

# Role of Christian Religious Communicators in the Management of Menstrual Taboos: Revisiting the Historical Perspectives and Exploring its Modern Outlook

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**ABSTRACT--***The cultural and religious relationships of Christianity with Judaism has prompted Christian religious communicators to construct unfair laws for menstruants based on Judaic laws. Jesus, the role model of all Christian religious communicators, opposed this ruggedness vehemently. Irrespective of Jesus' attempt, the patriarchy that prevailed in Christianity in the first century A.D, restricted women in religious practices due to attributed menstrual impurity. The stringent rules became trivial gradually as there is no report of a reformer or a definite period in history which claims this transformation. The present study explores the historical perspectives of menstrual taboos, the modern outlook of much progressive young Kerala Catholic Christian women, and the role of religious communicators in empowering women. Statistically significant results endorse Christianity as superior to any other religion in Kerala in their outlook towards menstruants and 93% advocates that religious practices should not be restricted for women during their menstruation.*

**Keywords--***Religious Communication, Christianity, Menstrual Taboos, Religious Communicators*

## I. INTRODUCTION

In recent time, menstruation has become a topic of discussion in the realm of religious circles. This academic attention ensues in a context of growing anxiety about the presence of religious pathos related to taboos attached to menstruation. This is because the attached taboos have affected the social and religious position of women since traditional practices and beliefs treat menstruation as an impurity. Why the 'Holy Men' of all Semitic religions considered menstruation as an impurity is a question which echoes time and again even in this twenty-first century. In their attempts to answer this, many scholars generally point their fingers at the patriarchal nature of the Semitic religions which treated women as secondary and on no occasion allowed them to hold any power positions of the society. With the lack of proper understanding of the biological process of menstruation, these religious practices were quite disheartening. This research paper attempts to trace out beliefs and practices that existed in Christianity, particularly among Catholics. Kerala being known for its literacy rate and status of women; the researcher makes a keen effort not only to revisit the issue from the historical perspective but also tries to understand the mindset of young Kerala Women to shed more light into the reasons that led to discrimination towards women based on menstruation, which was quite a natural biological phenomenon.

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A mixed-method of research is followed here. Scriptures are reviewed in-depth to understand the religious perspective. A pretested questionnaire with the credibility of 89.74 % was used to evaluate the perception of young women towards menstruation and the role of religious communicators in strengthening their opinion.

## **II. CHRISTIANITY AND JUDAISM**

Christianity, the dominant religion of the world, is principally based on the teachings of Jesus Christ. It comprises of different social, ethnic and cultural groups since it is widely spread around different continents. This religion has got three mainstream churches and diverse orthodox groups. Its largest groups are the 'Roman Catholic Church', the 'Eastern Orthodox Churches', and the 'Protestant Churches' (Encyclopaedia Britannica). The beliefs and practices of women in the menstrual phase vary in these different groups since each of them has originated from the different socio-cultural background.

Christianity, from its infancy, has adopted a lot of religious and socio-cultural elements from Judaism. Jesus was a Jew and was brought up in Jewish culture. Some scholars still consider Christianity as a religious sect of Judaism by quoting the fact that it originated in Judea, by the initiatives of twelve apostles of Jesus Christ, who were all Jews. They moulded Christianity in the framework of Judaism, and as a result, several existing rituals and practices in Judaism were either continued or renewed (Phipps, 1980). The Christian Holy Scripture 'Bible' comprises of two parts, namely 'Old Testament' and 'New Testament', out of which the latter is considered as the culmination of the former. The 'Old Testament' is the Hebrew Bible; the sacred scripture of Judaism. The 'Old Testament' encompasses a lot of passages on menstruation and impurity, which is predominantly the reference point of Jewish beliefs and practices on the same. In Christianity, both 'Old Testament' and 'New Testament' passages and the tradition of the Church are equally referred, to mount their views on menstruation and impurity (Catechism of the Catholic Church, article 84). Hence, in order to understand the beliefs and practices of menstruation in this religion, it is ideal for taking a closer look into the Jewish beliefs and practices of the same.

## **III. VIEWS OF JUDAISM ON MENSTRUATION AND WOMEN**

Research reveals that the doctrines of Judaism on menstruation and women are highly influenced by Zoroastrian doctrines. The reasons for the 'how and why' of this can be traced from the history of Jews. The historical period of 'Babylonian Exile' occurred when the Jews were in captivity in Babylonia. This happened after Jews were conquered by the Persian emperor in 587/6 B. C. The captivity came to an end in 538 B.C., when Cyrus the Great, the then Persian emperor, gave freedom to Jews and permitted them to return to Palestine (Smith, 2015). During the fifty years of their exile in Babylonia, Jews imbibed the Zoroastrian thought patterns on menstruation, ceremonial cleanliness and impurity of women. The statements in Zoroastrian literature relating to the women in menstruation were too harsh, such as, "When she touches the bedding and garments of anyone, it is to be washed with bull's urine and water. She was confined to a special house, and it was a capital offence for anyone to have sexual relations with her" (Sharma, 1994). These ideas had influenced the Jewish priests while they constituted rules and regulations for women in menstruation.

Three kinds of impurities are coded in the Pentateuch (a collective name for the first five books of the Bible namely, 'Genesis', 'Exodus', 'Leviticus', 'Numbers', and 'Deuteronomy'): moral, genealogical and ritual. The

'Holiness Code' in Leviticus declared every one other than Jews as morally impure, accusing their religious practices as idolatry and illicit sexual acts. This attitude was very much evident when Ezra the Priest commanded the Jewish community to purify themselves by divorcing their Gentile wives soon after the 'Babylonian Exile', considering them as a peril to the genealogical purity of Jews. Pentateuch declares a woman in menstruation as ritually unclean. The Jewish law had strictly prohibited sexual intercourse at the time of menstruation, and if found so, it resulted in ex-communication of both the parties (Koren, 2009). The following verses in the book of Leviticus in the Bible are associated with these findings.

"When a woman has a discharge, and the discharge in her body is blood, she shall be in her menstrual impurity for seven days, and whoever touches her shall be unclean until the evening. And everything on which she lies during her menstrual impurity shall be unclean. Everything also on which she sits shall be unclean. And whoever touches her bed shall wash his clothes and bathe himself in water and be unclean until the evening. And whoever touches anything on which she sits shall wash his clothes and bathe himself in water and be unclean until the evening. Whether it is the bed or anything on which she sits when he touches it, he shall be unclean until the evening" (Leviticus 15:19-30, Bible: The Message Version, 2002).

"If a man has intercourse with a woman during her monthly period, both of them are to be driven out of the community, because they have broken the regulations about ritual uncleanness" (Leviticus 20:18, Bible; Good News Translation, 1976).

Eleven books in the 'Old Testament' speak about women and their menstrual periods. The book of Leviticus (third Book in 'Old Testament') takes the major share of it. The book of Leviticus mainly speaks about laws which are prescribed for the priests of the tribe of Levi (One among the twelve tribes of Israel). It is more legislative in character. The 'purity laws' prescribed by this book were intended to preserve every Israelite in a state of 'Legal purity' and this Legal Purity was an external expression of their ever-binding relation with Yahweh.

It is also noteworthy that the religious beliefs of Jews about blood had influenced their contemplation of women in menstruation as impure. According to the Bible, God has declared blood as life, and the spilling of blood, even in the menstrual process was considered as a bad omen. According to Deuteronomy 12.23, it is said that "Only be sure that you do not eat the blood, for the blood is the life, and you shall not eat the life with the flesh" (Deuteronomy 12.23, Bible; English Standard Version, 2008) (Phipps, 1980). Considering the above-mentioned facts, Jewish priests and rabbis (Jewish religious teachers) made a lot of regulations for women in menstruation. Rabbi Hanina said, "even the saliva that she spits out onto the mattress pollutes her husband and sons. They (menstruating women) are forbidden entry to the synagogue until they immerse themselves. She who has relation with her husband while a *Niddah* (Hebrew word for woman in menstruation) will cause her sons not to inherit the Torah; and that is not all, for she will cause them to be afflicted with leprosy for one hundred generations" (Koren, 2009).

The history of Jews after their entry into the 'Promised Land' evolved in and around Jerusalem temple and temple worship. This temple in Jerusalem was mentioned by prophet Isaiah and Jesus as "a house of prayer for all people" (Isaiah 56:7, Bible, English Standard Version, 2008). Jewish Priesthood considered the women in menstruation lower to gentiles which depicts the lower status given to them in the temple. They were the only group who were denied access to any of the courts of Jerusalem Temple.

The book of law in Judaism, 'Talmud', mentions uterus as a 'place of rot'. Talmud is well-known for its harsh statements against women in menstruation. This medieval Judaism text declared menstruation as a curse given to

the fallen woman Eve (the first woman created by God) since she is the mother of all this curse, which is passed on to every woman thereafter. Carrying a curse by God was an ample reason for the Holy men of Judaism to exclude women from all religious ceremonies (Segal, 1976).

The 'Non-Pentateuchal' (books in the Old Testament, other than the first five) books of the Bible has cited menstruation as a metaphor for evil. The following Bible passages are some of the examples:

"Then you will desecrate your idols overlaid with silver and your images covered with gold; you will throw them away like a menstrual cloth and say to them, "Away with you!" (Isiah 30: 22, Bible, New International Version; 2011).

"They cast their silver into the streets, and their gold is like an unclean thing; their silver and gold are not able to deliver them in the day of the wrath of the Lord; they cannot satisfy their hunger or fill their stomachs with it. For it was the stumbling block of their iniquity. The beautiful ornament they used for vain glory, and they made their abominable images and their detestable things of it; therefore, I will make it an unclean thing to them" (Ezekiel 7:19–20, Bible: New International Version, 2011).

"In you, men uncover their fathers' nakedness; in you, they violate women who are unclean in their menstrual impurity" (Ezekiel 22:10, Bible; New International Version, 2011).

#### **IV. CHRISTIANITY AND WOMEN IN MENSTRUATION**

Christianity has originated in Judea in the first century A.D. It considers itself as a continuation and fulfilment of Judaism. Christianity, at its infancy, thrived among the regions where Judaism had its roots. However, it had rapid growth among the neighbouring regions through the work of early Christian missionaries (Phipps, 1980).

Christianity has adopted a contextual stand on women in menstruation, and the approaches varied highly in treatment and nature of ideas. Scientific evidence proves the paradoxical approach of Christianity in this matter that was either due to the availability of resilient points of opposition to the contempt stated by males toward women in menstruation; or, on the other hand, persuasive arguments in favour of Levitical purification laws which disrespect women in menstruation.

#### **V. JESUS AS A CRITIC OF LEVITICUS PURIFICATION LAWS**

Jesus was known for his disrespect and criticism towards Jewish purification laws. He deliberately violated the purification laws on food, leprosy and women. The views and arguments put forth by him were totally different from all other existing Jewish texts. For example, "And Jesus said to them, "The Sabbath (Sabbath Laws) was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27, Bible, New International Version, 2011).

According to the gospels of Matthew 9:20–22, Mark 5:25–34 and Luke 8:43–48, Jesus, in spite of being a Jew who had to abide by the Leviticus Purification laws, was intentionally touched by "a woman with a flow of blood" (Buttrick, 1953). As one can read in the Bible, the woman who was in prolonged irregular vaginal bleeding got healed as she touched him in good faith and above all Jesus never cursed her for touching him while she is in 'impurity'.

Samaritan women were treated as perpetual menstruants and were given the lowest status by Jewish oral traditions. This ancient tradition considered anything which is touched by a Samaritan woman as polluted, and thus

when Jesus drank from the jar of Samaritan women, it was an act of clear proclamation of his opposition to the Jewish purity laws (McGrath, 2017).

Mark 5:25-34 is a significant passage which reveals Jesus' attitude towards the menstruating women. The passage reads as follows: "And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse. When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, because she thought, 'If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed.' Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering. At once Jesus realised that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, 'Who touched my clothes?', 'You see the people crowding against you,' his disciples answered, 'and yet you ask, 'Who touched me?' But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it. Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth. He said to her, 'Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering.' The woman was 'trembling with fear' when she was asked by Jesus to confess what she had done and the healing she experienced. Her expression is a clear evidence of the strict Jewish laws that existed then, against a woman in menstruation. Here, we read that Jesus was not concerned about the 'polluting touch' by the 'unclean women'; instead, as scripture says, she was healed, and Jesus consoled her by telling 'go in peace'" (Mark 5, 25-34, Bible, New International Version, 2011).

The character traits of Jesus in the gospel reveal that he never demanded a proclamation of the healing; instead, he repeatedly warned the cured not to disclose the miracle. Then arises the question of why is an exception in her case. According to the Leviticus purification code, the public appearance of a woman in menstruation had to be treated with harsh punishments. The fact that she came to Jesus while he was in the midst of a crowd was an ample reason for severe punishment. Asking her to reveal her face and her sickness in front of the very conservative Jewish community and Jesus' way of consoling her to return in peace can be looked upon as an indication of his refutation of Leviticus purification law.

## **VI. EARLY CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS LEADERS ON MENSTRUAL IMPURITY**

The unknown writer of *Didascalia Apostolorum* (collection of teachings attributed to the twelve apostles) confirmed that 'baptismal cleansing' (the first sacrament in the seven sacraments of Catholicism, and it is considered as the initiation ceremony to Catholicism) had substituted all earlier forms of purification. Therefore, the following instructions are given in it: "Separate not from the menstruating; for she who had the flow of blood was not rejected when she touched our Saviour's clothing. Cleave to your wife during her menstruation in a manner that is right; for you know that she is your member. Love her as you love yourself. Therefore, a woman when she is menstruating, and a man when an issue comes forth from him, and a husband and wife when they consort and rise up one from another: let them assemble without restraint, without bathing, for they are clean" (*Didascalia Apostolorum*).

The first Christian response in favour of this ancient taboo was from Dionysius the Great, (a third-century bishop of Alexandria). He favoured the constraints on menstruating women. In a letter to Basilides (early Christian Religious teacher from Alexandria), he pointed out that "impure" women should not rush to approach the

communion table."Synod of Laodicea upheld his opinion as to the official version of the Church about the menstruants.

Gregory the Great (Pope of the seventh century) had expressed his stand on menstruants, in a letter to Augustine of Canterbury (the first Arch Bishop of Canterbury). He was totally against the practice of forbidding the menstruants in the Church. Based on the bible verse, "To the pure all things are pure," he forcefully argued that the impurity is in the hearts of the people who label the menstruants as contaminated. "If she who had an issue of blood might commendably touch the Lord's garment," (Jesus and the unclean woman, Mark 5, 25-34) Gregory argued, "why should it not be lawful for one who is menstruating to enter into the Lord's church?"

Even though there were Christian literature against the evil practice of treating menstruants as contaminated, those literature which favoured this ancient taboo got an upper hand in the course of time. As a result, the women in Christianity continued to be on the losing side (Phipps, 1980). Medieval Byzantine canonist Theodore Balsamon appealed that "the uncleanness of menstruation banished the deaconesses' role from her before the holy altar" (Phipps, 1980). Later the deaconesses (the only ordained women in the early Christian Church) were asked to discontinue. Professor Nicolae Chitescu of Roumania, a contemporary Christian thinker, pointed out that the "blood impurity period" is serving as an ample reason for not allowing a woman into the Priesthood in 'Eastern Orthodoxy'. In 'Eastern Orthodoxy', menstruants are still not permitted to partake in Holy Communion (Holy mass). In and around the fourth century, both Latin and Great Church accepted the 'Leviticus code of Holiness' to deal with menstruation (Chitescu, 1964).

There are manuscripts in Greek Church which not only advocated the Jewish restrictions on menstruants but also added more prohibitions on them. The Jewish tradition prohibited sexual relation with a menstruant, but these manuscripts even went further saying that sex should be avoided "out of regard for the children to be begotten". The following statement by Jerome (father of the Church), which was later validated by Thomas Aquinas, a well-known Catholic theologian and philosopher, clarifies why marital relations during menstrual periods were deemed immoral during the Middle Ages. "Men ought to keep away from their wives during menstruation because it is then that deformed, blind, lame, and leprous offspring can be conceived" (Aquinas, 1485).

Theodore, a seventh-century Arch Bishop of Canterbury, ordered that "women shall not in the time of impurity enter into a church, or communicate". Roman Catholic canon law, codified in the twelfth century, states that a woman "must not for any reason approach the altar" (Corpus juris canonici no. 813). The Corpus Juris Canonici ('Body of Canon Law') is a collection of significant sources of the canon law of the Catholic Church that was applicable to the Latin Church. In the contemporary Catholic Church, there has been little relaxation of the menstrual taboo. In 1972 Pope Paul VI banned women as lectors and acolytes out of veneration for the traditional prohibition against menstruants at the altar. Vander (1973) reports that Dutch Jesuit Haye Vander Meer, in his book 'Women Priests in the Catholic Church?' has pointed out that menstruation is a fundamental reason for the Church's refusal to consider ordaining women.

## **VII. RECENT PRACTICES IN CHRISTIANITY AND THE ROLE OF COMMUNICATORS**

Christianity has always influenced the rituals and practices of all sects of people across the globe. It advocated for improvement in the living standards of the people by adopting the newly innovated technological gadgets and scientific discoveries. Their historical attempts to promote education, health and awareness through print and media, to elevate the living standards of the people; both moral and physical, is the tangible evidence for this fact. From the above paragraphs, it is apparent that scriptures did lay stringent rules on women; however, the communicators appear to have played a significant role in improving the situation. Though there is no clear demarcation about the time of transit, the religious communicators, adopting a broader outlook have encouraged women to participate in all the activities on all days, including the days on menstruation.

Catholic communicators of the time, are rather silent on this taboo. Bible passages, which impose restrictions on menstruants, are excluded from daily Holy Mass readings([http://www.syromalabarchurch.in/daily\\_reading.php](http://www.syromalabarchurch.in/daily_reading.php)). This radical step has resulted in the lack of any communication on these taboos over the church podiums. Since Christian catholic communicators play the role of opinion leaders in the Church, even their silence on this topic will result in disremembering this taboo. The researcher seldom finds any catholic communication or communicator enforcing the age-old practices relating to women in menstruation. The availability of interactive media and the scientific and medical advances of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has facilitated to overcome this illogical traditional practices. This envisaged the families to liberalise their views towards the women in menstruation and the traditional concepts of 'unclean and untouchable'. Women of today enjoy absolute freedom from any types of ban in religious practices, except for the Ministerial Priesthood.

Today, with the advancements in science and technology and with more insight into the biological processes and its reasons, we can look at life and life processes with more understanding and logic. Despite all these transformations, society shies away from discussing menstruation. This leads to a lot of ignorance and inconvenience among young girls. Lack of proper knowledge, together with the inhibition to disclose the obliviousness or clarify the doubts, drive them to hold several misconceptions. The practices in Judaeo-Christian tradition on menstruating women may not be the norm in every household. The degree of following the rules and the practices varies from family to family. It depends on their beliefs and how strongly they hold traditional practices.

## **VIII. PERCEPTION OF YOUNG KERALA CHRISTIAN WOMEN ON 'MENSTRUAL TABOOS': A CROSS-SECTIONAL STUDY**

A study was conducted to understand the mindset of young women who are staunch devotees of Church concerning the management of the much 'tabooed' subject. The study intended to understand the present scenario of how Catholic Church treats menstruants and how has it influenced their involvement in religious practices. To this effect, a survey was conducted among young catholic Christian women of the age group 16 to 26 years, who are in the higher education phase extending from an undergraduate program to doctoral studies. A questionnaire

was drafted and validated for this purpose which covered queries addressing their opinion about the historical perspectives and modern outlook of the status of menstruants in religious practices. 93% of the participants ranked four on a scale of 1-5 (5 highest, 1 least) which assessed their intensity of practising Christianity, which implies that the respondents of the survey considered themselves as staunch Christians. A cross-sectional study was conducted on 345 catholic Christian women, and the sample size was calculated based on the pilot study conducted on 50 women of the same denomination.

## IX. SAMPLE SIZE

A pilot study was conducted on 50 Catholic Christian women of the age-group 16 to 26 years. The 70% of participants answered the questionnaire alike, and the sample size was calculated using the following formula:

$$n = \frac{Z_{(1-\alpha/2)}^2 pq}{d^2}$$

$$Z_{(1-\alpha/2)}^2 = 3.84, \text{ at 5\% level of significance}$$

$$P = 70\% \text{ (proportion from a pilot study on 50 Catholic Christian women of the age group 16 to 26 years)}$$

$$q = 1 - p = 30\%$$

$$d = 5\% \text{ (margin of error or absolute precision)}$$

Thus, sample size,  $n$  was found to be 323. Considering 10% non-response rate, it was rounded to 345 participants.

## X. STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

Data was entered in M.S.Excel and analysed using SPSS version 16. An association between two categorical variables was evaluated using Pearson Chi-square test with Fisher's exact test in the case of small numbers and  $p$  value  $< 0.05$  was considered as statistically significant (Debata, Kumar, Kumar & Philip, 2018).

## XI. RESULTS

According to the results, 93% of survey participants are staunch Catholics who practice the religion strictly. Inherently, these group of people are subject to the parish priests, who are their immediate religious communicators. The views and suggestions put forward by the religious communicators who serve as opinion leaders in the catholic community influences the Christian families. In the matter of religious practices, these opinion leaders have got impactful influence. By saying so, from the survey, it was understood that 92.8% of the participants do not face any discrimination or ill-treatment due to their menstrual status. According to the historical aspects discussed in this paper, religious leaders had imposed restrictions on women during menstruation. But the present study clarifies the fact that in the modern scenario opinion leaders of the Catholic Church (religious communicators) have intentionally disremembered the restrictions, which has promoted the equality of women even during the menstrual period.

92.8% of the participants are of the opinion that Kerala Christian families do not consider menstruants (women in menstruation) as 'unclean' or 'impure'. 86.1% are not shy/reloquent/awkward/offended to discuss their menstruation in the family, and 97.7% responded that their families do not impose any restrictions on them for menstrual reasons. In such a scenario, it is evident that there are no inhibitions imparted by the authorities of the Church through religious communicators.

95.9% have received their first lessons on menstruation from mother/close relatives. 51.5% responded negatively while 27% were not sure about the fact if any restrictions are being imposed on menstruants for biological reasons. 67.9% said that women are emotionally stable during menstruation, but when asked if a woman can handle physical and emotional tasks equally well during menstruation as they are in the regular days, the response was not very demarcating. Here, 41.9% felt that it is possible, but 54.4% suggested that it would be challenging to handle physical and emotional tasks equally well, during regular and menstrual phases.

According to 86.9% of the responders, Christianity is superior to any other major religions of Kerala, in their outlook towards menstruants. 92.7% of them suggested that the religious leaders do not impose any restrictions to attend religious services such as entering the Church and participate in the holy services during menstruation. Considering a time when these were treated as a sin, this is much-welcomed progress by the Catholicism. 91.8% do not refrain from religious practices during menstruation and 93% advocates that religious practices should not be restricted for women during their menstruation. In the view of 76.8% of participants, there is no scientific reason to avoid women from holy/religious practices during menstruation, and 74.1% believes that there isn't any rationale in prohibiting women from holy/religious services during menstruation.

It is surprising to note that 47.8% do not consider patriarchy as a significant reason for restraining women from religious positions, against 21.2%: 31% are not in a place to comment on it. 58.5% opined that the Holy Bible does not recommend/advocate that the women in menstruation be side-lined or prevented from holy/religious practices during menstruation, and 20.1% was not sure of the case. It is surprising to note that only 21.3% are aware of the discussions about menstruation in the Holy Bible. 41.2% do not think menstruation is a reason for denying the Priesthood to women in Christianity, while 44.1% are not aware of the condition. 58% said that women needn't be considered for the Priesthood and other holy services in Christianity contrary to 19.5%. The balance 22.4% remained without taking a stand.

Association between the queries if menstruation is the reason for denying Priesthood and if they feel Priesthood may be extended to women as well, was studied. The results show statistical significance with  $p = 0.007$ . 41% (141/343) of the responders did not feel that menstruation is the reason for denying Priesthood, of which 59.57% (84/141) suggested that Priesthood needn't be given to women. Overall, 58% of the population studied do not recommend women Priesthood. It is noteworthy that this opinion has raised from a community where 87.1% (283/327) believed Christianity is superior to any other religion in Kerala in their outlook towards menstruants. A significant share of the respondents, 92.98% (268/285) had the opinion that religious leaders never impose any restrictions on menstruates. 93.64% (265/283) opined that they do not refrain from religious practices due to menstruation.

When studied if there is any scientific or logical reason to impose restrictions on religious practices during menstruation, a statistically significant result with  $p < 0.001$  was obtained. 76.74% (264/344) suggested that there is no scientific reason. Among them, 84.85% (224/264) did not feel if there is any logic in avoiding them.

A correlation was drawn on the fact that according to Christianity, menstruants are not unclean and that Christianity is superior to any other religion in Kerala in their outlook towards menstruants. The statistically significant result with  $p = 0.002$  was obtained in this scenario. 93% (306/329) believed that menstruants are not unclean. And among them, 70.92% (217/306) considered Christianity superior. 97.67% (335/343) of the survey participants have not experienced any restrictions at home because of menstruation and 93.43% among these did

not feel that there should be any restriction imposed on religious practices during menstruation. 86.22% (294/341) of the participants expressed that they did not feel shy/reluctant/awkward/offended to discuss menstruation in their family and 96.26% of them received the first lessons on menstruation from mother/close relatives.

## **XII. CONCLUSION**

Initially, Christianity was not different from other religions in its approach towards menstruants. The discrimination had gradually sneaked into Christian practices due to its cultural and geographical connections with Judaism and Zoroastrianism, which had a harsh treatment on menstruants. Even the teachings of Jesus treating the menstruants as equally human, went in vain when the followers constructed Christianity in a patriarchal structure.

Over a period of time, there appeared relaxation on the ruggedness towards menstruants. This process includes deliberate disremembering tactics enacted by religious communicators by excluding obvious passages from the Holy Scripture, which could potentially initiate discussions about menstruation and its associated prohibitions. Today, with the advancements in science and technology and with more insight into the biological processes and its reasons, we are able to look at life and life processes with more understanding and logic. Added with this, the improvement in the awareness and facilities to improve the hygienic conditions, also act as a promise to uplift the menstruating women from social taboos.

Christian religious leaders gradually accepted the firmness of 'Jesus'. When the religious leaders initiated to follow liberal and reasonable approach towards menstruants, the families followed them. The study reveals that a high percentage of youngsters are unaware about the bygone viewpoints about menstruation recorded in their holy scripture, Bible. This can be primarily attributed to the fact that the religious communicators who are considered to be the 'opinion leaders', have consciously stopped making any negative communication regarding the treatment towards women in their crucial period of time. Yet another significant finding of the study reveals that young women still prefer men for Priesthood. A possible reason for the women not promoting women-Priesthood could be the fact that they have not recognised the internalised patriarchy that has crept into society over the period of time.

To conclude, today's society experiences a very open and promising approach towards menstruants. The social and religious taboos that existed once upon a time is no more valid and valued. Women have proved successful in all walks of life. Thus they may be considered equally suitable with men, to execute religious practices as well. The contributions of religious communicators in bringing about such radical changes in the society, though not abrupt, is commendable.

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The authors have no financial and personal relationships with any other people or organisations in this work, and there is no conflict of interest.

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