

The Space of Women Sanctioned by Religions

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Introduction

When we go to consider the question as to what space is allowed by different religions of the world to women, the reply may be made in negative terms only. Many scholars term religious thinkers as spiritual thinkers, and that these thinkers allow little space to women is an accepted fact. An Assamese scholar Satyendranath Sarmah therefore observes, "It has been the custom with the spiritual thinkers of all times to condemn women." (Sarmah 65) Sarmah also has used the word 'spiritual' in the sense 'religious'. It means that religious preceptors and scriptures find it difficult to allow space to women. Thus Engels rightly observes, "Religious independence of mind is an awkward matter for women." (Marx-Engels 56) This statement may be proved in many ways. Let us refer to a statement made by a Pakistani woman activist Asma Jahangir, "Religion has always been used to suppress the rights of women and morality comes in handy when women have to be oppressed." (Quoted, Ramachandran, *The North East Times*, 5) Under these circumstances Bangladeshi writer Taslima Nasrin has been compelled to observe, "The Quran is superfluous, I think Quran is wrong in many points." (Quoted, *Dainik Janambhumi*, 27 Feb., 2000) She again says that all religions are against women. She said this in a lecture delivered in a Kerala Literary Festival. (Vide, Amar Asom, Feb. 8, 2016)

Considering these facts Aparna Mahanta is not wrong when she says, "All institutionalized religions are creations of men, where women play only subordinate or submissive role." (An Unpublished Research Paper read in a Seminar in DKD College, Dergaon on 27th Sept., 2001) She again says, "In fact, all religions teach that woman is created for man and hence she should sacrifice her likes and dislikes, hopes and aspirations to satisfy the male members of the family." (Ibid.) She continues, "This psyche built up by religion, still remains so strong that even at the dawn of the twenty-first century of science and technology, men in general, are not mentally prepared to accept women's equality, and women in general, are not prepared to revolt against this irrational tradition." (Ibid.)

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It is to be admitted by all that the rising forces of religious fundamentalism have relegated the issue of women's empowerment to the background.

Hinduism

A religious book named *Ghunuca Kirttana* written by Shridhara Kandali (included in Sankaradeva's *Kirttana*) says, "Samaste Kahaya ramanira gati swamira pada arcana" (102) meaning 'All people say that the final refuge of all women is the feet of their husbands and, therefore, they should adore their feet'. Similarly the *Kirttana* also says, "Swamira shushrusha kulastrira mahadharma" i.e. the care of and attention to the husband is the principal duty of the women of the clan. (*Kirttana*, Rasakrida, 17) Again in the *Harischandra Upakhyana*, a *Kavya* written by Sankaradeva, it is said,

"Strijati bhaile tara swami jive prana
Swamiye devata yata tapa japa dhyana.
Hena swami marile yi jani namaraya
Bajrato adhika dekho taira hridaya."
(Chutia 831)

It means: The soul of a woman is her husband. The husband is her god, her object of penance and meditation. If a woman does not die when her husband dies her heart is harder than even diamond. There are thus many other verses in Hindu scriptures to the effect that the husband is all in all for a woman. Sankaradeva, has downgraded women to the lowest category of man, as he says in the *Kirttana*,

"Stri shudre kare yadi amaka bhakati
Tahata Kariba ito jnana mahamati."

Here amaka means Lord Krishna. In this verse women are placed at the level of the Shudra tribe. The purport of the verse is that women and Shudras become great when they worship God; others are so without doing it.

The *Kirttana* again says,

"Swamirese seva kulastrira mahadharma
Purushaka pushiba kariba grihakarma." (824)

Meaning: 'Women have no other work except entertaining their husbands and doing household works.' It is said that a husband is to be worshipped even if he is uneducated and characterless. Let me mention some verses from the *Brahmavaivarta Purana* to this effect,

"E jagate ramanira pati matra sara
Patibina tahadera gati nahi aara.
Ramanira patiseba ekamatra brata
Narira patira dhyana kare abirata.
Pati guru tahadera tapodharmmamaya
Pati istadeba haya sakala samaya.
Pati bhinna anya kare nahi bhabe sati

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Pati chara tahadera naahi anya gati.

Swami seba shreshtha dharmma ramanira kache

Pati sama shreshtha bandhu aara kebaa aache....." (Majumdar 422)

In this world the husband is the essence of her life. Her life has no meaning without her husband. So she should always offer service to him. She should think all time of her husband. She should not think any other man except her husband. Service to husband is the only religion of a woman. The husband is the best friend of her. All other works on the part of a woman are meaningless. If she rebukes her husband she has to go to the hell after death. The *Manusamhita* says,

"Vishilah kamavritti vaa gunairvaa parivarjitah
Upacaryya striyaa sadhvyaa satatam devavatpatih."

(5/154; Baruah 137)

M. N. Dutt translates this verse in this way, "Like a deity a chaste wife shall always serve her husband, even if he be found devoid of learning, character and conjugal fidelity. (Dutt 207)

Women are not only under their husbands but also their fathers and sons. Thus Ananta Kandali says,

"Cawala kalata bape rakhibe kanyaka
Yuva bhaile swami sange lage banciveka.
Bridhakale bhaile putre poshe yatna kari
Tinio kalata nari nohe swatantari."
(Kandali 34)

This verse is a translation of the third verse of the ninth chapter of the *Manusamhita*. The verse runs thus:

"Pita rakshati kaumare bharta rakshati yaubane
Rakshanti sthavire putra na stri swantryamarhati."
(9/3, Baruah 236)

Tran: "The father protects her in infancy; the husband, in youth; and sons, in old age; a woman does not deserve independence". (Dutt 315)

Thus Dharmashastras, religious law books, like the *Manusamhita*, allow little space to women. It again says,

"Nasti strinam kriya mantrairiti dharma vyavasthiti
Nirindriyaa hyamantrasca striyo'nritamiti sthitih."
(9/18, Baruah 239)

Tran.: "The purificatory rites of women are (i.e., must be performed) without the Vedic Mantras; this is the decision of the law code. And for this disqualification of Mantra-lessness, women are like unto inorganic things. This is the conclusion." (Dutt 317)

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These are some of the references to recent religious literature. Such things are not lacking in the oldest writing pieces like the Rigveda. Kidnapping of women, for example, is not simply a recent phenomenon; it was prevalent in the days of this Veda also. There are descriptions of many kidnapping cases and when a man kidnaps a woman he prays God so that the brothers of the woman might not rise from sleep, the dogs might not bark at the kidnapper etc. A husband could buy a woman by paying heavy amount of money. There was the system of polygamy also. Women prayed God so that they might not be step-wife.

The space of women was much narrowed down during the days of the *Yajurveda*. They did not have any role in yajna affairs. Simply they had to be present along with their husbands. Women had not to undergo any upanayana (initiation) ceremony. A woman was not permitted to offer ghee (refined butter) to homa. During the ceremony of yajna the priest asked publicly the wife of the yajamana (i.e one who employed the priests to offer sacrifices) whether she committed adultery.

During the *Yajurveda* days prostitution was prevalent. One who went to prostitution houses was not to face any punishment or prayascitta i.e. expiation or penance. Women were also barred from obtaining knowledge i.e. learning. They remained ignorant. As they had not to pass through Brahmacharya Ashrama they were not permitted to study the Vedas. Anything a woman had to observe as a religious duty was only to have a husband. It was a strange practice that only the prostitutes could acquire knowledge. Perhaps they did so only to attract learned male persons.

Normal women had to flee away when they saw their fathers-in-law as though the ghosts fled when the sun rose. (*Atharveveda*) In this way daughters-in-law had no place in the house-hold. Their personality had no value. Their space was only in the innermost apartments (anteshpura). They were not allowed to attend any meeting. (*Maitrayani Samhita*) Thus they had no social role.

A married woman could not have any extra marital affair with anybody. If she had such an affair then she was to be killed. (Vide the fourth Brahmana, *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*)

Women were so impure that the priests and others did not look at them. They were of the position of a dog or a Shudra, because the priests should not look at these two species also. (*Shatapatha Brahmana*, 3/2/4/6) The *Aitareya Brahmana* regards a girl child as a curse. (6/3/7/13) Even if a woman possesses all the virtues she is below the standard of a man. (*Taittiriya Samhita*, 6/5/8/2) When a man kills a woman his punishment is something like that was perpetrated to either a dog or mongoose. (*Apastamba Dharmasutra*, 1/9/23)

In this way in both old or contemporary scriptures women have not been able to occupy a legitimate space. Under what circumstances a woman is to be abandoned by her husband is described in many such scriptures. A woman who cannot give birth to a child is to be abandoned after the tenth year of her marriage; a woman who cannot give birth to a male

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child is to be abandoned after the twelfth year; a woman who gives birth to only dead children should be abandoned after the fifteenth year and the quarrelsome woman should be abandoned forthwith. (*Apastamba Dharmasutra*, 1/10/51-53)

A woman should not have any right on the wealth of her husband. Even she has no possession on her own body. Therefore the *Satapatha Brahmana* asks us to beat a woman in such a way so that she becomes weak and cannot demand the property of her husband. (4/2/13) That a woman should not possess any property is admitted by the *Maitrayani Samhita* also. It says, "A woman should not possess any property. She should not have any right on either her husband's or father's property." As has been said that a woman has no right on her own body, therefore, if she finds it difficult to offer her body to her husband he should try to assuage her so that she yields to his demand. If the wife does not yield the husband should beat her and forcefully make her yield. (*Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, 6/4/7) Let us see as to what exactly is said by the *Upanishad*, "If she should not grant him his desire, he should bribe her. If she still does not grant him his desire, he should hit her with a stick or with his hand, and overcome her, saying: 'With power, with glory I take away your glory!' Thus she becomes inglorious." (Hume's tran.)

That women are inglorious is admitted by Assamese Vaishnavism also. The *Kathaguru Carita* says, "Women are generally liar. Even when they commit sin they often swear that they have not committed sin." (Lekhuru 221) These sayings speak of her inglorious condition.

The characteristics of a decent woman are determined by the *Aitareya Brahman* as one who satisfies her husband, who gives birth to male babies and who does not argue with her husband. In the marriage incantations of those days it is said "Follow your husband". Even in modern day marriage rules such things are there.

A great deal of difference was maintained between male and female children. A male child when born was kept in bedstead and a female child was placed on the floor.

Sri Chaitanya also does not lag behind allowing little space to women. He mentions three chief Vaishnavas and adds a 'half' one who is a woman. Thus woman is imparted 'half' of the man. But a man is a whole person, not half. (Bezbaroa 541)

We know that the Hindu society is caste divided. But the division of caste belongs to man only, not to woman. She does not actually acquire a caste. She does not have a Gotra (loosely 'gentile'); her Gotra is either of her father's or of her husband's. This system has given her the status of a non-person. She cannot have an independent resource for her personal development. The caste system has negated the individuality and independence of women.

All forms of Hindu literature impart women a secondary status beginning from the Vedas up to our Sankaradeva's. Sankaradeva seems to follow the *Bhagavata* maxim that "Stri Sudra jati adhama candala". It seems that in these forms of literature there is no respect

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for women. Not to speak of surpassing male persons women have not been able to equal themselves with men. This is a case in all spheres of life. They have been deprived of being in the fore front in all human affairs. The Hindu scriptures have failed to represent mankind in totality.

In Hindu society the child marriage is still prevalent and this system is in vogue due to the influence of religion. The so called scientific books like the *Arthashastra* also do not lag behind in denouncing women. It says that a woman is nothing but a skin-bag of producing children. (7/60/32) The *Manusamhita* says that a child belongs to the father, not to the mother; because it is born out of the semen of the father.

In the practice of the Hindu religion no woman is permitted to perform any ritual. When a woman performs such a ritual it is regarded as an ill-omen for the men-folk.

There is an image of a goddess quite naked with the exposition of her vagina. The name of the goddess is Lajja Gauri. This goddess seems to symbolize a shameless woman. She is regarded as a nude squatting goddess. She has been sculptured as an image with a female torso, while her legs are bent up at the knees and drawn up to each side in a position that has been described as self-display. (*MLBD News Letter* 1) How such an obscenity is tolerated is not known. Russel, a rational thinker, is not wrong when he says t, “... Obscenity is never tolerated except in temples, where the law permits even ribaldry.” (Russel 196) He says that obscenity in religion must be condemned as satanic bestiality.

Temples record stories full of lewd innuendos. Most of the priests of the temples are lustful and lewd persons. We have such a story in a temple of Guwahati in which a priest tried to molest a girl who went there for offering puja. This story was reported in *Dainik Janasadharan*, an Assamese Daily published from Guwahati in its issue of 18th Aug., 2007. Another priest Katiya Bhuyan of Dani Baba Than near Dergaon killed Ranjit Karmakar of Rongamati on woman affairs. (*Ibid.*) *The Times of India* reported that a tantric was convicted for raping a married woman who went to him for her husband’s treatment. (Delhi/Gurgaon, April 13, 2018) The same news-paper reported another incident of raping and torturing a girl when she came near a temple in search of her horses in Rasana at Kathua where the temple was situated. The eight year old girl was thrown by one of priests to the jungle after confining her for several days. (April 15, 2018)

Inter-caste, inter-community and inter-religious marriages in Hinduism are not admitted and permitted. When IAS topper Tina Dabi, a Hindu girl, wanted to marry second topper Athar Amir-ul-Shafi, a Muslim boy, criticisms arose in Hindu circles. When they were married they had to withstand criticisms. (*The Times of India*, New Delhi/Gurgaon, April 10, 2018.) The epics also do not lag behind in denigrating women. Referring to Ramayana denigration Subrahmanian says, “The denigration of women is an integral part of the Ramayana epic.” (*Epic Musings*, p. 15) We know the plight of Draupadi in the Rajsabha when Duhshasana wanted to make her nude in front of all the members of the House. In the Ramayana Rama

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asks Bharata not to believe women. (Vide Rudra, A., *Brahmanya Bhabadhara O Adhunik Hindu Mon*, p. 95) A prince can kill a woman if she is killed for the good of the four varnas. (Vide, Mukhopadhyaya, H., *Khola Chokhe*, p, 35)

Sikhism

Like Hinduism Sikhism also does not allow widow marriage. There was a report in a news-paper that a Sikh widow had to go to Pakistan to marry a Muslim person of Lahore. Her name was Kiran Bala, 31 years old, from Garhshankar town in Hoshiarpur. The man she married was Muhammad Azam. The Shiromani Gurdwara Management Committee was not satisfied with the incident and complained that India should have not allowed this incident to occur. It blamed Indian intelligence officials for not detecting the incident. After the marriage she took the Muslim name Amna Bibi. Her father-in-law was a former granthi i.e. Sikh priest. His name was Tarem Sing and he appealed to foreign minister Ms. Sushma Swaraj to help him bring Kiran back. Kiran insisted that she was not forced by her present husband to marry him. She did so at her own will. (*The Times of India*, New Delhi/Gurgaon, April 20, 2018)

Christianity

Christianity also has not lagged behind the attempt of denying space to women. When in 1992 the Church of England voted to ordain women as priests many bishops and clergy men opposed it. (Vide the News item ‘Women Priests’ in *The North East Times*, Nov. 13, 1992) Similarly the Vatican also reiterated its refusal to have women serve as deacons. It was argued that the offer of deaconate to women would go a step forward to become a priest, because a deacon is a position just below a priest and the Roman Catholic Church employs only unmarried men as priest. Another argument in favor of not allowing women to be priest was that as Jesus Christ was a man so only men are entitled to be priest. (Vide the News Item ‘Vatican says no to women deacons’ in *The Eastern Clarion*, Jorhat, 28th March, 1999) The priests are not wholly responsible for their denial of women to be priest, because God himself says that Eve, the first woman, will be under her husband Adam for the whole life.

St. Paul says that if women want to learn anything they should ask their husbands. (Vide *New Bible*, Epistles of Paul, I, Corinthians, 35)

There is a glaring instance of how women are exploited in the religious environments. Such a description we find in the famous religious Novel *The da Vinci Code* written by Dan Brown. Let me quote some portion if this description, “She (Sister Sandrine) had been shocked to learn that female numeraries were forced to clean the men’s residence halls for no pay while the men were at mass; women slept on hardwood floors, while the men had straw mats; and women were forced to endure additional requirements of corporal mortification... all as added penance for original sin.” (Brown 46) Again Brown, “The Catholic Inquisition published the book that arguably could be called the most blood-soaked publication

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in human history. Malleus Maleficarum – or The Witches’ Hammer – indoctrinated the world to ‘the dangers of free thinking women’ and instructed the clergy how to locate, torture, and destroy them. Those deemed ‘witches’ by the Church included all female scholars, priestesses, gypsies, nature lovers, herb gatherers and any women ‘suspiciously attuned to the natural world’. Midwives also were killed for their heretical practice of using medical knowledge to ease the pains of childbirth – a suffering, the Church claimed, that was God’s rightful punishment for Eve’s partaking of the Apple of Knowledge, thus giving birth to the idea of Original Sin. During three hundred years of witch hunts, the Church burned at the stake an astonishing five million women.” (Brown 134) These statements need no comments.

The Church has presented the Bible as the creation of God, while in true sense it has been created by man as all other scriptures. The Bible was composed perhaps by a man and, therefore, he has created a man dominated situation for which women have been set aside. Brown again says, “The power of the female and her ability to produce life was once very sacred, but it posed a threat to the rise of the predominantly male Church, and so the sacred feminine was demonized and called unclean. It was *man*, not God, who created the concept of ‘original sin’, whereby Eve tasted of the apple and caused the downfall of the human race. Woman once the sacred giver of life, was now the enemy.” (Brown 258)

Strange things have been written in the *Bible* (Genesis) to the effect that women were born from Adam’s rib, and therefore they are regarded as an offshoot of man. That women are sinful is admitted by the *Bible*.

In the Christian world we generally see the polarization in the issues like abortion, equal rights among men and women etc. Even there are attacks on abortion clinics.

If we observe Christian religious canons we find that they do not allow women to speak in the public. Such repressive attitude causes suffering to the woman folk. Radhakrishnan refers to Young in his *Religion in a Changing World* and quotes some lines from him, “Among the great religions of the world Christianity must be squarely qualified as anti-life. Its repressive attitude in regard to sex causes more suffering to believers and alienates potential converts than all other attitudes put together.” (Radhakrishnan 114)

Most of the Christian priests are unmarried male persons. These priests often engage in sexual harassment on women. There was a report in 2003 in which it was stated 176 priests in the United States of America were discharged from duty for this offence. This news was received from a study undertaken by the News Agency of the Associated Press. (*Alok*, Sept. 8, 2003) Even in India such cases are not wanting. I read in a News Paper a news item in which it was reported that in Kerala Father Edwin F. Joseph raped several times a fourteen year girl. (The news was published from Ernakulam on 18th May) A news was published in the *The North East Times* to the effect that a priest was arrested for rape attempt. The news item was published from Baripada, Odisha which reads, “A Roman Catholic priest attached with the Ghatiduba Roman Catholic Church here was arrested on the charge

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of attempting to rape a tribal woman. The priest, identified as H. Kerketta, was produced before a magistrate who remanded him to jail custody.” (Jan. 11, 2000)

Judaism

Judaism is a religion which is based on the *Old Bible* and see what the old Bible says as regards women. It says, “Thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.” (Genesis, 3/16) See again what the same scripture says, “Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.” (Genesis, 3/16) Here ‘woman’ means Eve and ‘he’ means God. Thus the sufferance has become the badge of all women.

A strange incident was recorded in a News Paper in which it was reported, “It was April last year Doctors at the emergency ward of Genesis Hospital off Calcutta’s E.M.Bypass, received a strange request from parents of a 19-year-old girl who was rushed in for a gall bladder operation. ‘Please don’t give her any blood,’ Daisy Tesra’s parents pleaded, explaining, ‘We are Jehovah’s Witnesses.’” (*The Telegraph* 12) In the same News item it was reported that many parents abandoned their wards for receiving blood. The argument put forward in favor of denying the acceptance of blood is that the Bible speaks against it because accepting blood means eating blood which is considered to be the soul of the flesh. (Book of Genesis 9) It is also said in Verse 10 of Chapter 17 of the Book of Leviticus like this, “As for any man . . . who is residing . . . in your midst, who eats any sort of blood, I shall certainly set my face against the soul that is eating the blood, and I shall indeed cut him off from among his people.”

Islam

In Islamic language a word ‘fatwa’ is often heard and it is mostly applied in the case of women. Fatwa means religious edict. Generally in Bangladesh the divorced women are forced by fatwa to marry her husband’s brother or cousin. Such an incident was published in a News Paper to the effect that a woman Shahida Atikha of Naogaon village in northern Bangladesh was given talaq by her husband Saiful. Then a local maulana Haji Azizul Haq issued an edict for hilla i.e. forced marriage to compel her to marry her husband’s cousin Shahidul. (*The Sentinel*, Jan., 2001) This fact synchronizes with what Uma Ramachandran in *The North East Times* observes, “In Bangladesh, Islam as a religion plays a vital role in determining women’s rights and obligations. The ideology of Islam is used to exert male control and power over women and to perpetuate women are taught to follow and honour the traditional religious values, and violation of religious norms and practices is met with sanctions by the community.” (5) Another case came to light through News Paper in Nigeria to the effect that a teen aged mother was found guilty for pre-marital sex (zina), and for this offence she was flogged 100 times. Her name was Bariya Ibrahim Magazu. (*The North East Times*, Jan 24, 2001) In this way women are disgraced, degraded and devalued in Islam.

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There was a report in a News Paper that famous tennis player Sania Mirza was condemned by the fundamental Muslims for her dress and her partners in the play. Once she was injured and was under treatment of Dr. K. J. Reddy. Reddy received several threatening letters as he was going to treat her. This news was published in *Dainik Janasadharan* in its 24th Dec. Issue (Vol. 5, Issue No. 349, 12).

In a News Paper report I read that a Christian woman was sentenced to death because she had an argument with another woman on religious matters. The name of the woman was Asia Bibi. This happened in Pakistan. The news was published from Islamabad. (*Niyamia Varta*, Sept. 23, 2015) We read another story in a News Paper as regards injustice to women in Islam. The story is told by Jamida Beevi. This woman came to the limelight when she led Friday prayers in a predominantly male dominated congregation in Kerala. It created a controversy. The controversy was so severe that she was not able to step out of her home. She had to take police protection. Death threats were issued to her. There were vilification campaigns against her. She belonged to a group viz. Quran Sunnath Society established by Chekannur Maulavi, who was murdered by religious fanatics. This Society adhered only to the Quran and not subsequent works like the Hadith. Her story goes as follows: "I was forced to marry against my wishes. I wanted a divorce but there was no support from any quarter. I experienced it in my own life, how family, Muslim society and even secular structures like Women's Commission let down Muslim women by citing shariat. I got a divorce after a lot of effort. At college I used to ask questions which my teachers couldn't answer and they turned vindictive." Jamaida followed the ideas of her guru Chekannur whose "main precept was that Quran is Allah's sole bequest to humans and no other book needs to be followed. Quran has capacity to reflect and absorb changes in society over time. Everything else like the Hadiths (records of Prophet's actions and sayings) were written long after Prophet's death. ... He argued that Quran gave equal rights to sons and daughters in inheritance and did not discriminate between men and women. ... Even now they (the clerics) treat women as second class citizens. Left to such preachers, women won't even be taught to read. Because I oppose them I have to pay heavy price. ... No one is willing to engage me in a dialogue. The so called responses are just personal attacks. ... Triple talaq survived so long because politicians feared clerics' disapproval. The Supreme Court judgement said triple talaq violated fundamental rights and was not sanctioned by Quran. On criminalizing it, shouldn't such husbands be jailed? Triple talaq is a criminal act because it creates destitutes. The children of such injustice owe nothing to society, and turn criminals tomorrow. ... We are minority in a minority. If the Hindu Aikya Vedia and BJP had not expressed solidarity with me, I would have been stoned to death. ... The Indian Constitution is fine, but it failed to touch Muslim women. ... Article 15 shuns discrimination on religious/gender grounds. Despite these, the unequal position of Muslim women remains, because Indian state was weak. ... In sports you will notice how no PT Usha or Anju Bobby George came from

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among Muslim women..." (*The Times of India*, March 16, 2018, p. 22)

The 20th March, 2018 issue of *The Times of India* published another news item relating to the objection of a college professor to the way of wearing dress by Muslim girls. The story is from Kozhikode, Kerala in which it was stated that assistant professor Jouhar Munavvir T. of Farook College was alleged to be commenting that Muslim girl students of the institution wore dresses unbecoming of Islam. It means the girls have no independence in wearing dresses they like. At this comment students brought out processions taking water melon pieces in their hands in protest of the saying of the professor to the effect that students exposed "their chest just like 'slices of watermelons on display'." This incident proves that elders are very much conservative as regards girls' wearing style. (P. 17) Reacting to the news Rehana Fathima posed bare-breasted with watermelons. She is "the 31-year-old government employee, mother-of-two, model and activist from Kochi". Her opinion is that "Men and women are held to different standards." She comments, "I don't think anyone just decides to be a revolutionary or a rebel one fine morning. Often, it's their experiences that drive them to be one." This rebel woman was brought up in an orthodox Muslim family and attended a madrasa. She says, "I used to wear the hijab and do namaz five times a day." She narrates her story in this way, "We were just three women in the house and after my father's passing, and just about any man in the neighbourhood wanted to come home. They would come drunk or call after dark. I have lost count of the number of times I made a public ruckus but got no support". These "experiences made her disillusioned with religion". *The Times of India* further reports, "When she posted a photo of herself and her family at a picnic, she was shocked to see abusive comments about her clothing – shorts and a sleeveless t-shirt." About this incident she comments, "My kids and my partner were also in the pic and he was shirtless, but nobody had any issue. There were threats too, and it got me thinking." She is of the opinion that these incidents prove that the freedom of a woman is "chained". She says that the police and other agencies are helpless to curb such incidents. (March 25, 2018, p. 19)

There are bad practices like polygamy, nikah halala, nikah mutah etc. in Islamic societies. "In Nikah Halala, a Muslim woman, who wishes to restore her marriage after divorce, is required to marry someone else and consummate the marriage before divorcing him to remarry her previous husband. Nikah Miutah, which means pleasure marriage, is a temporary marriage contract in which the duration of the marriage and the mahr must be specified and agreed upon in advance. It is a private contract made in a verbal or written format does not confer any right on the woman." (*The Times of India*, March 27, 2018, p. 11) Sooner these practices are abolished the better for Muslim women.

We know that the Shayara Bano case has made history which has led to the banning of triple talaq. Most of the Muslim women are of the opinion that the triple talaq has been rejected on the ground that it is gender-based discrimination.

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In the Middle East women are mostly exploited. The countries of this area are mostly occupied by the Muslim people. The rulers of these countries aver that they follow the Koran in administering their kingdoms. But actually they do not do so.

Humayun Azad, a Bangladeshi writer, wrote a book named *Naari*, in which he related some Koranic verses written against women's independence. The Bangladesh government banned this book. The ban was lifted only after four years in 2000 A.D. One member of the Bangladesh parliament asked the government to arrest Azad. He was attacked by the fundamentalists in 2004.

Zoroastrianism

Daisy Irani, famous actor, fell victim of molestation by her own uncle who was her guardian. She was born a Zoroastrian. She was molested at the early age of six. Commenting upon this incident she said, "I was too young. What can I do? You are in a man's world." (Report, PTI, *The Times of India*, March 24, 2018) Later on she accepted Christianity and became a member of New Life Fellowship Church.

Conclusion

That women were imparted little space in almost all religions may be proved on the basis of the above discussions. This fact is admitted by famous novelist Dan Brown when he says, "Women, once celebrated as an essential half of spiritual enlightenment, had been banished from the temples of the world. There were no female Orthodox rabbis, Catholic priests, nor Islamic clerics. The once hallowed act of Hieros Gamot – the natural sexual union between man and woman through which each became spiritually whole – had been recast as a shameful act." (Brown 134-35) He admits that even feminine associations could not rectify these things due the influence of the Church. He says, "Not even the feminine associations with the *left-hand* side could escape the Church's defamation. In France and Italy, the words for 'left' – *gauche* and *sinistra* – came to have deeply negative overtones, while their right-hand counterparts rang of righteousness, dexterity, and correctness. To this day, radical thought was considered *left* wing, irrational thought was *left* brain, and anything evil, sinister." (Brown 135) In this way religion regards everything human in woman as alien to her and everything inhuman in her as belonging to her. Thus religion makes a woman forget her human essence. It teaches woman to give herself wholly to man and become dead to the world. It annihilates the life and essence of the woman. With the superstitions and deceptions as weapon, religion dupes common man along with women. Common people accept the illusions as taught by religion as real. Women also do so due to their ignorance.

There is nobody to listen to the pathetic moan of the religiously suppressed women. They are to live under constant terror of man. Religion has contributed to the class division of society and the value based division between man and woman. It creates a psychological army to look to the maintenance of this division.

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The foregoing discussions prove that religions are full of superstitions; so they cannot think of improvement on the part of women. But nobody has been able to raise a voice against atrocities committed by religions on defenseless women. All the thirty three crores of god always conspire to crush them into nothingness. The Hindu males have followed the suit and posed as husbands to establish their right to enjoy the person of their wives without regard to the question of safety and security to them. They not only make physical harm to women but also psychological harm. The penis or phallus is always regarded as the symbol of male power and therefore in Shaivism the linga worship is prevalent. All these signify the weakness, futility and docility of women. This often leads to the repression of women's desire. They are often victimized. Such a situation always endangers the life of a woman. So religiously displaced women need to be rehabilitated at any cost. Religious rules promulgated centuries ago cannot be or should not be applied in the modern age, because they are not applicable in today's society. A philosophical approach to them might consider them as false. If we bring religion under a true philosophical analysis we find that it is nothing but the sum of scruples which impede the free exercise of our faculties, especially of women. Women of all religions have a class of obligatory rules endowed with mystical characters, believed to be enforced by so called supernatural sanction provided with a social binding force. These rules speak simply of *acara* i.e. the rule of conduct and in this sense religion consists in *acara*. It is therefore said, "Acaro dharma ucyate".

Now-a-days religion has taken the form of a religious impulse to find evil in everything. This situation goes against religious tolerance. Again while there is religious freedom on the part of the male persons, women do not have such type of freedom. Males are generally regarded as the chosen people. This inveterate prejudice against women might continue to some years to come. We are however hopeful that the good days are coming as because religious cleavages between persons committed to orthodox religious faiths and those who favour modern views are becoming more apparent. I expect modern rational men will break the wall of separation between man and woman.

It is to be remembered that violation of women's right has been difficult to subject to state regulations because of precedence claimed for directives of religion and because of lack of sufficient political power to women. (This time in the Nagaland election – 2018 not a single woman has been elected to the Assembly.)

Most of the intellectuals and religious leaders hold a view that religion should not have a social role. Many celebrated thinkers hold that religion is not at all concerned with social affair. If it is admitted then religion should not interfere with women's affairs. Famous Buddhist monk Dalai Lama even goes to the extent of observing that religion should be separated from Ethics. He says, "In a moral society, we are not paying enough attention to ethics. People consider compassion as a practice of religion. Human affection is part of the life, but religion comes only later. Ethics can survive without religion that can only play a

.....
supplementary role.” (*The North East Times*, April 1, 2000, 6)

Our duty is to criticize those religious maxims which curtail the freedom of women. Marx says, “.... Criticism of religion is the premise of all criticism.” (Marx 39)

Taslina Nasrin observes that all religions are against women. She said this while lecturing in Kerala Sahitya Mahotsav. (*Amar Asom*, Feb. 8, 2016) To stand against anti-woman approach of religion we should always act as sentinel so that atrocities on woman do not happen in the name of religion. “Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty” keeping in mind such maxims we should work together so that the conditions of women would be ameliorated.

Women should not think themselves to be weak and fragile. They may be to some extent biologically weak; but they should not think that mentally also they are weak. A woman should not think herself as a woman; she should think herself as a human being. She should not tend to bend backward. She should look to moving forward. She should not impose on her self-censorship.

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