

Women, Equality and Religions. Zoom March 2026

The meeting focused on discussing the role of women in different religions and faiths. Participants, male and female, shared perspectives from Hinduism, Christianity, Paganism, and the Baha'i faith, highlighting both traditional roles and modern advancements toward gender equality. The discussion covered how various **religious texts** are interpreted regarding women's roles, the challenges of implementing equality in **religious institutions**, and **societal attitudes** toward women's empowerment. Participants noted positive changes in younger generations' acceptance of gender equality while acknowledging ongoing resistance and backlash in some communities. The conversation also touched on the impact of education, legal frameworks, and cultural factors on women's rights across different societies and religious contexts.

Updates and Interfaith Event Planning

The meeting began with informal introductions and casual conversation among participants, including updates about personal activities and experiences. V expressed interest in hosting a future interfaith event at her **Hindu temple** and would send possible dates.

B announced an upcoming **Bahai New Year event at Thorpe St Andrew, Roxley Village Hall** this Sunday, **March 22nd**, to which NIFL members are invited for talks, drama, music, and art activities. D H-P shared updates about his work visiting schools to teach the Easter story and a recent successful SIAMS inspection at a local church school. DG also wondered about the significance of ivy requested on the coffin in a recent funeral of someone local to her in Attleborough, with C, Pagan, offering insights into its symbolic meanings related to life, renewal, and support.

Main Summary

Women's Roles in Religious Leadership and Gender Equality in World Religions

The group discussed attitudes toward women in religious leadership across different faiths. D H-P shared his experience with the **Church of England's** evolution toward accepting women as priests and bishops, noting both progress and ongoing resistance, including cases where some parishioners refused to accept female priests. A explained that **Hinduism** views women as embodying divine feminine power (Shakti) and both genders were equals in spiritual terms, though historical patriarchal structures had previously restricted women's roles. G elaborated on **Hindu teachings** about the divine feminine, including goddesses like Saraswati, Lakshmi, and Parvati, and noted that while traditional gender roles in the home and society existed, modern Hindu society is increasingly embracing gender equality. B shared **Baha'i teachings** on gender equality, emphasizing that women can serve in all spiritual assemblies and that both genders are essential for the world's progress and survival, using the image of a bird which needs both wings to fly. C discussed **modern paganism's** evolution regarding gender roles, highlighting the influence of feminist movements and influential female writers in the community, linked to experiences brought back from the USA and Canada. N represented the **Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints**, explaining their belief in gender equality and the essential role of both men and women in families and the church. J, with his own interpretation of Christian biblical texts from his upbringing in the **Caribbean**, believed in gender equality and had worked with the UN on a number of projects in the Caribbean supporting the empowerment of women. But he had also seen gender equality taken to extremes by what he called fundamentalist feminists -

both men and women. Having discussed the role of women in religious leadership, particularly in the Church of England, P shared his research on how **biblical texts** in both Testaments have been misinterpreted to support anti-women sentiments, explaining how these contrasted with informed readings of Genesis, Jesus' life and St. Paul's letters. He planned in his current academic research both to conduct focus groups with women to understand their self-perception of being created in God's image, and to analyse transcripts from the Church of England's parliament, General Synod, in their debates on women priests, and later women bishops.

The Challenges of supporting and achieving Gender Equality

The group discussed gender equality, with participants sharing perspectives on women's roles in today's society and workplaces. G noted that while women in **India** are taking on dual roles of working outside the home and managing household duties, there hasn't been significant resistance from religious leaders compared to other societies. B observed positive changes in **younger generations**, citing increased educational opportunities for women and more egalitarian approaches to parenting, though she acknowledged that men still feel threatened by women's rising status in positions of power. The discussion highlighted the ongoing challenges in achieving true gender equality, including the need for men to support and celebrate women's achievements. C discussed the historical roots of patriarchy, tracing it back to ancient Greek city-states and its subsequent development and spread through empires and religious structures. P concluded by noting that while there has been significant progress in women's roles in society, there remains a backlash from certain sectors, but expressed optimism about younger generations being more accepting of gender equality.

Gender Dynamics and Social Challenges and Resistance

The group discussed evolving gender dynamics and challenges in society. DG expressed sympathy for men facing changes in **traditional gender roles**, while D H-P highlighted a concerning backlash among young males driven by **social media influencers** and the "Incel" movement promoting celibacy and anti-women sentiments. The discussion touched on how different generations are adapting to changing attitudes, with G noting that many **young men in India are avoiding marriage** due to concerns about wealth distribution in case of divorce. The conversation also highlighted the **Church of England's** choosing to fudge rather than make clear decisions about gender equality, with participants noting the church's tendency to accommodate different viewpoints rather than establishing definitive positions based on Christian teachings and truths eg setting up parishes for men only priests with their own bishops, and continuing to ordain priests who reject women priests in their churches.

Single-Sex Education and Mythology

The topic of influences on the **upbringing of boys** led to a discussion of the narrow and negative experiences and the benefits of single-sex education. DG shared her positive experience at an all-girls grammar school while expressing possible concerns about her grandson's education in an all-boys secondary school environment. C concluded with a different perspective on the Greek myth of Atalanta, suggesting that the golden apples dropped by her suitor for her to pick up so she lost her race, were actually pomegranates used as contraceptives in the ancient world, providing a more egalitarian interpretation of the story in contrast to focussing on female distraction.