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# The Role Of Women In Abrahamic Scriptures: A Comparative Study Of **Selected Sacred Books**

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#### **Abstract**

This article examines the role of women in Islam, Christianity, and Judaism as depicted in their respective religious texts. It suggests that Christianity and Judaismhave experienced distortions over time, focusing on the New Testament and the Hebrew and Samaritan Torah as the primary texts. The study explores themes of creation, family, and society within these religions. The Bible and Torah describe Eve's temptation and Adam's fall, whereas the Quran attributes the temptation equally to both Adam and Eve, emphasizing devotion and piety over gender. In contrast, Judaism and Christianity exhibit clear patriarchal elements, imposing restrictions on women's authority and roles within the family. The patriarchal structure in Islamic societies is suggested to stem more from cultural influences than from religious doctrine, with elements from Israelite traditions infiltrating Islamic culture and jurisprudence under the guise of religion. The study employs a comparative methodology for its analysis.

Keywords: Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Role of Women, Patriarchal elements

#### 1.1 Introduction

The role of women in human creation and their importance in the family and the preservation of the human race are central to all heavenly religions and deeply emphasized in their holy texts. Women are valued for their health and their role in maintaining the privacy of the family. Religious beliefs consider women as the cornerstone of human life and the foundation of society, and people's lives are often influenced by these beliefs. Consequently, religious teachings have been expressed to protect the privacy and dignity of women. However, throughout history, discussions regarding women have sometimes been taken to extremes. It is important to note that the teachings of heavenly religions underscore the significance of women. Many verses in the Torah, the Bible, and the Qur'an are dedicated to the topic of women, highlighting their importance in these sacred texts.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the creation of man and all creatures is described as a blend of physical and intrinsic beauty, both in material and spiritual realms<sup>3</sup>. As divine religions are founded on the wisdom, knowledge, and infinite mercy of God and all pursue a common goal, their teachings are the most beautiful, clear, and best, originating from the source of divinerevelation. Despite some variations in their written teachings, they all pray for the same purpose. 4

The discussion in this article focuses on the adaptation of the position of women in divine religions. It is related to their creation, individual and social behavior, as well as their position in the family and the preservation of their privacy. It is important tonote that women, as human beings, are subject to the same laws that apply to men, as they were created in the same type and gender. All heavenly religions share a common view of women, as the source of sending all religions goes back to a singleGod. However, it is believed that the current heavenly books have undergone distortions over time. The discussion on women in the three books of the Torah, Al-Jabal, and the Qur'an is based on the current holy books. Historical discrimination and conflicts regarding the position and dignity of women are discussed in these three divine books. In modern times, religiously women could have relative freedom and attend religious institutions, but there have been instances where women were prevented from entering churches or mosques in certain regions. Discrimination against women was prevalent in the modern era, and it created the belief that men are superior to women, leading to violence against women. However, from the 1950sonwards, there has been a social movement for the restoration of equal and fair rights for women. In the name of feminism, women have assumed many social roles and their presence in various institutions has become more important in the construction of their identity.<sup>5</sup> This discussion on the creation, position, and dignity of women in he family and society is vital.

#### 1.2 The Creation of women according to the Torah

In the Old Testament, there are two different narratives about the initial creation of women. The first narrative presents the creation of humanity in general terms, mentioning both man and woman without attributing any particular significance to

one over the other. According to this account, God created man in His image to ruleover the animals, the earth, the sea, and the birds of the sky.6 God created both man and woman in His image, blessed them, and instructed them to "be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it." In the second narrative, the creation of man isconsidered primary, with the creation of woman derived from man's existence. Commentators of the Bible defend this narrative, dismissing any doubts or uncertainties about its interpretation.<sup>7</sup>

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In the book of Genesis, it is described how God created Adam from the dust of theearth and breathed life into him. God saw that Adam should not be alone and created suitable partner for him. God put Adam into a deep sleep, took one of his ribs, filled its place with flesh, and created a woman. When Adam saw the woman, he said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man." This passage from the Old Testament explains the creation of woman from man.<sup>8</sup>

This narrative clearly describes the creation of woman from man, as explained and interpreted through verses and words from the Old Testament. According to this interpretation, the woman's existence is derived from a man, indicating that the creation of a woman is secondary to that of a man. The second account emphasizes the original creation of man and the derivative creation of woman. It states that "Goddid not wait for Adam to fall asleep naturally but put him into a deep sleep to operate without causing pain." Mackintosh and others suggest that God directly breathed His spirit into man, specifically Adam, and since Eve was created from Adam's body, she was susceptible to Satan's deception. He further argues that Eve's original sin plays a crucial role in shaping perceptions of women.9 The Old Testament attributes the original sin to Eve, portraying her as the cause and the first sinner in the world. It narrates that the serpent, more cunning than all other creatures, tempted the womanby questioning God's command. The woman responded that God forbade them from eating or touching the fruit of a particular tree. The serpent assured her that she would not die. Seeing that the tree was good for food, the woman ate its fruit and gave some to her husband, who also ate it. Their eyes were opened, and they realized their nakedness, leading them to sew fig leaves together to cover themselves. When God confronted them, Adam blamed the woman, saying, "The woman you made mywife gave me the fruit, and I ate it". 10

The Old Testament mentions that Eve committed the original sin, leading to Adam's temptation. Commentators have written that when Satan could not reach Adam, he targeted Eve, who was considered weaker in spirit, leading to Adam's seduction. According to the above-mentioned perspectives of the Old Testament and the commentary by Rashi (1105), the original sin of women is considered to be her weaksoul. Another point of interest in the Old and New Testaments is the superiority of amale child over a female child in the Torah. The Torah advises caution with daughters, warning against bringing shame or dishonor to the family and community. 11 In the Old Testament, it is clearly stated that the birth of a daughter is considered a loss. The Book of Leviticus (52) in the Talmud, which is a commentary on the Torah, says: "Blessed is the one whose children are all sons, and woe to the one that all his children are daughters."

#### 1.3 Creation of women in the eyes of the bible

Judaism's official teachings were patriarchal, placing women as secondary in the social and spiritual hierarchy. However, women were respected and held a good position at the beginning of the New Testament period and the establishment of the first church. Despite their roles primarily remaining as mothers and homemakers, the New Testament provides a broader perspective on women's identities and rights in Christianity. While the traditional roles of wife and mother were emphasized, perfection was also seen as attainable through virginity. 12 In the New Testament, it is stated that God first created Adam, and then Eve. The serpent deceived Eve and ate the fruit, leading to sin (Paul's first letter to Timothy). 13 Both the Old Testament and the New Testament portray women as the cause of original sin and responsible for the evils of the world. Additionally, they depict women as the source of misery and corruption for all humankind, and unfortunately, some have assumed that women are the strongest tool of the devil, used to influence and

Christianity's perspective on the creation of a girl is similar to that of the Jews. The Bible states that the impurity during the birth of a girl is considered to be twice as much as when a boy is born. The New Testament acknowledges the divine nature in mankind, emphasizing purification to escape from evil and turn to the truth. Both the Old Testament and the New Testament contain verses that highlight human dignity, emphasizing the equality of both men and women in terms of human dignityand inherent value. 15

Christians introduced a controversial concept in religious history: the idea that women are fundamentally associated with sin and evil. This notion suggests that men do not sin on their own; rather, women, depicted as minor devils, tempt men into sin. The narrative holds that Satan deceived Eve, who then deceived Adam. Thus, it posits that the great Satan tempts women, and women, in turn, tempt men. This belief is based on the idea that Adam was created first, and then Eve, as mentioned in Paul's epistle from the New Testament. However, the New Testament, emphasizes that the mistake and error did not originate solely from Eve. It also highlights the unity between a man and his wife, as expressed through the analogy where a man leaves his parents and becomes united with his wife to become one. 16

1.4 The beginning of creation of women from the point of view of the Qur'an In the Qur'an, the creation of humans, including women, is described with a sense of dignity and equal importance. The different verses often cited to illustrate the process of human creation are below mentioned: We created man out of the extractof clay, <sup>17</sup>Then We made him into a drop of life-germ, then We placed it in a safedepository, 18 Then We made this drop into a clot, then We made the clot into a lump, then We made the lump into bones, then We clothed the bones with flesh, and then We caused it to grow into another creation. Thus, Most Blessed is Allah, the Best of all those who create. 19

The Qur'anic text discusses the creation narrative, referencing specific verses to illustrate the origins and development of human life. It begins with the creation from a clot of congealed blood (Alaq), citing: "Read in the name of your Lord who created

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(1) Created man from a clot (2)".20 It further interprets the creation of humans from a single soul, as stated: "He Who created you from a single soul and made from it its

spouse, so that he might find comfort in her". <sup>21</sup>Most commentators interpret ( ° وْ أَهُ )

"minhu" to mean "of the same kind," referring to both male and female spouses, asin: "He made from it its mate, male and female". 22 The creation of women is seen as a source of peace and comfort for men, ultimately contributing to societal tranquility. God says: "And among His signs is that He created for you from yourselves mates that you may find tranquility in them, and He placed between you affection andmercy. Indeed, in that are signs for a people who give thought". 23 In this verse, theinterdependence and complementary nature of the two sexes are conveyed. Theplural form highlights the mutual need and completion each sex provides to theother. The term signifies marriage and refers to both the husband and the wife. 24 After the creation of Adam's wife God said "They should live in Paradise and eatany fruit they want, but they pointed to one of the trees that they should not approachthat tree because being close to that tree would cause them to become oppressors 25 and God warned them "That Satan is their enemy, and they should be careful that hedoes not take them out of Paradise, because they will suffer and suffer. And said, "OAdam, this is an enemy to you and your wife so do not expel you from Paradise, lestyou be miserable." 26 Despite this, Satan whispered to him, "O Adam! Shall I showyou the Tree of Immortality and a kingdom that does not fade away? 27

In another place, it is mentioned that Satan tempted both of them to reveal what washidden from their bodies. He told them that their Lord only forbade them from eatingfrom the tree because, if they did, they would become angels or attain immortality. He swore to them that he had their best interests at heart. However, he deceived them, causing them to lose their high status. When they are from the tree, they became aware of their bodies.<sup>28</sup>

After they realized their mistake, they began to cover themselves with the leaves of the trees in Paradise. Their Lord called out to them, saying, "Did I not forbid you from that tree and tell you that Satan is a clear enemy to you?" Thus, Adam disobeyed his Lord and went astray. Adam and his wife then regretted their actions and said, "O Lord, we have wronged ourselves, and if You do not forgive us and have mercy on us, we will surely be among the losers." 29

The Qur'anic approach to the creation of women mirrors its approach to the creation of humans. This differs significantly from the accounts in the Torah and the Bible, especially in the reasons for the creation of women. In another verse, it is stated: "And I have created for you spouses from yourselves to dwell with them and made love and mercy between you". This emphasizes that the creation of Adam and Eve was not simultaneous but sequential. Scholars and intellectuals need to provide deeper explanations of these verses. According to several verses in the Qur'an regarding the creation of women, it is evident that women, like men, have independence in their creation, and their creation is original.

## 1.5 The status of women in the family and society

Now we will explore the status of women in family and society through the perspectives of the Torah, Bible, and Qur'an, enriched with references from these sacred texts. Understanding these perspectives is essential for appreciating the diverse roles and rights of women across different religious and cultural traditions.

## 1.5.1 The dignity of women in the family and society from the perspective of the Torah

In the narrative of *Genesis*, both male and female are created. In the Torah, the rolesof women are primarily defined as wives and mothers. As part of a couple, a woman is referred to as "wife" in Hebrew. According to the divine plan, a woman is meant to complement a man, and their relationship should be based on the principle of equality. However, their first sin disrupted this balance, resulting in women becoming subservient to men, as described in the Book of Genesis. In Judaism, women's roles are somewhat limited. 22

A woman's education is often tied to her rights and duties towards her husband, andMosaic law generally accords her a secondary status. Women do not officially participate in religious rituals but can partake in public celebrations and joyous occasions, as mentioned in Exodus. <sup>33</sup>Additionally, they are not assigned any priestly duties, and only men are required to undertake obligatory pilgrimages. The High Priest, for instance, is not allowed to have more than one wife. Despite these restrictions, women hold a significant role within the Jewish home due to the sanctity of the family, which grants them a certain degree of superiority. <sup>34</sup>

Will Durant<sup>35</sup> asserts that in Judaism, the family is highly esteemed, surpassing eventhe Temple in Jerusalem in its social importance. This reverence persisted through the Middle Ages and Renaissance but began to diminish with the onset of the Industrial Revolution.<sup>36</sup> An examination of both the Old Testament and the New Testament reveals that human dignity is a significant theme. The Old Testament emphasizes the inherent dignity of human beings, which declares that creation is "very good."<sup>37</sup> This perspective implies a universal dignity shared by all humans, regardless of gender. Early interpretations recognized men and women as collaborative partners in societal creation, with women playing a crucial role in the propagation of life. However, Mosaic law reflects a secondary status for women, and societal expectations often imposed loyalty upon wives without equivalent obligations for husbands.<sup>38</sup> Despite this, the "Ten Commandments" advocate respectand equality, and the "Levitical Law" mandates equal treatment in cases of parentaldisrespect.

Proverbs<sup>39</sup> depict an idealized vision of marriage, where a wife is seen as a valuable and supportive partner, enhancing

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her husband's life and status. This ideal includes mutual respect and affection, though the dynamics of young love are acknowledgedas complex and challenging.<sup>40</sup>

In ancient Jewish society, boys were actively involved in family life and religious festivals, often participating in groups. Women, on the other hand, had significant influence over religious practices within the family, particularly when their husbandsdid not intervene. Despite this influence, women did not enjoy equal rights compared to men and were often treated as property rather than individuals. Women were frequently listed alongside property such as houses, slaves, and animals, highlighting their subordinate status. They were expected to address their husbands as "lords," similar to how a slave would address a master. Women could neither separate from their husbands nor undertake religious vows or fasts without their husbands' or fathers' consent, which could invalidate their actions if consent was not granted. Also, daughters and wives typically could not inherit from their fathers or husbandswithout male heirs. 41

The Old Testament includes provisions such as Moses' instruction for daughters without brothers to receive a share of their father's land and to marry within their father's tribe. Daughters could be sold into servitude, but they had the potential to be freed unless they became a master's concubine and displeased him. Overall, patriarchal norms heavily influenced Old Testament laws concerning women.<sup>42</sup> Both fathers and mothers were to be respected, and laws were designed to apply to all individuals. The Old Testament showed concern for justice and compassion, particularly for the oppressed, including women. For instance, Exodus warns against mistreating widows or orphans, emphasizing divine accountability for such actions. 43

I terms of societal roles, women in ancient Hebrew culture had limited professional opportunities, with no female prophets and few roles outside the home, unlike other ancient Near Eastern cultures. The daily prayers of Jews at that time reflected a lack of respect and status for women. Men would thank God for not making them women, while women would express gratitude for being created according to God's will.<sup>44</sup>

### 1.5.2 The status of women in family and society from the perspective of the Bible

In the Bible, the status and dignity of women are described in a way that reflects both creation and the teachings of Jesus (PBUH). Jesus began his mission in a society that was socially corrupt and oppressive, and while he did not introduce specific laws regarding women's social freedom or the institution of slavery, he emphasized the divine command to "love one another." His teachings highlighted the virtues associated with women and affirmed their dignity, as evidenced by the Annunciation to Mary. 45The Gospel's message supports human equality in all areas—social, political, and economic—and underscores a divine covenant rooted in humanity and compassion. This is closely aligned with the biblical concept that all humans, regardless of gender, are created in the image and likeness of God. 46

The relationship between men and women is depicted in terms of the relationship between Christ and the Church. A woman's role is thus seen not only concerning "Adam" but also as a symbol of the Church, with the Gospel advising: "Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord".47 Men are reminded to love their wives as Christ loved the Church, reflecting the idea that husband and wife are one body. The Gospel further emphasizes the sanctity of marriage, stating that divorce and remarriage, except in cases of marital unfaithfulness, constitute adultery. <sup>48</sup>Although the early Christian teachings advocated for unity between men and women, this unity weakened over time and was increasingly enforced by the ecclesiastical system.<sup>49</sup>

Paul's writings address two aspects of women's behavior: First, in public worship, women should wear head coverings, reflecting adherence to traditional norms and the secondary status ascribed to them in sacred law. 50 Second, women are instructed to remain silent in church assemblies and ask their husbands questions at home if needed.<sup>51</sup> Christian women are encouraged to dress modestly and be recognized for their good deeds rather than their appearance. Widows should be known for their charitable actions, such as raising children and caring for others. While some modern perspectives view Paul's views on women as outdated, Christianity fundamentally promotes the equality and freedom of both men and women. Jesus was pioneering in advocating for equal rights for men and women.<sup>52</sup>

#### 1.5.3 The status of women in family and society from the perspective of the Qur'an

When considering the status of women in the family from the Quranic perspective, the following verses highlight the importance of women:

"And among His signs is this, that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that you may dwell in tranquility with them, and He has put love and mercy betweenyour (hearts). Verily in that are signs for those who reflect". 53In this verse, the Quranidentifies women as sources of tranquility and comfort within the family. The position of women in the family is preserved by highlighting mutual support between spouses, where both are responsible for maintaining the family unit and ensuring a peaceful environment. This mutual support is exemplified in the verse:"... They are your garments and you are their garments..."54 This metaphor suggests that spouses should cover and protect each other's flaws, and emphasizes focusing on each other's positive traits, leading to the exchange of love and affection. This mutual care provides stability and comfort in the family.

Additionally, the Quran advises men on how to treat their wives: "O you who have believed, it is not lawful for you to inherit women by compulsion. And do not make it difficult for them to take [back] part of what you gave them unless they commit a clear immorality. And live with them in kindness. For if you dislike them - perhaps you dislike a thing and Allah makes therein much good". 55 This verse instructs men not to treat women harshly or unjustly, emphasizing

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kindness and fairness. It highlights the importance of living together in a manner that promotes harmony and acknowledges the potential for goodness even in situations of dislike.

### 1.5.3.1 Pre-Islamic practices and Quranic reforms regarding women

- **Prohibition of Inheriting Women as Property**: During the pre-Islamic era, when a man died, his wife would be inherited by one of his heirs. The above-mentioned verse of *surah nisa: 19* prohibits this practice, emphasizing that it unlawful to inherit women against their will.
- **Prohibition of Coercion**: The verse also underscores the prohibition of coercion, stating that it is forbidden to treat women harshly or compel them

• **Kind Treatment**: The third point emphasized in the verse is the importance of kind treatment towards women, ensuring their dignity is preserved. This is summarized in the phrase "live with them in kindness"

**Women's Rights in Divorce or Death**: The Quran also highlights the importance of upholding women's rights during divorce or upon the husband's death. For instance, it states: "And give the women [upon marriage] their [bridal] gifts graciously. But if they give up willingly to you anything of it, then take it in satisfaction and ease." 56 This emphasizes their material rights, such as dowry (mahr), compensation, and other financial entitlements

Due to these reasons, the Quran sternly warns those who disregard women's rights and treat them unjustly, indicating that divine punishment awaits such individuals: "And when the souls are paired, and when the girl [who was] buried alive is asked, for what sin she was killed." <sup>57</sup>Islam makes no distinction between sons and daughters, considering daughters as blessings from Allah is evident from the different sayings of Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W).

The Quran also recognizes the righteousness of women, providing guidance to all believers, male and female, through the examples of virtuous women like Maryam and Asiyah, the wife of *Firaun*. It promises a life of goodness and a great reward to anyone who does good deeds, whether male or female, provided they have faith in Allah: "Whoever does righteousness, whether male or female, while he is a believer

- We will surely cause him to live a good life, and We will surely give them their reward [in the Hereafter] according to the best of what they used to do." <sup>58</sup> Furthermore, it states that believing men and women are allies of one another, encouraging each other to do good: "The believing men and believing women are allies of one another. They enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong." <sup>59</sup>

### 1.5.4 Social and Religious Status of Women in Islam

Women are described as active participants in social and religious life, asemphasized in the following verse: "The believing men and believing women are allies of one another. They enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong and establish prayer and give zakah and obey Allah and His Messenger. Those - Allah will have mercy upon them. Indeed, Allah is Exalted in Might and Wise." 60

This perspective is so advanced that the Prophet Muhammad explicitly linked the treatment of women to a man's honor and nobility. He stated: "The best among youare those who are best to their women." The Prophet's behavior set an example of valuing women equally to men. During the pledge of allegiance (Bay'ah), women pledged their allegiance alongside men, reflecting their equal status.<sup>62</sup>

The Quran consistently recognizes women in social activities, emphasizing their spiritual and moral equality with men: "Indeed, the Muslim men and Muslim women, the believing men and believing women, the obedient men and obedient women, the truthful men and truthful women, the patient men and patient women, the humble men and humble women, the charitable men and charitable women, the fasting menand fasting women, the men who guard their private parts and the women who do so, and the men who remember Allah often and the women who do so - for them Allah has prepared forgiveness and a great reward." <sup>63</sup> This verse indicates that righteousness, faith, humility, patience, charity, and modesty are qualities valued equally by both men and women. It underscores the importance of women's participation in social, political, cultural, and economic spheres, alongside men. It also emphasizes their role in influencing public opinion and combating ignorance and oppression.

As observed, the Quran addresses all believers, both men and women, recognizing their significant influence and roles in societal reform. Women, due to their influential speeches, have an essential role in societal reform. This is emphasized in the verse: "The believers are but brothers, so make settlement between your brothers. And fear Allah that you may receive mercy." <sup>64</sup>

The Quran emphasizes the shared responsibility of men and women in maintaining societal harmony. It states: "O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted." <sup>65</sup>

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The discussion here focuses on the equality between men and women and the emphasis on respecting women as half of society. Various aspects related to women's rights and social status in the Quran include economic rights, such as ownership of property, inheritance, dowry, and maintenance, as well as their freedom to participate in social activities, marriage, divorce, and political affairs, including pledging allegiance to the Prophet and leadership roles. The Quran addresses the broad topic of women's issues extensively. However, the main focus here is on the equality between men and women and the emphasis on respecting women as an integral part of society. This brief discussion primarily focuses on the Quranic perspective regarding the status and dignity of women in the family and society, with an emphasis on equality. The religions of Judaism and Christianity, over time, have also undergone reforms regarding women's rights, which are worth mentioning.

#### 1.6 Conclusion:

In conclusion, this comparative study highlights the nuanced roles and perceptions of women within the religious texts of Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. While eachtradition presents a unique theological and cultural framework, common themes of creation, family, and societal roles emerge, illustrating both convergence and divergence in their teachings about women.

The analysis reveals that Christianity and Judaism, as reflected in the New Testament and the Hebrew and Samaritan Torah, have undergone significant interpretive distortions over time. These texts often depict a patriarchal narrative, particularly in the story of Eve's temptation and Adam's fall, which has historically influenced the societal roles and restrictions imposed on women within these faiths. Such patriarchal structures have contributed to a longstanding tradition of limiting women's authority and participation, particularly within family and religious settings.

In contrast, the Quran offers a more egalitarian perspective by attributing the act of temptation equally to both Adam and Eve, thereby emphasizing devotion and piety over gender distinctions. This theological stance suggests a foundational equality between men and women in spiritual and moral responsibilities. However, the studyacknowledges that the patriarchal practices observed in many Islamic societies are more a reflection of cultural influences and historical interactions, notably with Israelite traditions, rather than intrinsic to Islamic doctrine itself.

The study underscores that the patriarchal elements in Islamic jurisprudence and culture often result from external cultural infiltrations rather than from the core teachings of Islam. This finding challenges the notion that Islam inherently advocates for gender inequality, instead suggesting that true adherence to Islamic principles promotes a more balanced and respectful treatment of women.

Ultimately, this research calls for a reexamination of religious texts and traditions through a lens that seeks to disentangle cultural practices from religious doctrines. By doing so, it advocates for a reclaiming of the original, more egalitarian teachingsfound within these sacred texts, thereby promoting a more inclusive and equitable understanding of women's roles in religious and societal contexts. This endeavor is essential for fostering a more just and balanced society, where the dignity and contributions of women are fully recognized and valued in alignment with the divineintent as depicted in these holy scriptures.

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