

WOMEN AND RELIGION IN A GLOBALIZED WORLD:

A CONVERSATION OF WOMEN'S AND RELIGIOUS LEADERS

Convened by The Peace Council and The Center for Health and Social Policy

*Chiang Mai, Thailand
February 29–March 3, 2004*



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Introduction

Stephen L. Isaacs and Daniel Gómez-Ibáñez

Forty-eight religious and women's leaders participated in a "conversation" in Chiang Mai, Thailand between February 29 and March 3, 2004 to discuss how, in an era of globalization, religions could play a more active role in advancing women's lives. The "conversation," the first-ever of its kind, was organized by The Center for Health and Social Policy and the international inter-religious Peace Council. The participants, who came from Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Middle East, Europe, and North America, unanimously adopted an unprecedented and far-ranging declaration that states in part:

We, the participants in this conference on women and religion, recognize that contemporary realities have tragic consequences for women's lives. Without a commitment to women's human rights and to the resolution of these tragedies, religions are failing the world. Their own relevance is at stake as they become more and more isolated from the values and needs of their members.

It is urgent that religions address these realities. Religions must be consonant with the cultural evolution in which we are all immersed. Religions must no longer tolerate violence against women. Women are alienated from religions that do. We are committed to working toward change, and we call on others, women and men, to join in this task. Religions at their best celebrate the dignity of each human being and of all life as valuable parts of a sacred whole. They inspire and empower us to compassion and justice.

Religions, however, have not always been at their best. They have collaborated with dehumanizing values of cultural, economic, and political powers. Thus they have contributed to the suffering of women:

- They have made women invisible by denying them religious education and denying them from decision-making.
- They have been silent when patriarchal systems have legitimated the violence, abuse, and exploitation of women by men.

- This silence has been deafening in the face of such atrocities as rape, incest, female genital mutilation, sex selective abortion, and discrimination against sexual minorities
- They have not recognized the conscience and moral agency of women, especially in relation to their sexuality and reproductive decisions. But religions can and must do better. They must reclaim their core values of justice, dignity, and compassion, and apply these values to women.

The host of the “conversation” was the Venerable Dhammananda Bhikkhuni, a Peace Councilor who was recently ordained as a Buddhist monk in Sri Lanka and has since returned to Thailand, where the clergy does not ordain women as monks. The Thai Theravadin tradition ordained both men and women until the XII Century, a practice revived in the last few years in Sri Lanka. She had arranged for the highest ranking monks in the north of Thailand to bless the opening of the meeting. Their presence also helped legitimize Ven. Dhammananda’s work to open Thai Buddhism to the concept of female monks. Following the monks’ blessings at the opening ceremony, a woman Thai Senator, Rabiebrat Ponganit, welcomed the participants, as did Stephen Isaacs on behalf of the Center for Health and Social Policy and Daniel Gómez-Ibáñez on behalf of the Peace Council. Aminata Touré, representing the United Nations Population Fund, read a message of welcome and congratulations from Thoraya Obaid, executive director of the UNFPA. The opening ceremony concluded with a northern Thailand welcoming ceremony chanted by a local shaman.

The formal sessions, held at the Chiang Mai YMCA, began the morning of March 1 with a plenary session in which Christine Gudorf, a North American Christian theologian, summarized her paper on “World Religions on Women: Their Roles in the Family, Society, and Religion,” and Vandana Shiva, an Indian ecofeminist who heads the Indian Research Foundation for Science, Technology, and Ecology, summarized her paper on “Women and Religion in the Context of Globalization.” Following discussion and comments during the plenary session and a brief overview of the context, issues, and expectations by José Barzelatto, vice-president of the Center for Health and Social Policy, the participants broke into five working groups charged with identifying key issues, areas of consensus, and recommendations for action that should be taken so that religions would actively work to advance women’s lives. On the afternoon of March 2, the participants gathered in plenary again, and representatives from each group presented their working groups deliberations. The participants felt that it was important for the “conversation” to conclude with a declaration that would represent the consensus of the group, would transmit the sense of urgency felt by the participants, and would be used as the basis for follow-up. A drafting committee worked well into the night crafting the working groups’ deliberations and the plenary discussion into a single declaration that the participants adopted unanimously.

Follow-up activities are underway in many parts of the world.

- The Declaration has been translated into Spanish, Arabic, Hebrew, and other languages. It is available as a concise brochure.
- The Declaration is available on the websites of the Peace Council (www.peacecouncil.org) and the Center for Health and Social Policy (www.chsp.org) and has been posted on a number of other organizations' websites, e.g., the Association of Women in Development and the Religious Consultation on Population, Reproductive Health, and Ethics. One indication of widespread interest in the Chiang Mai “conversation” has been the traffic on the Peace Council's website. After the Declaration was posted on March 8, there was an immediate and substantial increase in the number of visits—most of them hitting the page with the Declaration. There was more activity on the Peace Council's website in March than in any month before or since. In fact on March 11 and 12, there were times when the Peace Council was registering 490 hits per hour (the average is 20-30 hits per hour).
- The Declaration was discussed at a recent meeting of the International Sexual and Reproductive Rights Coalition a group of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) participating in the follow up to the United Nations' Cairo Conference on Population. It was also cited on March 24, 2004 at the 37th Session of the UN Commission on Population and Development.
- Several of the participants have published articles about the Chiang Mai “conversation” in hard and electronic media. Sister Joan Chittister, a Peace Councilor, used two of her weekly columns in the *National Catholic Reporter* to report on the conference.
- Regional and national “conversations” have been held. Others are being planned.
- The next meeting of the Congress of World Faiths will focus on women and religion, utilizing the Chiang Mai Declaration.
- The Peace Council organized a sub-committee on women and religion and the topic will appear on the agenda of its meetings in the future. Additionally, the Peace Council plans to seek observer status at the UN's Cairo + Ten and Beijing + Ten conferences. The Cairo conference is concerned with population issues and the Beijing conference is on the status of women.
- Some ordained participants have spoken of the “conversation” in their sermons or other talks.

- Two advisors to the Peace Council, Sr. Marilee Howard RSM and Sr. Marcelline Koch OP, recently wrote a study guide to help individuals and groups discuss and learn more about issues raised in the Chiang Mai Declaration. The study guide can be downloaded from the Peace Council's web-site.
- An inter-faith group comprising participants from several religions was formed to examine and advance the ordination of women.

This was an unusual conference attended by an extraordinary group of individuals. There was a palpable sense that this was an important gathering and that what one participant called "the spirit of Chiang Mai" must live on. As the conference concluded, several women representing secular NGOs said that although they had come doubting that religion would ever do anything significant to advance the interests of women, they now saw matters very differently. They were moved by the willingness of the religious leaders to engage the issues. In the Declaration, the participants pledged to "commit ourselves and call on women and other religious leaders to reach out to each other to enhance mutual understanding, support, and cooperation." They concluded, "we believe that when women and religious traditions collaborate, a powerful force for advancing women's human rights and leadership will be created."

While only time will tell whether the participants will accomplish their ambitious goal of starting a movement, they certainly planted the seed for, in the words of the declaration, "an agenda for change."

The conference was made possible by the generous support of the following donors:

- The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation
- The United Nations Population Fund
- The Ford Foundation
- The International Planned Parenthood Federation
- The International Women's Health Coalition
- The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation
- The Pathfinder Fund
- The Rockefeller Foundation
- Catholics for a Free Choice
- Religion Counts
- The World Bank

Special thanks are due to Saleha Mahmood Abedin and Paul Knitter for co-chairing the drafting committee, and to Jacqueline Pitanguy and Joan Chittister for chairing the plenary sessions.

Special thanks are due as well to the International Women's Partnership for Peace and Justice, and its director, Ouyporn Khaunkaew, for their splendid local work organizing the "conversation" in Chiang Mai.

The Chiang Mai Declaration: Religion and Women: An Agenda for Change*

Preamble

We, the participants in this conference on women and religion, recognize that contemporary realities have tragic consequences for women's lives. Without a commitment to women's human rights and to the resolution of these tragedies, religions are failing the world. Their own relevance is at stake as they become more and more isolated from the values and needs of their members.

It is urgent that religions address these realities. Religions must be consonant with the cultural evolution in which we are all immersed. Religions must no longer tolerate violence against women. Women are alienated from religions that do. We are committed to working towards change, and we call on others, women and men, to join in this task.

I. Women and Globalization: Problem and Promise

We live in a time of rapid change which provides both challenges and opportunities. This change has profound effects on all our lives.

Our globalized world is ravaged by armed conflict, increasing economic disparity, the feminization of poverty, massive displacement of peoples, violence against women, the pandemic of HIV and AIDS, enduring racism, and extremism—all of which generate a climate of deep fear and widespread insecurity.

* A declaration approved unanimously by the participants at the meeting of *Women and Religion in a Globalized World: A Conversation to Advance Gender Equity*, convened by the Peace Council and The Center for Health and Social Policy in Chiang Mai, Thailand, from February 29-March 3, 2004.

Globalized capitalism has reduced everything to a commodity and everyone to a consumer and commodity. Nowhere is this more evident than in the lives of women:

- Women's and children's bodies are commodified, especially in sexual trafficking.
- Increasingly, HIV and AIDS have a woman's face.
- Women and children disproportionately populate the camps of refugees and displaced persons.
- Women make up the greater proportion of exploited laborers.
- Pressures of the globalized economy have led to even greater violence against women and children.

Globalization, however, also bears the promise and possibilities of advancing women's human rights and well-being:

- More women in more places can be gainfully and justly employed.
- Information technology can enable women throughout the world to share strategies, successes, and hope.

II. Women and Religions: Problem and Promise

Religions at their best celebrate the dignity of each human being and of all life as valuable parts of a sacred whole. They inspire and empower us to compassion and justice.

Religions, however, have not always been at their best. They have collaborated with dehumanizing values of cultural, economic and political powers. Thus they have contributed to the suffering of women:

- They have made women invisible by denying them religious education and excluding them from decision-making .
- They have been silent when patriarchal systems have legitimated the violence, abuse, and exploitation of women by men.
- This silence has been deafening in the face of such atrocities as rape, incest, female genital mutilation, sex-selective abortion, and discrimination against sexual minorities.

- They have not recognized the conscience and moral agency of women, especially in relation to their sexuality and reproductive decisions.

But religions can and must do better. They must reclaim their core values of justice, dignity, and compassion and apply these values to women. We reached consensus that:

A. Within the religions, women’s religious literacy should be recognized and fostered. Women are:

- *Students*: Just as education of women is today understood to be critical in transforming the world, so providing women with religious education is critical in transforming religion. Women seek religious education at both basic and advanced levels. They should be welcomed.
- *Scholars*: In spite of obstacles, women have developed as religious scholars. That scholarship is an essential resource for the overall development of our understanding of religion. It should be promoted.
- *Teachers*: Male religious leaders and students have much to gain from exposure to women teachers of religion. Unless we work to change men, the ability of religions to progress in sensitivity to women is impossible.
- *Leaders*: Women should be full participants in the life and institutional leadership of their religious communities. Women are prepared to be decision-makers, and their gifts should be recognized and used to the fullest extent.

B. Within the world:

- Religions should apply their message of peace in order to oppose the daily reality of violence in family and society. There is a contradiction between the message of peace inherent in all religions and the absence of advocacy for peace in the home and society.
- Women are subjects, not objects, in their own lives. The right to choose any role, including motherhood, should be supported socially, economically, and politically.
- Religions should apply the message of social justice to women. The world’s religions play a leadership role in seeking social justice, in the environment, against racism, and for the poor. But religions have been largely silent in response to critical issues of women’s human rights, in the family and in the work place.

- This is nowhere more evident than in the area of women's sexuality and reproductive health. Given the moral concern about abortion and the range of stances toward it, the view of any particular religious tradition should not be imposed on the consciences of others. Decriminalization of abortion is a minimal response to this reality and a reasonable means of protecting the life and health of women at risk.

Conclusion

Our experience of coming together as women leaders and religious leaders has convinced us that the religious traditions and the aspirations of women are not in opposition. We are not enemies. On the contrary, we share the same commitment to human dignity, social justice, and human rights *for all*.

We therefore commit ourselves and call on other women and other religious leaders to reach out to each other to enhance mutual understanding, support, and cooperation. This can be done on the regional level to expand the consensus achieved here and at the national level to define concrete, joint activities toward advancing women's human rights and well-being.

We came together as women and men to explore how the positive powers of religion could be engaged to advance the well-being of women. Indeed, we believe that when women and religious traditions collaborate, a powerful force for advancing women's human rights and leadership will be created.

This statement was unanimously endorsed by all the participants on March 3, 2004.

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World Religions on Women: Their Roles in the Family, Society, and Religion

Christine E. Gudorf

The status of women in religions is complicated both by the nature of religion itself and by the consequent diversity of religions. Religions are a part of culture, and as a part of culture religions are neither static nor monolithic, but rather dynamic and diverse. Cultures change in history, adapting to new circumstances in the natural environment, production, politics and economics. As a part of culture, religions, including their teachings, their structures, and their rules for behavior, have always changed through history.

The principal functions of religion within culture are also diverse. Religion, for example, serves to explain what is valuable and what is not, to prioritize values, to ground values in some ultimate reality beyond the historical moment, and to bind communities together in shared identities through ritual that connects the community to ultimate reality. As living conditions change and demand different human traits, modes of activity and organization, the messages and structures of religions are reinterpreted to meet the new conditions. Thus it should not be surprising that religious treatment of women has changed throughout history, even within single religious communities.

Though linked to ultimate reality through human intuition and historical experience of transcendence, religions are human institutions, and as human institutions, they seek not only to serve the larger community, but to maximize and preserve the power of religious institutions over other human institutions. Inevitably, maximizing the power of religion and reli-

gious institutions is sometimes indistinguishable from maximizing the power of the elites that control religions. In the world religions—that is, religions that have historically had a global impact, here understood as Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Judaism and Christianity—religious elites have been virtually exclusively male. Between human prehistory and the beginnings of modernity, we have almost no religions founded by women, though as Susan Starr Sered has illustrated, there are a number of small, lesser known religions dominated by women.¹ She examines “ancestral cults among Black Caribs in contemporary Belize, the indigenous religion of the Ryukyu Islands, the *zar* cult of northern Africa, the Sande secret society of Sierra Leone, matrilineal spirit cults in northern Thailand, Korean shamanism, Christian Science, Shakerism, Afro-Brazilian religions, nineteenth-century Spiritualism, the indigenous *nat* cults of Burma, and the Feminist Spirituality Movement in twentieth-century United States.”²

¹ Susan Starr Sered, *Priestess, Mother, Sacred Sister: Religions Dominated by Women* (Oxford, 1994). There are also a few religions founded by women in the modern period: Ann Lee, who founded the Shakers; or Mary Baker Eddy who founded Christian Science; or Aimee Semple McPherson, who founded the Foursquare Gospel Church in Christianity; or Sayo Kitamura, who founded the Tensho-kotai-jingu-kyo movement in Japan. (Kyoko Motomochie Nakamura, “No Women’s Liberation: The Heritage of a Woman Prophet in Modern Japan,” in Falk and Gross, eds., *Unspoken Worlds: Women’s Religious Lives* (Wadsworth, 2001), 168-178.

² Sered, 3.

Women were virtually invisible among the great prophets, high priests, jurists, judges and theologians that constructed the majority of religions around the world. Until the twentieth century, women had little or no role among the religious teachers who interpreted the great traditions to new generations of followers. This exclusion of women from formation and transmission of most traditions is one of the major themes of women scholars of religion today who have documented that in the past, across many cultures, the great traditions have either dismissed women as not being religious at all, or as being significantly less religious than men, or, when women were religiously active, as being more unorthodox than men, inclined to engage rather in either magic and superstition or outright heresy. Furthermore, women who are lower caste, from lower economic classes, dark-skinned and from post-colonial countries have usually had less status in institutionalized religions than those who were higher caste, lighter skinned, from middle and upper classes, and from former colonial powers.

Some religions, such as Hinduism and Judaism, have either created, or allowed women to create, female domestic ritual within the larger tradition. In Hinduism, women are responsible for long series of rituals around pregnancy and childbirth,³ for rituals to protect the health of husbands, children, and brothers (on whom North Indian women, for example, rely to convey them to visits to their natal homes), as well as for the family to avoid disasters and dangers, and to achieve prosperity.⁴

In Judaism, following the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE by the Romans, ritual was divided between the home and the synagogue. Orthodox Jewish women initiate domestic ritual by lighting the candle that ushers in the Sabbath and holidays, as

well as by preparing the Sabbath meal and maintaining the family kitchen in accordance with *kasrut*, the very intricate Jewish dietary law.⁵ They also observe *mikvah*, a ritual bath required to end ritual impurity after menstruation and childbirth. And yet even in Hinduism and Judaism, which have assigned women ritual roles, women are not full members of the religion. In Orthodox Judaism and in the traditional Judaism that long preceded it, women are bound by only 3 of the 613 commandments of the law, and do not count toward the *minyan* of ten adults necessary to hold Torah services in the synagogue. According to the Torah, the mark of the Jewish covenant with God is male circumcision. In Hinduism, only male Brahmans may be priests, and the goal of *moksha*, release from the cycle of rebirth, can only be reached from the status of male Brahman; all others must earn good karma and move through a chain of rebirths until they are finally reborn as a male Brahman in order to be able to aspire to *moksha*. Only men in the thrice-born castes wear the sacred thread.

According to Fatima Mernissi, among Muslims in Morocco (as in a number of other Muslim cultures), women are considered to be less religious than men because they seldom if ever attend the mosque.⁶ Women explain that women are actively discouraged from attending the mosque, and that married women are not allowed to bring children to the mosque, nor can they leave them alone. In the mosque, women are not allowed to lead prayer, and must be hidden, out of sight and hearing of male worshippers.

Mernissi describes one common aspect of women's religious practice in Morocco: making pilgrimage to sanctuaries, the tombs of saints, where they pray to

³ Doranne Jacobsen, "Golden Handprints and Red-Painted Feet: Hindu Childbirth Rituals in Central India," in Falk and Gross, 83-102.

⁴ Susan S. Wadley, "Hindu Women's Family and Household Rites in a North Indian Village," in Falk and Gross, 103-113.

⁵ Susan Starr Sered, *Women as Ritual Experts: The Religious Lives of Elderly Jewish Women in Jerusalem* (Oxford, 1992) 87-102.

⁶ Fatima Mernissi, "Women, Saints and Sanctuaries in Morocco," in Falk and Gross, 144-155; another example is village women in Iran: Erika Friedl, "Islam and Tribal Women in a Village in Iran" in Falk and Gross, 159-161.

the saint for help, learn each other's stories and support each other.⁷ The sanctuaries are both female ground (very few males are ever seen), and are not considered venues for orthodox Muslim prayer, but rather part of the emotional superstition of women.

Some of this same attitude has been common in Catholicism concerning not only women's, but poor people's, religiosity (popular religion) which tends to revolve around devotion to the Virgin Mary and the saints.⁸ Such practices are understood by the clergy to sometimes lead to heresy (worship of Mary or the saints, rather than of God, and in the Caribbean to syncretic Afro-Catholic worship in Voudou, Santeria, Candomble, etc.). Devotion to Mary and the saints is also claimed to distract believers from the central Catholic rituals of the Mass and the sacraments which are clergy-controlled.⁹ An important aspect of the reforms of Vatican II was to de-emphasize devotion to Mary and the saints and to stress the clerically controlled sacraments, especially the Mass.

The only relief from this pattern of exclusion and denigration of women has occurred in those few religions in which women constitute the majority of both the leaders and the members, religions which have sometimes been founded by women, essentially in the modern period, as in Shakerism, Christian Science, nineteenth-century Spiritualism, and the Feminist Spirituality Movement. Female dominated religions older than the modern period are almost exclu-

sively to be found in isolated cultures with essentially oral religious traditions and low rates of literacy, cultures that place great emphasis on communication (either mystical or through mediums) with spirits (deities, nature spirits, spirits of ancestors or other dead). All over the world in cultures in which spirit communication is important, women are recognized as more likely mediums. The psychological explanation is that women's subordinate status in most cultures has given them more permeable ego boundaries so that they find it easier to be possessed.

It is generally agreed today among women's movements that the religions of the world will not be capable of supporting the dignity and welfare of women until women are both recognized as being full members of the religion and have been integrated into decision-making roles within the religion. The sociology of knowledge perspective—an understanding that truth looks different from different social locations and experiences—has become global and universal, except for religion. In no other aspect of human life is the exclusion of half the population from participation and/or decision-making accepted as either just or supportive of the common good. The basis of activism for women all over the world is this perception that the welfare of women demands that women be included on equal terms among those who make social decisions. In religions as well, only when women of all races, classes and ethnic groups are included among the priests, lawyers, and scholars of the religion can religions effectively support the dignity and welfare of women. As we shall see, the exclusion of women from leadership roles in the world religions has been aided and abetted by the exclusion of females from religious education, especially higher religious education, and in some places from basic literacy.¹⁰

⁷ Mernissi, 146-147.

⁸ Ana Maria Diaz Stevens, "The Popular Use of Popular Religion in Latin America," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 34 (Mar 1995):129-130; Cristian Parker and Robert R. Barr, eds., *Popular Religion and Modernization in Latin America* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996); Maria Clara L. Bingemer, "Popular Religion and the Church," in Guillermo Cook, ed., *New Face of the Church in Latin America* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1994).

⁹ Christine E. Gudorf, "Renewal or Repatriarchialization? Responses of the Roman Catholic Church to the Feminization of Religion," *Horizons: The Journal of the College Theology Society* 10:2, Fall 1983, 231-251.

¹⁰ Women's lesser access to literacy is recognized as oppressive by women of all ages and classes in all corners of the world, and is not reliant simply on any feminist ideology. See Sered, 61; Friedl, 158-159 among many others.

Women in Non-Literate Religions

Before surveying world religions on the roles of women in the family, in the larger society and in religion itself, I want to briefly focus on women in non-literate religions, in order to give us a platform for viewing contemporary world religions. As religion scholar Mary Pat Fisher writes: "Cross cultural studies of all religions indicate that the more religion is an integral aspect of life, rather than something institutionalized and separate from daily life, the more women are likely to be involved in it. The more a religion becomes institutionalized, the more women are excluded from significant roles within it."¹¹ Our information on non-literate religions comes from limited archeological study of artifacts of ancient religion, from accounts of archaic religions by literate conquerors, traders and missionaries, and in the case of pre-literate tribal religions that survived into modern times in Africa, Latin America, the Pacific and Central Asia, from often extensive anthropological descriptions. Ursula King, a British religion scholar, writes: "The earlier, more undifferentiated religions—whether prehistorical, archaic or tribal—all share a primal vision characterized by a unitary consciousness within which self, society, and nature still form a continuum, an uninterrupted whole. The historical religions, with their breakthrough to individual, reflexive consciousness, lost this basic unity and are shaped by a fundamental dualism affecting time (past/present; present/future) and space (sacred/profane), cosmos (earth/heaven), self (body/spirit), and society (men/women)." By treating prehistoric, archaic and tribal religions together I assume only this, and not any uniformity of belief or practice. The uneven level of information we have does not support such a claim.¹²

¹¹ Mary Pat Fisher, *Women in Living Religions* (Longman's, 2004), pagination not final.

¹² As an example of the unevenness of the field of scholarship in this area, see my review of *Ancient Goddesses, The Cult of Asherah, Goddesses Who Rule, and In Search of God the Mother* in the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 70: 1 (Spring 2002): 198-203.

Perhaps the two most recurrent patterns in all of the evidence concerning religion in non-literate societies involve reverence for fertility as representing life, and the centrality of balance between the sexes and the two dimensions of reality they represent. This balance is often achieved through parallelism and almost always involves sexual complementarity, the understanding of males and females as having different and exclusive traits and roles. It is important to stress that I am not claiming that prehistoric, archaic or tribal religions were or are non-patriarchal or fully egalitarian. But the evidence we do have suggests that in them the activities and concerns of women were considered central to religion, and that the status of women and men was generally more equal than in later literate societies.

Fertility as Representing Life

There is an ongoing debate about whether earth goddess worship was the earliest form of human religion.¹³ The evidence is clear that fertility was regarded as a sacred power and understood as primarily female.¹⁴ The earliest cultic artifacts are female figurines, often with human female bodies and the head of various animals sacred to the goddess, though artifacts of male deities also existed in most of the same societies. Among the earliest cultic artifacts in Egypt is a goddess with the face of a pig, probably because the pig gave birth to large litters that were weaned early and demonstrated rapid weight gain, making pigs a potent source of protein and thus of life sustenance. Snake goddess figures were also early, and are found from India through northern Europe, probably because snakes represented regeneration of life when they emerged from the ground and shed their skins

¹³ The debate is between the archeologist and religion scholars following Marija Gimbutas, and many of her archeologist colleagues who think that she overgeneralized from her data and was not always open to other possible interpretations. One of the best examples of their dispute with her is Lucy Goodison and Christine Morris, eds., *Ancient Goddesses* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1999).

¹⁴ Marija A. Gimbutas, *Language of the Goddess* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1989).

in the spring. Later there were goddess patrons for pregnant and nursing mothers, such as Mater Mantua of southern Italy, Madonna figures such as Isis, Native American corn goddesses who gave humans the gift of corn, their staple crop. The list is long. The specific image of female fertility that was worshipped differed—in much of West Africa devotion to Mami Wata (Mammy Waters) survived into the present, and streams of water were often carved onto the ancient statues of mother goddesses. In Europe and the near East, where the most archeological work has been done, the majority of sexed images during the Paleolithic period are female, and in many places female images continued to predominate well into the Neolithic. We find these images on altars and in wall niches with oil lamps in front of them. Many of these earth mother goddess figures not only represented birth and life, but also death and decay, as these were also part of the life cycle over which goddesses presided. Worship of these goddesses seems to have been strongly associated with attitudes of reverence toward nature, but not necessarily with the predominance of women in leadership roles.

The situation of women in religious traditions without sacred texts today varies. There is general agreement that the status of women seriously declined in indigenous societies all over the world during modern (1600-1950) colonialism, in spite of the fact that Europeans understood themselves as bringing enlightened culture, particularly on issues involving women. All over the world—in Latin America, India, SE Asia, and Africa—women lost rights to own land and to legal standing under the impact of colonialism. In Indonesia, for example, Muslim women across the many ethnicities lost all inheritance rights and a host of other economic rights guaranteed in the *Quran*. These losses under civil law inevitably affected their religious status.

In general, however, despite the impact of colonialism on indigenous peoples, the religious status of women in non-literate traditions, though varied, is more nearly equal that of men than in literate tra-

ditions. This greater equality seems linked to the facts that such traditions are often found in relatively isolated areas in which people live in intimate association with and dependence upon nature, that their societies are structured in terms of sexual parallelism (treated below), and that their communities are usually of small enough size that the gifts and talents of individual women are sufficiently known to all that they are not evaluated solely on the basis of gender stereotypes. In Sered's list of religions dominated by women we see some of these same characteristics: small, relatively isolated communities living in close connection with nature.

Balancing Male and Female

A second common pattern in prehistoric, archaic, and tribal religion is that of balance, especially of balance between the sexes. This pattern is documented historically and still found among many indigenous peoples today. Irene Silverblatt described the pre-Incan tribes of the Altiplano¹⁵ as organized into two lineages, with men descended from the sun and women from the moon, each sex having their own rituals and their own plots of land that were redistributed at death within the sex.¹⁶ Each sex selected from their ranks a chief, and the male and the female chiefs ruled the village together, giving precedence to each over the matters exclusive to one sex. Among the Kaata of Bolivia yet today, there are male diviners and female diviners. Male diviners perform rituals to bring good fortune; female diviners perform misfortune rituals, to remove bodily or social disintegration. The complex local symbol system clusters together men, stability and the mountain, and contrasts them to women, the river, and the cycle of dissolution and renewal.¹⁷

¹⁵ These tribes were defeated by the Inca about the beginning of the 16th century, a little less than a century before the Inca themselves were defeated by the Spanish.

¹⁶ Irene Silverblatt, *Sun, Moon and Witches: Gender Ideologies and Class in Inca and Colonial Peru* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987).

¹⁷ Joseph W. Bastien, "Rosinta, Rats and the River: Bad Luck Is Banished in Andean Bolivia," in Falk and Gross, 243-252.

Among the Mapuche of Chile, the central *nguillatun* ceremony similarly requires the leadership of both the female *machi* (shaman/priestess) and the male *nguenpins* (lineage heads/priests).¹⁸ The Mapuche also illustrate another common pattern: that balance between maleness and femaleness needs to be re-established periodically, due to historical changes. Until the Mapuche were forced onto reservations in the 18th and 19th centuries, the *machi* were male, and many of their functions involved assisting and supporting hunting and war while domestic ritual headed by women within the lineages dealt with fertility issues. Now that they are settled agriculturalists, the *machi* are 95% female and preside primarily over agricultural ritual. But ritual presiding has also changed with the shift to female *machis* and agricultural rituals, and female machis share the role of ritual presider with priestly lineage chiefs, *nguenpins*, who are now almost all male.

Australian aborigines are another example of balance in religion. Rita Gross has explained that men have their own set of rituals from which all women, except sometimes post-menopausal women, are excluded, and from whom the rituals must be kept secret. Men, except for a short rite by the medicine man before a laboring woman enters the last stages of childbirth, are completely excluded from women's rituals, which are also secret. During each sex's rituals, the other sex, remaining in the camp, observes silence out of respect.¹⁹ Men's ritual among Australian aborigines illustrates also an attempt to create for men a balance with women's more visible link to fertility, in that in men's initiation rituals men open cuts in the penis or arm to simulate the menstrual bleeding of women, groan with the pains of childbirth, and present the initiated boys in their arms as newborns. Sered suggests that the ritual shedding/ingesting of

blood by men, as in animal sacrifice or body mutilation, serves as an analogy to female reproduction in that it makes men, too, share the same blood. These rituals simultaneously represent men's claim to be bonded together, and to reproduce the community.²⁰

The Sambia of New Guinea studied by Gilbert Herdt²¹ understood, as some modern non-literate peoples did not, the male contribution to fertility in semen, and believe that semen ingestion is necessary to make boys into fertile men, unlike women, whom nature fashions to become fertile without cultural action. Elaborate systems of semen ingestion for boys serve to emphasize men's role in fertility. This fits within the larger pattern: virtually all cultures have male puberty rituals, but less than 20% of all global cultures have female puberty rituals. Societies understand that nature provides for women a dramatic indication of sexual maturity (menarche) while culture must create ritual to mark sexual maturity for men.

Sometimes balance between the sexes in society was achieved not through parallelism, but through a check on power, as when the North American Iroquois, whose war chiefs could only be male, had the highest ranking woman in the tribe choose who was to be war chief. Among the Ammatoa people of South Sulawesi, Indonesia, after the election of a new tribal leader, called the Ammatoa, that leader chooses two women called *aronta* who, upon his death, will preside over not only the funeral process, but the three year process for selecting the new Ammatoa.²² To date all Ammatoas have been male, but this is not required.

¹⁸ Ana Mariella Bacigalupo, "The Rise of the Machi-Moon Priestess," *The Annual Review of Women in World Religions Vol VI*, eds. Arvind Sharma and Katharine K. Young (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 2002), 208-259.

¹⁹ Rita M. Gross, "Menstruation and Childbirth as Ritual and Religious Experience Among Native Australians," in Falk and Gross, 301-310.

²⁰ Gross, 307.

²¹ To protect the identity and cultural integrity of this people, Herdt has named them the Sambia and not disclosed their exact location. Gilbert Herdt, *Guardians of the Flutes: Idioms of Masculinity* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1994).

²² Samsul Ma'arif, *Religious Liberty in Indonesia: A Case Study of the Ammatoa of South Sulawesi*, MA thesis, Gadjah Mada University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia.

Many of these local traditions regarding balance between male and female powers, roles, and interests survived transferal into other later religions, as in Bali, where Hindu temple rituals must include pairs of male and female priest figures, a requirement that disappeared in Indian Hinduism in late Vedic times. Balance between the sexes was a recognition that the welfare of the entire community depended upon utilizing the gifts of both sexes, who each had their own special powers and concerns.

If female fertility was so sacred in prehistoric religion, and later non-literate religions focused so regularly on complementarity and balance between the sexes, how did men come to hold exclusive control over religions in later periods? We do not have the answers to this. But the most probable theory begins with the prehistoric connection of women with the fertility of nature. Early human communities were dependent upon both human fertility and fertility in surrounding nature, and worshipped that fertility, often in female form, what have come to be called goddesses.

In the agricultural revolution of about 10,000 years ago, humans learned to harvest and plant seed, rather than merely gather whatever grew wild, to domesticate animals rather than hunting all their meat, and to harness large mammals as beasts of burden.²³ This agricultural revolution allowed human settlements to grow, because it vastly increased harvests. Human bands no longer needed to stay small and move on when they had exhausted the local food supply through hunting and gathering. With permanent settlements, humans developed specialization. Not everyone was necessary in the task of growing food—some could become builders, others bakers, others priests and kings. And technology developed. Not only did people plant seed, but they invented plows and irrigation, millstones to grind grain, ovens to bake it, wheels to move it, and granaries to store it in. They built cities and walls,

²³ Jared Diamond, *Germes, Guns and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997).

bridges and dams. In short, they came to have less awe of nature and its power, and to see themselves as having ever increasing power over nature. In different places, some gods became separate from nature; some new male gods arose in Europe, the Middle East and West Africa who were imaged more as warrior-kings than as either mothers or consorts/sons of mothers. As literacy developed, and religious teachings were written in sacred texts—another new technology—control of the texts went to men.²⁴ There seems to have been a strong connection between humanity's growing power over nature, and growing assertion of male power over women that continues into the present. If women had been understood as connected to nature through fertility, then when the fertility of nature was harnessed, it seemed appropriate to harness women's fertility and production also. We see some of this same connection in developing societies today, where agriculture is disproportionately women's work so long as it remains back-breaking manual labor, but as soon as it becomes mechanized, it becomes male work.

Literacy, and the transmittal of revelation in written rather than in oral form, seems to have been an effective method for excluding women from religious power and authority. When religious knowledge was oral, it was in many ways public and accessible to all, because it was publicly recited. But literacy began as the specialization of only a small elite charged with ruling and trading; still today in most of the world literacy is not universal. When religious knowledge took written form, it became even more likely to be restricted to elites. Women have been either discouraged or actually forbidden from formal

²⁴ In the same way, in the 20th century throughout developing nations it has been noted by most critical observers that among traditional peoples women did the vast majority of the agricultural work. Generally men cleared any new land that was necessary, and sometimes helped in harvest. But planting, the never-ending tasks of weeding and in some places watering crops went to women. Until modernity introduced machines, agriculture was largely female work. Wherever agriculture was mechanized—whenever it was no longer back-breaking work done by hand—it became a male occupation.

study of sacred scriptures in most traditions for thousands of years until the last century or so, and in many places have been discouraged or forbidden literacy itself.

If this theory is correct, then one lesson that women should take from this history is that to be defined completely in terms of fertility is very dangerous. Women must insist on being defined not only in terms of their differences from men, but also in terms of their similarities with men, which have been largely ignored within the world religions.

Religion on Women; Women in Religions

In turning to religions on the roles of women, in the 8-9 minutes I have for each religion or category of religion I will attempt to convey both something of what the sacred texts say about the roles of women, and what women's roles are in these religions today. I must be highly selective! It is important to remember that there are often major differences between the religious teachings on women and women's roles within that religion, because religions have adapted to local historical circumstances.

Interestingly enough, while there are some major differences in the way that the texts of world religions have understood the nature of women, they agree almost totally on the purpose of women, their function in society: they are to be wives and mothers, they are under the protection and control of men, and their usual place is in the home. This understanding generally results from women being defined in terms of their differences from men, rather than their similarities with men, and the basic difference noted is reproductive biology. Often this biological reproductive difference is interpreted to mean not only that women were created for reproduction, but also that because they were created for the physical and material task of reproduction, women are less rational and more emotional than men, and should be prevented from making important judgments.

The headship of men is also a general theme in sacred texts, and various reasons are given for it, including God's preference, women's punishment for the original sin of the first parents, the economic dependence of women on men, and the common notion that women need to be protected from the predation of other men, as well as from their own irrationality and hyper-emotionality. In the oldest traditions, for example Hinduism and Judaism, the headship of women is taken for granted, and underlies both the mythic accounts and the legal provisions of sacred texts. In later traditions such as Christianity and Islam the headship of men over women is directly stated in sacred texts, as in Ephesians 5:22-33 or Surah IV: 34. In many traditions as well, there is a theme of male control of women as necessary to protect men's virtue from women's seductive wiles. Seclusion, body covering and veiling, and supervision of women's dress and activities outside the home have been and are all justified in this way.

Interestingly, while at one level this description of women is fairly consistent in religious texts, it is often contradicted at other levels within the same text, especially in the stories of extraordinary women told within the same texts. That is, the women noted in the texts are often not at all examples of female nature as it is described in these texts. In the Jewish scriptures, Rebecca, Deborah, Judith and a host of other women were independent women of sound judgment exercised on behalf of a whole people. In Christianity, the New Testament on the one hand says that women will be saved through childbearing,²⁵ but on the other hand not only names specific women as prophets, apostle, deacons and heads of churches, even of the Greco-Jewish church in Jerusalem itself, but also records the words of Jesus denying that his own mother is blessed because of her motherhood. Instead he insists that "Blessed are those who hear the word of God and heed it."²⁶ Although the *Quran* depicts men as the "managers of the affairs of women" (4:34) some

²⁵ I Tim 2:15.

²⁶ Lk. 11:27-28.

women were even warriors in the early battles of Islam. One woman warrior of Islam, Nasibah bint Ka'b al-Maziniyyah, not only protected the body of the Prophet himself during the battle of Uhud (in which her son also fought) but went on to fight and be wounded in a number of later battles, in one of which she lost a hand.²⁷ A'isha, the youngest of Mohammad's wives, was responsible for contributing many of the hadith about Mohammad's deeds and words, more than most men and all other women. Al-Hafez al-Zahabi, a renowned Muslim authority on hadith who died in 1347, pointed to four thousand suspect Muslim hadith tellers, and then adds, "I have not known of any woman accused of falsifying hadith." Abdol Sir Afifi, a Muslim scholar of the early twentieth century, quoted this statement of Al-Zahabi and went on to say, "To this we add that from the time of Aisha, the mother of believers, until the time of al-Zahabi the sayings of the Prophet Muhammed were not kept or related by anyone as they were kept in the hearts of women and related by them."²⁸ Both the emigrants who followed Mohammed from Mecca and those who welcomed him in Medina considered Aisha a source of religious rules and an expert on Islamic legislation. But Aisha was not alone. Asma Bint Yazid bin al-Sakan al-Ansariyya is known to have related 81 sayings from the Prophet which were reported and quoted by others. She was known to be a woman of science and a defender of women's rights to the Prophet himself.²⁹

In Hinduism, at least three women, Ghosa, Apala and Visvavara, are credited with writing parts of the Rig Veda, and Gargi is shown to be an important philosopher in the Brhadranayaka Upanishad, and yet in the Vedic Commentators (e.g., Jaiminya; Sabarab-

hasya) women are redefined as unworthy of education in the Vedas, and Vedic references to the involvement of women in sacrifice and ritual is reinterpreted according to what was then³⁰ considered appropriate for women, resulting in their being relegated to passive and insignificant roles, such as holding the priestly implements only males could use.

Not only do the teachings on women's nature and role in the family not describe many of the very women celebrated in the tradition, but there is also a disjunction between different teachings on the nature and role of men. Men are described as rational, cool heads capable of rendering sound judgment, and therefore appropriate heads of households, including wives (in Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism). Yet these same men are presented as unable to control sexual desire at the sight or smell of an unguarded woman (in Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism). The former description of men is used to justify males as rulers of households, and the second to justify even further restrictions on women's access to and movements outside the home.

Within all religions traditional scholars have divided somewhat on why women should be restricted outside the home. More misogynist scholars describe men's lust as aroused by the deliberately seductive wiles of women who are depicted as invariably sexually insatiable and greedy for pleasure of all kinds. Less misogynist scholars portray women as unconsciously seductive; not only the sight of a woman, but the sound of her voice, her smell, even the sight of her clothes on the washline arouses instant lust in men. Here, perhaps, rather than projecting men's problem onto women, the best advice is from the *Quran*: "Say to the believing men that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty: that will make for greater purity for them: and God is well acquainted with all that they do" (24:30).

²⁷ Dr. Muhammad Ali Al Hashimi, "The Ideal Muslimah" (www.jannah.org/sisters/mwarrior.html).

²⁸ Quoted from Bouthaina Shaaban, "The Muted Voices of Women Interpreters" in Mahnaz Afkhami, ed., *Faith and Freedom: Women's Human Rights in the Muslim World* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1995), 62.

²⁹ Fatima al-Batoul Mersa, "Muslim Women in Arab History," *al-Abram* 15 April 1989: 5 (Cairo), as quoted by Shaaban, 61-62.

³⁰ Julia Leslie, "Essence and Existence: Women and Religion in Ancient Hindu Texts," in Lucinda Peach, ed., *Women and Religion* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 2002), 28-29.

While those religions with monastic traditions accepted monastic life as appropriate for some women, they often considered these women as not really female. Christian writers often considered female virgins as male both in their freedom from female reproduction and the social freedom that vows brought; as they became more spiritual and less material in their functions, they also became less female and more male.³¹ In Buddhism, too, enlightened monks, both male and female, were considered free of all sexual desire and pleasure; female bhikkhunis in the Therigatha speak of their liberation from household chores, attachments to youth and beauty, attachment to their former lovers or family members, and rebirths—all those things that distinguish male and female.³² One mentions her freedom from the “three bendings” of women: bending from cooking, bending from using the pestle, and bending from serving her husband.³³ Thus femaleness was understood as inseparable from reproduction and family service; renunciation of these masculinized women.

Buddhism and Women in the Family

It is difficult to speak of Buddhism on women's role in the family, since the focus of Buddha's teaching was the *sangha*, originally understood to include only celibate monks and nuns. The fundamental role of the Buddhist layperson was to accumulate good karma for the next reincarnation, from which one might be able to reach enlightenment by devoting oneself totally to the (monastic) path laid out by Buddha. Laypeople earned good karma by observing at

a minimum the five precepts and supporting the monks and nuns, who begged their meals from housewives. The five duties of wives were to be good housewives, take good care of husband's relatives, be faithful, save a husband's belongings, and be diligent. The corresponding duties of a husband were to honor his wife, show no contempt, be faithful, delegate household management to his wife, and buy her dresses and ornaments.³⁴

These rules were basically rules for general social order, and not paths toward salvation. Since the entire material world, including selfhood, was understood as a kind of illusion, sexual desire, sexual pleasure, reproduction and family were all understood as powerful distractions drawing people deeper into the world of illusion and further from nirvana, liberation from the cycle of life, death and rebirth.

In fact, Buddhism largely adopted the prevailing marital norms of whatever culture it encountered, though subordinating them to the central monastic teachings. Commentators have often identified Buddhism's principal reform over previous systems as offering women an alternative to marriage in the form of *bhikkuni* vows. As in Christianity, not all women were free to choose this alternative, but where it existed it served to strongly undermine the understanding of the domestic role as the only one for women, as well as to allow them access to education and social status in their own right. Yet some analysts of women in Buddhism argue, particularly with reference to China, that “nunneries, rather than offering an alternative to or disrupting the patrilineal family, act as its constitutive outside. The nunnery contains the detritus of the patrilineal family, troublesome ancestors, unwanted progeny, and women who might disrupt the smooth existence of the patriline.”³⁵ Nunneries, even in China, undoubtedly served both functions in different sit-

³¹ Jerome, “Letter to Eustocium,” in Elizabeth Clark and Herbert Richardson, ed., *Women and Religion: A Feminist Sourcebook of Christian Thought* (San Francisco: Harper-Collins, 1988).

³² Suwanna Satha-Anand, “Buddhism on Sexuality and Enlightenment,” in *Good Sex: Feminist Perspectives from the World's Religions*, eds. Patricia B. Jung, Mary E. Hunt and Radhika Balakrisnan, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 120.

³³ “Mutta-theri,” *Therigatha* (Bangkok: Pathum-vanarum Royal Temple, B.E. 2539), 13.

³⁴ Sinkalgha, Dhiganikaya, Patigavagga, 11/201/170; 11/200/170.

³⁵ Samantha Anderson, “Gender and Ritual in South-East China,” *Annual Review of Women*, 187.

uations: giving some women a desired alternative to marriage, and serving as a warehouse for spare or welcome women in patrilineal households.

There are a number of negative portrayals of women, both nuns and female householders, in Buddhist literature, largely connected with the attempt to protect the monks' vow of celibacy. Even the Buddha is said to have warned his monks, who begged their food from householders, not "to frequent householders, for frequenting leads to seeing[women], and seeing leads to relationship, relationship leads to familiarity, familiarity leads to attention, attention leads to non-commitment to religious pursuits."³⁶ Sayings such as this were often interpreted to mean that there was something about women in general that was dangerous and corrupting.

While Buddhism has not established general family norms in the way of other religions, it has a very clear teaching on dealing harm or death to living beings. Thus domestic violence is accepted as violating basic Buddhist precepts. It is not necessary in Buddhism, as it is in many other religions, to oppose domestic violence based on the dignity and welfare of women. In Buddhism, any use of violence is understood as involving serious negative karma for the doer himself. For the same reasons, Buddhist scholars have generally understood the choice of abortion as incurring bad karma. Though abortion has been common in both Japan and China for many decades, even there Buddhists acknowledge its morally problematic nature. On the other hand, Buddhist objection to contraception is relatively rare, and has often been more culturally than religiously grounded. Although an understanding that the use of contraception does harm to souls waiting to be born by postponing their chance to earn nirvana has been occasionally expressed, most authorities are unwilling to accept an argument that would make maximal procreation a moral obligation for Buddhists.

³⁶ Satha-Anand, in Jung et al., 115.

Hinduism and Women in the Family

Hinduism has understood women as having great *shakti*, or creative energy, but as being without the rationality to control that energy, and needing a male to perform this function. Marriage shifts a woman from her natal lineage to her husband's, and links her salvation to her husband and her service to him. So important is marriage and family that the ancient Law of Manu instructed parents to betroth children very young. Among the better educated, marriage ages have risen significantly in the last half century, so that child brides are much less common today in India, but marriage age for girls is still very low in many villages. Early marriage of girls, usually to significantly older men, creates great imbalance in the distribution of power in the marriage, regardless of how roles are otherwise culturally defined. Where it continues among the poor and uneducated in India today, child marriage creates as well large numbers of very young widows, who are seriously discriminated against in the upper castes, where they are forbidden to marry even if they are widowed before puberty.³⁷

Most traditions have laid primary stress on motherhood. Hinduism is somewhat different on this point, for while reproduction is an important task of women, the primary role of a Hindu woman in the classical texts was that of wife.³⁸ Yet in Hinduism, too, reproduction has been important, to the extent that barrenness served as grounds for men to take a second wife, either through polygyny in the past or divorce in the present. The situation of widows, too, especially widows without sons, has been and continues to be perilous in Hinduism. Upon the death of husbands yet today, widows, especially in the upper castes, are forbidden to remarry, to appear in public, to eat spicy foods, and sometimes even to look

³⁷ Shampa Mazumdar and Sanjoy Mazumdar, "Silent Resistance: A Hindu Child Widow's Experience," in *Annual Review of Women*, 93-121.

³⁸ Denise L. Carmody, *Women in World Religions* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989), "Hindu Women."

others in the eye, lest they bring onto others the bad luck that led to the deaths of their husbands.³⁹

Protection of women in Hinduism until relatively recently was entrusted to parents, who were instructed in the ancient Law of Manu to betroth their children very young, and who had the obligation to make the best possible matches for both sons and daughters. Traditionally, considering a family into which one might marry one's daughter included not only examining the prosperity of the family, their reputation in the community, but also the treatment of daughters-in-law.

Modern reforms in Hinduism to protect women in the family system became prominent in the 19th century work of Ram Rohan Roy, whose late 19th century reform movement, Brahmo-Somaj, championed legal bans on both *sati* (the burning of widows, even very young ones, on their husband's funeral pyres) and child marriages, as well as advocating education for girls and remarriage for widows. All of these were religious as well as social reforms, since *sati* was a path for women to become divine, child marriage was obligatory in the Law of Manu, education for girls was not compatible with child marriage, and widows were understood to be still linked to husbands even after the death of husbands. Mohandas Ghandi picked up the Brahmo-Somaj mantle, and consequently the Indian state has carried out these reforms in most areas of the nation, though female illiteracy greatly exceeds that of males among the poor in the villages, where marriage age for many girls is still sometimes pubertal or even prepubertal, and remarried widows, their new families and children are often totally ostracized.

Son preference is strong in Hinduism, as in Chinese religions as well as others, and today in India has resulted in widespread recourse to sex-selective abortion as well as higher child mortality rates for girls, with the result that there are millions more males than females in the Indian population.

³⁹ Mazumdar and Mazumdar, *Annual Review of Women*, 98-99.

Family planning using modern methods of contraception has become widespread in India, bringing the total fertility per woman down from 6 children in 1950 to 3.3 today as many Hindus have gradually come to redefine the center of Hindu faith, *dharma* ("that which is conducive to the highest good," or "that which promotes right living"), as including small, rather than large families. While this shift in the meaning of *dharma* requires ignoring much of the pronatalism of traditional Hinduism, it has been able to use the example of the Hindu gods and goddesses, who virtually always had small families. What opposition there is to family planning in India today is not religiously based, but is often the result of son preference in families whose first children were female.

Widespread recourse to abortion continues in India today, causing a sex imbalance, despite the Hindu religious tradition against abortion:

The Hindu tradition has from the beginning placed a high premium on life in the womb and treated abortion as a heinous crime. In fact, it is classified as one of the *mahapatakas* (atrocious acts), and subjected to severe penances and punishments. In the *Atharva Veda*, there are two hymns invoking the goddess Ushan to wipe off 'the misdeed upon him that practiceth abortion.' The Brahmanas, the second major corpus of Hindu religious literature, also perceive abortion as the basest of sins. This view is continued in the Upanishadic period, wherein abortion is believed to have consequences that *karmically* affect both this life and the next one; mercifully however, one can be released from its malignant effects through enlightenment. The Hindu juristic schools that follow, Manu, Gautam, Vasistha, Yajnavalkya and even Charak, all condemn abortion in unequivocal terms, even in the case of illegitimate children.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Sandhya Jain, "The Right to Family Planning, Contraception and Abortion: The Hindu View," in Maguire, *Sacred Rights*, (New York: Oxford, 2003) 136.

One of the reasons that this religious ban on abortion has not been more effective is that however highly the tradition valued life in the womb, it valued maternal life more. Commentators have disagreed as to whether this greater weight was due to women's greater degree of karmic development, or to their greater obligations to family and to society. Placing the value of the mother's life ahead of that of the fetus set a precedent for dealing with competing weights and values in which the fetus often lost, despite the general teaching of the faith. As the standards of maternal health have risen a great deal in the last two centuries, the grounds for abortion have also expanded.

Among reasons for son preference are parental dependence upon sons in old age since daughters belong to their husband's family, as well as the high cost of dowering daughters so that they may marry.⁴¹ Even after girl children are born, the welfare of daughters suffers compared to that of sons, since the understanding is that daughters are both expensive to marry off, and the cost of their rearing is lost because they will not be members of one's family after marriage. The growth of consumerism in India has combined with the dowry system to produce a rash of well publicized bride-killings among all classes in the last decades. Husbands and mothers-in-law pressure brides to extract more dowry from their families, and sometimes confine or even torture brides until they agree. If more dowry is not forthcoming, the bride may meet with a fatal "accident" which allows the husband to keep her dowry, and marry again to obtain a second dowry. Very few of these are investigated by the police, though there have been some convictions in a few highly publicized cases in the last years.

⁴¹ Veena Talwar Oldenburg argues in her *Dowry Murder: Imperial Origins of a Cultural Crime* (Oxford, 2002) that British policy in India bears a great deal of responsibility for turning what began as a practice by which women ensured the security of young brides into a process of extortion in which some brides were murdered for dowry.

Judaism and Women in the Family

Due to lack of space and time, I will not deal with women in ancient Judaism, except to say that Hebrew scriptures often depict women as property of men, without inheritance rights, and with a very ambiguous role within the covenant with Yahweh that defined the Jewish people. The 613 commandments of the Jewish law are divided into 248 positive commandments ("you must") and 365 negative commandments ("you must not"). Following the destruction of the Temple, and Jerusalem itself by the Romans in 70 CE, the rabbinic tradition replaced the ancient sacrificial system of the priests, and the indirect revelation based on textual study replaced direct prophetic revelation. While the rabbis who reflected on the Torah taught that women were bound by the negative commandments of the law, they excused women from many of the positive commandments because these were time bound, and women's time was not considered their own: their domestic duties were understood to have first claim on their time. By the second century CE three of the 613 had been demarcated as "women's responsibility": lighting the Sabbath candle and preparing the challah bread, as well as observing *niddah*, the regulations around menstruation. Today the liberal denominations (principally Reform, Reconstruction, and some Conservative) generally see men and women as equally obliged to fulfill commandments, though denominations differ on which commandments are still binding. Some Jewish religious feminists today work on "claiming our rites" and turning these three special commandments for women into springboards for empowering women as agents and leaders in religion.⁴²

In an interesting difference from other religions, the rabbis recognized that childbirth frequently endangered a woman's life, and opined that no one

⁴² I am grateful to Leah Shakdiel and Levi Weiman-Kelman for the formulation of much though not all of this paragraph; final responsibility for accuracy is mine.

should be under obligation to endanger her life.⁴³ So the obligation to reproduce the community through procreation was assigned to men.⁴⁴ The rabbis also opined that a man's duty to reproduce was satisfied when he had produced at least two children, ideally one male and one female, a reproduction of the parents. This opinion, originally stated as a minimum, eventually became the norm for many Jews.⁴⁵

This same reasoning gave Jewish women the right to use contraception, which was originally expressed as permission for women who were minors, already pregnant, or nursing to use a *mokh*, a soft cotton pad that covered the cervix, though references to sterilizing potions are also prominent.⁴⁶ Husbands were also given the obligation to ensure that sexual intimacy was pleasurable for women, and to respond positively to signs of sexual interest in wives.

Failure of either spouse to agree to a minimal level of sexual frequency set by the rabbis in the *Gemora* was grounds for divorce; a wife, even when another pregnancy was clearly dangerous, risked divorce if she refused sex for longer than the minimum period allowed.⁴⁷ Under the Jewish law, men did not require grounds for divorce—they had an absolute right to divorce. In the case of extended barrenness of wives, men's obligation to reproduce demanded divorce and remarriage to a fertile wife after the medieval rabbis banned polygamy. Among many Orthodox today the requirement to divorce a wife who has been barren ten years is still practiced.

Though the Orthodox reject abortion except to save the life of the mother, Reform and Conservative traditions accept abortion in a wide variety of circumstances. One aspect of Jewish tradition that has supported a right to abortion is the under-

standing that the fetus is not a person (*nefesh*) until its head emerges from the birth canal. Consequently, as Zoloth wrote, "If the mother's life is at risk (including, for some, the situation in which having a severely disabled child, such as a child with Tay-Sachs, would threaten her mental health) the abortion is not only permissible, but mandated."⁴⁸ Some groups of Orthodox are strongly pronatalist in response to the deaths of six million Jews in the Holocaust, and, in Israel, due to the desire to preserve a Jewish majority.⁴⁹

Though the ancient Jewish scriptures treated women more or less as the property of men, first fathers and then husbands, and rape as a property offense of one man against the property of another, a number of reforms were instituted by the rabbis, using two principal tools: the *ketubah*, or marriage contract, and women's access to divorce through the rabbinical court system. The *ketubah* is a marriage contract negotiated by the woman and her family with the husband, which is kept by the wife and was often framed on display in the home. It spells out all the obligations that the husband will have towards the wife, and the wife's rights in the marriage. Strong *ketubahs* included a named sum that the husband would provide to maintain the wife, whether or not the wife had a voice in where they would live, what each would take with them in case of divorce, and, until the rabbis banned polygyny in the medieval period, whether or not the husband could take a second wife without the consent of his first wife. Individual families added provisions in which husbands pledged not to beat the wife, or similar restrictions. Husbands' violation of the *ketubah* gave wives grounds for divorce. Rabbis not only strongly encouraged use of the *ketubah*, but often refused to marry couples without one, and in fact developed a number of standardized forms for *ketubahs* which could be adapted as needed.

⁴³ Laurie Zoloth, "Each One an Entire World: A Jewish Perspective on Family Planning," in Maguire, *Sacred Rights*, 30.

⁴⁴ Zoloth, 31.

⁴⁵ Zoloth, 31-32.

⁴⁶ *Yeyamot* 12b, *Ketubot* 39a, *Niddah* 45a, *Nedarim* 35b.

⁴⁷ Zoloth, 44.

⁴⁸ Zoloth, 37-38.

⁴⁹ Elliott Dorff, *Matters of Life and Death* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1999).

Rabbinical reforms also gave women access to divorce through rabbinical courts. However, as in Islam, Jewish men have a textually based absolute right to divorce, and Jewish women only access to the possibility of divorce. Jewish rabbis cannot confer divorce on a woman; they can order her husband to give her a *get*, a divorce decree, but if he refuses, she cannot be divorced. Today in Israel there are numerous *agunah* (bound women) some of whose husbands have stubbornly endured a number of civil sanctions but still will not give separated wives a *get* so that they can remarry, and others whose husbands have disappeared without furnishing a *get* so that the wives may remarry.⁵⁰

The division of traditional rabbinic Judaism beginning in the late 19th century into Reform, Conservative and Orthodox wings of Judaism further changed the status of women in the Reform and Conservative wings. Most of those reforms affected women's roles within worship (e.g., mixed seating as opposed to female galleries), the abolition of the dietary law and therefore of women's role in implementing it, and the release of women from the purity laws around menstruation and childbirth (*mikvah*). Though some Conservative and even Reform women sometimes enjoy the *mikvah* ritual, which is still obligatory for the Orthodox, Reform and Conservative women are no longer required to refrain from sexual contact during their menstrual cycles or for seven days following it until they have bathed in the *mikvah* and become ritually clean again.

Many Jewish feminists have criticized the inadequacy of these reforms. As Judith Plaskow points out, "The so-called divinely ordained laws concerning marriage, divorce, adultery, rape and so on, allow for the regular and orderly transmission of women from the homes of fathers to the homes of husbands, or, if need be, from one husband to another. Women's

fears, desires and preferences, their efforts to find meaning in or to resist this legislation, are nonissues and "nondata" that are also nonsense in the context of the rabbinic worldview."⁵¹ Rachel Adler adds, "The problems that receive extensive attention in Jewish law are the status problems of marriage, desertion, divorce and *chalitzah* [levirate marriage] which the tradition itself created and from whose consequences it now attempts to 'protect' women, since by its own rules they can never protect themselves."⁵²

Christianity and Women in the Family

Like Buddhism, Christianity designated the vowed celibate life as the highest and most appropriate religious life, though this option only developed in the second century of Christianity. Catholicism, unlike Protestant Christianity, still retains this teaching. But Christianity, unlike Buddhism, from the beginning laid out norms for marriage and family, because vowed virginity was not instituted by Jesus, and was, in fact, foreign to the Jewish context of the first generations of Christianity, which assumed marriage as virtually universal.

Though Jesus seems to have been, like Mohammed and the Jewish rabbis, a reformer with regard to the situation of women, he made no laws and left no writings of his own, and our knowledge of his teachings come from texts written by followers three to six decades after his death. The gospels of the New Testament reveal that women, both single and married, were part of Jesus' itinerant band, contrary to the Jewish tradition of homebound women (Lk 8:2). These women, according the gospel of Luke, supported the band with their resources (Lk 8:3). The Lukan story of Jesus visiting the home of Mary and Martha tells of Jesus defending Mary for remaining with Jesus and his followers rather than retreating to

⁵⁰ Judith Plaskow, *Standing Again at Sinai* (Harper San Francisco, 1990), 129.

⁵¹ Plaskow, 63.

⁵² Rachel Adler, "I've Had Nothing Yet, So I Can't Take More," *Moment* 8.8 (September 1983): 24.

the kitchen to prepare the food with her sister Martha. Upon Martha's complaint to Jesus that Mary should be sent to the kitchen, Jesus proclaims that Mary had chosen the better part, and should stay (Lk 10:38-42). It was based on such examples in the life of Jesus that later New Testament documents name many women who left their homes to become missionaries (Acts 18; Rom 16:3; Phil 4:2), prophets, deaconesses (Rom 16:1), even apostles (Junia, Rom 16:7) as well as the heads of various church communities, including the Greco-Jewish church in Jerusalem (Acts 12:12; Col 4:15).

In Christianity by the beginning in the second century there arose strong pressure to conform to the hierarchical social mores of the Roman Empire and purge the leadership ranks of women, slaves and the poor.⁵³ Though it seems to have taken some centuries to complete the purge of women leaders from all corners of Christianity, it was done. The New Testament, whose latest parts were written, and its canon selected, during this purge, thus offers a contradictory set of teachings on women. In various places in the epistles of the New Testament we find repeated the Roman household code that enjoined women, slaves, and children to obey male heads of households, while ordering those male heads to love wives, and not abuse slaves or provoke children (Eph 22:6-9). Elsewhere in the New Testament women are said to be saved through motherhood (1Tim 2:15), and told to be silent in church (1Tim 2:12). On the other hand, we also find stories of Jesus condemning divorce as victimizing women (Mt 5:31-32), forgiving a prostitute (Lk 7:36-48), stopping the stoning of a woman caught in adultery, including women in his traveling band (Lk 8:3), choosing Mary Magdalene as the first witness of his resurrection (Mt 28:1-10; Mk 16:1-9; Lk 24:10; Jn 20:10-18), as well as Paul's famous statement of the early baptismal formula in Gal. 3:28, "there is no longer Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." While

the gospels describe Jesus as the defender of all socially powerless groups, including women, the rest of the New Testament is torn between silencing women in subjection and treating them as equals.

From the earliest period in Christianity, marriage was understood to require the consent of both the woman and the man. This was undoubtedly due in part to the multitude of Christian virgin martyrs of the first centuries, who died rather than accept the marriages arranged for them, and instead insisted that they were brides of Jesus. Through the ages the right was never denied, but neither was it respected in practice. Especially in the upper propertied classes and among the nobility, where marriage was the principal means of consolidating wealth and power, consent was frequently elicited by threats, beating, starving or raping women, with the full knowledge and approval of church officials. It was not until the twentieth century that real consent became the norm in Christian marriage.

Christianity did not permit divorce until relatively recently, and Catholicism still does not permit divorce, for either men or women. Women have traditionally had no right to refuse sex to a spouse on a number of different grounds. Church teachings understood that marital sex was created for reproduction and to prevent lust from leading to serious sin, such as fornication or adultery. So a wife had the moral obligation to provide sex for her husband lest he be otherwise tempted to adultery. But more than this: she was not recognized as having any control over her body. Medieval theologians pointed to Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians:

The husband must give the wife what is due her, and equally the wife must give the husband his due. The wife cannot claim her body as her own; it is her husband's. Equally, the husband cannot claim his body as his own; it is the wife's. Do not deny yourselves to one another, except when you agree to devote yourselves to prayer for a time, and to come

⁵³ Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her* (Crossroad, 1984), Chapter 5.

together afterwards; otherwise, through lack of control, you may be tempted by Satan. (1Cor 7: 3-5)

This passage, while alienating both men and women from control of their own bodies, does at least give reciprocal rights to women as well as men. Yet the medieval theologians interpreted this text to mean that the body of the wife belongs to the husband for sexual use, but that since women are naturally passive, they are not capable of exercising their parallel right. Thus it became accepted that it was husbands' right to determine if, when, where, and how sexual activity would take place. In many contemporary nations the attempt to eliminate the exemption for marriage in civil rape laws (to recognize that rape in marriage is a crime) has come up against vociferous Christian objections that wives do not have the right to refuse sex to husbands.

Men's headship in marriage was similarly understood to allow husbands and fathers the right to inflict physical punishment on women as part of disciplining them. In the first millennium of Christianity, until western Christianity enforced priestly celibacy, and again within the Protestant Reformation whose priests could marry, there are writings from bishops to priests under them, advising them to regularly beat their wives, so that their wives would present good models of wifely submission for other wives in the church. In time, the church came to limit the force used in such beatings; one such rule in northern Europe was that men were not allowed to use sticks thicker than the diameter of their thumbs to beat their wives. As states began in the twentieth century to extend civil laws against assault to marital situations, some of the principal opponents of such laws were Christians who argued for the responsibility of men to control women.

One interesting change on this issue of husbands' control of wives is found in recent papal teaching in Catholicism, in which the present pope, John Paul II, has declared that the correct interpretation of the

New Testament texts ordering wives to be submissive to their husbands is, in fact, that spouses are to have mutual submission to each other.⁵⁴ He thus disavows the traditional teaching of the "headship" of men over women, and attributes the history of such domination to the enduring effects of the original sin of Adam and Eve, the first parents, for which Jesus Christ atoned. Such creative re-readings of scripture have also occurred in some small Protestant denominations, notably the United Church of Christ and the Metropolitan Community Churches, but are impossible in denominations with more literal readings of scripture. Even within the Catholic church, the effect of releasing women from the headship of men does not bestow on her full control of her body, for in Catholicism sex and reproduction have been controlled more by church teaching than by husbands. Nor has this new teaching been incorporated into sermons to inform lay Catholics of the changed teaching. It is a well kept secret in much of the church, and has not impacted other aspects of church treatment of women.

While it is hoped that this rejection of the headship of men will in the near future pressure further changes in wives' right to control their bodies in sex and reproduction, historically women's lack of ownership of their bodies gave them no rights in reproduction. Just as in Judaism the right of wives to deny sex to husbands was extended into a later right to contraception, so the Christian denial of wives' right to refuse sex was linked to a rejection of wives legitimately choosing contraception. The religious right in the United States, for example, for decades demanded changes in the law to require husbands' consent for contraception, and, having lost that battle, now demands changes to require not only husbands' consent for abortion, but even the consent of unmarried fathers.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem* (On the Dignity and Vocation of Women), August 15, 1988, #10.

⁵⁵ Dallas A. Blanchard, *The Anti-Abortion Movement and the Rise of the Religious Right: From Polite to Fiery Protest* (New York: Twayne Publishing, 1994).

When the first wave of the modern women's movement arose in the United States and shortly after in Europe, Christian churches of all denominations were hostile, and in fact clergy, bishops and popes provided many of its most vociferous opponents, insisting that the headship of men over women and women's role as wife and mother in the home were based not only in nature but in God's revelation. In the century and a half since that time, churches have lagged considerably behind egalitarian gender reform in secular society, though most denominations have accepted civilly enacted rights of women, such as the right to own property, to divorce, to child custody, to vote, to equal education and to non-discrimination in the workplace. Protestantism has accepted women's right to use contraception, and some denominations a right to abortion under different, but not all, circumstances. The Catholic church has not accepted either, though the majority of Catholic women of childbearing age around the world use artificial contraception, and Catholic rates of abortion are as high as, and in Latin America even higher than, Protestant rates. Even where many rights of women in the family have been accepted in Christianity, there are ongoing questions about whether women's primary role is in the family.

Islam and Women in the Family

Islam is the youngest of the world religions, and the most historical in the sense that its revelation remained in oral form only very briefly, and a larger proportion of its early history and teaching are preserved. The circumstances surrounding the *Quran* and *hadith* of Mohammed in Islam led to Islam becoming perhaps the most pronatalist of all religions, which has had great impact on the lives of women. Arabian culture before Islam included polygamy and early marriage, and generally considered women the property of men. Female infanticide was said to be common.

Due to political and economic circumstances in Arabia during Islam's first centuries, Islam spread

rapidly through conquest. This led not only to the need to replenish the ranks of men lost in battle, but also to the need to provide for the widows and orphans of the dead. The *Quran* banned infanticide, celebrated female fertility, and suggested that if men did not trust themselves to care for the orphans justly (without appropriating their property), then they should marry them, up to four. Mohammad himself, who in his last years married a number of women not only to form political alliances but also as examples of this kind of care for needy women, married the widow of a former slave.

The *Quran* affirms the basic equality of men and women in a number of verses (4:1; 4:124; 33:35), but like other religions primarily defines the role of women in terms of being wives and mothers in the home, and has continued its emphasis on high fertility into the twentieth century.

Polygamy has generally been practiced by only a minority of Muslim men, largely because the Quranic verse allowing plural wives conditions this permission upon equal treatment of wives (4:3), and this equal treatment has been almost exclusively been interpreted to refer to equal financial support. Most Muslims have not been able to support multiple wives and their progeny. In the modern period many Muslim scholars have pointed out that the condition of equal treatment does not merely refer to equal financial support, but also to equal treatment in terms of time, affection and intimacy, and they note that the *Quran* in a different verse says that it is, in fact, impossible to treat plural wives equally (4:129). Such scholars argue that the thrust of the *Quran* is actually toward monogamy, that the allowance for polygamy was principally due to the particular needs of the time. The restriction of Muslims to four wives, rather than the unlimited numbers allowed before Islam, is interpreted as a first step toward eventual requirement of monogamy, and a few Muslim nations have banned polygamy. An analogy is frequently made between polygamy and slavery in the *Quran*. The *Quran* and *hadith* encourage the freeing

of slaves, and decreed the freeing of a slave as atonement for a number of different offenses by Muslims and as a token of virtue. These are interpreted as first steps toward the intended eventual elimination of slavery, just as some point to the limitation to four wives with equal treatment as a first step toward requiring monogamy.

The *Quran* and *hadith* are very positive about marriage, and discourage divorce, though providing procedures for divorce when it is unavoidable. There is a strong preference for reconciliation (4:35). Peace in the home is a central value. The *Quran*, like other traditions, understands men as the heads of households: “Men are the managers of the affairs of women on the basis of what Allah has preferred, some of them over others, and on the basis of what they spend of their property [on women]” (4:34). Contemporary interpretations of this text vary, with some reading the “preference” to be a universal preference of Allah for men over women, others limiting the preference to heads of families over women in the family, and yet others much more narrowly to husbands over wives if the husbands support non-working wives (that is, they read the last clause as a condition on the first).

Part of managing the affairs of women was understood to entail managing women’s behavior, and the *Quran* goes on to say that if men fear “*nushuz*”—variously translated, ranging from “lewdness” to “disobedience to the husband”—then “admonish them, banish them to beds apart, and scourge them. Then, if they obey you, seek not a way against them” (4:34). This verse is extremely controversial. A number of contemporary Quranic scholars object to translating “*nushuz*” as disobedience to the husband because, they point out, the same word is used in other parts of the *Quran* to refer to men, for whom disobedience to husbands is not possible. Other parts of the *Quran* refer to arbitration in cases of domestic discord, and specify a member from the wife’s family and a member of the husband’s family as arbiters. Thus the three ways to treat “*nushuz*” in 4:34 are generally interpreted not as simple alternatives, but are steps to be taken in series.

Amina Wadud agrees with Sayyid Qutb that *nushuz* is best understood as a state of disorder between the couple, and goes on to say:

“In case of disorder, what suggestions does the *Quran* give as possible solutions? There is 1. a verbal solution: whether between the husband and wife (as here in 4:34) or between the husband and wife with help from arbiters (as in 4:35). If open discussion fails, then a more drastic solution: 2. separation is indicated. Only in extreme measures a final measure: 3. the ‘scourge’ is permitted.”⁵⁶

But she adds that the nature of the scourge cannot create conjugal violence or a struggle between the couple, because that would be “un-Islamic,” and contradict the general sense of the *Quran*.

Throughout the world before the 20th century, the most comprehensive religious reforms to benefit women took place in Islam, and most of them impact women’s role in the family. With his revelation of the *Quran*, Mohammed instituted many reforms in the treatment of Arabic women. The reforms of Mohammed that were most original are those concerning economic rights. In fact, no other major religious culture in the world bestowed such economic rights on women until the late nineteenth century, and that happened in Europe and the Americas over the vociferous objection of Christian religious leaders. One of the reforms was a demand that the *mahr*, usually translated dowry but better understood as bride-price as it passed from the groom toward the bride, be paid directly to the bride, and not to her family (4:24), and that it remain in her control rather than revert to her husband upon marriage (4:20). If her husband divorced her, she was to take the *mahr* with her. Second, husbands were obliged to furnish wives with funds for their upkeep (4:34). Third, daughters were to have inheritance rights

⁵⁶ Amina Wadud, *Quran and Woman: Reading the Qur’an from a Woman’s Perspective* (New York: Oxford, 1999), 75.

(4:7), the proportion of which varied with the situation, but where there were both sons and daughters, the daughter's share was to be half that of sons (4:11; 4:176). This inheritance, too, belonged to the wife, and not to her husband, to be managed by her if she chose. Fourth, women, even married women, had a right to paid employment, and to manage the money they earned (4:32).

Two other critical familial rights were bestowed on women in Muslim revelation: the right to consent or not to marriage (4:19), and the right to divorce. Both of these rights had some conditions, however. The right to consent to or refuse marriage belonged only to free women; enslaved women could be claimed in marriage by their owners. On the other hand, the *Quran* insisted that in the case of slave women who had not chosen their marriage, their offenses against the marriage could only be punished at half the rate of free women who had had a choice. Women's right to divorce was based on *hadith* in which various women approached Mohammed for permission to divorce, and the divorce was granted. Later, Islamic courts heard the cases of women seeking divorce, and granted or denied those requests. Under Islamic law yet today, men have an absolute right to divorce, and women have access to the possibility of divorce, though civil law in some Muslim nations has required that both husbands and wives apply to the courts for divorce.

There is general agreement among reformist scholars and women's groups in Islam that the principal problems of Muslim women are due to a long history of biased interpretation of the *Quran* and *hadith*. For example, Wadud writes,

Rather than be elevated by the text to transcend their own limitations, some interpreters bring the text down to their own level when they project narrow or negative meanings which suit their individual whims, perceptions and prejudices about women. This is most often done on the basis of a single word!

Some of the words do not even exist in the text. Other negative terms, if used at all in the *Quran*, are neither directly nor exclusively associated with women. Even when a negative word is coincidentally used exclusively in connection with women, it does not mean to imply that all women necessarily fall prey to the indications of that word, nor that men are exempt from falling prey or permitted to fall prey. The interpretations of these words and other syntactical structures have not been juxtaposed with the entire Qur'anic worldview.⁵⁷

It is this body of rights granted to women in the *Quran* and *hadith* that forms the foundation of the claim by many liberal Muslims today that all that is needed to liberate women under Islam is to cut through the patriarchal system of interpretation that caused distortion in *shari'ah*, but especially in *fiqh*, and return to revelation itself. There is a general recognition that not even the requirement of women's consent for marriage was recognized in most of the history of Islam, much less the economic rights of the *Quran*. Based on Quranic mention of guardians for women, women's consent to marry was interpreted as being given by her father or other guardian, and as in Christianity, women, unless they were widows, and sometimes not even then, were seldom given the right to refuse arranged marriages until very recently. Muslim women in much of the world today would be astonished to know that they are supposed to be able to control either inheritance or the dowry. In Indonesia, for example, which has the largest Muslim population in the world, where the *jilbab* is not mandatory, women are not secluded, and many women work, the husband sometimes gives the wife the *mahr*, and sometimes merely tells her how much it is; but it is expected to be used for joint purposes, such as purchasing the family home, a car or motorcycle, education or training for her children or husband, or given to him to

⁵⁷ Wadud, 97.

manage as he will. Muslim women who are secluded in the home in Pakistan can make only weak arguments as to how well they could manage any sum; because they are restricted to the home unless escorted by a male relative. Thus local cultures have often blunted the force of religious reforms, and made them ineffective in improving the situation of women.

There is also a division within Islam as to whether or not women have the right to refuse sex to husbands. On the one hand, the *Quran* tells men that women are their fields, which they may plow as they will. On the other hand, a verse warns women that one of the penalties for refusing husbands is that they may be replaced by more complaisant wives, which seems to indicate that women have a choice, though not one without potentially negative consequences. For much of Muslim history, 4:34 was interpreted to allow a husband to beat his wife if she disobeyed him when he demanded sex. Today, such an interpretation is contested in many places. In the contemporary world, civil reforms that criminalized domestic abuse have been very difficult to pass, and even more difficult to enforce, due to historical religious support for husbands to discipline wives. In many Muslim nations, there are no laws against a man beating his wife so long as he does not kill her, and even if he does, he has a number of grounds he can claim as justification.⁵⁸ But increasingly, states, encountering pressure from other states and from women's groups within, criminalize wife-beating. As in other religions, Muslim authorities seldom oppose such reform in the statutes, but on the other hand, very seldom have they explicitly rejected or reinterpreted those texts which have been used to justify wife-beating.

⁵⁸ The laws surrounding families killing women for crimes against family honor in Jordan and Pakistan are perhaps the best known of these. At the same time, the concept of honor killings is unknown in many large Muslim nations. Stephanie E. Nanes, "Fighting Honor Crimes: Evidence of Civil Society in Jordan" *Middle East Journal* 57.1 (Winter 2003): 112-130; "Lebanon Asked to Toughen 'Honor Crimes' Law," *United Press International*, May 15, 2001.

Baha'i Women

The Baha'i faith dates itself from 1844 when a Persian called the Bab (the gate) announced the imminent appearance of a messenger from God who would follow him. The Bab was arrested and imprisoned and in 1850 the Bab was executed, followed by about 20,000 of his followers in Iran. In 1863 Baha'u'llah (the Glory of God) announced that he was the figure foretold by the Bab who would lead humanity into an age of universal peace. Baha'u'llah was exiled and imprisoned, but produced more than 100 volumes of mystical writings and social and ethical teaching, as well the method for succession of leadership. He was followed by his son, called Abdu'l Baha (servant of the Glory of God), and then by his great-grandson, Shogi Effendi, who died in 1957. Since 1963 legislative authority among Baha'is rests with the Universal House of Justice, a nine member council elected at five year intervals by the entire membership of the national governing institutions of Baha'is around the world. The House of Justice pronounces on all matters not specifically laid down in the writings of Baha'u'llah and Abdu'l Baha and explained by Shogi Effendi.

At the center of Baha'i teaching is the doctrine of progressive revelation, that all of the great prophets and religions of the past have been true revelations meant to bring humanity to spiritual and moral maturity, but that they were all limited by the level of understanding of peoples of those times and places. The Baha'i scriptures represent the latest stage in the unfolding of divine revelation, the final stage in which it has been revealed that all of humanity is one, meant for universal justice and peace under one world government. This teaching on progressive revelation has relieved the Baha'is of one of the biggest problems faced by much older religions: how to explain clearly patriarchal scriptural passages in texts that are taught as divine revelation. Since all the pre-Bab texts are understood as reflecting not only divine revelation but also the limited understandings of the recipients of revelation, patriarchal texts are

dismissed, and only passages that reflect equality are accepted as truly revelatory. Thus one of the principal teachings of Baha'is has been the assurance to women of complete equality with men.

Another central teaching has been the understanding of violence as primitive, destructive and to be avoided in all situations. The latter has been the result of persecution of Baha'is, not only in Iran where it has been more or less continuous since the time of the Bab, but also in the Ottoman Empire and succeeding nations of the Middle East. Committed to peaceful methods of conflict resolution, the Baha'is have a history of opposing corporal punishment of all kinds, including in the treatment of women and children,⁵⁹ an opposition that anticipates by many decades similar stances by other religions. Baha'u'llah himself understood women as central to the efforts to create world peace and unity, because he saw them as naturally peaceful and more compassionate than men, as well as more experienced in matters of reconciliation. Today many feminists would reject his reasoning as essentialist, and would rather insist that any advantages women have over men in conflict resolution are environmental and experiential rather than rooted in women's "nature."

Women have held positions in the House of Justice, as well as in the more local Baha'i organizations. They have not been excluded from leadership, even though the original prophets and authors of the scriptures were all male, and I know of no movements of dissent from women within the Baha'i movement. The Baha'i movement thus has a much more positive record on gender justice than most other religions.

⁵⁹ For example, Abdu'l Baha wrote, "Whosoever a mother seeth that a child has done well, let her praise and applaud him and cheer his heart; and if the slightest undesirable trait should manifest itself, let her counsel the child and punish him, and use means based on reason, even a slight verbal chastisement should this be necessary. It is not, however, permissible to strike a child, or vilify him, for the child's character will be totally perverted if he be subjected to blows or verbal abuse." (Abdu'l-Baha, *Tablets of Abdu'l-Baha*, vol. 3 (Wilmette, IL: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1988), 605.

At the same time, study of the Baha'i movement finds little that resonates with the patterns that we find in religions in which women have predominated. This is to say that, judging by existing studies of women's religious behaviors, the Baha'i movement seems designed to appeal more to men than to women. The Baha'i movement tends to be very rationalist, and to understand religion as completely compatible with science and technology. Most of its informational materials stress internationalism and world government, with an emphasis on law.⁶⁰ Although these materials do stress teachings on gender justice, they do not address teachings on the activities and roles that preoccupy women in much of world: child rearing; family health; relations with the dead and other spirits, including ancestors; mysticism; and other domestic realm issues. And the language that they use is often very masculinist. In the *Baha'i Teachings For the New World Order*, quotations from the Hidden Words of Baha'u'llah all begin with the invocation to individual believers "O SON OF MAN! (or O SON OF SPIRIT! or O SON OF BEING!)"⁶¹

While Baha'i material refers to many scriptures from other, earlier religions, it has not adopted much of the ritual or symbolism of these faiths, and is rather ritual poor—not uncommon for new, rationalist religions. From a feminist point of view, its strengths are its recognition of the equality of women, its inclusion of women in governance, its

⁶⁰ I am limited to a limited number of English language accounts of the Baha'i faith, including publications of the movement itself and its extensive website, www.bahai.org. Baha'u'llah and Abdu'l-Baha did write about some family issues, and may well have written about any number of other domestic matters that are not stressed by the publications of the faith. For example, the *Writings of Baha'u'llah* (New Delhi, India: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1960), is described in *Baha'i Teachings For the New World Order* as "A compilation in a single volume offering the majority of the writings of Baha'u'llah." Since Baha'u'llah wrote over 100 volumes, this volume is necessarily very selective. Thus my portrayal of the faith itself as more attractive to men may well be a portrayal not of the sacred texts, but of selection of texts used in missionizing and public relations today.

⁶¹ *Baha'i Teachings For the New World Order*, ed. Mouhebat Sobhani (New York: Baha'i Center of New York, 1992), 10-15.

strong stand against any form of violence, and its emphasis on unity amid racial, cultural, and ethnic diversity. Its weak points are its neglect of mystical and other non-rationalist approaches to the divine and its greater stress on “public” rather than domestic experience and concerns. It is possible, however, that this critique is more appropriate regarding the missionizing stance of Baha’is than it is of the breadth of revelation. It will be interesting to find out.

Religion, Sex and Reproduction

Perhaps the most critical family issue in improving the welfare of women in all religions and cultures involves recognizing women’s right to control their own bodies: to consent to marriage; to accept, reject or request sex in marriage; to freedom from both physical and sexual abuse inside and outside of marriage, and to control of her own reproduction. Most religions have recognized only women’s right to consent to marriage, and in many parts of the world this right is not fully implemented. Judaism is the exception here, in that it has also recognized the right of women to accept or reject sex in marriage, to use contraception, and to have a right to sexual satisfaction in marriage. Religions as a whole have defined rape as forced sex between persons not married to each other and refused to consider rape in marriage. Religious teaching on the headship of men in marriage has supported understandings of wives as obliged to obey men in every area of life, including sex and reproduction, and has often justified the use of beatings as necessary discipline to enforce such obedience.

In most religions the dangers of childbirth—which until relatively recently everywhere risked, and still in some parts of the world routinely risk, women’s lives—were considered simply a part of women’s reproductive role. For this reason, religions commonly condemned women for using contraception. Women who did were viewed as unnatural, as thwarting the divine plan for them, and their unwill-

ingness to have yet more children was interpreted as evidence of their being bad mothers. In the late twentieth century, public health care workers all over the world report that many women who ask husbands for permission to use contraception, or are discovered using it by husbands and mothers-in-law, are liable to suffer severe abuse. Long-term injectable and implantable contraceptives are often the most popular form of contraceptives partly because they are the most concealable.

Within the last few decades, as social attitudes change in this area, so have the attitudes of religious leaders and their teachings. Most religions no longer condemn all uses of contraception, and no longer encourage men to discipline wives with beatings. Yet when we consider how important religion has been in forming and maintaining restrictive concepts of women as limited to sexual, reproductive and house-keeper service to men, it is striking how little religions have been involved in contemporary reforms in these same areas. The most common response of religions to initial social and legal trends toward respecting women’s bodyright is strong organized resistance, followed by a capitulation which takes the form of simply falling silent on these issues. Very seldom have religions ever formally repudiated former teachings oppressive to women, very seldom have they put forth new interpretations of either problematic sacred texts or theological and philosophical teachings in order to support women’s integrity and bodyright. And the few repudiations and reinterpretations that do exist are seldom publicized or made a part of the regular media through which the religion is transmitted. Moving around the world one very seldom hears sermons admonishing men not to beat or rape their wives, or that urge couples considering the number and timing of children to remember that wives should have the final say in whether or not they will bear another child.

Yet religions’ shift from opposition to silence on these issues does not end their responsibility for ongoing oppression and crimes against women. Religious

teachings were a major influence on the creation of enduring cultural attitudes that do not automatically change when the religious leaders fall silent. All over the world, violence against women is on the rise. Changes from extended family households to nuclear family households, the mobility of nuclear families away from relatives and friends, and the increased anonymity of urban settings, as well as male fear of losing control of women, have all combined to greatly increase rates of both domestic violence and public attacks on women, especially gang-rape.⁶²

Religious leaders have not often fully supported even the rights their own traditions have recognized for women. This is especially telling in Islam, where the *Quran* included so many rights for women. Yet there are many times more imams and mullahs calling for further restrictions on the lives of women than there are for the implementation of women's Quranic rights to employment, education, inheritance, consent to marriage, and control of her own money. It is as if religions have conceded to the state all responsibility for the welfare of women, except for "protection" of women by restricting their activities, associations, and access to the public sphere. The vast majority of women around the world are religious. They deserve more from the religious institutions they have trusted.

Women's Role in Society

There is relatively little to add here to what we have already said about women's role in the teachings of religions, because religions have given women access to little outside the domestic realm. Women's access to the public world outside the domestic scene has been limited throughout history across religions, though with some variation both between religions

and within religious traditions. For example, both some Muslim communities and some Hindu communities today seclude women in the home, even to specific parts of the home, while many others in both religions do not. The seclusion of women is not understood as required by religious revelation in either religion.

The most common explanation for the origin of seclusion in the Muslim world was not religious teachings, but rather the example of rulers with large numbers of wives and concubines. The ruler demanded exclusive sexual access to all these women, but realizing that he was unable to satisfy the sexual and intimacy needs of so many, he felt the need to seclude them so as to limit their access to other men. For this same reason, harem guards were often eunuchs. The practice of severe forms of female circumcision, both clitoridectomy and the more radical genital infibulation⁶³ inflicted on more than 130 million women in Africa today and defended as religious by some African tribal religions, African Muslims, and some African Christians, are forms of sexual seclusion attributed specifically to the Egyptian pharaohs, who used clitoridectomy or genital infibulation on their women to lessen the temptation to adultery. Because the practice spread throughout the court and came to define royal women, it was imitated by large parts of the population across Africa, though not in Arabia outside Yemen. It has been in Africa a kind of status symbol for both women and the men who claim them; it is defended today as evidence of women's virtue. But like physical seclusion, it is not required by religious revelation either in Islam or Christianity; in Islam there are three *hadith* referring to it, but the most authoritative of these merely permits it.

⁶² Anita M. Weiss, "The Slow Yet Steady Path to Women's Empowerment in Pakistan," in Yvonne Y. Haddad and John C. Esposito, eds., *Islam, Gender and Social Change* (New York: New York University, 1998), 124-143.

⁶³ Genital infibulation is the surgical removal of the clitoris, labia minora and large parts of the labia majora, and the sewing of the two edges of the vulva, leaving only two tiny openings for urine and menstrual blood. In many places this pubertal sewing is repeated after every childbirth. See Hanny Lightfoot-Klein, *Prisoner of Ritual: An Odyssey into Female Genital Mutilation In Africa* (New York: Harrington Park Press, 1989).

While complete seclusion of women has been rather rare in the world religions, there is no question but that the general tendency has been for religions to assign virtue and respectability to women who remained in the home, and to be suspicious of the virtue of women who spent much time in the public domain. Virtually without exception, this understanding has favored the upper classes, which could afford to support wives and daughters who did not work outside the home. Peasant women who worked in the fields, until the last century the vast majority of women in the world, together with women in nomadic tribes, have always been considered less respectable and less religious than middle-class urban women.

In many religions women's primary access to the public sphere was religion itself. This was most true of upper-class women. But Buddhist, Hindu, Christian and Muslim women of all classes have made pilgrimages to temples, churches, mosques, tombs and other holy places, as well as had access to local places of worship and often religious festivals as well.

Within Christianity, women in religious orders (nuns) fought the official church for over a thousand years for the right to be active in service to the public. During some periods they were able to succeed in such goals, operating schools for girls, hospitals, hospices for the dying, and various other services. But periodically the church would demand that the nuns retreat to the cloister, cease all contact with the outside world, and devote themselves exclusively to prayer.⁶⁴ Nuns in cloister could not leave, and were restricted to very rare visits from family from behind screens and bars, always with another sister listening. Groups of religious women known as Beguines arose in the Middle Ages and were persecuted for centuries by the bishops and popes as necessarily immoral because they were neither married under the control of husbands, nor cloistered nuns under the

control of the bishop.⁶⁵ Beguines were not nuns, but took vows of celibacy and regular prayer, and lived in small groups supporting themselves in the community through their needlework, nursing the sick and dying, and as mourners. After the Council of Trent in the 16th century, the Church supported a variety of local laws that declared that two or more women living together without a male head of household were to be considered as operating a brothel and treated accordingly.⁶⁶ Other groups of Beguines were forced into convents.

In many Theravadan Buddhist nations the *bhikkuni sangha* either never existed or died out centuries ago; where it survived, the nuns also endured long periods when they were prohibited from access to the public sphere and were restricted to their monasteries.

When honored in practice, Muslim women's Quranic right to paid employment outside the home and management of her own funds have given her the soundest foundation for public access, but this has rarely been the case. Hindu women of the lower castes have had access to paid employment, even to paid ritual roles such as midwives, washerwomen, and barbers, but because of the seclusion of upper caste women, such roles were understood as demeaning, especially as they typically involved service to upper-caste women and involved doing tasks understood as highly polluted.

In fact, within religions until the 20th century, access to the public sphere and to recognized roles within it has generally been limited to poor women of very low status, who were understood not only to have no alternative to paid employment, but to have forfeited through those public roles any claim to be respectable, virtuous women. Middle-class women have had limited access to parts of the public world, for purposes

⁶⁴ Ulrike Strasser, "Bones of Contention: Catholic Nuns Resist their Enclosure," in Falk and Gross, 207-220.

⁶⁵ Emilie Zum Brunn and Georgette Epiney-Burgard, *Women Mystics in Medieval Europe* (St. Paul, MN: Paragon House, 1989) and Dorothee Soelle, *The Silent Cry: Mysticism and Resistance* (Minneapolis: Augsburg/Fortress, 2001).

⁶⁶ Strasser, in Falk and Gross, 210-211.

of such tasks as marketing, but often under conditions of chaperonage, and even such excursions were in many cultures understood as best left to lower status, less respectable servants whenever possible. Virtuous women were those who lived under protective male control in the restricted space of the home.

Religions have had less to say about social leadership roles for women. Some Christian religious leaders of the past, such as the Scots Presbyterian leader John Knox, have excoriated women as rulers.⁶⁷ Many Protestant ministers in the late 19th and early 20th century United States vocally opposed women's suffrage. A group of New England Protestant clergy published a letter admonishing two Quaker abolitionist women, Sarah and Angelina Grimke, for speaking in public, which they considered not appropriate for Christian women. In the Catholic Church, a number of 20th century popes insisted that women's work should fit the nature of women, and be directed at care of children, the orphans, widows and other social service "rescue" work, but that women lacked the rationality and discrimination to be good administrators or judges.

In Islam, the *Quran* depicts Bilqis, Queen of Sheba, as a wise leader—in fact, Amina Wadud points out that Bilqis is the only ruler treated approvingly in the *Quran*.⁶⁸ But one questionably authentic *hadith* says that groups led by women will end in disaster. There is great debate over this issue throughout Islam. One of the reasons for this is that a number of Muslim nations—though in Asia, not the Middle East—have recently had female prime ministers, including Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Indonesia (by far the three most populous Muslim nations in the world), and there have been conflicting rulings by local *ulama* on the issue of women running for public office.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ John Knox, *The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* (1558).

⁶⁸ Wadud, Chapter 4.

⁶⁹ Weiss, for example, discusses how Pakistani *ulama* changed their view on the permissibility of women running for president of the country from one decade to the next, first allowing then disallowing it.

In Judaism there is no religious ban on women in public roles. Though fewer Orthodox women have been active politically or in leadership roles in business and finance than is the case among Reform and Conservative branches, Orthodox women, too, are found among politicians, as heads of social-service organizations, in finance and in other social-leadership roles. One traditional precedent among Jews for women's access to the public sphere has been the role of rabbis' wives, which long entailed relieving husbands of all responsibility for material life in order that they might totally devote themselves to study. Many rabbis often spent years away from home in study, leaving their wives to raise the children, run the household, and even to support the family. Thus in some ways a rabbi's wife was more connected to the public sphere than her husband.

Among both Hindus and Buddhists, especially over the last decades, women have held political office and other leadership roles as well, depending upon class, caste, access to education, and, as in other parts of the world, the power of one's family. While these roles are relatively new, they have not generated strong religious criticism. In India, the influence of Ghandi, and the career of Indira Ghandi, following in her father's (Nehru's) footsteps, smoothed the path for women in the public sphere.

Religions all over the world are being forced to change their teachings that the proper place for women is in the home in the face of two major social shifts: the pressure exerted by the globalized economy for families to require second wage-earners in order to survive, and economic and environmental pressures on nations to lower female fertility rates to replacement rates. The need for women to work exerts pressure for higher education for girls and women; longer years of education for girls in turn helps to postpone marriage and decrease fertility rates. It is difficult for religions, even where they understandably object to both the exploitation of female labor at low wages and unsafe working conditions and the neglect of young children in the home, to do so successfully in the face of the economic and political power of these shifts.

Women's Role in Religion

As mentioned early on, outside the few small religions scattered around the world in which women have predominated as members and leaders, women have had until very recently little or no presence among those who interpreted sacred texts, created theology, constructed or administered religious law, or transmitted any of this to new generations. Women have responded to that exclusion either by accepting and developing the secondary roles they were assigned, or by developing new rituals and roles of their own at the periphery of the larger tradition, and sometimes by both.

Today there is great variation in both the status and the leadership roles of women in religion. In Christianity, religious participation is not differentiated between men and women, though leadership often is. In the last half of the twentieth century, and occasionally before in denominations led by the Spirit, Protestant Christianity has generally ordained women. Catholicism and Christian Orthodoxy have not ordained women. But even among Protestants there are some denominations, such as Missouri Synod Lutherans, various Reformed churches in Europe, and some Baptist and Pentecostal churches, which do not ordain women to ministry. Many Christian seminaries are open to women at all levels, but some are not, especially in Catholicism and Orthodoxy.

One of the central questions of Jewish feminists is to what extent they are Jewish, since they are bound by only three of the 613 commandments of Jewish law, and the mark of the Covenant is male circumcision. While Reform ordained its first woman in 1972, and Conservatism decided to follow in 1983, Orthodoxy does not ordain women.⁷⁰ In Orthodoxy, women are generally separated from men during worship, and have no role in the synagogue

service. Among the Reformed, there are more female than male cantors in training.⁷¹

In the U.S., Jewish women among the Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox have all been active in organizations that served their communities since the nineteenth centuries. But by the 1920s among the Reform, the National Committee on Religion floated the idea that the temple sisterhoods should organize the summer services in the temples, a wildly popular idea that resulted in many synagogues not only having a woman deliver a message to the congregation from the pulpit, but women conducting the entire service.⁷²

Both Reform and Conservative wings have added a *bat mitzvah* ritual to parallel the male *bar mitzvah* ceremony in which a pubertal male becomes an adult Jew by reading from the Torah scroll in the Sabbath service, and women take all roles within worship services. Some Jewish congregations have also designed rituals for the birth of girls that parallel the *brit milah* (male circumcision) rites for boys, and there are many feminist *Haggadot* (Passover liturgies) which restore women to the account of the Exodus.

As we have seen, monastic ordination was open to both men and women within Buddhism during the lifetime of the Buddha. In Buddhist scriptures, however, the account of Buddha's granting the plea of his aunt, Mahaprajapati, to allow women into the *sangha* is marked with reluctance on the part of Buddha. He imposed eight "heavy" additional rules on the nuns, including rules that monks could teach nuns, but nuns could not teach monks; that female ordinations require monks, but male ordinations do not require nuns; that nuns of all ranks must show respect to all ranks of monks; and that nuns were

⁷⁰ Lucinda Peach, "Women and Judaism," in *Women and Religion*, 163.

⁷¹ Nancy S. Hausman, "On Becoming a Cantor," in Peach, *Women and Religion*, 195-196.

⁷² Paula Nadell and Rita J. Simon, "Ladies of the Sisterhood: Women in the American Reform Synagogue, 1900-1930," in Peach, *Women and Religion*, 181.

required to spend the rainy season near monks.⁷³ But Buddha is also recorded as remarking that this decision to admit women would shorten by half the life of the Buddhist way. Warnings against the seductive wiles of women are found throughout the writings of Buddhist monks, who frequently resented being charged with supervision of the nuns, whom they saw as distracting and threatening to their vows.

A number of scholars have remarked that the Buddhist tradition in many ways has been more accepting of laywomen than of nuns. Certainly during the life of Buddha and immediately after, the achievements of laywomen, especially laywomen such as Vishakha, who were big donors to the monks, received more adulation than those of the nuns.⁷⁴ Female monks (the *Bhikkuni Sangha*) died out in India and Sri Lanka in the 11th century and were never officially established in Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, Japan, or Mongolia. But six centuries before its demise the Sri Lankan lineage of nuns had been transferred to China, and from there to Korea and Vietnam; it has flourished in all three areas since.⁷⁵ The status of nuns within Buddhist traditions rests largely upon ordination status. Nuns with full ordination status are more likely to be well educated and better supported. Nuns with only novice ordination (*sramanerika*) are recognized as members of the *sangha*, but are not given treatment equal to monks, even novice monks. Movements of socially engaged Buddhism often target improving the situation and training of nuns as a major contribution to the Buddhist community, as well as to women. In fact, some Thai reformers propose that providing full ordination to nuns in Thailand will resolve the serious prostitution situation. They contend that the number of monks in Thailand is approximately equal to the number of prostitutes, and that the majority of monks come from the same social backgrounds as the majority of prostitutes, and that both groups are drawn—or pushed by

family—toward their occupation by hopes of bettering themselves and possibly their families.⁷⁶ An alternative destination for women, one that matched that of the monks in terms of status and support, would undermine the attraction of prostitution, which offers not only income but also the danger of violence and disease as well as bad karma.

Warnings about the moral dangers of women were even more pointed in Christianity, because the negative valuation of sexuality was even stronger. Sex was not only distracting for celibates, but was actually sinful. While theoretically sex within marriage intended for purposes of procreation (rather than lust) was not sinful, the theological tradition following Augustine taught that even such sex was at least venially sinful, because it was impossible to eliminate the pleasure. Later medieval theologians including Thomas Aquinas taught that so long as the purpose was reproductive or acquiescing to a demand of the spouse (to prevent his committing adultery) that sex in marriage need not be sinful even if it did entail some pleasure. Either way, these teachings effectively meant that women were a temptation to sin not only to those who took vows of celibacy, but to all men, because they constituted a temptation to sexual pleasure.

While Orthodoxy is the only branch of Christianity which still has menstrual taboos (from participating in church ritual, and for some, even in prayer), customs earlier based on menstrual taboos still linger, such as the exclusion of young (pregnant or menstruating women) from cleaning church sanctuaries or priests' homes, from the pulpit (one issue which repeatedly arises within Protestant churches which ordain women is the appropriateness of visibly pregnant women in the pulpit), or from altar service in general. In some parts of the world, women who have had children are still “churched” or “blessed” outside the church before they may enter—the remnant of old purification rituals. Among Catholic

⁷³ Karma Lekshe Tsomo, “Mahaprajapati’s Legacy: The Buddhist Women’s Movement,” in Peach, *Women and Religion*, 79.

⁷⁴ Falk, 204.

⁷⁵ Tsomo, 81.

⁷⁶ Ouyporn Khuankaew, “Thai Buddhism: Women’s Ordination or More Prostitution?” in Peach, *Women and Religion*, 93.

theologians, the majority understand exclusion of women from the priesthood and deaconate as historically conditioned and not scripturally or theologically dictated stances.

But scripture is a problem for many Christian women, in that the New Testament is so clearly divided between patriarchal and liberatory treatment of women. Literal approaches to scripture in interpreting the role of women in the church, then, can only produce inconsistent nonsense. At the same time, church tradition, upon which Catholicism also relies, is not helpful, either. As in other religions, it is reliance on the spirit—on the mystical, the symbolic, the mythic—which has most supported the religious needs and aspirations of women. In traditions where ministers are called by the spirit of God, which gifts the individual with charisms recognized by the religious community, access of women to leadership has generally been easier, for it is difficult to deny that across religious traditions women often seem to have disproportionate access to the spirit(s).⁷⁷

In the same way, the general exclusion of women from being imams (prayer leaders) in Islam is also not the result of any clear teaching in either *Quran* or *hadith*, but rather to interpretations of these in *shari'a*. The general explanation today is that women are excluded in order to safeguard the quality of men's prayer, in that they are too easily distracted, if not actually seduced, by the sound or sight of a woman. As women become better educated and more publicly vocal, the obvious response is that if women can be expected to discipline themselves so as not to be distracted or seduced by the sights and sound of a male prayer leader, then men can also be expected to develop such discipline. In fact, in some parts of the Muslim world, though not in the Middle East proper, women have led prayer for mixed groups, and even given public sermons, as in South Africa, Indonesia and Turkey, though not without controversy. This is,

say Muslim feminists, another example of how the problems for women in Islam are not basically with revelation—either *Quran* or *hadith*—but with centuries of male interpretation of revelation. Today many of the issues in Islam concern the form of the *umma*, and relate to politics. Should national law be *shari'a* law? For many Muslim women, this is a difficult question, since their real question is “what *shari'a* law?” They want to be loyal to their tradition, but they do not believe that much of traditional *shari'a* represents the revelation in *Quran* and *hadith*, at least as it concerns women, and they want new interpretations, and assurance that the *ulama* that do new interpretations include women who represent their lives and their perspectives.

In Hinduism, revelation is not the central problem that it is for Islam and Christianity, or even Buddhism. Indian sacred texts are older, more varied, and much less known by ordinary Hindus, who are much more likely to be involved in *bhakti* and in village-based traditions than in Brahmanic ritual. Not text, but tradition is the issue for most of these. One symbolic step, with probable impact on even those not closely involved in Brahmanic rites, would be to restore to Brahman's wives the participation in ritual that they once had. More likely to occur, however, is the continued movement of women into the ranks of guru (teachers) in Hinduism,⁷⁸ and the continuing formation of new, more egalitarian Hindu organizations (as are especially popular throughout the West) around such gurus. In India, much of the force of tradition—in this case patriarchal tradition—is connected with lack of education. The religious status of women is generally lowest at the village level, and among the poorest. General education for females as well as males, and religious education for both females and males, are both critical necessities. To know something of the changes that have taken place within the past of Hinduism is to relativize any absolute claims for present tradition.

⁷⁷ Sered, *Priestess, Mother*, Chapter Two.

⁷⁸ See Charles S. J. White, “Mother Guru: Jnanananda of Madras, India,” in Falk and Gross, 43-58.

Conclusion

What then, can we conclude from this brief survey of world religions on women? One conclusion must be that religions have been both oppressive and liberative in their treatment of women. Another is that positive reforms in the treatment of women have come more often, though not exclusively, from civil law (generally through the application of human rights theory) than from religion. Interestingly, religion and civil law have not displayed two different agendas for the liberation of women. Instead, the same reforms appear (ending polygamy, or giving women the right to property, for example), in some places as an internal religious reform, and in other places as a reform in civil law.

What reforms are necessary in religions if they are to support the full dignity and welfare of women? Perhaps the most important reform for safeguarding the long-term welfare of women in religions is religious education for women at all levels. This would ensure both that ordinary women knew their rights under their religion, and that women could no longer be excluded from the ongoing work of interpreting the sacred texts and traditions, and adapting them to changing circumstances. Large-scale movement of women into higher religious education would be the strongest evidence that women are more than merely reproductive biology, that they must be interpreted not only on the basis of their differences from men, but also in terms of their sameness.

In the short-term, the most pressing women's issues in religion are issues of bodyright for women. The equality of women in the family, in society, and in religions absolutely requires respect for women's bodyright. Women who do not control their bodies can have no sense of independent identity, no sense of their responsibility for their overall lives, no aspiration or ambition for equality, no sense of their own power and what it can accomplish for themselves and others. Women's bodyright must include

their free consent to marriage and to a particular spouse (which need not mean ending arranged marriage in favor of romantic love marriages); wives' freedom from both rape and assault by the spouse; and women's ability to control their bodies' reproduction, to choose contraception and abortion. For most women, the ability to defend one's right to control one's body is only real in the presence of economic rights—the right to earn a wage to support oneself and one's children and to manage one's property—and thus the full dignity and welfare of women will ultimately depend on the elimination of abject poverty, the majority of whose victims around the world are women and children. If the poorest among the poor are inevitably women and their dependent children, then ending poverty must be not only the long-term goal, but also a part of every short-term goal.

Women and Religion in the Context of Globalization

Vandana Shiva

Two Concepts of Religion, Two Concepts of Globalization

Religions have been the source of ordering life in meaning, embodying universal values of right living. They have been about connectedness—among the human community and all beings. Religion at this level is about spirituality and inclusion; it is about being and living. This is the religion of women and ordinary people.

The reference is creation and the integrity of creation. Religions are about positive identities of the self in the context of the universe. But religions have also been about texts interpreted by men in power to exclude other religions and women. Religion in patriarchal form is about control over behavior, especially women's social and sexual behavior; it is about exclusion, it is about power and control. This is the religion of patriarchy. It is the religion of exclusion and negative identity, where the "self" is in opposition to the other. This negative identity is the fundamental thesis of Huntington's "Clash of civilizations." His book, which has become the gospel for those who would naturalize religious conflict, is full of this "either / or" paradigm, of religious identity being premised on hate for the other: "unless we hate what we are not, we cannot love what we are" (page 20). "We know who we are only when we know who we are not and often only when we know whom we are against" (page 21). Fundamentalisms of various hues are fueled by this exclusivist philosophy.

Globalization has two meanings. It can refer to our universal humanity, to cultures of compassion and solidarity, to our common identity as earth citizens. I call this type of globalization, "Earth Democracy." But the dominant meaning and form of globalization is economic or corporate globalization. This is the globalization of capitalist patriarchy—in which everything is a commodity, everything is for sale, and the only value is value in the global market place. All other values are merely "tariff and non-tariff" trade barriers. Non-commercial values, and the lives and cultures they support are excluded, including women's work and knowledge for life's maintenance.

I am deliberately not using the title phrase "in the context of a globalizing world" because it could suggest that "the world" is "globalizing" by its own agency. The patterns of globalization would therefore be set by "the world" and there hence there would be an inevitability about its patterns and the way they are unfolding. In other words, there would be no alternative to the way the world is globalizing at the present time.

I use the term globalization to identify agency not in "the world," but in the minds and constructions of the minds of men in power, which of course changes "the world," and those who inhabit it, including "women." This globalization is one pattern of relationship that is possible. I prefix it with "corporate globalization" and "economic globalization," to

indicate that the pattern and rules of globalization are shaped at present by those who run giant global corporations, and only along economic parameters—economy defined from the perspective of corporate profits. There are other actors and factors that are disappearing in this equation—society, culture, religion, women's work. And these forgotten, suppressed aspects emerge in new forms, shaped by and shaping the “globalization” we are part of.

Corporate globalization is a project defined by the values of capitalist patriarchy—which puts men who control capital above other human beings and the rest of nature. Other humans—women, the poor, the Third World, are reduced to a sub-human status, and nature is reduced to mere raw material—to be mined, exploited, manipulated.

Capitalist patriarchy changes the very meaning of what it is to produce and be a producer, what it is to create and be a creative agent. These shifts are also linked to redefining the place where the economy takes place. Ecology, economics and gender are all intimately connected to the construction of “home” as a metaphor.

The household was originally the metaphor for the economy. The word “economy” has its roots in the Greek word “oikos,” which referred originally to the family and household and its daily operations and maintenance. The household in women centered, life centered economies is at the heart of productivity and creativity. In capitalist patriarchy, the household becomes unproductive, a place of ignorance, a place to escape from for liberation.

In 1988 Ernest Herschel, the leading German disciple of Darwin derived the new label “oecologies” from the same root oikos, to refer to the science of the relations of living organisms to the external world, their habitat, customs, energies etc.

Before the emergence of a modern patriarchal paradigm of economies, it was assumed that national

economic affairs could be conceived of as merely extensions of the housekeeper's budget. Similarly, “oecologie” suggested that the living organisms of the earth constitute a single economic unit resembling a household or family dwelling intimately together.

With “home” as the metaphor for both ecology and economics there was no hierarchical divide between domestic production and commodity production for exchange and trade, or between nature's economy, the sustenance economy, and the market economy.

Modern economic paradigms however, reconstituted the metaphor of home. It was no longer the model for economic organisation. The home was separated from the economy and made economically invisible. The home was redefined as the absence of economy. Division of labor between the genders was also mapped, with females and males being projected into the household and the economy, respectively. When the economy was an extension of the household both domains had the participation of both genders. The removal of the economy from the household was also associated with a gendering of the economy and the household.

Sociologically, this led to what Maria Mies has called the “housewifisation” of the domestic economy. In terms of the economic paradigm it means that production in and for the home and its needs is not counted as production. The transformation of value into disvalue, labor into non-labor, knowledge into non-knowledge, was achieved by two very powerful constructs, the production boundary and the creation boundary. The production boundary is a political construct which excludes regenerative, renewable production cycles from the domain of production. National accounting systems which are used for calculating growth through gross national product are based on the assumption that if producers consume what they produce, they do not in fact produce at all, because they fall outside the production boundary. All women who produce for their families, children and nature are thus all treated as non-productive, as

economically inactive. Self sufficiency in the economic domain is therefore seen as economic deficiency when economies are confined to the market place. The devaluation of women's work, and of work done in subsistence economies in the Third World, is the natural outcome of a production boundary constructed by capitalist patriarchy. By restricting itself to the market economic value as defined by capitalist patriarchy, it ignores economic value in two vital economies necessary to ecological and human survival—the domain of nature's economy, and the domain of the sustenance economy. In nature's economy and the sustenance economy, economic value is a measure of the protection of the earth's life and human life. Its currency is life giving processes, not cash or market price.

At the level of gender impact, this paradigm of economic value in one fell swoop made women's work and all domestic production disappear. The exclusive focus on incomes and cash flows as measured in GNP has meant that the web of life around women, and the environment is excluded from central concern. The status of women and children and the state of the environment have never functioned as 'indicators' of development. Thus exclusion is achieved by rendering invisible two kinds of processes. Firstly, nature's and women's contribution to the growth of the market economy is neglected and denied. Dominant economic theories assign no value to tasks carried out at subsistence and domestic levels. These theories are unable to encompass the majority in the world—women and Third World people—who are statistically "invisible." Secondly the negative impact of economic development and growth on women, children and environment goes largely unrecognized and unrecorded. Both these factors lead to impoverishment.

Among the hidden costs generated by destructive development are the new burdens created by ecological devastation, costs that are invariably heavier for women, in both the North and South. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that a rising GNP or rising global trade figures do not necessarily mean that

either wealth or welfare increase proportionately. I would argue that GNP and growth in international trade is becoming increasingly a measure of how real wealth—the wealth of nature and the life sustaining wealth produced by women—is rapidly decreasing. When trade in commodities is treated as the only economic activity, it destroys nature and services for basic needs. More trade and more cash mean less life in nature through ecological destruction and in society through denial of basic needs. Women are devalued, first, because their work cooperates with nature's processes, and second, because work that satisfies needs and ensures sustenance is devalued in general. More growth in what is maldevelopment has meant less nurturing of life and life support systems.

The Three Economies of Nature, People and the Market

Nature's economy—through which environmental regeneration takes place—and the people's sustenance economy—within which women produce the sustenance for society through "invisible" unpaid work called non-work are being systematically destroyed to create growth in the global market economy. Closely related to the concept of people's economy is Hilka Pietila's categorization of the free economy in industrialized societies which consists of the non-monetary core of the economy and society, like unpaid work for one's own and family needs, as well as, community activities, mutual help and co-operation within the neighborhood, and so on.

In addition, there is the protected sector which consists of production, protected and guided by official means for domestic markets, like foods, constructions, services, administration, health, schools and culture and so on.

Finally Pietila describes the "free-trade" economy as the fettered economy which consists of large-scale production for export and to compete with imports. The terms in this economy are dictated by the world

market, dependency, vulnerability, compulsive competitiveness and so forth.

For example, in 1980, the proportions of time and money value that went into running each category of the Finnish economy were:

	Time	Money
A. The free or informal economy	54%	35%
B. Protected Sector	36%	46%
C. The fettered economy	10%	19%

In patriarchal economies, B and C are perceived as the primary economy, and A as the secondary economy. In fact as Marilyn Waring (Waring, Marilyn, *if women counted*, Harper & Row, San Francisco, 1988) has documented, national accounts and GNP actually exclude the free economy as lying outside the production boundary. What most economists and politicians call the 'free' or 'open' economy is seen by women as the 'fettered' economy. When the fettered economy becomes 'poor'—that is, runs into deficit—it is the free economy that pays to restore it to health. In times of structural adjustment and austerity programmes, cuts in public expenditure generally fall most heavily on the poor. In many cases reduction of the fiscal deficit has been effected by making substantial cuts in social and economic development expenditure, and real wages and consumption decrease considerably.

As the "trade" metaphor replaces the metaphor of "home," economic value itself undergoes a shift. Value which means "worth," derived from *valere*, is redefined as exchange and trade. Unless something is traded it has no economic value. "Home" as the root and metaphor for the economy is substituted by trade as a metaphor for the economy and as a source of economic value.

And with trade being put above production, profits were put above need. To force this decision on people, whose lives and livelihoods were being destroyed by exclusivist values of capitalist patriarchy, a coer-

cive, undemocratic instrument was created. January 1, 1995 started a new era in which globalization is legislated by the World Trade Organisation (WTO). The WTO is armed with the power to adjudicate in international trade relations and enforce the implementation of the Uruguay Round agreement. It replaces the General Agreement of Trade and Tariffs (GATT). Its primary objective is to ensure a free trade environment.

Trade is not new. It is as old as human economic activity itself. International trade also has an ancient history. Even free trade is not a new experiment. It has been tried before. What is today the Third World used to dominate international trade prior to colonialism. "Free-trade" was in fact an important instrument for colonization especially in the South Asian context. The transformation of the East India Company from a trade company to the ruler of colonial India was made possible by a free trade treaty of 1717 called the Faruksheer Firman. Free trade then implied the freedom of the East India Company to have a trade monopoly. Colonialism distorted the terms of trade and the Third World was transformed from being an exporter of manufactured commodities to a supplier of raw material and a market for British manufactures.

Traditionally, GATT Negotiations have centered around those trade issues, practices and disciplines which impinged on the transactions at the international border. They did not concern themselves with policies or transactions which were recognized as falling within the domain of the sovereign economic space of the participating countries. The GATT Uruguay Round changed the situation. The industrialized countries are trying to make GATT the most powerful instrument controlling trade by wanting the term "trade" to include the new areas of intellectual property rights, services, investments and agriculture.

At the first WTO Ministerial Meeting in Singapore, an attempt was made to enlarge the scope of WTO

and define new areas as subject matter for international trade rules. These new issues, called Singapore issues, include investment, competition policy, government procurement and trade facilitation. They have been rejected by the developing countries and were, along with agriculture, the reason for the collapse of trade talks at the Cancun Ministerial in 2003.

What was being contested in Seattle and Cancun was the anti-life, anti-people policies and rules, shaped by capitalist patriarchy, which work for global corporations but against all of nature and most people. Other economies are possible which protect nature and people's rights. These are the alternatives that women have kept alive and defended.

Both religion and globalization can be structures and systems of inclusion or exclusion. Religious and economic systems which are inclusive are also inclusive of women. Religious interpretations and economic policies based on principles of exclusion specifically target women since it is women who are at the center of living economies and living cultures. As systems of exclusion they share the fact that their legitimacy is derived from texts written and interpreted by men in power. Texts become the basis of religious patriarchy and trade treaties such as NAFTA, and the WTO agreements become the basis of globalization in the vision of capitalist patriarchy. And exclusion of women from full participation in social, political and economic life is an important dimension of both religious patriarchy and capitalist patriarchy.

Food production and processing has been primarily a women's economy. Most farmers in India are women. Most food processors are women. When McKinsey and Co., in their report on the wheat economy claimed that only 1% of India's food is processed, they were rendering the 99% food processing economy controlled by women invisible. Now through the rules of trade, the WTO Agreement on Agriculture, and Sanitary and Phyto-Sanitary

laws, women's food economy is being hijacked by corporations such as Cargill and ConAgra. And women are responding to keep the food economy in women's hands.

In 1998, when mustard oil was banned to flood the Indian market with genetically engineered soya oil, women organised as the National Alliance of Women's Food Rights came to the streets to dump soya and continue to use mustard oil.

“Sarson bachao, soyabean bhagao”

(Save the mustard and throw away soyabean)

“Hame accha our saccha sarson tel chahiye”

(We need good and genuine mustard oil)

(Statements of women from basties (slums) in Delhi at a meeting on Food Security on 15 Sep, 1998)

In 1999, when Cargill entered the Indian market, the women's movement organized protests against the hijack of food by global corporations. Women made chapatis outside the Cargill offices in Delhi, and declared that “our bread is our freedom” (Hamari Roti, Hamari Azadi).

The corporate take over of food and agriculture is threatening the survival of producers and of the poor. As corporations take control over seed and imports, costs of production are rising. With the forced removal of import regulations (Quantitative Restrictions - QRs) by the WTO—subsidized products are dumped on the Third World, reducing the already low incomes of producers pushing peasants into debt, and ultimately to suicide. Due to globalization over 20,000 peasants have committed suicide. (Ref: Seeds of Suicide). It is women who are left behind to labor, look after children, and repay debts. At a public hearing on farmers' suicides organised at the Asian Social Forum on 6th Jan 2003, families of farmers committed suicides have narrated their sad stories like how they fell into debt and were struggling for

their livelihood. Some of them even donated their kidneys. Banda Lakshamma, Jiyyedu, Anantpur district, narrated her story that all crops had failed and they fell into debt. The loan amount was 150,000 rupees. They had taken the loan with a hope that they would raise the crops. For the last four years there were no crops at all and they had to purchase seeds and pesticides. When the money lenders started pestering to repay the debt, her husband Narasimhulu drank pesticide which was bought for the crops and died. Narsi Reddy of Guntur district wanted to commit suicide as he could not pay his debts. When he came to know that someone was offering Rs. 50,000 for selling kidney, he decided to sell his kidney. His niece was also willing to sell her kidney. They were brought to New Delhi for operation. But they were cheated. They got only Rs. 40,000 instead of 50,000. He cleared some part of his debts. His health became complicated as the stitches did not heal properly. Ever since he donated the kidney, he cannot work in the farm as laborer. There is pressure from the money lenders to pay back his debts.

And it is women and children who are the worst victims of hunger when the public distribution system is dismantled, food rights are undermined, and grain is allowed to rot while people starve. On 16th August 2001, the *Hindustan Times* reported the death of 8000 children in Nasik in Maharashtra. In 2002, 40 starvation deaths were reported among the Sahariya tribe from Baran district in Rajasthan. In 2002, 30 starvation deaths were reported in Shivpur district of Madhya Pradesh.

In 2001, more than 20 tribals died of starvation in Kashipur district in Orissa. The Tribal Research and Training Institute's report, "Malnutrition Related Deaths of Tribal Children" reported 158 deaths from 143 families in one district of Maharashtra. While hunger related deaths of infants were not recorded before the policies of globalization were introduced, 46.2% of infant deaths in 2001 were related to lack of food.

Privatisation and Commodification of Water

Water was another issue I had raised as a women's issue in *Staying Alive*. The disappearance of water as a result of over-exploitation and pollution immediately translates into a burden for women -- and it is women who have always sounded the alert on the water crisis. But instead of turning to women's solutions to the water crisis, globalization has unleashed a mad rush to privatize and commodify water, and hand it over to global corporations like Suez, Vivendi, Bechtel, Coca Cola and Pepsi.

Women in Maharashtra and Kerala have gone to jail for resisting Coca Cola's theft of their water resources. For nearly two years tribal women have been leading a struggle to shut down a Coca Cola plant in Plachimada which is mining 1.5 million liters per day of ground water. This is "hydropiracy"—and affects women most. From 21st to 23rd January, 2004, we organised a World Water conference to support the local struggle and support a High Court Ruling which ordered Coca Cola to stop mining the ground water and look for alternatives. As the order states "The Public Trust Doctrine" primarily rests on the principle that certain resources like air and sea waters have such a great importance to the people as a whole that it would be wholly unjustified to make them a subject of private ownership. Public at large is the beneficiary of the seashore, running waters, airs, forests and ecologically fragile lands. The state as a trustee is under a legal duty to protect natural resources. These resources meant for public use cannot be converted into private ownership."

After 100,000 people were displaced to build the Tehri dam, in spite of 30 years of resistance, the water reservoir formed by the dam will not serve the public good, but will be privatized by Suez, the world's largest water company, which is building a plant to divert and sell 635 million liters per day of Ganges water to "consumers" of Delhi.

Recently, during a Ganga Yatra which was part of the National Jal Yatra that I undertook with Rajen-

der Singh of Tarun Bharat Sangh, we stopped to meet the women in Tehri. The widows continued to sit in protest even when their homes were destroyed in front of their eyes. In a patriarchal system, the compensation goes to the sons, and the mothers are destitute. The villages around Tehri dam have no water, and all schemes to provide drinking water have been cancelled to let every drop of water flow into the commodified river.

Privatization implies commodification, and when water is reduced to a commodity, women's water rights have no place—only corporate capital has rights. And water starts to flow uphill to money removing every block on the way, the fundamental right to life, culture, ecology, justice, and sustainability. The Doha Declaration of WTO clearly refers to removing all tariff and non-tariff barriers to trade in environmental services, which include water. Kusumji, the organizer of the women's dharna told me about how they had to do a Chipko to save their sacred pipal and bel trees. She accuses the Hindutva forces patriarchal religious fundamentalism of fraud because they have been party to the destruction of 36 ancient temples of Tehri and the Sacred Ganges. We were born in a land where every tree, every river, every life is sacred.

In every village from Tehri to Delhi, people are saying, "the Ganges is not for sale." The slogan of the movement against globalization is "Our world is not for sale." Women were marginalized and subjugated because they sustained life, they provided food and water. These were considered the lesser economies. Today, food and water are at the center stage of the global economy. They are at the "frontier" of privatization and commodification and generation of profits, not life.

The contest that globalization has unleashed is a contest between women-centered world views, knowledge systems and productive systems which ensure sustenance and sharing and patriarchal systems of knowledge and the economy based on war

and violence. Women generate, sustain, and regenerate life. Global patriarchal institutions are unleashing death and destruction by trying to own life, and commodify it. The issues are old, the instruments are new. The paradigms are old, the projects are new. The patriarchal urge to control and own everything free and alive is old, the expressions are new. The ecological and feminist struggle to protect life is ancient, yet contemporary. The epic contest of our times is about "Staying Alive."

When food and water are hijacked by corporations for profits, women's economies and knowledge systems are destroyed—and with women's marginalization is also associated with growing violence against women.

Capitalist patriarchy and religious patriarchy share—

1. Domination of men with religious and economic power over other humans and the earth.
2. Devaluation of women, workers and other beings.
3. Disconnection from the earth, and living cultures and economies.

In this scenario, women fall at the vortex.

The Convergence of Fundamentalisms

Religious patriarchy and capitalist patriarchy have common roots. However, they have conventionally been viewed as opposing forces, with religious patriarchy viewed as "traditions," and capitalist patriarchy viewed as "progress" and "modernity." The emergence of a world order driven by global capital, globalization, is therefore seen as undermining tradition, hence religious patriarchy is often presented as liberating for women. However, what we are witnessing in contemporary times is not a contest between, but convergence of religious patriarchy and capitalist patriarchy in the form of religious fundamentalism and market fundamentalism.

Religion is often opposed to the market. However, when the market itself becomes the ruling religion, and takes on the form of market fundamentalism, it can actually converge with religious fundamentalism. The convergence occurs at multiple levels.

1. Both market fundamentalism and religious fundamentalism make women as human beings disappear. Women are reduced to sex objects or reproductive machines, to be controlled by men in power—either through the market or through invoking of religious texts. Even while there is an apparent “clash of civilizations” a la Huntington, in terms of reducing women to their sexual bodies and controlling women’s bodies, both forms of fundamentalism converge.
2. As market fundamentalism generates economic insecurity, people move to religious fundamentalism as a source of security reinventing “identity” to deal with the culture of insecurity. Right wing ideologies grow in direct proportion to the insecurities generated by deregulated markets.
3. Globalization as market fundamentalism erodes the economic content of democracy. Representative democracy becomes empty of economic content. The vacuum is filled with xenophobic, exclusivist ideologies, disembedded from people’s real securities but offering an illusion of security through fundamentalist religious ideologies.

Religion, which in its embedded, inclusivist, relational form could be a countervailing value system to the excesses of the market becomes part of a vicious cycle of violence and exclusion in its disembedded, exclusivist, disconnected form, supporting disembedded, excluding and polarizing economic systems of globalization.

This convergence is illustrated vividly by three processes:

1. The emergence of female foeticide in market dominated parts of India.
2. Violence against women from minorities under a regime that promotes both religious fundamentalism and market fundamentalism.
3. The mutation of development and democracy under the pressures of both fundamentalisms.

Female Foeticide: The Disappearing Women

Religious patriarchy has institutionalized a bias against women and girls. The prevailing view is that with economic globalization, religious values will be marginalized, and where religious patriarchy is the source of suppression and marginalization of women, women will be liberated. However, the opposite seems to be happening. The patriarchal values of the market combine with anti women values of religious patriarchy, leading to not just marginalization of women but their very dispensability. The growing phenomena of female foeticide in India illustrates how capitalist patriarchy and traditions of religious patriarchy are converging.

The emergence of new reproductive technologies in the form of amniocentesis and ultra sound have enabled families to know the sex of the unborn child, leading to selective abortion of the female fetus.

Discrimination is mutated into dispensability under the pressure of globalization. To the traditional male bias is being added commodification of life itself, and further devaluation of women. Traditional patriarchy and capitalist patriarchy are (population stands at) converging to become a threat to the very survival of women.

India’s population stands at 1.03 billion, and grew at 21.34% between 1991 and 2001. While the population grew, girls were disappearing. There are 36 million fewer females in the population over

the past decade. The child sex ratio is calculated as the number of girls per 1000 boys in the 0-6 years age group. In 1991, the census reported 945 girls per 1000 boys. By 2001 the ratio had fallen to 927. This trend existed earlier, the child sex ratio had dropped from 976 in 1961 to 964 in 1971 and to 962 in 1981.

Year	Sex ratio (0—6)	Variation (points)
1961	.976	
1971	.964	-12
1981	.962	-2
1991	.945	-17
2001	.927	-18

The higher the economic growth and prosperity, the higher is the number of missing girls. In Punjab, Haryana, Delhi and Gujarat, the prosperous North West, the ratio has decline to less than 900 girls per 1000 boys. It has fallen to 770 in Kurukshetra, 814 in Ahmedabad and 845 in South West Delhi. (Missing Census of India, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare & UNFPA, 2003)

If female foeticide was only a result of a traditional bias against women, it would decline as socio-economic changes eroded traditional structures. However, the regions with high economic growth and more rapid “modernization” and integration with the global economy exhibit higher rates of female foeticide and lower child sex ratio.

States with lower economic growth and economic integration such as Kerala, Goa, Sikkim, Mizoram and Tripura have not registered a decline in child sex ratio.

Delhi India’s capital region has the highest literacy rates, highest per-capita income, and also highest violence against women. Literacy has gone up from 75.29% to 81.8%, female literacy increased from 66.91% to 75% during 1991-2000. However, while opportunities in the market place have increased, the hazards have also increased.

As the report “Missing Girls: A Case Study of Delhi” of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare states,

In the 1991 Census count more than 71,000 female infants and children below six years were missing. The 2001 Census brings out the stark fact of Delhi decimating its born and unborn female children. There are now 139,173 fewer females in the age group 0-6 years. The city continues to decimate females at inception, in the womb and currently before conception. The alarm bells were ringing in 1991 and the 2001 census sounds the death knell for the female half of our population. (Missing Girls, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, New Delhi, 2002, p. 1)

Even though there is a law “The Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Act of 1994, new reproductive technologies are being increasingly used for femicide.

Abortion has become a suicidal substitute for getting rid of unwanted pregnancies. Not only the female foetuses are being destroyed but also women resort to repeated abortions which are indicative of their poor control over their own bodies, and their inability to exercise their right to safe sex. To add insult to injury, sex selective abortions are becoming rampant in India especially in it’s relatively more affluent highly gender discriminatory north-western region with acute son preference. (Missing Girls, p.3)

And so called “development” and “growth” has worsened the status of women. In Haryana, with per capita domestic product of Rs. 12,158, there are only 861 women per 1000 men. As Kamlash, a woman activist of the region reports, things have never been so bad:

“Earlier there was guilt about it. Now it is seen as a matter of choice.” (Quoted by Pamela Philipose, *Indian Express*, April 13, 2001)

Modernity and old traditions are forming an unholy alliance against the very right to life of female babies. The emergence of sex detection technologies and increasing incomes to use costly technologies has reinforced the “son complex” instead of weakening it. And sex selection through abortion of the female foetus is becoming the ultimate tool of dispensability of women, not a sign of their liberation. (Darkness at Noon, Mira Shiva and Ashish Bose, VHAI, 2003)

In 1988, in *Staying Alive*, I had observed how the Green Revolution region of Punjab was the place where female foeticide started. This region was also the first to turn amniocentesis into a modern form of female foeticide, by allowing the selective abortion of female fetuses. Between 1978 and 1983, 78,000 female fetuses had been aborted after sex determination tests. The first sex determination clinic was set up in Amritsar in Punjab. People are willing pay up to Rs. 5,000 to be able to get rid of the ‘dispensable sex’. As the practice of dowry spreads across the country, and across classes, the dispensability of the girl child also increases. About 84 per cent of gynaecologists currently perform amniocentesis in Bombay and see it as a ‘human service to women who do not want any more daughters. (R.P. Ravindra, *The Scarcer Half*, Bombay, CED, 1986). The costs of a sex determination test, and selective abortion of female fetuses are lower in terms of cash than the thousands of rupees needed for a girl’s dowry. And in a world dominated increasingly by capitalist patriarchy, cash is the only measure of worth -- of women as of everything else.

The Gujarat Genocide: A Second Partition

In March and April 2002, we were saddened to see more violence on Indian soil. The fundamentalist forces of “Hindutva,” (Hinduness), a pseudo-identity within the Hindu faith, attempted to kill Hinduism as an inclusive and tolerant faith in Gandhi’s own land. They targeted, burnt, and raped Muslims; the same Muslims who had once been friends, neighbors, and associates. Rajmohan Gandhi

has called Hindutva “un-Hindu.” I would go one step further and call it “anti-Hindu.”

This was not the first time, however, that Gujarat had seen such trauma. After the electoral failure of the Muslim league in 1937, violence erupted in Punjab and Bengal. It seems this was not an isolated incident, but a pattern to be repeated: after the BJP’s electoral failure in the regional elections of four states, Gujarat erupted in violence.

When Gandhi had reluctantly and sadly accepted the decision for partition, he said,

This decision puts both our religions on trial. The world is watching us. In the three-quarters of the country that has fallen in our share, Hinduism is going to be tested. If you show the generosity of true Hinduism, you will rise in the eyes of the world. If not, you will have proved Mr. Jinnah’s thesis that Muslims and Hindus are two separate nations, that Hindus forever will be Hindus and Muslims forever Muslims, that the two will never unite, and that the Gods of the two are different. Anders Bjorn Hansen, “Partition and Genocide Manifestation of Violence in Punjab 1937-1947,” India Research Press, New Delhi, 2002, p132)

In 2002, the problems began with the renewed demand to rebuild the Hindu Ram Temple at Ayodhya, where a revered mosque now stood.. After electoral failures of 2002, the temple card seemed a good bet again. Pravin Togadia, the VHP Party international general secretary said on Feb 7 of 2002:

The speedy construction of the Ram temple is the only befitting reply to Islamic terrorism which has shaken the pillars of even the Indian Parliament. It is high time the government banned the *madrassas* in the country as they had been converted into factories manufacturing Islamic militants. (Pravin Togadia, quoted in *The Times of India*)

This was placed geopolitically in the post-September 11 campaign against Islamic terrorism.

The mosque constructed by Babur at Ayodhya 450 years ago by destroying the Ram temple and the September 11 attack on the World Trade Center are symbols of Islamic *jihad*. It is necessary for India, Jews and the Western world to come together and fight Islamic militants. (Ref: "Communalism Combat: Genocide Gujarat 2002 p7)

When the delayed Sabarmati Express, which was carrying as its passengers a group of "kar sewaks" ("temple activists") left Godhra station in Gujarat on February 27, chaos soon broke out. Coach number S6 was burnt by a mob of 2,000. As reported by an independent fact-finding mission,

These tragic communal killings on the Sabarmati Express on February 27th, 2002 were preceded by repeated incidents of provocation and harassment of Muslim passengers by kar sewaks travelling by the train on the preceding days. The Jan Morcha (Faizabad) daily in a report of February 24th detailed instances of misbehavior by kar sewaks who allegedly hit and threatened Muslim passengers with iron rods, insisted that they shout "ai Shri Ram," and forcibly unveiled Muslim women. Many persons in Ahmedabad and Godhra also reported such instances. Since such communally inspired and provocative behavior was commonly known, it is strange that, as the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) in its Interim Report has also observed, no preventive action including a police escort, was taken at the time, in view of the known community charged atmosphere in Godhra. ("Gujrat Carnage: A Report to the Nation," An Independent Fact Finding Mission, p. 5)

In protest to these massacres, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) Party linked to the ruling BJP Party,

announced a *bandh* (civil strike) for the next day. Leaflets were distributed, which linked the carnage to Pakistan. Since Gujarat has a BJP government, their call to close down the state also became a state-sponsored call to violence. Senior officers were ordered to do nothing "which would hurt Hindu sentiments." ("Gujrat Carnage: A Report to the Nation," An Independent Fact Finding Mission, p. 17)

Even sitting Muslim judges of the High Court, like Justice Kadir and a retired judge, Justice A.N. Diwecha, had to leave their own homes in fear of their safety. The discovery of a secret circular by the Gujarat Police, dated February 2, 1999, exposed that they had been collecting details of Muslim households three years before the carnage began. This is an indication that the Gujarat violence was (just) not a spontaneous reaction of anger at the Godhra incident; but that instead it had been preplanned.

A leaflet distributed in Kolol identified Muslim businesses for arson and loot. Just as in Jinnah's declaration a half a century ago—calling for a separate nation for Muslims, saying there could be no Hindu/Muslim unity—the fundamentalist forces of Gujarat echoed the exclusivist agenda. They said Hindus and Muslims could not live together in love and peace.

Those who talk about Hindu-Muslim Harmony, don't they know that the Muslim attackers, right from the day of invasion to this day, have been continuously fighting with the Hindus? Let those who talk about harmony tell the Muslim priests to give back to the Hindus the temples they had destroyed in Ayodhya, Kashi, Mathura and many other places and over which they had built their mosques. Every year, the communal riots are initiated by the Muslim community and when the Hindus retaliate they talk about "good will and harmony." Hindus, who go first to the mosque on the primary peak of Pavaghad and then go to take the 'darshan' of Maha Kali

Mata, now wake up. Now onwards go only to the Hindu temple. ("Gujrat Carnage: A Report to the Nation," An Independent Fact Finding Mission, p. 37)

The diversity and multiplicity of India and Hinduism was, in effect, being reengineered into mutually exclusive monocultures. 10,000 homes and 10,000 shops were burnt and more than 2000 people were killed. ("Communalism Combat: Genocide Gujarat 2002," p. 17 and p. 100)

Women were the worst victims of the Gujarat carnage. A women's fact finding panel reported on hundreds of rapes and killings. The testimonies it records (see below) are chilling reminders of how young men can be trained in violence against women, as part of a political culture which uses the mask of religion for unreligious activities.

.....
Naroda Patia, Ahmedabad, February 28, 2002

The mob started chasing us with burning tyres after we were forced to leave Gangotri society it was then that they raped many girls. We saw about 8-10 rapes. We saw them strip 16-year-old Mehrunissa. They were stripping themselves and beckoning to the girls. Then they raped them right there on the road. We saw a girl's vagina being slit open. Then they were burnt. Now there is no evidence.

Source: Kulsum Bibi, Shah e Alam Camp, March 27, 2002

.....
I saw Farzana being raped by Guddu Chara. Farzana was about 13 years old. She was a resident of Hussain nagar. They put a saria (rod) in Farzana's stomach. She was later burnt. Twelve-year old Noorjahan was also raped. The rapists were Guddu, Suresh and Naresh Chara and Haria. I also saw Bhavani

Singh, who works in the State Transport Department kill 5 men and a boy.

Source: Azharuddin, 13 years. He witnessed the rapes while hiding on the terrace of Gangotri Society. The Chara basti is located just beind Jawan nagar.

.....
The mob, which came from Chara Nagar and Kuber Nagar, started burning people at around 6 in the evening. The mob stripped all the girls of the locality, including my 22-year-old daughter, and raped them. My daughter was engaged to be married. Seven members of my family were burnt including my wife (aged 40), my sons (aged 18, 14 and 7) and my daughters aged 2,4 and 22). My eldest daughter, who later died in the civil hospital, told me that those who raped her were wearing shorts. They hit her on the head and then burnt her. She died of 80% burn injuries.

.....
Sultani, A rape survivor, speaks...
Village Eral, Kalol Taluka, Panchmahals District, February 28, 2002

On the afternoon of February 28 to escape the violent mob, about 40 of us got on to a tempo wanting to escape to Kalol. My husband Feroze was driving the tempo. Just outside Kalol a Maruti car was blocking the road. A mob was lying in wait. Feroze had to swerve. The tempo overturned. As we got out they started attacking us. People started running in all directions. Some from behind and threw me on the ground. Faizan fell from my arms and started crying. My clothes were stripped off by the men and I was left stark naked. One by one the men raped me. All the while I could hear my son crying. I lost count after 3. They then cut my foot with a sharp weapon and left me there in that state.

Following the violence and carnage which occurred in Gujarat, the city is undergoing a redefinition: from a region which is home to Gujarati Hindus and Muslims, to the home of exclusivist, violent, fundamentalist Hindu religion in which Muslims have no place. And as is the case in all conflicts shaped by exclusivist politics, women's bodies became the ground for fighting for false, fundamentalist identities.

It is not just in periods of communal violence that women have been victims in Gujarat. Violence against women is also prevalent in "peace time," especially since the crude commercial culture of globalization has become prevalent. Gujarat has the highest rates of female foeticide and female infanticide. The gender sex ratio in the 0-6 age group has dropped from 928 in 1999 to 878 in 2001; in the areas most badly affected by communal violence, the ratio of females to males is 781 to 734. Violence against women and communal violence show a deep co-relation. (Achut Yagnik, "The Pathology of Gujarat" in the book by Siddharth Varadarajan, *Gujarat: The Making of a Tragedy*, Penguin Books, 2002, p. 414.)

Young boys have been taught to burn, rape and kill in the name of defending "Hindutva." But the carnage of Gujarat did not just kill Muslims—it also killed the compassionate core of Hinduism.

A Jain poet of the 19th century Narmada Shankar had written a poem, "Jay Jay Garvi Gujarat" in which he asked "who does Gujarat belong to?" and answered that it belonged to all who speak Gujarati, all castes, communities, religions and sects. In Gujarat, there should be no sharp division between Hindus and Muslims. Gujarat has the largest number of in between "communities which are both Hindu and Muslim, like the Dawoodi Bohras, the Khojas, Piranas and Aga Khanis. ("The Crisis in Hinduism," *Outlook*, July 8, 2002, p. 62) Being a Gujarati was an identity based on place; an ecological identity based on region, language, food. This

was the Gujarat of Gandhi, a land of compassion and peace. Today, it has surpassed even the first Indian/Pakistani partition in engineered violence and brutalization.

The End of Democracy?

We are currently witnessing the worst expressions of humanity's organized violence against humanity. We are witnessing this because we are losing our grip on philosophies of inclusion, compassion and solidarity. This is the highest cost of globalization -- it is destroying our very capacity to be human. Rediscovering our humanity is the highest imperative to resist and reverse this inhuman project. The debate over globalization is not fundamentally about the market or the economy. It is about remembering our common humanity—and about the danger of forgetting the meaning of being human.

Before the December 2003 elections in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Delhi and Chattisgarh, BSP stood for the Dalit politics of the Bahujan Samaj Party which helped the Dalit leader Mayawati rise to become Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh. The assembly elections of 2003 changed the meaning and reference of BSP beyond recognition—it now stands for Bijli, Sadak, Pani (Electricity, Roads and Water), the election campaign slogan of the BJP. With national elections scheduled in a few months time, we can expect the BSP strategy to be a major electoral spin. The hijack of BSP is a brilliant move on the part of the BJP strategists and think tank—Not only has Mayawati been robbed of her dalit identity and social justice platform, the agenda of globalization and privatisation which is leading to underdevelopment has been packaged as "development" for innocent voters. Just as the west transformed the anti-development trade liberalization formula of "free trade" into the "Doha Development Round," the BJP has packaged the priorities of privatisation as the "development" agenda for elections. It possible to call anything and everything "development" because as we have said in the

“Development Dictionary” (editor Wolfgang Sachs), development is an amoeba world which can take on any meaning—it can refer to self determined evolution (the original meaning in biology), it can refer to programmes of poverty alleviation and basic needs satisfaction (garibi hatoa or soft development) it can refer to globalization and privatisation (as in the Doha ministerial and now in the assembly elections). Soft development is people responsive and inclusive, hard development is excluding and renders people dispensable. “BSP” development is about highways and dams, and not people.

During the 1990s, even while economic globalization was creating deeper economic insecurity for the peasants, the tribals and the workers, elections were fought by the BHP on the “Hindutva” agenda. The Congress Party won in the last assembly elections (the “onion” elections) because it addressed the issue of food prices and kept basic needs in focus. These are people’s development issues. The BJP has not only hijacked “BSP” from Mayawati, it has hijacked economic issues and development from the Congress. And it has shifted economics from economic justice and economic democracy to economic globalization and trade liberalization. This is evident in the way the issues that have been prioritised are not the survival issues of the poorest and most marginalized—they are the hottest items on the corporate privatisation agenda power, highways and water. While disconnecting people from their resources and rights, these globalization priorities are couched in the new jargon of connectivity.

There is a real crisis of livelihoods and basic needs facing the people of India. The thousands of farm suicides and starvation deaths are symptoms of a deepening crisis in food and agriculture. A basic needs slogan should have focused on “Roji-Roti” (livelihoods and food) or the old “roti-kapda aur makan.” But this was neither addressed by BJP or Congress. The BJP conveniently substituted peoples development agenda by the World Bank “development”

agenda of economic reforms, with a focus on privatisation of services such as water and electricity, and privatisation of infrastructure such as the “golden quadrangle” highway project.

In one stroke, BSP has neutralized not just the dalit politics of Mayawati, it has neutralized the basic need struggles of the poor by replacing their survival needs with the priorities of globalization and privatisation of corporations and contractors. Bijli, Sadak and Pani are high on the privatisation agenda of the World Bank and World Trade Organisation. By announcing these as electoral priorities, the BJP has succeeded in selling the anti people economic reforms as “development” and corporate greed as basic needs. Electoral democracy has been mobilized for the anti-democratic agenda of globalization.

Not only does the BSP agenda of the BJP subvert the opposition based on politics of exclusion, it also subverts the political opposition to globalization policies driving economic reforms. But it does more. It is brilliant attempt to rewrite the culture of India, its imagination and its metaphors and reshape its geography. It is a refashioning of the very cosmology of our existence.

The BJP rose to power on the “Hindutva” plank. Hindutva like development has different connotations. It can mean the indigenous traditions of India, “the land beyond the Indus” (“Bharityata” or “soft Hindutva” as Prime Minister Vajpayee presented in his Goa Musings). It could also mean exclusion—an India in which minorities are reduced to being second citizens (the Modi version of Hard Hindutva in Gujarat). The Hindutva agenda was not used by the BJP in the assembly elections. The elections were won on BSP—hard development. The two agendas are however not separate and different. Both are based on the ideology of exclusion. In fact, the ideology of hard Hindutva and the ideology of market driven development are a convergence of fundamentalisms—one based on religion as political ideology, the other based on the market as the new religion. Common

to both is the stifling of nature and cultural diversity. Common to both is the exile of the sacred and of reverence for life. If hard Hindutva excludes religious minorities from the benefits of a shared soft development, hard development excludes women, tribals, peasants, children from their fundamental rights to land and biodiversity, food and water. Both use violence as a means to implement their exclusivist agendas. Both destroy democracy and diversity. Given the World Bank structural adjustment conditionalities, and the pressures of globalization, BSP is not a democratically chosen priority of the poor, but an externally imposed agenda for rapid privatization of our electricity, roads and water. Not only does this marginalize the more basic issues of poverty, hunger, landlessness, indebtedness and unemployment, it substitutes the people's economic agenda with a corporate agenda. "BSP" is the agenda of the Enron, Reliance and Tata, Bechtel, L&T, Suez and Vivendi. IT is not the priority of women, tribals, dalits, peasants and unemployed youth. While parading as "development," BSP is leading to underdevelopment of communities displaced by the new power plants, highways, dams and canals. 'B' will mean more Dabhols, 'S' will mean more Dubeys, 'P' will mean more dams and canals as proposed in the River Linking Project.

An India reduced to power plants, highways and dams is an India that has lost its soul—it is an India that will destroy its self consciousness of an "Aranya-Sanskriti"—of living in peace with nature and diverse cultures. BSP is a declaration of war against nature and local communities. It will drown India's land and rivers under concrete, while uprooting her tribals and peasants. A BSP vision is based on corporate greed and political corruption. It is a dream project for "Contractor Raj" as tragically highlighted by the murder of Mr. Dubey working on the Golden Quadrangle Project and the scandals around the Taj express. What is common to Bijli, Sadak and Paani is the globalization induced idea of "connectivity"—"connectivity" of a national electricity grid, "connectivity" of a super highway network, "con-

nectivity" of linked rivers. However, hiding behind the "connectivity" image are disconnections. "Bijli" has already disconnected us from renewable sources such as biomass. The shift from "energy" to "electricity" is both a disconnection with indigenous meanings of energy and indigenous sources of energy. It is also a disconnection of people from their land as they are uprooted from their homelands to make way for power plants as in Dabhol for the Enron plant, which was a failure.

Highways connect goods to global markets, but disconnect the village through which it cuts through and cut down the ancient trees which have lived in our roads offering shade to travelers. Disconnecting us also from other mobilities and connectivities that are more eco-friendly and people friendly—the bicycle, the bullock cart. It disconnects families and communities as fences come up to protect highways and automobiles from people and cattle. The connectivity of the super highway substitutes the sacred cow as the keystone species of sacred geography with the sacred car as the core of modern mobility and its related estrangement from being and belonging. The economy of renewability is symbolized in the sacred cow, especially its contribution to animal energy and biomass energy. That is why cattle are worshipped on Mattu Pongal and cowdung is worshipped on "goburdhun pooja." It is the cow's gift of renewable energy which is the renewable basis of life.

The sacred car and the super highways that become the altar for its gift of mobility also bring the costs of CO₂ pollution and climate change which has already started to threaten life.

The River Linking Project disconnects rivers from their basins—and the ecologies and cultures that have evolved with the river. It links river waters to other basins but delinks people from their rivers, and from each other, as mega diversions become sources of river conflicts. The river linking project disconnects us from the culture of the sacred river, and becomes the mechanism of thinking of rivers as carriers of just

another commodity—water—to be dammed and diverted, bought and sold to the highest bidder. In the worldview of river linking Bhagirath and his “tapasya” (penance) disappear, the divinity of our rivers disappears. Bhagirath is substituted by Suez and Bechtel, rivers as mother goddesses give way to water as a commodity.

In the “connectivity” of BSP, government projects get intimately “connected” to the designs of World Bank and WTO, politicians get intimately “connected” to the corporations which bribe them for “deals,” and India’s natural resources get connected to the global market as environmental subsidies.

But the price is a disconnection with democracy and sustainability, people and communities, nature and ecology, indigenous cultures and social cohesion. Will our rich civilization, will the dreams of a billion Indians be buried under highways and dams for corporate profits? Or will the people of India and political parties provide creative and robust alternatives to BSP—alternatives that respect peoples rights and natures limits and protect our natural and cultural heritage, recognize the subtle and delicate fabric we have women over millenniums between nature and people to ensure livelihoods for millions of people, not millions of dollars of profits to a few corporations. Gandhi had reminded us that the earth has enough for everyone’s needs, but not enough for a few people’s greed. BSP is an attempt to redefine corporate greed as people’s needs. It is time for India’s silent majority to find its voice to shape the future on the basis of our distinctive civilization values of conservation and compassion. India’s soul cannot be petrified in concrete graves. India needs to rise in the world view of “Vasudhaiv Kutumbakam”—the earth as family—giving space to every member, excluding none. Exclusivist hard Hindutva and exclusivist hard development both threaten India’s composite culture and ecological foundation. We need visions and dreams based on inclusion. Highways and dams and electric grids won’t get us there.

Women as Guardians and Promoters of Life Centered Cultures

Globalization is redefining the very status and understanding of creation. Corporations like Monsanto pirate and patent the qualities of ancient India’s wheat and become “creators” and “inventors” of plants. Corporations like Suez and Vivendi and Coke refer to water in rivers, and in underground rivers as “raw” material, and the water they package and sell as a “manufacture” and their production.

Capitalist patriarchy thus defines creation and nature as raw material, and acts of domination, destruction and exploitation as acts of creation. In science and technology this patriarchal myth of creation has led to patents on life and laws like the TRIPS agreement of WTO. In the economic sphere, patriarchal values have led to destruction of household and local economies, and entire ecosystems. The destruction is counted as “growth.” Dispensability is interpreted as liberation.

What happened in the Iraq war was destruction. It is being referred to as reconstruction. Innocent people were killed, thousands of years of civilization history was destroyed and erased. Yet, Jay Garner - the retired U.S. General appointed unilaterally as head of office for Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance, talked about “giving birth to a new system in Iraq.” Bombs do not give “birth” to society. They annihilate life. New societies are not “born” by destroying the historical and cultural legacy of ancient civilizations. Maybe the choice to allow destruction of Iraq’s historical legacy was a pre-requisite for this illusion of giving “birth” to a new society.

Maybe the rulers in U.S. do not perceive these violations because their own society was built on the genocide of Native Americans. Annihilation of the “other” seems to be taken as “natural” by those controlling power in the world’s lone super power. Maybe the perception of the deliberate destruction

of a civilization and thousands of innocent lives as a “birthing” process is an expression of the western patriarchy’s “illusion of creation” which confuses destruction with creation and annihilation with birthing. The “illusion of creation” identifies capital and machines, including war machines as sources of “creation” and nature and human societies, especially non-western societies as dead, inert, passive, or dangerous and cannibalistic. This worldview creates the “white man’s burden” for liberating nature and our societies even with violence, and seeing it as the “birth” of freedom.

Religion which recognizes the integrity of creation and the sanctity of life is a source of resistance to this destruction of globalization and the violence of capitalist patriarchy organised on a world scale. And while men in power redefine religion on fundamentalist terms in support of market fundamentalism, women in diverse cultures mobilize their faith, their spirituality, their power to protect the earth, and life on earth.

In spite of being subjugated by the double burden of religious and capitalist patriarchy, women are emerging as leaders and guardians of life centered cultures, economies and policies. Movements to defend water are being led by women. Movements to defend biodiversity are being led by women. Movements for food and water rights are being led by women. While overcoming their marginalization, women are emerging as guardians of life and the future.

Women farmers have been the seed keepers and seed breeders over millennia. The basmati is just one among 100,000 varieties of rice evolved by Indian farmers. Diversity and perennality is our culture of the seed. In Central India, which is the Vavilov Centre of rice diversity, at the beginning of the agricultural season, farmers gather at the village deity, offer their rice varieties and then share the seeds. This annual festival of “Akti” rejuvenates the duty of saving and sharing seed among farming communities. It establishes partnership among farmers and with the earth.

IPRs (intellectual property rights) on seeds are, however, criminalizing this duty to the earth and to each other by making seed saving and seed exchange illegal. The attempt to prevent farmers from saving seed is not just being made through new IPR laws, but also utilizing the new genetic engineering technologies. Delta and Pine Land (now owned by Monsanto) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) have established new partnership through a jointly held patent (No. 5723785) to a seed which has been genetically engineered to ensure that it does not germinate on harvest thus forcing farmers to buy seed at each planting season. Termination of germination is a means for capital accumulation and market expansion. However, abundance in nature and for farmers shrinks as markets grow for Monsanto. When we sow seed, we pray, “May this seed be exhaustless.” Monsanto and the USDA on the other hand are stating, “Let this seed be terminated so that our profits and monopoly is exhaustless.”

There can be no partnership between the terminator logic which destroys nature’s renewability and regeneration and the commitment to continuity of life held by women farmers of the Third World. The two worldviews do not merely clash - they are mutually exclusive. There can be no partnership between a logic of death on which Monsanto bases its expanding empire and the logic of life on which women farmers in the Third World base their partnership with the earth to provide food security to their families and communities.

There are other dimensions of the mutually exclusive interests and perspectives of women farmers of the Third World and biotechnology corporations such as Monsanto. The most widespread application of genetic engineering in agriculture is herbicide resistance i.e. the breeding of crops to be resistant to herbicides. Monsanto’s Round up Read Soya and Cotton are examples of this application. When introduced to Third World farming systems, this will lead to increased use of agri-chemicals thus increas-

ing environmental problems. It will also destroy the biodiversity that is the sustenance and livelihood base of rural women. What are weeds for Monsanto are food, fodder and medicine for Third World women.

In Indian agriculture women use 150 different species of plants for vegetables, fodder and health care. In West Bengal 124 “weed” species collected from rice fields have economic importance for farmers. In the Expana region of Veracruz, Mexico, peasants utilize about 435 wild plant species, of which 229 are eaten.

The spread of Round Up Ready crops would destroy this diversity and the value it provides to farmers. It would also undermine the soil conservation functions of cover crops and crop mixtures, thus leading to accelerated soil erosion. Contrary to Monsanto's myths, Round Up Ready crops are a recipe for soil erosion, not a method for soil conservation.

Instead of falsely labeling the patriarchal projects of intellectual property rights on seed and genetic engineering in agriculture which are destroying biodiversity and the small farmers of the Third World as “partnership” with Third World women, it would be more fruitful to redirect agricultural policy towards women-centered systems which promote biodiversity based small farm agriculture.

A common myth used by Monsanto and the Biotechnology industry is that without genetic engineering, the world cannot be fed. However, while biotechnology is projected as increasing food production four times, small ecological farms have productivity hundreds of times higher than large industrial farms based on conventional farms.

Women farmers in the Third World are predominantly small farmers. They provide the basis of food security, and they provide food security in partnership with other species. The partnership between women and biodiversity has kept the world fed

through history, at present, and will feed the world in the future. It is this partnership that needs to be preserved and promoted to ensure food security.

Agriculture based on diversity, decentralization and improving small farm productivity through ecological methods is a women-centred, nature friendly agriculture. In this women-centered agriculture, knowledge is shared, other species and plants are kin, not “property,” and sustainability is based on renewal of the earth's fertility and renewal and regeneration of biodiversity and species richness on farms to provide internal inputs. In our paradigms, there is no place for monocultures of genetically engineered crops and IPR monopolies on seeds.

Monocultures and monopolies symbolize a masculinization of agriculture. The war mentality underlying military-industrial agriculture is evident from the names given to herbicides which destroy the economic basis of the survival of the poorest women in the rural areas of the Third World. Monsanto's herbicides are called “Round up,” “Machete,” “Lasso.” American Home Products which has merged with Monsanto calls its herbicides ‘Pentagon,’ ‘Prowl,’ ‘Scepter,’ ‘Squadron,’ ‘Cadre,’ ‘Lightening,’ ‘Assert,’ ‘Avenge.’ This is the language of war, not sustainability. Sustainability is based on peace with the earth.

The violence intrinsic to methods and metaphors used by the global agribusiness and biotechnology corporations is violence against nature's biodiversity and women's expertise and productivity. The violence intrinsic to destruction of diversity through monocultures and the destruction of the freedom to save and exchange seeds through IPR monopolies is inconsistent with women's diverse non-violent ways of knowing nature and providing food security. This diversity of knowledge systems and production systems is the way forward for ensuring that Third World women continue to play a central role as knowers, producers and providers of food.

Genetic Engineering and IPRs will rob Third World women and their creativity, innovation and decision making power in agriculture. In place of women deciding what is grown in fields and served in kitchens, agriculture based on globalization, genetic engineering and corporate monopolies on seeds will establish a food system and worldview in which men controlling global corporations control what is grown in our fields and what we eat. Corporate men investing financial capital in theft and biopiracy will present themselves as creators and owners of life.

We do not want a partnership in this violent usurpation of the creativity of creation and Third World women by global technology corporations who call themselves the “Life Sciences Industry” even while they push millions of species and millions of small farmers to extinction.

If in the seventies and eighties, women’s knowledge was ignored, in the nineties it has been pirated and patented. The new intellectual property rights enforced by the TRIPS (Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights) Agreement of WTO has enabled powerful corporations and countries to claim patents on life—sheep, cows, cells, genes, seeds, plants. The cloned sheep Dolly was on every newspaper and magazine cover as “created” by her “creator”—Ian Wilmut. No mention was made of her 272 “sisters” who had to be killed because of deformities. And when Dolly herself had to be put to sleep because her health problems kept increasing, her death, contrary to her birth, went unnoticed. The successes of patriarchal science are glorified. Man is put in the position of the creator. And when experiments fail, there is no news, no responsibility, no accountability, no assessment. The patriarchal myth of creation also justifies patents on life and biopiracy. For ten years, I fought the false claim of the U.S. Department of Agriculture and W.R. Grace that they had “invented” the use of Neem as a fungicide. In May 2000, the challenge filed by the Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Ecology (RFSTE) and the International Federation of Organic Agricul-

ture movements (IFOAM) was successful in revoking the Neem patent - (no. 0436257 BT)

Patent number 5663484, issued by the US Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) on September 2, 1997 demonstrates how broad a patent can be:

The invention relates to novel rice lines and to plants and grains of these lines and to a method for breeding these lines. The invention also relates to a novel means for determining the cooking and starch properties of rice grains and its use in identifying desirable rice lines.

Specifically, one aspect of the invention relates to novel rice lines whose plants are semi-dwarf in stature, substantially photo-period insensitive and high yielding, and produce rice grains having characteristics similar or superior to those of good quality Basmati rice. Another aspect of the invention relates to novel rice grains produced for novel rice lines. The invention provides a method for breeding these novel rice lines.

Patent No. 5663484 is based on three forms of piracy.

- The piracy of unique cultural heritage embodied in the name of Basmati.
- The economic piracy of export markets from farmers and countries who have evolved this unique aromatic rice (claim 4,15,16,17)
- The piracy of farmers innovation and nature’s creativity in the claim of inventing a novel rice line (claims 1,5,6,7,8,9,10, 11,12, 13,14,18, 19, 20)

The Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Ecology along with others filed a case in public interest in the Supreme Court of India on 4th March 1998 seeking the court’s direction to urge the Government of India to challenge the patent at the

USPTO primarily on the grounds that the patent by the foreign company is in violation of sovereign rights of our country which include the indigenous and inherent knowledge systems of our farmers.

In the same year, the campaign against the Basmati patent was started with widespread protests in India. A memorandum on behalf of people's organizations against the Basmati Patent was sent to the US Ambassador to India in New Delhi. However, at this stage, the Government of India chose not to take any action in the matter.

The citizens' movement against RiceTec had an impact and as a result of the global citizens' pressure, on 27th March 2001 the USPTO initiated full re-examination of RiceTec Patent and sent a 46 page letter to the Rice Tec's representatives rejecting all but three of the remaining 16 claims.

We won the Basmati biopiracy battle, though the war for defense of farmer rights, indigenous knowledge and biodiversity still needs to be won. And this victory has been based more on citizens' actions than government action. And Indians in solidarity with the people worldwide succeeded in freeing the Indian Basmati from the clutches of monopoly, colonialism and seed terrorism of corporations.

The latest biopiracy we have had to fight is a patent taken by Monsanto (Patent No. EP 0445929 B1) on an ancient Indian wheat variety and products made from it. Once again women's productive and creative capacities are being hijacked. On 27th January, 2004, I was at the European Patent Office to challenge the Monsanto Wheat Patent.

Navdanya, the movement to keep seeds in women's hands and knowledge as a community resource was founded to resist patents and seed monopolies. Today, many groups are involved as off shoots of Navdanya—seeds are being saved and exchanged, farmers breeding, especially women's contributions, are now recognized, and even while global corpo-

rations seek to monopolize living diversity, communities are getting organized to keep seed and knowledge free.

Women Say "No" to Hydro-piracy in Kerala, India

In a little village of Plachimada, tribal women took on the soft drink giant—Coca Cola and are succeeding in their struggle to shutdown the plant. The Coca Plant in Plachimada was started to produce Coke, Fanta, Sprite, Limca, Thumps Up, Kinley and Maaja and within a year, the water table had started to fall, as bore wells extracted 1.5 million liters per day according to the local community.

Not only did the water table decline, the water was also polluted. Women had to walk miles to get drinking water. They decided to end cokes' hydro-piracy by starting a protest outside the gates of the plant. To celebrate a year of their resistance, the local movement invited me for Earth Day 2003. In April 2004 the women's protest will complete 2 years. Women saying "no" to Coke, and "yes" to "Water, The Only Real Thing" is an expression of our living democracy. A direct and vibrant democracy for life.

Since then, the movement has spread. The locally elected Panchayat has spearheaded a legal campaign. The local community related that the Panchayat has issued a conditional license for installing a motor for drawing water. However the company started to daily extract illegally lakhs (100,000s) of liters of clean water from more than 6 bore wells installed by it using electric pumps in order to manufacture lakhs of liters of soft drink. The company is also pumping wastewater into dry bore wells within the company premises for disposing solid waste. Earlier it was depositing the waste material outside the company premises which during the rainy season spread into paddy fields, canals and wells, causing serious health hazards. As a result of this, 260 bore wells which were provided by public authorities for drinking water and agriculture facilities have become dry. Complaints are also being received from tribals and common people

that storage of water and sources of water are being adversely affected by indiscriminate installation of bore wells for tapping ground water leading to serious consequences as regards cultivation in the area on which residents of the Panchayat depend on their living—e.g. maintenance of traditional drinking water sources, preservation of ponds and water tanks, maintenance of waterways and canals and shortage of drinking water. When the Panchayat asked for details, the company failed to comply. The Panchayat therefore served a show cause notice and cancelled the license.

The Perumatty Panchayat also filed a public interest litigation in the Kerala High Court against Coca Cola. The court supported the women’s demands and in an order given on December 16, 2003, Justice Balakrishna Nair ordered Coca Cola to stop pirating Plachimada’s waters. The court’s judgment is a vindication of the women’s movement against Coke. From 21st to 23rd January, 2004, a World Water Conference was organized in Plachimada to celebrate the legal victory and to continue the solidarity for the struggle till the Plachimada Plant is closed.

Earth Democracy : Re-embedding Religion and Economy in Life.

Gender inequality and women’s exclusion and dispensability arise from systems of patriarchy organised through religion or economic and political systems which give primacy to men in power over women, most humans, and all living beings. Disembeddness from life and living processes enables anti-life systems to become dominant. Gender equity requires seeing women in their full humanity—as producers and creators, as custodians of culture, as political decision makers, as spiritual beings. Women’s full humanity brings concern back to life. It becomes the healing force to break the vicious cycles of violence based on treating the inhumanity of man as the measure of being human, of greed as the organizing principle of the economy, of genocide and suicide as the expression of religious fervor. Underlying the exclusivist

philosophies of the fundamentalist market ideology or religious ideology is the polarization of identity. In Indian philosophy, we think in terms of “so-hum”—“you are, therefore I am.”

Fundamentalisms, however, function on the belief “If you are, I am not” or “My being requires your annihilation.” As mentioned earlier, Samuel Huntington’s “Clash of civilizations” is based on this paradigm of mutual exclusion, hence mutual annihilation which he presents as follows:

“One grim weltanschauung for this new era was well expressed by the Venetian nationalist demagogue in Michael Dibdin’s novel, *Dead Lagoon* “There can be no(t) true friends without true enemies. Unless we hate what we are not, we cannot love what we are. These are the old truths we are painfully rediscovering after a century and more of sentimental cant. Those who deny them deny their family, their heritage, their culture, their birth right, their very selves” (Page 20, Huntington, *Clash of civilizations*).

However, the old truths of ancient religions teach connection and inclusion, not separation or exclusion. A sample of teachings compiled by the Interfaith Coalition for Peace and Justice shows in the following, how loving the other is the very basis of religion.

.....

We are people of many faiths, drawn together by our deep concern for the safety, justice and peace of people of the world. We believe that violence is morally and spiritually wrong and are committed to nonviolent solutions to global injustice and conflict.

We believe that war increases the cycle of hatred, claims innocent lives, and distracts us from the work of ending poverty and injustice at home and abroad. We will not bless war, we will work passionately for peace. Deeply aware of our shared humanity and spiritual

unity with all peoples, and in accordance with the democratic values of our country, we dedicate our actions to building a culture of peace, eradicating poverty, guarding human rights, and working under international law. We will speak up publicly for our beliefs, guided by moral principles. We will seek courage and guidance from our religious traditions and from solidarity with one another in pursuit of equitable and non-violent solutions to conflict.

Let us be united; Let us speak in harmony; Let our minds apprehend alike; Common be our prayer; Alike be our feelings; unified be our hearts; perfect be our unity. ~*Rig Veda*

There exists something which is prior to all beginnings and endings. Which, unmoved and unmanifested, itself neither begins nor ends. All pervasive and inexhaustible, it is the perpetual source of everything else. In this and such as this, all are one in one another. ~*Tao The Ching*

They shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they fear war no more. ~*Isaiah*

Just as a mother would protect her only child, even at risk of her own life, even so let one cultivate a boundless heart toward all beings. ~*Shakya-muni Buddha*

But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you, and persecute you. ~*Matthew*

It is the servants of the all-merciful Lord who go about the earth in modesty and who answer: "Peace" when accosted by those who talk to them rudely. ~*Holy Qur'an*

Lord make me an instrument of Thy peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is sadness, joy; where there is darkness, light. ~*St. Francis of Assisi*

Creator made us whole: we are one being. There is no separation except in our thinking. So... to open to the truth, is to know that we are connected and able to communicate with, and be in harmony with, all things in the circle of life. ~*Brooke Medicine Eagle; Crow Indian Tribe*

A human being is part of a whole, called by us "universe," a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings, as something separate from the rest - a kind of optical delusion of consciousness. This delusion is a prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons around us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature and its beauty. ~*Albert Einstein*

It is true that there are devout believers in nonviolence who find it difficult to believe in a personal God. But even these persons believe in the existence of some creative force that works for universal wholeness. Whether we call it an unconscious process, and impersonal Brahman, or a personal Being of matchless power and infinite love, there is a creative force in this universe that works to bring the disconnected aspects of reality into a harmonious whole. ~*Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.*

“We still have a choice today; non violent co-existence or violent co-annihilation.”

~Dr. Martin Luther King

Humanity is at a cross roads in terms of where our sense of self our identity will be derived from. Will human identity be derived from the world constructed by patriarchy—a world in which religious fundamentalisms put every religion and culture in a “clash of civilizations” and market fundamentalism which throws every human being in competition for survival in a market place for labour, a market place for food and water, and everything that is abundant is turned into scarcity? A world driven by the fundamentalisms of patriarchies is a world of violence against women, because women’s bodies become the ultimate ground for wars between religions, and the ultimate commodity, in the rule of the market.

Women are the most affected by both religious patriarchy and capitalist patriarchy. Women are potential sources of alternatives to the religious fundamentalism and market fundamentalism because they have been the practitioners of other forms of religion and other forms of economic organization. Non violent religions and non-violent economies can reinforce each other in contributing to gender equity by contributing equity in term.

Patriarchy and fundamentalism, whether of religion or the market, share certain features.

1. They are shaped by arbitrary rules created by men in power.
2. These rules are imposed through violence and coercion and are designed to increase the power of those who make the rules.

There are other rules, other values which are possible. Rules based on inclusion and equity, on reverence for life and non-violence, for diversity and plurality, and for spirituality and ecology.

Religions which promote gender equity also promote economic justice and class equity. Religions which protect the dignity and freedom of women also protect the dignity and freedom and intrinsic value of all species. Real religious practice as spiritual practice needs no priests, hence no patriarchs. As the Koran says: “In Islam there are no priests” and Mira Bai, an Indian saint, created a “bhakti” movement bypassing the brahmins and the priestly class. Without priests as middlemen, religion becomes accessible to women, to be interpreted in their terms and their terms relate to life. Deep religious focus on divinity, no violence against the other. And divinity and the feminine go hand in hand. Women’s spirituality focuses on the sanctity of life. And the sacred is the ground for resisting the commodification of life by capitalist patriarchy through corporate globalization. The sanctity of and integrity of creation is the ethical ground for resistance to patents on life and the TRIPS agreement which disenfranchise women of knowledge.

The sacredness of water, of seeing our rivers as divine mothers, is the ground for resisting privatisation and commodification of water which robs poor women of access to water. The sacredness of food of being a gift of Annapurna is ground for finding alternatives to iniquitous and hazardous food systems which are pushing more people to poverty and hunger, and condemning everyone to unsafe food.

My own evolution as an ecologist has been inspired by grassroots women’s movements which mobilized to protect nature and their lives from the devastation of commercial activities. In the 1970’s, women peasants of the Himalaya launched the Chipko movement (hugging the tress movement) to stop logging by calling the forest their sacred mother. The movements against Tehri Dam and Narmada dam have been inspired by the sacred geography of the rivers Ganges and Narmada. And the movements to save seeds have often referred to seeds as sacred.

The recovery of the sacred can become the source of gender equity by transforming the categories and

concepts underlying both religious patriarchy and capitalist patriarchy which justify the domination of and violence against women. Bringing the focus back to the sacred and feminine in religion helps create the conditions of non-violence because the sacred invokes reverence for life, and the sacred distributes power through creation, instead of allowing it to be controlled by mullahs and priests and right wing ideology who justify killing in the name of God. Bringing the sacred into our material lives can help heal the excesses of globalization—sacred values remind us that market values are not the only measure of life, and by focusing on the value of life rather than profits, the sacred shifts power from men who control the military-industrial complex and destroy life, to women who work to maintain, renew and regenerate life. The remaking of religion and of globalization for gender equity rests on bringing life to the center of concern—the life of all people, including women, and the life of all beings. This remaking is giving shape to “Earth Democracy.”

World Religions and the 1994 United Nations International Conference on Population and Development*

A Report on an International and Interfaith Consultation

In anticipation of the United Nations International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) to be held in Cairo, Egypt, September 5–13, 1994, thirty thinkers from the world’s major religious traditions held an international and interfaith consultation in Genval, Belgium, in May 1994. The consultation was held in the belief that the world’s religions could make a fruitful contribution to reflection on the themes, rationales, objectives, and recommendations of the ICPD’s proposed “Programme of Action.” Participants reached a significant measure of consensus on several important items. This report will be forwarded to the Cairo delegates and representatives of nongovernmental organizations, the religious communities (in order to aid their own study), and the world press.

Only a few conferees were officials of their religious communities and thus bound to put forward an official position. Most were religious thinkers in the mainstream of their traditions. All were asked to describe and explain the official stance as well as the diverse contexts, mores, and positions represented within those faiths. Some expressed personal dissent from an official position of their tradition; others noted the extent to which the stances and practices of followers differ from authoritative teachings. Each knew, however, that the readers of this document would be ill served unless both the authorized position and the range of opinions and practices of their respective faith traditions were depicted. To reflect that diversity of perspective within and among the faiths the term religious communities is often used in this document.

* A declaration approved unanimously by the participants at the meeting of *World Religions and the 1994 United Nations International Conference on Population and Development* convened by The Park Ridge Center for the Study of Health, Faith, and Ethics with the cooperation of The International Forum for Biophilosophy in Genval, Belgium, from May 4 – May 7, 1994.

Preface

The religious communities of the world have a large investment in issues connected with the words *population and development*. All would explain that the root of that concern lies in a witness to what is sacred. This is usually understood as something that transcends, that goes beyond, the bounds of ordinary human and natural existence. Most people of faith focus their witness on God or gods and thus describe their relationship to what is sacred in explicitly theistic language, while millions of others refer to what is sacred and their connection to it in more generalized, nontheistic terms. All are concerned to relate this religious dimension to the created order.

With such profound, religiously charged human concerns like population and development at stake, many believers feel compelled to offer religiously informed perspectives on these issues, and some attempt to persuade others to accept their point of view. Sometimes their sense of responsibility and commitment to their religious vision is so strong that they may seek to impose their beliefs on others. At their best, however, people of faith find occasion to address social crises by thinking and acting together, fully aware that no one religion, segment of a religion, or cluster of religions is to be privileged or to have dominance in the family of religious communions or in public debate. Further, they look for opportunities to work with people of goodwill who profess no explicit faith and do not consider themselves to be religious but pursue shared goals on other grounds.

The gathering in Belgium was not intended to make a contribution to the theory of interreligious dialogue. Instead, the intent was practical: to articulate the interests and witness of religious communities on the themes of the ICPD and to seek points of convergence on these urgent issues. The measure of consensus reached does not represent any kind of agreement in detail within or among religious communities. It does, however, provide a positive counterpoint to media accounts that have emphasized a few notable cases of religious opposition to the ICPD agenda and particular items on that agenda.

Recognizing and respecting the great diversity in religious beliefs and practices, the participants nonetheless affirmed that the faiths share a regard for human persons both as individuals and in communities. This regard includes but also surpasses mere biological existence: it encompasses the health and well-being of persons, their quality of life, and their dignity, rights, and equality in the context of society and culture. Underlying these concerns is a belief that persons have inherent value and are not to be treated as objects, as instruments for other purposes. The ICPD provides an apt occasion, as people across the globe think and speak and work together, to assess and renew religious commitments to this fuller understanding of the human person.

It should be noted that if there were massive opposition from all religions, the ICPD would probably fail in implementing any program, no matter how impressive its statistics, how

scientific its arguments, or how rational its proposed solutions. Religions, in other words, can have a powerful influence in guiding human thought and behavior.

Most religious believers and communities who are informed about the ICPD “Programme of Action,” however, have already given it significant support. Others, for principled reasons, oppose some of the proposals. What impressed conferees at the Genval meeting was the surprising number of themes on which there was convergence in the assessments of the ICPD recommendations and religious responses to them.

Findings

1. On freedom of religion and conscience, and the role of religious communities in international debate on public policy.

Any talk about controversial international issues must include discussion of freedom of religion and even freedom from religion and religions. The ICPD, of course, cannot and should not reach into particular religious communities and seek to impose its will on the consciences of individual believers. But international bodies could not achieve anything of importance for the larger world community if they were never permitted to challenge the religious outlook of one or more faiths or never allowed to develop programs that one or another of the religious communities might oppose. Religious groups themselves must respect the beliefs and values of others, because no single faith may claim final moral authority in international discourse.

Such assertions call for prudence on the part of religious communities, including the largest ones, which can exert great influence upon national and international policies. They, of course, must be free to guide members of their own communions on issues and practices deemed essential to the integrity of their religious traditions and to try to persuade others of their positions in public debate. So also they must be ready for criticism when some of their practices offend others or seem to those others to work against the sacredness of life and human dignity.

The corollary of religions’ freedom to propagate and practice a faith is the freedom of others not to be bound by their strictures. On almost any vital topic addressed by the ICPD there will be some religious dissent. Although it is important for strategic and humane reasons to take such dissent into consideration, the UN and its member nations will also, at times, address issues in terms uncongenial to one or another religion. Some faith communities may perceive themselves as the possessors of all truth and the custodians of all virtues in both religious and political spheres. But because we exist in time and space and share the earth with others, one community’s claim to truth and virtue is not likely to be accepted by all others. In the political realm, the voices of different faiths and moralities need to be heard. But the voice of any single faith should not carry so much weight as to stifle debate or paralyze action on the international agenda.

2. On the population and development crisis.

People of faith across the boundaries of particular traditions, because of their religiously inspired concern for the health and well-being of persons and the environment, agree that a population and development crisis exists. They may not fully concur on how the issues interrelate or on what means for addressing the crisis can be religiously endorsed. But when confronted with evidence about current conditions and future implications of the crisis, most recognize complex linkages among the issues and an urgent need for the international community to address these factors simultaneously.

3. On development, consumption, and the maldistribution of resources.

In light of the history of what has occurred in the name of *development*, the term is sometimes suspect. Because its usage is a given in ICPD documents and discussions, however, many religious communities would urge the adoption of a comprehensive definition of *development* that unequivocally embraces a broad understanding of human nature and need, a sensitivity to cultural distinctiveness, a respect for environmental integrity, and a deep regard for justice and equity.

Most religious traditions have much to say about caring for resources and using them responsibly, about valuing human work and planning, and about providing equitable access to both the means and fruits of development. They speak out against waste and extravagance, greed and self-preoccupation, lack of generosity and unwillingness to share, and, most of all, against personal and structural injustice that prevents sustainable development and impedes access to the means of supporting not just basic survival but also human well-being and environmental integrity.

While religions vary in their assessment of the value of wealth, overconsumption by individuals and within whole societies is seen as problematic in virtually all the faith communities and their classic religious texts. This concern is intensified when overconsumption results in pollution of the environment and depletion of irreplaceable resources.

No consensus exists on how overconsumption by the affluent may confound development in poorer countries. But virtually every religion instructs adherents to attend to the needs of the poor, and much religious energy has been directed to the question of how the poor and the hungry are to be treated by individuals and in societies. They are usually seen to be especially deserving of attention.

In a global society, these moral insights apply far beyond the boundaries of individual religious communities or nations. The means of achieving the eradication of poverty and hunger, the enhancement of human well-being, and the protection of the environment will need to be broad-based and multifaceted and will require the cooperation of religious and civil communities.

4. On humans and the natural environment.

God-centered religions speak of the natural environment as the work of a creator or creators and therefore as sacred. Nontheistic faiths also affirm the sanctity of the natural environment. Almost all the texts that witness to the founding of faith communities include injunctions to stand in awe of nature, to respect it, to be good stewards of its resources, and to share them with some sense of fairness.

Some religious texts speak of human dominion over the natural world and have been invoked, at times, to sanction the exploitation of nature for human use. More recently, many faith traditions have begun to emphasize that human well-being depends upon the quality of air, earth, and water in one's community and around the globe. Moreover, a sense of the intrinsic value of nature, long prevalent in some traditions, now grows in other religious faiths as well. The human may be sacred but is not alone sacred.

5. On the role of women in issues of population and development.

The witness of religions to the equal dignity, rights, and freedom of women and men has not been uniform or unambiguous. Many ancient texts and modern interpretations reflect cultures of male dominance and are construed as divine authorization for the subjugation of women. When religious communities meet, they often speak self-critically about past abuses and continuing resistance to acknowledging the full humanity and moral agency of women. But almost without exception the world's religions are faced with the challenges of not only modern movements but also those sacred texts and traditions, often obscured in the past, that either explicitly or implicitly affirm the dignity, moral agency, and equivalent roles of women and men. How to advance women's rights and roles is debated among and within religious communities and cultures. That these must be advanced—or in some cases retrieved from what had originally been set forth—is not at issue among them.

The claims for the full human dignity of women in the private and public as well as sacred and secular spheres of life, therefore, will likely find increasing support among and within religious communities, even when the official position of a religious tradition is at variance with the views held within the larger body. And while women in different parts of the world may reflect the distinctive character of their cultures and faiths, the fundamental and universal rights of women as human beings can be expected to receive support from a broadening spectrum of religious communities.

These basic rights require the participation of women in the formulation and implementation of policy, particularly in those areas where their lives are most directly affected, and especially in such vital areas as reproductive health, population growth, development, and the environment. Women individually are also understood to have the freedom to exercise conscience in matters that have an impact on their survival,

health, well-being, and destiny. For this freedom to be meaningful, women need access to education, the resources for reproductive health, and opportunities for personal development and socio-economic advancement.

6. On religious communities' valuing of families in their various forms.

Religions tend to hold relatively conservative views on families, although over a long period of history many religious communities have embraced a variety of family forms. Some models of family have been so repressive, often with religious sanction, that they have drawn criticism from within and outside faith traditions. Others, claiming religious inspiration, have experimented with variant forms of marriage and family life. While religious traditions in different times and cultures have sanctioned various family structures, they have consistently viewed families as hallowed institutions that should be protected and enhanced.

Religious communities regard the family as the chief place in which the religious and cultural values of communities and civilizations are transmitted from generation to generation, thus providing stability and moral cohesion to a people. Increasingly today religions too are recognizing that abuse and human rights violations within families cannot be condoned or justified.

Families are also important for faith communities because children need sustained nurture in a reliable context that some form of family helps assure. Children require material and human resources for their survival and development, and the capacity to provide for these essentials should be a factor in family planning. Issues concerning these needs are as urgent to faith communities as are debates over reproductive rights and policies. In such intimate circles of life, boys and girls can grow toward adulthood with a developing sense of moral rootedness and responsibility.

7. On the special circumstances of adolescents.

Different religious traditions have different understandings of the roles, needs, and expectations of adolescents, as do different cultures. Thus it is difficult for international bodies to offer proposals or programs that are applicable and appropriate to adolescents everywhere. Still, because adolescents are capable of sexual activity, which can have enduring consequences for their own health and well-being and that of their offspring, as well as for societal stability, concern about ill-informed or irresponsible sexual behavior is legitimate. Most religious traditions tend to address this concern by urging sexual restraint on the part of unmarried adolescents.

Neither faith communities nor civil societies, however, can expect responsible sexual behavior on the part of adolescents without providing information, moral guidance, and education. Faith traditions can be instrumental in helping adolescents refrain from premature and irresponsible sexual behavior if the religious communities accept their

obligation to engage in effective religious and moral formation. The occasion of the ICPD provides a timely opportunity for religious communities to develop training programs for parents and teachers of adolescents reflecting their distinctive teachings on sexuality and responsible sexual behavior.

8. On contraception as an instrument of reproductive and public health, family planning, and population stabilization.

Although a few major religious groups or movements steadfastly oppose “artificial” contraception, almost all of the world’s religions endorse contraception as a means of improving reproductive and public health, promoting family planning and responsible parenthood, and contributing to population stabilization. Contraception is also seen as an effective way of reducing the incidence of abortion. In those few instances in which a religious body condemns artificial contraception in its official teachings, evidence indicates that the teaching is widely disregarded by followers, even those who are loyal in other areas of religious discipline. This suggests that many people of faith today see no important moral distinction between natural and artificial methods of contraception.

Religious communities, however, object to any form of contraception that is coercive or is forced by governments on citizens, because such action is a profound violation of human freedom and moral agency in a fundamental area of human life.

Voluntary contraception, on the other hand, is seen as a way in which those cherished values can be acted upon. Because of a strong commitment to the physical, mental, and spiritual health of human persons and the well-being of families, as well as a profound respect for the exercise of personal conscience, most religious communities view contraception as a responsible option, even as a religiously motivated activity.

9. On abortion.

While abortion is universally treated as a serious moral and religious concern, it is treated differently among and within religious communities. Most religious traditions do not forbid abortion altogether, yet some limit the conditions under which it may be permitted. Others understand it as a matter that is to be left to the discretion of the individual in conformity with the dictates of personal conscience.

The rationales for taking one position or another on abortion among and within religious groups include a commitment to the sanctity of human life even in its earliest embryonic stages; an interest in the current and future health and well-being of both the mother and the embryo or fetus; a respect for the right of a woman to act as a full moral agent; and a concern that the state not interfere in personal matters of conscience. Although some traditions and people of faith ground their stance in one of these rationales to the exclusion of the rest, many others develop positions that draw

on several of these perspectives, resulting in a great variety of assessments concerning when and under which circumstances abortion is morally justified.

Whatever their stance on abortion, religious communities cannot disregard the fact that it occurs and that, in places where abortion is illegal or heavily restricted, it often poses risk to the life and health of the woman. Decriminalization of abortion, therefore, is a minimal response to this reality and a reasonable means of protecting the life and health of women at risk.

Given the moral concern about abortion and the range of stances toward it taken by religious communities, the view of any particular religious tradition should not be imposed on others.

10. On sex education, particularly in the context of sexually transmitted diseases and the AIDS crisis.

Many faith communities in diverse cultures have been so protective of traditional ways and so defensive about sex education under the auspices of “others”—secular agencies or other religions—that they have neglected to offer such education on their own and to their own. As communication between generations breaks down and a variety of forces assault the integrity of families, young people and adults alike are often without moral guidance on issues of sexuality, sexually transmitted diseases (including AIDS), and responsible parenthood. Religious communities must take up anew their responsibility to act as educators on such vital issues. They should also counter those elements of mass media and global popular culture that undermine a full appreciation of human sexuality and responsible sexual conduct.

In cultures where one religion predominates, special attention should be given to acknowledging and respecting the moral convictions of those who hold minority views on sex education. A single system should not be imposed.

11. On human migration in a time of unsettlement.

The religious communities have much to say about the movement of human populations—whether in pilgrimage, hajj, exodus, exile, the search for utopias and promised lands, wanderings, explorations, or for refuge. Religious texts address the plight of those left abandoned, homeless, or impoverished as a result of war, exploitation, and natural disaster. Those without homes deserve special attention and compassion.

The twentieth century has seen unprecedented numbers of both voluntary migrants and refugees who have been forced from their homes; continuing warfare and material deprivation will displace even more. Unfortunately, religious warrants for “ethnic cleansing” and tribal aggression have been invoked all too often. It should be

noted, however, that faith communities have often provided protection and assistance to forced migrants, political refugees, and victims of war and famine.

Because many religious traditions promote special treatment for the homeless and for strangers, religious communities recognize urgent reasons to connect the themes of dislocation and resettlement with those of population and development.

Afterword

Participants in the consultation reaffirmed the vital interest of their religious communities in the interrelated issues of population and development, noting the impact that policy decisions have on the diverse peoples of the earth and the environment, along with the constructive contributions religious communities can make in forming and implementing public policy in these areas. Reflecting on their experience together, they acknowledged that exploring these issues in a multifaith and multicultural context enriched understanding and the possibility of cooperation. They recommended that similar discussions continue at the international, national, and local levels on the vital and interrelated issues of population and development.

Participants

Affiliation is listed for purposes of identification only. In rare instances a participant noted that the official position of his or her religious community ran counter to the broad consensus of the group.

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