



Research Paper

Critically evaluate the role of women in Church leadership in your context

B. Paulin Ebenezer
14PHTH102

Received 09 Mar., 2024; Revised 20 Mar., 2024; Accepted 22 Mar., 2024 © The author(s)
2024. Published with open access at www.questjournals.org

I. Introduction

Women have been marginalized due to the ecclesial hierarchy which is evident in the scripture, tradition, church structure and the society. In the Indian church context, the patriarchal structures and the culture have influenced the ecclesial orders and privileges. Though Women play an important role in society and contribute much for the betterment of the society and church at large, the proper recognition and acceptance is lacking. This paper deals with the role of Women in Church Leadership in the Indian Context.

II. Experience of Women:

Women's experience in the patriarchal society is that they have been generally treated as 'non-persons' in terms of worth, dignity and freedom.¹ In society women are suppressed due to the patriarchal set up and in the church, women are rejected from the ecclesial functions. In the early Christian community, leadership roles were diversified and were based on the actual function and service. Gradually the leadership roles were institutionalized and a patriarchalization of the Christian community, offices and theology took place. The patriarchal line of early Christian development played down women's role or made it marginal.² Women play the roles of mother, housekeeper and guardian of traditional values, which means they remain marginal to the labor force or to the professional world.

Culturally and theologically women are considered to be the 'weaker sex' and in the church they are addressed as 'silent majority' and also called as the 'silenced majority'(I Cor. 14:34; I Tim. 2: 11-14).³ Although women constitute the majority in the church by their attendance and join religious orders, only males represent the church officially.⁴

In the nineteenth century, the women's movement sought access for women to the academia and ministry by pointing to women's contribution. Though women scholars have fulfilled all the standards of academic excellence, only few have achieved status, leaving the majority silenced.⁵

III. Problems faced by Women in the Indian Church

There are many conflicting rules and regulations for women in the Indian Church based on biblical principles. The restrictions are that women should not pastor a Church and speak in the Sunday worship services.⁶ They should not be ordained and serve on any governing board in the church. Women should not serve in any capacity of authority in the church that involves a woman directing man and equal partnership in the ministry. Women must be silent in the church,⁷ be submissive to men⁸ and believe that God directs them through their husbands, making it unnecessary for God to deal with them directly.

¹ Leelamma Athyal, *Man & Woman: Towards a Theology of Partnership* (Tiruvalla: CSS, 2005), 74.

² Fiorenza, 'Word, Spirit and Power: Women in Early Christian Communities' in Rosemary Ruether & Eleanor McLaughlin eds, *Women of Spirit: Female Leadership in the Jewish and Christian Traditions* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1979), 31. Hereafter cited as Fiorenza, Word, Spirit and Power.

³ Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, *Discipleship of Equals* (New York: Crossroad, 1993), 143, 251.

⁴ Ibid.,252.

⁵ Ibid.,253.

⁶ Some churches do not permit women to preach in the service since men are present in the congregation.

⁷ For the silence of women in the church Pauline writings are quoted (I Cor. 11:3-12; I Tim. 2: 11-14).

Other barriers are physical barriers: women are considered as unclean. Due to the societal insecurity she should be accompanied by men.

Social Barriers: The Indian society is a male dominated society and the set pattern is that only men can give leadership.

Responsibility: Women have the responsibility of taking care of the home, husband and children. The involvement in the ministries will affect their role in the family.

Women's own opposition: In India, women themselves are opposed to their leadership role in the society.

IV. Marginalization of Women's Role

Leadership:

Leadership is the responsibility given by God. Many argue about this and object to women's leadership in the church. Leadership roles were diversified and were based on actual function from the missionary period. Since the early Christians adopted the institutional forms of the surrounding patriarchal cultures, patriarchalization took place. The androcentric tradition and patriarchy played down the role of women or made it marginal. Paul's writings are often quoted to restrict women's participation in leadership.

Partnership

Power-sharing is a prerequisite to the operation of co-responsibility.⁹ God made man and woman as stewards of creation and gave authority to jointly fill the earth and manage it. People are of the opinion that stewardship is domination, husbanding is control and partnership complementary in which the male determines everything. Patriarchy has ousted God's intention of partnership. God has created both men and women equally in God's own image. Partnership should move towards equity in representation of men and women in decision-making bodies. Women should be empowered to become active partners in determining the quality of life of the church as a community.¹⁰

Ordination

Women are denied ordination in some churches and the Scripture has been used to justify such discrimination. In some denominations, women are given ordination on condition that they would not ask for promotion or rise in their salary. Some ordained women are not included in the decision-making body.¹¹

According to Fiorenza, 'the ordination of women cannot simply mean their addition and integration into the male clergy but implies a psychological, structural and theological transformation of the church.'¹² And ordination should not only be for admission to ecclesial ministry but also for the ecclesial transformation that brings emancipation of women in the church in service to the well-being of the world.¹³

V. Factors that Marginalize Women in the Indian Church

Language

Language is a tool that signifies the role of the person in the society. The biblical text contains androcentric language and the translators share in the androcentric patriarchal mindset.¹⁴ Linguistic and scientific structures define women as secondary to men and androcentric perception of being human in the world has determined the reality constructions and scholarly interpretations not only of men but also of women.¹⁵

Patriarchy

Patriarchy is an oppressive social structure, which subordinates women and justifies man's aggressive behavior towards her. Deeply rooted in Indian culture and religion, it has influenced all social institutions, destroying

⁸ Ephesians 5:21-33.

⁹ Prasanna, *A Reader in Feminist theology* ..., 124.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 124 - 125.

¹¹ Prasanna, *Feminist Theology: Perspectives and Praxis* ..., 230).

¹² *Ibid.*, 89.

¹³ Fiorenza, *Discipleship of Equals* ..., 37-38.

¹⁴ Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her* ..., 83.

¹⁵ Fiorenza, *Feminist Theology and New Testament Interpretation* ..., 32.

women's self-esteem.¹⁶ Sexism, racism and militaristic colonialism are the roots and pillars of patriarchy. Patriarchal laws have silenced women and made them invisible. The church structures were maintained by androcentrism and patriarchy.¹⁷ Thus – 'the early church' was a 'man's church' and women were marginalized in it.¹⁸

Traditional Images of Women

Women in the Indian society are marginalized by the prevailing traditional images from the patriarchal structure. Dependent on their husbands, the traditional images of women were that of mother, housewife,¹⁹ weaker sex,²⁰ temptress,²¹ men's property, sex objects²² and unclean persons.²³ These images have influenced the role of women and their identity in society.²⁴

In the Indian church, there are images,²⁵ formulated by the use of the Bible and used as the guiding principle for the role of women in the Church. In the early Church history, most of the churches used Bible women to preach and teach the Christian faith but only at the grass root level. Women were engaged in teaching and counseling. Though they had active roles²⁶ in the church, it was only outside the church but not within its administration.²⁷ In most of the churches, women had only a passive role.²⁸

Reasons for Inequality in the Indian Church

- (i) In the Indian Church, tradition is given more importance than the Word of God. The Indian Society being patriarchal has subordinated women. Traditional India has seen a woman only as a member of a family or a group, not as an individual with an identity or rights of her own.²⁹
- (ii) Though some churches accept women in leadership and give equal status, because of the assumption of the inferior nature and passive roles, women themselves do not accept leadership.
- (iii) The Judaeo-Christian conception about women also negatively impacted on the role of women.³⁰

VI. Role of Women in the Indian Society

The patriarchal values prohibited and subordinated women. The subordination takes various forms.³¹ The patriarchal system controls women's productivity both within the household and outside in paid work; it

¹⁶ Lalrinawmi Ralte and Florence Robinson, *Envisioning A New Heaven and a New Earth* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1988), 290 – 292. Hereafter cited as Lalrinawmi, *Envisioning a new heaven and a new earth*.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.257.

¹⁸ Fiorenza, *Feminist Theology and New Testament Interpretation* ..., 37.

¹⁹ Virtuous happy housewife has the role as submissive, chaste, self-sacrificing housewife and it is measured by childbearing.

²⁰ Weak creature – women need male protection and so her mobility is restricted.

²¹ Temptress image means women are the source of temptation to man.

²² Women are treated as commodities created for the pleasure of man.

²³ Women are considered as unclean and so restricted from religious and social activities.

²⁴ Lalrinawmi, *Feminist Hermeneutics* ..., 50-51.

²⁵ The images are those of loving, caring, self-sacrificing wife and mother. Hardworking housewife- e.g. Martha and Proverbs 31: submissive women- e.g. Mary, mother of Jesus; temptress – Eve; Man's property- Levite's concubine; Unclean – the Levitical Law; Nameless – as in the genealogies.

²⁶ Active roles played by women are secretarial work, social work concentrating on women and children.

²⁷ In the areas of financial management, policymaking, legal matters and management of property, they are excluded (In some churches where ordination of women is agreed upon, women take part in decision-making but to a certain extent).

²⁸ Nirmala, *Role and Identity of Women in the Church* ..., 50-53.

²⁹ Their status is very low and it can be understood from the following quotation: "Behind us lies the patriarchal system, the private house with its nullity, its immorality, its hypocrisy, its servility. Before us lies the public world, the professional system, with its possessiveness, its jealousy, its pugnacity, its greed. The one shuts up like slaves in a harem, forces us to circle like caterpillars head to tail, round and around the mulberry tree, the sacred tree of property" (Prasanna Kumari, *A Reader in Feminist Theology*, 153).

³⁰ Prasanna, *Feminist Theology: Perspectives and Praxis* ..., 12-13. The image of Eve as temptress had made all women to be thought of as such. They were believed to have inherited from their mother, both her guilt and guile

³¹ Various forms of discrimination are disregard, insult, control, exploitation, oppression, violence within the family, at the workplace and in society.

controls women's reproductive power, sexuality, mobility and property and economic resources. Patriarchal influence is seen in every area.³²

Women in the Vedic Period

The core of woman's subordination is found in the religious code of Manu, the ancient lawgiver. In this period, daughters were considered or regarded as a source of misery. Women could not go to the trivial council or assembly (*sabha*) neither could they take an inheritance. Rich women³³ were allowed to be educated while ordinary women were admittedly neglected.³⁴ In the Vedic period, women achieved supremacy over men in their pursuit of knowledge. But in the medieval period during the Muslim rule,³⁵ the picture changed and women were led to illiteracy. Due to the impact of the Indian Renaissance, the spread of education among women and their greater exposure to the world became important. Education helped women to equip themselves to play a meaningful role in the society.³⁶ The participation of women in the technical and professional streams has shown a marked increase. The Indian Government has taken adequate steps to educate women.³⁷

Women in the Epics and Puranas

Women traditionally occupied a role of subordination and dependence, both at home and in public life. They were not encouraged to take up a life of asceticism, but were considered as impediments to men's asceticism and spiritual goals.³⁸ The role of women improved little under the impact of the Indian Renaissance. They came out of their cloistered life and took an active part in the struggle for national independence. But after the Independence again the situation changed to subordination.³⁹

Women in Islam

The Islamic system of allowing four wives and the right of man to dissolve a marriage by uttering *talaq* reduced their status to that of a chattel.⁴⁰ According to the Quran, the role of women is not limited only to childbirth. As men do, women were also required to do the good deeds. Theoretically they speak of equality but in practice – their veil, their illiteracy and the demands of fundamentalism on women, make the Quranic promise of equality invalid.⁴¹

Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism

These religions provided equality in certain respects. But, the stranglehold of customs and traditions got the better of these religions. So these religions also in institutionalized and organized forms have in practice pigeonholed women into subordinate roles affecting their total development and existence as human beings.⁴²

³² Nirmala Jeyaraj, "Understanding Gender Issues: A Move towards Gender Equality" in Nirmala Jeyaraj ed., *Women and Society: A Reader in Women's Studies* (Madurai: Lady Doak College, 2001), 4 -5.

³³ Rich women took part in industrial life as makers of embroidered garments, worked in thorns, dyers etc.

³⁴ Somen Das ed., *Women in India-Problems and Prospects* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1997), 7-29. Hereafter cited as Somen Das.

³⁵ The Muslim period in India left its mark in several ways. During the Moghul rule (1526-1857) to protect women, they were confined to the portals of their homes which slowly contributed to the 'Purdah System'. Due to this, women had to cover their face in order not to tempt them. (Jessie, *Indian Womanhood ...*, 26, 62-67).

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 34.

³⁷ The Draft National Policy for Empowerment of Women (1996) observes that 'A Synergy of development measures will be effected and affirmative action designed for the holistic empowerment of women. Equal access to education for women and girls will be ensured. Measures will be taken to eliminate discrimination, universalize education, eradicate illiteracy, and create a gender – sensitive educational system improves the quality of education to facilitate life-long learning as well as development of skills by women.' (Nirmala, *Women and Society ...*, 107).

³⁸ *Ibid.*,

³⁹ Their status can be understood by the quotation "In childhood a girl must subject to her father, in youth to her husband, when the Lord is dead, to her sons; a woman must never be independent." Prasanna Kumari ed., *Feminist Theology: Perspective and Praxis* (Chennai: Gurukul Summer Institute, 1999), 8-10, 40.

⁴⁰ Aruna Gnanadason, *Towards a Theology of Human hood: Women's Perspectives*. Delhi: ISPCK, 1986. 9-10. Hereafter cited as Aruna, *Theology of Humanhood*.

⁴¹ K. Rajaratnam, 'Women through the ages: A Brief survey' in Prasanna Kumari, *Feminist Theology: Perspective and Praxis ...*, 17-18.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 10 (For more explanation, refer, Hem Lata Swarup ed., *Women, Politics and Religion* (Etawah: Aditya, 1991), 53-58).

Family

The status of women in the family can be understood by the sayings in the Laws of Manu. 'In childhood a female must be subject to her father, in youth to her husband, when her lord is dead to her sons; a woman must never be independent.' 'By a girl, by a young woman, or even by an aged one, nothing must be done independently, even in her own house'.⁴³ Women are dependent on men and not given much privilege to enjoy life. The status of women is low that there is violence⁴⁴ against women in family.

Women and Jesus

Jesus lived in a background where women were regarded as having a domestic role and had a low status. During his days, women were not allowed to study, to participate in religious criticism and interaction. But Jesus interacted with them deeply, taught them privately and did not discriminate them socially. Jesus considered women not as objects but as subjects and as persons of full worth. He appreciated their spiritual capability, intellectual capacity and other ability to serve. Women's testimony was not trusted but Jesus used them to witness and testify to his resurrection.⁴⁵ Jesus set women free from the bondages of cultural drawbacks, lifted their soul by considering them as subjects of full worth, used them as ministers to spread the good news and made them to feel that they are also God's creation.

VII. The Role and Status of Women in the Indian Churches

Role of Women in the Indian Church

Women are faithful and support the church activities generally. In many churches, women play an active role in the Sunday school, Youth Ministry, Women's Fellowship and other social services. However, in most of the churches, they are not allowed to preach or lead the congregation. They are not fairly represented in church committees,⁴⁶ councils and theological colleges.⁴⁷

The Church, down the history has inherited its essential structure from Jewish religion and the Roman Government. The model of the hierarchy of the Roman government system was adopted for administration and handling of power in the church. As the church spread around the world the pattern was sustained and it is the same with the Indian Church.

The Indian church has its heritage from the mother churches in the West Asian countries, Europe or America. When the Indian Church established its forms, the social customs of the society around were absorbed.⁴⁸ The ritualistic worship forms restricted women's participation in worship. In the Indian church, women have been given both priorities and abused.⁴⁹

The Roman Catholic Church

Women are completely excluded from major decision-making bodies of the church, since these are made up of clerics only. Moreover, preaching is considered as part of the priestly ministry, and so entirely denied to women. However, women's participation is seen in the reading of the Scripture, leading prayers and collecting offering.⁵⁰

⁴³ Aruna, *Theology of Humanhood* ..., 134.

⁴⁴ Domestic Violences are wife beating, torture by in-laws, dowry, and violences in the society are Eve-teasing, Female Feticide, Kidnapping, Sex Trafficking, Rape, murder, prostitution, Bride burning, sexual harassment in the education centre, in public and in the work place. (See Ghadially, *Women in Indian Society* (Delhi: Sage Publications, 1988), 149-206 and also refer Corinne Scott, "Violence against women/women against violence" in Prasanna Kumari, *Feminist Theology: Perspectives and Praxis* (Chennai: Gurukul Summer Institute, 1998), 331- 342).

⁴⁵ Charles Caldwell Rylie, *The Role of Women in the Church* ..., 2-5.

⁴⁶ Few denominations like Baptist, Lutheran, Presbyterian and Methodist include women in decision-making.

⁴⁷ Even theologically qualified women are not accepted for leadership role in the church and church related institutions. They are not given the charge of any congregation (Nirmala, *Women and Society* ..., 290-291).

⁴⁸ K.K. George, 'Women and the Indian Church Structure' in Aruna, *Theology of the Humanhood*, 111-114.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 111-114.

⁵⁰ Ibid., (If the church is a progressive church, women can give the homily).

The Syrian Orthodox and the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church

The church constitution allows independence to vote and have them as representatives of the decision making body of the local church. However, there is no representation in any decision making other than participation in the choir. There is also another discriminating tradition that after the Feast of Epiphany, the first child to be baptized in the church must be a male. So in this church, women are not given any prominent role.⁵¹

The Marthoma Church

One noteworthy observation is that this church has a strong women's wing called the Sevika Sangham,⁵² established in 1919. There are a few representatives in the church committees, Mandalam⁵³ and council. Moreover in all parishes women are allowed to read the Scripture, preach, lead prayers and call offertory. Although there are no ordained women until now, the matter of ordination is being discussed at various levels.⁵⁴ Few women are theologically trained and lead the Bible study among the women and small groups and are allowed to preach to a certain extent but cannot enter the altar.

The Pentecostal Churches

The roles of women in the Pentecostal churches are not prominent. Their only prominent role is in women's fellowship. The significant change lies in the fact that although there is an outright denial of women's ordination,⁵⁵ the church still has quite a few theologically trained women. At present the Assemblies of God is allowing women in the ministry by ordaining them with the exception from conducting the communion services.

The Baptist Churches

In the Baptist church in the North East India and in other parts of the country, women have equal opportunities in principle and have fairly good representation at the council and convention levels. However at the local levels their roles are defined and restricted. There are many theologically trained women but only some work in the churches.⁵⁶

The Methodist Church⁵⁷

Women have representation in the decision making body. It has strong women's wing and structure for full-time women ministry. Women are also ordained.⁵⁸

The Mizoram Presbyterian Church

Women's representation has a significant number at the pastorate level. Voting rights are limited to only a few selected women at the synod. They are not considered for the ministry of priesthood as equal to men. The objections are mostly based on social and cultural practices rather than on theological basis. Women play an active role in women's fellowship.⁵⁹ The church has a large number of theologically trained women exceeding 300 [sentence not complete].⁶⁰

⁵¹ Hannah Devashanthi, "A Study of Rosemary Radford's select writings and its theological significance for the role of women in the Indian church" (M.Th., Thesis, Gurukul Lutheran Theological College, 1995), 30-60. Hereafter cited as Hannah Devashanthi.

⁵² It is an independent body and very active in evangelistic work, running orphanages, hostels, schools, Bible seminary and developmental programmes.

⁵³ Mandalam is the highest representative body of the church.

⁵⁴ Aruna, *Theology of Humanity* ..., 111-114.

⁵⁵ The prohibition of ordination as indicated is on the basis of scripture that says 'women should not have authority over men'.

⁵⁶ Nirmala Vasanthakumar, 'Role and Identity of Women in the Church', in Lalrinawmi Ralte & Evangeline Anderson ed., *Feminist Hermeneutic* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2002), 56.

⁵⁷ The Methodist Episcopal Church, the Methodist Episcopal Church South, and the Methodist Protestant Church merge to form The Methodist Church. The various women's home and foreign missionary societies and other women's groups of the three uniting churches are joined and become the Woman's Society of Christian Service.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, (1866 Helenor M. Davison, was probably the first ordained woman in the Methodist tradition, was ordained a deacon by the Indiana Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church and in 2002 There are eleven active women bishops in the United Methodist Church).

⁵⁹ Women's fellowship is the most important source of income or funds for the Mizoram Presbyterian Church, which represents 11.5% of the church's annual budget

⁶⁰ At present, most of them are employed as full time workers with the women's organizations of local churches, associations and at convention level, whereas only a few are employed in general church work. (Hannah Devashanthi ..., 35)

The Church of South India and the Church of North India

The Church of South India and the Church of North India have separate women auxiliaries.⁶¹ They also run weekly prayer meetings at grass-root levels to keep the spiritual life of women alive and the local pastors or pastor's wives give unlimited support and patronage to women's activities⁶² and women have been ordained.⁶³

The Lutheran Churches

The Lutheran churches are spread all over India. Until 1980, women were not having voting rights but they could participate in the worship services. The status of women has improved and the church ordains women but not involved much in pastoral ministry.⁶⁴

The Brethren Church

For more than a century, women in the Brethren church have led a struggle for human rights and social justice.⁶⁵ However, women gained wider and more influential responsibilities when the Woman's Missionary Association was organized in 1875.⁶⁶ But they have not yet attained freedom to participate completely in the church ministry and ordination to women is denied.⁶⁷

VIII. Emancipation of Women in Leadership:

In the Indian Church, the church can be democratic and women can take decisions. These can be attained if,

- (i) Women are made aware of their positive roles.
- (ii) Women are trained theologically and used vibrantly without restrictions.
- (iii) The traditional images of the role of women are changed.
- (iv) The Indian Church unmask the structural sins and alienation of racism, sexism and exploitation.
- (v) Women live 'for one another' and experience the presence of God in their gathering.
- (vi) The Church attempts to make women strong as individuals with talents and abilities.

Calling the Churches

Churches vary in their understanding in incorporating women in the Body of Christ. The Church should be called for orienting with the theological principles and insights.

Strategies in Ministry

- a. A public forum or committee which includes women should be formed in every church to discuss the issues, to investigate and debate new forms of being the Church.
- b. Women should be encouraged to undergo theological education and given equal place in the public ministry.
- c. The Church should provide funds to train women theologically.
- d. Women should be included in decision-making and their rights as responsible members of the church should be asserted.
- e. Leadership and ordination should be given to women considering them as equal partners in the ministry.

Conscientization

Women must develop a politics and spirituality for survival and change. Women should be made aware of their potentialities and identities. The positive role of women should be made clear to women. Women should be motivated to express their rights in writing.

⁶¹ The Church of South India Women's Fellowship and the Church of North India Women's Fellowship. These are powerful organizations running parallel to the churches. They raise large funds and run orphanages, schools, hostels, Bible schools, train Bible women and conduct quite a bit of missionary activities.

⁶² K.K. George, 'Women in the Indian church structure' in Aruna, *Theology of Humanhood* ..., 111-114.

⁶³ In the Church of South India and the Church of North India, all who have theological degree can be ordained but in some diocese they are not given salary that is equal to the men nor do they get the parishes of their choice. (Stella Faria, Key note address on Feminist Biblical Hermeneutics in Lalrinawmi Ralte & Evangeline Anderson ed., *Feminist Hermeneutic* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2002), 20).

⁶⁴ Nirmala Vasanth Kumar ..., 56.

⁶⁵ The early missionary societies meant opportunities for women to be in service through the church as never before possible and so developed powerful networks and organizational structures to help women attain full participation in the life of the church and society. They soon discovered that they were being denied the rights to full participation in church structures and on mission.

⁶⁶ In 1877, Emily Beekin is sent to Sierra Leone as the Association's first missionary; and the association is given General Conference recognition. 1909 The Woman's Missionary Association becomes part of the General Board of Missions.

⁶⁷ "Living The Legacy: The Continuing Journey of Women In Mission 1869-2002", www. <http://gbgm-umc.org/umw/history/legacy.html> (1 March 2007).

Conscientization of women can be done in many ways - developing teaching materials, songs, skits, television and radio programme, exposition of God's word and communicating how God cares for women and how God uses everyone irrespective of sex.

In many churches, people are accustomed to and comfortable with men's leadership. When some churches offer leadership to women, the congregation is not able to accept it. The Church should be open to accept and understand the ability of women.

Transformation

Many women are satisfied with the passive roles played by them. Their mind should be transformed by making them understand the positive and active roles that can be played by them. Women should be liberated from patriarchal structures. The full participation of women in the Church should engender the transformation of the Church and the liberation of the oppressed from the clutches of age-old traditions.

IX. Conclusion

The role of women in the Indian church is conditioned by the Indian culture as well as by the biblical tradition. Though women are given equality in socio-political-economic-religious level, equality is denied practically. Women in the Indian society received certain amount of freedom and enlightenment due to the impact of the Indian Renaissance and the missionary movement. Indian women are active in the educational and social realm. In the church women dedicate themselves to the service, ministry of prayer, ministry of the poor and are uplifted at all the levels. However, their ministry is wholeheartedly accepted only at the local-level and in some churches at various levels of decision-making bodies.

Evaluation:

Men and women are both created in God's image. They are equally blessed and commissioned to carry out his mission in the world. Church is the community of men and women where women are equal or more in number but tragically pushed into silence and discriminated against.

The Indian culture is a 'collectivist' or a 'communitarian' culture where the community takes precedence over the individual. Women desire and look for opportunities to study the Bible in groups, share the experiences and insights within the group that would result in the transformation of the community.⁶⁸

The Indian society is a patriarchal society. Though women have come into the public sphere socially, economically, politically and educationally, in the religious sphere they are still in the stranglehold of male domination. Hence, women are not participating completely in the church ministries. The Church should liberate women from the patriarchal oppression and transforms the life of the women which in turn transforms the whole society.

The context and culture during Paul's time were different. Women were not allowed to be educated and so they were prohibited from reading the Scripture. Since women lacked in understanding and knowledge they were ignorant and innocent of the teachings. Women, if with inefficiency preach or teach, they might mislead the congregation. But currently, women are entering the theological world and are contributing challenging theological concepts.⁶⁹

When fifty percent of the members of the congregations are women, how can the male pastor's ministry be effective without the assistance of an ordained woman? In many evangelical churches women visit houses, teach and preach the Word of God and bring them to church. But the men's roles are recognized and women are not recognized.

Rajaratnam, a leading Indian Churchman, considers women as a vast real estate.⁷⁰ Indian churches are keeping a vast resource in a state of disuse. In the medical field, educational institution, political arena, science and technology women never played a leadership role. But the Government has broken that tradition and has given leadership to women. Why then does the Church still follow tradition and restrict women in leadership?

⁶⁸ Prasanna, *Feminist Theology: Perspectives and Praxis ...*, 290-291.

⁶⁹ Gabriele Dietrich, Prasanna Kumari, Monica Melancthon, Leelamma Athyal, Sakhi Athyal, Nirmala VasanthaKumar and others. These theologians have written many books and articles envisioning and reshaping the theological world and in all their writings women shared the center.

⁷⁰ Prasanna, *A Reader in Feminist theology* (Madras: Gurukul, 1993), 135.

The Indian church has adopted its heritage from the mother churches in West Asian countries, Europe or America. The social customs of the society were absorbed. The church architecture and the worship pattern have been modernized and the Western pattern also has been adopted. But when it comes to leadership roles, they restrict by pointing to the heritage that was adopted in the past. When the church can go along with development and modernity in some areas, why not women be given leadership without any restriction?

The professions like teachers, theologians, assistant pastors, religious educators, counselors or administrators should also be acknowledged as 'ordained ministry'.⁷¹ Women have to demand ordination as priests, bishop, cardinals and pope. By involving themselves in formulating theology and church law, women have to be visible at all levels of the church. Only then can the church become a community of equals before God and the world.

⁷¹ Fiorenza, *Discipleship of Equals* ..., 88-89.