

Faith, Belief and Practice: Gender lens on Religion

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Abstract: Religion has an important role as a regulatory mechanism overseeing lives of members of society. Religion maybe perceived as a belief system at the same time it can be a system of oppression as it may sanction power and responsibility to some and seize the same from another. Focusing on the patriarchal Gangte tribe of Manipur, the paper seeks to dissect women's status in two phases i.e. traditional religion and Christianity. The paper will illuminate how religious structure of the Gangte tribe has played an important role in shaping gender disparity and tries to delve on how religion as a social structure stunts women development and perpetuate their invisibility and muted presence. Despite the attainment of education, economic security, etc., the Gangte women continue to be absent in their political and religious body, and only had subordinate position in the administration of the churches which is the most important decision-making body of their society.

Keywords: Gender, Power, Religion, Leadership, Gangte tribe

Religion as a system of belief and its manifestations in practice are often reflected in the most basic set of rules that a society functions upon. Religious practices are vital in the structural make up of a society, its role as a regulatory mechanism overseeing lives of members of the society. The incorporation of doctrines and decrees as part of the regulatory framework governing our daily lives underlines the importance of religion in human society. According to Roberts and Yamane, wherever one sees a closing of the gap between fact and hope, wherever one sees a leap of faith that allows a person to assert that suffering and evil will somehow, someday be defeated, there one sees the manifestation of religion (2012:7). The genesis of religion is not merely a process which was birthed by imagining God, when men established a link between themselves and their surroundings, they formulated an enigmatic nature of the unknown between themselves with things which they made use of, or which they suffered or feared. Religion is something which men created to explain and make intelligible the happenings around him to make sense of things around him. Religion was thus created by men themselves

to explain things otherwise unknown to them and for their own security and protection from these incomprehensible forces and entities that struck fear in their day to day existence. Religion is the human enterprise by which a sacred cosmos is established. Put differently, religion is a cosmic phenomenon in a sacred perspective. By sacred is meant here a quality of mysterious and awesome power, external to man and yet related to him, which is believed to reside in certain objects and experience (Berger, 1967). In his explanation of religion Geertz asserts that religion is a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conception of general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seems uniquely realistic (1973:90).

The Concept of God and Religious Belief

The Gangte word for religion is *How* whose homonym is 'worship' as well as 'communication', and *Ho* is coterminous with *Sakhuo* which is the practice of religion. Like any other society, the Gangte society believed in the existence of a duality where good coexists with evil in the world. They postulated the existence of a Supreme God called *Pathien* who is proclaimed to be the creator of everything and is given the image of a beneficent being who had power over nature and a malevolent being *Thitha* an evil dark powers that doom mankind and causes great sufferings and misfortunes to humans. *Pathien* is characterised as male, the word *Pa* meaning male or father and *Thien* meaning creator or protector. Therefore the Supreme God has always been characterised as male. One of the first evidence of religious belief was the worship of *Uphok* (Frog) and *Gulpi* (Snake) that was worshipped regularly both in public and in the privacy of their homes. The Gangtes also believed in the power of ancestors which are regularly venerated through rituals known as '*Pusa*'. They believed in the concept of heaven and earth. The concept of life after death existed in the traditional belief system. They held the belief that the souls proceed in the afterlife on to the area of crossover known as *Hingkhen tang* which separates the land of the living and the dwelling of the dead known as *Mithi Khuo*. *Kuolounu* a female spirit would direct the dead to their rightful place. The gate of *Mithi Khuo* is guarded by a *Kuolounu*, she would examine the deeds of the person in their past lives and reward them according to their deeds. The most preferred place for a person in the land of the dead is the *Pielgal* which depends entirely on the achievements garnered by a person in his life, for instance, if they killed a specific number of wild animals or hosted some ceremonial public feasts, *Pielgal* was achievable depending on a person's prowess and determination. Women especially who have undergone abortion in their life in the living world would be bracketed as the sinners who would have to undertake a torturous path to reach *Mithi Khuo*, over long stretches of rough and thorny terrain,

alone and unaided, clearing the path through the pain. The burial ceremony for a woman included a weapon which would assist her in her journey to the other world. Infants would be accompanied by an egg acting as a compass, rolling across the *Mithi Khuo* and leading the child towards the destination. Thus showing the achievement of *Pielgal* was dependent gender and age in the traditional times.

In the Gangte language, religious practice as well as ritual is known as *Sakhuo* and its specificity favours the practice of appeasing a number of mystical, supernatural powers to avert illness and misfortune to truly achieve a liberated life. In the traditional Gangte religion there were different types of *Sakhuo*. There are varying ways to appease the spirit but this is unattainable without the presence of the *Thiempu* whose main role was to appease the spirits, he was the doctor for the sick and the protector of the people from demons and evil spirits. No ceremonies can be performed without the officiation of the *Thiempu*. The term *Thiempu* in literal translation means *Thiem* wise or knowledgeable and *Pu* is used for older man, therefore even if there are no records, the term itself meant that there never was a woman *Thiempu*. Even though there was no evidence of women being excluded from religious affairs, it is clear that women were never religious leaders.

Christianity among the Gangte and the Role of Foreign Missionaries

Christianity was first introduced among the Gangtes in the year 1912. Conversion to Christianity has brought about significant changes in the socio-cultural practices of the Gangte. With conversion to Christianity the belief in spirits and all the attendant rites and sacrifices were gradually abolished and the worship of the Supreme God was consolidated. Other prominent changes that occurred were the total abandonment of head hunting and drinking *Zu* (rice beer) during festivals and social gatherings. The severe decree of law and custom attenuated and the concept of marriage changed from strict rules to popularisation of romantic love. Christianity brought along with it the notion of individuality and rationality. On the flip side, conversion to Christianity meant loss of culture and tradition due to the popularisation of western values. It not only changed the belief system but the ways of life of the people as it enticed the people to imitate things that are western. Most of the literature that developed about the Gangte came after the conversion to Christianity, they wanted to dispel their previous faith and therefore very less record can be discerned from literature which meant total disassociation from the people's history. Thus it would not be erroneous to state that Christianity bought with it the loss of Gangte history.

Another influence of the missionaries is the reinforcement of patriarchy and the subordination of women. Under the patronage of the church, the sharp division between men and women got a boost. Among the Gangte women's sexuality is strictly

controlled by men and the community and the same is reinforced by the church, which puts emphasis on female purity and chastity. It was not that men were free to indulge in sexual activities but emphasis was given more to purity of women than that of men. Women are deemed to possess the powerful force of sexuality (Ralte, 2002:96). Women in religion have mostly been seen as a distraction and in the worst case scenario they have always been portrayed as seductress or vile and evil adulteress. Among the Chin Kuki Mizo tribe, the Mizos were the first to convert to Christianity and therefore the Christian practices and lifestyles were adopted mostly from them. The newly converts in Mizoram claimed that 'Adultery must be the greatest sin in the world because even in Jesus' time the adulterous woman was stoned to death. So women had to be kept under check to prevent them from inciting adultery. Women had to sit facing the walls in the church so that they would not see the preachers and men in the congregation in order to avoid adultery, they were not allowed to dance together at the revival and as a precautionary measure the church elders stood between them (Ralte, 2002:94-95). This culture and practice of separation between men and women during worship has carried on among the Gangtes and exist even to this day, where men and women are seated separately during service. Women have most of the time being portrayed as seductress. Even the Proverbs are replete with instructions for men to sway away from women with no principles. Till today in the churches there is a clear-cut segregation between men and women during worship.

On the question of womanly status, it can be stated that patriarchy hegemonies with fervour. Even on the question of embracing new faith, it was observed that women were converted to Christianity only after the men. In the pre Christian state women were prohibited from achieving the status of *Thiempu* but their lower status in comparison to men continue to persist. With the advent of Christianity the status of women improved in some spheres, with exposure to education they gradually developed in their personal sphere; women's sphere of activity expanded from the house and field to church related activities. However, women's ideological subordination continued to be a reality, the reason for which lies both in the patriarchal structure of the Gangte society and the missionaries. Both men and women participate in different church activities but women were passive participants with little role in the ministry. In the twentieth century when the missionaries entered Manipur, there were no independent women missionaries or pastors as gender bias gave women little space in their own society. The only women in the mission were the wives of the male missionaries. In line with the patriarchal ideology that characterised the western society, the main teaching of the missionaries to the women converts was to be submissive to their husbands, hospitable to strangers, guests, husband's friends and relatives. That she should cover her head and exercise self-restraint in speech and behaviour they should

worship silently and most faithfully support their husband, which in itself was taken as worship to God. In her study on the impact of missionaries, Ralte argues that while the missionaries might not harbour negative attitude towards women, they did little to correct the asymmetrical gender relation that existed in the society (2009:89). Besides, the missionaries did not want to interfere with the indigenous customary laws and practices and this is true not only of women's concerns but with other areas of the community's life as a whole. There was no critical interpretation of the scripture and mostly the bible was interpreted and applied literally even in the present times. Thus converting to Christianity did little to change the old way of life especially on the powerlessness of women.

Religion and Patriarchy

Patriarchy literally means the rule of fathers. But today male dominance goes beyond the 'rule of fathers', it includes the rule of husbands, of male bosses, of ruling male in most institutions (Mies, 1998: 37). In patriarchal discourse the nature and social role of women are defined in relation to norms which are male given. This finds its clearest expression in the generic use of the terms 'man' and 'he' to encompass all human kind (Weedon, 1987:2). Fox identifies three key paradigms in the discussion of patriarchy; patriarchy as collective male dominance permeating society, patriarchy as a self-contained system, and patriarchy specifically as the sex/ gender system (2001:315). Patriarchy as a system connotes how changes in the social structure overtime in history produces an arrangement in which power and prestige are accorded to men and men through their assigned power; promote, perpetuate and validate their status and position. He further stresses that patriarchy is a self-contained system like capitalism in which men own the means of production (resources, inheritance etc.) and women are merely the workers of what men possess, patriarchy as system of reproduction involves control of women's sexuality and fertility. As a sex gender system patriarchy is a connection between psyche and social structure, or the way gendered subjectivity and male dominance are related to each other (ibid: 322-323).

Coming back to the Gangtes, the first woman to receive a degree in Master of Theology was Hahat (name changed) in the year 2005. In an interview she narrated about her life after obtaining her degree. After obtaining her degree she started teaching in Bible College and found her interest in teaching. On the question of ordination she states that ordination is about having a calling from God and as she did not have a calling she did not even attempt to become a pastor. At the same time she expressed that if woman from her community did want to become a pastor she will give complete support to them. About her encounter with her congregation she expressed that her church was very supportive about her and she was even allowed to stand and preach in

the pulpit. At the same time, she reveals Evangelical Congregational Church of India (EECI) is not supportive of woman leadership, women are not perceived as leaders in the church and many churches continue to prohibit woman to even stand and preach in the pulpit. Hahat's grandfather was one of the first men who converted into Christianity and she belonged to an influential family so her acceptance maybe because of her family background and her charisma. But after marriage she had to leave the Church to join her husband's Church since he belonged to another church. The overriding power of kinship over structures like religion can be seen from the case of Hahat an empowered woman in her church but on marriage had given in to the kinship system which makes her subordinate to her husband, which eventually displaced her from the place where she enjoyed much respect and power.

Beliefs are not always at the heart of religious behaviour (Roberts and Yamane, 2012:22). Religion is closely intertwined with the kinship structures of the society. Vaiphei argues that The patriarchal culture could not imagine God as a female entity, as they are so accustomed in having a man as head of the family similarly God is perceived as male which gave rise to negativism towards women (2009: 31). Among the Gangte and other Christian community God is envisioned as male and in their prayers and preaching they address God as "*Aw Lalpa, chung Pathien*" (Father God, creator of heaven and earth). In a patriarchal culture respect is associated with father, and father is seen as a protector and a disciplinarian. In the same way the Gangte see God as their creator, and by virtue of that he is revered as the father. Father adoration is pivotal to fundamentalist construction of kinship and family in a way that links individuals to their church and its cosmology (Jankowiak, 2001:264). With the emergence of the patriarchal extended family as the structure involved absolute authority of the father or the senior male over everyone in the household-all junior males and all females, women were brought under the direct and systematic control, first by their natal families, and then by their husbands and their affinal kin (Ortner, 1996:50). In the words of one author,

Father adoration is a complex psycho-cultural configuration that arises from three separate yet intertwined factors: (1) a theology that endows men with supernatural essence that commands the regeneration of religious organisation primarily, but not exclusively, through copious reproduction; (2) a closed-corporate, theological community that confers its greatest esteem on men in leadership positions as members of the church's priesthood council and/or on men who are independently wealthy; (3) a family system organised around a father/husband, who is primarily focal point, at least at the symbolic level, and who unites the often competing female-centred natal family unit (Jankowiak, 2001:264).

One important question is ‘why the bible verse which posits that men should be the head of the house’ taken seriously whereas other scripts are not. At the beginning of the bible the lord says ‘therefore men will leave his parents and will be one with spouse’ (Genesis) but the rules of patrilocality emphasise on the importance of woman residing in the husband’s house...why are such verse ignored? The bible itself has professed that the man has to leave his parents to be united with his wife...two men cannot be the head exercising power and authority. Yet, in most societies (including Christians) it is the women who leave the parents house to stay with the husband. Also it needs to be asked, why when Jesus had categorically stated that it would be more worthwhile for women to devote themselves to religious activities than engaging in household chores (in his conversation with Martha¹), Christian teachings continue to associate women with service of the house and husband, giving them little place in church administration or proselytising activity.

Women and Church Organisation

Women play a pivotal role in the church. Every church has a *Numei Pawl* or Women Society which is run by women and carries out activities pertaining to women’s interests and concern. The *Numei Pawl* under the banner of the main churches are a support group for the church whose main activities are concerned with welfare of the people (not only the members of the church but the society as a whole) they assist people financially especially the member of congregation, the aged and the sick, gifts for member of the church on occasions like (mother’s day, father’s day etc.), marriage, achievements, ordination or farewell of the church member etc., and most importantly for the mission workers of the church. They would organise collective fasting prayer for the disadvantaged, family facing problems like sickness, alcoholism, drug addiction, marital problem etc. when they feel the requirement of such assistance. They administer their activities with their own funds which they generate from weaving traditional clothes and selling them, rearing and selling of pigs and other cattle, cooking and catering delicious curry (usually of meat) house to house. All the fundraiser money would eventually be contributed to the church. For the interest of the women and recognition of the role of women different congregation organises *Numei Khawmpi* (Women Conferences) and Seminary for women. The *Numei Khawmpi* is often an important activity for the women folk where women of different congregation interact amongst themselves in worship and singspiration and engage in Church related activities like praying, social work, funding projects etc. which may last for two to three days. It is an activity which often mandates travelling of women in large groups from one village to another and wholly confined to women alone and besides the religious activities such activities establishes a bond of sisterhood and

also a space for women (majority of them married women) to enjoy and rejuvenate themselves from their monotonous activities of housework at their respective homes. Unlike the *Numei Khawnpi* the Seminaries are held on sporadic occasions. In one such seminar attended by the Head of the Church acknowledges the importance of women's role in the formation of a strong and solid Church. The focus turned to the operation of human agency within structures of subordination. Anthropologists looked at women's forms of resistance to the dominant male order, like subversions of hegemonic meanings of cultural practices and redeployments for women's own interests and agendas.

Church is one of the most important form of social organisation and instrument of social order in the Gangte community interconnected with the social, economic and political life of the people. The churches belong to different denominations but there are no one particular family that is not a member of any church. In the good times and the bad times of an individual's life the church acts as a system of support. In as much as societal life is embedded in the society, the church and its guiding principles are also entrenched with the cultures, norms and values of the society. The structures of patriarchy along with the cultural ideology exert deep influence in the practice of religion. In order to understand the role and identity of woman in the church, we need to understand their role and identity in the society because the church is very much part of society that is influenced by its culture and traditions (Vasanthakumar, 2002: 49). The clear-cut separation of men and women is visible in the seating arrangement in the congregation where men and women are seated separately. And in keeping with the socio-cultural practice only men are seated in the pulpit of the church unconsciously exhibiting their higher status in comparison to women. A close analysis of the church programs show that in the church services during worship, women rarely stand in the pulpit, their main role is the scripture reading and praying at the commencement of the service. All the significant roles like preaching are exclusively the domain of the men in the church. This is true of folk beliefs too as revealed by Ortner in her study of Sherpa religion; She elucidated the prestige of men in the practice of religion, and find out that in the Tengboche women may have sacred ceremonies, from which men are excluded, but these are considered less prestigious than the ceremonies engaged by men: the male ceremonies are considered to be for the welfare of the group as a whole, while the women's ceremonies are specific to women (1996:48). This is true of the Gangte too. The patriarchal nature of the society has permeated the churches of the Gangte. A perusal of the administrative structure of the church bodies among the Gangte would make this clear (Please see Table 13). Evangelical Synod Church (ESC) with 41 churches and Gangte Baptist Association (GBA) with 13 churches are the two most prominent Gangte churches in Manipur.

Table 1: Administrative Structure of the Gangte Churches

<i>Evangelical Synod Church</i>	<i>Gangte Baptist Association</i>
Executive Committee Members: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chairman Vice chairman Executive Secretary Department Secretary Finance Secretary Members ONLY MALE MEMBERS Pastoral Committee Members: Ministers and Elders NO WOMEN MEMBER Departmental Committee Finance Mission and Evangelism Education Sunday School Women Society (<i>Numei Pawl</i>) NO WOMEN MEMBER	Executive Committee Members: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> President Vice president Executive Secretary Department Secretary Members ONLY MALE MEMBERS Pastoral Committee Members: Ministers and Elders NO WOMEN MEMBER Departmental Committee Finance Mission and Evangelism Education Sunday School Women Society (<i>Numei Pawl</i>) NO WOMEN MEMBER

The above table shows that the only time women figure in the church administration is as a member of *Numei Pawl*. Though women are included in the *Numei Pawl* of the church department of *Numei Pawl* is headed by men. A close examination of the *Numei Pawl* or the Women Society (Synod Women Society) of ESC shows that in all the 41 churches in Manipur even though *Numei Pawl* is a supposed to be a women's sphere it is under the supervision of men with the department head as the Chairman and the Area Pastor as the Vice chairman. Therefore, it is not the women members but the executive committee of the church which decides on the office bearers of the *Numei Pawl*. The main role and responsibility of the *Numei Pawl* is raising fund for the church namely *Anchang Ham*, that is collection of paddy from each household, which are later sold for profit and organisation of fetes for the benefit of the church consisting of sale of cooked meat and clothes which are collected by women of the church. In an interactive session with Zezem, an important member of SWS, she revealed that the *Numei Pawl* are involved not only in fundraising activity but also in the organisation of seminars and Camps for women (*Cha Chawilai Camp*) which brings women together to discuss about the Christian ways of raising the young and household management. She also

stated that *Numei Pawl* concentrates on different projects to increase the budget of the church and with the finance raised they provide help to widows, the elderly, the poor and needy. On the control of the money she declared that even though women of the church work year round for the collection of funds the funds collected are submitted to the main church who regulate its use and their role is basically to mobilise the funds. At present Zezem is the only woman holding an important post in the church, being an important church leader and qualified preacher. On being asked whether she gives sermon in the church, she disclosed that she has been offered to speak during Adult Sunday School in the church but she refused the opportunity as she felt it was more fitting for men to preach or give sermon. In her own words she revealed that *Ho inn a Pasal in thu a gen aphaï, Sapchuom Pu Pa umdan ahi* (Only men should preach in the church, it is the custom of the church). Besides preaching, Zezem and many women are of the opinion that church administration and leadership in the church should be in the hands of men rather than women.

The following table (Table 2) shows the sex-wise preference of women to leadership in the church for different activities:

Table 2: Survey on women's preference of leaders in the church

<i>Activities</i>	<i>Gender preference Men</i>	<i>Gender preference Women</i>	<i>Total</i>
Publication of news and magazine	87%	13%	100%
Sunday school activities	67%	33%	100%
Fundraising activities	63%	37%	100%
Church administration	85%	15%	100%
Youth activities	74%	26%	100%
Home visit for healing prayer	76%	24%	100%
Mission and Evangelism	77%	23%	100%

Note: Percentages shown are issue wise

It would be clear from the above an overwhelming majority of women are opposed to the idea of women occupying administrative position, which in other words means playing a leadership role. Many have internalised a well augmented oppositional statement, quoting directly from the sacred text and interpreting it as it suits the need. Some even proclaimed that having a female leader would be preposterous as she would never be good enough. The responses in the above table clearly show that women members of the church still prefer to have men control different activities of the church. Some qualified their preference by making reference to local gender stereotypes that question women's intellectual competence like:

Numei lung leh vawk-kuong aki dawng hi

(Women's intelligence is as shallow as the shallow dish that feeds the pigs).

"Numei pil pen chu pasal ngol pen sanga a ngol zou hie"

(The most intelligent woman is less intelligent than the most unintelligent man).

The alacrity, with which such defeating viewpoints are cultivated within the church and society, makes it even more alarming. One can speculate the low viewpoint of woman's intelligence by how culture has ensconced the construction of gender and such perception has percolated to the religious realm. On many recorded sessions, women have themselves agreed that it is better for them to be looked after by male leaders in the church as men are more rational and impartial as compared to women.

A century has passed since the Gangte embraced Christianity yet there has not been a single woman pastor in the history of Gangte church. It is only in recent times that women have been allowed to join the ministry that too in very few churches. Ordination or the anointment of a person from God to perform religious duty has been the exclusive domain of men. Reverend Elizabeth Paul was the first women minister to be ordained as Deacon on May, 6, 1976 at Madras (present Chennai). The first ordination of woman in the church in India performed in Church of South India in 1983 and 1986 in the Church of North India (Bharati, 2001:38). Up to this day ordination of women in the church is not a common occurrence. In Manipur, Reverend Dr. Kim Vaiphei was the first 'Woman Ordain Minister' on the 13th of February 1997 by the 44th Kuki Baptist Church General Assembly. Till date ordination of women in churches of the Gangte has continued to be very bleak. The most common response which was collected from asking women whether they want a woman church leader or a woman pastor was that it was "bizarre" to be under the leadership of a woman. On the question of ordination of woman as a pastor almost eighty percent of the interviewees were against having a woman as a pastor. The small minority who were more open to having women lead the church belong to the younger and educated age group, mostly under 35 years of age. There is a shift of opinion among this generation to the question of having woman as leader in the church. An important reason could be their experience of having women teachers or boss in their school, colleges or work place where they themselves have witnessed the ability of women leaders. Some women opined that having a woman pastor would be good as they will be able to relate more to women. This will be a good change for the church but they should have the calling from within themselves and are qualified to preach for women to be leaders or pastors in the churches.

It would be instructive to look at the reasons why men are preferred to be church leaders. In a survey eliciting the views of women to a number of reasons why women should not become leaders in church, the responses are revelling (see Table 15)

Table 3: Responses to why women are not fit to become church leaders

<i>Reasons</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Maybe</i>	<i>Total</i>
Women should be busy with childcare and household activities	81%	8%	11%	100%
Men are better administrator	72%	19%	9%	100%
Men are better decision makers	69%	20%	11%	100%
The bible does not encourage women leaders	78%	11%	11%	100%
Women will cause disorder in decision making	59%	18%	23%	100%
Women do not want to be involved	20%	67%	13%	100%
Like kinship, polity, economy etc. men are also decision makers and leaders in religion	73%	13%	14%	100%

Note: Percentage shown here has been worked out issue wise

More than 80 percent of women see women's place is primarily in the home looking after family and children and over 70 percent admitted that men make better administrator than women. Most women believe that women should be at home catering to the need of the family rather than being involved in outside activities even if it is religious activities. Care for the family is equated with devotion to God. Miller and Stark argues that cultural ideology and socialisation inculcate passive and nurturing personality in women which have doomed them to have a home centric attitude in comparison to men, such influence can be observed in the sphere of religion.

Although little systematic theorizing has been done on this topic, our review of the literature suggests three distinct ways in which gender- specific socialization leads to greater levels of differential religiousness. The first involves personality characteristics. Females are socialized to be more passive and nurturing, characteristics associated with greater levels of religiousness. The second involves traditional gender roles. Women are socialized into the role of mother, family caretaker, and so on, which are seen as subsuming religiousness. Third, women are raised in societies where they are denied social and economic power, which is seen as leading to greater religiousness by encouraging female passivity and submissiveness (a variation of the first explanation), forcing women to accept the role of mother and family caretaker (a variation of the second explanation), and increasing religion's appeal as a provider of social and emotional support to deal with blocked social and economic aspirations (a variation of classic deprivation theory) (2001: 1405-1406).

Women opine that men are better administrator because they are respected more than women and people listen to them and comply with their authority as they are more farsighted but can assist men in their situation. Since Eve women have always been seen as the cause of problem and evil and if they are involved in decision making they would create more chaos than peace in the church. Some women deny that women are

not involved in decision making process because they are not permitted to do so but when we look at the women and their well being they are more better in multitasking. Since the beginning of time, even before Christianity women and children have not been counted. With reference to the Bible many women opine that women and children should not be involved in the administration of the church.

On the question of decision-making men are considered to be more intelligent and therefore better equipped for decision making roles as compared to women. God himself made men first and therefore it is logical that men should lead the church and not women. 13 percent of the women believe that it is the matter of religiosity and not the structure of the society that has deemed men to exercise full control of the church. Women who object that men are better decision maker opine that it is the lack of experience and the fact that they are not given opportunities, render women a passive member of the church. Out of the women interviewed 67 percent disagree that women do not want to be involved in the administration of the church, in fact some women are more enthusiastic than men to be part of the administration of the church. Women do want to be involved in the administration of the church but even in the church we do not have any women who can lead us. As far as the adoption of patriarchal system is concerned 73 percent of the women believe that it is the natural course of the society that men would lead the church. Women have actually quoted the Bible during their interviews and asserted that it is written in the bible that men should be the head of the house and the church and if reversed it will be doom for the family and the congregation as it is going against the bible. It would instructive to look at some of the verses quoted by the women:

For man is not from woman, but woman from man. Nor was man created for the woman, but woman for the man.

(1 Corinthians 11:8-9, The Holy Bible)

I permit no woman to teach or to be in authority over men; she is to keep silent.

(1 Timothy 2:12, The Holy Bible)

But I want to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.

(I Corinthians 11:3, The Holy Bible)

Let your women keep silent in the Churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are also to be submissive, as the law also says. And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in the Church.

(1 Corinthians 15: 34-35 The Holy Bible)

On the question of induction of women in the administrative structure of the church the bible and its teachings are literally pursued. The church and the patriarchal ideology

of Christianity have deeply permeated the mindset of the people. At the surface level of the Gangte churches women are highly visible, their attendance in the morning devotion and church services are equal to that of men. In their homes women are actively engaged in the religious activity as they initiate family prayers, they teach their children verses from the bible and socialise their children to internalise characters in tandem with the words of God. It should be remembered that religiosity is not only related to spirituality but it helps in character building of a person. Among the Gangte, when a person is termed as religious it not only implies spirituality but also good character; man or woman of God is a person who is hardworking, who wakes up early, who are generous to the poor and needy, does not gossip, who does not smoke or drink and who is not corrupted etc. Religiosity in women is both admired and glorified, but when it comes to power and authority in the administration of the church, patriarchal ideology of men dominance come into force. The patriarchal ideology of men as the dominant being is not only a result of the kinship practice of the Gangte but also the influence of the bible which is highly patriarchal and hierarchical.

The male bias of Jewish and Christian theology not only affects the teaching about woman's person, nature and role, but also generates a symbolic universe based on the patriarchal hierarchy of male over female. The subordination of woman to man is replicated in the symbolic universe in the imagery of divine-human relations. God is imaged as a great patriarch over against the earth or Creation, imaged in female terms. Likewise Christ is related to the Church as bridegroom to bride. Divine- human relations in the macrocosm are also reflected in the microcosm of the human being. Mind over body, reason over the passions, are also seen as images of the hierarchy of the "masculine" over the "feminine." Thus everywhere the Christian and Jew are surrounded by religious symbols that ratify male domination and female subordination as the normative way of understanding the world and God. (Ruether, 1981:390)

Christian theology is rooted in the Jewish culture whose society had a very rigid patriarchal set up. Male stream religion in general and Christian theology in particular classically viewed gender and roles assigned to it as natural law theory and therefore seen to be universal and eternal. Kumari stresses that Christian sexual ethics is on the foundation of obedience, that is biologically determined, socially relevant, theologically inscribed and divinely (1998:iii). Women have been encumbered with the notion of religiosity. Cultural ideology entail women are ideal and valuable women are meek, submissive and most importantly chaste. A religious woman is thus one who is active in the church related activities like attending early morning devotion, philanthropy, choir, assisting church leaders in prayer, etc. and such personality quickly catches the attention of the elders and receives much praise and adoration from the member of the society. Roberts and Yamane argue that religion is historically connected to sexism

and gender inequality, and yet in most cases women exhibit higher levels of religiosity than men (2012:262). They further acknowledges that not being in the labour force gives women more free time for attention to faith issues (ibid:264). An examination of the household data on work participation among the Gangte showed that only 43.5 percent of the household are run by the males in the family (see chapter 3). Therefore work (force) participation cannot be the sole criteria for the religiosity of the women. Religion is an essential part of the society and in displaying of religiosity can sometime mean acceptance of the cultural norm and values of the society. In a society wherein the character of a woman is very highly judged upon, often women have to resort to religion to show their good character. To the many modern adherents of Christianity, ethics appears to constitute its principal or only meaning, and the loss of religion implies the disruption or even destruction of society through loss of morality. Popular and theological opinion both frequently implicitly include the idea that religions should incorporate codes of ethics and those failing to do so are not really religious at all (Norbeck, 1961:170). In a society where the woman's reputation can be easily tainted by such heavily gendered epithets as 'bad wife', 'bad mother', 'bad daughter', 'bad sister', and 'bad daughter in law', religiosity often prove to be the only safeguard for women to be accepted and approved by the society.

The patriarchal structure of religion is quite evident in its practice. The binary of the public and the private is strictly observed in the Gangte society and men are always viewed as leaders and women their followers. During the celebration of the Gospel centenary in 2012 it was evident that the women played a secondary role in church. There was a reverberation of the *Dakpi* to commemorate the centenary celebration wherein one hundred personalities were invited to ring the *Dakpi* in the dais, in which no woman was summoned implicitly showing that the role of women in church were insignificant. The church leaders were all men as though women did not play a significant role in the practice of religion. Even though the *Numei Pawl* were officially recognised none of the member of the *Numei Pawl* were asked to play a role in the centenary except for the secondary role of collecting fund, selling souvenirs, decorations, ushering, etc. Women's marginalisation in religion is not confined to Christianity alone. Even in traditional religion, men dominated the ritual space. In the Gangte religion, the male based lineage system are strictly observed, as it was the eldest member of the lineage who initiated the rituals along with the *Thiempu* and were followed in the chronological system of the lineage order in any social or religious event of the lineage. Even with the advent of Christianity traces of the traditional religious practice was evident, it was the *Upa* of the church who were given the precedence over any religious function. The *Thiempu* role which has now been replaced by pastor is an exclusive domain of the men of the community. Religious institution, however can also affect behaviour

quite indifferently of beliefs. In fact, religious institutions sometimes entice people to behave contrary to the official belief system of that religion (Roberts and Yamane, 2012:21). Therefore religion is not only system of belief as the influence of the dominant social structure can be observed in the functioning and practice of religion. Thus the Gangte women have managed to inculcate, no doubt, through the patriarchal social circumstances to acknowledge limitations in their domain in the private sphere and an ideology which stresses that a complete and a true self of woman lies in her silence, dedication to household chores etc. had corrupted and waylaid the very perception of femininity and are made to believe that the subordinated position of woman is natural and is how the world is.

Note

1. In one excerpt of the Bible, Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to the village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparation that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me. "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed-or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her". (Bible, Luke 10:38-41)

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