

A MAN'S FAITH: SEXISM DISGUISED IN RELIGION BY AYAH ALSHEIKHA

Female oppression lies within the roots of human existence, woven throughout religious texts and cultural traditions worldwide. Women have fought and suffered for their rights, but the question is: Does religion continue to enforce gender disparity despite women's efforts?

Christianity, Islam and Hinduism are the three most practiced religions globally, accounting for 70% of the world's practiced religions. To fully examine the sexism ingrained in modern society, it is necessary to observe the practices the majority of the population abides by and the ways in which women are forced to function in different cultures and religions apart from Western philosophy.

Rooted in the Middle East and Northern Africa, Islam has numerous passages meant to depict the genders as equal, such as the maintenance of spiritual balance between men and women and the standards of modesty upheld by both genders. However, practices in Islamic Saudi Arabia lead observers to note strong sexist traits of the religiously-governed country, with comparisons that women are essentially treated as, "permanent legal minors."

Direct correlations can be made between these Saudi Arabian policies and Islamic traditions themselves, such as the law that women cannot marry without consent from a male legal guardian. This idea stems from Islamic traditions of a father's blessing being required in a marriage. In addition, domestic abuse was criminalized only in 2013, and there have been complaints that the government lacks implementation of this law, which also stems from an ancient Islamic Hadith that permitted husbands to beat their wives, however, this is no longer practiced with good morality is Islam. The Quran is the religious text read and followed by Muslims. Specific passages stand out to feminists, one from The Hadith Regarding Concealment of Voice During Prayer states that "Women can not speak during prayer to correct an Imam [men can] because their voices are too distracting." The insinuation that women not only have one less right than men in Islam, but also cannot speak or input their opinions due to their distracting voice is based solely on a male's perception of "distracting." When a man's lack of self-control dictates a woman's right, their blatant sexism becomes glaringly ap-

parent. The idea of a woman being dictated by the male eye plays a role in a woman's dress, also a controversial subject of Islam. Modesty is valued among both genders in Islam; however, a woman's modesty is the center of discussion among feminists. Women are generally held to a higher standard of modesty than Muslim men, as men must only cover past the knee, whereas traditionally, women are expected to cover their hair and conceal their figure completely. This contrast contributes more to the sexism in religion targeting women, as they are once again held to higher standards of modesty determined by a man's perception.

Christianity, similar to Islam, comes from a distant hearth in the Middle East. Many parallels can be found between the two religions, especially in women's traditional--often sexist--roles, namely, the roles of wives. Ephesians 5:22-5 states, "Wives submit yourselves unto your husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church." Verses like these depict the woman of a marriage to be submissive to her husband, a common thread among the Abrahamic religions, which include Judaism and Islam. This expectation of the wife's submission enforces gender disparity within the household.

Another controversial biblical verse essentially outlines a woman's role and significance in society compared to a man's. Timothy 2.12 states, "I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet." This verse highlights the truest perception of women in Christianity to a tee: "she is to remain quiet."

Women are repeatedly depicted as the secondary, incapable gender, made for men and their every action must revolve around or be dictated by them. Otherwise, she is essentially expected to remain quiet and have no contribution if that contribution suggests authority over a man. Even more so, the natural functions of a woman's body are seen as unholy and impure. Islamic passages force a woman to abstain from praying and she cannot be considered clean until the end of her menstruation. Similarly, Hinduism includes traditions of claiming menstruation as impure, as a

translated segment of Hindu text states, "Women shouldn't touch anything sacred and pure because of their lack of physiological impurity each month." Even the uncontrollable existence of a woman's period is viewed as unholy, begging the question: who is interpreting religious text and enforcing these traditions today?

The answer to this question, unsurprisingly, is men. For centuries, only men could be Rabbis and Pastors, and even today, the positions of religious leaders like Priests and Imams are solely reserved for men. Men have been the delegators, translators and interpreters of religion for years. Religions themselves are inherently sexist, but the lack of women in religious leadership continues to promote religious inequality.

There are recent religious reparations meant to bring about equality, such as a woman's ability to be a Rabbi or Pastor, but this does not mend the years of sexism women faced in religion. Perhaps nothing can mend the deaths of the women accused of being Satanists by Christian leaders during the religious awakening of 1740. Perhaps nothing can mend the deaths of women in Iran fighting for bodily autonomy from the Islamic regime. Perhaps there are no adequate reparations to mend the suffering of women at the hands of male religious leaders and their fanatic followers.

Religion has and continues to place women secondary to men. Despite modern adaptations or interpretations of religion that may promote equality, at their very roots, the most practiced religions around the globe are sexist.

