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| FEMINIST VIEWS OF RELIGION |
| Key Concepts:•Feminism is a conflict theory although feminists do not see religion as causing conflict in society rather; religion acting on behalf of men to continue patriarchal control. Feminists argue that the social explanations of religion put forward by ‘classic’ theorists only account and explain male behaviour. http://tarmojuristo.files.wordpress.com/2009/04/feminism.jpeg-Much of the empirical research sociologists such as Durkheim and Marx use are part of the ‘malestream’ made up of male participants. Although feminism can be split into a number of branches (Marxist, liberal, Postmodern) they agree that religion, society and sociology is patriarchal, male dominated.•Feminist writer De Beauvoir (1949) argues that religion oppresses women in much the same way as Marx suggests religion oppresses the working classes. •Feminists believe that religion is an ideological force as religion is controlled predominantly by men. De Beauvoir (1949) argues that religious leaders are generally male and much of the doctrine is interpreted from a male perspective, which controls the way women view themselves and reinforces patriarchy •The ideological control of women leads to their social control in society. De Beauvoir (1949) that through secondary socialisation religion teaches and preaches the norms and values of the men, helping to suppress and control women. •Women are more likely to believe in a God, an afterlife or a code of ethics than men. Women are also more likely to join and take a greater part of new religious movements. Meaning the impact of the patriarchal control is greater.•Bruce (1995) argues that women are more likely to join sects and cults. This could be because they feel disadvantaged by other parts of a patriarchal society and therefore seek out a place outside of society that better understands their needs. However feminists would argue that sects offer no escape from male oppression. In sects women have no chance of being in power, and stand a chance of both physical and sexual abuse. |
| Theoretical evaluation |
| •Feminist theory has gained theoretical support from Marxist theorists. Marxists agree with the feminist idea of ideological control and false consciousness. Marxist would also support the idea that control come from an unequal power relationship between social groups (although they would disagree as to which groups these are). This suggests that feminist ideas have wider theoretical appeal. However Marxists would argue that understanding an individual’s relationship to the economy plays more important than their gender in understanding oppression.•Traditional Feminists theory connected to oppression has been criticised on a theoretical level by postmodern feminists. Postmodernist feminists would argue that women's role in religion is about choice rather than patriarchy. Instead women choose to either be religious or not. This suggests that the Feminist approach only offers a partial view on how religion functions within society. |
| Empirical evaluation |
| •Feminist ideas have empirical support. Jean Holm (1994) investigated the role of women in religion. She found that although the classical readings of the religions emphasised equality between men and women the reality was very different, with women being generally excluded during religious cerimonies. Saadawi found that women are equally disadvantaged in the Muslim faith. She claims that a female circumcision, an unpleasant mutilation of female genitalia, can be attributed to Islam. This suggests that there is some validity in the Feminit ideas. •Feminist theory has been criticised on empirical grounds. Not all religions can be criticised for being patriarchal. Increasingly women are taking an active role in religion. For example Judaism has allowed rabbis since 1972 and the Church of England has allowed female vicars since 1992. This suggests that feminist theory is based on one very narrow view of society and therefore the evidence lacks validity.  |
| Conclusion:•Contemporary arguments only cloud understanding of religion and oppression. The rise of Fundamentalism has increased the oppression of women to; from wearing the veil in the Muslim faith to control of abortion law in America. However Fundamentalism in The Middle East is not an example of ruling class oppression rather the fight against global capitalism.•It is also difficult to use Britain as an example of either Marxism or feminism being a correct interpretation of religion’s role in society. Secularisation has been continuing to reduce the power of religion over British people. If only 24% of people in the UK regularly attend religious service how can it be argued that religion has ideological and social control?  |