

# History of Gender Disparity in Religion with Special Reference to Greece



**Anita Goswami**

Associate Professor,  
Deptt. of Ancient History,  
S.M.P. Govt. Girls P.G. College,  
Meerut

## Abstract

The rules and regulations of life were being guided by religion only. It was very common to find the gender disparity in the name of religion in ancient times. There were so many religion in which the rules and regulations for male and female were different. The history of woman is the history of the world. Strait orthodoxy may remind us that man preceded woman in the scheme of creation and that therefore history does not begin with woman; but this is a specious plea. The first historical information that we gain regarding Adam is concerned with the creation of woman, and there is nothing to show us that prior to that time Adam was more active in mind or even in body than a mollusc. It was not until the coming of woman that history began to exist; and if the first recorded act of the woman was disastrous in its consequences, at least it possesses the distinction of making history. So that it may well be said that all that we are we owe to woman. Whether or not the story of the Garden of Eden is to be implicitly accepted, there can be no doubt that from the moment of the first appearance of mankind on the scene woman has been the ruling cause of all effect.

However, since the dawn of human consciousness, women had formed an inseparable part of society and culture .Ever since the birth of Indian Philosophical thought, the eternal relationship between Purush and Prakriti remained the source of creativity and sustenance of the universe. They have remained a subject of concern and attention to writers, philosophers, law-givers and social thinkers. Almost all societies in the time and space have demarcated the world of men and the world of women.

**Keywords:** Greece, Purush, Prakriti, Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Siblys, Herophila, Promenia, Nicandra.

## Introduction

In ancient times religion was a very important part of day today life. So all the rules and regulations of life were being guided by religion only. It was very common to find the gender disparity in the name of religion in ancient times. There were so many religion in which the rules and regulations for male and female were different. The history of woman is the history of the world. Strait orthodoxy may remind us that man preceded woman in the scheme of creation and that therefore history does not begin with woman; but this is a specious plea. The first historical information that we gain regarding Adam is concerned with the creation of woman, and there is nothing to show us that prior to that time Adam was more active in mind or even in body than a mollusc. It was not until the coming of woman that history began to exist; and if the first recorded act of the woman was disastrous in its consequences, at least it possesses the distinction of making history. So that it may well be said that all that we are we owe to woman. Whether or not the story of the Garden of Eden is to be implicitly accepted, there can be no doubt that from the moment of the first appearance of mankind on the scene woman has been the ruling cause of all effect.

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More spiritual by nature, more to mysticism, with keener institutions, women has ever taken a more prominent part in religious matters than man. Hence, even in such a country as Hellas, where woman was excluded from so many lines of human activity, we find that in

religious observance she had equal freedom with man, and far exceeded him in devoutness and religious fervour. In religious festivals, woman's part in all bonds of union made her influential in the welfare of the common country, and religious ceremonies were to her occasions in which she could feel herself an essential factor in Greek life.

#### **Aim of Study**

The aim of the study of this paper is to understand the religious differences between men and women in Greece and in general to most of the religions of the world. Here we will try to find out the rules and regulation and general interpretation for women in Greece.

#### **Women in Greek Religion**

In the childhood of the world, man, who reached conclusions by a long process of reasoning, stood in awe of the intuitive faculty in woman that enabled her to arrive at a truth without apparent effort. Hence the spirit of divination was thought to be inherent in the sex, and women were prophetesses from remote ages. Among pagan peoples, the earliest manifestations of the prophetic instinct in woman were recognized in the persons of certain seers to whom was given the name of Sibyls. The word in its etymology signifies the "will of God," and was applied to the inspired prophetesses of some deity, chiefly of Apollo. The Sibyls were generally represented as maidens, dwelling in lonely caverns or by sacred springs, who were possessed of the spirit of divination and gave forth prophetic utterances while under the influence of enthusiastic frenzy. Their number, their names, their countries, their times, are matters about which we have no certain knowledge; but twelve are mentioned by ancient writers, of whom three were certainly Greek--the Delphian, the Erythrean, and the Samian. Herophila, the Erythrean Sibyl, was the most celebrated of them all, and she is represented as wandering from her Ionian home, by manifold journeyings, to Cumæ, in Magna Græcia, whence she became known as the Cumæan Sibyl. She it was whom Æneas consulted before his descent into Hades, and who later sold to the last Tarquin the prophetic books. It was believed that her age reached a thousand years.

Women also were priestesses at the oracles of Hellas, which were seats of the worship of certain divinities, where prophecies were imparted to inquiring souls through the instrumentality of the attendants of the deity. The oldest and most venerated of the oracles was that of Zeus at Dodona, mentioned by Homer. Here, among the prophetic oaks, priestesses read the future in the rustling of the leaves and in the creaking of the branches, in the bubbling of a spring and in the sounds made by brazen cymbals hung near the sacred shrine. Herodotus visited this oracle, and gives the names of the three priestesses who officiated in his time. These priestesses--Promenia, Timarete, Nicandra--related to him a very interesting story concerning the origin of the oracle. They traced its sacred legends back to the worship in the famous temple of Thebes in Egypt. Two doves, they said, flew away one day from the city of Thebes and took their flight into distant lands. One alighted in Libya, on the spot where the oracle of Jupiter Ammon was later established; while the other,

crossing the sea, flew as far as Dodona, where, perching on an oak, in human voice she commanded those that heard her to establish there an oracle of Zeus. For this reason the priestesses were known as Peliades, or doves. When, however, Herodotus inquired of the priests in Thebes about the tradition, they told a different story: that two priestesses of their temple had once been carried off from Egypt by the Phoenicians and sold into slavery, and that one of these priestesses finally established herself at Dodona. So, whether dove or priestess, the tradition of the Egyptian origin of the oracle seemed confirmed. Apollo, however, rather than Zeus, was the god of prophecy, and it was generally in connection with his shrines that oracles were spoken. Usually, fountains whose water was supposed to influence the workings of the mind, or caverns whence escaped a gas producing delirium or hallucination, were regarded as places where the divinity was present. Hence there existed numerous oracles of Apollo in Greece proper and in Asia Minor. The most celebrated of the latter was the oracle of the Didymæan Apollo at Branchidæ, near Miletus, where a priestess uttered prophecies, seated on a wheel-shaped disk, after she had bathed the hem of her robe and her feet in the sacred spring and had breathed the vapors arising from it.

The most illustrious of all the oracles of ancient Hellas was at Delphi, which is situated, like a vast amphitheatre, above the beautiful plain of Cirrha in Phocis, with the double summits of Parnassus forming the background. Delphi became the centre of the Hellenic religion, and the fame of its oracle extended as far as to Lydia in the east, and to Rome and the Etruscans in the west. At first, a young maiden took the part of the priestess of Apollo who gave the responses; but the authorities realizing the dangers to which the beauty of the priestess might lead, a woman of at least fifty years of age was later selected for the honor, and finally, as one prophetess was not sufficient to answer the questions of the vast crowd of pilgrims that assembled to consult the oracle, three were chosen. The name given to the inspired priestess was always the same, that of Pythia.

The status of women in society is very diverse worldwide. Among many important traits associated with the differentiation of gender inequality is religion, which itself must be regarded as a fluid concept with interpretations and practices 'embedded' and thus varying with respect to cultural and historical relations. Admitting the complexity of the issues, some religious norms and traditions can contribute to the formation of gender inequalities and to subordinate the role of women in society. Using an exploratory quantitative analysis, the influence of religiosity on gender inequality in social, economic and political spheres is examined. Three categories of states have emerged from the analysis: (a) states where the majority of inhabitants are without religious affiliation, which display the lowest levels of gender inequality; (b) Christian and Buddhist societies, with average levels of gender inequality; and (c) states with the highest levels of gender inequality across the observed variables, whose inhabitants adhere to Islam and Hinduism.

In the histories of religions, the voice of women is rarely heard, due to the patriarchal dispositions of societies in which these religions emerged, and which eventually stifled some of the changes in the status of women triggered by these new religions. The world religions all agree on the respect for women and their crucial role in family life, especially with emphasis on women as mothers and wives. They do not, however, advocate emancipation in the sense of total equality with men. According to Holm (1994), the most severe restrictions apply to women during their periods of menstruation and pregnancy, when, for example, they cannot enter the temple or touch the Quran.

Male and female roles are therefore much differentiated and also unbalanced in the world religions. The influence of women on the formation of religious norms and traditions is small, even though in certain doctrines, we can find women who succeeded in having their normative views accepted, or men who advocated equal integration of women into religious ceremonies. It needs to be stated that there exists a certain discrepancy between normative conditionality, which refers to what the given religion proclaims (equality of men and women before God) and practical conditionality, which involves the role of women in religious communities and state societies in terms of everyday life (Holm, 1994). In addition, the heterogeneity of the global categories ('Islam', 'Hindu', etc.) must be emphasized, such that general conclusions must be tempered by admitting such variability in religious affiliation – otherwise we would tend to stereotype religious affiliation, which is certainly not intended here.

The quantitative analysis aims to explore the extent of the influence of selected world religions on the indicators of gender inequality and the social status of women. States with a majority share of inhabitants without religious affiliation have also been included for comparison.

Overall, 50 'states' have been chosen as the cases for this analysis. The selection criterion was religiosity. States with the highest share of religious (self-identified) people in the world were selected, as

well as states with the highest share of people "without religious affiliation" (Zuckerman, 2007, who takes into account so-called 'lived religiosity'). These include 30 states in which one of three the most common religions (Christianity, Buddhism, Islam – ten of each) are dominant. Note that differences between Christian denominations have not been given attention in this analysis. Furthermore, the dataset includes ten federal states of India with the highest share of adherents to Hinduism, since no nation states (aside from India, Nepal, and Mauritius) have a high enough percentage of adherents to Hinduism to lend themselves to meaningful analysis. Therefore, the article uses the ten federal states of India which fulfil this requirement. All federal states of India have their own government, yet remain part of the State of India and defer to its legislature. They cannot be considered as fully independent in all areas, which must be kept in mind when interpreting the results.

States from each religious group (Christian, Buddhist, Muslim and Hindu states) have the first to the tenth highest share of the religion's believers in the world. This method allows the possibility of finding a relationship between religiosity and indicators of gender inequality at the state level. Of course, the results cannot be generalized to the entire societies of selected states. Similarly, ten states with the highest share of inhabitants who declare themselves as without religious affiliation were selected (Zuckerman, 2007).

#### **Conclusion**

So after having these information we can say that there were some disparity in terms of women in religion in Greece but even than they were playing an important role in religion and festivals of Greece. They were celebrating festivals on their name and giving lot of respect to their activities in the temple and in religious festivals.

#### **References**

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