

RELIGION AS AN AGENCY OF PATRIARCHY - WOMEN & RELIGIOUS RIGHTS

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Received: 23 Sep 2018

Accepted: 15 Nov 2018

Published: 29 Nov 2018

ABSTRACT

In this paper it is intended to express, articulate and analyze the Impact of religion on women's rights and its implications on society.

Women are always considered as the harbinger of Religion and its practices. However, it has always been a barrier to women's rights and has imposed illogical norms and barriers concerning her life thus depriving her of her basic right to live with dignity. All religions, be it Judaism, Jainism, Christianity, Islam, Confucian views or Hinduism all have demeaned women beyond the religious purview and have provided a lower status due to her reproductive cycle. This natural phenomenon has been viewed as something unnatural and impure despite the fact that it plays a vital role in reproduction and has kept out of all religious activities. Patriarchy has garnered such beliefs and has made women ignorant about their rights thereby making them submissive and unquestioning. This has made women weak and confused, thus preventing them to question the said norms. If this is the condition of the upper caste educated women, then one can imagine the status of Dalit women and downtrodden section. They are doubly exploited – one due to the social stratification and other due to the position they hold in their own community. Apart from these due to the religious identities and its practices, customs and thinking, women's role in social activities have also been considered negligible as also responsible for her oppressive condition. This article, which is a part of the doctoral thesis has been able to capture some key factors concerning religion and women's rights. Women's organizations of different political parties (Congress, BJP, CIP (M)) and civil society groups with varied ideologies were taken up for study and the results analyzed using SPSS software. Chi Square test, Anova tests were conducted to verify the results and accordingly the tables, charts and pie-diagrams are interpreted.

KEYWORDS: *Confucian, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Patriarchy, Reproductive Cycle*

INTRODUCTION

Objective of the Study

- To find out the influence of religion on women's rights
- To study the influence of religion and customs and their impact on society

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted on women's organizations with different ideological perspective to identify whether religion and women's oppression are linked to each other or not.

Interviews were conducted for both women's organizations of political parties and civil society groups

To the question on women's oppression, one major factor that was identified was 'Religion and Customs' and the respondents were asked to mark their opinion on the Likert scale measuring 1-5, After measuring this, it was also marked to understand whether these beliefs had changed or not and if no, what is its impact on the society.

“Religion and Customs” are responsible for women's oppression

Table 1

	F	%	Whether the Belief has Changed or Not			Impact on Society		F	%					
S.D	8	7.0	Yes	26	22.6	Women are the torch bearers of religion and customs and due to this the family can live in peace	31	27.0						
D	33	28.7												
N	2	1.7												
A	51	44.3							No	78	67.8	Modern women follow religion, traditions and customs and at the same time participate in social activities	22	19.1
SA	17	14.8												
N.R	4	3.5												
Total	115	100	N.R	3	9.6	Superstitious religious beliefs and customs are responsible for women's oppression	59	51.3						
			Total	115	100	No Response	3	2.6						
							Total	115	100.0					

TEST OF HYPOTHESIS

H₀: The level of agreement to the belief that *“Religion and Customs” are responsible for women's oppression* by the respondents is independent (no relationship) of the types of ideology. If there is **no** relationship between the belief that *“Religion and Customs are responsible for women's oppression and the types of ideology*

H₁: The level of agreement to the belief that *“Religion and Customs” are responsible for women's oppression* by the respondents *is not independent* (relationship) on the types of ideology. Is there any relationship between the respondents belief that Religion and Customs are responsible for women's oppression and the different types of ideology

Table 2: Cross Tabulation of Affiliation to Political Party and Level of Agreement to Religion and Customs are Responsible for Women's Oppression

	Religious and customs					Total
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	
Right Ideology	0 .0%	14 82.4%	1 5.9%	2 11.8%	0 .0%	17 100.0%
Left Ideology	3 11.5%	4 15.4%	1 3.8%	6 23.1%	12 46.2%	26 100.0%
Liberal	0 .0%	12 40.0%	0 .0%	15 50.0%	3 10.0%	30 100.0%
Feminism	5 11.9%	3 7.1%	4 9.5%	28 66.7%	2 4.8%	42 100.0%
Total	8 7.0%	33 28.7%	6 5.2%	51 44.3%	17 14.8%	115 100.0%

Pearson Chi-Square Value = 70.291, Asymptotic significance (p-value) = 0.000* [Significance at 5 % level]

From the above chi-square test result, it is observed that chi-square value obtained is 70.291 with a p-value of 0.000. As the p-value is less than the significance, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis. In other words, we can conclude statistically that there is a relationship or an association between the type of ideology and the perception of acceptance to *the above mentioned belief*. This is evident from the percentage of respondents agreeing to the above statement has increased from 11.8 % (Right ideologists) to 23.1 % with respect to left *Ideologists* and then increase to 66.7 percent with respect to feminists to *Religion and Customs are responsible for women’s oppression*

Table 3: Whether the Belief “Religion and Customs” are Responsible for Women’s Oppression has Changed Perception from Liberal and Feminists’ Ideology Based Organization

Type of ideology	Yes	No	Total
Liberal	6 (20.1)	24 (80.0)	30 (100.0)
Feminism	19 (45.2)	23 (54.8)	42 (100.0)
Right ideology	2 (11.7)	15 (88.3)	17 (100.0)
Left Ideology	2 (7.7)	24 (92.3)	26 (100.0)

Note: Percentages are in parenthesis

Now, the proportion of Liberals saying “No” is 80.0%, Feminist is 54.8%, *Rightists* is 88.3%, *Leftists* is 92.3%.

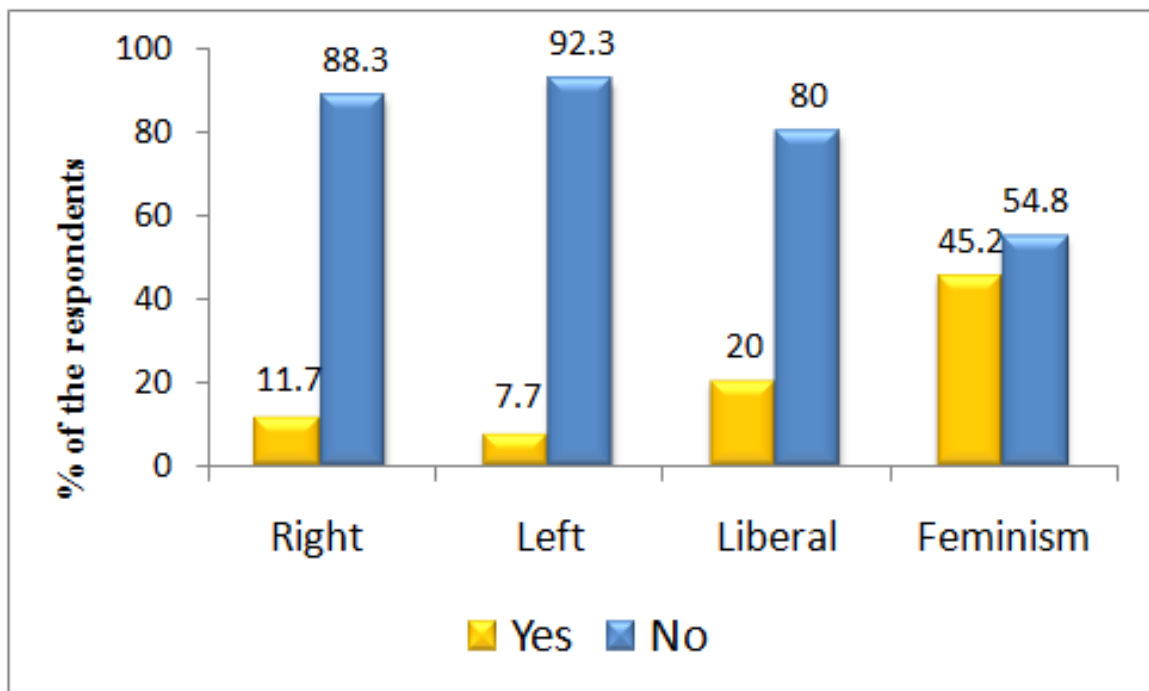


Figure 1

Now, the hypothesis is

H₀: Proportion of liberals saying “No” does not significantly differ from the proportion of feminists say “No” to the belief that *belief has not changed*.

H₁: Proportion of **liberals** saying “No” is significantly less than the proportion of **feminists** say “No” to the belief that *belief has not changed*.

H₂: Proportion of **liberals** saying “No” is significantly greater than the proportion of **feminists** say “No” to the belief that *belief has not changed*.

Two Sample test of Proportion:

Table 4: Two Sample Test of Proportion Result- Liberals Vs Feminists to Religion and Customs Belief

Variable	Mean	Std. Err.	z	P> z	[95% Conf. Interval]
x	.8	.0730297			.6568645 .9431355
y	.548	.0767953			.3974839 .6985161
diff	.252	.1059757			.0442914 .4597086
	under Ho:	.1137895	2.21	0.027	

Two-sample test of proportions x: Number of obs = 30
y: Number of obs = 42

diff = prop(x) - prop(y) z = 2.2146
Ho: diff = 0

Ha: diff < 0 Ha: diff != 0 Ha: diff > 0
Pr(Z < z) = 0.9866 Pr(|Z| < |z|) = 0.0268 Pr(Z > z) = 0.0134

Interpretation

From the above two sample test of proportion result (Table), it emerges the p-value (0.0134) for the [encircled in blue colour] is less than the significance level of 0.05; we accept the hypothesis H₂ that the proportion of **liberals** saying “No” is significantly greater than the proportion of **feminists** say “No” to the belief that *belief has not changed*. In essence, it has emerged that a higher percentage of **Liberal**s are concluding the *Religion and Customs* has not yet changed as compared to the respondents from **feminists**’ ideology.

(b) Between Right and Left ideological organization:

Now, the hypothesis is

H₀: Proportion of **Right ideologists** saying “No” does not significantly differ from the proportion of **Left ideologists** say “No” to the belief that *belief has not changed*. (i.e, the difference in the proportion of **Right** and **Left** ideologist group saying “no” is zero)

Alternative

H₁: Proportion of **Right ideologists** saying “No” is significantly less than the proportion of **Left ideologists** say “No” to the belief that *belief has not changed*. (i.e, the difference in the proportion of **Right** and **Left** ideologist group saying “no” is less than zero)

H₂: Proportion of **Right ideologists** saying “No” is significantly greater than the proportion of **Left ideologists** say “No” to the belief that *belief has not changed*. (i.e, the difference in the proportion of *Right* and *Left* ideologist group saying “no” is greater than zero)

Table 5: Two Sample Test of Proportion Result –Right and Left Ideologists Group to Religion and Customs Belief

Two-sample test of proportions					
				x: Number of obs =	17
				y: Number of obs =	26
Variable	Mean	Std. Err.	z	P> z	[95% Conf. Interval]
x	.883	.0779559			.7302093 1.035791
y	.923	.0522829			.8205274 1.025473
diff	-.04	.0938649			-.2239718 .1439718
	under Ho:	.0905061	-0.44	0.659	
diff = prop(x) - prop(y)					z = -0.4420
Ho: diff = 0					
Ha: diff < 0		Ha: diff != 0		Ha: diff > 0	
Pr(Z < z) = 0.3293		Pr(Z < z) = 0.6585		Pr(Z > z) = 0.6707	

Interpretation

From the above two sample test of proportion result, it emerges that the p-values of no difference (p-value = 0.6585), difference < 0 (p-value = 0.3293) and difference > 0 (p-value = 0.6707). As the p-values of all the three categories are greater than the significance level of 0.05; we accept the null hypothesis H₀ that the proportion of **Right ideologists** saying “No” is significantly equal to the proportion of **Left Ideologist** say “No” to the belief that *belief has not changed*. In essence, it means that the Right Ideologists agree that Customs and Beliefs are not responsible for women’s oppression while the left agree that ‘*Religion and Customs*’ are ‘*responsible for women’s oppression*’.

The above categorically and emphatically signifies the role played by religion and the views expressed are of different organizations and civil society groups. The organizations that follow liberal, democratic and left ideologies have admitted that religion plays a very vital role in influencing the position of women in society while the organizations that follow traditional view are opposed to this and believe that religion is a part of social structure. Historically speaking, religion was one of the social institutions that united the people but unfortunately gradually all religions and religious texts were written from patriarchal view and women’s point goes missing. All these have preached that women should be subordinate to men and are required to follow the social norms. Today, women continue to be in the clutches of religion. Be it worship or her identity, she still needs to get social consent. She is banned from entering into temples, her dress matters, her sanctity becomes more important than her and the rituals have kept her in dark away from thinking liberally. All these issues haunt us even to this day. However, what needs to be done is to empower women.

Women's Empowerment & Religion

At a time when women empowerment has become the buzz word, it is pertinent to analyze women's position that has to be viewed, understood and acted as it is essential to recognize both men and women as equal partners in social development. In this quest for search we find that women are always in history considered as "inferior" both in physical as well as intellectual capabilities. They are nurtured to abide by religion and its practices even though they deny their fundamental rights as enshrined in the constitution. Patriarchy, capitalism and consumerism have conveniently failed to recognize that women are no inferior or lesser in their intellect or capabilities and still believe that it is women who are the fore bearers of religious beliefs in the society. The do's and don'ts imposed on them in the name of culture, customs and traditions even to this day are surely not only detrimental to her development but the very concept of empowerment. Women too need a scientific outlook here while practicing such traditions because during the menstrual cycle they are prohibited from household work and are made to rest in a designated place. In the remote villages this practice is much more rigid. With no proper hygiene and other facilities this will have a bearing on women's health. They are kept away from the normal functioning outside the periphery on these days and are required to stay aloof from the social day to day works. Despite the scientific developments such customs continue to dominate our society. There are such practices in all religions and they surely have become detrimental to the progress of women.

CONCLUSIONS

Thus, Religion, Patriarchy and Capitalism have defied all social structures and women have been subjected to follow harsh norms. Hence women themselves have to break the chains and fight for their rights. As Rabindranath Tagore has rightly pointed out "For we women are not only the deities of the household fire, but the flame of the soul itself." Women need to stand up for themselves, for their rights.

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