

Women religion



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Women and Religion 5/11 WOMEN AND RELIGION Gender inequality has been an ongoing issue which is being debated and worked upon since many centuries. The period between the early seventeenth and the mid nineteenth century was particularly a period in the United States of America when this drive against inequity was on its peak. Important female figures were associated in this period for the fight of equal rights and they used religion as a tool to assist them in accomplishing this task. These brave women with the assistance of religious thoughts worked towards the elimination of male chauvinism from the society. This paper will encompass this aspect with regard to the work done by some of the brave women who stood up for this right and provided an insight in to this matter.

During the Puritan Age, there was a religious belief that the sacred text of Bible could only be understood by the holders of the local ministries. It was further believed that only they possessed the right to explain the religious text to others as they were the only ones who interpret the true meaning of the Holy Book. The ministers were all men and hence only they had this ultimate right which led them to manipulate religious thoughts according to their ways. They suppressed women by presenting their thoughts that females did not have the capability of understanding religion and that females were subordinate to them. Anne Hutchinson was a brave lady who stood up against these barriers in this period of ignorance and started preaching religion with her own viewpoint.

Anne Hutchinson stood for the fact that a person had the capability of linking directly to God and they were not supposed to depend upon others for explaining religion to them. To support this she claimed, " that god had spoken to her directly and not through the intermediary of properly

appointed (and male) minister" 1. She was of the belief that religion had no barriers and a person was only accountable to God for his actions and not others. This resulted in an uproar since this was an unusual thing in that time. Females were suppressed and they were not supposed to express their perspectives of understanding religion. This led the state to take action against her and the Governor of Massachusetts imposed a ban on her ceremonies where she openly declared and taught her beliefs to other women and she was asked to undergo a court trial. The governor criticized her by saying " by the general assembly as a thing not tolerable nor comely in the sight of God, nor fitting for your sex" 2. This statement clearly indicates the male perception of that time and how females were considered to be inferior to their male counterparts.

Anne Hutchinson did not lose her spirit and she stood for her beliefs. She confronted the difficulties that came in her way and she spoke boldly in the court to defend herself by saying " Do you think it is not lawful for me to teach women and why do you call me to teach the court? 3 Thus she openly declared the fact that all beings were born in this world with equal rights and freedom of expression. She stood for the fact that religious beliefs were a matter of a person's own thinking and everybody had the right to choose their values according to their perceptions. She clearly overcame the barriers of gender inequality and this was the reason why she was subjected to discrimination. Her bold stand against the rules of her state and the laws provided by the church in the year 1634 provided an exemplary step which served to be an inspiration for other women of that time.

Eighteenth century was a period of progress for trade and business. This provided for the absence of males from the Churches in England during this

period. The females availed this opportunity and attended the church on a more regular basis than men which assisted them in polishing their religious beliefs. The religious thoughts opposed the fact of slavery and this was an inspiring thought for females. The decline in the number of men visiting the church was not very long lasting and they started returning to attend to their religious obligations in the period of the Great Awakening which was a period that “ promoted ... and appeal that crosses gender, class and slaves status”⁴ . Despite of this, the gap had provided sufficient time for the women to get a clear picture of their religion and this raised their moral spirits and raised their status in the eyes of the church as well. This era assisted the women in understanding their importance and moral equality to men and this was an accomplishment for them.

Jemima Wilkinson was the female figure who rose in this period of Great Awakening. She used to visit the Church and had knowledge regarding the fact how women were maltreated after their marriages and considered inferior to the males. She used her religious beliefs to stand up for the right of women. She opposed all the norms of that age by dressing up like males to prove the fact that she had the right to choose what was right for her. She opposed the fact that she should be referred to with her feminine name and declared “ void the feminine pronouns of “ she “ and “ her “ when referring to their leader.”⁵ She was a firm believer of God’s principle of, “ treating others as one wishes to be treated”⁶ Thus she defied all the injustices that the women had to go through in that period.

The Grimke sisters, Sarah and Angelina were the next important figures to uphold this movement in the nineteenth century. They had firsthand experience of oppression due to the slavery that they had seen on their own

family plantations. These women were female rights activists who used the pen to assist them in their task. They also stood up for the abolition of slavery. They presented direct quotes from the bible to oppose the wrongdoings that women were subjected to. They opposed the pastoral letter and responded to it in these words " We invite your attention to the danger which at present seem to threaten the female character with wide spread and permanent injury" 7. They also put forward this quote from the Sacred Book " Men and women were created equal; they are both moral and accountable beings, and whatever is right for man to do, is right for women" 8. Through this they wanted to make women aware of the fact that they had an equal right to enjoy all the privileges that they were denied by men. The two sisters utilized their skills for the right purpose and were well known participants of the movement of women's rights.

The First Women's Rights Convention in Seneca Falls, New York was a perfect forum for females which was organized by Elizabeth Stanton in collaboration with Susan B Antony in the year 1948. This convention was a gathering point for many women and it was here that the injustices that were done against women by the American Law were declared publicly. Elizabeth Stanton also presented the Declaration of Sentiments which was a work to condemn the gender bias against women that they were subjected to since a long time. Stanton stood for this fact declaring that she did not make up these rights but rather it was God who had endowed them to women and the Bible clearly presented " That woman is mans equal- was intended to be so by the Creator, and the highest good of the race demands that she should be recognized as such" 9. Thus she explained that for the society to run in a balanced way it was necessary to be understood that

women were not to be treated as inferior beings but rather they were to be provided with equal rights and opportunities.

Sojourner Truth provided a perfect answer on another Women Rights Convention to a male chauvinist who was arguing against women rights. She used the example of Jesus to uphold her argument by saying " who said that women do not have rights because Christ wasn't a woman", " What did your Christ come from?" From God and a Women! Man had nothing to do with Him. 10 Thus she tried to explain that for every man's existence a woman has to play a role. Hence no man can exist in this world without the intervention of a woman and hence she holds a very strong position in the society.

Thus the years from 1634 to 1851 were periods of male dominancy where they occupied powerful and key positions in the State as well as the Churches. They manipulated rules to maintain their superior position in the society. It was with time and proper understanding of religion that women realized their self importance. They then used religion as a stand for themselves to overcome the injustices that they were subjected to and stood up for their rights that they truly deserved.