

## Women and their Religious Experiences under the Purview of Growing Gender-based Violence in South Asia—A Socio-Historical Study

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### Abstract

The present study examines the intersection of gender, religion, and violence in South Asia, focusing on the religious experiences of women in India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh. Despite the region's rich spiritual and cultural heritage, women have historically faced pervasive gender-based violence rooted in deeply entrenched patriarchal and religious norms. These norms have justified practices such as domestic abuse, child marriage, honour killings, sexual violence, trafficking, female infanticide, dowry deaths and so on, ensuring the lower in status of women. In a region marked by high religiosity, religious ideologies and practices have profoundly shaped women's lives. This study explores how religious institutions and leaders have often reinforced patriarchal structures, yet also highlights cases where women have challenged these norms. Through case studies from across South Asia, it examines how women, even within deeply patriarchal environments, have discovered agency in religious spaces and narratives. Some religious leaders and institutions have played pivotal roles in advocating reform and gender equality, while others continue to perpetuate traditional norms. In fact, in the name of religion the religious actors usually engaged in cementing the inferior position of women in a complex patriarchal society in South Asia. The paper underscores the complexity of the relationship between religion and gender-based violence, where religious identity can simultaneously oppress and empower. It calls for both religious and social reforms to combat gender-based violence and promote gender equality. By unravelling this nuanced interplay, the study seeks to foster inclusive religious practices and safer, more equitable environments for women.

### Keywords

South Asia, Women, Religion, Gender-based violence, Patriarchy, Social reform.