European Journal of Business & Social Sciences
Available at https://ejbss.org/
ISSN: 2235-767X
Volume 07 Issue 6
June 2019

Women's Role in Ministry: A Woman's Perspective of the Holy Bible

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ABSTRACT:

While women were created as equals before God, the patriarchal society disapproves the verity that women were created as equals and instead pronounces the fact that women were created only as subordinates to men. This paper attempts to reconnoitre the Holy Bible through a woman's perspective thereby deconstructing the patriarchal statements that pontificate the Holy Bible as a text that favourites men.

KEY WORDS: Women, God, Men, Equals, Subordinates, Patriarchal society, Holy Bible.

FULL PAPER:

Women were already a part of God's salvation for mankind and they still play a huge role in the ministry of Christian mission. They have made great accomplishments in different domains of Christian mission in the world. The missionary movements throughout the world have numerous records of women missionaries outnumbering their counterparts (missionary of men). This paper attempts to empathize the Biblical suppositions on women denouncing the patriarchal interpretations of the Holy Bible in regard to gender roles. Women, just like men were endowed with different gifts from God as both women and men were created as equals before God. "So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them" (Genesis 1:27; NKJV). Even though women were considered voiceless during those days, many women in the Bible had overcome their issues and problems

ISSN: 2235-767X
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in life to do ministry and they served the Lord with all their proficiency. During the Old Testament times, women were not even permitted to raise their voice against men. But even during those times, the Bible gives readers the examples of Deborah, Esther, and Miriam as Women leaders. The examples of Lydia, Pricilla, and Phoebe in the New testament substantiates the assertion of having women leaders in the Church. Many Churches ordain women as presbyters, these days. Women cross the barriers of language and culture to go and share the Gospel. While the mission is established in the New Testament of the Bible, While Church is considered as Christ's body, women constitute a major part of this body. In the New Testament times, women were highly accorded by Jesus in his ministry. When women were considered dilapidated during those days, Jesus's ministry made them come out of their patriarchal circle and prove themselves in the gigantic task of spreading the Gospel. When women were created in God's own image, the patriarchal society denounced their status by saying that they were less equal to the men in society but the strong combat of women for their equality had paved way for women's equality in the society. Biblical feminists looked at Bible from women's perspective, where they reread Scriptures through the verses that corroborate women's equality in the Bible. When many patriarchal writers affirmed the point that God created woman as only a helper of man, the Biblical feminists sequenced the same statement by pronouncing women's equality where the statement evidences the point that man can't do anything alone without the help of a woman. This verse in Genesis 2:18, "And the LORD God said, 'It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.'" (NKJV) clarifies that a helper is not somebody who is subsidiary, but one who works side by side. The word helper is even used for God in some junctures in the Holy Bible. When many patriarchal thinkers claim the apostle Paul as women hater, Paul himself has quoted Women's equality in the Bible through the verse, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave

ISSN: 2235-767X
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nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28; NKJV). This paper denounces the patriarchal avowal of laws concerning women's impurity by articulating the fact that if women were impure, Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit would not have entered into the body of the virgin, Mary to accomplish the task of human salvation. Jesus Christ treated women as equals in life and social status. Jesus Christ showed no favouritism to any in particular as He expected women to be equally his disciples as well as men. When women those days were restricted to read Torah, Jesus Christ encouraged them to sit at his feet as a disciple and learn. He had no double standards for moral concepts regarding men and women. The examples of Jesus's treatment regarding divorce and adultery prove the equal stand of women with that of men.

> Then the scribes and Pharisees brought to Him a woman caught in adultery. And when they had set her in the midst, they said to Him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses, in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do You say?" This they said, testing Him, that they might have something of which to accuse Him. But Jesus stooped down and wrote on the ground with His finger, as though He did not hear. So when they continued asking Him, He raised Himself up and said to them, "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first." (John 8:3-7; NKJV)

When Old Testament laws had serious impacts on women, Jesus' take on this issue deconstructed the patriarchal norms of the laws of adultery. The New Testament of the Bible proclaims the authority of women in Jesus's ministry. Many times, Jesus's ministry was funded by women.

> Now it came to pass, afterward, that He went through every city and village, preaching and bringing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with Him,

ISSN: 2235-767X
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> and certain women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities- Mary called Magdalene, out of whom had come seven demons, and Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others who provided for Him from their substance. (Luke 8:1-3; NKJV)

When the dearest of Jesus's male disciples deserted Jesus during the time of Crucifixion, women were with Jesus near the Cross until his death. The Bible considers women as very significant channels of ministry. The Book of Acts in the Holy Bible testimonies the place of women in the happenings and growth of the Church.

> Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey. And when they had entered, they went up into the upper room where they were staying: Peter, James, John, and Andrew; Philip and Thomas; Bartholomew and Matthew; James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot; and Judas the son of James. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers. (Acts 1:12-14; NKJV)

This shows that women were much persistent in their faith. The Holy Bible signifies the fact that both women and men stand on parity with each other as disciples, in prayer. This verse shows that even women were given the gift of prophesy, "Now this man had four virgin daughters who prophesied" (Acts 21:9; NKJV). This verse in the Bible disapproves the demarcation on women which states that Spiritual gifts were only given to men. Women prophets were not only seen in the New Testament, but there were also women prophets in the Old Testament too. The examples of Huldah and Deborah stands firm to substantiate the statement.

ISSN: 2235-767X
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"So Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam, Achbor, Shaphan, and Asaiah went to Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tikvah, the son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe. (She dwelt in Jerusalem in the Second Quarter.) And they spoke with her" (II Kings 22:14; NKJV);

"Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, was judging Israel at that time" (Judges 4:4; NKJV). The Holy Bible has also included women in teaching the ministry.

> I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea, that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and assist her in whatever business she has need of you; for indeed she has been a helper of many and of myself also. Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. (Romans 16:1-4; NKJV)

These are certain examples that substantiate their stand on Women's equality in the Bible. Women were participating in imperative roles like teaching and evangelizing ministry and they contributed a lot for the early church ministry. This paper also denounces the fact that Apostle Paul' s teachings were illtreating women. The certain examples of women mentioned in this paper exhibits that Paul had genuinely used women to minister in churches. Though man and woman's role were seen independent in the Bible, they were always designed to be interdependent upon each of them. This paper, therefore, deconstructs the patriarchal norms of gender discriminations in the Bible thereby postulating the actuality that both men and women were given equal moral and social responsibilities to build the Lord's kingdom. This paper thus ascertains that even women were fellow workers in the development of Christian ministry. "For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building" (I Corinthians 3:9; NKJV).

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ISSN: 2235-767X
Volume 07 Issue 6
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