

Lecture #1

Introduction to women in religion

Women's experience with the world religions is practically coextensive with human culture.

Religion centers in Mystery--in human nature's ^{Longing For} ~~condemnation~~
~~is~~ a life richer than its understanding, and ^{it} has historically revolved around questions such as: what is life?, What is death?, Why do we exist?, Why must we suffer?

From archaic times these questions have generated myths, rituals, sacrificial cults and moral codes.

even today ^{These} ~~this~~ old questions remain.

The religions--archaic and modern, East and West-- have all tried to express, harmonize with and communicate this mystery. they have all tried to name it--Being, nonbeing, Void, Fullness, Father, Mother, or Spirit--but all have acknowledged that Mystery escapes these names.

theoretically, all persons are apt for mystery because all ^{people} want to know and love unrestrictedly. These twin drives are insatiable: knowing never exhausts the urge to know; loving only increases the capacity to love.

Religion then, is self-transcendence par excellence. It is the way of knowledge and love that carries one out to the oceanic wholeness of God.

If religion centers in Mystery, and Mystery transcends sex, then religious experience should transcend sex.

however, religious experience comes to persons who have a

gender and this, along with the tradition in which one was raised, will determine how it is interpreted.

What a tradition says about one's sex, therefore, has shaped a great deal of what men and women have made of these transforming insights.

One of the points of this course is to show that the religions have frustrated women's access to equality under Mystery by ^{Larding} leading their experiences with perceptions of social inferiority.

This age is one of unprecedented communication between cultures and between women of all cultures.

In the midst of these cultural differences there are two similarities.

first there is a constant, core humanity. Women's socialization everywhere has tended to make them feel inferior to men, but nowhere has it destroyed their core drivers to know and love.

Moreover, their common subordination has tended to restrict women's abilities to know and love in similar ways. for example: mothers (Jewish, muslim, Chinese, Hindu, Irish-Catholic) have all tended to emotional manipulation. Because they have had little official, institutionalized status or power, they have all been severely tempted to make spouses or children feel guilty.

a second common factor, despite cultural differences, is the influence of religion.

religion has been central to world history. religions,
archaic or the so called "higher" ^{Religions} ~~ones~~ have delineated all
societies' world-views. Even when individuals spurned religion,
they were living in cultures carrying heavy religious overtones.-
Civil religion

the religious traditions of West and East agreed that a woman
should never be independent, ought always be subject.

thus, traditional societies took steps to insure women's
subjection or nonindependence.

for ex: Hinduism denies women the sacred thread, the symbol
of religious birth.

Buddhist nuns, are allowed to be nuns but must obey the
youngest male monk.

Christian women were taught to be silent in church and
obedient to their husbands.

Purdah kept Muslim women veiled from the eyes of all but
their own men, partly because Islam measures women's salvation in
terms of submission, not to allah but to their husbands.

Most importantly both East and West regulated women's education.
what better way to insure inferiority then by prohibiting
intellectual growth.

thus Jewish women could not study the Torah, hindu the Vedas,
Chinese the Confucian classics.

Looking at the psychology behind this social positioning one sees
the ambiguity in the religions' symbolization of women's holiness

and evil.

clearly one of the most pregnant signs of women's subordinate status has been the tendency to view them as either much better, or much worse, than men, for this implies that only men have normal, mid-range humanity.

Thus women have been elevated as goddesses, virgins, mothers, symbols of purity, mercy, love. likewise, they have been denounced as whores, witches, seducers, symbols of treachery, malice, lust.

what they have not been historically is equal sharers of humanity whose social and religious offices have been determined principally by their talents.

the balance of religious symbolization has fallen on the side of evil. Hinduism's Kali, the devouring mother, Freudian analysis, Buddhist doctrines "daughters of Mara" (the evil one) who are out to seduce the enlightened ones.

Then of course, Lilith, Adam's first wife who dominated him in Jewish myth and who dines on small children. *- show lilith story.*
and don't forget Eve, the cause of all the evil in the world.

With this introduction, let us look at a time when the Goddess was worshipped and women did not have the subservient position she does today. *- The*

Lecture # 1

The worship of the great mother.

Archeological evidence shows that the Religion of the Great Mother goddess had existed and flourished in the Near and middle east for thousands of years before the arrival of the northern invaders (the Aryans) beginning around 2400 B.C.E.

the worship of the goddess has been found in Neolithic communities of about 7000 B. and some cultures in the upper Paleolithic cultures of about 25,000 B.

its existence is attested to well up into Roman times the last temple of the goddess being destroyed in Rome by the Christians about ⁵⁵⁰~~500~~ C.E.

The religion found in the Near and Middle east evolved and was intertwined with the earliest beginnings of religion so far discovered anywhere on earth.

The sites in Upper Paleolithic Europe is the conjectural foundation of the religion of the Goddesses as it emerged in the later Neolithic age of the Near east.

theories on the origins of the Goddess in this period are founded on the juxtaposition of mother-kinship customs to ancestor worship with three lines of evidence.

the first relies on anthropological analogy to explain the initial development of matrilineal societies.

studies of 'primitive' tribes over the past couple centuries

have led to the realization that some isolated peoples, even today, do not possess the conscious understanding of the relationship of sex to conception. it is then believed the paleolithic people were at a similar level.

Thus as Margaret Mead has established, among others, the female was revered as the giver of life since man's part was not known.

Thus a child would take the mother's name and the descent was mother to daughter, including inheritance. This is true of the Pueblo indians today, as well as parts of Africa and the Dravidians of India, and relics of them in Melanesia, Micronesia and Indonesia.

the second line of evidence is the beliefs and rituals and their connection with matrilineal descent.

exploration of paleolithic sites and the disposal of their dead suggest that, as the earliest concepts of religion developed, they probably took the form of ancestor worship. this is still observed among many people.

thus the female was seen as the source of life with the primal ancestor being a female.

the third line of evidence and the most tangible comes from the numerous sculptures of women found in sites from Spain, France, Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia and Russia dating back to 25,000 years and spanning at least 10,000 years.

as one archeologist (Maringer) said, "that the female

figurines were idols of a "great mother" cult, practised by the non-nomadic Aurignacian mammoth hunters who inhabited the immense Eurasian territories that extended from S. France to Lake Baikal in Siberia."

incidentally, it is from this Lake Baikal area in Siberia that the tribes which migrated to N. A., supposedly about this same period (ancesters of the american indians) are believed to have originated.

The connections between the paleolithic female figurines and the later emergence of the Goddess-worshipping societies in the Neolithic periods of the Near and Middle east are well attested.

the sculptures of the paleolithic period and the agricultural neolithic are remarkably similar in materials, size, and most astonishing, in style.

it is believed there is a direct connection. it is also believed that the mother goddess represented by such figurines was the central figure in Neolithic religion.

In Catal Huyuk in Anatolia (southern Turkey) dating from 6500 and the following 1000 years the evidence is overwhelming that the goddess was worshiped. she is represented in three aspects--a young woman, a mother giving birth, and an old woman.

it is also seen that the cult of the goddess was administered mainly by women.

the Halaf culture along the banks of the Tigris and westward as far as the Habur River appeared about 5000 B.C.E.

there was metal working, cobbled streets and the first wheeled vehicles date from this time.

the goddess figurines have been found at all the halaf sites and were associated with serpents, double axes and doves, all symbols connected with the goddess worship as was known in historical times.

By 4000 B.C.E. the goddess figurines appeared at Ur and Uruk, both on the southern end of the Euphrates River near the Persian Gulf.

about this time also agriculture first emerged in Egypt again associated with the figurines of the goddess.

about 3000 the invention of writing occurred in Sumer. it was believed a goddess invented it and agriculture in both Sumerian and Egyptian myth and good reason to believe that women invented both writing and agriculture, not to mention medicine.

During the historic period beginning at 3000, there were many centuries of transformation of the mother goddess but the worship of the female deity survived into the classical periods of Greece and Rome.

The Goddess reigned alone for millennia but at some unknown point in time she acquired a son or brother (depending on the geographic location) who was also her lover and consort.

he is known in the early historical period and is believed to have been part of the female religion in much earlier times.

the point is that the goddess at first had precedence over the Young god with whom she was associated as her son or husband

or lover.

he symbolized the male role in the sacred annual sexual union with the goddess probably from neolithic times. with the discovery of agriculture it became apparent that the male had something to do with creation of life. a stelle dating from about 6500 B.C.E. shows a man and woman copulating on one side and the mother holding the baby on the other, thus the connection was made.

this youth known in various languages as Damuzi, Tammuz, Attis, Adonis, Osiris or Baal died in his youth, causing a period of annual grief and lamentation among those who paid homage to the goddess. He is always the associate of the Goddess.

the relation of the young god or youth to the goddess was known in Egypt by 3000 and occurred in the earliest literature of Sumer, emerged in later Babylon, Anatolia and Canaan and survived in the greek legend of Aphrodite and Adonis (who was born in Bethlehem) and was known in Rome in the rituals of Attis and Cybele, possibly influencing the symbolism and rituals of early Christianity.

it is one of the major aspects of the religion which bridges the vast expanses covered both geographically and chronologically.

Upon closer scrutiny, we can see that what is being dealt with is basically one religion covering thousands of years and a very large geographical area.

the names for the goddess were simply various titles such

epithets as queen of heaven, Lady of the high place, celestial ruler, Lady of the universe, sovereign of the heavens, lioness of the sacred assembly or simply her holiness. she was revered much as God is today.

the similarities of statues, titles, symbols such as the serpent, the cow, the dove and the double axe, the relationship of the son/lover who dies and is mourned annually, eunuch priests, the sacred annual sexual union and the sexual customs of the temple, each reveal the overlapping and underlying connections between the worship of the female deity in areas as far apart in space and time as the earliest records of Sumer to classical Greece and Rome.

Robert Graves points out that judging by archeological evidence there was a remarkably homogenous system of religious ideas based on the many titled Mother Goddess.

as another writer put it. "From India to the Mediterranean she reigned supreme."

Women--where women were deified

first some definitions.

Matrilineality is generally defined as that societal structure in which inheritance takes place thru the female line, sons, husbands or brothers gaining access to title and property only as the result of their relationship to the woman who is the legal

owner, it does not mean

Matriarchy which is defined as women in power, or more specifically the mother, as the head of the family, taking this position in community or state government as well.

the economics of the Neolithic and early historical agricultural societies have been described as follows:

"In early society women wielded the main sources of wealth; they were the owners of the house, the producers of food, they provided shelter and security. Economically, therefore, man was dependent upon woman."

a man named Diodorus about 49 B.C.E traveled and wrote about women in other cultures.

he reported that women of Ethiopia carried arms, practiced communal marriage and raised their children communally so that they often confused even themselves as to who the natural mother was.

in Libya where the Goddess Neith was highly esteemed, accounts of Amazon women still lingered even in Roman times.

All authority was vested in the weoman, who discharged every kind of public duty. The men looked after domestic affairs just as the women do among ourselves and did as they were told by their wives. They were not allowed to undertake war service or to exercise any functions of government, or to fill public office, such as might have given them more spirit to set themselves up against the women. The children were handed over immediately after birth to the men, who reared them on milk and other foods suitable to their age.

he also reported that women formed armies and invaded other lands

on behalf of their goddess.

Egypt he reported, worshipped the goddess Isis (Au Set). she was revered as the inventor of agriculture, as a great healer and physician and as one who first established the laws of justice in the land.

he wrote "It is for these reasons, in fact, that it was ordained that the queen should have greater power and honour than the king and that among private persons the wife should enjoy authority over the husband, husbands agreeing in the marriage contract that they will be obedient in all things to their wives."

Herodotus of Greece, several centuries before Diodorus, wrote that in Egypt "Women go in the market -place, transact affairs and occupy themselves with business, while the husbands stay home and weave."

By the 18th dynasty (1570-1300) the influence of the Aryan invaders was being felt strongly and it was only at this time that the word Pharaoh was used to designate the male of the household.

in Sumer

before 2300 polyandry was practiced as is evidenced by laws against it. in India the Dravidian Goddess-worshipping areas polyandry has still been practiced this century.

in the Epic of Gilgamesh the official scribe of the Sumerian heaven is a female and a goddess is credited with the invention

of writing.

the earliest examples of writing (about 3200 B.) were discovered in the temple of the Goddess Inanna of Erech where the women lived and turned out temple accounts of payment for land rental.

in Babylon, with the law code of Hammurabi but was already being influenced by the Aryan's, women could acquire property, take legal action, be a party to contracts and she had a certain share in her husband's inheritance.

they were free to request divorce, and could disclaim any responsibility for their husbands indebtedness which means she was involved in financial affairs.

in Northern Mesopotamia, there are records of women judges and magistrates down to the 8th Cent. B.C.E.

by the end of the 2nd Millenium a married woman could no longer engage in business unless directed by her husband, son or brother in law.

These are just some examples of the way women were treated and allowed more freedom then ever since. The same is true of Anatlia, Crete and even Sparta where the worship of Artemis continued to thrive in classical times, women were free and independent.

according to Euripedes and Plutarch, young Spartan women were found in the Gymnasia where they tossed off their clothing and wrestled naked with their male contemporaries. they apparetently

had total sexual freedom and tho monogamy was the official marriage rule it was mentioned in several accounts that it was not taken seriously.

The Aryan Invasions (4000-1100B.C.E.)

I have been refering to the coming of the Indo-Europeans now more clarification.

These invaders were coming from Thier northern homelands of Russia and the Caucasus region where they were nomadic hunters and fishers. A change in weather forced a southern migration.

They were aggressive warriors riding two abreast in horse-drawn war chariots, called by scholars "the battle axe cultures" and represent the root of all Indo-European speaking peoples.

their character was dominantly pastoral, patriarchal, warkike and expansive.

They came in a series of migrations perhaps reaching back to 4000 B.C.E.

most important is they viewed themselves as a superior people based upon their conquest of the more settled worshippers of the goddess whom they conquered.

they were in continual conflict not only with the people whose lands they invaded but between themselves as well.

the Pattern that surfaces in each area in which they made and appearance is that of a group of aggressive warriors, accompanied by a priestly caste of high standing, who initially invaded,

conquered and then ruled the indigfenous population of each land they entered.

they were on the Iranian plateau by the fourth millenium., in Anatollia by the early third dated around 2300 B.

the Iranian plateau and Anatolia were their main area from which they immagrated south into the near east during the 2nd millenium going as far as northern India.

historical, mythological and archeological eveidence suggest that it was these northen people who brought with them the concepts of light as good and dark as evil (possibly their view of the darker skined people they conquered) and of a supreme male deity.

this deity was not like the son/lover associated with the Mother goddess, but was most often portrayed as a storm god or mountain god blazing with fire or lightening.

sometimes this storm god was annexed to a goddess such as Hera, an older mother goddess in Greece was to Zeus, or emerged as a rebellious young god who heroically destroyed the older female deity such as Marduk slaying Tiamut in Babylonian myth.

in thse myths the female deity is symbolized as a serpent or dragon most often associated with darkness and evil.

there is no question that the allegorical identity of the dragon or serpent is that of the Goddess religion.

The Aryans didn't ignore the goddess, the original supreme diety of the conquered peoples, but she was symbolically included in such a manner that these supposedly religious myths allow us to trace her eventual deposition.

the male deity is invariably the powerful champion of light.
(appollo, Indra in India, Baal in Cannan)

tho Baal has a dual role as storm god of Mt. Saphon as well as
the brother/consort of the Goddess Anath.

The conquest of Leviathan by the Hebrew god YHWH is the
biblical account (Psalm 74:14 and Isaiah 27).

the myth even survives in St. George and the dragon and the
story of St. Patrick driving the snakes (the worship of the
mother) out of Ireland.

the female religion, especially after the earlier invasions,
appears to have assimilated the male deities into the older
worship and the Goddess survived as the popular religion of the
people for thousands of years after the initial invasions.

The God of the Hebrews sounds so much like Indo-European
influence there has to be a connection. YHWH is a god of the mt.
blazing with light, he defeats the serpent, and the very
patriarchal attitudes and laws which were later adoped into
Christianity, were unlike anything of the surrounding peoples but
show this Aryan influence.

these will all be discussed later.

It is interesting to note that it is after the Kassites (an
indo-European group) conquered Babylon about 1600 BCE that
Marduk, a god known in Hammurabis period (about 1800) was made a
major god, in fact head of the pantheon. The myth of Marduk
killing Tiamut, and the myth of Indra killing Danu and her son,
Vrtra in Indian myth, were written about the same period

(1600-1400 BCE) for the same reason, to make the male deity supreme.

Egypt around 3000 was invaded by a group which eventually formed an aristocracy or master race and ruled the whole of Egypt. They were called by the natives "followers of Horus". The evidence of this is found in the graves of the late predynastic period where the remains of people whose skulls are of greater size and whose bodies were larger than the natives were found so that it is sure one did not derive from the other.

Memphis was made the capital and by 2900 the sun god Hor-Wer showed him riding about in his boat of heaven.

The name of the first king of the 1st dynasty was Hor-Aha but the name of Hor appears to have then been incorporated into the more ancient religion of the Goddess as "the son who dies." This led to confusion between the two hors, one the aryan god of light of the invaders, the other Horus the son of the Goddess Isis.

~~the followers of Hor who invaded Neolithic Egypt established~~

The earliest writing from Iran is that of the Avesta of Zoroaster around 600 BCE, which is relatively late in comparison to the biblical writings and the writings from India.

However, the themes are the same as all the Indo-European ideas about God. The very strict dualism between light and dark. In fact Zoroaster developed this into a good god (Ahura Mazda) vs. his equally eternal evil counterpart, (Ahriman).

Ahura Mazda is represented by fire and it is noteworthy that the Brahmins of India and the Levite priests of the Hebrews also

considered fire an extremely important part of their ritual.

In all these cases we are dealing with mountain gods and and/or storm gods. and they are all male.

Mithra who appears in the Rig Veda in India is developed more significantly in Iran. He is the sun God and his religion (exclusively male) was found as far as great Briton carried by Roman soldiers.

Many of his rites, such as communion of bread and wine, baptism in bulls blood, and his birthday on Dec. 25, are followed by Christianity (not in blood, of course).

the goddess religion was apparently revived in Iran about the 4th Cent. C.E. when the Goddess Anahita was in charge of the universe. we are told that Ahura Mazda has given her the task of watching over all creation.

As far as Christianity is concerned, the rites of Cybele and Attis which were in Rome well before the Christian era had much influence.

Claudius made the worship of Cybele and Attis the state religion of Rome in 51 C.E.

it is interesting to note that he put out a decree about this same time kicking all the Jews out of Rome "because of Christus". (at this time the Christians were still considered a sect of Judaism).

It looks like he was getting rid of the one real competitor to Cybele.

Her rites are celebrated around the spring Equinox in March

and run for 9 days which include the death and resurrection of the son/lover, attis.

his efigay was carried thru the streets of Rome tied to a tree (pine) under which he died castrating himself so he would be faithful the Cybele.

he was raised after three days at which time is great celebration and all men who want to become priests castrate themselves, are baptized and must go thru the streets of Rome begging women's clothing to wear.

The influence of the Indo-Europeans upon India and upon the Hebrew people starting with Abraham will be discussed later.

The revival starting in the 1960's of paganism and the Wicca movement will be discussed in the last lecture.