

# Socio-cultural factors responsible for less participation of women in Kanwar yatra

Ms. Mithlesh<sup>1</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

When we see the religious practices of people from the past time in India, we see people practice religious rituals in their day to day life according to their beliefs. Though they relate to any religion or any culture. When look inside the family structure of Indian families, we find that women are more involve in religious practices in their day to day life than men. But when we see the data of travelling data for different pilgrimage the picture is totally different. Because women ratio for a specific pilgrimage journey like Kanwar Yatra in Hindus and Huj yatra in Muslims is very less than men. In the present paper, we basically discuss about the various social – cultural factors responsible for less participant of women in pilgrimage like Kanwer which are most among in the northern part of India. Kanwer Yatra is an annually celebrated pilgrimage event. In which many people participant with a religious belief. It is the rigid religious belief in which people of India special the northern part of India takes part form long period of time.

But a peculiar image appears when we look at female participants in such kind of religious activities. There are very few women who participants in Kanwer Yatra.

**Keyword:** Kanwar Yatra, Religion, Women, pilgrimage.

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## INTRODUCTION

Gender inequality belongs among the most prevalent forms of social inequality and exists all over the world, with different effects in different regions. These differences are primarily due to cultural legacies, historical development, geographic location, and, finally, the religious norms which predominate in society. Religion plays a vital role in the cultural life of different spaces. It is deeply rooted in people's experiences and influences the socioeconomic and political direction of societies. The status of women in society is an outcome of the interpretation of religious texts and of the cultural and institutional set-up of religious communities. Gender equality and the emancipation of women as important factors for the economic, social, and democratic progress of the world's regions and for the development of human society. This process is influenced by institutional norms, as well as culture and tradition, which are both largely determined by religion. As the relationship between religion and culture is reciprocal, religious systems are locked in a circle of mutual influence with social norms and patterns of social organization. It is apparent that the study of the status of women in religion also reflects the status of women in society as a whole (King, 1995), while considering the cultural, political and geographic factors. Every religion promotes somewhat different norms, creates different institutions, and builds on different cultural and historical foundations. The influence the individual world religions have on the status of women is much differentiated. Also, religious norms and prejudices may reflect patriarchal values, which are characteristic of all societies of the world religions. The role of God, or a creator of a religion, is always taken by a male and the woman is primarily valued as a mother, especially as a mother to a son. Her place is in the household, less so at religious ceremonies or in public positions. The real status of a woman in a religion is more complicated, however, as in some religions certain women have acquired significant posts (Holm, 1994). 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 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

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<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar, Ph.D. Department of Sociology, Maharshi Dayanand University Rohtak (Haryana)

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.

In the present paper we will discuss about the Hinduism religion and the role of women participating in the pilgrimage namely as Kanwar yatra.

The Kanwar Yatra is an annual pilgrimage of devotees of Shiva, known as Kānvarias or "Bhole" to Hindu pilgrimage places of Haridwar, Gaumukh and Gangotri in Uttarakhand and Sultanganj in Bihar to fetch holy waters of Ganges River. Millions of participants gather sacred water from the Ganga and carry it across hundreds of miles to dispense as offerings in their local Śiva shrines, or specific temples such as **Pura Mahadeva and Augharnath** .

At its base, Kanwar refers to a genre of religious performances where participants ritually carry water from a holy source in containers suspended on either side of a pole. The pilgrimage derives its name from the contraption, called kanwar, and while the source of the water is often the Ganga, it can also be its local equivalents. The offering is dedicated to Shiva, often addressed as Bhola (Simple) or Bhole Baba (Simple Grandfather/Father). The pilgrim, accordingly, is a bhola, and in the vocative, *bhole!* Although there is little mention of the Kanwar as an organized festival in canonical texts, the phenomenon surely existed in the early nineteenth century when English travelers report seeing Kanwar pilgrims at many points during their journeys in the north Indian plains.(Singh,2017). The devotees come from the surrounding states of Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Rajasthan, Punjab, Bihar and some from Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh. Heavy security measures are undertaken by the government and the traffic on Delhi-Haridwar national highway (National Highway 58) is diverted for the period. the Kanwariyas, dressed in saffron, trek along the route chanting 'bam bambholey' or 'har har Mahadev'. They usually travel in groups, and most of them come from Rajasthan, Haryana, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal. Folk dance and bhajans in local dialects is an important part of the Kanwar Yatra. While men constitute a major chunk of Kanwariyas, women often join in the annual pilgrimage. The Kanwar Yatra is done barefoot (a few also travel on bicycles, motorcycles, and four wheelers), and usually lasts two weeks. It sees participation from both young and old from across the country. Haridwar is one of the main pilgrimage sites where Kanwariyas arrive to collect Ganga water, whereas some also travel to Gaumukh and Gangotri in Uttarakhand. According to Free Press Journal, the Kanwar Yatra was a small affair till the 1980s, but it later started gaining popularity. Today, it's considered one of the largest religious events in the country.(Singh,2017)

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Havlicek and Havlicek (2015) presented the paper in which the study tried to confirm that religion significantly affects the status of women and the state of gender inequality, since it seeks to regulate the role of women in certain aspects of social and political life in a given society. The analysis confirmed the relation between religiosity and gender inequality factors, while the strong influence of economic development on gender inequality was controlled statistically. This proposition had concluded through the use of a correlation analysis of variables representing gender inequality in selected states: the results indicate that gender inequality is higher in those selected states with a higher religiosity.

Stephanie and Lovinsky(2009) presented a paper which seeks to shed light on those questions by investigating the impact of religiosity on attitudes towards gender equality. We find that religiosity is indeed strongly linked to gender inequitable beliefs. Not only religion matters, of course. The gender gap in attitudes is wide. In our statistical work, the effect of being male on gender inequality in attitudes was almost as great as religiosity. Perhaps more heartening in terms of what policy solutions might exist to engender conditions for greater equality, we also found that individuals with higher levels of education and income showed evidence of holding more gender equitable views. This evidence implies that apart from its intrinsic value and role in stimulating growth, broad-based education is tied to social and institutional change on the macro level.

We find overwhelming statistical evidence that the effect of religiosity extends beyond attitudes to negatively impact several measures of gendered well-being outcomes.

In all but one measure of gender equality in well-being (percentage of births attended by skilled health personnel), religiosity was found to contribute to more unequal gender outcomes – even once the level of GDP and social development were controlled for. We also found that higher income countries perform better on some measures of gender equality such as life expectancy, educational attainment, and skilled health personnel attending births. But in the areas of women's share of the labor force, maternity leave compensation, and the Social Watch's gender equality index, a composite measure of gender equality in material well-being, rising GDP gives no evidence of ameliorating women's status, suggesting that more interventionist policies may be required.

Rather, the empirical evidence presented here implies that dominant religions – have varying effects on gender attitudes and outcomes, some positive, some negative. The emphasis in previous research placed on any one religion therefore seems misplaced – or at least, is not fully illuminating with regard to the effect on gender attitudes and outcomes. Of greater significance, however is the finding that once we control for the individual's religion, we find that religiosity itself the intensity of religious belief and the frequency of religious participation – is consistently negatively correlated with gender attitudes and outcomes.

Vaus and McAllister (1987) studied that the most consistent finding sociology of religion, is that women tend to be more religious than men. Surprisingly, there are relatively few attempts to explain this phenomenon empirically. This article examines the extent to which gender difference in religious orientation can be attributed to structural location of women in the society. the analysis uses the nationality Representative data collected in Australia in 1983 to show that child rearing role and differencing attitudes towards work do not account for greater religiousness of women. He suggested that the greater religiosity of women not simply because of psychological disposition or differential positioning in society. A person position in the society and role they perform affect religiosity.

Hoge and Roof in their discuss “ parson with local orientation and tradition value in the area of sex , family ,drug use and civil liberties are more involved in church life. In social determinants of Church life found that age and value orientation are especially important, indicating value cleavage between older traditionalist and younger modernist explain much about pattern of church membership and activities. People who most believe in sexual freedom, marijuana use and moral individual find a barrier between their lifestyle and those of people in mainline churches. The number of such people in young adult population is growing.

In that study social and cultural factors that influences people to be Churched or Unchurched identity.

### METHODOLOGY AND AREA OF STUDY

The study carried out with personal interview people along with the well-organized questionnaire. The aim of the study to know about various factors related to the less participants of women in kanwer yatra special in the reference of the rural areas. This is descriptive kind of research in which the “What is” aspect of research problem is looked.

The area is chosen basically a rural context in which the religious belief is so stronger. For the study of various social – cultural factor responsible for less participant of women in the Kanwer yatra , I choose a village Pali located nearby of Mahendergarh district of Haryana . The population of the viallge nearly 1500 people. The caste compositon of the village is like as Rajput, Harijan, Prajapat, Brahmins, Ahir and minority of nearly 2-3 houses of Muslim community. In the present year 2018, nearly 5-6 women participants in kanwer yatra.

For the sake of the study of the present topic , I interviewed 5 women through the snow ball techiques. In the snow ball (Non-probality sampling) meet one respondent and then that respondent give reference to another respondent and so on.

The study is mainly narrative base in which respondent (Female kanwariyas) explain their experience related to kanwer yatra. It is extensive Interview in respondent mention their all of experiences regarding their family aspect, traveling experiences. Through this kind of narrative, I get much of information regarding kanwer yatra.

**Methodology used:-**1) Snow ball sampling for choosing the respondent.

2) Personal interview and narrative for collective of information.

**Objectives: -**

- 1).To Know about socio-economic background of the respondent (female kanwariyas)
- 2).To determine what are the various socio-cultural factors obligates the women to take participate in Kanwer yatra.
- 3). To analyze the gender inequality for participant of women in kanwer yatra.

### FACT AND FINDING

It is narrative base report in which researcher went to filed and hear the narrative of the respondent (female Kanwariyas). In the field, I meet with 5 respondent of the village who go for kanwar Yatra. Out of them 2 are going regularly for the yatra.

The first respondent age nearly 48 narrate her experience such like “she continuous going to Haridwar from the last 8 year along with her husband. She has two sons and both of them are married and employ as government servant . She said that all the family responsibility is now carried out by her daughters-In- Law .Now she and her husband are completely free from the family affairs .So every year , both (she and her husband) spend most of their time in

performing their religious activities. She says each year they go for Kanwer yatra for the 'internal satisfaction' as they have completed their family responsibility. Now they are waiting to get the moksha by performing the religious activities.

Another respondent who also married and age of 42 mentioned that "she had gone with her husband for Kanwer yatra from last 3 year in hope for get happiness life. For them meaning of happiness is good education of child, job of her husband and prestige of their family. But they don't want anything for themselves. In the hope to get the happiness for family she goes regularly with her husband".

By listening their narrative it can be concluded that there are some social cultural factors which obligates women to go to Kanwer yatra. The factors are listed below:-

1. The social restriction is that unmarried women cannot take participants in Kanwer yatra as the society it is not safe for unmarried women to go Haridwar . There can some kind of sexual teasing at the Haridwar when they go alone. One respondent say that "Kuwariladki ko hum nhi jane dete, zamana bhut bhura h ptanhiladkiyo ko nuksaannapahucha de"( They will not allow to go unmarried women as society is very bad somebody can harm them).
2. Mostly the female Kanwariyas go along with their family member as well as after there marriage. Before marriage no single woman participate in Kanwer yatra.
3. The female go for Kanwer yatra lies in age range 40-50 . The respondent say that " Ab gharki sari zimadarinibaah di, ab to bus bhagwan ko hi time dena." ( they have fulfill all responsibility of the home and now they will devote their all-time to God)
4. The family which have good economic resources allowed their female member to go Kanwer yatra. The people which are very poor never allowed their women to take participant kanwer yatra. Many of them explain " Kanwar main jane k liye paise or time hone bhut jarruri ha"( There should be money and time for going to Kanwer yatra). As poor people have lack economic resource, so they never go to Kanwer yatra.
5. The issue of child rearing also prevented to women to less participant in Kanwer yatra. In Indian society, it is the responsibility of women to take care of their child. So the women have children upto age 12 are never go to kanwer yatra. One female respondent says that "Mere bache bade hogye h, ab yeh apneKahyal Khud raksakte"( There child grown up and they can care ownself) or "Bacho Ki Saadi Ho gyi ab hum aaram se Kanwerlekar aa skate h" ( There child get married and now they freely can go for Kanwer yatra).
6. A major reason specify by all the respondents is for less number of female going for kanwar yatra is that they face some biological weakness during the menstruation cycle, so they don't able to travel such large distance. Another aspect related to menstruation cycle is that women are not allowed to go inside the temple during that period of menstruation cycle. Because in our religious teachings it is consider as sin. And as they are not sure about the date of menstruation so they always leave the chances for going to this yatra.

## CONCLUSION

The presented study discusses how the "female kanwariyas" are less in number. The present paper in which the female respondent narrates the various social –cultural factors which are responsible for restrict women to take participant in pilgrimage like kanwer yatra. It is rigid social structure which bound to the women to their household work. Society thinks that women are not safe outside the houses, so for them Kanwer yatra will not be beneficiary. Women are articulates as the "care taker of their child", taking participant in Kanwer yatra is not responsibility of the "mother women". So the present paper will draw the attention towards the women which are restrict to do religious activities due to this patriarchal society and rigid role assigned to the women.

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