

## IS RELIGIOSITY A PANACEA FOR MITIGATING INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE IN INDIA?

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**ABSTRACT:** *The religiosity of people may make them respond positively or negatively to various persons in different social situations. Some scholars claim that religiosity can be positively related to intimate partner violence (IPV), when the dominance of men over women is sanctioned by religion. On the other hand, some other scholars support the view that religiousness is negatively associated with IPV as individuals involved in religious activities tend to be less aggressive and more altruistic and empathetic to their partners. This paper attempts to reveal how the religiosity of husbands and wives may mitigate the former's violent behaviour against the latter in Tamil Nadu State, India. The findings presented in the paper are arrived at from the analysis of qualitative data collected through selected case studies.*

**KEYWORDS:** *religiosity, domestic violence, intimate partner violence, India*

### VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN INDIA

It is important to know about violence against women in India to understand clearly the background of the problem (intimate partner violence) under discussion in this paper. The increasing rate of crime against women in societies around the world has become one of the crucial issues of great concern. The National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB 2020) shows that 371,503 cases of crime against women were registered during 2020, showing a decline of 8.3% over 2019 (405,326 cases). Close to one-third of cases of crime against women

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were registered as ‘cruelty by husbands or their relatives’ (30%), followed by ‘assault on women with plans to outrage their modesty’ (23%), ‘kidnapping and abduction of women’ (16.8%) and ‘rape’ (7.5%). The crime rate per 100,000 women population was 56.5% in 2020 compared to 62.3% in 2019.

According to the International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW), globally, at least one in every three women has experienced physical and/or sexual violence at the hands of their husband, partner or boyfriend. This varies by country, with estimates of 21% in North America, 29% in Europe and Central Asia, 33% in Latin America and the Caribbean, and 43% in South Asia (ICRW 2009). Thus, violence against women, which remains a global social problem, cuts across the boundaries of culture, caste, class, education, income, ethnicity and the like. No society can claim to be free of this sort of violence, but variation exists across countries, especially in terms of its patterns and trends.

Sudha Chaudhary (2013) observes that the most unrelenting human rights violation is the act of depriving women and girls of fundamental freedom, equality, security, self-reliance and self-respect. Indisputably, violence against women in domestic settings exerts a debilitating effect. The fifth National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5) (2019–2020) reports that, in India, 30% of women aged 18 to 49 have experienced physical violence since the age of 15, and 6% of them have experienced sexual violence. Three per cent of ever-pregnant women in the age group 18–49 have experienced physical violence during their pregnancy. The survey further reports that, regarding spousal violence, 32% of ever-married women in the age group 18–49 have experienced physical, sexual, or emotional spousal violence. The most common type of spousal violence is physical violence (28%), followed by emotional violence (14%). Six per cent of ever-married women in the age group 18–49 have experienced spousal sexual violence. Nevertheless, concerning the trends in spousal physical and sexual violence, ever-married women’s experience of spousal physical or sexual violence declined from 31% as recorded in the NFHS-4 to 29% in NFHS-5. About 13% of ever-married women who experienced spousal physical or sexual violence suffered a physical injury (IIPS–ICF 2021).

In India, women are subject to domestic violence (DV) not only from their husbands but also from the members of natal as well as marital families. A study by Nanda et al. (2014) based on six large Indian states shows that there is a high rate of intimate partner violence (IPV): more than half (52%) of women surveyed reported that they had experienced some form of spousal abuse at least once in their life time. Close to two-thirds of husbands (60%) admit that they have been violent to their wives and/or partners at times. Thus, women are subject to the violent activities of their husbands and their family members. The National Crime Record Bureau Report (2015) reveals that incidents of violence

against women (122,877) committed by their husbands or their relatives in 2014 more than doubled since 2005 (58,319).

## **DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE**

It is also important to know the difference between these two types of violence. From time immemorial, violence in the domestic sphere has been a universal phenomenon that is mainly perpetrated by men in positions of trust, intimacy and power, such as husbands, boyfriends, fathers, fathers-in-law, stepfathers, brothers, uncles, sons, or other male relatives. The term 'domestic violence' (DV) mainly refers to violence against women and girls by intimate partners, cohabiting partners and other family members. Usually, the victims of this violence refuse to name the perpetrators due to fear, shame or other reasons. Hence, they attribute false explanations for injuries caused by such violence. This is perhaps why thousands of such incidents go unrecorded and are forgotten altogether. While women can also behave violently in domestic settings, the proportion of such incidents is insignificant.

On the other hand, intimate partner violence (IPV) is experienced by married women within intimate relationships. It is estimated by the World Health Organisation (WHO) that, worldwide, 30% of women have experienced IPV at least once in their lifetime (WHO 2021). Both DV and IPV cause physical, psychological and sexual harm to women. Physical violence includes slapping, beating, kicking and the like. Sexual violence refers to forced sexual intercourse and other forms of sexual coercion involving threats or intimidation. Psychological (emotional) violence means that a man harasses, humiliates or insults his wife or women and girls from his family and keeps them under surveillance. There is another form of violence, viz., economic violence, which involves male partners refusing to give money, food or other basic forms of sustenance to wives or restricting their access to financial resources, employment, education and medical care (UNICEF 2000). Heise et al. (1999) corroborate this point by stating that the most common perpetrators of this violence against women are male intimate partners or ex-partners. A woman's perceived lack of response to the violent behaviour of her intimate partner may be due to a calculated desire to protect her children and herself. Her 'tolerance' of violence may also be due to a lack of physical power, fear or disgrace. Therefore, in some incidents of violence against women, the victims appear to be non-responsive. However, some victims in India justify wife-battering, a phenomenon which is often reported in incidents of domestic violence.

For instance, Sahoo and Pradhan (2009) find that most married women justify wife-battering for specific reasons.

It is evident from the NFHS-3 (2005–2006) and NFHS-4 (2015–2016) that the proportion of incidents of ever-married women experiencing spousal violence (also known as DV or IPV) in Tamil Nadu State is significantly greater than at the all-India level. In the ten years from 2005–2006 to 2015–2016, with respect to this sort of violence, there was a drop of 8.4% at the national level. Conversely, in Tamil Nadu State, the drop was relatively insignificant (1.3%) during the same period (IIPS – Macro International 2007; IIPS–ICF 2017).

Some scholars claim that religious sanction is positively related to IPV; i.e., it tends to give way to IPV. In other words, the dominance of men over women sanctioned by religion will give rise to IPV. The suppression of women may seem to be rooted in the socio-cultural and religious practices of people who uphold the patriarchal system prevalent in world societies. For instance, the Biblical exhortation, “Wives, submit to your husbands, as to the Lord” (*Ephesians 5: 22*), is taken by male chauvinists as justification for controlling their female partners. But Thiruvalluvar, a *Sangam*<sup>2</sup> Tamil poet, writes about the submission of women to men differently (*Thirukkural* 1931: 55). He states that the word of a woman who does not worship God but worships her husband can bring about rain. This means that she is capable of controlling nature. This indicates that women elevated their husbands over God in the past. This explicitly indicates wives’ submission to their husbands’ exhortation. However, it may also be interpreted that the patriarchal social structure has given rise to domination of men over women. Pande et al. (2011) also point out that since the patriarchal system gives men power to control their partners, the latter may become subordinate and obedient to the former. Sometimes, men may go to the extent of justifying their violent actions against their partners to make them obedient.

It is relevant here to point out that there is a relationship between religious fundamentalism and the subordination of women. Derichs and Fleschenberg (eds. 2010) observe that “Sexual violence by fundamentalist groups highlights the fact that a key area of contestation is the subordination of women’s desires and sexuality by and for individual men.” (ibid. 18.). This is perhaps why religious fundamentalism is positively associated with physical violence against women, whereas religiosity is not (Koch–Ramirez 2010). However, religiosity

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2 During the *Sangam* Age (the period referring to ancient parts of Tamil Nadu and Kerala and parts of Sri Lanka spanning approximately the sixth-century BCE to the third-century CE), varieties of Tamil literature were contributed by poets as well as poetesses. This period was named after the term *Sangam* (which means organization). The *Sangam* poets and scholars used to gather at Madurai, the second largest city in the Tamil Nadu State of India.

is positively as well as negatively related to incidences of IPV. For instance, Peter Warren (2015) observes in his work that the direct effect of religiousness on masculine power over women is insignificant. However, its indirect impact through fundamentalism is significant. On the other hand, other scholars support the view that religiousness is negatively associated with IPV (Zinnbauer et al. 1999; Brinkerhoff et al. 1992; Ellison–Anderson 2001). This suggests that religiosity may mitigate IPV. Higginbotham et al. (2007) endorse the same view when stating that women associated with low religiosity and insecure positions experience more courtship-related violence than peers with high religiosity and secured positions. Supporting this view, Saroglou et al. (2005) claim that individuals involved in religious activities tend to be less aggressive and more altruistic and empathetic.

It is inferred from these findings that the religiosity of men may make them behave humanely with their intimate partners, thereby averting IPV through the mechanisms of kindness, empathy and the like. The present study attempts to explain the impact of religiosity on the perpetrators of IPV in terms of mitigating their violent activities against their partners.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study examines religiosity's role in mitigating IPV in the Tamil Nadu State of India using a descriptive research design. The case study approach, a qualitative methodological tool, was used to collect information from seven married Hindu individuals from the Tamil Nadu State, India, comprising three men and four women. Of the three men, two were villagers, and one was from an urban area. Of the four women, one was from a rural area, and three were from an urban one. All of them were literate workers from the lower class except for one school teacher from the middle class. In addition, a relevant case study about a software professional from the middle class was taken from one of the first author's published papers and included in this paper as a reference.

One major limitation of the paper is that it is based only on limited case studies in the Tamil Nadu State due to restrictions on space. For the same reason, the other limitation is that it primarily discusses the impact of religiosity on the perpetrators of IPV.

## DISCUSSION

### *Impact of religiosity on perpetrators of IPV*

Generally, Hindus are associated with various religious activities that may serve as indicators for measuring their level of religiosity. When they become religious in their thought, speech and actions, they are likely to be truthful in their behaviour. This may regulate husbands' behaviour in relation to their treatment of their wives, children and other family members.

While conducting a personal interview in mid-2021 with a literate maid servant who serves in a few houses in a suburb of Vellore City, Tamil Nadu, India, she described her bitter experience with her husband. The information that was collected from her throughout the interview included the following.

*I was married to a taxi driver. In the initial period of my marital life, I did not face any problems from my husband. Afterwards, I gave birth to a female child against his wish and that of my in-laws, whose aspiration was to have a male child. From then onwards, I started experiencing physical and emotional violence from my husband, even for trivial reasons. For instance, several times, he quarrelled with me because the food I prepared was not up to his expectations. On such occasions, my in-laws readily joined in with him to humiliate me. Therefore, every day, it was difficult for me to withstand his abuse. To get rid of this agony, I took asylum with my child in my parental home for some months. In the meantime, due to his friends' compulsion, he started on a religious fast for a few days before commencing a pilgrimage to a prominent temple in Kerala State, India. However, we joined him on his arrival due to my parents' repeated advice.*

*It was indeed a surprise that I noticed specific and notable changes in his attitude and behaviour. I believe these changes might be due to the efficacy of his pilgrimage. He started treating my daughter affectionately and behaving with me kindly. He started catering to some of our needs and taking care of us voluntarily. Later, his pilgrimage to the same temple became an annual event.*

To corroborate this information, I interviewed her husband briefly to learn about his change after the pilgrimage. He responded to my query through referring to his experience. He said that during those days of fasting before he commenced the pilgrimage, the sacred leader of his religious group instructed

him to strictly adhere to the truth in his thoughts, speech and actions. Moreover, he cautioned him not to skip this practice and advised him to continue the pilgrimage to the same temple and to live a peaceful life. Further, he told me that this had brought about a positive change in all his activities, and as a result, he turned into a responsible and caring person for his wife and daughter.

Another man experienced a similar incident. A young literate farmer from a village near Vellore City in the Tamil Nadu State, India, was in frequent conflict with his wife. He was interviewed in early 2022 to learn about changes in his attitude and behaviour with regard to his wife and children due to his religious inclination. The information collected from him included the following.

*My wife happened to be my distant relative. Until she gave birth to two girl children, I was happy because my wife was fond of female babies. Surprisingly, my half-brothers sowed poisonous seeds in my mind and cautioned me that I would not have a male child to inherit my properties and carry on my family lineage. They repeatedly emphasised this, with the hidden agenda of taking away my properties at a later stage. At one point, they openly pleaded with me to provide them with half of my properties. This put me in a state of mental stress and restlessness. During this time, my wife was about to deliver a third baby. I was pinning my hopes on having a male child, but disappointingly, she delivered a female baby again. This made me depressed to the extent of me showing my bitterness toward her and children. I don't hesitate to say that I often used to drink liquor and beat her even for minor things. For more than a couple of years, conflict between us became a recurring feature, which affected her physical and mental health.*

*One day, my maternal uncle, for whom I had great respect, came to me to solve my problem. Earlier, he had made several attempts to correct me in different ways, but in vain. Therefore, he took me to Tiruvannamalai town in the Tamil Nadu State, one of the prominent pilgrimage centres in South India, and introduced me to a known ascetic living close to the town. After listening to my problem, he started meditating for some minutes. Then he started advising me to follow the values related to family life prescribed in the Hindu religious texts and to abstain from alcohol as it would destroy the family unity. Moreover, he made it clear that begetting a female baby was in no way inferior to having a male baby. Further, he said that my girl children would bring prosperity and happiness to my family over time. Then he blessed me, followed by offering Prasad (sacred food). At this point in time, I started feeling like a new person, as*

*well as sensing a change in my mind, which in turn led me to realise the importance of marital life and regret my habit of drinking and engaging in offensive activities against my wife. Since then, I have frequented the ascetic with my family to get his blessings and live peacefully.*

These two incidents exhibit how husbands' religiosity mitigated IPV. Contrastingly, another incident demonstrated how a wife's religiosity helped solve the issue of IPV. A case study conducted at the end of 2021 clearly shows how the personal values of a married woman from Vellore City of the Tamil Nadu State in South India influenced her to make a subjective decision to defend her husband, who was about to become entangled in a crucial situation. Her husband reported the following episode during the interview.

*I am engaged in the loading and unloading of goods in a busy marketplace in Vellore City. At one point in time, I started drinking alcohol due to peer group pressure. As a consequence, I became a habitual drinker within a short time. Whenever my wife, who is very religious, questioned me about drinking, I used to scold and beat her to the extent of causing injuries. This became a regular feature that distressed her and my children. Eventually, my drinking habit made me irregular in attending my work. Therefore, I was often denied a regular job in the market, which made me unemployed for months. But somehow, my family's survival was sustained with the support of my wife's earnings as a domestic help in the neighbourhood. Though I understood her dedication to our family, my urge to drink drove me to compel her to give me money to buy liquor. But her repeated refusals made me restless and sometimes violent. While scolding and beating her, I could not think about the crying of my children and the intervention of neighbourhood families.*

*One night, under the influence of alcohol, I beat her ruthlessly with a wooden pole, not bothering about the consequences. As she received severe head injuries, she became unconscious. Known persons from the neighbourhood took her immediately to a nearby hospital, where she regained consciousness after some time. Meanwhile, two constables inquired, after her parents lodged a complaint with a local police station. During the police inquiry, she was firm in her decision not to reveal the truth. Instead, she falsely stated that she had fallen over in the house accidentally. This moved me so much that I deeply regretted what I had done to her.*

*When I asked her about the false explanation she had given to the police, she told me that she had done so because she firmly believed that her prayers, addressed to a local Goddess, would change me sooner or later. Further, she said she wanted to live with me for the sake of children. Her tolerance of my atrocities was mainly because of her devotion to the Goddess. After a week, she took me to the temple of the Goddess to perform a special ritual to reinforce our marital life. This changed me to the extent that I took a vow in front of the Goddess to refrain from alcohol. Surprisingly, after our temple visit, I received a call from a known businessman in the market saying that I could resume my work immediately. I really believed that this was due to the efficacy of her prayers. I would like to be truthful to my wife, as she has always been truthful to me.*

To cross-check the truth in this narration, the man's wife was interviewed later. Though she acknowledged his violent behaviour due to alcohol, she said that she had wanted to remain tolerant because her husband used to behave normally with her and his children when he was not affected by alcohol. Moreover, she informed that all her problems would be solved sooner or later by the grace of the Goddess. This incident gives an insight into the relationship between religiosity and IPV. In other words, it may be inferred that religiosity is a panacea for mitigating IPV. The wife's tolerance made her decide not to reveal the truth to the police, mainly to protect her husband. Her religiosity seems to have allowed her to overlook his violent behaviour at times and to remember his everyday interactions with family members when he was not under the influence of alcohol. This tolerance led her to exhibit another virtue, i.e., defending her husband unconditionally without minding what he had done to her. This shows that she wanted to remain a sympathetic wife despite his atrocities. However, it is clear that her tolerance based on her religiosity changed her husband by resolving the IPV.

Sometimes the situation is the other way round; i.e., the offenders seduce women by making them drink alcohol and rape them (Abbey et al. 1994; Horvath–Brown 2006). The following episode supports this finding based on a case study conducted with a literate male agricultural worker in a village of Thivuvannamalai District in the Northern Tamil Nadu State of India at the beginning of 2021.

*I was experiencing frequent conflicts with my wife because of my habitual alcohol consumption. I was provoked whenever she questioned me about my drinking habit. Sometimes, I became violent to the extent*

*of hitting her brutally. This habit did not allow us to lead a conflict-free conjugal life. Many times, under the influence of alcohol, I had sex with her through coercion. When this was not possible, I used to beat her and sometimes send her to her parental home for some months. However, I wanted to end this problem by any means, as I was often unable to live with my loneliness. As we had faith in God, sometimes we visited a nearby temple to offer prayers for a conflict-free life. But there was no change in our life. After a serious thought, I offered her a glass of brandy to drink one night, but she refused. But because of my repeated insistence, she drank and soon drowned in sleep. Later on, alcohol became her most sought-after drink. Time and again, both of us jointly consumed liquor secretly at home. This made her compromise with me in several respects, including sex. Therefore, at present, conflict between us occurs occasionally, but it gets resolved quickly through alcohol consumption.*

However, it is not ethical to consider alcohol an agent of conflict resolution. Although, at times, it serves to momentarily relieve conflict between husband and wife, it will eventually lead to a series of physical and mental health problems. Instead, they need to be trained to behave with each other more humanely by instilling in them the values of mutual understanding and trust.

The following case study is evidence for understanding the impact of the religiosity of a wife on her troublesome husband in terms of restoring his psychological well-being. While interviewing a female school teacher in early May 2022 in Cheyyar town, a sub-division of Thiruvannamalai District, Tamil Nadu, India, she presented her bitter and pleasant experiences.

*I am an elementary school teacher. I married a businessman who runs a small grocery shop locally. In the initial period of my marital life, I was happy with him, my children and my in-laws. When his business incurred a significant loss due to COVID-19 during 2019–2021, he had no choice except to close the shop. Somehow, we managed the financial situation with the support of my salary and my father-in-law's pension. But his financial instability made him prejudiced, and often he behaved indifferently with me. When I approached him a few times to find an alternative source of income, he used to shout at me using awkward words to hurt my feelings. Later on, I thought that offering prayers to God was the only way to make him realise his outrageous behaviour and correct him.*

*Since I was determined to do it for the sake of my family, I started visiting local temples on weekends, besides attending religious programs in and around my place. I used to fast on days meant for special religious observances. Once, I made a vow to render a religious service to a nearby temple in the belief that God would change my husband's mind and behaviour. Unexpectedly, my husband was hospitalised for some days due to a severe infection of COVID-19. Since his condition was uncertain at the time of admission because of breathing trouble, I prayed to God day and night for his recovery. After he was discharged, I spent most of my time with him, attending to his needs. After some months, I obtained a bank loan to revive his shop and rendered all my support to sustain it. He started behaving kindly towards me as he made more profit from his shop. Several times, he appreciated my tolerance, selfless dedication and unconditional support in restarting the shop, besides deeply regretting what he had done to me in the past.*

The tolerance that the respondent's religiosity supported made an impact on her husband, and he started behaving normally with her.

Several religious texts confirm that any form of violence against women is considered a sin. For instance, *Garuda Purana* (one of the eighteen *mahapurana* genres in Hinduism) corroborates this and provides a list of various types of sins committed by human beings and penalties for those sins (Garuda Purana 1908, Chap. IV). One of the sins highlighted by this text is the atrocities done to women and children. This sin is reflected in *Puranaanuru* (verse 34), a *Sangam* literature known in Tamil society.

Fortune and Enger (2005) disclose that religious teachings can serve as resources for helping those who experience the abuse of their family members. In the context of violence against women, religious teachings may play a vital role in mitigating the severity of violence. It is understood that the teachings of all religions are meant to develop people's good behaviour and avoid violent activity. It is also presumed that while following the morals and ethical principles prescribed in various religious scriptures, people tend to think rightly, speak honestly and behave accordingly. They may thus behave with others kindly and righteously. It is clear that religiosity is a decisive factor in instilling morals and values in people concerning living a peaceful life. Usually, religious people are scared of committing offences because of their fear of God. Even if they commit offences unwittingly, they may beseech God's pardon for their sinful actions.

Yick (2008) presents the findings of six studies that describe how women who were in or who left abusive marriages derived strength and resilience from

their religious beliefs to cope with the ill-treatment and violent behaviour of their husbands and their relatives. Women from various religious groups may experience a similar situation. For instance, some Hindu women who are inclined to attend religious performances can tolerate the abuses of their husbands for reasons such as their children's future, family tradition, self-esteem and the like.

It is also possible that the tolerance of a religious wife to the recurring violent behaviour of her ruthless husband may permit him to continue his atrocities against her. Unmindful of her tolerance, he may exploit it to advance his offensive behaviour. If she is prepared to face him courageously, she will be able to shake his domination over her and restrain him from such activity. This occurs in several rural households in India where marginalised women are empowered economically and socially through self-help groups (SHGs) supported and facilitated by local NGOs. They are deliberately oriented in such a way as to face the challenges posed by their husbands and other family members and even their local communities. Karunanithi (2013) observes that "Their [women's] collective action can, in one way or other, withstand or even challenge internal oppressions and impositions from their families and communities as well." (Ibid. 73). This is evident from a case study conducted in mid-2022 with a literate SHG woman agricultural worker in a village in Thiruvannamalai District in the Tamil Nadu State, India. This case study shows that a woman victim of IPV managed to change her husband's violent behaviour through her non-religious strategy, i.e., her empowerment through a SHG.

*I am a 35-year-old woman and a fervent devotee of a local deity. I married a local agricultural labourer at the age of 25. I have been a member of a SHG in my village since my marriage. Initially, my husband did not want me to continue my group membership, but I convinced him with great difficulty by explaining the benefits of being a group member. Whenever I was away from home for hours to participate in group activities, he shouted at me and sometimes beat me for not attending to household work, which was not urgent to deal with at once. In fact, I was tolerant of his aggressive behaviour because of my devotion to the local deity and respect for my in-laws. But he exploited my tolerance by way of continuing his ill-treatment. At one point in time, notwithstanding his violent behaviour, I sought the help of my group leader and a local social worker, who was instrumental in organising my group. Both advised me to face him boldly and warn him I would lodge a complaint against him at the local police station if he didn't stop such atrocities. After one day, as usual, he started abusing me for a trivial reason. Against his expectations, I reacted to him negatively and fearlessly.*

*The same evening, my group leader and the social worker visited my home to meet my husband. They politely advised him to refrain from engaging in such activity against me, warning him that he would face a police inquiry soon if he continued to do the same. He was taken aback momentarily due to the fear of the police and promised them that he would stop what he had been doing.*

Likewise, in several rural households in Tamil Nadu, India, women are empowered through their SHGs. Most of these empowered women can stand up to IPV and challenge their husbands' domination.

### ***Family, religion and values: Interrelated factors***

Values are learned throughout life. During childhood, the value-learning process is influenced by children's frequent interactions with parents and other family members. Parents tell their children what is right and wrong and persuade them to follow the right path. Besides parents, family members, schools, peer groups, friends, personal experiences and religion play a vital role in this process. For instance, Rethidevi (2016) reports that people acquire values from their parents, families, religions, friends, life experiences, education, etc. Schwartz and Huismans (1995) point out a positive association between religiosity and values. According to Schwartz and Huismans (1995), religiosity develops values. They say: "Religion is often seen as a value in itself, and is also regarded as a way of life that encourages people to strive for other values." (Ibid. 88.) Therefore, it may be reasonable to claim that religiosity itself is a predominant value for many religious groups. In other words, if some people are religious, it means that they follow the values associated with religiosity. This may be because of their family values or reverence for God and belief in His supreme power. This belief in God among family members is promoted by elders, and as a result, other family members will become religious. This religiosity influences their beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours and preserves family values. These family values have been passed on through generations since the distant past.

Barbara Hargrove (1979) observed that there is a close relationship between religion and family throughout history in Western as well as non-Western societies. D'Antonio et al. (1982) also highlight the significance of the connection between these two institutions. Bina Gupta (1994) claims that the joint family in India symbolises Hindu culture, which is deeply rooted in the Hindu tradition. Karunanithi (2021) believes that the joint family preserved culture, customs, tradition, beliefs, and values, which are passed down through generations.

Therefore, the members of joint families acquired the values associated with religiosity, sharing joys and sorrows, mutual adjustments and obligations, selflessness and humanism. Further, he observed that, in contemporary India, the breaking down of these families into nuclear families has shifted the focus from collective interest (the foundation of the joint family) to self-interest (the main feature of the nuclear family). In other words, there has been a paradigm shift from the value of collectivism to the principle of individualism. While the value of collectivism in joint families promoted religiosity among members, the principle of individualism in nuclear families seems to have given way to couples following their personal likes and dislikes, which may or may not advance their religiosity.

In contemporary India, a significant proportion of couples working in the IT sector and living in nuclear families face problems getting along due to their inclination to individuality, resulting in marital conflict. Such conflicts may eventually end in IPV. This is evident from a discussion with a retired family court judge from Madras High Court in 2021, Chennai (the capital of Tamil Nadu State), who disclosed that, during his tenure, about 80% of divorce cases were registered by young couples from the IT sector. Further, he pointed out that an independent mindset was pronounced amongst them mainly due to their economic freedom and independent decision-making capacity. In support of this, Singh (2003) states that the disintegration of the joint family may also be due to the career orientation of couples, their economic freedom, independent decision-making capacity and interest in individual accomplishment. This economic independence and individual decision-making capacity are the main reasons for marital conflict and subsequent IPV. In such situations, both partners may opt for legal separation through mutual consent or one of them may decide to file for divorce against the wish of another. However, in the worst case, divorce rather than religiosity may put an end to IPV.

The following case study, conducted with a female IT professional in Chennai in early 2022, presents this situation.

*I am an IT professional working in Chennai City. I am 32 years old, and three years ago, I got married to a man of the same profession in the same city. A few months after marriage, he was deputed to work in his parent company in the USA. We were living separately for a year. In the middle of the second year, I left my job and joined him, hoping to secure a new job in the USA. But after three months, I was forced to come back to India for the reason that I could not withstand his torture, which happened almost every day. I was subject to physical, sexual and emotional violence. As I was helpless, I first tolerated his atrocious*

*activities. One day, I lost my patience and tried to contact the police. Immediately, he pleaded with me not to do so and promised to stop his violent activities at once. But I told him to live together after some time, if he was ready to arrange my return journey soon. He did this within a week and requested me not reveal the incident to my parents.*

*After returning to Chennai, I informed my parents of what he had done to me and conveyed my decision to divorce him. However, they asked me to wait for some time. Meanwhile, I was able to secure my former job. I did not contact him after my arrival. Although he tried to contact me over mobile several times, I did not respond. After some months, he visited Chennai and met me at my house in the presence of my parents. I informed him that I had already decided to go for legal separation. Suddenly, he came down and promised my father that he would live with me as a caring and responsible husband. But my father asked him to bring his parents for a discussion to find out how to solve the problem. Though he agreed to do so, I was unwilling to change my mind because I was confident that I could take care of myself and my parents with the support of my earnings. I made my parents understand the fact that I would not be able to live with him peacefully. At last, they agreed to my decision to file for divorce. After legal separation, he prepared for a second marriage with the support of his parents.*

In most incidents of IPV, husbands harass their wives. When employed couples are heading toward complete individuality, neither their religiosity nor their family values influence them to reconcile with each other. The following case study of a married woman from the IT sector is an example of such an incident (Karunanithi 2021).

*I am a 27-year-old IT professional married to a 30-year-old man of the same profession. We are Hindus, and hence, our arranged marriage was solemnised according to Hindu religious practices. We settled down in nuclear family in Chennai City in 2017. I have been an independent person since my school days, as my parents never restricted my freedom in my endeavours, including my studies and employment. But, at the same time, they imparted religious values and morals in me to refine my behaviour. Initially, I believed that my husband would not interfere with my freedom and would treat me equally. But within some months of our conjugal life, I came to know that he is a selfish male chauvinist, expecting me to do whatever he says. He belonged to my*

*religious denomination but seldom followed basic religious practices. I believe that this may be the reason why he wanted to dominate me in all aspects.*

*I had my first shock when he demanded me to give him my bank savings and debit card. But I could not yield to his demand and told him I didn't want to lose my financial freedom. However, I agreed to contribute my share to meet the family's monthly expenses, including house rent. But he did not accept, as he wanted to control me and my earnings. Besides, he was reluctant to share our domestic and allied work. When I engaged a maidservant to assist me in attending to household chores, he categorically told me to pay her from my purse. Even after experiencing these hardships, I believe that a nuclear family is a safer marital home for a woman, provided her partner treats her equally with mutual trust.*

*One day, he forced me to hand over my savings and the bank debit card. When I bluntly refused, he beat me repeatedly and violently. After an elaborate consultation with my parents in the presence of my family lawyer, I conveyed my decision to divorce him. After my parents' approval, I filed a case to obtain a divorce against his wish. At last, I got my legal separation papers after a couple of years. Though I belong to an orthodox family with strong family values, I do not want to reconcile with the male chauvinist and unscrupulous man. Instead, I have decided to live independently with self-esteem. I believe that the religious values that I am following do not restrain my individuality but promote my self-confidence.*

It is evident from this episode that, irrespective of religious affiliation, high educational qualifications, and well-paid jobs, they were not able to live together peacefully. In this case, the selfish husband was keen on satisfying his needs by controlling his wife rather than moderating his superiority over her through practising egalitarian values, mutual trust and adjustment. On the other hand, his wife gained the confidence to live an independent and trouble-free life instead of living with a selfish, male chauvinist husband. In relation to this situation, Peter Warren (2015) says there is an increasing power difference between men and women, which is inherent in traditional male-female relationships. The same view is emphasised by Imbrogno and Imbrogno (2000) and Robinson (2003). This power difference is a significant cause of IPV. Rodríguez-Menés and Safranoff (2012) also endorse this view that abusive relationships tend to

occur more frequently when a male partner has greater control over his female counterpart. However, several couples employed in the IT sector seem to have remained in abusive relationships despite their complete independence and uncompromising power differences between them.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the selected case studies, this paper concludes that the religiosity of couples may regulate husbands' violent behaviour against their wives. In other words, religiosity may change the violent behaviour of husbands into sociable behaviour. This behavioural change is evident from the limited case studies presented in the paper. But it is also possible that some husbands exploit the tolerance of their religious wives to continue their violent activities against them. Nevertheless, religiosity regulates the violent behaviour of most husbands, but not all. However, the conclusion obtained from the analysis of case studies cannot be generalised to all husbands who perpetrate domestic violence or intimate partner violence in India. This may be because of the diversity of personalities based on the background of their families, castes, classes, ethnicities, and religions. Therefore, at present, there arises a need to conduct a cross-cultural macro study on this problem covering a wide range of people across India to assess the efficacy of religiosity in mitigating IPV by regulating the violent behaviour of husbands against their wives.

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