Chapter 8

Case Studies

Case studies provide qualitative data for enhancing our understanding of the problem. Respondents for case-studies were purposively selector from individuals who are knowledgeable and hold positions of authority.

Case study technique was attempted with six women from different backgrounds. One was principal of a college who also delivers religious lectures, second was a woman priest, third was an educationist, fourth was M.sc. electronics, who worked for a while in a college as lecturer but soon began delivering religious lectures (pravachanas) full time and is well-known in her field and the fifth was a head of religious organization, i.e. Women priest’s organization. sixth was a well known woman activist in Pune.

A professor and principal of a college, M. A. with Marathi, she is a Brahimin, her age is 59 and she and her family are very religious. Her parental family is also very religious she is a member of a well-known religious organization in Pune.

When the present researcher interviewed her she said that she has deep faith in God, and all major concepts in Hinduism. She performs all daily religious activities. She and her family members like to celebrate festivals. She observes vratas like ‘Vatapournima’ and if time permits she goes to the ‘vata’ (Banyan) tree for worship. As far as delivering religious
lectures are concerned she said that women should do it because they are eligible for it but in case of purohitya they should not do it during menstrual periods.

As regards ethics she said that ethics is important for both man and woman. She stated that unmarried women should be allowed to have babies through artificial insemination or she could adopt a child.

According to her, Hinduism has never discriminated against anybody in society. Not understanding the true nature of religion creates problems in society. Religion is not the opium of masses', she said, and it never misguides people. She did not support 33 percent reservation for women in polities. As far as feminism is concerned she said that she did not have clear-cut ideas about it. In her home status of women is good, she stated.

A second case study was done of a woman priest. She is B. A. with Sanskrit, aged 45, belonging to the Brahmin caste and has been working as ‘priest’ for the last twenty years and running her own institution of women priests. At present there are over a hundred members in her institution.

In her conversation with us she said that she has deep faith in God. Her parental family is very religious. She has faith in all major concepts of Hinduism.

She stated that government should encourage religion and religious institutions along with science. For example, she said that when we recite mantras in ‘Rudra’ our lungs get exercise. So we should know the scientific reasons behind religious acts and that should be encouraged by govt.

She performs daily rituals and celebrates all festivals. As regards vratas she performs vratas like Vatapournima and Hartalika.
She further stated that for girls also Upanayana should be performed because
Upanayana is a samskara of education and it is a major samskara. She felt that unmarried
women should not be allowed to have a child through artificial insemination but they could
adopt a child.

As regards Hinduism, she said, Hinduism is not male dominated nor it is the opium of
masses neither it is fatalistic.

As regards modelling, ‘I will not allow my daughter to go in for modelling’ she said.
When we asked her about feminism she said that some feminists are extremists. In reality,
man and woman both of them need one another. Now a days, power is in woman’s hand so
there is no need for women’s lib.

A third case study was attempted with a well-known educationist, a Brahmin, aged 95
years. Like Tarabai Modak and Anutai Wagh, under the influence of national movement, she
used her education as an instrument for social work.

She was born in Mahad (Konkan). Her father was a teacher, so in her family the
atmosphere of education was there. According to the customs prevailing at that time, her
father arranged her marriage when she was twelve years of age. But she was not ready to
marry. Her elder sister’s husband was in favour of girls education. He supported her wish to
be educated and her marriage was postponed.

She took her education in Hingane Women’s Educational institutions. In school, she
participated in sports like badminton, kho-kho, kabaddi, Drill and Lathi-kathi games.

At that time she attended and participated in lectures by national and social leaders
even at night. When she used to go by cycle.
In her childhood she stayed in Kolhapur with her aunt. When she was playing with maid servant’s daughter, one servant raped that girl. When she saw that she developed a strict distrust of men. Looking at quarrels between husband and wife, women’s hardships and severe sufferings, she disliked the idea of a ‘husband’. She firmly decided that she will never tolerate coercion by men. For this she decided that she will take education, become economically independent and live her life in her own way. Due to the influence of Maharshi Karve, she decided that her goal in life would be the spread of education among women.

When she completed her education her mother insisted that she should marry. To stop the comments of the people and misunderstanding that because of education girls do not wish to get married, she decided that she will marry. She was influenced by Gandhiji’s concept of ‘Brahmanacharya’. Before the marriage she explained to her husband that after marriage she would wish to observe the ‘brahmanacharya vratha’. When her husband agreed to a companionate marriage, she tied the knot with him and her husband respected her wish throughout his life.

She worked in various educational institutions, introduced new activities like ‘Girl Guide’ and started sports associations for women. She is associated with a reputed girls’ school in Pune. For her work she was felicitated by various organizations. Government of India has honoured her with ‘silver star’ at the hands of the President for her work in the field of women’s education.

While talking with the researcher this educationist said that she has faith in God. According to her good persons are like Gods. She has faith in their work. ‘When I said that I have faith in God I did not mean faith in worship and rituals.’ She has faith in karma theory. She also said that she recites shlokas and prays every day which gives her mental peace.
As regards religious education in schools and colleges she said, 'when we say religious education I mean moral, ethical education. In school every day prayer must be there so the students will follow good ideals. Ideals of Hinduism should be taught.'

She has faith in the concept of 'dana' but it should be in proper way. Donation for social work, schools should be given. She herself has donated to school all that she has received in felicitation programmes for her outstanding work.

As regards festivals she said, 'In festivals wastage of money and energy should not be there. I do not like current style of celebration of festivals. I never perform the ritual of shradha. But on every death anniversary I garland the photo frame of that person, offer namaskar and distribute prasad. I never performed any vratha. Those who have faith should perform vrathas but their behaviour should be proper.'

She opposed the idea of a woman having a child without marriage but favoured adoption of child by unmarried woman.

She stated that religion never does injustice to women, man may be unjust to woman. It is wrong interpretation of religion that has created problems in society. If religious principles change according to changing situations then it will not misguide masses. She favoured 33 percent reservation for women in politics but insisted that only eligible persons should be selected. She was totally against girls entering modelling and 'daring to bare' for the sake of money. When quizzed about feminism and women's lib, she reacted sharply by saying, 'Why we want liberation and from whom we want to be liberated, this should be clear in our minds. If there is real injustice then liberation is necessary'. She expressed the view that feminists are extremists, all men are not bad, all husbands are not bad.
A fourth case study was attempted with a very well-known ‘Pravachankara’ in Pune. She is 44 years old, an M.sc in Electronics, a Brahmin, for a while she worked as a college lecturer, but since the last twelve years she is entirely devoting her time for delivering religious lectures. Her family is very religious.

She has faith in all beliefs in Hinduism, she celebrates all festivals and performs vrathas also.

The researcher had long discussion with her about the sixteen samskaras in Hinduism. According to her, very few people perform all the sixteen samskaras. Now a days these samskaras are diminishing in number as they are losing their importance. In our ancient society, Annaprashna, Upanayana these samskaras were prescribed for girls also. Namakarana, Vivaha, Anthyeshty, Dashakriya, Pindadan are major samskaras which are still being performed. Other samskaras are optional. Most of the samskaras, except those connected with death have become social and not religious in nature viz., a get-together for enjoyment, socializing, returning others hospitality etc. The notion of social responsibility is lacking. Samskara of marriage has undergone changes. ‘Sakharpuda’ formal engagement is a recent ritual. Those bride’s parents who can not afford to do so they also have to do this ritual.

All rituals in a Hindu marriage are very significant. If we take example of Vyahibhojan, this is a good social custom and an indicator of equality between the bride’s and bride-groom’s party. If we take ‘Kanyadana’, it is the highest dana in Hinduism. This dana is optional and not compulsory, there is no coercion. Parents bring up daughter with great affection, but in marriage they give her as ‘dana’ and relinquish their right on her. They do not interfere in her family life after marriage. By nature, man is aggressive and woman is submissive. In family life she has to adjust, this is the notion behind kanayadana. In
marriage, bride’s parents give to their daughter something more than what the bride groom’s parents give because of their affection for their daughter. Otherwise, in a Hindu marriage bride-groom’s family is never superior than bride’s family. In all our marriage rituals bride is greeted as ‘Laxmi’, ‘Devata’, ‘Gruhini’, ‘Kulavadhu’, etc.

In a Hindu marriage, the husband has to take full responsibility of the wife. Even though she may be of bad character, but the husband can not shirk his responsibility towards her. They are bound together for better or for worse. The interests of the wife are safeguarded in a traditional religious marriage but in a registered marriage these safeguards are lacking, so for the woman’s safety religious marriage is better.

When we asked her about Vratas, she explained, that man gives security to woman and woman gives love, affection to man, in this mutual relationship there is equality. Wife is friend of husband, for the perpetuation and for the remembrance of this relation ‘Hartalika Vratha’ is prescribed. Vratha of ‘Vatapournima’ is based on the concept of rebirth, seventh birth is the last birth, which gives ‘moksha’. The husband of this life should be the husband for seven births- this is the notion behind Vatapournima. Perpetuation of character, good behaviour is the aim of this Vratha. Vratha of Mangalaguari is prescribed for ensuring longevity of the husband. When we asked her whether men perform any vratha for obtaining a good wife, she opined that man should obtain a woman through his bravery, cleverness, he should not run around women. His manliness should attract woman. A man can obtain a son only through a women, so a wife is important for a man.

She favoured widow remarriage to give equality between the sexes and explained that woman has a right to remain without marriage. Unmarried woman can adopt a child but should not have a baby without marriage.
As far as character is concerned, she said, religion has not prescribed different standards for man and for woman. Hinduism calls married man and woman ‘Dampati’, they are joint owners of property. Without the permission of wife he can not spend the money. Today we are not following these rules.

When we asked her about feminism and women’s lib, she said it is an anti-male movement. Feminists say that they will smoke and drink like men, they want equality in every field, they are not ready to perform their role of women, they oppose everything to do with men. This was the nature of women’s lib in the beginning, now it has become a problem solving agency for women. In the beginning they advised women to leave home and husband, they did not get co-operation from women so they are now doing social work. According to Hinduism there is no need of women’s lib because other religions have not given rights to women. For example in a conference on Christianity there was a debate whether woman should be considered as a human being or not. In this conference it was decided that woman should be considered as a human being. Before that she was considered as a ‘commodity’. In Europe women fought for the right of franchise. In Hinduism this is not the case. If there is a woman, a ‘Grihini’, then that house is called ‘home’. Hinduism has given prestige to woman as ‘mother’, ‘daughter’, which other religions do not. She has been given right to education, right to property. The concept of ‘streedhana’ explains that this is her personal property. On working woman’s income others i.e., her parents, her conjugal family, do not have any right.

She opposed strongly the idea of having a child without marriage. In high class society to some extent this may be acceptable but in contemporary middle-class society never. Parents do not have right to procreate children if they do not have the time to bring
them up. For a child, a mother is must. In Australia they are preaching the 'Kangaro' theory i.e. a mothers place is by her child.

As regards modelling, she said, 'Women are responsible for their indecent portrayal in advertisements, without their permission this is not possible.

She favoured kirtanas and pravachanas by women but in case of pourohitya she explained that pourohitya is an institution of men's livelihood. Woman's throat, lungs are not powerful as man, she does not have that capacity. How far she will bear it, is a moot question.

A fifth case study was done of a woman who looks after a Women Priest's Organization in Pune, aged 65 years, belonging to the Brahmin Caste for the last twenty years she has been looking after this organization established by her husband. Approximately five to six hundred women have been trained as priests by this organization. In 1981, twenty-two women of this organisation went to Europe, stayed there for four months, where they got very good response from the people.

She and her husband started this organization with fifteen to twenty women, who had a liking for priesthood. This organization was started due to decrease in number of male priests. All the women are from Pune, they are very much in demand but due to lack of time they can not go out of Pune.

For the correct pronunciation of Sanskrit words primary training is given to women. In the beginning her husband used to teach them, now the women from the first batch give lessons to other women. Classes are arranged in the afternoon, i.e. 2.30 to 4.00 p.m. because at this time housewives are free from their domestic activities and in the training mostly
housewives participate. Those who perform rituals, are ‘suvasinis’ i.e. sumangalies but amongst teachers one widow is also there.

In her conversation with us she said that she has deep faith in God. She has faith in all major concepts of Hinduism.

She performs daily rituals and celebrates all festivals. She stated that for girls also upanayana should be performed, because it is a samskara of education. She said that widow is not inauspicious. She opposed having a child by unmarried woman but favoured adoption.

She praised Hinduism. According to her religion is not the opium of masses, it never misguides masses.

As far as feminism and women’s lib is concerned she felt that some feminists are extremists.

A sixth case study was attempted with active, well-known feminist, journalist in Pune. This fifty five year old, Brahmin lady was working for 22 years with a very reputed marathi magazine in Pune, in which she tackled problems of middle class women. While writing on women she started working for women and established an organization to help women. Her work is not limited to Pune only. After 22 years of working with this magazine, she left it to start her own magazine for women which is now in it’s eleventh year.

When we were talking with her she said, ‘I do not have faith in God. We should do our work. There is no relation between our good life and God. She does not have faith in idol worship, visting temples, observing vrathas, making of vows, karma theory, etc.’ She does not have faith in vastushti and performing of Upanayana. idols do not have any place in her house. In the past she had faith in God. But slowly she lost faith in God and religion. She said in India there are many major problems like poverty, illiteracy but God is not solving
them. She is influenced by Agarkar’s thoughts. She states that man has created religion to

gain power over masses who follow them.

When we asked her about worship of God, she said ‘worship of God, drawing of
rangoli these things are good. We feel pleasant by seeing them but I do not believe that if I
will worship God, he will give me something. This is bargaining. I do not like to bargain
with God for something, I have faith in myself and my efforts’.

As regards religious education in school and college, she said it should not be there
but if we want to give, it should be of all religions. Everybody should be given freedom to
choose religion in their 18th year, that will reduce religious fanaticism and religious
fundamentalism.

She celebrates festivals, because of which people come and meet each other.

She approves of the idea of a woman wilfully having a child without marriage and
adoption by unmarried woman.

She was of the opinion that all religions, not only Hinduism, were unjust towards
women. In every society therefore, there are different rules for men and women.

When we asked her whether religion misguides masses she said, ‘People do not
understand the true nature of religion. For them religion is the ‘Karmakanda’ (rituals). Basics
of every religion is good but ordinary people follow religion in a wrong way. Observing Sati,
doing Vrathas by women, this is false Karmakanda. This shows maintenance of authority by
men over women in society. I feel very bad when I see educated women perform vrathas,
their education is of no use.’

She favoured 30 percent reservation for women. She said. ‘It is very important, this is
a golden opportunity to make up our mind and take advantage of the provision.’
As regards political parties she does not like parties like V.H.P. and R.S.S. she said, ‘Compared to other religions, Hinduism is modern in nature but it is not perfect. Islam and Christianity have been unjust with women to a great extent.’ She stated that religion should be practised on a personal level, in public functions worship of Sarswati should not be there. Naturally it will not be welcome by Muslims and Christians.

While she was talking with us on feminism and women’s lib, she explained that ‘woman versus man’ this is not the idea behind feminism. It is a struggle against all types of discrimination and inequalities. Feminists wish a gender sensitive society, they want freedom from gender based norms, they wish for a society where they will live as human beings and not as ‘man’ or ‘woman’. Men should look at women as human beings first, then the problem will get solved. People do not take into consideration the real meaning of feminism and criticize it by saying it is anti-man, it is home-breaking, etc.

These case-studies are representative in nature and they were attempted as feed back in our study. These six case studies fall within the continuum starting with total belief in Hinduism, its rituals, vrathas and festivals to the other extreme of not believing in God, Hinduism with its belief system and ritual.

All the women were highly educated, having a career and a strong commitment to their values and goals. The women who followed the profession of pravachankar, priest and educationist were committed to Hindu religion. They did not find much negative factors in Hinduism however, the journalist – feminist lady did not believe in God, rituals, vratas, etc. She strongly criticized religious observances.

However, we can conclude that women do not negate religion completely nor accept it totally. It shows that women, when they find some obsolete observances as like sati, tonsure of widows, etc. they will change it. Religion is functional in the lives of women who
require some props to support then in times of adversity and problems. They do not blindly follow everything in Hinduism.

Since women, through Feminism or Liberation Movement want equality with men, they have achieved the same by becoming priest and pravachankar which was the male bastion in Hindu society for centuries. This achieving equality in a male domain is commendable and can be considered as one phase of feminist achievement.