
The Attitude to Women in Different Religions

When the word “religion” comes to people’s mind, it’s often described as a certain group of people conform to a belief system that is underneath one central authority. Based on this concept, it’s supposed to be a holy place that opens to people who has a belief or worship in God, instead of limit the followers by the gender and identity. Historically, the context of different religions has disparate understanding on because of sexism and heterosexism believes that men are more superior and above on women, women have been treated unequally and experiencing challenges in religious traditions. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam worship the same god.

The first of these three religions is Judaism, and then Christianity, and finally Islam, but you can't say that the last two are Judaism, or that Islam is Christianity. Because while there are many similarities among the three, there are also many differences: Specific gender roles are strictly applied in all the religious groups we have learned so far. “The religion of Islam shares the same roots and the same God as Judaism and Christianity and thus may be considered to be a relative, albeit in some respects a distant one, to these Western monotheistic traditions.”

Islam is the youngest among three major religions, the other two are Christianity and Buddhism. Islam was formed in eighth-century C.E. Mecca by Muhammad, he said that he got the message from an angel that Allah sent to him, Allah is like the god in Christianity. The word Islam means obedience, and muslim are the followers of Islam.

Christianity was formed in 1st century C.E, it is the largest religion in the world. The founder of Christianity is Jesus. Jesus was born in Nazareth of galilee in northern Palestine. His parents were Mary and Joseph. Before they were married, the holy spirit came upon her and impregnated her. At one point, Joseph tried to divorce Mary, but the angel told him to marry her. Jesus' baptism by John at the age of thirty and the temptation of the devil in the wilderness strengthened his faith in god. After this, Jesus led Peter, John and other disciples around preaching the Gospel. Jesus' preaching caused consternation among jewish nobles and priests, who bought Jesus' disciple judas and crucified him. But three days later, Jesus rose again and showed signs to the disciples and the crowd, asking them to preach the Gospel in a wider range. Since then, more and more people believed in Christianity, and they spread Christianity around the world. Christians see Jesus as the savior and waits for his second coming. Islam and Christianity have different understanding on god. Islam consider the god of creation as the purest monotheism. Christianity, on the other hand, considers the creator as unique, but at the same time has three personages: the father, the son and the holy spirit are different from each other but unified in a whole, which is called the trinity. Christianity believes that Jesus is the god, however, Islam believe that Jesus was not the god or the son of god, he was just one of the Prophets of god along with Adam, Moses, Muhammad, ect. Muslim only obey to the Allah.

Women are understood as a bane and lesser than men in patriarchal societies like Islam and Christianity. Due to Islam is androcentric and male-biased, people believed that men are one degree above women. Therefore, according to the Qur’an, two women are equal to one man. As a result, the wisdom of two women is equal to one man’s wisdom. When it comes to the inheritance, men can get more than women. Muslim believes that women have a congenital

deficiency, so that they are not allowed to pray or touch a Qur'an during their period of menstruation or pregnancy, because menstruation is viewed as a pollution and impure. Men who have sex with the menstrual women will be considered "unclean" as well.

Women were not always treated unequally in Christianity. Historically, there are evidences show that Jesus himself see women are spiritually equal to men. The reason why that women were under men was because people like St. Paul who had explained scripture in a wrong way. Later on, the negative image of eve as a seducer in the bible is heavily influenced by jewish and Christian traditions. Women, therefore, are untrustworthy, morally inferior and vile. Menstruation, pregnancy, and procreation are the punishments women receive for their crimes.

The similarity between Islam and Christianity is women are viewed as fundamentally impure that only male's sacrifice is meaningful, women will pollute the holy church. For example, women are not allowed to speak in the church because their voice are shameful. In both Islam and Christian societies, men and women have completely different gender roles in a marriage. As for Muslim female to have a marriage, her partner must be a Muslim as well, but men can marry Jewish or Christian women because they believe in monotheism. Men can have a marriage with maximum four wives in the same time, however, women can only marry to one man; men have the privilege right to divorce, but women have to petition for a divorce in the court. Meanwhile, women have to return the the dower. However, men can not divorce with his wife if she is pregnant.

Under the Muslim system, men can highlight their outstanding identity by marrying different women while women must be loyal stay at home run family affairs, education child, ect. In Christian society, Saint Mary is the role model for women, because virginity and motherhood exist in her body at the same time. Some Christians expect all the women have the same ability just like Mary, which is a perfect virgin, a perfect mother and a perfect woman, otherwise, they do not have the divinity like Mary does. According to the New Testament, there was a "Household Codes" which indicates the gender roles in Christianity. Men are in charge with affairs that relate to home, the state and the war. However, women are supposed to obey their husbands, it is undeniable because it is God's command. This kind of commend is to contribute a "family value.

There are significant differences in these two religions when it comes issues like marital intercourse. Muslim think that women can have sex desire just like men. In a marital intercourse, men need to make sure that their wives have orgasm, sexual pleasure is the responsibility. In contrast, women's sexual pleasure is to have babies in Christian society. Meanwhile, homosexual is strictly banned in both Islam and Christianity, they believe same-sex sexuality is a violation of God's order. Because their social structure is a typical patriarchal society. The social ethics, code of conduct and even sex in the society are all made by men as the subject. Therefore women are naturally subordinate to a group. The natural order of a sex activity is male to female, if same-sex activity happens, it is a vice against nature. Especially in Islam, there are no such words like "gay lifestyle" in the society, hence, they have not developed a sense of homosexuality as a state of identity of being. In order to clearly show the gender identities, both men and women in have dress codes that strictly match their identities. They do not want to see that men are dressed feminine, nor women dress themselves too masculine. Because it is a patriarchal society, people put too much attention on gay and kind ignore the exsistance of lesbian. Therefore, the punishment on lesbian were not as bad as it on gay. In their opinion, lesbian sex does not involve male organ. However, if two men are committed a

relationship, they will be brutally whipped.

Christianity shares the same value as Islam, Christians believe that same-sex sexuality disorganized the natural order which is carrying on the family line – to have children. “You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is an abomination.” Christians think people who have same-sex sexual activity will get karma and get physically tortured. Gay marriage is a combination of what God considers as extremely evil and what God considers to be sacred, this will lead to the curse of God. For instance, Paul’s statement in Romans (1:26-27) that lesbianism is the result of idolatry. Some Christians also believe that it is the Bible and the teachings of Jesus led to the social advancement of marriage as well as progress in other areas. So in order to maintain the basic structure of human society, it is better to submit to the natural order.

Buddhism is one of the three major religions as well, it was formed in India in 5th or 6th century B.C.E. by Siddhartha Gautama, who is also called Buddha Shakyamuni. Buddhism believes that individuals do not have a constant soul (atman), which refers to, "empty". People do not have a core inside of them. So even if you keep reincarnation, the next one is not you, the former atman in the flesh is not in contact with the current atman in the flesh. Buddhism preaches that all lives are equal in the soul, and against the "caste" system. Buddhism believes that people are sinned because of desires. The soul can enter the "bliss world" in the future only by destroying all desires and suffering. Suffering is important, people have been told that if they are sick or abused, it is their karma from the previous life.

Hinduism is also a religion that formed in India in 1900 BCE to 1400 BCE. Hinduism is the traditional religion and the first major religion of India. It originated from ancient Indian Vedicism and Brahmanism. It is generally believed that in the 8th century, it was adapted to the feudal unification of thought and integrated with various religious doctrines such as Brahmanism and Buddhism. It is hard to say how many gods they have in Hinduism, however, there are mainly three major Hindu deities: Brahma, Shiva and Vishnu. The basic tenets of Hinduism are dharma and karmic rebirth. The idea of karma and reincarnation is every life has a soul. It will be reincarnated, good will be rewarded and bad will be punished. It will continuously revolve. In order to be free, one must attain the unity of the Brahman, which is the unity of the soul and god. There are three ways of liberation: one is the way of behavior, which is strictly observe precepts and rituals. Second, the path of knowledge, through studying, practicing, and pro-witnessing; The third is to be devout in order to get the grace of god.

Women were/are not only experiencing the challenges based on the gender stereotype in religions like Islam and Christianity, but also in Buddhism and Hinduism. In Buddhism, being a woman is a manifestation of karma, it means that women have no right to be free in the next life. However, there is a great chance that women can be born as a male if they build up the good behaviors like doing the housework, submitting to husband and father and taking care of children, etc. The truth is, this might be the only expectation for women as well. Because women are fertile, they are seen as the embodiment of sex and desire, some monks thought it was a threat to men. Therefore, there is no place in the paradise for women after they die. When it comes to education, women can barely access to education compared to men, no matter they are monastic or not. This kind of culture has deeply impacted on Asian countries like China, for example, most of the Chinese Buddhists believe that the good woman is an illiterate one. Women are generally described as weak and more vulnerable than men, unlike men are wide, women may limit their capacity for Buddhahood.

There are some rules in the Eight Garudhammas which is the traditional concept that specifically for women. It indicates the superiority of male and inferiority of female. For instance, women cannot be independent, they must rely on the male; women cannot live with the men but cannot live too far away from the men either; the elders male must be invited to teach women every half month; women cannot directly ordained to be a nun, they must approve by men, ect. Buddhists' views on homosexuality is more open and indifferent compare to religions like Muslim and Christianity. It is not absolutely prohibited, they often see this kind of act as an "individual business", and has rare relevance with the religion. According to Wilson, the pleasure that people get from homosexual intercourse is the same like other erotic acts. Either one of them is divine or sinful, nor blessed or cursed. They do not see sexual orientation as a problem, the problem is always the desire, unbridled or monopolistic may result in injuries. People like Leonard Zwilling, who have researched on the codes of monastic in Pali and Sanskrit addressed that one is homosexual or not is not against the life as a monastery, as if it will not be the cause to abandon the order they have promised, or to lead others to join the sangha to escape the burden of their families.

Even the supplemental authoritative text did not include any denunciations of premarital sex or homosexuality, and non-married Buddhists were free to participate in voluntary homosexual acts. Therefore, in Buddhism, gay are not oppressed or cursed by religion, nor regarded as patients who need "correction". However, Buddhism has become the major religion in Southeast Asia, most of the countries are still against homosexuality, so this kind of view has never apply to these countries.

Hinduism is a extremely sexist and male-dominate religion, but meanwhile, women have found their places through practicing. Although Hinduism has a number of female deities, people are worshipping them, but women in real life are often seen inferior to men. The existence of martyrdom of widows, child marriage system and female fetus abortion reflect the fact that women's rights are generally weakened. Hindus often define women as two kinds, either virgin, or whores, and they still worship "cool goddess" and "hot goddess."

Sex culture also plays an important role in Hinduism, therefore, it restricts the roles of women in traditional religious and cultural practices. In Hinduism, born with a woman body is a tragedy for the family, because son stays with the family forever and has the ability to pass down the family name. It is also viewed as a burden for the parents when women get married, it means the parents need to pay the dowry, at the same time lost a free labor in the family. In this case, sex-selective abortion continues to be a highly contested problem in India society. According to IDF, 9 percent of all abortions are following sex selection in India.

One of the things that Hinduism and Buddhism shares in common is women's bodies are deemed as polluted. However, in order to make the bodies pure, women should put more effort on ritual practicing, the same strategy also applies for women who do not have children to balance their social status. Peach also addressed in the essay that in a marriage, women can only marry to someone that is in the same caste system or higher than her, otherwise, it would destroy the reputation of her family. Women need to take the major responsibility for marital harmony.

Hinduism similar issues like the other three religions. For example, women do not have the same access to education as men do and women should get marry earlier than men. However, there is a practice called "Sati", especially for widows in Hinduism society. Women's situation

will get even worse once their husband is dead. They are not allowed remarry to other men, but they can choose to join her husband, which is go down with him. The word "sati" means sincerity and truth love. Hindus believed that burial practices can help wash away the sins of their husband in this life and make his soul more pure.

Hinduism has different views on homosexual. Unlike Christianity and Islam see same-sex activity as "out of order", in classical Sanskrit source, Vatsyayana's Kama Sutra described homosexual as the "third nature" to let other people recognize it without judging. There is also a Hindu god named Murugan, he was the son of two male deities, Siva and Agni, which can be viewed as an evidence of gay sex. However, they also have texts that against same-sex activity. There were two major voices on homosexual in Hinduism society. First, people who got involved with same-sex activity should get punished. For instance, to be put in the prison for the rest of their lives and pay fine. Second was since Hindus sexual pleasure is vital, however, sex intercourse in most of the times is aiming to have babies. Therefore, some Hindus believe that people can have sex with whoever they want, as long as to produce a child by having heterosexual sex.

Ironically, there are far more female followers than men in any of the four religions, they have been devoutly practicing and attend worship frequently. However, they are not only be treated unfairly, but also only few of leadership spots are open to female. History was made by the victors, and victors were men. So it is not hard to understand why there are so many stereotypes towards women. It is understandable that some religions believe that different body functions have different responsibilities. But different doesn't mean less. Personally, religion is a way for people to get release and enter to a peaceful world, a world that can provide solutions for those unsolved problems in daily life. Therefore, if the existence of religion can actually provide a joy and peaceful world to people, then why it made homosexual people to obey the orders that against their nature by using god's name?