

16-12-25

12-2: Gender, Feminism and Religion

Zainab Zafar Rehman
SOC202

Leftover Question

"Religion contributes to gender inequality." Evaluate this view.

(35)

Religion is a set of beliefs, "symbols" and practices (for example rituals) which is based on the idea of the "sacred" and which unites believers into a ^{social} religious community. Gender inequality is discrimination on the basis of sex or gender causing one sex or gender to be routinely privileged or prioritized over another.

Religion is seen as a patriarchal institution that perpetuates gender inequality over time. Feminist sociologists draw on evidence from a variety of religious beliefs and practices to support this view.

Feminist theories of religion often argue that religion can be an instrument of domination and oppression. Many feminists see religion as part of a wider ideology or set of ideas which serves the interests of men rather than those of women.

Work on
improving
your
TS?

Debate?!

Radical feminist perspectives argue that gender inequality is the central type of inequality in society.

Furthermore, a radical transformation of society is necessary to remove gender inequality.

Unlike liberal feminists, they believe that small-scale reform will not be enough to bring about change.

A radical feminist, Simone de Beauvoir, backs the statement in the question. In her book "The Second Sex" (1953) she says that in the modern industrial society, religion seems much less an instrument of constraints than an instrument of deception. Women are deceived by religion into thinking of themselves as equal to men despite their evident inequality. In some way, women are portrayed by religion as being closer to God than men, even if they are unlikely to hold a position of power within religion. Simone recognizes that religious organizations clearly reflect patriarchal ideologies, as they use religion to suppress women, and men make use of religion to promote ideas which make them have divine rights over women. She says that women are told to believe that as mothers they have a key religious role; this way, women are taught to be passive, submissive, and timid. Through religion, men try to instill values in women that make them more obedient towards them, this way they are able to carry out their process of exploitation. Women are told not to raise their voice against violence, because if they suffer in this life they will be rewarded in the afterlife. Religion actively works to help men to carry out their exploitation and sustain their position of power in society.

my specific
temporary
example?

However, Nawal El Saadawi disagrees with de Beauvoir. Saadawi, in her book "The Hidden Face of Eve" does not see religion itself as the main force of oppression in society, but men interpreting religion to serve their own interests to help justify or legitimize their oppression of women. She gives an example from her life when female circumcision was performed upon her in the name of Islam, but in reality, authentic religious beliefs tend to be opposed to such ideas.

EL

scriptures,

How to allocate marks for
essay-answer (26 and 35) → at the back

She argues that it is wrong to blame religion for the oppression of women in society, because this oppression is not in the hands of religion but in the hands of the culture and men who interpret religion according to their patriarchal mindset. She concludes by saying these men who oppress women using religion do not represent religion but cultural organizations that reflect patriarchal ideologies.

Any Pakistani example?!

Furthermore, she believes that other religions, including Christianity, are often more oppressive than Islam. To El Saadawi, female oppression is not essentially due to religion but to patriarchy. Men have often distorted religion to serve their own interests, to help justify or legitimate the oppression of women.

El Saadawi is not hostile to religion itself, but only to the domination of religion by patriarchal ideology.

Daly's contributions?

Additionally, Holm argues that while the classical teachings of many religions have stressed equality between men and women, in practice they have usually been far from equal. In Japanese folk religions, for example, women are responsible for organizing public rituals but only men can take part in the public performances. In Chinese popular religion, women are associated with Yin and men with Yang. However, Yang spirits are more important and powerful. In Buddhism, both men and women can have a religious role, as monks and nuns, respectively. However, all monks are seen as senior to all nuns. Orthodox Judaism only allows males to take a full part in ceremonies. In Islam, in some regions, women are not allowed to enter mosques for worship, and men have made all the legal rulings. In Christianity, it is still impossible for women to take the highest positions in church hierarchy.

Jean Holm further points out that 'Menstruation and childbirth are almost universally regarded as polluting. In many traditions, women are forbidden to enter sacred places or touch sacred objects during the menstrual period.' For example, Hindu women are prohibited from approaching family shrines when pregnant or menstruating. Muslim women are not allowed to touch the Quran, go into a mosque or pray during menstruation.

Contextualisation of this point?!

However, egalitarian religions such as Sikhism where offices are equally open to men and women and the Church of England finally allowing the ordination of female priests in 1992 and female bishops in 2014 can be used to criticize this view.

+ Aldridge's view of Quakers & Unitarians!

Many feminists view the issue of veiling and modest dress among Islamic women as controversial. Rachel Rinaldo notes that, as veiling regained popularity in the 1970s and 1980s, 'the reaction from feminists was overwhelmingly negative' seeing the practice as a 'reassertion of patriarchy. After the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979, for example, veiling was made compulsory, and some saw this as a direct attack on women's rights.'

Contextualise!

However, these assumptions have been challenged by a number of other feminist writers such as Helen Watson, who view the veiling of Islamic women as beneficial, being a reaction against an increasingly pervasive Western culture and as an assertion of independence, separate identity and a rejection of Western cultural imperialism.

Watson also argues that veiling reduces the possibility of sexual harassment(?!), staring/gawking in Pakistan!!

(2)

a connective?!

The Salvation Army has the highest percentage of female ministers, at nearly 60% in 2010.

New Religious Movements (relatively modern forms of religion which are different from, or challenge, traditional religions in some way) are not easy to compare, as they vary considerably in relation to gender. Susan Palmer (2008) suggests that the majority, however, tend to reinforce conservative, simplistic ideas about the role of women as carers or mothers that uphold patriarchy. A minority of new religious movements offer opportunities for greater experimentation with gender roles. For example, the Raelians encouraged experimentation with gender roles, encouraging transvestitism, as well as practicing the removal of gendered identity and behavior. Other new religious movements sought to challenge patriarchal assumptions, although these practices are not always long-term. For example, between 1981 and 1985 the Rajneesh movement granted women leadership positions, only shortly afterwards to be replaced by male leaders. Therefore, the overwhelming view is that new religious movements are unlikely to challenge patriarchy or, indeed, offer women any form of liberation. ✓

Thus it can be concluded that many writers view religion as contributing to gender inequality in society. ✓

Good Analysis Statement

On the flip side, many ^{writers} view religion to be liberating for women. Karen Armstrong, for example, argues that in early history women were at the center of the spiritual quest. In the Middle East, Asia and Europe, archaeologists have uncovered numerous symbols of the Great Mother Goddess. She is pictured as a naked pregnant woman and seems to represent the mysteries of fertility and life. There were very few early effigies of gods as men. As societies developed, religious beliefs in which there were held to be many different gods and goddesses, the Mother Goddess still played a crucial role. However, the final death knell for goddesses came with the acceptance of monotheism.

name any other 3 goddesses of that time.

^{However} Some feminist approaches, such as that of de Beauvoir, assume that religion is inevitably patriarchal and must be abolished. Others accept that religion is patriarchal but do not believe that religion itself needs to be abolished. Instead, they argue that patriarchal religions need to be replaced with feminist religion. In particular, they need to be replaced with Goddess religion. ✓

she is a radical feminist.

Daly was one of the earliest advocates of this approach. She was strongly influenced by de Beauvoir and agreed that religion was oppressive to women. She argued that existing religions are based on an inadequate God, and that women are oppressed in several ways:

1. Religions such as Christianity have often proclaimed that the subordination of women is God's will.
2. God is portrayed as a man and as Father. 'One-sex symbolism' of this sort alienates women and places them in an inferior position to men.
3. Religion tells believers that redemption comes through prayer, not through actively trying to change the situation and abolish exploitation. For this reason, it tends to support the continuation of patriarchy.

3

Daly argued for a new feminist spirituality. This sense of spirituality can come from within women themselves and can lead to the revolutionary overthrow of dominant, male gods. Together, women can 'struggle towards self-transcendence' so that religious and spiritual insight comes from within and not from the teachings of male preachers imposing a male god on women. ✓

In this way, some religions may oppose rather than support male domination. Woodhead (2007) describes the Goddess feminist movement as seeking to honor the "divine feminine" in their own lives and in society. It is committed to the empowerment of women.:

Radical feminist approaches which emphasize the importance of Goddess religion have demonstrated that, while a belief in God can help to maintain patriarchy, non-patriarchal religions are possible.

However, critics argue that Daly's work is rather generalized and, in places, lacks detailed evidence to support her claims. Nevertheless, Shih (2010) believes that this type of research has been significant in developing the sociology of religion in general, by helping to open up female and feminist perspectives. For example, Woodhead (2007) has discussed how involvement in New Age activities such as Reiki in Kendal, Britain, can be a way for women to gain self-esteem, which may be low as a result of patriarchal ideology. For example, women may have found that their sense of self-worth has been undermined by male partners and that involvement in New Age activities is a way to overcome these feelings. ✓

Many liberal feminists suggest that the patriarchal oppression of women within religion is not universal.

Essays in a book edited by Holm (1994) identified three main reasons for this:

1. Some religions are generally patriarchal but aspects of them can still provide significant opportunities for women. For example, Leila Badawi (1994) noted aspects of Islam that are positive for women. Unlike Christian women, Muslim women keep their own family name when they get married. *Only in Sindh, other parts of Pakistan is a big NO!*

2. There are a few religions which do not have a strong tradition of patriarchy and have always been relatively egalitarian. According to Alexandra Wright (1994), some Christian religions, particularly Quakerism, have never been oppressive to women. For example, Quakers believe in totally democratic organizational structures and value then and women's contribution to the day-to-day running of the religion in equal measure. *Even Nadra rejects it*

3. Patriarchal aspects of some religions are changing, partly as a result of some liberal feminists' actions and campaigns for gender equality within religions. For example, some have campaigned for women to hold senior posts within the Church of England hierarchy on equal terms to men. *① Bishop Libby Lane was the first female bishop in 2015.*

However, these views are refuted by radical feminists who tend to believe that patriarchy is so embedded within existing religions that reform will never be enough to significantly improve the position of women within religion and within society in general. ✓ *② Also mother Teresa was Canonised as St Teresa of Kolkata*

Some feminists express concerns about

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Pentecostalism's deep conservatism with respect to women's roles. However, Elizabeth Brusco (1996) carried out research into Pentecostalism in Colombia in the 1980s and found that Pentecostalism can be a source of change or emancipation for women. Brusco claims that Pentecostalism has the capacity to reform gender roles in ways that enhance female status. Brusco claims that Pentecostalism promotes female interests in simple, practical ways, such as involving them more in organizational roles and valuing their contribution in the family. Pentecostalism also has the potential to challenge machismo or male dominance that is so central to Latin American culture. This is possible through the expectations and New Age movements appear to attract women more than men. For example, the Kendal Project in the UK notes that women are more likely to be part of a growing number of people who are not affiliated to traditional religious organizations, but who instead attend New Age movements that practice techniques such as voga. ✓ Contextualisation?!

connecting ✓ Michael York claims that much of the outlook of New Age movements, their spirituality and organization lends itself to a more female-centered belief system, Cynthia Eller claims that New Age movements in the USA offer women the opportunity to be part of a feminist spirituality movement, as opposed to traditional patriarchal forms of religion.

four conclusion is found lacking, it is not evaluative?! Contextualisation, of this point? postmodern?! Therefore it can be concluded that the extent of religion's contribution to gender inequality is a matter of sociological debate which cannot be tipped in favour of either side.

Awarding Marks:

- *A01 (K U): Excellent = 8 out of 8 **9**
- *A02 (I A): v. good = 9 out of 10 **11**
- *A03 (A E): good = 13.5 out of 16 **15**

30.5 out of 35 minus 1

How to grade a 35-mark Answer

Q = "MIS have witnessed a move towards gender equality in religious organisations." Ev. this view. [35] **5**

Q. "Religion contributes to gender inequality" Evaluate this view (35 marks)

As defined by Emile Durkheim religion consists of anything that surpasses the limit of knowledge " In essence it is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred items or objects.

Gender inequality as defined by the Oxford University Press in the dictionary is the "Social process by which people are treated differently and disadvantaged, under similar circumstances; on the basis of gender."

The crux of the question proposes that religion as a social institution propagates the patriarchal ideologies often found within society.

This is a view supported by many radical feminists however, some liberal feminists and fundamentalist religions argue the contrary believing that religion may be uplifting for women. Thus, the stem of the question is a matter of sociological debate and must be carefully examined to come to a holistic conclusion.

The proposition, supported heavily by radical feminists argues that religion suppresses women through its practices, hierarchy, and structure.

The proposition is therefore led by sociologists such as Karen Armstrong (1443). Armstrong argues that there is no major religion that has uplifted women. She in particular targets the Abrahamic religions: Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. Within her findings, she claims women have been "relegated to a marginal position" by men due to multiple reasons specifically the exclusion from roles in many religions. For example, women cannot lead prayers within Islam. Similarly, she claims the portrayal of women in religions texts as 'lesser than' men further contributes to the portrayal of gender inequality within religious institutions.

However, Armstrong may be criticized by writers such as Wright who claim that in religions texts many women have been portrayed in revered positions such as Mary, mother of Jesus, is highly regarded in Christianity and Khadija (RA) is regarded with respect in Islam. Similarly, she gives the example of reform Judaism within which women are now allowed to be Rabbis, to highlight the manner in Which women are taking leadership roles in traditional religions.

This view may however, be rebutted by Anthony Giddens who supports Karen Armstrong's view in his writings on religion. He claims that the Christian religion is a 'resolutely male affair' due to its symbolic hierarchy. He states That while Mary, mother of Jesus is respected she is not as highly revered as men in the religion. He further claims that the portrayal of God as a father, a male figure and Jesus as a man, not simply portraying women as a creation from a 'man's rib' results in the subordination of women and creation of a male dominated hierarchy.

Moreover, the propositions argument was further strengthened by writers such as Simon de Beavoir in her book, "The second sex". She pioneers the radical Feminist approach to religion using a comparative analysis between religious relationship to women and religious relationships to the oppressed. She highlights the idea that men use religion to oppress women while simultaneously using it as a means of compensating women For their " Second-class status. She notes that men have historically exercised control over religious beliefs. They use what she terms as religious 'code' (text) to support male dominance.

As quoted From her book, "For the Jews, Mohammedans and Christians, and many others man is master by divine right." Hence, she claims religion acts not as an instrument or constraint but an instrument of deception. Whereby women are deceived into thinking that their second class status is due to religious predetermined roles not male wrapping of ideas for

example men may portray women as mothers who are connected to divinity through the production of a "soul for god", thus subjecting them to the all the child care it is bestowed to them religiously. She further claims that the idea of heaven as a sanctuary where the religious restrictions placed on women will be removed pacifies women into cutting subservient and enduring religious control by me.

On the contrary, de Beauvoir's view may be countered by examining Nawaal El Saadawi's theory "The Hidden Face of Eve". She claims that while de Beauvoir advocates for the inherent patriarchy within religion, the truth is that it is not religion which is patriarchal, it is culture. She discussed female oppression in the Arab world El- Scadawi describes her personal experiences with female circumcision and patriarchal dominance of Arab men over Arab women. She notes that while such practices have been contrary to Islam, they, in fact act and arised from the cultural perspectives of men preaching the religion. Hence, she concludes A religion doesn't promote gender inequality instead the influence of culture on religion promotes male dominance

Furthermore, Mary Da ly believes that the religious oppression of women was due to a planetary sexual caste system. Strongly influenced by De Beauvoir , she claims that through a multitude of mechanisms, the 'caste system' , of religion is maintained. She first cites sex role segregation as a means of subjugation for women whereby men play the roles of leader in religious contexts such as the pope while women serve them. Similarly, she claims the existence of a 'derivative status', whereby women receive their status not from their position in society but that l of their husbands - further creating a view that women are subordinate to men. She claims that patriarchal religious ideology helps justify this subordination.

Daly argues that religions such as Christianity often proclaim that subordination of Women as God's will. Similarly , men portray God as a man and Father women alienating women in to a position of inferiority Lastly a religion encourages a detachment from the reality of humans struggle against oppression which is redemption of one's position comes through passive means such as prayer not through active attempts to abolish the exploitation. Thuss, women are discouraged from opposing oppressive systems allowing for the contentions of the patriarchy.

However, Daly States that religion may also be used as a tool for liberation She claims that a sense of feminist Spirituality should be established to combat religious inequality. She believes that through a "revolutionary overthrow of male dominated gods, women can struggle towards self transcendence" so that religious insight may be wholly feminine.

In addition, liberal writers such as Jean Itolm reviewed some ways in which women are subordinated or exploited in contemporary religion . She states that while classical teachings of religion may have stressed equality between sexes, in practices men and women have been far from equal. She cites the example of Japanese folk religions whereby women are responsible for organizing public rituals only men may take part in the public performances. Similarly, in Chinese popular religion women are associated with Yin Spirits and men with Yang however Yang spirits are more important and powerful.

Lastly, she sites that while in Buddhism both men and women can have religious roles as monks and nuns, however monks are senior to all nuns. She claims women's second class status is often released to to female sexuality whereby " mensuration and childhood, are both regarded as polluting". She cites the examples of many traditions where women are forbidden from entering sacred places or touching sacred objects. In islam for example women are not allowed to tpu h the quran whilst they are mensurating in Hinduism may not approach shrines when pregnant or menstruating. She is us sites how many religions are often patriarchal in nature.

However, she is criticized by multiple writers such as Rita Gross who Detect signs of opposed patriarchal Buddhism whereby nuns and monks are equally revered. Kan Waljit Kaur Singh

point out the works of Sikh gurus in the case of emancipation of women in India. Thus her view is combatted via examination of modern trends in religion.

Additionally, the proposition case is further enhanced via the examination of fundamentalist evangelical religion by writer such as Rachel Ronaldo (2010). Ronaldo argues towards the shift to religious piety movements around the world at the end of the 20th century. All these movements had tendency to support theological conservatism, with an emphasis on strict observance of religious devotion acknowledges that. She acknowledges that movements tend to reproduce patriarchal relationships by legislating male domination in a household. For example, she says pentecostals espousing an idea of male domination.

Thus religious piety movements propagate men as leaders of the household further contributing to inequality in religion.

However, Ronaldo criticized her own view by citing examples of religious movements which empower rather than oppress women such as the example of Shia women in Beirut who used Islamic faith to emphasize the importance of education for women. She further is supported

by Sudy whereby Evangelical Christianity among Taiwanese Immigrants in the US help create a new society with women feeling empowered.

In conclusion, the proposition debate while subject to criticism establishes the many mechanisms within religion which may be used to propagate inequality.

On the other end of the spectrum, the opposition that religion is not inherently patriarchal sighting example of feminist religions which promote equality not subordination.

The opposition that Christ P Christ in her book do 'rebirth of the goddess': finding meaning in feminist spirituality while she argues that many traditional religions are patriarchal due to what she terms as ethos of objectivity knowledge is always in reference by the values of those who create she proposes an alternative to the male dominated legends via embodied thinking a version of knowledge formulated via empathy of others she use that using knowledge theology (study of religions) maybe replaced by theology. The words etymology being then meaning goddess and logos meaning "meaning" she believes theology may move past dualism and instead embody nature and love. She states that such religions are not a new phenomenon but have been seen throughout history. She highlights Goddess Malia who existed into 25,000 BCE. Thus, not all religions are dropping off patriarchal ideology.

However, she has been criticised by many failing to outline how this new "goddess religion" works.

Furthermore, the opposition case is further by writer such as Linda Woodhead who discussed the involvement of New age writers in propagating equality in religion she believes that one's sense of self is largely derived from one's position in society. She believes a woman due to their isolation from the public sphere often lack holistically developed independent sense of self. Defamation of new age religion such as Reiki and Wicca gain self-esteem and self-confidence thus allowing for them to and identity away from the realm of their male partners. For example, women in New Age Religions such as Wicca often have more self-confidence as such movements do not have a permanent head and self interpretation allowing women to envision religion, freeing them from the clutches of inequality.

However, has been criticized by many writers, including William E Baden who claims that there is a lack of evidence to prove women's affinity to religions it is not a concrete theory

Moreover the opposition further highlights traditional religions use as a means of liberation for women.

Sociologist Leila Badaui highlights the opportunities for women provided by many traditional religions. She particularly use Islam as an example for her theory. She states that in Islam woman are allowed to keep their family name when they get married and are in fact discouraged from taking their husbands name, this accompanied by abolition of dowry in Islam resulted in marriage no longer being seen as transactional and no longer being viewed as property. Thus she claims that Islamic rulings, battered women's standing in the world rather than propagating in equality where in fact the baselines which perpetuated equality.

On the contrary she has been criticised by writer such as Mc Garth who state she is as many parts which in fact propagates women as second class citizens. Sites women's testimonies being equal to half of a man in law cases as an example of such inequality.

However, she may be rebutted by Muhammad 2005 Islamic woman in Egypt. He argued that in any Egyptian society there was little opportunity for women. What little rise they were given all the prescribed within Islam thus proving religion may in fact promote equality.

Additionally, the opposition is Friday supported by Helen Watson in her 1996 study of Islam in the Veil she argues that veil of Islamic women may be beneficial to muslim women. As western culture attempts to influence Islamic countries the veil acts as a source of pride for Islamic women. She cites Nadia, a second generation British - Asian woman who began to wear the veil at 16 as she wanted to let others know she was proud of her religion. Nadia felt the veil symbolized (her words were more important than her looks) and also acted as a way to words lecherous stares from men. Thus, the veiling of women in Islam. May in fact not be an oppressive signal but a sign of pride in ones culture and religion.

However, Watson has been criticized by many radical feminists for ignore conversions of many women in places such as Iran. In 2019 over a dozen women in Iran were murdered for not observing the veil proving it may be used in a negative light to promote control by men.

Lastly, the opposition is supported by Alridge who found increasing equality in new age religious movements. He gives the example of Quakers and Unitwia as two. New age movements committed to gender equality. He claims that due to them originating in a time. When women are not viewed as second-class citizens. It uses the example of Unitarian ministry one third of which I female as an example of this equality. To further explain this theory Brierlys study of the salvation army maybe use within which 60% of ministers were women

Thus providing NRMs promote gender equality. To further strengthen the opposition's case contemporary examples of women leadership in religion maybe used as outlined in "swattos" book the feminization of religion.

He cites examples of Libby Lane as Bishop of Stockports the appointment of the little saint lost. Theresa of Kolkatta and the provision of the right to become a colytes Catholic girls as signs that I religion is allowing women to become more involved in religious practices reducing inequality and religion.

However, this view may be lambasted by recent protests to the appointment of a female imam in California proving that while some change may have occurred many spheres still lack the equality required for substantial change.

In a nutshell that argument comprises two vastly different ideologies, some arguing women have been unjustly suppressed while others argue equality has been achieved. Fang Long shih 2010 believes a middle ground is a more accurate representation of the case whereby while some equality has been achieved there is a lack of globalization of such practices which promotes such equality trully determine whether religion is a proponent of inequality or not.