CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In this work, we have studied the role of the predominant religions of India on the image and status of women in the society. Our study of the textual representations of woman in the religious scriptures has shown that there is a dichotomy in most of the religions. The image of woman is found to be glorified as well as enchained in different contexts in the scriptures.

We made an attempt to explore the position of woman through examining religious rituals and religious prescriptions and injunctions accorded to woman in the socio-religious field. We also examined the status of woman under religious laws of the predominant religions of India. It has been observed that religious norms and laws are grossly discriminative against woman in almost all religions.

We have studied certain challenges against the established beliefs and practices, which are known as socio-religious reform movements and feminist critiques. Through this discussion, we have examined the attitude of religion towards the efforts for social change. The discussion also gave a glimpse of the status of woman in the contemporary societies.

Towards the end, we have analysed our observations to understand the role of the predominant religions of India regarding their relation to the status of woman. We made an effort to ponder on the questions which form the objectives of our study and try to obtain possible answers based on our observations.

We now give a summary of the observations and analysis of our study followed by a section with our concluding remarks.
6.1 Summary of the Thesis

*Image of Woman in Religious Scriptures*

The image of woman depicted in the scriptures of the predominant Indian religions does not form a consistent picture. Women’s image in both social and religious fields is glorified in several passages of the scriptures. On the other hand, some other passages portray women as spiritually inadequate and a secondary cause of spreading evils in the society. Woman is found to be liberating as well as enslaving in different contexts in the scriptures. One way woman’s theological equality is proclaimed by texts of most of the religions. On the other hand her secondary status is also equally spread over in the texts.

Generally, every creation theory in religion reveals an egalitarian attitude. This is especially true when a religion talks about the creation of man and woman by God. According to the cosmology and Genesis (creation) theory of different religions man and woman are created as equal beings by God, i.e., essentially they are of equal status. This is reflected in the Genesis theories of Islam, Christianity and Sikhism, which give descriptions of creation. The other theist religions also preach that men and women are equal in the eyes of God in their basic essence. The basic ideal of Hinduism preaches that women should be adorned and worshipped. Moreover, many of the deities worshipped are women.

Woman was depicted in high esteem not only in the Vedas. Manusmriti, which is infamous for gender biasness on its social law, also subscribes that “woman is the source of all good, worthy of adoration. Where women are honoured and adorned by all other family members, there the God is pleased. For the prosperity and welfare of the family the women should be respected whereas the grief of a woman may bring harm to the prosperity of the family”.\(^1\) Thus, in certain counts, Hinduism gives woman high esteem.

In both Buddhism and Jainism, woman is placed at same status as man in their intellect. The Buddha preached that the path of dhamma could be practiced by anyone, male or female, and the supreme enlightenment or salvation is available to both. Similarly, Jaina scriptures do not reflect any
restriction or inhibition to admit woman into the monastic order. Appreciating in high terms the intellectual calibre and capacities of women in comparison to men Somadeva wrote, “Woman is counted among fourteen jewels of a Chakravarti”. While comparing the physical and intellectual qualities of men and women it has been declared in emphatic terms that women are superior to men in intellectual activity.² Similarly, regarding woman’s spirituality, the Qur’ān holds that the best in the eyes of Allah is one who is most pious. Men and women are regarded equal in relation to their religious duties and responsibilities.

While all religions primarily announce the equal essence of man and woman, on many occasions, the same religions declare woman as an agent of evil spirit. Women are seen as inferior to man both in intellect and character.

The second creation story in Bible claims that man was made first.³ Then God takes one of man’s ribs and shapes it to a woman as a suitable companion for man and to remove his loneliness. Thus, man is theologically considered as the immediate source of woman. Moreover, through the story of the first sin in Bible, where Eve tempted Adam to eat of the fatal fruit, makes woman (Eve) responsible for all misery of the mankind. For being instrumental in the sin, she was punished by God: “I will greatly multiply thy sorrow, and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.”⁴ This pronouncement of God affected her very existence and purpose of life and put her under the domination of man forever. Because of Eve’s role in the first sin, many early Fathers of the Church and theologians, held her and all subsequent women to be the first sinners, and especially responsible for the Fall of the mankind.

The concept of original sin does not exist in the Qur’ān and Eve was not to blame solely for the consumption of the forbidden fruit. However, the Hadiths proclaim that the Prophet Mohammad designates Eve as the epitome of female betrayal: “Were it not for Bani Israel, meat would not decay, and were it not for Eve, no woman would ever betray her husband.”⁵ And “Had it not been for Eve, woman would have never acted unfaithfully towards her husband.”⁶
Though at times Manusmriti presents woman as the source of all good, worthy of adoration it clearly states that a woman can never be independent in her life and that she will be always controlled and protected by her male relatives. In the later Vedic period, the concept of protection changed to watch and control. The husband is pati, the lord, even though he may be destitute of virtue; he must be constantly worshipped as God by the wife, there is no protection equal to him and this is according to dharma.

We see negative attitudes towards the image of a woman also in the scriptures of Buddhism. Some verses in the Anguttara Nikāya describe women as faithless, greedy, foolish and possible obstacle in the path of spiritual practice. Anguttara Nikāya narrates that women are more attached to worldly objects than men do and their knowledge is not equal to that of men. Moreover, Jātakas are full of references to the faithlessness and greediness of women.

In Jainism, where the Svetambaras refuse exclusive male access to the path of liberation and affirm woman’s capacity to achieve salvation, Digambaras insist that one cannot attain salvation as a woman unless she is born again as a man.

In the Qur’ān woman is considered to be weak and therefore a subject of pity and sympathy. She is dependent on men and therefore, should be loyal to her husband and is to be controlled by him. Many ahadith reflect this attitude and prescribes her complete subjugation to man. Her obligation is that she does not go out of her house except by his permission even if he oppresses her. Moreover, the Prophet said: “I was shown the Hell-fire and that the majority of its dwellers were women” because they are ungrateful, not necessarily to Allah but “to their husbands and for the favours and the good (charitable deeds) done to them”.

Thus, the scriptures reflect an ambivalent attitude towards woman which can be interpreted constructively as well as negatively. This bipolarity makes the overall situation more difficult and complex.
Religious Prescriptions, Injunctions and Laws on Woman

Religion affects individuals in a society by prescribing norms on various aspects related to religious, social as well as individual life. These norms include religious rites, different rituals, prescriptions and restrictions, and the rights and privileges permitted to an individual. The privileges accorded or denied to a person by religion greatly influence her or his position in the society.

In various rituals prescribed by religion, we note many discriminative practices against women. These discriminations not only affect women’s participation in socio-religious practices, but they also take crucial role in moulding women’s status in the society. To enforce domination of males over females, the society seems to influence the religion right from the formative period of a religion to promulgate various restrictions and injunctions on women.

In Hinduism, religious activities such as initiation, performance of sacrifice at official religious ceremonies are believed to be the privilege, responsibility and mandate of men. The discriminative attitude of the society towards a girl child is reflected quite prominently in Hindu birth rituals. The desirability of a male child manifests in the rituals garvādhāna, pumsavana, etc., which are observed after the conception but before the birth of the child to secure the birth of a son. That some of the chanted prayers in these rituals are aimed to prevent the birth of a daughter shows the very attitude towards girl child. The injunction of Dharmaśāstra scholars including Manu and Yājñavalkya, on performance of the ritual of upanayana (initiation) of a girl was clearly aimed at depriving her from Vedic education, and thereby enforcing exclusive domination of males in religion and over all intellectual quests. By the imposition of the rituals of marriage of a girl as equivalent to initiation of a boy\textsuperscript{14}, the Dharmaśāstras pushed women to the confinement of household activities rather than academic pursuits. The rituals observed in many parts of the country at the time of attaining puberty by a girl are aimed at making her conscious about her fertility and preparedness for marriage. This helps in convincing her of the prevailing social attitude that wifehood is the essence of woman’s existence.
Further, the dictates of the śāstras and purānas on pre-puberty marriage for girls were clearly aimed at enforcing complete submission of women to male domination in the patriarchal society. Moreover, bar on a daughter from the right to perform the death rites and the customary ritual of pindadāna to the ancestors made a son indispensable.

In most of the religions, women are not allowed to participate in most of the significant religious performances. None of the religions allow women to head any religious institution. The restriction served a patriarchal society in two ways. First, by not allowing equal participation in one of the most vital institutions of the society, namely religion, the society places woman in an inferior position. Second, with domination in the helms of affairs of religious leadership, the society incorporates the patriarchal interests in religion through formulating norms and laws with gender bias.

A woman in Islam has no place in the formal religious organizations and legal affairs of the community. She cannot be a priest or a Kazi, nor can she lead the prayers. The restriction is to such an extent that “a woman should not fast if her husband is present, except with his permission”.¹⁵ Women have never been allowed to bear the responsibility of elder or bishop in the Church organization in Christianity.

Several religions restrict women from education by categorical injunctions in their scriptures. Manusmriti declared that women are not eligible for study of the Vedas. The Bhāgavata Purāṇa categorically denies the necessity of formal education to women. While discussing the danger from women, Jaina lawgiver Somadeva illustrated it by asserting that it is risky to educate women.¹⁶ Thus, society uses religious injunctions to make education a domain exclusively for men.

Impurity is one of the cardinal attributes imposed on woman by almost all religions. During menstruation and after child birth women are deemed ritually unclean and are prohibited from performing religious duties. These restrictions are quite prominent in the texts of Hinduism, Islam, Jainism and Christianity.
Manu restricts a Brahman from conversing with a menstruating woman and equates a menstruating woman with village pigs, cocks, dogs and eunuchs, while debarring all of them from looking at a Brähman while he eats. Such injunctions of Manu are just a few of the manifestations of the attitude in Hindu society towards women’s impure states. In Christianity, Levites are considered as God’s priests and God has given them the authority to judge cleanliness and perform rituals for purification.

The impurity imposed on woman in the pretext of innate biological phenomena is also forcefully used against her spiritual and intellectual abilities. As we have seen, the impurity of women is a reason for debarring her from sacred practices by many Hindu scriptures. Jainism holds that women are not fit to get liberation due to her periodic impurity. Islam affirms that a woman’s deficiency in her religion lies also in the fact that she has been debarred from praying and fasting during her menses.

It is easy to understand the effect of the notion of impurity imposed on women by religion on the moral of a woman. Because religion is accepted to be sacred, so are its dictates. Thus, uncleanliness and impurity become unquestionable attributes of a woman, which bring to her moral degradation, and therefore she succumbs to prescriptions, injunctions and various corollaries imposed on her due to her innate impurity. As a result she accepts the inferior status accorded to her in the society through religion as the one destined to her.

Almost every religion prescribes women to be dependent and submissive. In Hinduism, this has been portrayed clearly in most of the religious lawbooks including Manusmriti which declares that a woman can never be independent in her life and that she will be always protected by her relatives. In the later Vedic period, the concept of protection changed and turned to be very rigid. The perception was that women should be confined to the house and that the husband is pati, the lord. Even though he may be destitute of virtue, the husband must be constantly worshipped as God by the wife, there is no protection equal to him and this is according to Dharma.
The Asta Gurudhamma\textsuperscript{22} prescribed by Buddha to woman aspirant to be bhikhsuni states that a bhikhsuni can only be a subordinate of a bhikhsu. The Bible ordains woman to be ruled over by man, because of the first sin.\textsuperscript{23} The same prescription to women is seen in the Qur’\textsuperscript{407} an and various Islamic texts. She is dependent on men and therefore, should be loyal and devoutly obedient to her husband and is to be controlled by him.\textsuperscript{24} It is typical of the Qur’\textsuperscript{407} an which states: “women shall have rights similar to the rights against them, according to what is equitable; but men have a degree of advantage over them.”\textsuperscript{25} The Hadith literature is full of instructions to women to be faithful to the husband and to fulfil all his wishes, even if he is destitute of virtues.\textsuperscript{26}

Though the Adi Granth is considered to have an egalitarian gender outlook, it basically preaches for cordial relation between man and woman. The portrayal of the divine-human relationship in Adi Granth, sometimes as that of master and servant and sometimes as that of husband and wife, reflects the acceptance of the social reality. The list of thirty two merits which are supposed to be possessed by a good wife, the scripture categorically prescribes woman obedience, purity of heart and complete surrender, body and soul, to her husband who is the Lord for her.

The religious scriptures not only prescribe woman to do her duty to the satisfaction of the husband and other members of the family, but also many times restrict her movement outside the household severely. In Islam, the obligation of the wife is to take care of the children and to look after her husband’s property when he is out,\textsuperscript{27} and that “she does not go out of her house except by his (husband’s) permission…even if he oppresses her.”\textsuperscript{28} It is recommended that male members of the Muslim community join the congregational prayers that are regularly held in the mosques, but the females pray at home. The most stringent norm against movement of women is enforced in the form of veil or Hijab, which is prescribed by religious authorities. The crucial characteristic of the veiling system is its achievement in limiting interaction between women and men outside certain well-defined categories. These restrictions imposed on women nullify the minimal measures
for gender equality prescribed in Qur’ān and the egalitarian outlook it otherwise preaches.

Impact of religious laws on women

In the societies till the medieval period, secular laws did not exist and the society was used to be governed by the laws prescribed by the religions. For example, the lawbook Manusmriti had great influence in Hindu society, and it provided not only laws to govern social life, but also framed detailed guidelines to the rulers for ruling their kingdoms. Similar were the cases for the Islamic and Christian societies. Since the laws were pronounced by the religious authorities, they were considered to be sacred, and therefore unquestionable.

We note here that among the predominant religions in India, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism did not intervene in the Hindu laws prevailing in the society, though they differed with Hinduism in their attitude towards certain social practices on ideological grounds. The religious laws of Hinduism (and to some extent that of Islam) dominated most parts of the Indian society throughout its history. In most of the legal matters, the provisions prescribed by Hinduism and Islam are highly discriminatory against women.

Throughout the history, the ruling class in India practiced polygamy irrespective of the sanction or otherwise by the religious or social practices. In Hinduism, the coronation ritual presupposes four wives for the Kshatriya king, and in practice he may have had more. Though in the later part of the era of Dharmaśāstras, many authors started upholding monogamy, the Hindu law subscribed a second marriage for a man in certain situations such as when the wife is infertile, or gives births to daughters alone or short-lived children. Some authors prescribed that it was the duty of the wife to support her husband for a second marriage in case she had failed to give birth to a son. Jainism allowed a man to marry more than one wife, even when his first wife is alive, if the first wife is childless, gives birth to only daughters or is unlovable. In Islam, a man is allowed to marry up to four wives simultaneously, and this has Qur’ānic sanction. The only condition put is that he should give equal treatment to all his wives.
Almost all religions give a man his right to have divorce from his wife, though the circumstances in which he can do so vary across religions. However, on the same issue, the attitude of a religion towards women is highly discriminative. In scriptures of Jainism and the early period of Hinduism, especially the earlier Dharmaśāstra texts, woman was allowed to have divorce in certain special cases. However, this sanction in Hinduism ceased to exist by the later period of Dharmaśāstras. Manu put forward the extreme view that the wife’s marital ties and duty did not come to an end even if the husband were to sell or abandon her. The Bible accords right to divorce to a man which he can avail even on the basis of some uncleanness of the wife or if the wife fails to find any favour in the husband’s eye. However, there is no such provision for woman in the Bible. Islam approves unquestionable authority of divorce to a man, where he can divorce his wife even instantly through Bidd‘at, i.e., by simply repudiating her with three continuous pronouncements or equivalents of divorce. It is true that Islam gives the right of divorce to both men and women. However, the provision of right to divorce by a woman is conditional. A woman can seek for divorce under special circumstances which are very unlikely to occur or difficult to establish for the woman, and finally the right to divorce remains in the men’s hand.

Religious laws are often seen to have discriminative attitude against women on right to property, especially inheritance. In Hinduism, women’s right to property has undergone many changes during the long history of Hindu traditions. A woman, as a daughter or a wife, was accorded limited rights to property and inheritance during the early Vedic period. However, these rights are seen to be gradually curtailed by the lawgivers since later Vedic period. Most of the Dharmaśāstras and Purāṇas marginalized women and rights to property were completely bestowed on men.

Āpastamba allowed a brotherless daughter inheritance of her father’s property only in the nearly impossible situation when there is no sapinda (up to seventh degree) or teacher or pupil to claim the property. Manu, Vaśiṣṭha and Gautama do not mention the daughter at all in their lists of heirs.
The scriptures of the early Vedic age considered the husband and the wife as the joint owners of the household and its property. The husband was required to take a solemn vow at the time of marriage that he would never transgress the rights and interests of his wife in financial matters. Āpastamba concludes from the joint ownership theory that the wife is entitled to incur normal expenditures on the household during her husband’s absence. Yājñavalkya concedes to her one third share of the husband’s property, in case she was superseded unjustly.

The final blow came from Manu when he said that a wife, a son and a slave can own no property independent of the father, the husband and the master. The only right to property the woman enjoyed was stridhana, which is solely comprised of the gifts a woman received in her life. There are extensive descriptions of stridhana in many of the Dharmaśāstras.

On widows’ right Āpastamba says that in the absence of a son it should devolve on nearest male sapinda up to seventh degree rather than the widow, and in absence of any eligible sapinda, to preceptor and disciple for charity.

Manu has also evolved such a scheme of devolution in case of a sonless person to his father, then brother, then a sapinda and sakulya, then a preceptor, a disciple for charity and lastly to king but not a widow. Gautama held a moderate view that the widow should be regarded a co-heir with other sapindas. Around tenth century, Mitākṣarasā school of Vijnāneśvara recognized widows’ right to inheritance, only if her husband had separated from the joint family before his death. On the other hand, the contemporary Dāyabhāga school of Jīmūtavāhana champions in liberalising the law further in favour of the widow. The Dāyabhāga law of inheritance prevailed in the Bengal region and Assam, whereas in almost the rest of India Mitāksarā law was followed.

Jaina law gave an unmarried daughter inheritance and proprietary rights. In the event of the death of a father without any male issue and having a daughter, the daughter became the sole owner of the wealth of the father. According to Jaina Law, on the death of a person without a son, his widow takes his property, as an absolute owner, whether it is divided or undivided. Further, she owns the husband’s share even if there is a son. The somewhat liberal attitude towards inheritance by women can be understood from the fact that in
Jainism son is not an important legal entity like in the Hindu jurisprudence. In Jainism, son does not require to play any particular role in obligatory rituals like pindadāna as in Hinduism. Therefore presence or absence of a son does not make a Jaina person spiritually meritorious or otherwise.

The Biblical sanction regarding inheritance makes the gulf between man and woman prominent. On his judgement on an issue of inheritance, God decreed to Moses that if a man die and does not leave any son, then the daughters if any will inherit their father’s property.⁴¹ In Islam, the Qur’ān gives a woman right to a portion of her husband’s property on her marriage, which is called ‘mahr’, i.e., dowry or marriage property, apart from a lawful maintenance during the conjugal life. Islam also gives woman a share of inheritance, but not at equal footing with a man. For inheritance, the portion a male is always equal to that of two females.⁴²

**Socio-Religious Reforms**

There have been many occasions in Indian history when efforts are made to reverse the process of degradation of the image and position of women in society through socio-religious reform movements. These movements added some new dimensions to the existing religious sphere of Indian society. The main concerns of such reform movements are to redefine the gender role of woman, establish the right to education, and grant equality that included marriage customs and relief from the restrictions and ritual pollutions. Above all, the prime concern of every socio-religious reform movement is establishment of an egalitarian society.

The emergence of Jainism and Buddhism is regarded as reformist movements in the history of Indian philosophy because of their radical critiques of prevalent Brāhmanical practices in Hinduism. As movements preaching new doctrines, they used the vernaculars rather than Sanskrit, were open to all social classes, men and women alike, and discarded the current social distinctions. Both of these religious movements found support among a variety of classes: the ruling elite, merchants, artisans, and those at the bottom of the social structure. Buddhism opened the door of order for women and introduced them to a new
state of religious individuality. Before the Buddhist epoch women were subjugated under various Brähmanic injunctions. That Buddha gave the dhamma to both men and women, can be regarded as a major reformist step in religion. Buddha’s rejection of the sacramental notion of marriage had a salutary effect on the position of Indian women in general and Buddhist women in particular. Buddhism and its secular notions of marriage had held in check Sati, child marriage and other pernicious institutions of medieval Hinduism in all parts of India, and only after disappearance of Buddhism from India was the field left free for Brahmanism to enforce these social evils.\textsuperscript{43}

One can perceive the emergence of Sikhism as a religious reform movement. It evolved in the backdrop of social and political conflict between Hinduism and Islam, when each of them was infected by evil practices. Since Sikh Gurus advocated for spiritual as well as social equality for all across caste, creed and gender, Sikhism took certain steps, at least in principle, towards gender justice. The Gurus enunciated the principle for a new social and religious order and subscribed equal religious status for both men and women and advocated social justice for women. Sikhism tried to eradicate female infanticide and Sati and promote female education and widow remarriage.

However, the guidelines of the gurus concerning social customs and practices remained to large extent only precepts, not practice. The religious, traditional and cultural practices prevailing under the established religions, mainly Hinduism and Islam, were very deep rooted in the society. Thus, the professed reforms of the Gurus could not have enough impact. By the end of the nineteenth century, the Sikhs had lost their independence, their symbol, their temples, and their fortune, notwithstanding the Sikh Gurus’ powerful denunciation of Brahmanism. The genesis of this downfall was mainly because Hinduism seemed to be assimilating Sikhism. To re-establish Sikhism as a distinct identity from Hinduism and to restructure socio-religious ethos for Sikhs, there had been efforts to formulate Sikh code of conduct, Rehat Maryada. After a long period of development and years of intense deliberations
and discussions, the Rehat Maryada came into existence in a universally accepted form in 1945.

From the earliest times the history of Hinduism has been marked by repeated endeavours at reform of different kinds. Almost at every epoch there have been efforts to purge and purify the religion. For example, from the times of the rishis of the Upanishads, there has scarcely been a generation when in some part of India or other some nobly inspired soul has not raised his protest against the idolatry, unspirituality and ceremonialism. The emergence of Buddhism and Jainism can be seen as a result of this process. In relatively modern times Sankardeva, Guru Nanak, Kabir, Chaitanya are only a few of the more prominent and successful spirits amongst a host of religious reformers in the long, mostly unwritten annals of Hinduism.

Towards the early nineteenth century, the Hindu elites who had come to the exposure of western education discovered to their distress that the society they lived in was not the ideal one, but ridden with many social evils. In particular, the Hindu traditions were often not respected or thought as credible by Western standards as the society was rampantly infected by caste rigidity, polygamy, child marriage, sati, sufferings of widow and various other superstitious beliefs and practices. On the other hand, Christianity propagated by western missionaries in India with a more human face had many takers from the lower strata of Hindus resulting mass scale conversions to Christianity. The Hindu elites realized that this phenomenon was heading towards a crisis of identity for the majority Hindus in India, and therefore required conscious intervention. The country had seen many efforts for social reform since early nineteenth century.

The leaders who strived for social reform across the religions soon realized that the evils in the Indian society are deep rooted and that they not only have religious sanctions, but also were evolved from the religions themselves. For example, Raja Rammohan Roy had believed that it was possible to bring social reform through bringing out peoples of all religions together and by projecting the basic unity that underlay all religious faiths. However, his
attempts met with resistance from the orthodox sections of different religious communities. Moreover, the resistance came also from the ruling power which believed that the security of British supremacy in India depended on keeping the different religious communities separate from each other. It was therefore inevitable that the movement of social reform should develop within the folds of each religion rather than as a unified movement for the transformation of the society as a whole. This realization motivated for religious reforms with a purpose of social reform and forced the educated elites to re-visit and re-examine the whole Indian ancient civilization or their social usages and institutions, their religious beliefs, literature, science, art, and their conception and realization of life as a whole. Thus, several socio-religious movements, organized and unorganized, were evolved in the nineteenth century India and women’s issues were raised for the first time in modern India. Hindu religious revivalists and reformers made efforts to improve the status of women by evoking the ancient Indian norms of purity and duty. Most of the Hindu social reformers sought credibility for the ideas and actions in the ancient Sanskrit texts. Abolition of discriminations in society on the basis of caste and gender was the prime focus of these movements. It involved attacks on social institutions and practices like child marriage, position and treatment of widows, seclusion and the denial of women’s right to property and education, the roots of which lay in the religious traditions of different communities. Among many such movements, the most significant of them that developed within the Hindu society were the ones spearheaded by Brahmo Sabha, Parthana Samaj and Arya Samaj. Moreover, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar (1820-1891) was one of the most prominent and significant reformers who fought untiringly for women education, widow remarriage and against child marriage and polygamy.

After the emergence of Muslims as a strong religious community in India, the first reform movement Islam saw in India was brought by Sufism. This was a subtle but effective movement acting on the gender issues in medieval Muslim society in India. The Sufi orders spread throughout India from the twelfth century onwards. Relatively little known about the impact of Sufi practices on
Muslim women, but it is clear that Sufi practices, and religious poetry made their impact on the spiritual lives of women.

The political transition from rule of the Mughal Dynasty to British colonial rule led to a basic religious reorientation among Indian Muslims. Nineteenth century India had seen a thrust of modern thinking in revisiting the religion and religious practices among Indian Muslims. Driven by the consciousness about the loss of political power to a foreign rule, a galaxy of Islamic scholars and thinkers engaged themselves to analyse Islam and to bring reform from inside. A strong need of reviving Islam in India in the tenets of real Islamic values and teachings was felt. Some interest in education of women was also shown by many of the Islamic scholars, at least to the extent of improving their knowledge of Islam.

The distinguished scholar in this sequel who was most vocal for gender equality in Islam was Sayyid Mumtaz Ali (1860-1935). He is chiefly known for his pioneering role in Urdu journalism for women. He founded the weekly newspaper Tahzib un-Niswan in Lahore in 1898 together with his second wife, Muhammadi Begam. In his revolutionary work “Huquq un-Niswan” (Women's Rights) he argued that Qur’ān had been grossly misinterpreted in regard to the attitude towards women and on their rights. He argued in favour of equal religious and social status of women, women’s education and against purdah and polygamy through his liberal interpretation of Qur’ān and Hadith.  

Starting from the early twentieth century when women gradually started appearing in the struggle for Indian national independence, Muslim women, though sporadically, started raising their voice in the religious and political forums. Chand Begum delivered her historical speech at the Mohammedan Educational Congress in Bombay in 1903 bringing forth the awful conditions of Muslim women and their lack of education, and appealed Muslim women to rise against religious suppression. The efforts by Chand Begum and various other quarters resulted in establishment of a normal school for training Muslim women teachers at Aligarh in 1913. The first Muslim Ladies’ Conference was held in 1915 where promotion of education for women was emphasized. In
1971, a group of leading Muslim women activists passed a resolution against polygamy which caused controversy in Lahore.\textsuperscript{46}

The early twentieth century had seen the emergence of groups of women activists in both Hindu and Muslim communities coming forward to fight for women's cause and rights. From the platform of several woman organizations like the Women’s Indian Organization and the All India Women’s Conference, women from both Hindu and Muslim communities raised their voice for women’s cause including female education, rising of marriage age and the removal of restriction of purdah. However, the desire for the recognition of the Shari’a as Muslim personal law was an issue which separated Muslim women from their Hindu counterparts. If the Shari’a were in force instead of customary law, Muslim women felt, then their rights to property, inheritance, and choice in marriage would be affirmed. On the other hand, the religious and political leaders of the Muslim community too felt the need of a personal law based on Shari’a for the Muslims for several reasons. First, the Muslim scholars had been striving for a long time to implement uniform religious and social practices for all Muslims in the country, so that Islam is freed from the non-uniform social customs and practices. Second, it was felt that this would help in attaining a legitimate identity of the Muslims as a nation. Lastly, to realize a separate nation for Muslims, it was important to bring the women’s movement to the political platform of the Muslims. Thus, both males and Muslims for different reasons strived for Muslim Personal Law (Shari’a) which materialized in 1937. The enforcement of this law brought some relief to the miserable lives of the Indian Muslim women.

\textbf{Feminist Critiques}

The emergence of feminism with a revolutionary opinion on women’s emancipation from discrimination in various fields in the society took place in as early as late eighteenth century. Since then many feminist thinkers, both Western and Eastern, placed their discourses in the area of the study of religion. Many among them have contested the traditional interpretations of sacred texts and offered new interpretations.
According to the feminist thinkers, religion provides and legitimates the superiority of men in family and society. Most feminists contend that sexism (discrimination between male and female) has permeated deeply the human psyche and most of this sexism could be derived from religious notions and practices. However, not all feminists reject the value of religion and would contend that there is a human need for ritual, symbol and myth.

In the early nineteenth century, advocates of women's rights began to accumulate rebuttals to arguments used against women founded on traditional interpretations of Biblical scriptures. Lucretia Mott, Lucy Stone, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony were all leaders of this early women's rights movement. The Women's Bible\textsuperscript{47}, conceived and developed by Elizabeth Cadystanton in 1895, challenged the Church's interpretations of the Bible and the teachings of Christ.

Contemporary feminist critiques of religion range from those who try to revise the religious traditions to those who reject them outright. Well-known contemporary feminists such as Leila Ahmed, Carolin Walkerbynum, Naomi Goldenburg, Rita Gross, Ursula King, Karen McCarthy Brown, Fatima Mernissi and Delores Williams, subscribe for new readings and interpretations of theology, sacred texts, history, symbol, myth and rituals. They have depicted that various constituents of religion can be analysed through a feminist outlook and their multifaceted possible interpretations can be brought forward, which will institute women's visibility within religious traditions.

Hinduism had seen heterodox sects and devotional movements such as the Bhakti movement that allowed women to transcend the physical constraints imposed on them by institutions of caste, marriage and female seclusion. Mirabai, Avvaiyar, Bahinabai, and Lal Dhed are examples of women who challenged the notions of subservient wifehood and conjugality central to the practice of orthodox Hinduism.

Most of the debates on Hindu social reform in the nineteenth century India revolved around women issues. There were several inflections in these debates, with contrasts in terms of intent and understanding. In one hand the
prevailing disgraceful condition of women provided the colonial rulers pretexts to their moral supremacy and to rule. In the 1920s, the American author Katherine Mayo launched a polemic attack in her book *Mother India* against Indian self rule, arguing centrally that the sexual depravity of the Hindu was at the root of India’s problems, drawing on the realities of child marriage, sati, the *devadāsi* system, untouchability, and so on. In 1947, Margaret Cousins, in stark contrast to Mayo, depicted a glowing picture of the position of Indian women enhanced through Indian nationalist movement in her book “*Indian Womanhood Today*.”

Tarabai Shinde was a key architect of the transition to a new womanhood in a predominantly Hindu caste-ridden society. In her essay “A *Comparison between Women and Men: An Essay to Show Who’s Really Wicked and Immoral, Women or Men?*” written in 1882, Shinde expressed her fury against the patriarchal social and religious norms which are responsible for the miserable condition of Indian women.

The Self-Respect Movement, launched in Tamilnadu in 1925 as a resistance to Brāhmanical Hinduism, imagined a new womanhood and a new world built around mutuality where women would be equal to men. Periyar E. V. Ramasami, the architect of the Self-Respect Movement, had a distinctive treatment of the question of masculinity. In an article titled “Masculinity Must Be Destroyed,” Ramasami observed that the term *masculinity* itself degraded women because it was built on the assumption that courage and freedom inhered in the man, with its obverse femininity implying subservience.

The National Federation of Dalit Women, formed in 1995, brings together the various perspectives in Dalit assertion and resistance. On one hand the federation interrogates upper-caste, Brāhminical hegemonies in inter-caste relations, and it attempts to address the challenges of Dalit women inside the patriarchy of the Dalit castes, on the other.

Many scholars and activists in the Muslim world have taken up the issue of women questioning the nature of the relationship between gender construction, religion and society. Fatima Mernissi and Leila Ahmed approach their study
and practice of Islam from the position of feminists working in the academy. Their work uses the methods of revisiting and reconstructing Islamic traditions. In the process of rereading, both scholars challenge male interpretations of Islamic law based on Qur’anic readings. In the process of reconstruction, both challenge male views of women.

Many Indian Muslim feminists subscribe to the ideology of distinguishing the normative and non-normative verses in the Qur’ān and establishing gender equality discarding the non-normative verses. The approach of these scholars towards the religion is almost the echo of the discourses of Sayyid Mumtaz Ali (1860-1935), the distinguished Indian scholar who was vocal for gender equality within Islam. Several contemporary Indian scholars like Asghar Ali Engineer use this methodology for their endeavour for establishing that Islam in its basic tenet supports gender equality and therefore women’s rights can be achieved inside Islam.

**Society in the Formative Period of the Religions**

Though most of the world religions were conceived through the vision and preaching of their founders, it took considerable time for them to form their systems of norms and practices. The religions evolved through interaction and interplay with the prevailing social, political and economic conditions over a long period of time, several centuries in most of the time. It is therefore natural that the social norms and practices influenced the religion during their formative period. Therefore, the response of a religion to a given social norm depends not only on its fundamental belief system, but also on the influence of the socio-political forces behind the religion.

In our study, we try to analyse the role of the predominant religions of India in the context of position of women in society. In fact, our aim is to understand whether religion initiates social change or acts as a conservative force to maintain prevailing social norms. To understand the impact of the social norms on religion, we start with a brief discussion on the prevailing social conditions during the period of formation of each of the predominant religions of India.
In ancient India, there were transitions of the society in the Vedic period; from cattle-raising to agriculture in its economy, from egalitarian tribal structure to one organized around the four castes (varnas) or social classes. The later part of this period corresponds with an increasing movement away from the previous tribal system towards the establishment of kingdoms, called *mahājanapadas*. Patriarchy appears to become more pronounced with the advent of hereditary and authoritarian ruling dynasties, a powerful state bureaucracy, and the growth of property rights. The Hindu system of beliefs and practices evolved in this background and the scriptures were written by Brahmins reflecting the emergent social norms, and understandably the interests of higher castes.

The two religions Buddhism and Jainism emerged during sixth to the fourth century BC, in a period of Indian history when urbanization and advancement of commerce took place on a wider scale. Formation of ruling dynasties and monarchy were taking full shape, caste (varna) stratifications were being enforced in society, and the Brāhmanical supremacy in the religious leadership was established with the support of the ruling Kshatriyas. The increasing social tension, in the form of caste conflicts, manifested through the emergence of the two new religions, Buddhism and Jainism. Although they did not call for the termination of the caste system or gender biasness, they were more open in their outlook towards these issues. In fact, they opposed to caste hierarchy as set out in the Dharmasūtras. Their non-sectarian appeal attracted the lower strata of the caste-ridden society readily towards them.

Christianity established itself as one of the most powerful religions in the midst of the massive social upheaval and changing environments during the time the Roman Empire. The martyrdom of Jesus became a rallying point that dominated the early religion. The poor, the slaves, women and others who felt left out by the Roman social system gravitated eagerly to this new idea of hope after death. As Christianity gained a foothold in the consciousness of the ancient world, the Roman authorities initially recognized it as a threat to their religion and power, and were quite oppressive against the Christians. The attitude of the Roman Empire towards Christianity gradually changed and by
the early fourth century A.D., the Roman Empire not only accepted the existence of Christianity, it started patronizing the church to an extent that the church was raised to the status and authority of an empire. Though the Bible came into existence in many versions among different sects for several centuries, only during fourth century the churches conducted massive canonization to finalize the scriptures, namely, the Old and the New Testaments. Thus, whereas its emergence was sparked among the lower strata in a repressive regime, the formation and growth of Christianity and the canonization of its scriptures took place in social set up with a strong patriarchal attitude under Roman Empire and the imperial Church authority.

According to Muslim tradition, the Prophet Muhammad, a member of the Quarish tribe of central Arabia, began to receive the revelations of the Qur’ān in about 610 A.D. and continued to do so until his death in 632 A.D. Though there is no complete agreement on the social conditions that were prevailing in the society, historians agree that a strong patriarchal form of family prevailed in Arabia during the time of Prophet Muhammad. The formative period of Islam is generally agreed to include the first three centuries of Islam, the 7th through 9th centuries A.D. From the very inception Islam envisaged to form a powerful political establishment. It emerged as a great religion through patronage of the ruling dynasty which was establishment with ideals of Islam. Since the Qur’ān is not a code of laws, it did not set out a theory of law as a guiding framework for further legal development. Thus after the death of the Prophet Muhammad, the Qur’ān, along with what people remembered of his sunna, were interpreted in the changing context of the expanding Muslim empire. This continued for several centuries during the dynastic rules of Umayyad caliphs. The Islamic Law, Shari’a, reached its full development during the time of robust patriarchal rule of Abbasid and Umayyad caliphs. Thus, Islam formed in a highly patriarchal set up under the patronage of ruling dynasties.

Sikhism evolved during a time of religious, political and social conflicts between Hinduism and Islam. The sant-tradition, which emerged in the medieval India, paved a way to form a distinct religion in the fifteenth century. The preaching of the ten Gurus, Guru Nanak and his nine successive
followers, appealed the people to throw away the age old norms and customs of Hinduism as well as the dogmas of Islam. Towards the later part of its formative period, Sikhism militarized to oppose Mughal hegemony. Subsequently, Sikhism grew with the emergence of the group of twelve sovereign states (Misl) and the Sikh Empire under reign of the Maharajah Ranjeet Singh. However, during this process, Sikhism somewhat misplaced the adherence of the teachings of its gurus on social egalitarian ethos.

**Dichotomy of the image of woman portrayed in religion**

A common feature among almost all religions is the duality in their attitude towards the image of woman. Whereas, every religion accords man and woman equal essence, it also declares woman as inferior to man and destined to be controlled by him. To understand this dual character in the attitude of religion towards woman, we must note the dual character of the religion itself. Every religion has two aspects: one, the fundamental tenets it holds, and the other, its relation and interplay with the earthly world, the society.

The fundamental objectives of religion are to work for the upliftment of human being, to beget human suffering, to disseminate the message of perpetual peace in the society, and above all to lead mankind towards liberation. These basic premises of a religion preach equality of all living beings, and therefore religion holds egalitarian outlook in its essence. This stance manifests in all primary teachings of religions and is reflected in the sacred texts. Thus, we see in most of the scriptures declarations of equality of man and woman in their basic essence. This outlook is also reflected in several positive attributes of woman mentioned in the texts.

During the formation period of a religion, the norms and practices prevailing in the society influence the religion. We have seen that, the prevailing social structure in which the religions evolved and formed was robustly patriarchal. The social attitude towards woman is invariably reflected various ways in the religion. Any patriarchal society considers woman to be weak requiring protection provided by man. The duties of man and woman in economic and social activities are highly classified, which most of the time puts woman in a
subordinate position. Her liberty in general is restricted, and she is not given participation in decision making except in trivial household matters.

Thus, religion portrays man and woman with same essence because of its fundamental egalitarian objectives, whereas her image with negative attributes are mainly due to the constant interplay between religion and social norms and practices.

**Religion as a Social Institution and its Impact on Woman**

In general, through its rituals, restrictions, prescriptions, injunctions and laws, religion conforms the gender construction and gender role as established in the society during its formative period. Various discriminative practices in rituals prescribed by religion not only affect women’s participation in socio-religious practices, but they also take crucial role in moulding women’s status in the society. The laws involving the life of women prescribed by the religions generally reflect gender discrimination most of the time which goes against women.

The natural question is how far religion can be held responsible for gender discrimination in the society. In another words, what role does a religion play in constructing and maintaining gender roles in society? Any attempt to seek for an answer to this question must take into account the fact that the religious laws and practices are moulded through the interaction and interplay between religion and society.

*Does religion determine the image and position of women in the society or reflect those created by other forces of the society?*

From our study we have noted that religion itself does not construct gender identities or gender roles in society. Whenever a new religion emerged, it brought a progressive worldview to the contemporary society because of its egalitarian fundamental system of beliefs. Thus, not only in regard to the position of woman, a new outlook to different aspects of spiritual and social beliefs and practices is developed. The progressive outlook of Buddhism and
Jainism on social and intellectual matters was reflected on their attitude towards woman. The inception of Christianity through the martyrdom of Jesus brought new idea of hope after death and the new religion became a rallying point of the poor, the slaves, women and others who felt left out by the Roman social system. Apart from duties, Islam provided women with rights through the Qur’ān.

However, the system of practice in religion and the religious laws are moulded through the interaction and interplay between religion and society. During the formation period of a religion, the prevailing norms of the society influence the religion greatly. Thus, the gender construction, which is essentially a social creation, is reflected in religion. Thus, religion does not determine on its own the image and position of women in the society. Rather, it reflects position of women as the gender roles are constructed by the society.

**Does religion define or formalize the image and position of women?**

We have noted that the society in which each of the predominant religions of India evolved was robustly patriarchal. The patriarchal attitude of the society in gender relations always presumed complete dependency of a woman on men and therefore demanded her submission to the men on whom she was supposed to depend. All domains of socio-economic activities except the ordinary maintenance of the households were dominated by men. The woman was put to look after the household by taking care of all family members including the children and keeping vigil to the family property.

Though religion does not construct the gender roles on its own, it certainly helps the society in shaping them. The norms prevailing in the society eventually permeate deeply in the religious norms and practices and are reflected in the texts of different religions. Through the religious approvals and commands that are considered divine, sacred and obligatory, the same prescriptions are enforced unabated in the society. Thus, religion formalizes and legalizes the image and position of women in the society.
Does religion initiate change in the position of woman or her role in the society?

In most of the cases, the inception of a religion occurs due to certain conflicts developed in the society, either social or intellectual. Most of the time this conflict involves social norms and issues, and the new religion emerges challenging some of the existing values and practices. In this sense, we can view a religion to initiate certain social changes. In the context of status of women, this phenomenon can be noticed in case of some of the predominant religions of India. Position of women is seen to have received an upward lift during the initial period of Buddhism, Islam and Sikhism.

However, a religion mostly reflect patriarchal attitude of the society and is seldom seen to endeavour to bring structural change to the existing society. The attempts for upliftment of status of woman are inadequate to initiate any radical change in gender construction or gender roles in the society. The religion is seen to merely make certain humanitarian appeal for enhancing the position of woman or her role in the society.

Does religion act as a conservative force in the matter of position of women?

In regard to the status of woman in Indian society, it is evident that religion acts as a conservative force. Each of the predominant religions in India not only helped the society in shaping the status of woman, but also played a role in preserving it for centuries. Indeed, the religions strive to reinforce the social norms on the individuals in the form of religious practices and laws, as Durkheim suggests. However, the social norms that were enforced by the religions seldom evolved from collective conscience as Durkheim believed. Nevertheless, once social norms take shape of religious beliefs and practices, they are preserved and carried forward by religions for ages, generation after generation. The women’s issues on which reform movements took place in the nineteenth century and the present day concerns of women’s movement and feminist critiques are only a few of the evidences of how gender discriminations in India have remained unchanged for centuries through
religious norms and practices. Social norms with respect to widows, marriage, property rights and inheritance, and, above all, the attitude towards woman are mostly determined by the classical religious dictates even today. Because religious prescriptions and laws are accepted as sacred and therefore unquestioned, religious norms are strictly adhered to without modification, unlike many other non-religious traditions.

**Does religion resist efforts of change in position of women in society, internal or external?**

In the context of the status of woman in Indian society, religion not only acts as a carrier of social norms like traditions, religion also tend to resist efforts to social change, whether internal or external, whenever such efforts go against the religious prescriptions.

The movements for social reforms of nineteenth century met with strong resistance from the orthodox Brahmanism. There were vehement oppositions to the efforts for social change in regard to sati, child marriage and widow remarriage from the quarter of religious authorities. For example, before the passing of Widow Remarriage Act in 1856 in the British Parliament, 56,000 persons from the orthodox Hindus petitioned against it. On the other hand, the incessant efforts of Vidyasagar and many other social reformers could mobilize support of a comparable figure of 55,000 persons for the act.54

Similar resistance was experiences at the dawn of Indian independence, when the effort of bringing out an egalitarian Hindu Personal Law with provision of women’s right to divorce, abolition of polygamy and child marriage, and nearly equal property rights for women met with vehement opposition of the orthodox Hindus.

The fallout of the famous Shah Bano case is another example which manifests the extent to which religion is used to resist social change in the matter of women’s position. The widespread outcry from the Islamic clergy including the Muslim Personal Law Board forced the government to pass the Muslim Women’s (Protection after Divorce) Act in 1986, which blocked any relief to
divorced Muslim women through Indian Criminal Procedure Code and made Shari’a the final authority in all such matters.

One can notice that women’s access to the high positions in religious institutions is always resisted by conservative religious authorities. A declaration affirming Vatican’s ban on allowing women to be ordained as Catholic priests came in January 1977 from none other than Pope Paul VI. In support of his declaration, Pope Paul argued that because people experience God through His representatives, the follower needs to feel the immediate connection between God and the priest; like Christ the priest was supposed to embody Him. Thus, if one were to change the sex of the priest, one would be changing the nature of God Himself.\textsuperscript{55}

Though, orthodox Muslims claim that woman has been provided with equal rights in regards to its five pillars, through injunctions of certain Hadith women were prohibited from joining prayers in the mosques. The recent incident of allowing women to join the congressional prayer in Ajan Pir Dargah in Sivasagar district of Assam on 18 November, 2011, initiated by none other than the Governor of Assam met with severe criticism from the religious authorities of the Muslim community of Assam.\textsuperscript{56}

Similarly, occasional efforts to change the prohibitory norm in women’s entry in Barpeta Kirtan Ghar, one of the famous Vaisnavite Satras of Assam, meet with strong resistance from the community, interestingly from both men and women of the locality.\textsuperscript{57}

These are only a few conspicuous examples; the extent to which religion exerts resistance to social change is enormous and deep rooted.

\textbf{6.2 Conclusion}

In this study, we have examined how gender construction and gender roles are depicted and enforced in the predominant religions of India. We have seen that most of the time the religious scriptures, and rituals, prescriptions and laws in
these religions facsimile the image and social role of a woman defined and imposed in a patriarchal society.

It is interesting to see that the image of woman depicted in the scriptures of the predominant Indian religious does not form a consistent picture. Women’s image in both social and religious fields is glorified in many passages of the scriptures. On the other hand, many other passages portray women as spiritually inadequate and a secondary cause of spreading evils in the society. One way woman’s theological equality is proclaimed by texts of most of the religions. On the other hand, her secondary status is also equally spread over in the texts. We now understand that this duality is quite natural to occur. Religion portrays man and woman with same essence due to its fundamental egalitarian objectives. On the other hand, image with negative attributes of a woman is mainly due to the constant interplay between religion and social norms and practices. Thus, the origin of gender biasness is in the society, not in religion. In fact, at times, especially during its inception, religion puts certain efforts to bring gender equality in the society.

It is important to note that there cannot be any scripture which is uni-dimensional; rather, every religious text can be seen only in a given social context. Consequently, scriptural pronouncements on social norms are reflections of the prevailing social ethos or those evolved through certain social-religious conflicts. In particular, religion reflects only those gender constructions and gender roles which were evolved in the society essentially due to various social-economic factors. It formalizes and enforces the gender construction and gender roles through various religious norms and practices, and preserves and carries them through ages, generation after generation.

Due to religious subscription, any effort to social change in woman issues meets with resistance from the conservative orthodox section of the society. Often, religion plays a vital role for justification of status quo in the matter of status of woman in society. There is always a section of society for whom religion is instrumental in promoting their interests rather than spiritual source for inner enrichment. They project religious norms as immutable, equally with
the religious doctrines. Because religion is accepted as sacred, so are its dictates. Thus, like other religious prescriptions, the social norms on women prescribed by religion are unquestioned and the women in the society are coerced to accept their accorded position as destiny.

It is important to note that the values like justice and social concerns cannot be applied independent of the age. The understanding and the notions of justice in ancient and medieval period was quite different from those of the present world. The structure of the present society is based on the spirit of democracy and present notion of justice equality of all humans irrespective of sex, race and creed. In present world, discrimination between one and other human being on any ground, including the sexual one, is considered as injustice.

There is no disagreement that majority of Indian populace is innately religious and religion plays a significant role in social as well as personal life. Most of the social issues including gender roles are looked through the prism of religion. This is precisely why secularism in Indian context does not denounce religion in private or public activities, rather it means being neutral and unbiased towards any of the religions. Thus, denouncing of religion to realize gender equality cannot be a pragmatic strategy in India. Rather, the belief system in the society has to be appealed for retrospection. This necessitates religious reform in each of the religions, and from within.

Every religion has egalitarian outlook in its basic essence. Whenever a new religion emerges, it brings a progressive worldview to the contemporary society. Thus, not only in regard to the position of woman, a new outlook to different aspects of spiritual and social beliefs and practices is developed. This role of religion is often ignored. If it is highlighted, then the resistance to change in a religion can be seen as contradictory to its basic tenets. The religious scriptures should be re-visited and re-evaluated, taking their contemporary social context into consideration. That, the fundamental objectives of religion are to work for the upliftment of human being, to beget human suffering, to disseminate the message of perpetual peace in the society, and above all to lead mankind towards liberation, is to be highlighted.
The irrelevance of the discriminative norms, injunctions, and prescriptions of religious texts and traditions should be discarded without denouncing religion.

This may be an effective strategy for social change in India so far as gender justice is concerned. However, given the ground reality this is not an easy task, for the populace of India should be ready to accept this massive reform. Due to poverty, illiteracy, especially female illiteracy, and many such factors, a vast majority of people in India are conservative and superstitious. We must strive for fighting these evils in the society to bring a situation where desired religious reform is a reality.

**Notes & References**

4. Ibid., *Genesis*, 3:16.
6. Sahih Muslim, Book 8, No. 3471.
8. Ibid., V, 154.
11. Ibid., p. 6.
12. *Qurʿān, Al Nisāʾ*, 4: 34.
15. Sahih Muslim, Book 7, No. 115.
18. Ibid., III, 239.
21. Ibid., V, 154.
22. Culla Vāga, x., 1, 4.
24. Qurʾān, Al Nisāʾ, 4:34.
25. Ibid., Al Baqarah, 2:228.
27. Qurʾān, Al Nisāʾ, 4: 3
30. Qurʾān, Al Nisāʾ, 4: 3.
31. Manusmṛti, IX, 46.
33. Āpastamba Dharmasūtra, 6:14:16-20.
34. Yājñavalkyasmrty, I. 76.
35. Manusmṛti, VIII, 416.
36. Āpastamba Dharmasūtra, II. 14. 2-4.
38. Vijñanesvara on Yājñavalkya, II. 136.
39. Dayābhāga, Section XI.
42. Qurʾān, Al Nisāʾ, 4: 11.


