

Gender Ethics in India

Sr. Vimala Chenginimattam

Introduction

"Gender" is one of the most discussed subjects in various areas of studies such as sociology, psychology and theology. The right understanding of the term 'gender', I think, can be done in the realm of ethics. For, ethics/morality always deals the human – in his or her integrity. On the other hand there are various problems regarding gender ethics arising mostly due to the lack of human consideration in its holistic manner. In general, the gender consideration is mainly referred to in connection with some kind of discrimination. Some way or the other most of the Indian womenfolk have internalized inferior self-images as part of genderization. One thing must be noted. Gender is not a woman vs man issue, but an issue that looks at a human being as an entity. As Kofi Annan has said, "Gender equality is more than a goal in itself. It is a precondition for meeting the challenges of reducing poverty, promoting sustainable development and building good governance."¹ I would say that to be moral

¹ Quoted in *Birthing A New Vision*, A Newsletter from *Streevani*, February 2005, 8.

Sr. Vimala Chenginimattam, CMC did her Licentiate and Doctorate in Moral theology at the Alphonsian Academy, Rome. At present together with her duty as the Novice Mistress, she teaches moral theology at Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, Bangalore, Jnanodaya, Bangalore, Carmel Jyothi, Aluva, and Euphrasia Study House, Wardha. Her forthcoming book: *A Resonating Different Voice. Psycho - Moral Development of Women according to Carol Gilligan*, Bangalore: Dharmaram publications. She has also published research articles in scholarly journals. E-mail: srvimala@gmail.com

naturally necessitates gender equity or equal dignity for gender identity.

Here, in this article, we just specify the study of gender to an area within a roof of ethics in the context of India. Before entering the distinctive area of the theme we will be doing a very brief analysis of the idea of gender.

1. Human Person

In our general understanding, gender ethics is mostly related to the exercise of power of one gender over the other, in which the powerful has the authority to discriminate. There is a disparity between man and woman. It is the stress on gender roles in our society that leads to oppression of the woman as well as the man. As a result of this emphasis, society does not respect the nature of the person but views each human being as either man or women.² Hence, we need to read gender-ethics in the context of person in its fullness. Again, in the sphere of ethics, to respect and honour each and every person, we need to rediscover a contemplative outlook (EV. n. 83). It is the outlook of those who see life in its deeper meaning, who grasp its utter gratuitousness, its beauty and its invitation to freedom and responsibility.

To illustrate this further, let us look at a striking Lenten message to the Brazilian Church in 1990 by the Pope John Paul II taken from his. "Womanis a person as much as man is; the person is the sole creature which God wanted for its own sake; the sole creature to be made expressly in the image and likeness of God, who is Love." ³ Precisely for this reason, in the analysis of gender ethics, our prime concern should be the person in his/her wholeness. A person, whatever gender role he/she may have as a sexed human being, is made up of the sum of sex plus gender. But, this analysis forgets that a sexed human being is more than sex, gender, race, age, class, sexual orientation, etc.⁴ Whatever may be our considerations about gender, once we classify one from the other according to gender or sex we

² Celine Arhana, "Gender Discrimination," *Journal of Dharma* 20/1 Jan-March 1995, 35.

³ Leonie Caldecott, "Sincere Gift: The Pope's 'New Feminism,'" in *John Paul II and Moral Theology, Readings in Moral Theology* No. 10, Charles E. Curran and Richard A. McCormick, ed., New York/ Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1998, 219-220.

⁴ Toril Moi, *Sex, Gender, and the Body, the Student of What is a Woman?*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2005, 37-38.

are actually reducing the person in relation with sexual difference. For example, when a woman is to be the sum of sex plus gender, the former is naturally given and the latter is received or identified in the process of growth, then she is to be nothing but sex, or nothing but gender.

In gender analysis, women are basically discriminated in the name of gender differences, or we can see that our society purposely uses gender differences to assert the power of male over female instead of appreciating the gender differences in their richness. All forms of sexual reductionism implicitly deny that a woman is a concrete, embodied human being, and not a human being sexed in a particular way. The narrow parameters of sex and gender never adequately explain the experience and meaning of sexual difference in a human being or in a person.⁵ So, some suggest that sex itself must be considered as variable and historical as gender. On the contrary for the Christian understanding sex is not something we have, but something we are in our being itself. At the same time it is not all about the person, the person is more than his/her sexuality or gender.

Due to the social construction of gender, women are socially defined by the capacity to do the works related to motherhood and going by social expectations that capacity is a basic characteristic of women's existence.⁶ What this means, of course, varies from context to context. Social definitions of women include many physical, psychological and behavioral characteristics, the sum of which for any society represents the gender label "woman" for that group.

Therefore, the concern for person will help the society to erase the practice of subordination or discrimination in the name of gender. Added to that, a change need to happen both in women – to overcome the internalized inferior self-image, and in men – to wipe out objectification of women in our society.

2. Idea of Gender- A Discussion

Here, we discuss the idea of gender very briefly. Generally speaking, genderisation of human beings has been brought about by the patriarchal system not just in India, but in the whole world. Human beings are born either male or female, but they are divided into masculine and feminine genders by being taught how to behave as

⁵ Toril Moi, 38.

⁶ Ülkü Ü. Bates, et al., *Women's Realities, Women's Choices*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2005, 143.

males and females and through the inclusion of the particular ways prescribed for each gender by the society which nurtures them from birth.

The definitions of gender and gender identity vary on a doctrinal basis. There we read gender as the wide set of characteristics that distinguish male from female entities, extending from one's biological sex to, in humans, one's social role or gender identity. In popularized and scientifically based usage, sex is what you are biologically; gender is what you become socially; gender identity is your own sense or conviction of maleness or femaleness; and gender role is the cultural stereotype of what is masculine and feminine. Again, for social sciences, it refers specifically to socially constructed and institutionalized differences such as gender roles. The feminist movements also took the word gender into their own usage to describe their theory of human nature.

Gender identity is the gender a person self-identifies as. There are different variables that take part in this process of gender identification such as society, politics, sex, etc. For example, the concept of being a woman is considered to be more challenging, due to society's viewing women not only as a social category but also as a felt sense of self, a culturally conditioned or constructed subjective identity.

Gender Roles: They are the product of differentiation of males and females according to their social roles which is listed by society in relation to their biological sex. Again, the gender perspective usually examines the ways in which specific behaviours and roles are given gendered meanings; the processes by which families and social structures inculcate gender values.

Globally, communities interpret biological differences between men and women to create a set of social expectations that define the behaviours that are "appropriate" for men and women and determine women's and men's different access to rights, resources, and power in society. Although the specific nature and degree of these differences vary from one society to the next, the danger is, they typically favour men, thus creating an imbalance in power and gender inequalities in all countries. This socialized gender roles were later imposed upon and now identified as the very root of gender discrimination. Finally, if we do a gender analysis, it implies that, if one is a woman then, it is surely not all one is; the term fails to be exhaustive, not because a pre-gendered "person" transcends the specific points to the notion of social construction to throw light on the process whereby men and

women have to think and behave very differently from one another and take up their respective roles in society.

The fact is, since every society makes gender assignments at birth, an infant is immediately and automatically heir to all these social-expectations-paraphernalia of its gender, because gender is not always constituted coherently or consistently in different historical contexts, and because gender interconnects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual and regional modalities of indirectly constituted identities. Essential to the construction of gender is the notion of polarity, that there are only two genders and each is the opposite of the other. By this reasoning girls and boys are each partially defined in terms of what the other is not. This way of thinking is not constructive, as one must be defined oneself in the realm of what one is.

Another deviation of human identity is that if individuals are assigned specific roles by their societies, there is no space for their choice out of human freedom, because of the supposed attributes they possess by virtue of membership in some social category such as gender. For example, by virtue of being identified at birth as "female," girls are assigned the roles of daughter and wife as these roles are dictated by their society. Girls are generally taught these roles as part of their upbringing.⁷ From these analyses, we learn that gender is only something that is constructed by society. For example, the girls perceive the gender-bound expectations of their parents and society. Then gender identity in our society is basically a social construction and what it means, may be varied from context to context. The personal diary of Anne Frank, a German girl outlines something which is similar to the expectation of society. "One must apply one's reason to everything here, learning to obey, to hold your tongue, to help, to be good, to give in, and I don't know what else."⁸ Here, it is explicit that girls are told what they must do and how they must respond without resistance.

When a girl called Kara was asked by the researcher about a girl's gender identity, she responded as follows: "A perfect girl is the one that doesn't argue, one who is smart, but doesn't voice her opinion."⁹

⁷ Ulku U. Bates, et al., 139.

⁸ Linda Irwin-DeVitis and Beth Benjamin, "Can Anne Be Like Margot and Still Be Anne?" Quotation from the book *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl*, 56. URL, <http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/ALAN/fall95/Irwin-DeVitis.html>, Accessed on 24th March 2010.

⁹ Carol Gilligan and L. M. brown, *Meeting at the Crossroads: Women's Psychology and Girl's Development*, New York: Ballantine Books, 1992, 58, 61.

They had already internalized the culture's lessons and identified the model female child as one who either lacks intelligence or hides it. From these examples one can understand how strongly gender is woven into the body, into language, and into identity and culture. Authors and gender scholars like Carol Gilligan (*In a Different Voice*) and Richards (*The Case for Gay Rights, Disarming Manhood*) make it clear that patriarchy is omnipresent in our society; discussion of matriarchal societies and literature would have made an enlightening counterpoint. This exhaustive study will be of particular interest to gender studies, but is yet to be developed.

There arises the question, "Is gender merely a social/cultural inscription of meaning on a pre-given sex?" I think we cannot limit gender just to culture and sex just to nature. According to Judith Butler, gender must also designate the very apparatus of production whereby the sexes themselves are established. That is gender in discursive terms means that sexed nature or a natural sex is produced and established as a "pre-discursive," or prior to culture.¹⁰ The meaning of the word 'gender' in human identity is always affected by class, race, ethnicity, religion, age, and physical ability, as well as the particular situation in which a person acts. As a result, it becomes impossible to separate "gender" from the political and cultural intersections in which it is invariably produced and maintained. From this analysis we can conclude that even though culture/society play a remarkable role in the formation of gender identity, gender cannot be considered just a social construction; instead, there is more to gender than just social conditioning.

3. Indian View on Gender

In India the sense of gender is comparatively higher than any other country, but in many ways it is used antagonistically. In some of the states, women brutally suffer due to gender discrimination. The positive things about Indian culture for women are the great women of the past, Goddesses that have great powers, and the belief that women too possess great power and virtue (Shakti). The idea of women's power persists even today. Actually in India, the discourse on the gender question has progressed to a good stature and has already drawn together its dynamism. Now it needs to persistently focus on gender, in order to promote meaningful gender equity.

¹⁰ Judith Butler, "Gender and Performance," in *Body and Flesh: A Philosophical Reader*, ed., Donn Welton, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000, 29. 30.

3.1. A General View

Positively speaking, the gender mainstreaming strategy, evolved in the 1980's and adopted by the countries all over the world, is aimed at making gender-equality central to all development activities. In India there is a great upsurge in awareness about women's rights among all sections of society. Only the Government of India Act in 1935 gave the vote to wives and widows of men qualified to vote. This was strongly protested by women's organizations, and Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya wrote, 'we do not think that a woman's rights as a citizen should depend on her marriage'.¹¹ The massive participation of women in the national movement was not just a feminist protest; instead, it was a joint struggle for national and gender equality.¹² This strength of the collective spirit of women is an example of their power.

The number of professionally competent and employed daughters (married or otherwise) who are supporting their ageing parents is increasing progressively. Over the past decade and a half, action against dowry harassment has made parents and daughters precocious. Parents make conscious efforts to see that their daughters are emotionally and economically self-sufficient. Women facing dowry-harassment after their marriage refuse to suffer in silence. They have not only got out of the oppressive situation but have helped other women in similar predicaments. These brave women who are courageous, confident and economically independent have proved to be role-models to thousands of girls in fighting anti-women customs and traditions. Weeping and wailing about dowry-harassment has its place only in the dustbins of history. Instead of victim-baiting we prefer to empower the forces within the state apparatus and society which are helping women's development. The developmental programmers and policies give emphasis to improving women's social status.¹³ Generally speaking, our development efforts have yielded creditable benefits for women in doubling their life expectancy over the last fifty years, and considerably reducing female infant mortality and child mortality rates.

Contrary experiences are there even today in Indian culture and civilization. In certain states of India the girl child is negatively measured.¹⁴ The incidence of rape, abduction, dowry murders, forced

¹¹ Nivedita Menon, "Introduction," *Gender and Politics in India*, 8.

¹² Nivedita Menon, 9.

¹³ "Empowering Women," *Yojana* 47/3 March 2003, 5.

¹⁴ Shoma A Chatterji, "Gender Monopoly," *Documentation on Women, Children and Human Rights*, July-Sep. 2000, 104.

polyandry have escalated in areas such as Rajasthan, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Haryana, where the imbalance in the sex ratio has been extremely unfavourable to women and girls. Opposed to this extremely negative statistic, many girls and women in states like Kerala, reach par-excellence than boys and men in both education and in higher levels of professions. Net result shows that employment may not release women from subordination, but it does provide them the psychological basis to exert and exercise power. Economic independence, self confidence and personal achievement motivation are the only tools that serve the women well in negotiating their status in the family and society.

However, the status of women and safety of girls and women in our society have not improved much. Again, though our Constitution and many other legislative acts have promoted gender equality, their status continues to be low. The so-called women-empowerment programmes seem just to concern women gaining control and power over their own lives. Actually, empowerment should come from within – women must empower themselves. This input of women-empowerment should facilitate the articulation of their needs and priorities and take up more active roles in promoting these needs and interests.¹⁵ In my opinion, in order to empower themselves, women must be encouraged by the society with gender equity as the main thrust.

The various problems regarding the gender concern in India can be summarized as follows. First of all, it seems to me that gender is a serious concern only for women. Men are already settled in their higher-gender identity and not worried about equality or equity. Secondly, within the plurality of Indian context is the question, Can we have uniform view of gender in all states of India? Or, does it point towards the need to take a plural view of gender? Thirdly, in India, generally speaking, the affirmed aspects of womanhood are situated and contained within the home, the most private of social spaces. The denied aspects of womanhood are largely located in public spaces which are the domain of the male. Through this gender identification, women see themselves as sexual beings that exist for men.¹⁶ Above all, gender equality or inequality, whatever may be our concern, the reality is that gender understanding can have different faces and vary from one region to another and also from one period

¹⁵ "Empowering Women," *Yojana* 47/3 March 2003, 5.

¹⁶ Ükü Ü. Bates, et al., *Women's Realities, Women's Choices*, 23.

to the next. These aspects make India different from other countries in that it has a unique perspective of gender.

In India, again, we have some kind of **thinking beyond gender**. The rigid normality of the gender divide, of heterosexuality and of an anthropomorphism alienated from other species is challenged by Ruth Vanta in her article "Thinking Beyond Gender in India".¹⁷ That is, whatever may be the gender concern, men are always higher in their aptitudes than women just because of the way they are anthropologically. As a result of this view there is prevailing bias against women. While addressing the 59th annual convocation of the Shreemati Nathibai Damodar Thackersey (SNDT), Women's University in Mumbai, Vice President Mohammad Hamid Ansari said that India's responsibility on gender issues is not in doubt and it is committed to bringing about gender equality. Indian Vice president Ansari further stressed that it is necessary to delve into the underlying unstated sources of the problem. "Most women often are denied the rights to emotional, mental, psychological and physical spaces. The fact that the female body is constantly under pressure to conform and mould into prescribed social and cultural roles brings into question the spaces that need to be protected as well as rights to be claimed so that women's bodily integrity is respected."¹⁸ So the rights, opportunities and responsibilities should not depend on whether the person is male or female, instead, we must have more openness in concern for the person.

Another noticeable thing in our country is that women-specific projects continue to play an important role in promoting gender equality. They are still needed because gender equality has not yet been attained and gender mainstreaming processes are not fully developed. Target initiatives focusing specifically on women are important for reducing existing disparities. Women and their organizations are coming out against the genius of the patriarchal system and thus play a very important role in achieving their overall development. Amidst all gender discriminations, in many cases, women have acquired confidence and managed to make some noticeable impact in local power structure levels. Women have also been successful in raising specific issues with gender dimension.

¹⁷ Ruth Vanta, "Thinking Beyond Gender in India," in *Gender and Politics in India*, ed. Nivedita Menon, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999, 25.

¹⁸ Hamid Ansari, "India Committed to Bringing about Gender Equality," Mumbai, 10th March 2010. http://www.indiaedunews.net/Maharashtra/Vice_President_addresses_59th_convocation_of_SNDT_University_11122/

As India enters into an international leadership arena we have to highlight our values and not consider development as something to imitate whatever the developed countries do. For this, respecting, adoring, admiring and empowering women need to be the first major milestone.¹⁹ The underlining need is to restore to women their rightful due as responsible citizens, recognize them as productive members of the society.²⁰ Lasting change will be visible only when there is gender-sensitive administration in our country. That is, we need sufficient number of gender-sensitive persons, both men and women in the institutions of power and decision making.

3.2. Catholic Church in India and Gender Analysis

As we have seen above, in India women are yet victims of multiple subjugations because the Hindu customs and traditions continue to be practiced and to influence Christian homes and communities. Added to that Catholic Church is so far in its nature patriarchal, indirectly affirming gender insensitivity among clergy and religious. It is also expressed through inadequate representation of women in ecclesiastical bodies, and formulation of discriminatory and arbitrary policies in various dioceses. The distressing thing is that in the context of the Catholic Church, in India, even though women religious outnumbered the men, they were verbally paralysed, and the culture of silence is imbibed by the great majority of women religious in India. These are major issues to be noted by the Church in India.

One thing is to be underlined that the discrimination or bias against the other half of humanity – women, is both unethical and un-catholic. In the year 2005 the Conference of Religious India (CRI), took “Gender-sensitive Church” as the theme of the five-day program of national assembly. “A careful examination of the Church reveals the harsh reality that what blocks collaboration between men and women for ministerial partnership in the Church is the powerful system of patriarchy.²¹ The assembly acknowledged gender justice within the church and society would help end discrimination against women. Church may be good and explicit in its teachings, but we see “the gaps” between the vision and practices in the church. To sum up, the

¹⁹ “Empowering Women,” *Yojana* 47/3 March 2003, 5.

²⁰ Cynthia Stephen, “Gender and social Reorientation: The Case for A Gender-Sensitive Leadership,” *Integral Liberation* 1/2 June 1997, 89.

²¹ Evelyn Monteiro SCC, “Towards a Collaborative Church,” in *Gender Sensitive Church: A CRI Initiative*, New Delhi: Conference of Religious India, 2005, 5.

studies and discussions point out that woman continue to be denied access to decision-making in the Church even after repeated discussions on this.

Added to this cardinal Stanislaw Rylko said in his inaugural address on the occasion of the CBCI's 28th General Body meeting, "the human person created in the likeness and image of God to be person who is only fulfilled in reciprocal relations who manifests in this communion the image of Trinity. This concept of person created for communion is essential in order to overcome all temptations to have a conflicting perspective between man and woman."²² After all these meetings and discussions by CRI and CBCI on the gender issues did not change much the condition of women in India. Even though Sisters are included in parish councils or Church's administrative meetings they have no voice in planning activities and they are there just for a decoration. They are not free to speak freely or are not trained to speak assertively and thus a system of subordination is perpetuated. The Catholic Church of India needs to make structural change to bridge the real and the ideal and work towards partnership of man and woman.

The challenging task of the Indian Church is thus to have a gender sensitive Church, which necessitates an integration of feminine and masculine qualities that will in turn make men and women better human beings. We need a new language of theology which propagates more inclusive attitude and mutual respect between male and female. Thus women must be treated as independent persons who have their own innate rights. Women themselves need to come out of their comfort beds and speak the truth of one's life with courage and face the consequences.

3.3. Some Related Issues

Although most gender-related issues like pay equity, sexual harassment, child-care needs, flexible schedules, minority and healthcare issues, started out as feminist agenda, both men and women have benefited from the debate and the resultant solutions at the workplace. Thus one can conclude that the basic work motivation is the same for men and women, but due to earlier social and cultural influences we make different choices and decisions. The various reports find that women in leadership beget more women in leadership.

²² Card. Stanislaw Rylko, "Women are Important, Irreplaceable in Church's Mission," *Sathyadeepam*, Vol. 5/7, 2008, 7.

Evidence suggests that as female representation in government increases, their shared interests emerge, bringing about increased attention of issues affecting women. It also paves the way for more women to move up the ranks, as their predecessors break down many of the cultural and institutional biases still in existence.

Women reservation bills: The arguments made for reservation in politics maintained that parties were reluctant to sponsor women candidates because of the overall patriarchal character of Indian politics; reservations would increase the number of women at one go and the inhibitions arising from their minority status would disappear faster, leading to increase in political participation; presence of more women in legislatures would lead to changes in direction of debates and policy. Arguments against reservations: women cannot be equated to socially backward communities as women are not a socially homogeneous group; Women's interests could not be isolated from those of other economic and social strata; Such a measure would lead to demands from other groups/communities, which could pose a threat to national integration.²³ The most recent attempt has been to reserve 33% of seats in parliament for women, as embodied in the 81st Amendment Bill of 1996. The Bill is already passed in the *Rajya Sabha*. The reluctance to pass the bill in *Lok Sabha* may be due to the fear that more women, who are more eligible in many ways, may enter into politics. It is possible to discern a shared concern about the ways in which gender gets defined, institutionalized and mobilized in perpetuating inequality and injustice.

The moral inferiority of women: In India, especially among the Hindus, barbaric practices against women of the nineteenth century – purdah, sati, female infanticide – were explained as outcomes of fears for women's safety which had their origins in a time of invasions. In Indian culture itself, there are structures that ensured the subordination of women.²⁴ Women are always considered the morally weaker sex because of the wrong notion of understanding of power, where power is equated with physical strength. Mahatma Gandhi, associated femininity with spiritual and moral courage, superior capacity for suffering and self-sacrifice.²⁵ On the other hand, Gandhian thinking is criticised by feminists who say that this affirmation of the capacity of self-sacrifice and suffering again

²³ Nivedita Menon, "Introduction," *Gender and Politics in India*, 28.

²⁴ Nivedita Menon, ed., *Gender and Politics in India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999, 3.

²⁵ Nivedita Menon, "Introduction," *Gender and Politics in India*, 9.

perpetuates discrimination of women. However, Gandhi also insisted on the absolute personal dignity and autonomy of women in the family and society.

Sex determination: Our contention is that the use of sex determination for selective elimination of the female foetus is unethical as it violates the principle of gender justice. Sex determination and Sex-preselection deliberately used the terms 'female foeticide' and 'femicide' to signify murderous attack by the patriarchal value system to annihilate the females among the human species. We see an *imbalance in the sex ratio in our country*. Many a time people are indifferent to the fact that Indian women are commodified by sex determination which treats them mainly as son-producing machines. Adverse sex ratio for women has been the marked feature of the demographic profile of India since 1901. We have anthropological evidence of the widening gap between the numbers of women and men. The intensity of violence against women is mounting. Thus, we must concentrate on the interplay of patriarchy with the new reproductive technologies in an era of generalized commodity production to understand the consequences of sexual determination in Indian.

4. Gender Ethics

Gender analysis in research enables us to see that though gender is a universal phenomenon, it is also something constructed by human beings themselves. That is why it is differently nuanced by different societies, cultures and regions. Something that is connected to human beings is naturally built on a basic ethics or morality. Again sex/gender is a foundational question in the contemporary Christian ethics/morality.

It is Carol Gilligan who, in her 1982 book, *In a Different Voice*,²⁶ proposed that, (a) there are two fundamentally different and gender-related orientations to morality (a justice-orientation that is typical of males and a care orientation that is typical of females) and (b) dominant theories of human development (most notably Kohlberg's) have an androcentric bias toward rights, individuality, abstraction, and fairness, and consequently miss or malign females' "different voice" on morality. Her claim of gender-related moral orientations is not a completely novel one; historically, women and men have frequently claimed or been accorded different moral qualities and

²⁶ Carol Gilligan, *In A Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983.

different places in society, but only recently has this issue received sustained psychological study.

Famous moral theologian, Kevin T. Kelly says that for women sexual ethics has generally emerged from the wrong starting point. Their main concern is the quality of relationship – the right relationship m – which fully respects them as women and their equal dignity as human persons. So we can understand from the starting premise that our understanding itself does not do full justice to the equal dignity of women and men.²⁷ The world of knowledge is still missing the experience of women or the way they see realities. The question is whether these two morals can be attributed according to gender or whether they are related to each other hierarchically, or heterogeneously (valency of the perspectives). With regard to the valencies of the moral/ethical points of view, Gilligan asserts that these are equivalent, but distinctly different. According to Gilligan the gender identity plays a notable role in reaching higher ethical/moral stages but at the same time we cannot compare them by saying that one is higher than the other. The fact is that human being's various gender perspectives and mutual respect for it is crucial to be ethical. Again, we cannot have the identical criterion to measure one of the two moral perspectives because their differences are unique in their richness. What we need is respect for the other human being with dignity – both male and female in the image and likeness of God.

If the perspectives are to be compared, it is necessary to indicate the criterion of comparison. However, this is done by Gilligan only as far as she says that attachment and separation, as basis of the perspectives, are two varieties of the human basic experience. In the end, she therefore defends a pluralism stemming from a human *nature* which remains in the dark (of psycho-analysis). Obviously Gilligan has taken out thoughts of the social circumstances, which many women also criticize. Relationship is thought of only positively and no differentiation to submission is any longer possible. Gilligan idealizes female care by extracting it from the origin out of which it has developed, the social suppression.

Gilligan's pluralism becomes questionable in the light of the *empiric substantiation* of the relationship between genders. She makes it (too) simple asserting that, socially, the two morals are attributed to the genders. As both points of view are equivalent, the question arising

²⁷ Kevin T. Kelly, *New Directions in Sexual Ethics: Moral Theology and the Challenges of Aids*, London and Washington: Geoffrey Chapman, 1998, 36.

now really is, why should something be changed in the education and the socialization circumstances of boys and girls, men and women.

To adopt more male characteristics would be to attract criticism by men and other women. The male characteristic of striving for autonomy was also claimed for women. This was a result of the phase of self-experience of the new feminism. Gilligan's vision attaches this idea of autonomy back to the conventional role of self-sacrificing women and asserts at the same time that this attachment allows for a deeper morale.

In view of Catholic feminist moral theologians, "when we speak of acts, we focus attention on a nexus of practical, physical, causal, and moral relationships, but do not mark off absolute boundaries around a moral event."²⁸ Again, we argue that patriarchal definitions of human sexual nature and gender roles are distorted rather than built on what human experience demands. For the patriarchal society 'human experience' is just male experience, so I think we need more Indian women theologians and ethicists to speak out their gender view. The actual human experience must include both male and female experiences so that the nature of gender identity may not discriminate one over the other.

Generally speaking the Church recognizes that women have the unique quality of brining in peace wherever they are, which is essential for development. The role of women in conflict resolution will be then acknowledged and supported.²⁹

Yet one problem which arises as a result of which theologian's appeal to "experience" is the danger of replacing oppressive generalizations with bottomless particularity. If women's experience alone is exalted as the final moral standard, we run the danger of a feminist relativism which is ultimately unable to give any real reasons for preferring equality rather than hierarchy. It is important to move back from particularity to the sense of shared values which is so central to natural law. For, the reason what is natural is something rhythmic and balanced which offers something of value to all human beings – for care, justice and moral value can flourish only in a truly equal and balanced world. Therefore, to speak of gender in the context of ethics,

²⁸ Lisa Sowle Cahill, "Accent on the Masculine," (85-97), in *John Paul II and Moral Theology: Readings in Moral Theology* No. 10, Charles E. Curran and Richard A. McCormick, eds., New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1998. 90-91.

²⁹ "Excerpts from the CBCI Gender Policy Special Areas – Peace and Harmony," *Magnificat: CBCI Commission for Women News-Letter*, Jan- March 2010, 4.

the dignity of the person must be of prime concern so that the gender perspectives uplift respect for human kind in its wholeness.

Conclusion

Through this brief discussion on gender ethics in India, I would suggest that India needs to be more sensitive in order to possess a correct perspective of gender. The healthy development of a country invokes respect for both male and female gender roles each with its own dignity. Although this article is not about gendered perspectives on morality, I found, Gilligan's insights into the formation of gendered identities to be relevant here. Added to that, the felt need of the country is the formation of a gender identity, by asserting each gender with its own particular richness without denying the other.

To some extent, the above task may actualise through gender specific education. Gilligan describes how gendered tendencies emerge and are reproduced; emphasizing that the divergence in perspectives do not stem from biology, instead, as a result of child care – considering the sole responsibility of women. In India especially women with their discriminated experience transmit the same way of thinking to their girl child that they are half human. Or men with their biased attitudes towards women convey their power over the so called weaker gender. Through this process of identity formation, gender stereotypes and perspectives of the culture and society continue the age old attitude towards women. So, the formation and development of gendered perspectives, identification of gender biases in culture must be changed. Thus, women in our country must be able to respect themselves and bring about respect by the other in the context of right way understanding of gender.

To sum up, it is the political will of society to bring about social, cultural and economic reforms and active support of a strong and efficient state apparatus dedicated to the ethics of gender justice that will enhance the position of women all over the globe. Only through action to remedy discrimination against women can the vision of India's independence – an India where all people have the chance to live healthy and productive lives – be realized.