

Reconciling Religion and Feminism: A Case Study of Muslim Women's Rights Activism in India

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Abstract : Feminism and religion have been regarded as opposing binaries. The reason being that religion is regarded as a tool to legitimize the patriarchal control over women, and therefore, it stands in contrast with the basic feminist principle of gender equity. Hence, the issue of incompatibility between religion and gender parity is often discussed by the feminist as well as secular/liberal discourses, but the feminist discourse has suffered a serious backlash in the recent times for it alienates those women who want to liberate but not at the expense of their religious identity. Though in the Western feminist thought, religion is regarded as a tool of patriarchy that promotes women's suppression, but for many women, religion can be a source of liberation that advances their rights. The feminists in general, fail to realize that religion, as a social phenomenon may not necessarily promote a series of dogmatic doctrines which are inevitably retrogressive or instinctively status-quoist especially when it comes to the social reforms affecting gender orders. The traditional institution of religion could be instrumental to provide what the women in contemporary situation demand. This paper highlights how the Muslim women in India negotiate and mediate this opposition in an Islamic context. To advance the socio-legal recognition of women's rights, they question the male privilege and patriarchy in a meaningful way without challenging their Islamic doctrines and try to build a feminist consciousness from within religion.

Keywords : feminism, Islam, Muslim women's rights, religious identity

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