



Role of Religion & Patriarchy

This article is based on [“Challenging patriarchy in religion”](#) which was published in The Hindustan Times on 25/06/2021. It talks about the role of religion in furtherance of Patriarchy.

At Durga temple Madurai, a woman staked her claim to be the full-time pujari (priest-a hereditary position at that temple) in 2006. Agreeing with her claim, the Madras high court has recently ruled that “the altars of the God must be free from gender bias.”

After the [Sabarimala judgment](#), this judgment can be seen as a positive step towards the furtherance of gender equality.

In many religions all across the world, patriarchal notions have seeped into religion which prohibit women into some religious activities. For example, prohibitions on women were based during their menstruation.

Therefore, in order to ensure opportunities for women to participate in every sphere of life, whether spiritual or material, the link between religion and patriarchy needs to be thoroughly discussed.

Linkage Between Religion & Patriarchy

There are several ways in which religion can promote patriarchy:

- **Through Religious Scripture/Teachings:** In many religious teachings across a wide range of religions, women are given the role of nurturing, caring and giving birth.
 - While these roles are presented positively and as essential, they reinforce the gender norms in society and the patriarchal power structures.
 - If women choose not to conform to gender stereotypes, they are not only deviating from gender norms and family expectations, but deviating from God’s will too.
 - Men have been dominant as recipients, interpreters and transmitters of divine messages, while women have largely remained passive receivers of teachings and ardent practitioners of religious rituals.
- **Through Religious Practices:** In many religions both menstruation and pregnancy are treated as impure or ungodly.
 - For example, in Islam women who are menstruating are not allowed to touch the Koran. Similarly, in Hinduism, menstruating women are not allowed to enter temples.
 - The practice of Sati, or self-immolation by widows on the funeral-pyres of their husbands, thrived for centuries because it was rooted in the belief of the futility of a woman’s existence without her husband.
- **Through the Structure of Religious Organisations:** Although some religious organisations do have women in senior positions, they are certainly the exception rather than the rule.
 - This exclusion of women from the priesthood or leader of a religious group exemplified women’s marginalisation in religious and social life.

- **Through Monotheistic Religions:** The development of monotheistic religions, with their all-powerful male Gods (such as Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Sikhism) which imbued religion with a patriarchal and sexist core.

Patriarchy & Religion and Its Impact on Women

- **Acting as Cause & Effect:** If patriarchy is the social normal, it is largely because it derives its legitimacy from religion, the most important rule book pertaining to societal do's-and-don'ts in any community.
- **Women as Inferior Being:** Due to patriarchal notions in religion, women are painted as physically, mentally, emotionally and sexually inferior to men.
- **Impacting Men As It Hurts Women:** Patriarchy penetrates into every single sphere of a person's life, and it hurts men as much as it impacts women.
- **Politics & Religion:** Politics uses religion as a tool to manipulate the masses, women bear the brunt of the consequences of cultural attitudes.

Way Forward

- **Demystifying True Essence of Religion:** Many religions in the world don't explicitly suppress the role of women in religion. Thus, there is a need to unravel the true essence of religion.
 - For example, the Rig-Veda expounded the idea of feminine energy behind the creation of the universe.
- **Implementing Uniform Civil Code:** Article 44 of the Constitution lays down that the state shall endeavour to secure a [Uniform Civil Code \(UCC\)](#) for the citizens throughout the territory of India.
 - Implementing UCC will be a step in the right direction in extending the narrative of gender equality.
- **Codification of Personal Laws:** Need of the hour is the codification of all personal laws so that prejudices and stereotypes in every one of them would come to light and can be tested on the anvil of fundamental rights of the Constitution.

Conclusion

The Durga temple example is not just a social engineering experiment, there are also good religious grounds for opening all ritual functions to women.

Drishti Mains Question

Women must be given opportunities to participate in every sphere of life, whether spiritual or material. Discuss.