

# The Status and Role of Women in Sikh Religious Doctrine

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## Abstract:

This study explores the status and role of women within Sikh doctrine, aiming to contribute to and enrich academic discussions on the intersection of religious doctrine and gender studies. Using a qualitative approach that focuses on religion and gender, the research employs a library-based methodology, analyzing various sources and relevant prior studies. The findings demonstrate that women in Sikhism are granted equal status to men, rooted in the doctrine that emphasizes an intimate relationship between humans and the divine, where gender holds no significance in the connection to God. Moreover, the study delves into human relationships as shaped by behaviors, attitudes, and societal norms during the Sikh Gurus' era, illustrating the ideal dynamics between men and women. Despite Sikh teachings of equality, women in the Sikh community still face challenges in accessing leadership roles, as cultural and historical narratives often prioritize male dominance. The contributions of Sikh women have been historically marginalized, leaving subsequent generations with limited role models. This research offers both theoretical insights into Sikhism and gender and practical implications for encouraging the Sikh community, particularly men, to uphold Guru Nanak's vision of gender equality.

**Keywords:** *Sikhism; women's status; religious doctrine; women's role*

## INTRODUCTION

Sikhism, which emerged in the 15th century in Punjab, India, emphasizes core values such as equality, justice, and compassion. Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, along with the nine succeeding Gurus, consistently emphasized the importance of gender equality in their teachings (Mayaratu, 2011). In this context, women in Sikhism are granted rights and opportunities equal to men in various areas, including religious, social, and economic spheres.

The Sikh Gurus affirm that women, like men, share the same responsibilities as servants of God, tasked with devoting themselves to the Creator (Avtarsign, 1992). Despite Sikhism's unique advocacy for gender equality, scholarly research that deeply examines women's roles within this doctrine remains limited. Previous

studies tend to focus on other aspects of Sikhism, while the contributions and roles of women are often overlooked.

This study aims to fill that gap by providing a comprehensive analysis of the status and role of women within Sikh doctrine. Furthermore, it seeks to challenge the patriarchal and gender-biased perspectives that persist within Sikh communities and beyond, by highlighting the theoretical foundations of gender equality in Sikh teachings. As studies on gender relations across different religious traditions continue to grow, they contribute to reshaping social structures. Therefore, this research is not only relevant to gender and religious studies in Indonesia but also has global significance, offering insights into how religious doctrines can influence gender dynamics in various cultural contexts (Firmanullah, 2020). By exploring the gap between theory and practice in gender relations within Sikh communities, this study offers a significant contribution to global discussions on gender equality within religious frameworks.

The study also provides practical implications for the Sikh community, particularly by encouraging reflection on how Guru Nanak's teachings on gender equality can be more fully implemented in contemporary Sikh society. By highlighting both the theoretical foundations and practical challenges faced by Sikh women, this research offers a deeper understanding of the intersection between religious doctrine and gender, both in local and global contexts.

## **METHOD**

This study employs a qualitative approach with a focus on religious and gender perspectives. The qualitative method was chosen for its ability to understand the complexities and depths of experiences and views related to the researched topic. This approach allows the researcher to explore the meanings and social contexts underlying practices and beliefs associated with gender within a religious framework.

The method utilized in this research is library research (Mustari & Rahman, 2012). The data sources collected include various literature from previous studies published in journals, theses, scientific reports, and other academic publications. The researcher gathered literature from credible sources, applying strict selection criteria to ensure the relevance and validity of the data. This process involved sorting and eliminating sources that were not pertinent, based on publication year, author credibility, and relevance to the research questions.

The religious and gender approach applied in this study aims to investigate the relationship between religious beliefs and gender roles in society. In this context, theory serves various functions, such as summarizing findings from prior research, inspiring hypothesis formulation, and guiding the researcher in obtaining answers. Theory also aids in making predictions based on existing findings, providing explanations that offer a clear direction and foundation for this research (Soehadha, 2012).

The data gathered from relevant literature will be analyzed using thematic analysis, which enables the researcher to identify patterns and themes that emerge within the context of religion and gender. Through this analysis, it is expected that this study will provide deeper insights into the dynamics of women's roles in Sikh religious doctrine. This research also acknowledges certain limitations, including potential biases in the selection of literature and limitations in the generalizability of findings, which will be discussed further in the discussion section.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Getting to Know Sikhism**

The story of the Sikh religion was first written by Gokul Chand Narang, the first Punjabi Hindu to write a regular history of Sikhs in the early 20th century before no regular Sikh history was written even by Sikhs themselves (Singh, 2010). Sikhism is a religion that is still relatively new when compared to other religions before. However, western scholars believe that Sikhism has elements of Hinduism and Islam in its teachings. In response to this, Guru Nanak actually clearly rejected many aspects of the two religious communities, especially criticizing the empty ritualism of Brahmanist Hinduism, which he considered as an obstacle to true spiritual understanding until finally Guru Nanak established a Sikh community consisting of about 2% of the population and has approximately 20 million members around the world including Indonesia, one of which is (Juergensmeyer et al., 2013).

Guru Nanak traveled across the subcontinent, gathering disciples or Sikhs (a term derived from the word learn, implying those who learned from a spiritual teacher or teacher). Guru Nanak emphasized the importance of meditation on the unity of the divine spirit and righteous living in the world. This shows its difference with orthodox Hindus (Zain, 2012). As in Hinduism, various castes in its philosophy of life have different levels, the Brahmin, Knight, Vaishya, and Sudra castes (Esha, 2008). Brahma and Knight came from the Aryan people, namely Persian

and European descendants who were not native to India, or immigrants from Central Asia, while Vaishya and Sudra came from the Dravidian people who were native to India or those from South Asia (Suadnyana, 2020).

The Sikh community seeks to overcome caste differences by sharing food in public kitchens, Sikh temples or gurudwara (doors to teachers) are also open to all. In the teachings of Guru Nanak, the ideal human beings who are teacher-oriented (Gurmukh) are those who carry out virtue and purity, establish relationships with God, with society, and establish relationships with themselves, a balance between individual and community development in accordance with cognitive and communal aspects (Singh, 2014b).

After Guru Nanak passed away from the world back to the afterlife, the title of teacher did not necessarily sink, but was passed down to loyal students, as well as the authority of teaching continued from one teacher to another through a series of ten teachers (Mayaratu, 2010). Guru Arjun, the fifth teacher (1563-1606), in addition to being the compiler of the *Adi Granth* (Ancient Scriptures), then became *Guru Granth Sahib* (the teacher's holy book). The sixth Master, Hargobind, lived around (1595-1644), creating the Sikh martial tradition and depicting the complementary worldly and spiritual forces. The tenth and final Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708), formed the Khalsa army, a venerable group of Sikhs who swore commitment to their faith, an important step towards the full militarization of the Sikh tradition (Andreliyani, 2021). True Sikh believers are disciples of God and diligent learners of the teachings of *Guru Granth Sahib*. A Sikh is not just a disciple or follower but is seen as someone who embodies values in accordance with the scriptures (Singh, 2010). Sikhs are required to maintain a combination of the natural form of the body (e.g., hair is an important part of the natural order) and character (developed by scripture), living a virtuous and honest life while maintaining a balance between spiritual and temporal obligations.

By the time India gained independence in 1947, Sikh activists played an important role in gurudwara reform and gained recognition as a significant political force. Despite the discourse on the formation of a Sikhs, or Khalistan, Sikh leaders chose to remain with pluralist and secular India, and in 1966 Sikhs became the majority in the newly established state of Punjab after the division of Punjabi language boundaries (Juergensmeyer.Dkk, 2013) In the 1980s, the Sikh separatist movement fought for the independence of the Indian state of Khalistan. This struggle incorporates the theme of martyrdom from the history of the Sikh religion and becomes a movement of resistance against the injustice felt in India. The movement was not only political but also provided an existential means for Sikh individuals, regardless of their instrumental political objectives.

### **Sikh Religious Doctrine**

Guru Nanak argues that God is Transcendent and Immanent and has a fundamental implication that the universe is real and meaningful. God's attributes can only be expressed in the real world, because when God is Himself, then the question of God's expressions of love and other attributes cannot arise. Thus, this description of God gives authenticity as well as spiritual significance to the human world and his life (Avtarsign, 1992). This view is certainly in complete contradiction to the early Buddhist approach, which viewed the world as a place of suffering, involving withdrawal from monastic life. Even Vedanta's approach considers the world as *Mithya* and world activities are only illusive (Dewi, 2020).

The sun and the moon are your lights; the heavens are Your plates; The star balls are the pearls contained in them. The scent of sandalwood is Your incense, the wind is Your fan, all the forests are Your flowers, O Lord, what is this prayer, 'O Destroyer of birth? The invincible tones of happiness are the trumpet of Your prayer. You have a thousand eyes and yet not a single eye; You have a thousand forms and yet not a single form; You have a thousand feet that are unspotted and yet not a single foot; You have a thousand organs of smell and yet not a single organ. I am fascinated by Your play, The Light that is in everything is You, O Lord. From its brilliance, everything shines; With the Master's teachings, the light becomes manifest. What You love is true worship. O Lord, my mind is enchanted by Your lotus feet like bees with flowers; day and night I thirst for them. Give the water of Your pleasure to the Nest (bird) of Nanak, so that it may abide in Your name (Avtarsign, 1992).

Guru Nanak's expression shows how he sees the whole world and all its contents within the sphere of god's power, thus in his view, God has a myriad of powers and masters all kinds of things, yet God cannot be identified with beings who have ears to hear, legs to walk, and so on. The task of human beings is to carry out worship as best as possible in order to live in God's name. The above statement was born as an expression of Guru Nanak's own religious experience, as in Joachim Wach's view that religious experience is a response to absolute reality that requires several levels of awareness, understanding, conception, and so on, an encounter with absolute reality

through call and response, there is a dynamic relationship between the living and the living, and religious experience will always exist continuously (Joachim Wach, 1996) Guru Nanak's religious experience is then contained in the scriptures of his teachings.

Guru Granth Sahib is an authentic scripture that is believed to have originated from God and was passed on to Sikh Masters (messengers of God) who then spread it throughout the world. Sikh philosophy is written and authenticated by the Masters themselves in their lives. This scripture has survived through generations without a single letter being changed, as the last and unchangeable scripture. The current standard edition of Guru Granth Sahib, as it is known as the Sikh scriptures, contains 1,430 pages. It is written in the Gurmukhi script and arranged in 31 Ragas (songs/musical settings) that have been widely memorized, to ensure that there are no changes to the scriptures in any form (Singh, 2010). This scripture is very modern because of its citation and reference format. In addition to hymns from Sikh Gurus, the book also contains writings and hymns from saints and preachers from different religious backgrounds, the philosophy of which is in line with the spirit of Sikhism.

The main part in Guru Granth Sahib is Japji Sahib, holding a central role and being the core of Sikh teachings. As the first part of Guru Granth Sahib, Japji Sahib was written by Guru Nanak towards the end of his life. It is the only hymn that is not sung but rather is said every morning; Sikhs say this praise and also during the preparation of the ceremony of becoming a member of the Khalsa. Japji Sahib, which begins with Mool Mantar, highlights the basic principles of Sikh beliefs as follows:

*There is one God who is eternal truth.*

*The law of karma, where the results of an action will be harvested as a result of the action*

*Human salvation can only be achieved by following God's commands and teachings (Adhitama, 2022).*

Guru Granth Sahib is not only considered a holy scripture but is given the status of an eternal and absolute Sikh Guru (Living Guru or Jivant Guru). A guide to living an ideal life by connecting with the Creator. He emphasized the selfless actions taken for the good of the community, by supporting a healthy family life and social commitment. The place of worship is called gurdwara which literally means the gateway to the Guru. The presence of Guru Granth Sahib gives religious status to the gurdwara, so basically, any building that contains the holy book can be considered a gurdwara. Inside the gurdwara, there are no images, statues, idols, pulpits, or podiums, but only the text of Guru Granth Sahib (Singh, 2014b)

In addition to Guru Granth, there is also the Gurdwara skin that can be easily identified by its famous yellow flag Nishan Sahib, fluttering on the exterior of the temple. This flag visualizes a double-edged sword or khanda, symbolizing the struggle against the enemies of faith, both real and supernatural. In addition, there are two swords or kirpans, which reflect the concepts of Miri and Piri, as well as a circle that indicates unity with God (Murphy, 2005) The main function of the gurdwara is to ensure that all elements associated with the Sikh religion are preserved and fully practiced by Sikhs. According to Kahn Singh Nabha's view, the seven functions of gurdwara are as follows:

*Educational center for children and youth*

*Beacon of enlightenment for spiritual seekers*

*Clinics for the sick and elderly*

*Kitchen/dining for the hungry*

*A fortress to protect women's honor and dignity*

*Transit points for tourists*

*A means to strengthen family ties between humans, both young and old (Singh, 2014b).*

However, not all gurdwaras can comply with all of these due to local or resource restrictions. Most gurdwaras are managed by a committee made up of local community members. The Gurdwara Management Committee plays an important role in guiding and spreading the religious teachings and appropriate values to the Sikh community. In general, each committee has its own tasks, which are as follows:

*Managing gurdwara finances*

*Collecting donations to improve the condition of gurdwara and help those in need*

*Defending various religious and social activities*

*Recruiting religious specialists*

*Inviting religious experts from abroad to give religious sermons*  
*Organizing religious classes by teaching Gurmukhi script and Punjabi (Singh, 2014b).*

It can be seen that Sikhism is a religion that is as complete as its predecessors, has figures, then the holy book contained in it doctrines about mercy and humanity, and has a temple or place of worship. It is interesting to look further, as stated above, that in the doctrine of the Sikh Religion, there is no caste, seeing human beings as equal, and there is no difference between men and women having equal rights. Thus, in the next article, the author wants to further examine the position and role of women in Sikh religious doctrine.

### **Women in Sikh Religious Doctrine**

The doctrine of the Sikh religion recognizes equal positions and rights for both sexes, men and women. Guru Nanak refuses to acknowledge the inherent discrimination against human beings, especially with regard to gender, class, and caste systems, as well as orthodox social conventions or regulations, even Guru Amardas (the third Sikh Guru) is active in social movements and is very serious about the issue of gender equality between men and women in all aspects of life. Guru Amardas fought for the liberation of women regardless of their religious background. The practice of wearing a *purdah* in the form of a women's veil in Islam and the practice of *sati* or burning a widow on her husband's firewood by Hindu women are some of the practices that are strongly rejected (C. Kaur & Gill, 2018).

Guru Granth Sahib acknowledged equality between men and women; although women are often referred to as the weaker sex in many cultures, this scripture protects the dignity and status of women. Many of the holy verses compiled by Sikh Masters enhance the dignity of women and seek to change the perception of society towards them. The following poem is one of the most popular poems used in religious sermons and everyday interactions relating to the real position of women being 'approved' and 'disconnected' in the name of culture.

From a human woman is born, in a human woman is conceived, to a woman she is engaged and married. Women become their best friends, through women future generations are born. When his woman died, he looked for another woman, to whom he was bound. So why call it bad? From him, kings were born, from human women were born. O Nanak, only God is the Most True who does not involve women. The mouth that constantly praises God is blessed and beautiful. O Nanak, those faces will shine in the Court of the Most Righteous God (Singh, 2023).

This analysis of Guru Granth Sahib's verses reflects two types of relationship patterns that highlight the concept of gender in Sikhism. *First*, man's relationship with God shows that both men and women have an intimate and equal relationship with the Creator. This reflects an egalitarian view that overrides the traditional gender hierarchy often found in many religious texts.

*Second*, the relationship between humans, which includes behaviors, attitudes, and social interactions, illustrates the reality of the broader society. In this context, Guru Granth Sahib serves as a guide to creating awareness about gender equality, affirming that every individual, regardless of gender, religion, or race, comes from the same source. This is in line with the theory of Gender and Social Identity developed by Judith Butler, that gender is not a fixed identity, but the result of a social construction that continues to develop. In this view, the differences seen in each individual are considered part of the diversity of God's creation, which reflects divine creativity (Ezebuilo, 2023).

Furthermore, Guru Granth Sahib acknowledged the biological differences between men and women, such as the role of women in childbirth, but emphasized that this was only part of the "drama" of God's creation. This shows that despite the physical differences, in terms of spirituality, the two are equal. This approach is in line with the theory of Postcolonial Feminism, which views that gender identity must be understood in a broader social, cultural, and historical context (Ballestrin, 2022). This theory, in line with Chandra Talpade Mohanty, emphasizes the need to understand women's experiences in different contexts and criticizes the generalizations often made in traditional gender analysis (Haleem, 2024). In the modern context, the views expressed in Guru Granth Sahib serve as a critique of the patriarchal norms that often dominate many religious traditions. By emphasizing spiritual equality between men and women, the text offers a strong base for promoting gender equality in Sikh society and fighting for women's rights around the world (Kaur, 2024).

In addition, the basic teachings of Guru Granth Sahib discuss the harmonious relationship of humanity and the reality of man's relationship with the Creator. To convey this idea of relationships, which seems abstract,

Gurbani (verses) emphasizes the family and social relationships that have become the norm or culture of society. This approach serves as a basis for communicating the reality of life (Singh, 2023). Using this paradigm, readers can relate to the experiences they have or are living in their daily lives and understand the practices that should be applied to achieve life goals. This method not only embraces the ideal principle of life but also bridges the gap between God's words and man, regardless of diverse backgrounds and attributes.

However, a major challenge arises when it comes to transforming an already embedded lifestyle to accept new and higher possibilities, even though the new lifestyle offers greater benefits (Singh, 2023). In this context, Ake's *theory of Social Transformation* can be applied to explain how individuals and communities can adapt to the changes required in understanding Sikh teachings (Elawa, 2020). This social transformation involves not only changes at the individual level but also includes structural changes in society.

The intimate relationship between man and God in Sikhism is likened to a bride and wife between husband and wife. This concept implies the equality of status of each individual, regardless of gender or background. Gurbani also emphasizes the characteristics of the bride-and-groom soul that must be practiced by each individual. The inability to remember the Husband of God in this life is described as a betrayal of the dualistic view (*dwaita*); those who do will feel deep regret in the end (Singh, 2023).

Guru Granth Sahib prohibits discrimination based on caste, creed, class, religion, and gender, and guarantees equal rights, status, and opportunities for all individuals. In today's global context, where issues of gender equality are increasingly being addressed, Sikh teachings provide a relevant perspective. In this context, *the theory of Gender and Empowerment* can help to explain how Sikh teachers create a space for women to actively participate in religious and social life, by giving women equal rights to attend gurdwara and honor God (Garha, 2020).

The two main elements that form the basis of equality between men and women in Sikhism are the establishment of the gurdwara institution and the Khalsa identity through Sikh initiation. In this case, there is no prohibition for women to attend gurdwara or pay respects. Women also have the same right to Sikh initiation as men, and those who are initiated can carry out all the same religious rituals as Sikh men. This shows that in the context of Sikhism, equality is not only a theoretical concept but also applied practically in everyday life (Singh, 2023). Through the lens of *Social Justice theory*, we can understand that Guru Granth Sahib's teachings not only promote equality but also create structures that allow all individuals, including women, to contribute to social and spiritual life (Rawls, 1971). As such, Sikhism not only offers spiritual understanding but also provides a framework for creating a more just and inclusive society.

The presence of Sikhs has a significant impact on women's emancipation. As mentioned earlier, the position of women in Indian society before the time of the Sikh Guru was greatly degraded and continues to decline. Their presence in religious, political, social, cultural, and economic affairs is almost non-existent (Tedjo, 2021). Therefore, as stated above, it is important to apply the *theory of Intersectional Feminism* which shows how women's identities in India cannot be separated from factors such as class, race, and religion. This explains the dual challenges Sikh women face in the existing patriarchal structure (Galpin, 2022).

Before Guru Nanak's arrival, no religion or sect in India had ever taken any concrete steps towards women's liberation. Women are often considered "men's footwear," which is considered the root of all evil, pitfalls, and attractiveness, and are expected to serve men in their traditional roles as mothers and wives (Sulistyani, 2011). As a daughter, she was closely watched by her father; as a wife, she was under the control of her husband; And as a widow, she was trapped in the domination of her sons. The colonizers also exacerbated women's suffering, often taking them as slaves and treating them with violence (Choudhury & Sengupta, 2021).

In the midst of this sad situation, Guru Nanak denounced man-made notions of women's inferiority and challenged prolonged oppression. In his teachings, he affirmed that men and women have the same dignity before God and are responsible for their deeds. This is in line with the *theory of Social Justice*, which underlines the importance of gender equality as the foundation for a just society (Etchezahar et al., 2022). Guru Nanak and other Sikh Gurus open the *Very* (congregation) to women without restrictions or reservations and give a message that is as important to women as to men (Kaur & Singh, 2022).

The results of this change can be seen in religious practices in Sikh communities today. Sikh women are not only allowed to attend religious services but also lead and perform the same duties as men. They actively participate in the Langar (public kitchen) and in all other religious, social, and cultural activities in the Gurdwara. This transformation reflects the concept of Gender Equality in the context of religion, where the active participation of women is seen as essential to strengthening social structures (Nussbaum, 2023).

Thus, Guru Nanak not only rejects the idea that women are inherently evil and seductive but also seeks to build a nation that values equal dignity for men and women (Avtarsign, 1992). She invited women to play an active role in family and community life and emphasized that they are not an obstacle in achieving safety but an important partner in these efforts. This shows a paradigmatic shift in the understanding of gender in Sikhism, which is an example of how religious traditions can serve as tools for women's emancipation.

Through a broader perspective, this analysis shows that changes in Sikh communities are contributing to a greater understanding of the relationship between religion, gender, and social justice in a global context. *Globalization and Gender Theory* can be used to understand how Sikh thinking about gender equality interacts with broader global dynamics and can serve as a model for other communities facing similar challenges (Bello, 2024).

Furthermore, the Gurus in the Sikh tradition define the role of the cleric in the framework of chastity, which includes a commitment to fidelity in marriage and an inclusive education for students, both male and female. Guru Amar Das, one of the ten Sikh Gurus, unequivocally condemned harmful social practices, such as Sati, Purdah, and the killing of baby girls. He also encouraged the practice of remarriage for widows, inviting his students to completely reject the brutal practice of Sati (Singh, 2023). This progressive attitude reflects teachers' approach to social justice and women's human rights, which is in line with Sen's views on the *theory of Gender and Empowerment*, which emphasizes the importance of gender equality in social development (Lwamba et al., 2022).

Guru Amar Das also opposed the Purdah system, asserting that Queen Haripur should not enter the gathering with a veil. He forbade his students to interact with those involved in the practice of female infanticide. Guru's appreciation for women is reflected in her statement, "Blessed are the women who create life," which shows an emphasis on the value of women as creators and caregivers (Singh, 2023).

Under the leadership of Master Hargobind, a progressive attitude towards women was increasingly emphasized. She argued that women are "human consciences," and valued their vital role in the community. Guru Gobind Singh, as the tenth teacher, further affirmed gender equality by giving Amrit, or Sikh initiation, to both men and women. In this context, there is no difference in the maintenance of the five K's of the Sikh faith symbol. When Amrit is given, a man is given the name Singh, meaning 'Lion', while a woman is given the name Kaur, meaning 'Daughter', in an effort to improve the status and position of women in Sikh society (Singh, 2023).

The position of women in Sikhism can be further analyzed through the lens of Intersectional Feminism Theory, which invites readers to consider how various forms of injustice, including gender, class, and ethnicity, interact with each other (Hawkey & Ussher, 2022). In this context, the identity of a Sikh woman, who remained with the name Kaur until the end of her life, reflects a statement of individual autonomy and integrity. This shows that Sikh women are not just part of a patriarchal structure, but also individuals with independent identities and rights.

Sikh practices and teachings on gender equality challenge the patriarchal norms that exist in society at large. By emphasizing the importance of women's equality and rights, Sikhism serves as an alternative model for responding to the social and cultural challenges faced by women, especially in countries trapped in rigid patriarchal traditions. It is not to be missed that for the authors of the theory of postcolonialism it also provides a valuable perspective to understand how Sikh thought can function as a liberation tool for women, as well as support the courage of individuals in resisting oppression and unjust social norms (Tariq & Khan, 2023).

Thus, Sikh teachings and practices in terms of gender equality not only contribute significantly to the improvement of women's social conditions within their communities but also mark a form of resistance to the broader social structure. This further strengthens Sikhism's position as a religion committed to social justice and human rights.

### **The Role of Sikh Women**

Sikh women have played a significant and complex role in the social, religious, and political development of their communities. In the context of the Sikh religion, women are not only equal to men in social and religious affairs but also play the role of equal partners in war and peace. Since the beginning, the teachings of the Teachers have emphasized the importance of respecting women as equal partners in all aspects of life. This is reflected in the recognition of women's values and contributions, although they often have to fight against various cultural norms and limiting patriarchal practices.

As the Sikh movement grew, women began to show great courage and sacrifice. In the 18th century, in the midst of the struggle to defend independence in Punjab, many Sikh women emerged as leaders, soldiers, and advisors. In this context, the theory of *Gender and Empowerment* offers a precise framework for analyzing the role of women in the Sikh movement. Moser argues that women's empowerment involves recognition of their contributions in the public and private spheres and that such recognition can alter patriarchal social structures (Sidiq & Achmad, 2020).

Examples of important figures in Sikh history, such as Bebe Nanki, Guru Nanak's older sister, show how women are directly involved in the spiritual and social journey of the community. Bebe Nanki's role in supporting and encouraging Guru Nanak reflects the dynamics of women's support and involvement in spiritual pursuits, which is in line with the theory of *Social Support Theory* which emphasizes the importance of social support in achieving the well-being of individuals and communities (Çakar, 2020).

Mata Khivi, Guru Angad's wife, also played an important role in managing the affairs of Langar, a communal dining place that became a symbol of egalitarianism in Sikhism. Through the spirit of *Seva* (selfless service), Eye Khivi not only supports the community in a practical way, but also contributes to the formation of an inclusive Sikh collective identity. Fraser's Approach to the Theory of Care Economy can also be used to analyze the contribution of women in maintaining the social and economic structure of Sikh communities, where their invisible work has a significant impact on collective well-being (Fraser, 2023). Mata Gujri, the wife of Guru Tegh Bahadur and the mother of Guru Gobind Singh, has also become an important figure in educating the next generation. Her role in educating and inspiring women and children around her to continue the teachings of the Teachers shows the importance of education in empowering women and building community resilience.

In this context, Sikh women not only act as followers, but also as active agents of change. They fight for their rights and lead in crisis situations, often taking over responsibilities when male leaders are unable to carry out their roles. For example, after the death of Guru Tegh Bahadur, Mata Gujri managed the education of the young Guru Gobind Singh, showing resilience and leadership skills in the midst of great challenges. Through the lens of *Women's Leadership Theory*, we can see how Sikh women exhibit leadership qualities that are in line with the egalitarian values in Sikhism, while also serving as role models in their communities (Hoyt & Simon, 2024).

Thus, the role of Sikh women is a key element in the history and development of Sikh communities. They are not only supporters, but also leaders, educators, and fighters, proving that they deserve recognition and respect in all aspects of life. In this historical period (1720-1760), in the midst of the persecution experienced by Sikh men and the reward for capturing or killing them, Sikh women showed unwavering courage. They not only fight on the battlefield, but also carry out family responsibilities by making money for survival and meeting the educational needs of their children. Sikh women actively teach the principles of Sikhism to children, instilling courage in the face of persecution they experience. The bitter experience experienced by women during the reign of Mir Mannu (1748-1753) in Punjab, where hundreds of women were arrested and forced to work in deplorable conditions, is a silent witness to their resilience. In this very cruel situation, where women are forced to wear necklaces from the flesh of their dead children and suffer unimaginable torture, they remain steadfast in their religious beliefs (Singh, 2014b).

This analysis can be understood in the context of *Gender Resilience Theory*, which explains how women are able to cope with extreme situations and find ways to survive in the face of oppression (Bridges et al., 2023). This resilience is not only seen in the individual context but also in the collective context, where Sikh women form a network of solidarity to support each other in the face of oppression.

After this period of oppression, when Sikhs got the opportunity to establish their own government, Sikh women took over an important role in the administration of the country. Women such as Rani Sahib Kaur from Patiala State became central figures who not only led troops on the battlefield but also showed extraordinary abilities in organization and administration. Rani Kaur is an example of *Women's Leadership Theory*, which shows that women can overcome gender barriers and play a significant role in politics and the military (Kaur & Gill, 2018). The courage and leadership of Sikh women during this period reflects an important shift in the way women are viewed in social and political contexts.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Sikh women became increasingly active in the Indian independence movement. Figures such as Bibi Gulab Kaur and Mata Kishan Kaur Kanke point to the important role of women in the nationalist struggle, reinforcing the argument from the *Gender Activism Theory*, which emphasizes that women's involvement in social movements is a key factor in greater social change (Montoya &



Seminario, 2022). In this context, Sikh women not only contribute to independence, but also challenge pre-existing gender norms.

Today, Sikh women serve society in a variety of fields, including administration, medicine, education, and the arts. In many ways, they have proven their ability to occupy leadership positions, both at the local and national levels. The authority of Sikh women, both rich and poor, is enormous; they are usually the ones who control family expenses and plan social events such as weddings and birthdays (Jakobsh, 2000). This phenomenon can be analyzed through *Gender and Economic Theory*, which highlights how women in household positions can influence economic and social decisions in the family (Fennell & Arnot, 2023).

Sikh women have enjoyed a higher status compared to their peers in other communities, which has been achieved through their ability to stand beside their husbands in difficult situations. Many women today occupy positions as chairmen or secretaries of the Gurdwara and similar Sikh organizations. In almost every Gurdwara, women are involved in organizing events to raise funds for charity, showing that their role is not only limited to the domestic sphere, but also in the public and social spheres (Stewart, 2008).

In conclusion, the journey of Sikh women from a period of oppression to an active role in modern government and society shows the complex dynamics in gender relations and power. Relevant international theories provide a framework for understanding how Sikh women adapt and overcome challenges, as well as the important role they play in shaping the identity and social structure of their communities (Singh, 2014a).

Although Sikh women are actively involved in various religious, political, social, and cultural affairs, their status in society is far from satisfactory. The birth of a woman is often less welcome than the birth of a boy, creating inequalities that are ingrained in Sikh culture. Although the teachings of the Sikh Guru emphasize full equality between men and women, in reality, Sikh women still face various challenges. No woman has ever been elected president of the Shromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, and the number of women occupying key positions in the management of the Gurdwara is minimal (Singh, 2014b).

There are several factors that cause the position and role of women in the Sikh community to not be fully equal to men. *First*, as a minority community, Sikhs have experienced influences from Hindu and Muslim traditions and British colonial rule, which often did not support gender equality. In the Sikh view, the Islamic tradition does not fully reflect the equality between women and men, which is much more evident in the teachings of the Master. Harmful practices that once existed in Hindu societies, such as Sati and Purdah, also had an effect on Sikh communities, where some Sikh nobility sought to imitate them. In addition, when the Sikhs took over the management of the Gurdwara in 1924, voting rights for the election of the Management Committee were given only to men, systematically ruling out women's participation (Singh, 2014b).

*Second*, the disapproval of Sikh men to give up their dominant position is another major factor. They enjoy privileges and tend to resist changes that might threaten the status quo. This shows the dynamics of gender power that can be explained by the *theory of Gender Structuralism*, where men occupy a dominant position in social and cultural structures, while women are often marginalized. In this context, awareness and recognition is needed from Sikh men that the Master's teachings on equality should be applied in their daily practice (Norton, 2021).

*Third*, Sikh history is written and controlled by men, who often ignore women's contributions. This is in accordance with the *theory of Feminist History* which highlights the importance of a gender perspective in writing history. As a result, women's contributions are not recognized, and the next generation does not have a positive role model to follow, which can hinder the progress of Sikh women (Allen, 2023).

However, it is important to note that Sikh women also play a role in supporting the status quo. In many cases, they work closely with men in defining their own roles. Sikh women should teach gender equality in the family unit, by welcoming the birth of daughters with the same enthusiasm as the birth of sons and providing equal educational opportunities (Singh, 2010). Although Sikh women do not have to fight for basic rights of equality, this can lead to excessive satisfaction and a lack of motivation to achieve higher achievements. *The Empowerment Theory* can be adapted here, emphasizing the need for women's empowerment to reach their full potential as leaders, educators, and spiritual teachers (Joseph, 2020).

There should be no reason why half the number of Sikh leaders, educators, and organizers cannot be held by women. Through dedication and service (*seva*), Sikh women must strive to seize the status they deserve, which has been given by the Master's teachings. By understanding their glorious history and working for a brighter future, Sikh women can contribute significantly to social change in their communities.

## CONCLUSION

The position of women in Sikh religious doctrine is equal to that of men because there is basically no distinction between the two. Women are human beings who have an important position in human life; therefore, human beings are born with women, and human beings will later marry and establish harmonious family relationships to continue their offspring. Meanwhile, women are also not limited to the religious area, but also the political, social, economic, and similar areas. In fact, as mentioned above, women participated in the war and became great and respected leaders.

The presence of Sikhs has a significant impact on women, by spanning all forms of old traditions that demean women to the limit of doormats and sexual slaves, for example, the Sati tradition shows that women are only limited to reproductive tools, so when her husband dies, the widow must be killed by burning alive on her husband's firewood. Later Sikhs came along and opposed such practices. The Burdah tradition in Islam is also opposed because, for Sikhs, the practice of covering their faces with a veil is good to block men with striped noses in their view, but on the other hand, it also causes psychological impacts, as stated above, and is not emancipatory. This brings a breath of fresh air to women who have been oppressed for a long time, although in reality it has not been maximized due to certain factors above.

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