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GENDER JUSTICE VERSUS MALE EGO

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Abstract

The virtue of justice prompts one to do good to others by a constant and perpetual will. Persons with disposition to justice will have a propensity to respect the dignity of others, their fundamental rights and responsible freedom. It is high time for a paradigm shift from over emphasis on submissiveness and obedience to reciprocal responsibility, interdependence and collaboration. In the Indian religious and cultural context, in our search for ways to foster gender justice, we may have to develop a disposition to non-violence and truth. The moral sense of non-violence is grounded in the holistic goodness of the individuals. Hence, all forms of ill-will towards the opposite gender are injustice. A truthful person will be transparent in one's own reasoning, honest to others and upright before God. Where there is truth there is mutual strengthening, right relationship, trust and love. A Christian should not only be satisfied with fulfilling the principle of justice, rather be merciful without boundaries. Ethics of solidarity with and accountability for a suffering soul completes the ethics of justice. Women have to contribute to all activities of the society by sharing their skills, virtues, knowledge and wisdom. It is argued that most of the inhuman tendencies of violence and injustice would be eradicated if we strive to inculcate in children from an early stage, a moral concern about right relationships and interdependence.

Keywords: Co-responsibility, Equality, Fidelity, Human Dignity, Interdependence, Justice, Love, Mercy, Non-violence, Patriarchy, Truth, Violence

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Introduction

In the present scenario, there is amazing progress in actualizing gender equality — the reservation of 33% of parliamentary seats to women; girls are getting opportunities to study what they like; and the possibility to work in any field of their interest in national and international levels. Still in the real life, even among the educated family members there exist different forms of violence against women. Especially in India, due to high patriarchal mind-set, discrimination against women continues. Justice deals with the way one relates to others in society and it has the characteristics of non-violence and truth. In this article, we will discuss how far these virtues are found practiced in existential and concrete life situations, when there is prevalence of gender inequality and violence against women.

Virtue of Justice

In any culture, justice is a fundamental virtue. It is a habit whereby one renders to each one their due by a constant and perpetual will. Justice, as a propensity of doing good to others concerns with one's social relation to others. A human virtue is one which renders a human act good as well as making human beings themselves good. Therefore, justice is not only about the ability to do just things but also about being just as well, to have a disposition to act justly.

Culture of Patriarchy

Even though we are generally aware of all the above aspects of justice, when we think of gender justice, an important aspect we have to consider is the culture of patriarchy. It is "a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women." Hence, one has to ask himself/herself, how just am I in his/her own dealings with his/her life partner, colleagues in classroom or work places? Do our families, Church or the Government give due care and respect to our mothers, sisters and female children? Are they not hesitating to give equal chance to women who have the potential of reaching their full realm of possibilities in whatever walk of life they choose?

¹Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, New York: Benziger Brothers, Inc., 1946, II-II, q.58, a.1.

²M.T. Joseph, "Gender Relations in the Church," in *Gender Relations in the Church:* A Call to Wholeness and Equal Discipleship, ed. Astrid Lobo Gajiwala, Varghese Theckanath and Rayanah Braganza Passanha, Delhi: Media House, 2012, 31-32.

Male Ego as a Hindrance to Gender Justice

Existing gender related turbulences in society pave the way to steer our conscience towards the importance of implementing gender justice. This can be achieved by avoiding egoistic problems of both males and females, empowering women through developing their capabilities, emphasizing responsible human freedom and self-esteem. From my personal experiences, I would say that manly egotism and an inflated feeling of pride in one's superiority to others is the foremost barrier to put into practice the virtue of interdependence and gender equality in different realms of human life.

I have two brothers and their attitudes towards women progressed in opposite directions. One brother used to empower my sister-in-law and allow her to take responsible freedom to succeed in her carrier. The other brother however, though he is well appreciated among friends, at home, from childhood onwards he wanted to dominate over the female siblings in the family. Whenever some disagreement occurred among us, he always wanted to have the last word. Since he is the youngest one in our family, we the elder female siblings used to tolerate or allowed him to win, rather we were trained for that by our mother. Even now, those character traits are apparent in our discussions and in his dealings with his wife. It could be argued that it is his big ego that rules over him. Almost all of those men who support the culture of patriarchy are having this ego problem which is a tendency to dominate others. Though there are people who write and preach about the value of gender justice, there are many in reality that pay only lip service to this need and contribute nothing. The cornerstone of justice is respecting the dignity of each and every person, who is created in the image and likeness of God. If the foundation of justice is the value and dignity of a person, then the disposition towards justice has the imprint of a moral imperative coinciding with human interdependence and solidarity.3

Justice and Gender Discrimination

There are a number of countries and a few states in India where females play a leading role in the affairs of the family and in the business field. So when we discuss about gender justice like participation to be given to women and dignity of women, it is not equally applicable. People who live in such situations have to think

³Paul J. Wadell, "Reimagining the World: Justice, Virtue," in *Readings in Moral Theology No. 16: The Distinctiveness of Christian Ethics*, ed. Charles E. Curran and Lisa A. Fullam, New York: Paulist Press, 2011, 196-199.

according to their life situation. From my context, I am arguing for justice to be given to women.

Since the Second Vatican Council we can notice a shift in Catholic thinking from a patriarchal paradigm with its emphasis on submission and obedience, to co-responsibility or a participatory style. At the same time, we must keep in mind that there are still people who consider patriarchy as an ideology. They rarely want to detect its pre-eminence in their way of thinking and acting. There are instances where the victims of patriarchal violence themselves enforce patriarchal values. Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI condemns such "mind-set persisting in some cultures, where women are still firmly subordinated to the arbitrary decisions of men, with grave consequences for their personal dignity and for the exercise of their fundamental freedoms."⁴

In order to reduce the number of cases of violence and the attitude towards gender discrimination, it is necessary to encourage programmes like gender socialization and integration for a healthy attitude towards sexuality, psycho-spiritual and ethical formation. Women participation in decision making, especially that are related to them and their involvements in the activities of the society aimed at institution of justice and equality can establish their dignity as rational beings and afford opportunities for personal development. A few decades ago, Pope Paul VI, on the eightieth anniversary of the publication of the encyclical *Rerum Novarum* exhorted us to develop an aspiration towards equality and participation.

A society founded on participation and collaboration in the programs mentioned above, has no room for the idea of femininity conceived of as a condition of weakness, innocence, dependency, or self-sacrifice. Ontologically, women and men have equal dignity and deserve equal respect. The central virtue to be practised in this paradigm shift is justice informed by human dignity and equality.⁸ Anne E. Patrick says that love and justice working as mutually

⁴As quoted in Lisa Sowle Cahill, "Victims of Gender-Based Violence: Church and Social Change," *Living Nirbhaya: Path Ways to Violence Free Church and Society*, ed. Varghese Theckanath and Julie George, Bangalore: Claretian Publications, 2014, 166.

⁵Anthony da Silva, "Human Sexuality and the Consecrated Life," in *Gender Relations in the Church: A Call to Wholeness and Equal Discipleship*, 51-52.

⁶ John Exdell, "Ethics, Ideology, and Feminine Virtue," Canadian Journal of Philosophy: Supplementary 13 (1987) 177.

⁷Paul VI, OctogesimaAdveniens, no. 22, AAS 63 (1971), 390-420.

⁸For a study on gender justice and sexual ethics, see, Shaji George Kochuthara, ed., "Sexuality: Changing Perspectives," in *Moral Theology in India Today*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2013, 515-521.

reinforcing norms have to govern both woman and man equally.⁹ Any person with rationality deserves respect. If virtues are the inner qualities or the spiritual power of women to discharge their responsibilities prudently, they are not the product of emotion, but of reason.

According to the Biblical view, men and women are equal in their covenant relationship to Yahweh, as attested to by the book of Deuteronomy 20:10-20. They are called to reciprocity and mutuality and to work together as partners to develop their full human potential. They are equal, yet each one is different, neither superior nor inferior. According to Genesis 1:26-27, God created human beings, both man and woman, in his own image and likeness. The Letter to the Galatians 3:26-28 asserts that a Christian's solidarity with Christ which results from baptism, is where we find a comprehensive equality between people of different nations, states, caste, colour or gender. Other differences are abolished by the baptismal inclusion into Christ. This foundation is strong enough to nullify all other discriminations against women. ¹⁰ Pope Francis says that there can be no unity in the Church as long as we do not recognize that every part of the body of the Church is fundamental for its life. There can be no Church, if women are excluded from her decision making; there can be no unity in the body if it is mutilated.¹¹ Referring to John L. Allen, Kochuthara further accentuates that only those institutions which have public accountability will survive in the future. Even though there are incidents like honour killings, rapes, personal sacrilege, abuse and torture, often we pretend that the problem does not exist. This truth should be accepted and we have to take necessary and timely steps to build up a Church based on truth and justice animated by love. In order that the Church's commitment towards justice has to be convincing and effective, justice has to be ensured within the Church itself. 12 Let our religious convictions dispose us to what is good. It is high time to have a participatory

⁹ Anne E. Patrick, *Liberating Conscience: Feminist Explorations in Catholic Moral Theology*, London: SCM Press, 1996, 77-79. See also, her article, "His Dogs More Than Us," *Practice What You Preach: Virtues, Ethics, and Power in the Lives of Pastoral Ministers and their Congregations*, ed. James F. Keenan and Joseph J. Kotva, Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1999, 306-307.

¹⁰James Gurudas, "Gender Justice in the Bible," *Journal of Dharma* 29 (April-June 2004), 140.

¹¹Francis, "There can be no Unity if the Body is Divided," *L'Osservatore Romano*, 12 (March 2019), 11.

¹²Shaji George Kochuthara, "Ongoing Renewal of Moral Theology in India," *Asian Horizons* 9 (2015) 211.

form of governance and decision-making, especially in matters concerning women where their opinion and consent have to be considered. Hence, in order to build a culture of gender justice, women also need to acknowledge their own dignity and collaborative responsibility.

The Hindu concept of non-violence is that it is goodwill towards all life. It is an attitude of complete absence of ill-will against one's brethren. ¹³ The moral sense of non-violence is grounded in the goodness of the individuals in a holistic sense. ¹⁴ Hence, in the Hindu religion *ahimsā* is considered a virtue as it gives respect to human life and includes the attitude of justice. It is one who abstains from doing violence to living beings, except as part of one's duty or in the case of self-defence, becomes fit for immortality (*Manusmṛti* 6:60). Therefore, all forms of ill-will towards the opposite gender are injustice. It includes any form of *himsa* against the sacredness of human life such as physical injury, murder, hurting the feeling, insulting them, or taking away their rights and dignity. It also involves purity of thought, word and deed in the practice of universal love. ¹⁵ One who has already established such dispositions in his/her heart is able to unconditionally love and respect others as one love oneself.

Generally a truthful person will be transparent in his/her will and reasoning, and will and honest and upright to others and to the Supreme Being. Swami Vivekananda says that anything that makes one weak physically, intellectually, and spiritually has to be rejected as poison; there is no life in it and it cannot be true. Truth must be strengthening, enlightening and invigorating. In order to be just or truthful what is needed is an inner integrity of the person and not just an action compelled by the force of an oath. Truth brings about mutual trust and love, and binds individuals together. Special significance of justice may be said to be the desire to do what is right, the desire to give everyone his/her due, and the desire to find out the truth and act accordingly. Where there is truth and justice one has to

¹³M.K. Gandhi, *Hindu Dharma*, Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1958, 165

¹⁴Jagat Pal, *Justice, Equality and Morality: Essays in Applied Ethics,* Haryana: Madhav Books, 2012, 89-93.

¹⁵P. NagarajaRao, "The Concept of Ahimsa in the History of Hindu Thought," *Religion and Society* 10 (1963) 37.

¹⁶ George Olivera, Virtue in Diverse Traditions, Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 1998, 209.

¹⁷The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, 3:224-225. As referred by Swami Satyapriyananda, "Do's and Don'ts for the Modern Age," *The Vedanta Kesari* (December 2002) 38.

defend it ardently, no matter what is the cost. One who lives according to this principle lives in a right relationship with oneself and with one's life partner and colleagues regardless of familiarity or disgust or degree of attraction. If one fails in controlling his/her senses, this will naturally beget violence and harm others.

The effort of performing an act of justice makes human beings themselves good. A person who really lives out the virtue of justice does not disregard the rights of others. James Keenan proposes that one not only has to be satisfied with performing the principles of justice and to give each one one's rightful demands, rather, the virtue of justice should be informed by mercy, "the willingness to enter into the chaos of others."18 He further says that the merciful God who incarnated into the chaos of human existence requires humans to be merciful without boundaries. It expresses God's way of reaching out to the needy. Hence, the practice of justice informed by mercy ranks the best.¹⁹ Whoever eliminates concrete love, forgiveness and mercy eliminates the personal concern and care towards the suffering soul.²⁰ Ethics of solidarity with suffering further completes the ethics of justice. Pope Francis says that "faith without solidarity is faith without... God, faith without brothers and sisters."21 He further urges believers to be missionaries of this faith which unites us to God and to our neighbours.

Justice and Violence against Women

Another decisive point is gender related violence and its ethics. Violence and discrimination against women commences from the time of birth and seems to continue through all stages of life. Though in general, families have started to welcome the female child, she is not welcome in all families. A woman who does not give birth to a male child has to undergo both physical and mental violence, from her in-laws. Non-violence is a core virtue/commandment in both Hinduism and Christianity, but what is really happening in our society? Rabindranath Tagore in his essay, "Woman and Home" describes women as the symbol of *shakti*, the creative power. He explains that she has been the inspiration to man, guiding him most often unconsciously, his restless energy into an enormous variety of

¹⁸ James F. Keenan, *The Works of Mercy*, Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2008, 4-11.

¹⁹James F. Keenan, *Moral Wisdom*, Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2004, 155.

²⁰Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est, God is Love*, Trivandrum: Carmel International Publishing House, 2006, 49-50.

²¹Francis, "Without Solidarity Faith Dies," L'Osservatore Romano (17 July 2015), 20.

creations in literature, art, music and religion. ²² Though what Tagore says is true at least in the life of a few, there is still a good percentage of men and women who forget or ignore the power of women. It is due to various restrictions imposed on the freedom of women on the basis of cultural practice, the culture of male domination, greed for material well-being, selfishness, imbalanced male ego and lack of emotional maturity that most of the problems and cases of violence against women and girl children still continue in our society.

The destiny of women is not only to give birth to children, cook for the family and take care of everyone and everything at home. She also has to participate and contribute in all the activities of society and share her knowledge, skill and wisdom. Where male and female wisdom is shared there will be a clear vision of the things that can be achieved more fruitfully. Margaret Farley remarks that the good of the family, Church and society is better served by a model of leadership which includes collaboration between equals. ²³ Farley further argues that an adequate understanding of both the individual and common good, requires a shift from the strict hierarchical models of social organization to a more egalitarian one.

Justice can be understood also as striving for the right relations in all situations.²⁴ Minimal justice may have equality as its norm but full mutuality as its goal; at the very least it has to be turned in the direction of equality and opened up to the possibility of communion.²⁵ In this understanding, justice and love are found to be mutually reinforcing norms. Anything one does against the above model of justice informed by dignity and equality is a sign of the absence of love and the presence of violence.²⁶ The predominant reasons for domestic violence against women are rooted in the lack of equality, objectification, and absence of

²²Rabindranath Tagore, "Woman and Home" http://www.online-literature.com/tagore-rabindranath/creative-unity/9/ (Accessed on 28 August 2015).

²³ Margaret A. Farley, "New Patterns of Relationship: Beginnings of a Moral Revolution," *Theological Studies* 36 (1975) 645.

²⁴Patrick, "His Dogs More Than Us," 311.

²⁵Farley, "New Patterns of Relationship," 646.

²⁶For strategies to combat violence against women, see, my article on "Violence Against Women in India," *Violence and its Victims: A Challenge to Philosophizing in the Indian Context*, ed. Ivo Coelho, Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 2010, 285-296. See also, Morris Antonysamy, "Patriarchy, Rape and Brutality," *Doing Asian Theological Ethicsin a Cross-Cultural and an Interreligious Context*, ed. Yiu Sing Lúcás Chan, James F. Keenan and Shaji George Kochuthara, Bengaluru: Dharmaram Publications, 2016, 140-152.

participation in decision-making²⁷ even in one's own matters. If genuine love, mutual respect and fidelity that nurture and sustain the bonds of those special relationships we enjoy are practised, one will be able to have self-control against anger, selfishness, pride and greed.

There are also different forms of public violence of which we are conscious and which cause a lot of physical and psychological hardship for women. They are expressions of the prevailing inequality in our society which are against our constitutional rights and freedom. Where the dignity and security of a woman suffers, there exists injustice. We need to "respect everyone's journey ... Every child born is the promise of a life."28 We have to think why certain horrifying and brutal incidents of sexual violence and brutal assaults on women, including those on the mentally challenged women and girls take place. Are their consciences so ill-formed or quasi dead to treat women as sexual objects alone which can be used, abused and discarded? Common people have the opinion that it is due to the danger of becoming slaves to modern social Media. But all those who use the same technologies are not becoming cruel or consider the woman just as an object of sexual gratification. All do not completely forget the human values, women's dignity, their right to live and their future just for momentary and passing lust. Human sexuality becomes meaningful only when it communicates the language of relationship like love, affection, mutual trust, respecting the freedom and otherness. When any form of force or fear enters into this communication, sexuality becomes dehumanising.²⁹ In certain cases a woman not only suffers violations of her body but also of her dignity and her privacy, by online posting of photos and by broadcasting the stories about her.

But certain cases are also happening due to the innocence and imprudence on the part of women. Women have to equip themselves with the knowledge necessary to defend themselves and learn from the signs of the time and from what is happening around them in society. Women have to liberate themselves internally and

²⁷ Kochuthara explains an example for rejection of women participation by illustrating a nun's request to her Bishop to constitute a panel headed by a woman or to include a number of women instead of priests alone to study the case of abuse by a priest. The Bishop refused her request to ensure a just procedure and transparency. See his article, "Sexual Abuse Scandal and the Church: A Critical Appraisal," in *Gender Relations in the Church: A Call to Wholeness and Equal Discipleship*, 80-83.

²⁸ Francis, "Nurturing Hope," L'Osservatore Romano (22 September 201), 3.

²⁹ Shaji George Kochuthara, "Mutuality: A Fundamental Norm in Sexual Relations," in *Living Nirbhaya: Path Ways to Violence Free Church and Society*, 215.

recognize that the energy to fight against violence is strong within them. Though there are different acts and laws to protect women from violence, they can take an initiative to learn certain skills and take courage to prudently respond to the situations, instead of waiting long periods of time, to get justice from the judiciary.³⁰ Women are beginning to realise that while sacrifice which is freely and consciously made is noble and is motivated by love, the exclusion and violence that they experience is none of these.³¹ "That country and that nation which did not respect women have never become great nor ever will in the future. The respect given to women in any society reflects its cultural richness." ³² The Law of Manu exhorts:

Fathers, brothers, husbands, and brothers-in-law, who wish for great good fortune should respect the women and adorn them. The deities delight in places where women are revered, ... Where the women of the family are miserable, the family is soon destroyed, ... Homes that are cursed by women of the family who have not been treated with due reverence are completely destroyed (*Manusmṛti* 3:55-58).

Such is the recognition of the glory and power of womanhood. Often what is happening in society is that man forgets his own role and responsibilities, especially the respect and encouragement to be rendered towards women. Much of the pandemic of violence against women stems from the crisis of masculinity that position women as inferior to men. Hence, as I said about my own brother, we cannot bring an end to violence against women without addressing and changing the mind-set of men.³³ The traditional Hindu or Christian virtues attributed to women are in fact helpful for a holistic attitude in life. But often men consider these feminine virtues as a weapon to keep women submissive and at the same time they forget the fidelity which they have to express towards women. They have to bear in mind the minimum principle of justice — to give each what one deserves with a constant and kind will.

³⁰Julie George, "Domestic Violence and Patriarchal Bargains," *Gender Justice in the Church and Society*, ed. Shaji George Kochuthara, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2016, 296.

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³¹ Philomena D'Souza, "Birthing of Spirituality from Women's Perspective," *Concerns of Women*, ed. Evelyn Monteiro and Kochurani Abraham, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2005, 188.

³²Vivekananda, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Volume 5: Epistles - First Series 6 — Haripada," (Accessed on 23 October 2015).

³³Julie George, "Your Honour! Where is Her Honour? A Study of Misogynist Court Rulings," in *Living Nirbhaya: Path Ways to Violence Free Church and Society*, 51.

Foster a Disposition to Justice

A disposition towards justice is a question of what we do and how we do certain kinds of things in the family and in a social context. In the context of affirmative action, justice is equality of opportunities which presupposes equality of qualification and capabilities. Justice applies whenever there are people living as a group and relating to each other as members of that group. For instance, justice governs right relationships between those who work at universities, and how family members interact. Expressions of solidarity, compassion and hospitality toward the suffering in society, are signs of justice³⁴ informed by mercy. A just person is also able to help others to respond to violations of justice and to respond to the acts that harm right relations and right order in the family or community.

It can be argued that most of the inhuman violence is mainly happening when we fail to impart the proper faith formation and value education to our youth. Both parents and teachers are to strive to inculcate in children from an early age, a moral concern about the signs of the times we are living in, which will help them to think, feel and plan for morally positive patterns of relationships. This can be achieved by respecting the human dignity of all, honouring promises and accords made to others, consulting and considering the opinions of others and by recognising a reciprocal interdependence.

Conclusion

In order to bring about a renewed gender just society, what is primarily needed is a change of the mind-set of men, a shift from the male attitude of dominating to the humane attitude of caring, nourishing, empowering and respecting the freedom and dignity of all. Remember that men and women are called to reciprocity and mutuality and to work together depending on each other as partners to develop their full human potential. If genuine love and fidelity that nurture and sustain the bonds of those relationships we enjoy are practised, one will be able to have self-control against anger, selfishness, pride or greed and there will not be any chance for any form of injustice. Similarly, know the place of the other person in whom God dwells and value her insights and point of view. It should begin from family, where proper parental care in the early stages of

³⁴ Christopher P. Vogt, "Forming Catholic Commitment to the Common Good," *Theological Studies* 68 (2007) 400.

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children's development is to be given. This should be continued in the schools through character formation and education based on a curriculum which emphasises the ethics of gender justice.

We have the power to create changes, the power to create happiness, to make our lives meaningful. Let us unite and fight for a new world of interdependence and responsible free world, a world of reason that respects the dignity of all and where gender justice prevails.