Chapter 9

Summary and Conclusions

Summary:

Chapter One dealt with the concept of Sociology of religion. From the definitions of various authors we could not find any one definition encompassing all facets of religion. However, we could find all the attributes of religion. However, we could find all the attributes of religion necessary for the study from these definitions of various scholars.

We examined the various theoretical approaches but found the functional theory to be most appropriate for a study of this nature.

Since a majority of people in India are Hindus, we thought a study of women and religion in India should be based on Hindu religious practices and beliefs. Any religion could be divided into philosophy and theology, beliefs and practices. Since women were prevented from the study of philosophy and vedas, we studied the rites, rituals, experiences, ethics and practices of women.

We also looked at feminism as an alternative philosophy to religion. Feminism tried to bring equality between men and women as an ideology. We assessed the impact of this
ideology on women and tried to find out the changes taking place in Hindu religious practices and observances.

In Chapter No. Two we made a survey of the literature pertaining to women and religion. This study gave us a peep into the various attributes of religious observances among women in India. We also surveyed literature on feminism to assess the areas where changes were occurring in our society in respect of religious beliefs and rituals.

Chapter No. Three started with the assessment of the status of women in India with reference to religion. Religion in Vedic times gave equality between men and women which, however, deteriorated into subordination of women in all aspects of life. Women were relegated to the position of sudras due to the so-called pollution of women arising out of menstruation and childbirth. Women’s role in religion was an adjunct to the men’s ritual performance viz. preparing ‘prasadam’ for Naivedya, getting ready the things needed for worship, etc. However due to modernization and industrialization men’s performance of religious rituals decreased and women became the torch-bearers of religion through ritual performances. Feminist ideology asserted its right to equality by women becoming priests and active participants in religious rituals, vrathas etc. The methodology adopted by the researcher was due to personal choice and interest in the problem Women and Religion. Since there were no full-fledged studies on women and religion, it was decided to study the same. In India, religion plays a very important role in the lives of individuals. We have chosen Pune City as the area of our study because it is a place of saints, religious scholars and social reformers. These saints and religious scholars influenced women vis-a-vis the importance of religion in the life of individuals.

Throughout the year we find religious discourses, kirtans, pravachans, Bhajans and ‘Sarvajanic Utsavs’ i.e. Ganpati Festival, Navaratri-Ras Dandiya, Satyanarayan Pooja and
Warkari’s yatra to Pandharpur. By and large religious believers are in majority in this city where there is considerable impact of social reformers and feminists on women. Therefore, we found Pune an ideal location for the study of women and religion. This city also manifests tradition and modernity co-existing without much conflict. Naturally, our choice of the location for our study was Pune city.

We chose only Brahmin women for our study because: (1) They were the custodians of religion through rituals. (2) They performed almost all the traditional and non-traditional rituals. (3) They attained some equality with men by becoming priests. (4) Brahmin women are in the process of bringing change in religion because of their education and employment.

The Exploratory Design was adopted by the researcher in the study. Selection of respondents was purposive using the snow-ball method. Care was taken to include roughly equal number of employed and unemployed women. The researcher, being a religious Brahmin woman from Pune, could establish good rapport among the Brahmin respondents. The data was statistically analysed with frequencies and percentages only. No cross-tables were attempted because the study was exploratory in nature without concrete hypotheses.

In Chapter No. Four an attempt was made to discuss the rites and rituals and the meanings attached to them by the respondents.

An overwhelming number had faith in God. Eleven facets of God were used to conceptualize God and they were empirically verified from the respondents. The respondents expressed diverse views for their faith in God like- ‘born with faith, parental teachings, Guru’s influence, personal experience and intellectual understanding.’ They opined that ‘women are more religious than men.’ Majority of the respondents believed in ethical dimensions like dharma, Papa-punya, sacrifice, charity, pativrata, virginity, sacredness of certain objects, etc. However, there were some who did not subscribe to these values. Nearly
fifty percent of the respondents believed in ghost, witchcraft, evil-eye and magic but did not believe in miracles. Notions of purity-pollution are almost lost in the present day society.

The diversity of opinion regarding the nature of God indicates that women exercise their rationality. That there is a tendency towards equality is revealed by the disappearance of belief in menstrual pollution, same is true of other kinds of pollution. These changes have been brought about by modern education, as also the difficulty of following traditional life in the modern world because of suitable houses, need of taking up a job, attending schools and colleges, pressures of modern life, the concept of health which have made a number of meat-eaters into vegetarians. This reveals the openness to accept new concepts and habits.

In Chapter No. Five we discussed the rites that accompany an individual from one social status to another in the course of one’s life and the rites that mark recognised points in the ‘passage of time’ viz., new year, new moon, equinox etc. In this chapter, life crisis rites like attainment of adult status, marriage and death are discussed.

There is a marked change in the performance of pre-natal rites. Due to modernization, pre-natal rites like Garbhadan and Athangul are losing their importance. However rites which are social in nature like ‘Dohal Jevan’ are gaining in importance. Majority of the respondents showed liberal views and felt Hinduism is an obstacle in the progress of women. That divorce and voluntary abortion were acceptable to a good number of women shows their rational attitude towards life.

**Childhood Rites**: Rites after childbirth are mostly socio-cultural in nature and are performed by these families. Our respondents were quite rational and did not discriminate between daughter and son in respect of naming ceremony and a preponderant number of respondents were willing to invite widows and childless women for the naming ceremony of their children.
Our respondents felt that ‘Upanayana’ has lost its religious significance and become a social function. If it is at all to be performed, they felt, it should be performed for both boys and girls. Since a majority of the respondents wanted to give religious education to their children they felt that ‘Upanayana’ is necessary.

Our respondents were attitudinally liberal towards anuloma marriages rather than pratiloma marriages for their children. A good number of respondents did not bother about Gotra and Pravara but were against Sagotra marriages which are permitted by law. In our respondents’ family traditional rites like Pindadaan, annual Shraddha, Agni Sanskar and Sutak are still being observed. However, majority of our respondents did not visit the cremation ground as it is proscribed by their religion. Only an inﬁnismally small number attended cremation.

In the attitudinal sphere, nearly 40 percent opined that women should attend the cremation rites of their near and dear ones.

A notable change is perceived in the case of women who ofﬁciated at Upanayana, marriage and Shraddha rites which were not permitted earlier in traditional Hinduism.

All the rites and rituals of child birth, marriage and death are being modiﬁed to suit the time constraints of the family members. Naming ceremonies are becoming more and more socio-cultural and less religious in nature.

In Chapter No. Six we have dealt with religious actions which constitute the structural elements of religion. The functions of these religious actions, namely the rites and rituals as observed by the respondents, are analysed in this chapter.

Religious beliefs always manifest themselves in behaviour as worship, prayer and observance of fast. This manifestation highlights belief in religion.
In the case of individual, daily activities of worship, ‘taking God’s name immediately after waking up, doing ‘namaskar’ to God, reciting prayer while doing domestic chores, drawing rangoli, worship of God, visiting temples, lighting of lamp before God’ are performed by majority of our respondents.

A good number of respondents heard spiritual programmes on T.V. and radio, reading of religious book, japa, arati, offering Naivedya is done by nearly half of our respondents. At one time, all these daily rituals were a ‘must’ for women. However, these are slowly being reduced due to time-constraints arising out of employment or decreasing faith in them. We can still say that tradition and modernity continue to coexist because women are not giving it up completely nor conforming to it totally. Rituals which are functionally possible or feasible are performed and the others are given up.

It is surprising to note that a preponderant majority observed fasts either weekly, fortnightly or monthly. The explanation given by respondents about fasting is ‘change of diet, physical fitness, mental discipline, for will power, faith in God, for good life, due to tradition, for the sake of elder family members.’ Majority observe fasts as a factor of diet but some because of their faith.

The physical manifestation of keeping photos of Gods, Saints and Gurus in the house is preponderant because the women want the children to be familiarised with these. Our respondents also feel it is good to come face-to-face with the photographs of Gods, saints and Gurus and also see it an auspicious omen.

In Maharashtra, among Brahmans, a number of vrathas and festivals are celebrated and most of the families perform one or the other vrathas and festivals. Festivals are important for women as an opportunity for a get-together and renewing their social contacts with friends and relatives. However, we noticed that only important vrathas are taken up by
women. Festival celebrations are becoming more and more social events. In Maharashtra, religiosity is still predominant among Brahmin women.

Vrathas are performed by a majority of the respondents even though its importance is decreasing. The reasons for performing the vrathas as given by respondents are 'for prosperity of family, happiness of children, preserving tradition, mental satisfaction and faith in them.'

Most of the vrathas are done for the welfare of husband, sons and brothers and none for either themselves or their daughter's welfare. Women are seen to perform more vrathas than men. Women's performance of vrathas is decreasing in number and in magnitude (scale) due to exigencies of time, space and to some extent, lack of faith. However, vrathas are not totally neglected in society in spite of challenges of feminism and Marxism with their emphasis on rationality. These traditional beliefs, rites, rituals, festivals and vrathas are still continuing in the society since they have a functional utility to the respondents.

In the Seventh Chapter we have analysed some important aspects of religion, e.g. ethics, organization, experience and knowledge.

Ethics, knowledge and experience are the manifestations of religion which control the social organization of a society. Ethics gives individuals a way of life which is permissible in society. It is the foundation for harmony in society staving off chaos and disorder. If the majority of a people in society live within the prescribed ethical limits, there will be less of disorganization and confusion.

Hinduism prescribes monogamy and proscribes polygamy. There is unanimity among our respondents towards the ideal of monogamy. A predominant majority felt polygamy was unjust to women which is also part of the feminist ideology. Chastity before marriage was
felt to be important for both men and women by our respondents. Loyalty towards married partner was also seen as important for both men and women. In Hinduism and our social organization, monogamy, loyalty and chastity were considered important only for women and there was punishment for transgression. It was not considered important for men and hence their misdemeanours were dealt with leniently.

The great change noticed in the attitudes of women is that these ethical values are seen as equally important for both men and women and not one-sided. One can attribute these attitudes to the education, employment and financial independence of women and their rational attitude towards life. However, there is no negation of ethical values by our respondents. They also showed a liberal attitude towards widows and felt that the traditional inauspiciousness attached to widows should be changed and they should not be prevented from putting on *kumkum* on their forehead and *flowers* in their hair. A majority of them said they did not have any objection to their family members marrying a widow.

In ethical code of conduct, many changes on attitudinal level are taking place among our respondents. Women, our respondents, even though they did not subscribe to artificial insemination, agreed to it and felt it to be a personal matter not an ethical issue. As men have a right to adopt a child so do women, our respondents opined.

Knowledge about philosophy and officiating as priests was the monopoly of men in the Hindu social organization. However, these are changing fast as women are interested in pursuing the dwaita-adwaita philosophies. Shankar Seva Samiti in Pune has started teaching scriptures to women and training them in priesthood. Above 6000 women have been trained as priests and they are becoming very popular in Pune. Kirtan and pravachans are also being performed by women, which is being appreciated by the public. Women are also seen heading some religious organizations.
Traditionally women have been doing ‘Arati’ and this practice is prevalent even today. Majority of the respondents were familiar with Ramayana, Mahabharata, Dnyaneshwari and Dasbodha. They know the mythological importance of festivals. Majority of them know about the Avataaras. Less than 50 percent know about Vedas, Puranas and Upanishads. However, Srutis, which laid down the values of social organization are comparatively unknown.

The ethical code of conduct, knowledge about religious tenets are still followed but with radical changes. Traditionally kirtan, Pravachan and ‘Paurohitya’ were the prerogative of males but now is being modified to give equal participation to women. Even though feminists and Marxists are against religion and rituals and condemn it as the ‘opium of the masses’, there is a great transformation taking place among educated Brahmin women in changing it. They are not negating religion but want to transform it to give equal participation to women, thereby changing the inequality perpetuated in the name of religion by men in our society.

Conclusion:

Before we conclude two points need to be emphasised. The first one is, this is a study of Brahmin women in a metropolitan city known for its intellectual, cultural and social reform activities. Other cities may not reflect the same views and patterns of behavior, however it is more likely that the trend may be similar though less intensive.

This study does not deal with non-Brahmins some of whom have shown same zeal and enthusiasm for Sanskritization and their attitudes and observances may again differ.

Secondly it is very important to note the religious differences in the movements and development of religion in India and the West.
Many sociologists in the west have questioned as to whether the values and practices of Hinduism and the Guru system can really transform religious attitudes and behavior. In other words, are these alien values and institutions compatible with western religious culture and take roots there. This problem does not arise in India because it means strengthening some of the elements of the existing religion. The acceptance by a section of the west has provided a kind of prestige to these values and institutions.

A vast majority of the people believe in God and some of the basic concepts and values like Dharma. Also, a vast majority have some practices daily, weekly, monthly as well as life cycle rites (rites of passage) and yearly cycle rites. There is belief in the moral values of religion.

We expected that the variables, Age, Education, Marital Status and Occupation may have a bearing on religious beliefs and practices. In view of the large number of religious beliefs and practices, a detailed analysis and interpretation could not be done with in the time frame. However their relationship with five selected items has been undertaken.

**Table No. 9:1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sr. No.</th>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Total F</th>
<th>Total %</th>
<th>No Faith in God</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>21-30</td>
<td>076</td>
<td>25.33</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>27.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>069</td>
<td>23.00</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>9.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>086</td>
<td>28.67</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>18.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>51-60</td>
<td>041</td>
<td>13.67</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>18.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Above 61</td>
<td>028</td>
<td>9.33</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>27.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>300</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An over-whelming majority, 289 (96.33%) belonging to all age-groups believed in God. In respect of faith in God eleven respondents (3.67%) stated that they do not have faith in God. Age wise certain variations could be seen. Among those non-believers 27.27 percent
were in the age group of 21-30 years, 9.90 percent in 31-40 years, 18.18 percent in 41-50 years, 18.18 percent in 51-60 years and 27.27 in above 61 years. On the whole non believers were from two age groups viz., 21-30 years and above 61 years. The younger age-group of non-believers may be feminists and rationalists while the elder group may have had some misfortune and hence lost faith in God.

Table No. 9:2

Visit Temple During Menstrual Period-Education-wise

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sr. No.</th>
<th>Educational Level</th>
<th>Total F</th>
<th>Total %</th>
<th>Visit temple …</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Below S.S.C.</td>
<td>012</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>S.S.C.</td>
<td>052</td>
<td>17.33</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>12.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>S.S.C. and Diploma</td>
<td>011</td>
<td>11.00</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>44.00</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>48.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Graduate with diploma</td>
<td>008</td>
<td>02.67</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Double Graduate</td>
<td>019</td>
<td>06.33</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>12.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Post Graduate</td>
<td>059</td>
<td>19.67</td>
<td>05</td>
<td>20.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>C.A./I.C.W.A.</td>
<td>002</td>
<td>00.67</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>M. Phil</td>
<td>001</td>
<td>00.33</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Ph. D.</td>
<td>004</td>
<td>01.33</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>300</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Relationship of education variable with visiting temple during menstrual period reveals that out of 25 respondents (8.33%) 88.00 percent were graduates followed by double and post-graduates and Ph.D’s. Which shows that education had significant influence upon visiting temple during menstrual period.
According to Hindu Tradition beliefs of purity and pollution concepts are central. Women during childbirth, menstruating time and all people after the death of a family member are supposed to be impure and therefore polluting to others.

During menstruation women were supposed to be physically impure, hence not expected to visit temples. Some of the graduates and post-graduate respondents questioned the concept of pollution and wanted to bring about social change. So we notice that higher education has a bearing on the rational thinking of some women about pollution and defied it by visiting temple during menstruation.

Table No. 9:3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sr. No.</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Total F</th>
<th>Total %</th>
<th>Do Not Observe Fast</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>House wife</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>48.00</td>
<td>008</td>
<td>29.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>45.00</td>
<td>018</td>
<td>66.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>013</td>
<td>04.33</td>
<td>000</td>
<td>000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>008</td>
<td>02.67</td>
<td>001</td>
<td>03.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>300</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>27</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A significant relationship could be seen between employment and observing fasts. 27 respondents (9.00%) stated that they do not observe any fast out of them 66.67 percent were employed 29.33 percent were housewives and 3.70 percent were students. Which shows that housewives observer fasts more than employed women.

Employed women have dual role responsibilities of home and career. Men in traditional house-holds do not participate in house-holds chores.
Out of 135 employed women 18 are not observing fasts and they opined that it is very difficult to cope with dual responsibilities while fasting.

Table No. 9:4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sr. No.</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Total F</th>
<th>Total %</th>
<th>Widow Inauspicious</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Unmarried</td>
<td>027</td>
<td>09.00</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>259</td>
<td>86.33</td>
<td>007</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Widow</td>
<td>014</td>
<td>04.67</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>300</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>007</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As for the relationship between marital status and regarding widow as inauspicious. 7 respondents (2.33%) said that they consider widow as inauspicious, all of them were married. Which indicates that very small number of married women considered widow as 'inauspicious' which shows their traditional attitude.

Table No. 9:5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sr. No.</th>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Total F</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Not happy as a woman</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>21 to 30</td>
<td>076</td>
<td>25.33</td>
<td>004</td>
<td>40.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>31 to 40</td>
<td>069</td>
<td>23.00</td>
<td>002</td>
<td>20.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>41 to 50</td>
<td>086</td>
<td>28.67</td>
<td>002</td>
<td>20.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>51 to 60</td>
<td>041</td>
<td>13.67</td>
<td>001</td>
<td>10.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Above 61</td>
<td>028</td>
<td>09.33</td>
<td>001</td>
<td>10.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>300</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Relationship of age with 'not happy as a woman' response indicates that 10 (3.33%) out of 300 respondents are in this category. Four were in the age group of 21-30 years, 2 in 31-40 years, another 2 in 41-50 years, 1 each in 51-60 years and above 61 years. ‘Not happy as a woman’ respondents are very few in number and are spread over all age-groups.

Many of the beliefs and practices which are opposed to science and rationality or are not practical are being given up. We may mention here that the major changes are the idea of purity and pollution, sacredness and auspiciousness. Values regarding food and dress have changed. Very few observe menstrual segregation. Apart from rational thinking, the small houses and exigencies of modern life do not permit this practice.

During the course of interviews of the respondents, some of the rationalistic ideas were expressed by a considerable number of respondents. In matters of food and social interaction inter-caste relationships have opened up. There is considerable liberality as regards not only views on inter-caste marriage but also on inter-religious marriages. Some of the beliefs which were given up pertain to varna, inauspiciousness of widow, the ritual of pumsavana (male making ceremony).

Modern urban conditions imposed many limitations on the observances of rites and rituals. People therefore take a pragmatic view and perform them in an abridged manner. This is particularly true of major life cycle rituals like upanayana, marriage and death rituals.

Along with rationalization, the ideas of equality and individuality have also been spreading in the field of religion. Women worship Gods at home in the traditional manner. Some have studied vedas and upanishads and give discourses and have taken up the priestly profession. The thrust towards equality in the field of religion is very much evident in the unanimous insistence of a common code of morality for men and women. It may be argued that women are picking up religious practices which do not have prestige and are being given
up by men. This would be a negative statement because Indian women are competing in the field of education, public services, sports etc. It may be noted that many Maths and organizations have started training priests and discourses on vendanta and Indian philosophy are attended by men and women. Currently there are many women Gurus such as Amrutanandamayee Maa, Swami Chidvilasananda, Nirmaladevi, etc. Women are taking up new religious careers (Kirtankar and priests) not from a position of weakness but from a position of strength. They may bring a new solemnity and dignity to make the religious practices more meaningful.

Because of modernization and technological development the religious beliefs and practices among women have been affected. Some have been continued with minor modifications, some weakened, other given up and some altered. In some respects, the impact of the west which started in the 19th century continues to this day.

In the west there has been a separation of the religious and the secular and a war between the two has been waged. In India it takes altogether a different form where it is taken to mean *sarvadharma samabhava*. Presently, in some respects religion has been privatized. However, we still notice public places, buses, offices adorned with photos of Gods, Godesses and saints. The response to a large number of questions show the diversity of views held by educated women. In matters of religion, women are being guided by their experiences and conscience.

Coming to women and religion specifically, noticed an important difference from the West. Indian women do not subscribe to androgyny and accept that there are fundamental psychological, differences between men and women. Further, they show a strong commitment to family as a large number who preferred a part time job. Only future will show whether this is a transitional phenomena. Even in the west there is rethinking on the feminist
discourse. How far one should go on whipping patriarchy and the process of imitating the males at times gives rise to a paradoxical situation where some extreme feminists consider man as an enemy and also as a role model. Rationality, equality and individuality can not be an end in themselves. If they do not lead to a harmonious society where individuals live with peace, contentment and pursuing their natural bent of mind. Many feminists, among them Rosalind Coward is questioning, “whether communism is going too far”. She has raised further questions... "How am I going to renegotiate, my relationship with my partner or husband? What quality of life can I get when we are both working?" What about our sons as well as our daughters? What about their future too? (Times of India, July 4, 1999)

Hinduism emphasizes that man is different from animal. Fear, anger, food and sex are common to human beings and animals. Religion steps in to make life meaningful and help one to meet the existential problems of scarcity, uncertainty and inevitability.

Many thinkers and writers, particularly the ecologists have questioned the ethos of capitalist production and consumption. After all, much of the work that men and women do is routine, repetitive, energy sapping and not meaningful. The workplace contributes in a large measure to the problems of physical and mental health. Religion emphasizing fundamental values and purpose of life can provide an antidote to these pressures.

As noted in the first chapter, the Indian culture provides great religious potentiality. The equality in the vedic times, the large number of goddesses and women saints, and the diversity and the ambiguity of views in scriptures provide ample opportunities to reconstruct the values and practices. There is no doubt that apart from patriarchy and male dominance, there are favorable aspects of Hinduism. As Gabriele Dietrich (Times of India, Feb. 1999) notes, worship of goddess and female infanticide have gone on in India side by side. The Indian state, which is strong on legislation and weak on implementation is contemplating to
offer 33 percent reservation to women in all elected bodies to bring about equality between men and women in politics, which is not given by Hinduism.

One thing is certain that science is not enough and people tend to believe in events and happenings which lack a scientific basis. The Olympian athletes, star sportsmen and even teams tend to be superstitious. In fact, in the highly industrialised west there are a good number of astrologers and palmists. Indian political leadership indulges in various rituals and ceremonies in times of crises. They offer pujas, yajnyas and have their own astrologers, Gurus and Bhagavans. The phenomenon of ‘Ganapati drinks milk’ which swept the length and breadth of India reveals possibly the ‘will to believe’. This is more predominant among women which is the reason why women are called torch-bearers of religion through rituals and rites.

Many Indian writers like Pandurangshastri Athawale believes that by nature woman has Bhakti and a capacity to serve a higher cause. Women themselves have endorsed this to some extent in our study. How far such attitudes have a logical route and how far they are a construct is a moot question. The debate between nature and nurture is an unresolved issue even today. The issues have been further complicated by modern drugs, surgical intervention and gene treatment which can alter the physiology and psychology of individuals. The question is how these techniques are to be utilised.

In the present capitalist world woman’s body has been exploited to which women themselves are a party. Women’s body is an advantage as it provides power over men, at the same time, it makes it a commodity which can be used against the woman’s will. Religion inducing discipline and loyalty in sex relationships and giving relationships a higher meaning and status can help in the true emancipation of women.

Conclusions drawn from the empirical data or chapterwise conclusion:

359
Religiosity of Women:

Women from ancient times were considered to be more religious than men. In earlier times women participated in religious rituals and rites as passive, secondary partners. However, women have taken up rituals since men are withdrawing from them due to westernization, occupations removed from the house due to industrialization and modernization. Women filled up the vacuum created by men. A preponderant majority of our respondents believed in God as omniscient, powerful and having power over individual’s destiny. However, a majority did not subscribe to the idea that God is the creator of the world.

We noticed in our respondents that they are questioning aspects which cannot be empirically verified and felt that religion is an individual aspect of life. Nearly 50 percent believed in the concept of papa-punya, soul, varna according to Guna, karma, purushartha’s and the Ashrama system. These respondents are following the traditional concept of religion while the remaining are questioning these concepts as empirically non-viable. Here we notice that the tradition and modernity co-existing in society. Even though a majority believed in God, due to their education, impact of social reforms and feminist thought they questioned some of the traditional ideas perpetuated by men subordinating women.

Women’s Equality:

In the Brahminic religion, study of vedas, upanishadas and philosophical texts were not permitted for women. This can be attributed to patriarchal domination of women by the all encompassing aspects of religion in society. The women, in fact, showed their protest about this injustice by seriously taking up the study of vedas etc. In Pune city we find Shankar Seva Samitee and Jnana Prabodhini trained above 6,000 woman priests in birth,
marriage and death rituals and study of Sanskrit text. These women priests are not only accepted but preferred by both men and women.

In Pune there is a long tradition of Sant Parampara- saints like Gnaneshwar, Tukaram etc. who not only condemned the caste hegemony or religion but also espoused the concept of equality between men and women in respect of religion. The women saints of Maharashtra, Muktabai, Janabai and Bahinabai, brought about a women’s movement for participation in religion. In fact, the Warkari Sampradaya provided an equal opportunity for religious pilgrimage to women along with men.

**Women’s response to the above is manifested in two ways:**

(a) Women seriously took to religious rites and rituals, performance of vrathas and fasts. In fact, they became the backbone of religion.

(b) There was also the influence of the innumerable social reformers like Lokamanya Tilak, G.G. Agarkar, M.G. Ranade, G.K. Gokhale and Maharshi Karve, who highlighted the injustice perpetuated on women in general and Brahmin women in particular - Child Marriage, Tonsure of Widows and Opposition to Widow’s Remarriage. These social reformer’s ideology have deeply affected our respondents and they questioned these inequalities and injustices. So, we find that half of our respondents have questioned the efficacy of rituals, etc.

**Brahmin Women as Torch-Bearers of Religion:**

Religion is not just a matter of communication between God and a single devotee but a mode of communication between individuals who have no existence apart from their group. Rituals are the activities for bringing identity and solidarity within groups. They are performed within the family or social groups.

361
In this study we purposively chose Brahmin women because they are following all the rituals which were prescribed for Dwijas. Earlier Brahmin women assisted their menfolk in the performance of religious rituals. Since men are gradually withdrawing from ritual performance, both as individuals and as professionals, women have taken over and provided continuity by becoming torch-bearers of religion through rituals. This can also be interpreted as a quest for equality by women in religious sphere besides equality in mundane sphere.

Ethics, Organization and Knowledge Dimension:

Our respondents were mostly educated, married and half of them were employed. These women have already broken male hegemony in the fields of education and employment. We do not find any office or profession in Pune where women are not found. Women even questioned the one-sided perpetuation of ethics on women. They wanted monogamy, chastity and loyalty towards partners for both men and women, abolition of polygamy, which was earlier prescribed on religious grounds for obtaining an heir.

Due to religious sanctions, disloyalty towards wife is condoned as it is believed that men, by nature are promiscuous. Religion earlier condoned even the responsibility of unethical behaviour of men while women were severely punished for the same, which our respondents want to be changed.

In the name of religion, widows were looked upon as ‘inauspicious’, prevented from remarriage and also the use of flowers and kumkum. These one-sided religious ethics were condemned by our respondents.

Till recently not only religion, even civil society did not permit a woman, married or unmarried, to adopt a child. Our respondents strongly wanted this religious disability
changed in favour of women but they were emphatic about not permitting unmarried woman to have a child out of wedlock.

In the case of membership of religious organization, very few were members. The reason given for the same was that women will not be given any important positions in the religious organization and there was little chance of a woman being selected as head of the organization. A great majority of our respondents wanted a change in the women’s role in these organizations vis-a-vis importance in terms of executive membership and head ship.

Women wanted equality in the acquisition of religious knowledge. Earlier Hindu religion did not allow upanayana rites and thereby initiation into vedic studies. In a small way, Jnana Prabodhini is attempting to change the situation by initiating of girls and women into vedic studies and training them in priesthood. Our respondents strongly recommended that women should be allowed to give pravachan and kirtan performances. It is surprising to know that 50 percent of our respondents had vedic knowledge. Majority were aware of Ramayana, Mahabharata, Bhagvad Gita, Jnaneshwari, Bhagavata, Dasbodha and the ten avatars of vishnu. They could recite aarti of God and knew the mythological importance of festivals. This is the reason why we call them the torch-bearers of religion.

**Functionalist Interpretation:**

As per functionalist assumption, religion has performed the function of bringing a certain degree of order and stability which is essential for the survival of a social system. Hinduism, as it is practised, is more a way of life than a theology. Hinduism prescribed ethics pertaining to family, economy and polity. It also gave code of conduct for individuals as guidelines.
Functional analysis is done in order to learn what the objective consequences of any one part or parts are to the whole. Here we have made a functional analysis of religion to look at the role of rituals, rites, festivals and vrathas in the lives of women. We found that they have a profound influence on the day-to-day interactions within the family and on all other institutions. When the respondents found certain dysfunctional elements which tried to subordinate women through religious sanctions, they tried to bring about changes in social system and bring about stability and order in society. Religion being an important institution in the lives of individuals by its ethical codes, gave a common acceptable framework for life. Religion, according to Marx is the opium of masses and should be destroyed. However, in our study, we found women negotiating their conduct to suit their needs by changing some of the dysfunctional elements in religion. Religion is being changed but not denied as almost all our respondents believed in God and religion.

**Hypothesis derived from the study:**

1. Whether religion has positive or negative impact on women.
2. The role of religion in the lives of individuals.
3. Do ethics and organization control women?
4. Is the feminist concept of equality antithetical to Hinduism?
5. What is the impact of Hinduism on other institutions like family, marriage and property?
6. Does religion subordinate economy and polity?
7. Is religion responsible for conflict between husband and wife?
8. Does Rites De Passage give continuity to religious performances?
9. Does belief system act as a mechanism of social control?
10. Does impact of vedic knowledge and priesthood bring social equality by enhancing women’s status in society?

We are giving below some suggestions for future studies to be undertaken by sociologists in the field of Sociology of Religion.

Suggestions for further study:

Since the present study is exploratory in nature, a full-fledged diagnostic study could be undertaken of women and their religiosity.

We could study women of all religions and the practice of religion. We could also study women of all major castes in India with reference to Great and Little Traditions. These studies will highlight the religiosity and changes in religious practices due to impact of urbanization and industrialization.

A comparative study of rural and urban women and religion can also be undertaken.