and arise a new phase that was the mission of love, brotherhood, freedom and equality that advocates equal place to men and women, king and bagger, high and low cast like everyone both in spiritual and social manner. He fills the minds of all and far and wide preach the subject that binds all the sections of society in the same bond within freedom and equality. Guru Nanak once advised a king (Skinder) remember God and love and serve both his sons and daughters- all living beings are created by God and you should not misuse or mislead you duty or power on the difference of creed, colour or sex. [10].

Women in past days with pregnant wombs were consider as a burden by their husbands and was made responsibility of her parents. Those who gave birth to female child was so much oppressed that she always used to weep and cry. Family always try to degrade her on the name of girl child and keep her remembering painful scans that happened with girls and women, then they prefer to kill her girl child. Child infanticide and bride killing were thought as great deed. No corner of society was less harmful for the women. A poor women though it good to do the Sati rather got ashamed by strangers. In such society the seeds and planting of benevolent and golden teachings of equality, rights, respect and reality were only started by great man and philosopher (Guru Nanak Dev Ji). [11]. This wonderful personality advocates the selflessness, uniqueness and prohibited the discrimination. But within the changing time no importance is given to such great lessons. Mirages are celebrated as evils, during Gurdwara movement, only four persons used to accompany groom marriage party and dowry and golden ornaments were prohibited. [12]

Human rights which are commonly known to everyone nowadays were not even heard during ancient days in our society. The spirit of humanism was dead in the society. This society saw a movement and get aware about these things only through the teachings of Guru Nanak Dev Ji. Guru Nanak Dei is not guide only for the Sikhism and India but his guidelines are the slogan to the whole mankind as well as world. He believed in love, brotherhood and oneness. Love for God and human was main motive of his teachings. Guru Nanak arrived during the crucial period of Indian history, when the political and social conditions of society had worsened. He preached the people not for himself but only for the service of society and safeguard of people from degradation towards justice and equality. Nowadays our education system is only the system of commercial value and just for degree purpose and job security, but ignores the vital value of humanity, equality and social justice that were injected by Nanak through his preaching. [13]. In such crucial circumstances Guru Nanak came for the awareness of betterment and upliftment of ignored but most important group and part of society (women). Guru Nanak Ji called the as creator of society. [14]. The contribution of Guru Nanak Dev ji was immense to promote the cause of women empowerment on multitude of parameters. He touched almost every aspect related to discrimination of women. He fought for equality of women at April with men. The need of hour is to revive the spirit of Guru Nanak ji to focus on the integration of women as an

essential part and parcel of society. The contribution of this great sage was to project that women didn't need doles and handouts but complete integration into the social mainstream.

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