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Q3(b)

Are all world religions patriarchal ? Substantiate your answer with examples

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2019 · Sociology GS 1 · 20 marks · Sociology

Sociology - The Discipline: Modernity and social changes in Europe and emergence of sociology; Scope of the subject and comparison with other social sciences; Sociology and common sense.

Core demand of the question

- Are all world religions patriarchal? Substantiate your answer with examples
- Keep the answer within a 20-mark length

Revision summary

Dominant forms of major religions have organised male sacred and legal authority.

Hindu dharma, Abrahamic clergy, Buddhist nun rules, and Confucian kinship illustrate.

Goddess cults, women saints, and reform block a total "all".

Walby and feminist theology name the structure without freezing it.

NFHS tracks outcomes; revival often re-inscribes patriarchy.

Introduction

Patriarchy here means organised male authority over women in law, ritual, property, and the sacred story. Most historically dominant world religions have been patriarchal in that sense. "All" is too clean. Internal dissent, goddess cults, and reform complicate a single yes.

Body

A careful yes on the main formations

- Classical Hindu dharma texts ranked women with dependents. Temple priesthood and coparcenary were long male. Bhakti and later reform still fought that grain.
- Abrahamic traditions coded God, prophecy, and clergy as male in their dominant forms. Islamic family law and Catholic priesthood illustrate institutional male gatekeeping.
- Buddhist sangha included nuns, yet the eight garudhammas and androcentric scriptures show a hierarchy. Confucian kinship was explicitly patriarchal.

Why "all" overreaches

- Shakta and village goddess traditions place female sacred power at the centre, even when everyday kinship stays male-headed.
- Sufi and bhakti women saints, and Quaker or some Protestant equal ministries, show counter-currents.
- Sylvia Walby's structures of patriarchy can sit inside a religion without exhausting it. Max Weber's theodicy and charisma also produce female founders.

Feminist substantiation

- Mary Daly and later feminist theology read the monotheisms as sacralising male rule.
- Leela Dube and Indian feminist work tied purity, marriage, and caste to religious honour.
- Census religion tables do not measure patriarchy, but NFHS on mobility, son preference, and decision-making tracks gendered outcomes across communities.

Contemporary mix

- Personal law reform, women's entry to some priesthoods, and court cases on temple entry show religion as a field of struggle, not a frozen yes.
- Fundamentalist revival often re-sacralises male control. That is evidence of patriarchy, not of a timeless essence.

Answer

- Dominant historical forms of the world religions have been patriarchal.
- They are not patriarchal in every strand, every period, or every local cult.

Flow diagram

World religions -> Clerical legal cores
Clerical legal cores -> Patriarchal order
Goddess bhakti reform -> Exceptions and struggle
Gender outcomes -> Patriarchal order

Conclusion

- **A substantiated answer is:** largely yes for the classic clerical and legal cores; not yes for every goddess cult, mystic current, or reform. Walby, Weber, and Indian feminist ethnography keep the claim empirical. NFHS outcomes show the social harvest of those cores.

Facts & figures

Walby

Patriarchy as linked structures: household, paid work, state, violence, sexuality, culture.

Weber

Religious virtuosi and charisma can include women even inside patriarchal churches.

Dube

Linked kinship, caste purity, and gender in South Asian religious practice.

NFHS

Indicators of mobility, son preference, and household decisions across religious groups.