CHAPTER V

HUMAN RIGHTS IN SIKHISM

A right is "just and fair claim to anything whatever; power privilege etc., that belongs to a person by law, nature of tradition; also that to which one has a just claim." And human means pertaining to mankind.

In the pre-historic times, the eldest male member had absolute rights over his family. The individual living under him had to surrender their individuality in return for the security. The head of the family was called Patriarch. According to Homer, "It was his authority to give law to his children and to his wives." He ruled over his wives and children. There was no question of any rights to individuals. With the passage of time slavery system started, mighty persons started keeping the other persons, who were mentally or physically weaker, as slaves. 'If there was one institution which was really common to all people of antiquity, it was
Stoics like Zeno, Cicero, Seneca were of the view that, "according to the law of nature, all human beings are equal despite the difference in languages, nationalities and races. All can lead universally one kind of life i.e., a life according to Reason. The civil laws of various states cannot separate them rather they should conform themselves to the Law of Nature." The Stoics, therefore, drew the conclusion that men should stop living as citizens of various states, under different conceptions of justice and law. Rather they should live as citizens of one world under one Law of Nature. It is for this that the stoics propounded their concepts of universal brotherhood and cosmopolitanism. As members of one great family all men are brothers and equals and have equal rights."

The stoics left an indelible impression on the Roman philosophers. Cicero talked of equality and cosmopolitanism of man. Seneca stressed the right of man and said slave or free-man all must be treated equally.

Saint Augustine introduced the subject very early in the City of God. The central theme is whether there can be a populus without justice. In Cicero's dialogue De Republica it is written- "a people is a multitude of men or an assembly associated together by a common acknowledgment of right (juris) and by a community of interests..."
Augustine then proceeds to interpret this Ciceronian statement. "Juris' derived from 'jus', means 'justitia'-"righteousness" or "justice." And he is at pains to show that he believes Cicero meant 'vera justitia'-true righteousness or justice. If legal right must be based on 'justitia' and 'justitia' is, in fact, 'vera justitia', then one vital aspect of 'vera justitia' is surely the recognition which man must accord to the one true God. For Augustine where rights and justice are taken away, the kingdoms are great robberies.

Thomas Aquinas acknowledged the 'equality of all men' and such other rights as were necessary for the development of their personality.

Thomas Hobbes was of the view that "the individual was a creature of passions and moved more by instinct than reason", all his activities were centred on two focal points that is self-preservation and the pursuit of felicity. Hence in the state of nature individuals definitely had the right of life, liberty and also to some extent property.

John Locke was one of the greatest individualistic thinkers. He preached that the earth and all the institutions thereof were made for the individual and not the individual for them. Hobbes was also an individualist
but he (Locke) was also authoritarian and an absolutist, who would compromise his individualism for the sake of discipline or order in the state even. The only precious thing for him was the life of the individuals for which he would allow his individuals the right even to resist the state. After all, man would require his liberty, property and other facilities like laws, impartial judges etc. in order to lead a good life.¹²

Situation started changing materially slowly which inundated the world with new ideas in all spheres of human life. In England authoritarian activities of the king Henry II were resented. The king was forced to sign Magna Carta in 1215 A.D., said to be the first milestone on the roads of liberties of the people of England. With this no freeman could be captured or imprisoned or outlawed or exiled or in any way destroyed except by the lawful judgement of his peers only. The right of justice was not to be denied to anyone. Magna Carta set a new trend. Then came the Petition of Rights in 1628.

As and when any political philosopher propounded any theory on human rights, the change started. With Hobbes and Locke's efforts came the Bill of Rights in 1689. King James II fled and William and Mary signed that Bill which
gave many rights to the Parliament, a house chosen by the people. With Rousseau came the French Revolution and the French Declaration of the Rights of Man came in 1789. In 1793 more rights such as right to resist oppression, freedom of the press and other civil and political rights were added.

THE INDIAN PERSPECTIVE.

Ancient Indian political thinkers approached the problem from quite a different perspective. They usually described not the rights of the citizens, but the duties of the state; the former are to be inferred from the latter. "We are quite in the dark about the details of the political life in the Vedic period. At that time popular assemblies (samitis) existed and controlled the king's activity. It is quite possible that not all the inhabitants had the right to become the members of the samiti; only it may have constituted a privileged class corresponding to the aristocratic order. Equality of all citizens before the law did not exist in ancient India, with Brahmans being the privileged class."

"Mahabharata and Diogenes tell that there prevailed a golden age of harmony and happiness when people led happy and peaceful lives, though no government existed (in ancient India) to see that the laws of nature were respected and
followed.14

Later, in the times of Mauryan rule, 'Megasthene's leaves no doubt that peace, prosperity and contentment prevailed throughout the empire.15 Ashoka worked for the elevation of his subjects and for recognition of the sanctity of life. His policy of non-violence led him to enforce law for the sanctity and security of all living creatures. In short people enjoyed many rights in the Hindu empire.

With the advent of the Muslim rule, in the Delhi Sultanate period the life of Hindus became miserable who did not get much rights especially the right to freedom of practising religion. A tax on their religion called Jazia was imposed. It is so said that "if the revenue collector spits into a Hindu's mouth, the Hindu must open his mouth to receive it without hesitation."16 The religious and cultural and even social rights of the Hindus were taken away. They were made to lead the lives of slaves. Many a time there were massacres of Hindus. The invasions of Changiz Khan and Timur made the condition of the Hindus more critical. Many of the Hindus were forcibly converted to Islam.

Guru Nanak condemned the atrocities of the rulers of the
Delhi sultanate and later those of the Mughals. He asked them to provide the subjects with certain fundamental rights which any human being must get. Some such rights can be taken out from the Sikh literature and history. These are described as under:

(1) **RIGHT TO FREEDOM OF RELIGION**

This was the right which was most forcefully advocated by Sikhism. It was for the sake of this right that the ninth Guru, Tegh Bahadur, laid down his life in 1675 in Delhi. Some Brahmins from Kashmir approached him to save them from forcible conversion to Islam by the then ruler. The Guru himself was not a believer of the faith of those Brahmins but he stood for the right to the freedom of practicing any religion and laid down his life for the cause. The tenth Guru writes about this martyrdom in his composition called *Bachitra Natak.*

It was for sake of the sacred thread and the frontal-mark (of the Hindus),

That he performed a great act of chivalry,

He suffered martyrdom for the sake of Religion,

His head he gave but not his determination. 17

In Sikhism the main objective of man is to attain oneness with God. God created the world for this very
purpose only i.e., to create the personality of a complete man or saint. This is the religion of man. For the achievement of this objective the right to practise the religion one wants, is very important. The choice should be of the man himself. The third Guru prays to God:

Through whichever Door it (world) comes unto Thee,
Save it that wise, pray. 18

Guru Nanak condemned the rulers of his times who took away this right of the people, especially that of the Hindus to practise their religion in their own way. He severely criticised the policy of levying tax on the temples and the religious rites of the Hindus. While criticising such tax he says:

And the (Hindu) gods and temples have been taxed such is the current way. 19

Bhai Gurdas, the Sikh theologian and a contemporary of the fifth Guru also condemns the destruction of places of worship of the non-ruling class. He condemns in his first 'Var' the destruction of Hindu temples by the Muslim Rulers. 20
In the western school of thought many thinkers advocated the right to the freedom of religion.

Though Plato was a great supporter of justice in his ideal state but in older age he held the view about the religion in his book The Laws that "in sub-ideal state religion is subject to the regulation and supervision of the state as Education is'. However Plato forbids the private religious exercises."21. "The Christians emphasised that spiritual side of man was beyond the scope of the state."2 The individuals need the security and order which it (state) provides in order to be free from disturbances and molestation in the performance of their religious duties.23. Machiavelli advised his fictional Prince to respect the religion followed by his subjects.24

Jean Bodin propounded religious toleration as a matter of policy because during his time (1530-1596) an acute civil war was going on in France. He believed that the state should allow all types of religious sects to flourish in the territory of the state and must not impose any religion of its own on the population.25

Thomas Hobbes use of the view that the individual must have full liberty in the sphere of faith. "Leviathan,
(his composition), wrote Hobbes, 'cannot oblige men to believe. Thought is free.' Wayper says, he is an opponent of all authority in philosophy, belief, opinion. 26

"Locke is in fact the first of the English thinkers the basis of whose argument is mainly secular. 'State will not interfere with anybody's soul.' 27

Prof. H.J. Leahi, a British thinker, referred to three aspects of liberty and those were private, political and economic. "Private liberty means the opportunity to exercise freedom of choice in those areas of life where the results of my effort mainly affect me. Such a thing is religion and the state should not interfere in it." 28

After the Second World War this right was included in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations Organisation in 1948. Article 16 of this Declaration reads "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance." 29 Now this right has been included in the constitutions of many countries, In Indian constitution also this right is granted by articles 25-28. 30
(2) CULTURAL RIGHTS

The Gurus advocated the freedom of culture. Man should be free to follow the culture of his choice and to speak the language he likes. There should not be any interference from the State. Guru Nanak forcefully condemned the rulers of his time for imposing their culture and language on the public. The Hindu culture and their Sanskrit language was looked down upon. He even condemned the Hindus for changing their culture and language under the influence of the ruling Muslim class. Even the gods were changed. To quote Guru Nanak:

"Now that the turn of the Sheikhs (Muslim divines) has come, the Primal Lord is called Allah; and the (Hindu) gods and temples have been taken; thus is the current way! The ablution pot, the prayer, the prayer mat, the call to prayer, have all assumed the Muslim garbs; even God is now robed in blue (like the Mughals did). And men have changed their tongue and the Muslim way of greetings prevails."

In 'Asa Ki Var' also Guru Nanak condemns the change of culture by the Hindus. He says:
Uhe (Hindu) Decked Himself in (the Muslim) blue and assumed the attributes of a Turk and a Pathan. They seek approval of the Muslim rulers by wearing blue.  

In modern times cultural rights have been granted by U.N.O. in article 2, 16 and 22 of the 'Universal Declaration of Human Rights' which were declared on Dec. 10, 1948.

In the Conference of Religion and Peace held in Kyoto (Japan) in October, 1970, it was declared - "Members of this Conference urge religions to use all their moral weight in bringing about an end to cultural discrimination which deprives the common patrimony of humanity of the cultural riches acquired so slowly and so laboriously."

Article 29 of the Indian Constitution guarantees cultural rights to all citizens. The article reads - 'Any section of the citizens residing in the territory of India or any part thereof having a distinct language, script, or culture of its own shall have the rights to conserve the same.'

(3) **RIGHT TO BASIC NECESSITIES**

In ancient India the rights of people were taken as
the duties of the ruler. The state was to promote Dharma, Artha, Kama, Noksha. In the sphere of Artha came this right of the people to have employment and the things of the basic need. "The state, however, was to secure not only the moral but also the material wellbeing of its citizens. The kingdom of king Purikshit, idealised in the Atharva-veda (xx.127), flowed with milk and honey. All round welfare of the public was clearly regarded as the chief aim of the state during the Vedic and Upanisadic ages, i.e. down to c. 600 B.C."[36]

In Sikhism it is the right of the human being to get the things of basic need. The means of subsistence are given by God to His creatures as the fifth Guru says:

In every home rings the Praise of this King
in every home are men zealous of Him,
He first Provides succour and thereafter createth the creatures.[37]

Kaun, while addressing God, says that the things of basic needs are his right. If the latter will not give it, the former will ask for it. He demands almost all the things of basic need. He says:

O God, I can worship Thee not on a hungry stomach:
Here I give back my rosary to Thee.

.....................
O Lord, how can I pull on with Thee?
But, if Thou livest not myself, I'll make a demand on Thee.

I seek no more than two seers of wheat flour,
With a quarter seer of ghee and a pinch of salt,
And half a seer of lentils too,
That I can eat two times a day.
I seek a couch too, supported by four legs,
And a bedding also, along with a pillow.
And, shall I ask not for a quilt too to cover my body,
So that attuned to Thee I worship no one but Thee?
No, no, I've shown no covetousness.

Ohanna, in the Adi Granth, has also demanded for certain basic things of daily need as a matter of right.
He says:

I beg of Thee to bless me with flour, lentils and ghee,
That my heart keeps ever pleased with Thee,
And I beg of thee for silken wear and also footwear,
And the foodgrains too, grown by tilling the land seven times over.
And, hark, I ask also for a rich cow and a buffalo too,
And a fine Arabian horse for me to ride (through
Thy wondrous earth)
And I ask for a dutiful wife to look after my
household:
These are the needs of me which I seek from
Thee, O my Beneficent God.

The fifth Guru puts a precondition on this right i.e.,

remembering the Name of God. He says if one remembers
His Name then one has every right to get the things of
daily need, even to some extent the things of enjoyment.
He says:

(remember the Lord) Whose are all the gift
which we receive.
Thirty-six kinds of delicious diets to eat,
comfortable couches, cool wind, peaceful
revelations and enjoyment of sweet pleasure.

In Sikhism it is the duty of every Sikh to give this
right to all fellow-she. Even if some one is unable to do
any work or has not got any employment, it is the duty of the
others to look after him. It was for this purpose that the
system of 'Daswari' (to donate one tenth of the total income)
uaa started. I was only to give the due right to the needy person. Guru Nanak gave the idea of earning one’s livelihood through rightful means and to give some part of it as donation or charity.

He alone, O Nanak, Knows the Way,

Who earns with the sweat of his brow and then shares it with the other (the needy). 41

Ravidas depicts an ideal state where this right of the citizens is well protected and all get what they need.

There abide only the rich and the satiated. 42

In the U.N’s Declaration of Human Rights 43 in 1948, the right to employment and the things of basic need have been included therein under articles 23 and 25.

(4) RIGHT TO JUSTICE:

In ancient India it was one of the fundamental aims of the state to promote dharma 44 or justice. In Vedic literature peace, order, security and justice were regarded as fundamental aims of the state. The king or the head of the state was to be like god Varuna, the upholder of the law and order (dhrityavrate); he was to punish the wicked and help the virtuous. 45
In the western world many political philosophers and thinkers have given their theories on this right from time to time. Plato (427 B.C.) was quite vocal in giving this right to the citizens. In the words of Prof. Darker: "Social justice may be defined as the principle of a society, consisting of different types of men who have combined under the impulse of their needs for one another, and by their combination in one society, and their concentration of their separate functions, have made a whole which is perfect because it is the product and the image of the whole of the human mind."\(^\text{46}\)

St. Thomas Aquinas (1227-1274) following Aristotle defined justice as "the fixed and perpetual will to give to everyone his own right."\(^\text{47}\)

For John Locke (1632) justice was "to give every individual the rights of preservation of life, health, liberty, possession, equality and the right to enforce law of nature to safeguard his rights as well as the rights of his neighbour."\(^\text{48}\) While for Edmund Burke (1729), men have a right to justice between their fellows.\(^\text{49}\)

According to Prof. H.J. Laski (1893), "Every citizen has the right to be provided with judicial safeguards which
can guarantee liberty to the citizens. This means that justice should be administered without fear or favour. It must not be harder upon the poor than upon the rich.\textsuperscript{50}

In Sikhism it is the right of the people to get justice. It is indicated by Guru Nanak when he criticises the Kazi who sits as the judge and takes away the right to get justice and sells it to someone who greases his palm. He says:

Kazi sits as a judge
He tells rosary and mutters God's Name.
Taking bribe he usurps the right to justice
(and does injustice).
If anyone asks for it, he misquotes and reads
out some aphorism.\textsuperscript{51}

It is the state which is to ensure that justice is done to all in the dominion. God Himself is Just. He never does injustice. The culprit can escape the human judge but he can't escape from the Court of God. It is His nature to do full justice to everyone. The fourth Guru says:

One can run away from man's court;
but where is one to go if one runs away from
the Lord?\textsuperscript{52}
The government of this world is only the image of the Government of God which He has created to give justice to the people. Guru Nanak tells:

Thou hast created the Throne to adjudicate truly.

So God, being Himself truly Just, has given the right to justice to all human beings.

RIGHT AGAINST RACIAL DISCRIMINATION:

Since the Vedic period the Hindu society has been divided into four castes - Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Sudra.

The English word 'Caste' is derived from the Portuguese and the Spanish word 'casta' which means race. It has been used since the middle of the 15th century to denote different classes into which Hindus are divided. Varna or colour and Jati or race are the two commonest words in Indian languages which are interchangeably used to denote 'caste'.

On the authority of the Rig Veda John Murray writes:

When they divided the Purusa, into how many parts did they arrange him? What was his mouth? What his two arms? What are his thighs and feet called?
The Brahmān was his mouth, his two arms were made in rājya (warrior), his two thighs the vaisya (trader and agriculturalist), from his feet the sudra (servile class) was born. 56

According to Chandogya Upanishad even man’s present castes is pre-determined, for it man’s destiny is determined by his karma:

"Those whose conduct here has been good, will quickly attain a good birth (literally womb), the birth of a Brahman, the birth of a Ksatriya or the birth of a Vaisya. But those whose conduct here has been evil, will quickly attain an evil birth, the birth of a dog, the birth of a hog or the birth of a Candela." 57

Here Candela is used for the outcaste or Sudra, so it means that a person has some caste from the birth itself. The Laws of Manu hold the divine origin of the castes:

"But in order to protect this universe He, the most resplendent one, assigned separate (duties and) occupations to those who sprang from his mouth, arms, thighs and feet. To brhamans he assigned teaching and studying (the veda), sacrificing for their own benefit and for others, giving and accepting of (of alms). The Kshatriya
be commanded to protect the people, to bestow gifts, to offer sacrifices, to study (the Vedas), and to abstain from attaching himself to sensual pleasures; the Vaisya to tend cattle, to bestow gifts, to offer sacrifices, to study (the Vedas), to trade, to lend money and to cultivate land. One occupation only the Lord prescribed to the Sudra, to serve needily even these (other) three castes.  

Manu gives the duty of teaching the Vedas to Brahma alone. For him Brahma is the lord of all castes. Whatever exists in the world is the property of the Brahma.

The Bhagavad Gita also supports the divine origin of the caste system:

"The four castes were emanated by me, by different distribution of qualities and action; know Me to be the author of them, though the actionless and inexhaustible."

Sikhism outrightly rejects the caste system. All human beings are equal. All are created by God. None is good or bad by birth. It is the actions which make a man good or bad. Nor there is any water-tight compartmentalization of the work in different castes. Any body can do any job of his/her choice. Condemning the traditional caste system Guru Nanak says:
Preposterous is caste and the name (glory) of source of every creature is One.

Guru Nanak talks about the futility of the castes because, as he says, our aim is to get in tune with God and in His Court there is no caste:

Recognise Lord's light within all and inquire not the caste for there is no caste in His world.

Again:

Ask not the caste of anyone,
Ask in whose heart God has come to dwell.
Caste is known There by the deeds done by one.

For Guru Nanak, a low caste is one who has forgotten the Name of God.

Kabir makes a scathing attack on the caste system. He criticises those Brahmins who assume that Godliness can be attained by them alone. He tells them that none becomes high caste by birth. Only that person is a true Brahmin who attains Godliness. He bitterly criticises the superiority complex of the so-called Brahmins. To quote him:

In the womb dwelling, the mortal has no lineage and caste.
From the seed of the Lord, all have sprung.

Said a Pandit, since when hast thou been a Brahman?
Waste not thy life by repeatedly calling thyself Brahman.

If thou art a Brahman, born of a Brahmin Mother, then why hast thou not come by some other way?

How art thou a Brahman and how am I a low caste?
How am I of blood and how thou art of milk?
Says Kabir, only he who contemplates over the Lord is said to be a Brahman among us.

The third Guru, Amardas, says that it is not the right of 'born Brahmin' only to realise God. Any body can realise Him by meditating on His Name and become a true Brahmin. According to Guru Nanak a person who is brave for doing good actions is a true Kshatriya.

He who know Brahman (God) is known as a Brahmin yea, he who is ever attuned to the Lord.

And, instructed by the True Guru, he practises Truth and Self-discipline and is rid of the Affliction of Ego.

He Sings the Lord's Praise, Gathers the Lord's Praise and Merges in God's Light.
Again the Guru says:

He alone is a Khatri who is a Hero in Deed,
And dedicates his body to compassion and Charity,
And knowing the right form, Sows the Seed of Beneficence,
Thus such a Khatri is Approved of at the Lord’s Court.

The tenth Nan Guru gives a call to people all over the world to take themselves as one caste. For him all are equal, difference is only of dress or environment. The Source of all human beings is one and that is God. All have emanated from Him like different sparks from the same fire; like several particles from the same dust, like millions of waves from the same water and they all will go back to the Source from where they have emanated. Guru Gobind Singh, thus gives us a spirit of internationalism. To quote him:

One man by shaving his head is accepted as a 

annvai

another as a Jot or a Brahachari, a third as a Jati.

Some men are Hindus and other Musalims; among the latter are Afaizis, Imams, Shefais—know that all men are of the same caste.

......................

All men have the same eyes, the same ears,
the same body, the same build, a compound of earth, air, fire and water.\textsuperscript{70}

From the above study it can be concluded that in Sikhism anyone high caste is a person who meditates of God's Name. It is the right of all human beings. Anyone can meditate on His Name. So any discrimination on the basis of castes by birth, is strictly prohibited.

Today this right is recognised by U.N. Charter of Declaration of Rights in the article 2 of it.\textsuperscript{71}

\textbf{(6) RIGHT TO PROPER EDUCATION:}

In ancient India the right to get education was given only to upper three castes the Brahmin, the Kshatriya and the Vysya. The Sudras who were placed at the lowest ebb could not get education. Of the three classes only Brahmin had the right to teach. Kshatriya and Vysya could get education but could not impart it. According to the laws of Manu:

"Let the three twice born castes (varnas), discharging their (Prescribed) duties, study (the vedas); but among them the Brahman (alone) shall teach it, not the other two; there is an established rule.\textsuperscript{72}

Regarding the aims and ideals of the state Chandogyo
Uoaniaad tell us that "Religion was to be promoted, morality was to be encouraged and education was to be patronised. In Sikhism all people have right to get education. Guru Nanak laid great stress on the need of education amongst the subjects of his time. The Guru believed that it was because of lack of education that people tolerated the oppressive ways of their rulers. Guru Nanak thus describes the situation in 'Asa Kri Vaar':

The subjects are blind and without wisdom (or knowledge), they satisfy the official's fire of greed and bribe (carrion)."

The tenth Guru attached great importance to education and learning. He himself got education in education and learning. He himself got education in

In his hymn Shri Guru devanji mentions about the lack of education amongst the people at the time of Guru Nanak's birth. He says that the subjects were blind because of lack of knowledge and following the falsehood. Guru Nanak laid great stress on the need of education amongst the subjects of his time. The Guru believed that it was because of lack of education that people tolerated the oppressive ways of their rulers. Guru Nanak thus describes the situation in 'Asa Kri Vaar':

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various fields. This he indicates in his autobiography called Bachitra Natak. He patronised scholars. He maintained many scholars in his court. This was to set an example for his Sikhs not to remain illiterate but to get proper education.

In the western school of thought Plato laid great stress on the need of education. Plato suggested spiritual method of education to attain justice. For him, "to make the society harmonious and to bring about unity in the State, proper education is essential. Education reforms the wrong ways of living by altering the whole outlook on life. It is 'an attempt to cure a mental malady by mental medicine' (Berkov). Rousseau is perhaps hitting the right mark when he says that 'Republic' (of Plato) is hardly a political work at all, but is the finest treatise on education that ever was written."^76

Like Plato, Aristotle also regards the state mainly as an educational institution. The main function of the Ideal state of Aristotle is ethical. It aims at inculcating moral values in men. That state is the best state which enables every one to lead a good and happy life. And good and happy life, for Aristotle, is moral life.^^

James Mill (1773-1836) said, "all men were by nature
equal and the differences among them were due mainly to education. Education was 'the best employment of all the means which can be made use of by men for rendering the human mind to the greatest possible degree, the cause of human happiness.'

Mill regarded education so essential that he laid a lot of emphasis on the educational qualifications of the voters.

Prof. H. J. Laski (1893-1950) said "Every citizen has the right to education. It is education which makes a man a good citizen. Every citizen is authorised to demand elementary education and it is only when this much has been guaranteed to every individual that provision should be made for higher education for a few individuals."

Like Plato Bertrand Russell also believed that "education is an attempt to touch the evil at its source and to reform the wrong methods of life by altering the whole outlook of life. This, and not violent revolution, or paper legislation is the way out of economic greed and international brutality."

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights of UNO granted the right to education to the individual in
Constitution of India also provides this right under articles 29 and 30 of it.

(7) EQUAL RIGHTS FOR WOMEN

In early Vedic period, position of women in Indian society was good. Though there were stray incidents of unwelcoming the female child but the sacred literature was against it. It was not a general practice. "Some thinkers have even pointed out that a talented and well behaved daughter may be better than a son (Sama, Hika III 2,6)". In cultured circles such a daughter was regarded as the pride of the family. Women were given proper education to make them properly trained so that they could be successful in their married life. The Atharvaveda observes that a maiden can succeed in her marriage only if she has been properly trained during the period of studentship (brahmacarya).

"In pre-historic times lady poets themselves were composing hymns, some of which were destined to be included even in the Vedic Samhitas. According to the orthodox tradition as recorded in the Sarvanukramanika, there are as many as twenty women among the 'seer' or authors of the Rigveda. Some of these may have been
mythical personages; but internal evidence shows that Lopamudra, Visvavara, Sikta Vivasva, and Ghosh, the authors of the Rigveda 1.179, VIII. 91, IX. 81, 11-20, and X.39 and 40 respectively, were women in flesh and blood, who once lived in Hindu society.\textsuperscript{85}

Women freely participated in religious rites and practices. For instance, in more than one place in Ramayana, Sita is described as offering her daily Vedic prayers.\textsuperscript{86} In some cases men's offerings were not acceptable without the presence of his wife.\textsuperscript{87} Satapatha Brahmana holds that 'gods do not accept the oblations offered by a bachelor.'\textsuperscript{88}

Even widow remarriage used to take place in the early Vedic India. "Athravaveda refers a woman marrying second time. It lays down a ritual to secure the union of the new couple in heaven."\textsuperscript{89} Custom of Sati was also not in vogue.

But afterwards the position of women started deteriorating. Slowly and slowly they were reduced to a low caste or equivalent to Sudra. Woman started being treated as property which needs protection and it was considered as one of the duties of the king. In Markandeya Purana, "a prince boasts that he never did coveted other man's wives or wealth or anything belonging
to them. According to Aonl Purana "woman and animal can be kept as pledge, and interest on them is the seventieth part of their original value. Very probably this is monthly interest." 

Women started being treated at par with Sudras. Aonl Purana, a work of about eleventh century A.D., holds that "one who commits the murder of a woman shall be required to perform the same kind of penance as is prescribed for the murder of a Sudra." According to Manu man should not eat the leavings of a woman or a Sudra who are forbidden flesh. In case anyone did not follow the rule he was required to eat barley for seven days as a punishment. According to him the woman and slave have no right to property. "A wife, a son, and a slave, these three are declared to have no property; the wealth which they earn is (acquired) for him to whom they belong." This trend was also prevalent in Rome at that time. "According to it (Roman law) the children, the wife, and the slaves of a Roman head of a house (paterfamilias) were equally subject to his unrestricted power (vitae necisque potestas) and equally outside the jurisdiction of the state."
For Manu a woman is never independent. "Her father protects (her) in childhood, her husband protects her in youth, and her sons protect (her) in old age; a woman is never fit for independence."96

In practising religion also she had got no rights. "Even in later Vedic period the Shapatha Brahma was that while teaching 'pravarjya' the teacher should not look at the woman, the sudra, the dog and the blackbird, because they are untruth."97 Manu also prescribes like this.98

"By the laws of Brahma the woman, the sudra and the people of lower classes are deprived of the right to perform fire sacrifice; they can perform other ceremonies without mantras."99

"In Gupta and post-Gupta times women and sudras were conceded at least the right to acquire the knowledge of the Puranas. But even in subsequent times it was not permissible to study the Veda near the woman and sudra."100

The evil of Sati was in vogue. The widows were burnt alive along with the pyre of their husbands, even against their wishes. According to Anirvan "only course which religion has prescribed for a widow is that of Sati."101 Another evil was Purdah system which was very popular especially amongst Muslims.
In Sikh society women are given high status. The very first Guru, Nanak Dev stood, very strongly, for equal rights to women. He vehemently condemned the low status given to them. He said that it is the woman who gives birth to men, it is she who makes the kings and other great men. Without her man is incomplete. Therefore we must not call her bad. To quote him:

From the woman is our birth; in the woman's womb are we shaped.
To the woman are we engaged; to the woman are we wedded.
The woman is our friend, and from the woman is the family.
If one woman dies, we seek another; through the woman are the bonds of the world.
Why call women evil who gives birth to kings and all?
From the woman is the woman; without the woman there is none;
Nanak without the woman is the One True Lord alone.

Guru Nanak also condemned the idea of impurity of a woman in the days of her menstrual cycle. Guru Nanak said there is no impurity in it. It is a natural cycle.
Actual impurity is in the mouth of a person who tells lies after lies. Impurity is due to bad qualities and not due to natural bodily function. 103

Then he condemned the idea of impurity after the woman gives birth to child. There was a system to keep woman separate from the rest of the family for some days after the child's birth. She was not allowed to touch anything because her touching anything would render it impure. This impurity was called Sutak. Guru Nanak raised his voice against this evil practice. He said everywhere reproduction is taking place. Even the cow-dung-cakes used to cook food are not free from it. The insects are reproducing, then, there must be impurity. None of the things we eat or use otherwise, is free from life which is multiplying every moment. He told that actual impurity is due to evil thoughts of mind. In *Ase Ki Var* he says:

If impurity attaches (to life's birth), then all, all over, are impure.

In the cow-dung and the wood too is the life of worms.

As many are the grains of food, not one is without life.

And, is not water life, that bring all to life?
How can then we believe in life's impurity, when impurity is in our bread?

Nanak! impurity goes no otherwise save by being wise. 104

Further the Guru tells about the actual impurity:

The mind's impurity is covetousness, the tongue's impurity is falsehood.
The impurity of the eyes is coveting another's woman, beauty and riches.
The ear's impurity is to hear and carry tales.
Nanak! even the purest of men, thus bound, go to the city of the Dead. 104

On the basis of these ideas he described Sutak as an illusion of mind:

All idea of impurity is illusion of mind which attacks those who are in the duality of Maya.
The creatures take birth and die through His will through His Will one comes and goes.
To eat and drink is pure: For the Lord hast Owest us with these in His Mercy.
Nanak! they who Realise the Truth through the Guru, to them Impurity sticks not. 105
Sikhism forbids women to immolate themselves on the pyres of their dead husbands. The third Guru put a complete ban on the Sati system. He says:

A *Sati* is not she, who burns herself on the pyre of her spouse.

Instead a *Sati* is she, who dies with the sheer shock of separation.

Again:

A Sati is one who lives Contented and embellishes herself with Good Conduct (chastity).

And serves her Lord (Husband) with all her heart and Cherishes Him ever.

The fifth Guru also condemned the Sati system and told that it was of no use to burn oneself. One can't reach one's husband. A true Sati is the one who obeys her husband and surrenders to his will and thinks her husband only as her master, just as a Bhakat takes God as his Husband. The system of dowry was also condemned by the fourth Guru.

Men, in Sikhism, is to treat his wife in a rightful manner. He must satisfy himself with his wife only. He must not go out for other women to satisfy his lust. Guru Gobind Singh asked not to think of other women in a lustful manner even in dreams. Bhai Gurdev advises
to treat other women as mothers, sisters or daughters according to their age.

It is not only the woman who has to adjust with her husband but it is both ways. It is a mutual adjustment. The third Guru tells:

They are not said to be husband and wife who merely sit (live) together.
Rather they alone are called husband and wife who have one soul in two bodies.

In Sikhism women have got full religious rights. They cannot only come to the Sikh religious place i.e. Gurduara but also participate actively in the functions. In Sikh history we can have the examples of Mata Khivi, the wife of the second Guru took active part in the maintenance of the langar i.e. community kitchen. This is confirmed by the Adi Granth.

There are several examples in Sikh history to show that the women worked and cooperated with men, sometimes with greater vigour. Examples of Bibi Bani, Mata Gujri (the mother of Guru Gobind Singh), Mai Bhago (who fought valiantly at Khidrana, now Mukatsur, at the time of Guru Gobind Singh), Mata Sundri are worth mentioning.
Mata Sundri provided the much needed leadership during the critical period after the demise of her husband Guru Gobind Singh in 1708.

In modern times, the Declaration of Human Rights by UNO declares in its article 2 that all human beings are entitled to the rights listed in the charter without the distinction of race, colour, and language etc. The Indian constitution also contains similar provisions.

(8) RIGHT TO RESIST OPPRESSION:

Ancient India had a strong tradition of the subjects resisting the tyrannical ruler and his functionaries. There is an ample evidence to support the argument that subjects were advised to resist the tyrants or to leave his territory and shift to better governed kingdom. It was probably hoped that the prospective loss of the revenue might bring the king to his senses. In extreme cases the subjects could even replace the king.

Mahabharata recognizes subjects' right to tyrannicide, if there was no other remedy left to them. Some thing
like this is conveyed in the Inserams of the tenth Guru Gobind Singh addressed to Aurangzeb, the tyrant ruler of his time. The Guru recommends that when all peaceful means fail to restore peace and order, it is lawful to take to arms.118

With this we can draw the inference that sovereignty ultimately rested in people. It was a constitutional right given to them by the scriptures.

In the western school of thought St. Thomas Aquinas (1227-1274) takes it as a duty and not right of the people to resist the tyrant ruler. "If he becomes tyrant and pursues his personal interests it becomes the duty of the subjects to resist. 'It is for this reason that the acts resistance of tyranny is not only a right but a duty.'119

Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) was of the view that the sovereign must get absolute powers. But man has entered into contract with the state and surrendered certain rights for the sake of his protection of life. If life is endangered by the sovereign then the people have the right to resist and change him. "... every man has the right to disobey if his sovereign commands him to kill, wound, or slay himself; or not to resist those that assault him; or to abstain from the use of food, medicine or any other thing, without which he cannot live..."120
John Locke was a great defender of the Glorious Revolution (in England) of 1688. He was firmly of the opinion that the people must resist oppression. "The true remedy of force without authority is to oppose force to it." According to T.H. Green (1835-82) when the laws of the state are tyrannical and the state fails to promote the common good, "resistance under these circumstances is not merely a right but it becomes a duty."

In Sikhism subjects have been given the right to raise their voice against the oppression of the ruler. Guru Nanak condemned the brutalities of the rulers of his time. It was he who stood against the ruler without any fear and hesitation. To quote him:

The kings are like whores, the courtiers like dogs;
For they awaken those that sleep in God's peace,
The king's servants tear (the docile subjects)
with their nails,
And, like curs, lick up all the blood that they spill.

Very courageously he spoke against the injustices being done by the rulers of his time:

The Kali-age is (like) the knifes; the kings are (like) butchers.
And righteousness (justice) has taken wings;
All around, it is the dark night of Falsehood;
And Truth? O, where is the noon of Truth?124

Guru Nanak blamed the subjects even more. According to him it was the fault of the public which obeyed the orders and showed faithfulness without seeing the right or wrong. In 

Avarice and Sin are the king and the minister,
and Falsehood is their chief;
And Lust is the advisor, and so they all confabulate.
Their subjects too are blind, without wisdom;
and like the dead, they dance to their tune
(submit to their will).125

He calls such men, who, for the sake of piece of bread obey like dogs all the orders of the ruler, whether right or wrong. He forbade to obey the orders of an unjust ruler:

Says Nanak, they are human in form, by name,
But in deeds a dog, waiting for the (just or unjust) order at master's door.126

Guru Nanak was in favour of taking a stand against the misrule. For this the subjects must be prepared for it and not let the ruler to misuse his authority.
The fifth Guru, Arjan Dev had the boldness to challenge the oppressive ways of the contemporary ruler and in the process faced martyrdom. Margobind, the sixth Guru had to resort to military action for the purpose.

Guru Tegh Bahadur did not accept the oppressive policy of the ruler of his time and stood against the religious persecution and reign of terror let loose on those who did not conform to the religious policy of the state. The Guru, who believed in the freedom of religion voiced his protest against the policy of Aurangzeb to forcibly convert Hindus to Islam and laid down his life in 1675 to uphold the principle of religious freedom. His son and successor Guru Gobind Singh created the Khalsa and fought against the unjust rule of Aurangzeb, the then ruler. He devoted the best part of his life in fighting against the oppression. Clearly stating his non-submissive rather offensive policy towards the royal oppression he writes in *Zafarnama*, the epistle of victory:

When all efforts to restore peace
Prove useless and no words avail,
Lawful is the flash of steel then
And right it is the sword to haul.127
For him it was better to die while facing such a challenge than to submit to repressive and unjust policies of the contemporary rulers. Even Guru Nanak gives the right to die while facing the challenge, for a righteous cause. He says:

_Blessed is the dying of the Hero whose death is Approved by the Lord._"
NOTES AND REFERENCES

5. R.M. Bhagat, Political Thought from Plato to Burke, p.18.
6. Ibid., p.51.
7. Ibid., p.156.
8. Ibid., p.176.
12. Ibid., p.118.
16. Ibid., vol six, p.25.


19. Ibid., p. 1141.

20. Ibid., p. 1191.


22. Ibid., p. 194.

23. Ibid., p. 204.


25. Ibid., p. 170.

26. Ibid., p. 56.

27. Ibid., pp. 114-15.


38. Ibid., p. 631.

39. Ibid., p. 665.

Kabir, Adi Granth, p. 656.

Channa, Adi Granth, p. 695.


42. Ravidas, Adi Granth, p.345.

43. "Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment" -- Article 23. Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care... -- Article 25, edited in T.S. Batra, op. cit., pp.251-52.

44. Kabbaharaa Xll. 29,112; Suvarna, XIII. 50,03 quoted in N. Pankaj, Status and Religion in Ancient India, pp.11 and 213.

46. R.M. Bhagat, op. cit., p.18.
47. Ibid., p.36.
48. Ibid., pp.93-94.
   quoted in R.M. Bhagat, op. cit., p.196.
50. V.D. Mahajan, op. cit., p.475.
52. Gopal Singh, op. cit., p.573.
54. Homo Hierarchicus, Dumont, p.21. Quoted in
   V. Thomas Samuel, *One Caste One Religion*
   *One God*, pp.74-75.
55. V. Thomas Samuel, op. cit., p.75.
56. *Rig Veda* 10:90:11,12. Quoted in S.Radakrishnan,
   *A Source Book In Indian Philosophy*, p.19.


59. Ibid., X.1, p.401.

60. Ibid., X.3, p.402.


64. Guru Nanak, Adi Granth, p.349.


71. T.S. Batra, *op. cit.*., p. 248. "Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without any distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language......".


Article 26

(1) Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be accessible to all on the basis of merit.

(2) Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace and security.
of peace.

(3) Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.


85. Ibid., p.10.

86. V. 15, 48. quoted in A.S. Altekar, \textit{op. cit.}, p.11.

87. \textit{Atharvaveda}, I.2.5; quoted in A.S. Altekar, \textit{op. cit.}, p.197.

88. V.1, 6, quoted in A.S. Altekar, \textit{op. cit.}, p.197.


90. \textit{krta sarga ca na sasya parestrivibhavedisu, Mark.}

93. The Laws of Manu, XI.153, Max Muller, op. cit., vol. xxv., p.461.
94. Manu, VIII.416., quoted in Max Muller, op. cit., p.326.
96. The Laws of Manu, IX.3, Max Muller, op. cit., p.320.
97. siti adrath ava krama en kuristen na prokasat, XIV.1.131, R.S. Shrame, op. cit., p.30.
98. The Laws of Manu, XI.224, Max Muller, op. cit., p.476.
100. Ibid., p.31.

104. Gopal Singh, op. cit., p.466,

105. Sahib Singh, Sri Guru Granth Sahib Darpan


the tenth Guru *Puram Granth, Charitro pakhyan, chapter 21, verse 51.4, ed. Bhai Chater Singh Jiwan Singh, p. 842.
110. Varan Bhei Gurdas, 2911.

111. Manmohan Singh, op. cit., p. 2567.

112. (1) ed. Shomekar Singh Aishok, Hukamnama, pp. 85-93.

(2) ed. Ganda Singh, Hukamnama, pp. 196-236.


115. Sukranitiisara, IV.1.3, King Kramadavaraya of Vijayanagar warns his officers that they should not allow subjects to migrate under such circumstances, but should try to remove their grievances. Quoted in A.S. Altaker, State and Government in Ancient India, p. 101.

117. \textit{Guru Nanak} \\
\textit{Adi Granth}. p.1288.


125. Ibid., p. 462.

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