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**UNDERSTANDING THE CONFLICT BETWEEN GENDER EQUALITY AND
FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF**

by Deepika K

According to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and several other regional and international agreements, freedom of religion or belief is an essential human right. FoRB worries about individuals, including independence from pressure and segregation, given their religion or conviction. This incorporates the opportunity to have, embrace, or change a belief or sentence and to show and practice that religion or conviction alone or in a local area with others. This covers the option to announce any religion or conviction and mystical, nontheistic, and sceptical perspectives. Discrimination against women is defined as any distinction, exclusion, or restriction based on sex that "has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment, or exercise by women, regardless of their marital status, based on equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil, or any other field."

Due to the historically problematic overlap between FoRB and women's rights, there haven't been many attempts to do so. Regarding international human rights norms and standards, neither the Universal Declaration on Human Rights nor the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief mainly address women's rights or gender equality. With the assistance of this paper, researchers need to understand the possibility of FoRB and what it means for oppressed ladies. We discuss the difficulties that exist among FoRB and gender equality, such as the denial of education or healthcare based on religious beliefs. We try to examine the association between FoRB and gender equality to maintain a turn of events. Finally, we tried to discover a few ideas from these conversations.

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Introduction

Equal rights, opportunities, and treatment for all people, regardless of gender, are considered gender equality. It advocates for equal access for both genders to healthcare, political involvement, education, and other social and economic realms. It acknowledges that everyone should have access to the same opportunities, rights, and responsibilities, including those with non-binary or varied gender identities.

As discussed earlier, freedom of religion and belief is a fundamental human right that protects individuals' rights to choose, practice, and change their religion or belief system. It ensures that people can hold and demonstrate their adherence to religion or atheism without coercion or discrimination. This freedom encompasses the right to have a belief and the freedom to engage in religious worship, rituals, and observance.

It might be challenging to understand how gender equality and freedom of religion and belief interact. The conflict can develop when religious or traditional practices continue gender-based discrimination or restrict the rights and freedoms of people, especially women and marginalised gender groups, even though both concepts are essential human rights.

In some instances, religious or cultural practices may impose restrictions or limitations on women's rights, such as unequal inheritance rights, restrictions on mobility or dress, limited access to education, or denial of leadership positions within religious institutions. Such practices can be seen as contradictory to the principles of gender equality. However, it's vital to acknowledge that people have a variety of spiritual and cultural convictions and that the right to practice one's religion or belief is a fundamental component of human rights. It takes constant communication, comprehension, and legal frameworks that uphold both rights to strike a balance between establishing gender equality and protecting freedom of religion and belief.

These two ideas have been successfully reconciled in several communities and legal frameworks. For instance, they could pass laws and regulations that oppose discriminatory practices, advance gender equality in religious organisations, and give people a way to report rights breaches. To develop a more inclusive and tolerant society, it is necessary to promote debate, education, and awareness to advance gender equality and the freedom of religion and belief. It entails appreciating and respecting the diversity of identities and beliefs while ensuring that no person or group is exposed to prejudice or has their rights violated because of their gender or religious convictions.

CHAPTER - 1: The Concept of Freedom of Religion and Belief

- **History and development of ERoB:**

The history of freedom of religion and belief is complex and multifaceted, with developments occurring over centuries and varying across different regions. While it is impossible to cover every detail, we try to focus on a general overview of the key events and concepts related to the history of freedom of religion and belief.

Ancient and Classical Periods:

- Ancient Mesopotamia: In early civilisations like Sumer, there was generally no concept of religious freedom. Religion was often tied to the state, and different city-states had their patron deities.²
- Ancient Egypt: Pharaohs were considered divine, and religious practices were closely tied to the state. Religious freedom was limited.³
- Ancient Greece and Rome: While there was a degree of religious pluralism, the dominant religions were often tied to the state. Dissent or non-conformity was sometimes met with persecution.⁴

Medieval and Renaissance Periods:

- The Edict of Milan (313 CE): Issued by Roman Emperor Constantine, this edict granted tolerance to Christianity, ending the persecution of Christians in the Roman Empire.⁵
- The Treaty of Westphalia (1648): This treaty, which ended the Thirty Years' War in Europe, marked a significant turning point by introducing the principle of cuius regio, eius religio

²“Mesopotamia - Civilization, Location & Summary | HISTORY.” *History Channel*, 30 November 2017, <https://www.history.com/topics/ancient-middle-east/mesopotamia>. Accessed 12 July 2023.

³ Abercrombie, Thomas J. “Pharaohs.” *National Geographic Society*, 19 May 2022, <https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/pharaohs/> Accessed

12 July 2023. ⁴ Emanuel, Susan. "Religion of the Greeks and Romans."

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<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/d/did/did2222.0000.431/>

--religion-of-the-greeks-and-romans?rgn=main;view=fulltext;q1=Pagan+theology. Accessed 12 July 2023.

⁵ *Edict of Milan | Description, History, & Facts.* (2023, June 19). Encyclopedia Britannica. Retrieved July 12, 2023, from <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Edict-of-Milan>

("whose realm, his religion"). It granted rulers the power to determine the religion of their territories but provided some limited protections for religious minorities.

- The Enlightenment: Philosophers such as John Locke and Voltaire advocated for religious toleration and the separation of church and state, emphasising individual liberty and freedom of conscience.

Modern Period:

- The First Amendment of the United States Constitution (1791): This amendment protects the freedom of religion, prohibiting the establishment of a state religion and ensuring the free exercise of religion.⁶

- French Revolution (1789-1799): The French Revolution brought about a separation of church and state in France, ending the privileged status of the Catholic Church and establishing religious freedom as a principle.⁷

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948): Adopted by the United Nations, this declaration recognises the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion, and belief as a fundamental human right.⁸

Contemporary Developments:

- Several international agreements and treaties, such as the European Convention on Human Rights (1950) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966), have been formed to safeguard freedom of religion and belief.

- The extent and boundaries of religious freedom continue to be a contentious topic, especially in light of concerns over problems like religious expression in public places, legal exceptions for religion, and the rights of religious minorities.

Numerous factors, including political, social, and cultural dynamics and the evolving interpretations of religious texts and teachings, have influenced the historical progression of freedom of religion and belief. The understanding and implementation of this freedom

⁶ *The Bill of Rights: A Transcription* | National Archives. (2023, April 21). National Archives | Retrieved July 12, 2023, from <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/bill-of-rights-transcript>

⁷ Mark, H. W., Henri, N., & Popkin, J. D. (2023, January 12). *French Revolution*. World History Encyclopedia. Retrieved July 12, 2023, from https://www.worldhistory.org/French_Revolution/

⁸ *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. (n.d.). OHCHR. Retrieved July 12, 2023, from <https://www.ohchr.org/en/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>

It continues to evolve, and its application can vary significantly across different countries and contexts.

- **Freedom and religion as a Fundamental human right:**

The right to freedom of religion and belief is recognised as a fundamental human right under various international and regional human rights instruments. Here are some key aspects and principles related to this right:

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR):

According to Article 18 of the UDHR, everyone has the right to freedom of mind, conscience, and religion, involving the freedom to express one's religion or belief via teaching, practising, worship, and observance in public or private.⁹

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR):¹⁰

- Article 18 of the ICCPR elaborates on the right to freedom of mind, conscience, religion, or belief and emphasises that this right should not be subject to any pressure that would restrict one's ability to have or adopt a religion or belief of their choice. The ICCPR forbids any restrictions on the right to freedom of religion or belief unless those restrictions are mandated by law and required to safeguard the public's health, safety, morality, or other fundamental rights and freedoms.

Regional Human Rights Instruments:

- European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR): Subject to some restrictions, Article 9 of the ECHR ensures the freedom of mind, conscience, and religion, including the freedom to express religion or belief.

⁹ *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. (n.d.). OHCHR. Retrieved July 12, 2023, from <https://www.ohchr.org/en/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>

¹⁰ *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)*. (n.d.). Equality and Human Rights Commission.

Retrieved July 12, 2023, from

<https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/our-human-rights-work/monitoring-and-promoting-un-treaties/international-covenant-civil-and>

- American Convention on Human Rights: Article 12 of this convention protects the right to freedom of conscience and religion, encompassing the freedom to profess and practice religion.

Fundamental Principles and Interpretations:

- Non-Discrimination: Freedom of religion and belief should be enjoyed by all individuals without discrimination based on factors such as race, gender, ethnicity, or any other grounds.
- Pluralism and Tolerance: The right to freedom of religion and belief includes respect for diversity, allowing individuals to hold and express their beliefs peacefully, and promoting tolerance and understanding among different religious or belief communities.
- Freedom of Worship and Practice: The right includes the freedom to worship, practice, observe religious rituals, and engage in spiritual activities individually or collectively.
- Freedom to Change Religion or Belief: Individuals have the right to change their religion or belief and not be subject to coercion or forced conversion.
- Limitations: While freedom of religion and belief is protected, it can be subject to limitations for legitimate purposes such as public safety, health, or protecting the rights of others. However, any restrictions must be necessary, proportionate, and legally prescribed.

The interpretation and implementation of the right to freedom of religion and belief can vary across legal systems and cultural contexts. National laws and judicial decisions play a significant role in defining the scope and limitations of this right within specific countries.

- **Status of EROB in India :**

The right to freedom of religion and belief in India is enshrined in the Constitution of India under Articles 25-28. Here is an overview of the status of this right in India:¹¹

The highest law in India is the Constitution. The text describes the framework that distinguishes the fundamental political code and individuals' basic rights, guiding ideals, and obligations. It also outlines governmental entities' structure, procedures, authority, and responsibilities.

¹¹ *Constitution of India*. (n.d.). Legislative Department. Retrieved July 12, 2023, from <https://legislative.gov.in/constitution-of-india/>

The Constitutional Provisions relating to Freedom of religion and belief are:

- Article 25 protects the freedom of conscience and the right to practise, profess, and spread one's religion without interference. It gives people the freedom to run their religious affairs and create and sustain charitable and religious institutions.
- Under the conditions of public order, morality, and health, Article 26 grants religious denominations, or any portion thereof, the freedom to administer their spiritual affairs, including the right to found and operate organisations for religious reasons.
- Article 27 guarantees that no one will be forced to pay taxes to support or promote a particular religion or religious institution.
- Article 28 forbids the teaching of religion in educational institutions that get all of their funding from the state while permitting it in institutions that are only partially supported by the state.

In addition to constitutional provisions, there are various legal frameworks in India, such as The Protection of Freedom of Religion Acts, commonly known as anti-conversion laws, which are enacted by some states in India. These laws regulate religious conversions and sometimes require prior notification or permission for conversion. The Indian Penal Code contains provisions that criminalise acts such as promoting enmity between religious groups, outraging religious feelings, and disturbing religious assemblies.

The Supreme Court of India has played a crucial role in interpreting and safeguarding the right to freedom of religion and belief. Notable judgments include:

- The S.R. Bommai case (1994)¹²: The court held that secularism is an essential feature of the Indian Constitution and that the government must maintain neutrality and not favour any religion.
- The TMA Pai Foundation case (2002)¹³: The court ruled that minority educational institutions have the right to administer their affairs and admit students from their community.

¹² ([1994] 2 SCR 644: AIR 1994 SC 1918 : (1994)3 SCC1)

¹³(2002) 8 SCC 481

- The Shayara Bano case (2017)¹⁴: The court declared the practice of instant triple talaq (divorce) among Muslims as unconstitutional, emphasising the importance of gender equality and individual rights.

Significant challenges and Conflicts about the right to freedom of religion and belief exist, such as communal tensions and religious conflicts, which have been a challenge in India's pluralistic society. Incidents of violence, discrimination, and religious intolerance have occurred in the past, and the implementation and impact of anti-conversion laws have been a subject of debate. Critics argue that these laws may infringe upon the right to choose and profess one's religion freely, and disputes over religious practices and places of worship, particularly about sensitive sites, have sometimes resulted in social and legal conflicts.

¹⁴ (2017) 9 SCC 1

CHAPTER - 2: CONCEPT OF GENDER EQUALITY

The concept of gender equality, which advocates for equal rights, opportunities, and treatment regardless of gender, has a long and evolving history. Here's a general overview of the historical development of the concept:

Ancient Civilizations:

- Ancient Mesopotamia: In some Mesopotamian societies, women had relatively more rights than other ancient civilisations. They could own and inherit property, engage in business, and act as priestesses.
- Ancient Egypt: Egyptian women had legal rights, including the ability to own and manage property. Some women even held positions of power, such as queens or pharaohs.
- Ancient Greece: In ancient Greece, gender roles were strongly defined, with women primarily occupying domestic roles and men participating in public and political life.

Religious and Philosophical Influences:

- Abrahamic Religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam emerged with specific gender roles and hierarchies. While these religions emphasised gender complementarity, they also provided opportunities for women's spiritual engagement and, at times, social reform movements.¹⁵
- Enlightenment Period: Philosophers of the Enlightenment, such as Mary Wollstonecraft, argued for women's rights based on principles of reason, natural rights, and social justice. Their writings challenged traditional gender roles and advocated for gender equality.

There were three Waves of Feminism¹⁶:

The First wave of feminism occurred during the late 19th to early 20th centuries. The first wave of feminism emerged in the context of industrialisation, suffrage movements, and society.

¹⁵ Abulafia, A. S., Azahari, M., Solomon, N., Harries, R., & Winter, T. (2019, September 23). *The Abrahamic religions*. The British Library. Retrieved July 12, 2023, from

<https://www.bl.uk/sacred-texts/articles/the-abrahamic-religions>

¹⁶ Grady, C. (2018, July 20). *The waves of feminism and why people keep fighting over them are explained*. Vox.

Retrieved July 12, 2023, from

<https://www.vox.com/2018/3/20/16955588/feminism-waves-explained-first-second-third-fourth>

Reform. Activists such as Emmeline Pankhurst and Susan B. Anthony fought for women's right to vote, access to education, and improved working conditions.

The mid-20th century saw the emergence of the Second Wave of Feminism. The second wave of feminism concentrated on various concerns, such as gender norms, job discrimination, and reproductive rights. Betty Friedan, Gloria Steinem, and Simone de Beauvoir were notable individuals.

The third Wave of Feminism started in the Late 20th century to persist till date. The third wave of feminism emerged in response to the perceived limitations of the second wave and aimed to address intersectionality, diverse experiences, and global perspectives. It advocates for inclusivity, challenging gender norms, and fighting against multiple forms of discrimination.

Numerous international agreements and pieces of legislation have taken the lead in advancing gender equality. The United Nations has significantly benefited from the work of promoting gender equality. A crucial international tool for advancing women's rights is the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)¹⁷. Laws on equal pay, sexual harassment, domestic abuse, and gender quotas are just a few examples of legislation that many nations have passed to combat gender-based discrimination.

In India, the idea of gender equality has a long history that political, social, and cultural elements have influenced. Here is a summary of the concept of gender equality in India.

Article 15 of the Indian Constitution forbids discrimination based on gender and ensures equality before the law. Additionally, it gives the state the authority to enact laws that positively discriminate against women (Article 15(3)). All citizens have equal access to work options under Article 16.

Equal rights for men and women are mandated under Article 39(a) of the Directive Principles of State Policy. In contrast, Article 42 asks for legislation to promote reasonable and humane working conditions and maternity leave for women.

¹⁷*Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) for Youth*. (n.d.). UN Women. Retrieved July 12, 2023, from

<https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2016/12/cedaw-for-youth>

Laws have been enacted to address gender-based discrimination and violence in India. These include the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (2005), the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition, and Redressal) Act (2013), and amendments to the Indian Penal Code to criminalise offences such as dowry, acid attacks, and rape.

Women's movements have been crucial in advocating for gender equality in India. Prominent leaders and activists, such as Rani Lakshmbai, Sarojini Naidu, and Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, fought for women's rights, education, and political representation during the pre-independence era. Post-independence, various women's organisations, NGOs, and grassroots movements have emerged to address gender-based discrimination, violence, and other issues affecting women. The Indian government has introduced several legal reforms and initiatives to promote gender equality. These include the introduction of reservations for women in local government bodies (panchayats) through the 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution, the Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao (Save the Girl Child, Educate the Girl Child) campaign, and the National Policy for Women.

Despite constitutional provisions and legal frameworks, gender inequality persists in various aspects of Indian society. Issues such as gender-based violence, female foeticide, child marriage, dowry, limited access to education and healthcare, and underrepresentation of women in politics and leadership positions continue to be significant challenges.

Efforts to address gender inequality have seen progress in certain areas. There has been an increase in women's literacy rates, a decline in maternal mortality rates, and improved access to education and employment opportunities for women. Women have also made significant strides in various fields, including politics, business, and sports.

However, it is essential to note that the journey towards achieving gender equality in India is an ongoing process, and there is still much work to be done to address deeply entrenched social norms, cultural attitudes, and systemic barriers that perpetuate gender-based discrimination and inequality. The concept of gender equality is still evolving, and challenges and inequalities persist in various contexts worldwide. The understanding of gender and its relation to equality has expanded beyond the binary understanding of male and female, recognising the experiences and rights of non-binary, gender non-conforming, and transgender individuals.

CHAPTER - 3: CONTESTED RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FORB AND GENDER EQUALITY

The relationship between freedom of religion and belief and gender equality can be complex and sometimes contested. While both concepts are fundamental human rights, conflicts may arise when exercising religious beliefs and practices infringing on gender equality or women's rights.

Some religious beliefs, traditions, and practices may uphold patriarchal norms and restrict women's rights and autonomy. Examples include restrictions on women's participation in religious rituals, dress codes, limitations on their roles within religious institutions, or justifications for gender-based discrimination. Freedom of religion and belief protects individuals' rights to hold and practice their chosen faith. However, tensions may arise when religious practices impede individuals' autonomy and freedom, particularly when it comes to issues such as forced marriages, female genital mutilation, or restrictions on reproductive rights. Balancing the right to freedom of religion with gender equality can be challenging. Legal and societal debates often arise around issues like religious exemptions from laws that protect gender equality or LGBTQ+ rights, such as anti-discrimination laws or marriage equality laws.¹⁸

Gender equality is not a singular issue and intersects with other forms of discrimination, such as race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation. This intersectionality can complicate the relationship between freedom of religion, cultural practices, and gender equality, as the impact may vary depending on different social identities.¹⁹ The interpretation and understanding of religious texts and teachings are diverse and can evolve over time. Religious communities may have varying interpretations of their scriptures regarding gender roles and equality. This can lead to internal debates and shifts within religious communities regarding women's rights and gender equality. Promoting understanding, dialogue, and reconciliation between religious freedoms and gender equality is crucial. Encouraging

¹⁸ *Statement on freedom of religion or belief and gender equality.* (2022, July 7). GOV.UK. Retrieved July 12, 2023, from

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/freedom-of-religion-or-belief-and-gender-equality-statement-at-the-international>

¹⁹ *FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS*. (n.d.). The Danish Institute for Human Rights. Retrieved July 12, 2023, from https://www.humanrights.dk/files/media/document/Brief_no4_03%20FINAL-a.pdf

Conversations and engagement between religious leaders, human rights advocates, and policymakers can foster greater awareness, respect, and accommodation of both rights.

Due to the historically problematic overlap between FoRB and women's rights, there haven't been many attempts to do so. Women's rights and gender equality are not directly included in the 1981 Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief or in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which likewise lacks a traditional non-discrimination article barring discrimination based on religion or belief, is similar in that FoRB is omitted.²⁰

The fact that gender equality and rights connected to FoRB are not inherently incompatible does not imply that their interactions are always simple. The two sets of rights may conflict in specific, concrete situations, with attempts to uphold one right leading to limitations on the other. The hiring of personnel in religious organisations is one example of this.

In India, there have been instances where conflicts arise between freedom of religion and gender equality. India has separate personal laws for different religious communities, governing aspects like marriage, divorce, and inheritance. These laws often contain provisions that are perceived as discriminatory against women, such as polygamy under Muslim personal law or limited property rights for women in specific Hindu laws. Certain religious practices in India have faced scrutiny for their impact on gender equality. For instance, the practice of triple talaq (instant divorce) among Muslims was declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in 2017, as it violated gender equality and women's rights. Some religious customs and traditions, such as restrictions on women's entry to certain temples or their participation in religious rituals, have also sparked debates about gender equality.

Women's rights and representation within religious institutions can be limited. For example, in some spiritual traditions, women are excluded from leadership positions or have limited decision-making authority. This can create tensions between the principles of gender equality and religious practices. Interfaith marriages in India sometimes face challenges due to social and familial pressures, as well as legal hurdles in certain states. Couples may encounter objections based on religious differences, with concerns raised about conversion, spiritual identity, and

²⁰ Alison Stuart, Freedom of Religion and Gender Equality: Inclusive or Exclusive?, *Human Rights Law Review*, Volume 10, Issue 3, September 2010, Pages 429–459, <https://doi.org/10.1093/hrlr/ngq014>

Societal norms. These conflicts can intersect with freedom of religion and individual rights, including gender equality. Women's rights to personal choice and autonomy can be contested in the context of religious and cultural practices. This includes issues related to dress codes, religious conversions, or participation in religious activities, where tension arises between an individual's freedom of religion and the principles of gender equality.

It is crucial to traverse these complications and discover approaches that respect both gender equality and the freedom of religion and belief, ensuring that people may express their rights without violating those of others. Societies must achieve a balance that promotes inclusion and equality for all people, regardless of gender or religious views, while upholding fundamental rights. These disputes don't include India's relationship between religious freedom and gender equality. There are persistent arguments and discussions on how to resolve these conflicts and guarantee the development of religious freedom and gender equality in the Indian context because of the varying interpretations and applications of laws, judicial rulings, and social attitudes.

CHAPTER - 4: SUGGESTIONS AND OPINIONS

The balance between freedom of religion and gender equality is a complex and nuanced topic, and a range of opinions and perspectives exist on this matter. Here are some suggestions and opinions to consider.

Respect for Human Rights: Both freedom of religion and gender equality are fundamental human rights that should be respected and upheld. It is essential to find a balance that ensures the protection of these rights for all individuals.

Governments can establish legal frameworks that protect both religious freedom and gender equality. These frameworks should aim to accommodate religious practices as long as they do not infringe upon the rights and freedoms of individuals, including gender equality. Laws and policies should be in place to prevent discrimination based on gender while also safeguarding individuals' rights to practice their religion freely. Any religious practices or beliefs that promote gender-based discrimination or inequality should be addressed and challenged.

Encouraging open and respectful dialogue between religious communities and advocates for gender equality can foster understanding and cooperation. Education and awareness programs can be crucial in promoting gender equality within religious contexts.

Striking a balance between individual rights and communal religious practices can be challenging. Courts and legal systems may need to assess individual claims for exemptions from specific laws or practices based on religious beliefs while ensuring that gender equality is not compromised.

Recognise that the experiences of women within religious communities can vary based on other aspects of their identity, such as race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status.

When talking about gender equality in religious contexts, it's vital to take these overlapping issues into account. To strike a balance between religious freedom and gender equality, nations can look to international human rights norms like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

In some cases, there could be a clash between gender equality ideas and religious practices. Considering the unique circumstances and potential effects on the parties' rights, a case-by-case analysis of these disputes may be necessary.

Engaging in respectful and constructive discussions is crucial to find a balance that respects both religious freedom and gender equality. Different societies and cultures may have varying perspectives on this issue, and ongoing dialogue can contribute to developing inclusive and equitable solutions.

CONCLUSION:

In conclusion, balancing freedom of religion and gender equality is a complex and ongoing challenge that societies face. Both values are important and should be respected and protected. It is essential to acknowledge that, by international human rights norms, people can practice their religious views freely. This includes practising their religion openly and free from prejudice or excessive intervention.

However, promoting equal rights and opportunities for all people, regardless of gender, and ensuring gender equality are equally vital. Gender equality covers various topics, including equal access to healthcare, work, education, and decision-making opportunities. Combating gender-based violence, discrimination, and detrimental cultural customs that uphold gender inequality are also part of this effort.

While religious beliefs and traditions can shape cultural norms and practices, it is essential to strike a balance that respects religious freedom while upholding gender equality principles. This can be achieved through open dialogue, education, and legal frameworks that protect the rights of individuals, particularly those from marginalised and vulnerable groups.

It is essential for societies to critically examine and challenge any religious interpretations or practices that perpetuate gender inequalities or violate the rights of individuals. Encouraging religious leaders and communities to promote inclusive and progressive interpretations of religious texts can foster a more equitable society.

Ultimately, achieving a balance between freedom of religion and gender equality requires a comprehensive and multidimensional approach that respects diverse beliefs and identities while ensuring that no one is discriminated against or denied their rights based on their gender. It is an ongoing process that requires collaboration, understanding, and a commitment to human rights principles to create a society where religious freedom and gender equality can thrive.

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