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Feminen Characterization of the God

Tanrı'nın Dişil Sıfatlarla Nitelenmesi

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Abstract

This study investigates how monotheistic religions depict God with masculine or feminine attributes, considering historical context. The issue arises from questioning the portrayal of a masculine God within these religions, influenced by a patriarchal socio-cultural backdrop. Instances mainly from Christianity and lesser from Judaism and Islam, the study analyzes the characteristics of religious theological language used in the depiction of God. In this context, we explore the linguistic challenge encountered by religious traditions when employing anthropomorphic language. Since the core issue revolves around expressing and labeling the divine, the paper initiates with a conceptual examination of God's characterization as either masculine or feminine. In this analysis, tracing back historically, archaeological and anthropological evidence indicates that language used to describe God was initially predominantly feminine. Feminist perspectives contend that over time, particularly within monotheistic religions, this language has become masculine and that this historical shift has been a major factor in the social and cultural exclusion of women. Against this claim, the study aims to substantiate the claim that despite the effective historical dominance of the theological masculine language, the feminine divine image persists in both theistic and non-theistic traditions. Both the Holy Scriptures and early theological writings occasionally employ feminine language when discussing God, although less frequently than masculine language. Within this context, anthropomorphic depictions of God in the Holy Books of monotheistic religions—where God is perceived as an immaterial being—are interpreted metaphorically, analogically, or symbolically. In particular, the mystical traditions of these religions have emphasized feminine qualities more intensely in their depiction of the divine. They portray God not only as a father or male figure but also with feminine attributes, such as a mother, lover, or friend. These traditions contend that qualities like divine beauty and mercy find their fullest expression in women and the feminine manifestation of existence. Notably, the Nag Hammadi tradition, rooted in Jewish mysticism, highlights the feminine dimensions of the divine, emphasizing love and compassion. Medieval Christian mystics such as Meister Eckhart and Julian of Norwich also emphasized the feminine dimension of God in their experience of the divine. Similarly, within Islamic Sufism, influenced by the Qur'an's balance and harmony of *tanzih* (exonerating God from human attributes) and *tashbih* (drawing similitude) the Ibn Arabi tradition, emphasizing the feminine portrayal of the divine. They recognized the divine presence within the feminine elements of creation. Additionally, a lesser-known figure, Molla al-Jaziri, dealt extensively with the theme of woman as a divine mirror. This study aligns with the feminist theological approach, advocating for the reinterpretation of theological and religious language in order to liberate it from the dominance of a patriarchal language and reveal its feminine aspect. Additionally, study also suggests further research by examining specific time periods, approaches and individual scholars' perspectives.

Key Words: Philosophy of Religion, God, Feminine characterization of God, Masculine characterization God, Feminist theology, Mystic experience

Özet

Bu çalışma, tarihsel bağlamdan hareketle, Monoistik dinlerde ağırlıklı olarak Hıristiyanlıkta Tanrı'nın eril veya dişil sıfatlarla tasvir edilmesi sorununu incelemektedir. Sorun temelde Teistik dinlerde ataerkil sosyo-kültürel arkaplandan beslenen eril bir Tanrı tasvirinin feminist perspektif açısından sorgulanmasını temel almaktadır. Ağırlıklı olarak Hıristiyanlık ve daha sınırlı olarak Yahudilik ve İslam'dan örnekleri inceleyen çalışma, Tanrı tasvirinde kullanılan dini teolojik dilin özelliklerini analiz etmektedir. Sorun temelde ilahi olanı dile getirme ve isimlendirme sorunu olarak ortaya çıktığından, çalışma Tanrı'nın eril ya da dişil olarak nitelendirilmenin kavramsal analiziyle başlamaktadır. Bu bağlamda Tarihsel olarak geriye gidildiğinde, arkeolojik ve antropolojik kanıtlar, Tanrı'yı tanımlamak için kullanılan dilin başlangıçta dişil ağırlıklı olduğunu göstermektedir. Zaman içinde, özellikle teistik dinlerde bu dilin erile olana dönüştüğünü savunan Feminist yaklaşım bu tarihsel değişimin kadınların sosyal ve kültürel olarak dışlanmasında önemli bir etken olduğunu iddia eder. Bu iddiaya karşı çalışma, teolojik eril dilin etkin tarihsel belirleyiciliğine rağmen, feminen ilahi nitelenmenin de hem teistik hem de teistik olmayan geleneklerde varlığını sürdürdüğü iddiasını temellendirmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu bağlamda Tanrı'yı maddi olmayan bir varlık olarak benimseyen Monoistik Dinlerin Kutsal Kitaplarında Tanrıya dair insanbiçimci veya cinsiyetçi betimlemeler metaforik, analogik veya sembolik olarak yorumlanmıştır. Tanrı özellikle sözkonusu dinlerin mistik geleneklerinde geleneklerde yalnızca bir baba ya da erkek figürü ile değil, aynı zamanda dişil niteliklerle de tasvir edilmiştir. Söz konusu dinlerin mistik gelenekleri ilahi olanı betimlemede dişil nitelikleri daha yoğun bir şekilde öne çıkarmışlardır. Bu gelenekler Tanrısal güzelliğin ve rahmetin en üst düzeyde kadında ve varlığın dişil boyutunda tezahür ettiğini savunurlar. Bunlardan kökleri Yahudi mistisizmine dayanan Nag Hammadi geleneği Tanrısal olanın sevgi ve şefkate dayanan dişil yönlerine vurgu yapar. Bu gelenekte Tanrı tasavvuru cinsiyetle sınırlandırılmaz; Tanrı'nın özü hem eril hem de dişil nitelikleri kapsar. Meister Eckhart ve Norwichli Julian gibi Ortaçağ Hıristiyan mistikleri de ilahi olana dair tecrübelerinde Tanrı'nın dişil yönüne vurgu yapmışlardır. Yazılarında ilahi olanın kadınsal yönünü vurgulamışlardır. Kur'anda tenzih-teşbih dengesi ve uyumu üzerinden şekillen Tanrı tasavvuru İslam Tasavvufunda İbn Arabi geleneğiyle birlikte ilahi olanın dişil tasviri öne çıkmaktadır. İbn Arabi'nin yazıları kadını ve varlığın dişil vechini ilahi sıfatları yansıtan bir ayna olarak yüceltmektedir. İbn Farid, Mevlana ve Davud el-Kayseri de mistik deneyimlerinde kadınsal olanı öne çıkarmışlardır. Bunlar yaratılışın dişil yönlerinde Tanrı'nın varlığını görmüşlerdir. Daha az bilinen bir figür olan Molla al-Ceziri, İlahi bir ayna olarak kadın temasını yoğun bir şekilde ele almıştır. Sonuç olarak Çalışmanın perspektifi, teolojinin ataerkil bir dilin egemenliğinden kurtarılarak dişil yönünün ortaya çıkarılması için yeniden yorumlanması gerektiğini savunan feminist teolojik yaklaşımı paylaşmaktadır. Bu amaçla Tanrı'ya dair dişil dilin tarihsel kullanımı hakkında üç teistik dinin mistik geleneklerinden örnekler sunmaktadır. Ayrıca belirli zaman dilimlerini, yaklaşımları ve bireyleri inceleyerek daha fazla araştırma yapılmasını önermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Din Felsefesi, Tanrı, Tanrı'nın dişil nitelenmesi, Tanrı'nın eril nitelenmesi, Feminist teoloji, Mistik deneyim

Introduction

In a broader sense, this study provides a general framework for the theological problematic of characterizing God with names and attributes. More specifically, it delves into the theological debate surrounding the anthropomorphic and gendered descriptions of God. Through an exploration of historical arguments and examples from scriptures and mystical traditions of teistic religions, the research investigates the problem of naming to God and theological language. In this context, the study focuses on analyzing the linguistic aspects of characterizing God in terms of masculinity and femininity. It highlighted that the necessity of using metaphorical, analogical, or symbolic language due to the anthropomorphic nature of such descriptions. The research explores feminist criticisms of masculine theological language. It also offers a response to the argument that patriarchal social structures influence religious language, including their sacred texts. The study delves into the perspectives of feminist critical approaches such as Day, C. Neuger, S. A. Harvey, D. Hook, A. F. Kimel etc. On the other hand, the main claim of the article that "despite the dominant use of patriarchal language in the Monotheistic religions, feminine language referring to God continues to exist in both Holy Books and the theological traditions of these religions" is exemplified by the Holy Books and the Theistic Mystical traditions. The examples of M. Eschart and J. Norwich in Christianity and Ibn Arabi and M. Al-Jaziri in Islam are mostly used to describe this mystical traditions. In this context, the study shares a common concern with feminist critiques regarding the dominant historical theological language, which tends to be patriarchal. However, the study also contends that singular feminist claims do not fully capture the complexity of the historical facts surrounding the theological language of theistic religions. In addition to the criticisms and analyses offered by feminist theologians, especially within Christian and Jewish traditions, the study also delves into the approach found in the Islamic Mystical tradition. The initial segment of the two-part study focuses on the analysis and historical context of theological language related to God. Within this section, it delves into the challenges of naming God and the issues arising from anthropomorphism and gender-biased descriptions. Additionally, it outlines the historical transition from a feminine conception of God to the prevalent masculine language. The study also critically assesses feminist theological perspectives. In the second chapter, two

subsections aim to demonstrate that the assertion regarding the masculine development of religious language does not encompass the entirety of reality. The first section highlights the feminine dimension of the divine found in the Nag Hammadi Scriptures, Women's Bible and Kabbalah traditions, along with instances of feminine imagery in biblical text from the Judeo-Christian tradition. In this section, we explore the impact of the Christian father figure on religious language and theology. The feminist perspective has critiqued this influence, emphasizing the need for more inclusive language. The study supports the claim that feminine language has indeed been employed in theology, drawing from biblical references and examples during the Christian Middle Ages, including figures like Clement of Alexandria, M. Eskhart, and Julian of Norwich. The second part, which deals with the Ibn-i Arabi tradition from the Islamic Sufi perspective and more specifically the examples of M. Al-Jazari, are again discussed as examples of the historical continuity of mystical experience in highlighting the feminine divine aspect in religious traditions. The perspective of the study supports the feminist theological approach, which argues that the language of theology and religion should be deconstructive reinterpreted from the dominance of a patriarchal language to reveal its feminine aspect. The study draws from three theistic traditions to provide a broad perspective on the historical use of feminine language to describe God. It also purposes further exploration by examining specific time periods, approaches, and individuals.

1. Conceptual Analysis and Historical Background

The following questions are intended to be answered by the article, which focuses mostly on offering a basic framework and viewpoint on the topic. Is God and His divine characteristics primarily masculine or feminine? What does it mean to attribute male or feminine qualities to God if He is a transcendent, unique, and unfathomable being? Alternatively, since this representation is unavoidable, why has God historically been portrayed as male rather than female? Is there a divinely revealed preference to depict God with masculine attributes and pronouns in the acknowledged Holy Scriptures, notably the Torah, the Bible, and the Qur'an? Is it necessary to discuss the inevitability of social-linguistic determination about this depiction?

One of the questions that needs to be answered earlier at this stage, in connection with the answers to the above questions is how and by whom are these namings and characterizations of God made? As Peter Fenves asks: "How do we name the unnameable? for the power of naming, especially naming God, remains a supreme task for the theological enterprise."¹ Given the historical and conventional influence of religion and theology, it is indisputable that theological discourse imposes a significant impact on view and perception. The reason that, the way of description the Divine, identified the cognition about human as well: "when the language of generic 'men' is used, the thoughts and images that are formed tend to be of men and not of women."²

The aforementioned phenomenon is attributed to the influence of nomenclature on the conceptualization of the divine, thus shaping social hierarchies and institutional structures to a considerable degree. In Hartland's words, "The power of naming is crucial; it is not only expresses and shapes our expression, but also gives us the power to transform our reality"³

Revelationary religious people often believe that such a designation is divinely inspired and determined by revelation. This strategy stands out as the most usual and appropriate way for theology to legitimate itself. For Neuger, Some theologians claim that 'generic' male language should be used in Bible translation for two reasons, i. That is divinely inspired and revealed in Bible language, ii. The issue of gender in language is trivial and faddish.⁴

However, the difficulty remains as a linguistic issue in this case. When addressing linguistic determinism in relation to revelation, it is also vital to understand what it contain. It is widely accepted in religious traditions centered on revelation that God addresses human beings through human language codes. It should be noted here that revelation does not create a

¹ Peter Fenves, "The genesis of Judgment: Spatialty, Analogy and Metaphor in Benjamin's on Language as Such and on Human Language", *Walter Benjamin Theoretical Questions*. ed. David S. Ferris (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 82.

² Christie Cozad Neuger, "Imagine and Imagination: why Inclusive Language Matters" eds, Linda Day and Carolyn Pressler, *Engaging the Bible in a Gendered World: An Introduction to Feminist Biblical Interpretation in Honor of Katharine Doob Sakenfeld* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 156.

³ Judith Hartland, *Language and Thought* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1991), 41.

⁴ Christie Cozad Neuger, "Imagine and Imagination: why Inclusive Language Matters", 158.

language from start, but rather addresses through an inherited language. For Lewis,⁵ the conventional structure of language is determined by a social consensus. This linguistic consensus transcends individuals that find themselves equipped to use this linguistic consensus. This is also true for the language of revelation. In religious traditions based on revelation, God revealed through a language shaped according to the patriarchic structure of societies. As Wren state that, "...every naming of God is a borrowing from human experience, whether contemporary, traditional, or scriptural, and that though language does not determine how we think, it shapes and slants thinking and behaviour."⁶ For example, in Arabs society, the word of "Allah" represented the highest Deity in the polytheistic imagination; but, the Qur'an redefines it as the One Deity who contains all perfect attributes and whose Divine authority is not shared by anyone else.

Despite the fact that religious beliefs differ in this regard, man has always personified (as if himself) the creative power or a Sublime Being behind the story of existence due to these limitations. As Paulsen highlighted that, "We can turn God into a god of judgment or a white male god or a black male god or a god of privilege, hierarchy, and power. Through our use of language, we create a god who looks very much the way we want God to be."⁷ Therefore, the attribution of human-like qualities to God constitutes an essential limitation for humanity. Hence, as an inevitable outcome of the human way of thinking, individuals conceptualize and personify a Being that is transcendent and beyond their comprehension, designating and naming it as Father, Mother, Beloved, and Friend.

In this aspect, the belief that God created man in his own image, which is more explicitly expressed in the Bible but is shared by most of the Scriptural Religions, is consistent with the anthropomorphic depiction of divine attributes. In other words, God creates man in his image, and man tries to understand God in their image. As Neuger point out that, "Trying to formulate language and imagery for God is immensely challenging. God is beyond all human beings. When seek to name God we are attempting to describe our relational experiences of the

⁵ Dawid K. Lewis, *Convention: A Philosophical Study* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), 42-64

⁶ Brian Wren, *What Language Shall I Borrow? God-Talk in Worship: A Male Response to Feminist Theology* (London: SCM, 1989), 3.

⁷ Paulson Steven D., "Calling upon the Name of God: Father as Personal Name", *Word & World* 36/1 (Winter 2016), 83.

divine. The most effective ways to do that are through metaphorical, analogical, and poetical languages.”⁸

God's communication through metaphorical, symbolic, paradoxical, parables, contrast, and negative expression, often known as the "language of religion" rather than a literal language, is related to the fact that Divine is not expressed in regular ordinary language. This leads to the assumption that understanding or talking about God is inherently a language issue.⁹ It is also an attempt to become acquainted with a foreign world because comprehending and experiencing God are beyond what we can ordinarily experience or grasp. In the words of Alston “We are forced into stretched or extended uses of language in order to capture, so far as possible, the features of this alien world. Domestic terms are pressed into foreign service by such devices as analogy, metaphor, and symbolism.”¹⁰

Given the monotheistic theological traditions, it can be posited that God is a transcendent being, hence existing outside the scope of human perception and comprehension. This view negates any general characterizations of God, as well as all semblance to any type of tangible reality.¹¹ Therefore consider the concept of divine as a person or personal inevitably construed as a metaphorical or analogical way of expression.¹²

Notably, in explaining God's incarnation in Jesus, the Syriac Sage Ephrem Syrus added the idea that God is also linguistically incarnated. “All religious language is metaphorical

⁸ Christie Cozad Neuger, “Imagine and Imagination: why Inclusive Language Matters”, 158.

⁹ Turan Koç, *Din Dili* (Kayseri: Rey Yayıncılık, 2008); Linda Day, “Wisdom, and Feminine in the Hebrew Bible”, eds, Linda Day and Carolyn Pressler, *Engaging the Bible in a Gendered World: An Introduction to Feminist Biblical Interpretation in Honor of Katharine Doob Sakenfeld* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 114-127; Susan A. Harvey, “Embodiment in Time and Eternity: A Syriac Perspective”, ed. Eugene F. Rogers jr. *Theology and Sexuality: Classic and Contemporary Readings* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd 2002), 3-22; Christie Cozad Neuger, “Imagine and Imagination: Why Inclusive Language Matters”, 160.

¹⁰ William Alston, “Literal and Nonliteral in Reports of Mystical experience”, ed. Steven T. Katz, *Mysticism and Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 82.

¹¹ For human beings, whose comprehension begins with perceptions, the conceptualization and articulation of the transcendent as an absolute abstract being, and hence its naming, has always been an epistemic-linguistic challenge. This difficulty can be seen most clearly in Plotinus' paradoxical statement of “ONE”. So much so that, according to Plotinus, the Absolute Being, which cannot, in fact, be described by any quality, name, or limit (had), can only be expressed as the most appropriate “One” out of our limitations, or to put it another way, our helplessness.

¹² Elizabeth Burns, “Classical and revisionary theism on the divine as personal: a rapprochement?” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 78/2 (October 2015), 151-152.

because no language is adequate to convey God; rather, it is a sign of God's loving compassion for us that the incarnation took place not only into the body, but into language as well. Just as God put on the 'garment of flesh,' so, too, did God put on the 'garment of names,' entering into human language as into the body so that we might approach an in our limited way to know about God"¹³

Considering the metaphorical approach based on comprehending God's essence through human reality, the literal characterisation of God with certain features is not excluded. In contrast, this is because an unequivocal, or non-metaphorical definition of God's attributes involves the risk of materializing and idolizing God. "Description of God as it means, dead of metaphor and open way to idolatry."¹⁴

As a social-cultural representative role of language, it depicts that the concepts of God or Goddess are also the represents the culture, which is also reflects social history. Correspondingly, God was imagined feminine in matriarchal societies and masculine in patriarchal cultures related to their historical representation. Additionally, it is remarkable to note that many Hindu Gods are masculine with female consorts, and in some society, like Japan, pronouns for God are neutral. Alternatively, in Buddhism, neither masculinity nor femininity is predominant since God is an impersonal being who occasionally takes the shape of Gods or Goddesses.¹⁵

Within this framework, it is noted that historically feminine perceptions of the personified deity are more widespread and influential. Archaeological excavations provide evidence that majority of ancient societies portrayed female deities in their earliest conceptions of God. Lucy Reid provides one of the most satisfying descriptions of such an image of God/s: "Whether called Sarasvati in India, Brigit in Ireland, Demeter in Greece, Isis in Egypt, Istar in Mesopotemia, Astarte in Canaan, Aphrodite in Cyprus, or Inanna in Sumeria, She was one, and from Her came all that was. Motherhood was a natural attribute for her, and she was depicted as a pregnant woman, large-breasted and sometimes in the act of giving birth. In Neolithic sculpture

¹³ Susan A. Harvey, "Embodiment in Time and Eternity: A Syriac Perspective", 5.

¹⁴ Christie Cozad Neuger, *Imagine and Imagination: why Inclusive Language Matters*, 165.

¹⁵ Münevver Tekcan, "An Overview of God and Gender in Religion", *Gender and the Language of Religion*, ed. Allyson Jule (New York: Pgrave Macmillan, 2005), 11-16.

throughout Europe, she called 'Venus figures' she was not Playboy models but was Goddess and her powers of creativity and generation was known."¹⁶ And remarkable representation of this Goddess, "with many different titles, functions, and names she was yet one concept-Goddess, a universal deity, "much as: people today think of God."¹⁷

Based on this historical context, feminist views contend that Theistic faiths shifted divine imagery and language from the feminine to the masculine, replacing the maternal understanding of God with power, authority, and the father figure. As a result, women, like the Goddess, were submissive to men as husbands and dependants.¹⁸

Some feminists argue that monotheistic faiths have historically embraced patriarchal language, which is strongly tied to a male-dominated mode of thought. God has been perceived as male for this patriarchal theological interpretation, which encompasses the Judeo-Christian heritage, and the perspective of men has come to dominate society's perception of reality.¹⁹

"If God is man, then man is God" has become the motto of this theological tradition's critics. This feminist viewpoint holds that language impacts perception, which shapes social institutions and culture. Arguing that masculine language in theology subordinate women to men, makes them invisible, and casts them in a lower class. Insistence, often by patriarchists, that God can only be addressed with masculine pronouns has often served to devalue women.²⁰ As Isherwood and McEwan emphasized, "has traditionally been a discipline which concerns itself with the divine and the spiritual aspect of human nature. Sadly, it has been one-sided, dominated by male views."²¹

For example, referring to the binding revelatory determination of the figure of the father, D. Hook and A. Kimmel argue that the figure of the father is the most appropriate metaphor for

¹⁶ Lucy Reid, *She Changes Everything: Seeking a Divine on a Feminist Path*, (New York: T and T Clark International, 2005), 26.

¹⁷ Merlin Stone, *When God was a Woman* (San Diego: Harvest/Harcourt Brace:1976), 22.

¹⁸ Merlin Stone, *When God was a Woman*, 28-29.

¹⁹ Lisa Isherwood and Dorothea McEwan, *Introducing Feminist Theology* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993); Paul R. Smith, *Is It Okay to Call God "Mother"?: Considering the Feminine Face of God* (Peabody MA: Hendrickson, 1993); Donald D. Hook and alvin F Kimel Jr., "Calling God 'Father', A Theoloinguistic Analysis", *Faith And Philosophy*, 12/2 (April 1995).

²⁰ Lisa Isherwood and Dorothea McEwan, *Introducing Feminist Theology*, 20.

²¹ Lisa Isherwood and Dorothea McEwan, *Introducing Feminist Theology*, 9.

God in Christianity. This is due to the fact that this image is not based solely on cultural or linguistic tradition, but on revelation itself. Although father and mother as metaphors do not convey a gender attribution, according to this approach, the metaphor of mother cannot be substituted for father. "The fact that, applied to the deity, the use of 'Mother' and 'Father' must be metaphorical in some sense-the Christian God is, after all, sexually transcendent-does not alter this more basic grammatical point: if "Father" properly designates the deity, then 'Mother' cannot logically do so-and vice versa."²² From the logical/linguistical reason for Hook and Kimmel since that the "Father" is a divine title which is designating and vocative like a proper name in its unique referential, therefore has a foundational status within Christian discourse. The term "Father" specifically refers to the God of Jesus Christ. It is treated like a proper name, capitalized, and used without determiners. Historically significant, it is connected to its bearer through a causal network of reference.²³

According to Hartland, the problem is far more serious than women's linguistic invisibility, and it is exacerbated by men's dominance and sovereignty²⁴ because the attributes referred to God present a model of the superhuman whose mind and character are shaped in a historically patriarchal society. In her article "Self Blessing Ritual" for *womanspirit rising*, for instance, Zsuzanna E. Budapest offer the image of women "filling with images of strength and beauty" should be replaced with the image of "the Police God image" or should be replaced with the women in labor in stead of ruler, king, father, or partner one.²⁵

In summary, the Feminist Theological perspective argues that the evolution of theological and religious terminology has been detrimental to femininity. It further suggests a reassessment and reinterpretation of scriptures and religious doctrines, which consequently affects the understanding of God and Her/His attributes.

Let us now ask whether the Monoteistic religions incorporate feminine attributes or representations of God. In the post-revelation interpretations, how are these attributes

²² Donald D. Hook and alvin F Kimel Jr., "Calling God 'Father', A Theoloinguistic Analysis", *Faith and Philosophy*, 215.

²³ Donald D. Hook and alvin F Kimel Jr., "Calling God 'Father', A Theoloinguistic Analysis", 207.

²⁴ Judith Hartland, *Language and Thought* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1991), 38.

²⁵ Zsuzanna E. Budapest, "Self Blessing Ritual", ed. Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow, *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers Inc. 1992), 275.

interpreted, and when did feminine interpretations originate in those traditions? Furthermore, does not the use of masculine language by God when revealing a specific message suggest a divine preference?

Contrary to M. Stone's claim, the feminine image and conception of God persists despite patriarchal dominant language, not only in early religions and depictions of God or Goddess, but also in significant interpretations of God in Judo-Christianity and Islam, particularly in their mystical traditions. For this traditions, though, God communicates in socio-cultural, stereotyped, and consensual language in the scriptures, but His/Her transcendence, nature, and attributes, as well as His uniqueness from all creation, are declared clearly. It is not an exaggeration to say that this method of explanation is at the highest level in the Qur'an.

On the other hand, contrary to what the feminist perspective claims, theistic faiths are not entirely shaped by a masculine language, even though historically the language these religions use about God is primarily conveyed through masculine grammar. As Lisa Isherwood points out, what we must bear in mind is that patriarchal documents do not reflect historical reality 'as it really was'.²⁶ In other words, despite the masculine form of revelation language, its content concerning God and divine works is not gender centered. "There is a broad consensus that God is not biologically male, yet the dominant language and imagery for God reflect maleness."²⁷ As a result, the issue must be identified as a linguistic, grammatical one.

Furthermore, revelation can offer a content based on new ideas and beliefs that transcend the social consensus and even completely contradict the beliefs of the society. In this context, theistic religions, which recognize God as a transcendent Being, do not ascribe gender to Him, but define Him as a Unique Being beyond all created entities, despite all anthropomorphic definitions.

While Holy Scriptures of mentioned religions contain some feminine references to God, one of the fundamental streams of theological interpretation of these religions has always been

²⁶ Lisa Isherwood and Dorothea McEwan, *Introducing Feminist Theology*, 90.

²⁷ Christie Cozad Neuger, *Imagine and Imagination: why Inclusive Language Matters*, 159.

feminine, which is the mystical approaches direct experience of God and union with Him/Her as a final goal. Feminist movements have expanded on this interpretation greatly.

Nevertheless, In Christianity, the representation or incarnation of God as a human being has been hailed as the cornerstone of religious commitment. This concept goes beyond mere metaphor and significantly influences theological perspectives on Christ.

We may now proceed with the investigation of these subject matters.

2. The Feminine Characterization of God in Theistic Religions

2.1. Judo-Christian Tradition

Since an in-depth examination of feminine religious language necessitates specialized research for each religious contemplative tradition, this paper will provide only a general overview, incorporating only a few instances from the Three Theistic Religions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

The Hebrew and Christian scriptures counting a multiplicity of images for the divine. Regarding the Jewish tradition, Torah recommends not putting God in a feminine or masculine form, to not making any idol for God in the form of any figure no matter to be like male or female. For example, God is the mother in Hosea; She/He treats Israel like a mother. Here is an alternatives of male images in the Old Testament; in vv. 1-4: “Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk, ... I was to them like those who lift infants to their cheeks, I bent down to them and fed them,²⁸ as Straumman pointed out: “Here we certainly have no image of a father, but the image of a mother who is rearing her son literally. Yahweh treats Israel like a tender mother..”²⁹ and such images are mentioned in the Bible. “Female images for God, both overt and implicit: God as mother, midwife, woman in labor, wisdom woman (Sopia), mother bird, housewife, compassionate womb.”³⁰

²⁸ Aida Besançon Spencer, “Does God Have a Nature”, *Priscilla Papers* 24/2 (Spring 2010), 2-3.

²⁹ Helen Schungel-Straumann, “The Feminine Face of God”, *Engaging the Bible in a Gendered World: An Introduction to Feminist Biblical Interpretation in Honor of Katharine Doob Sakenfeld*, eds. Linda Day and Carolyn Pressler (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 93-94.

³⁰ Lucy Reid, *She Changes Everythings: Seeking a Divine on a Feminist Path*, 2-3.

The Hebrew Bible is repeated with accounts of women, who dispense wisdom to others, and advise in various capacities such as Huldah, Esther, Abigail, Sarah, Zeresh, Jizisbel.³¹ However, in Judaism, the feminine depiction of the Divine is predominantly associated with the term "Zoe." The utilization of the metaphor of Zoe has been extensively employed in biblical literature, as expounded upon in Neimann's scholarly investigation. This metaphor encompasses a range of religious texts, namely the Septuagint, the Nag Hammadi Scriptures, the Women's Bible, and the Kabbalah.³² A metaphor with multiple, profound meanings, Zoe alludes to the feminine attributes and dimensions of the divine. "There is validation in sacred literature that Zoe is a metaphor for the Divine. Furthermore, this feminine expression of the divine is relevant to theological society and worth of dialogue."³³

The feminine divine manifestation embodied in the Hebrew Scripture, or Women Wisdom, based mostly on the Zoe description, represents divine attributes such as divine creation, nurturing, giving birth, compassion, producing, the tree of life, and wisdom in this similarity. This beautiful feminine expression is described by Linda Day as follows: "Women wisdom, as a personification of the deity, reminds use of the power of metaphorical envisioning. Theologically speaking, she portrays a feminine aspect of the divine: God is like a smart, self-confident, and outspoken woman."³⁴

In contrast, when comparing to Islam and Judaism, it may be argued that Christianity employs a more pronounced utilization of masculine language in reference to God, which has been a focal point of feminist critique throughout history.

The concept of God's embodiment in a human form, along with the portrayal of God as a paternal figure, has been interpreted as evidence that, as Aida Basan suggests, "God prefers to relate to us over masculinity." This approach, as mentioned above, is interpreted as masculine language being a choice of revelation and of God Himself. As Hook and Kimel state, "We do not

³¹ Linda Day, "Wisdom and Feminine in the Hebrew Bible", 118.

³² Theresa Neimann, *The Five-Thousand-Year Search For a Way to Describe the Feminine Nature of God: A Study in the History of Language* (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2014), xi-4.

³³ Theresa Neimann, *The Five-Thousand-Year Search For a Way to Describe the Feminine Nature of God. A Study in the History of Language*, xi-

³⁴ Linda Day, "Wisdom and Feminine in the Hebrew Bible", 121.

first know God as fatherlike and then decide to call him Father. We begin with the historical naming, with Jesus' invocation of God as Father, and then inquire as to its meaning."³⁵ So that, if we agree that, for the most part, "God chooses to relate himself to us as masculine," *Father* is not a culturally conditioned term, but the proper name of God given by divine revelation.³⁶ Accordingly, the description of the Father, the Son, and the Trinity are determined by revelation itself which inevitably affects the church's identity. One of the main arguments supporting this view is this religious reference to the masculine figures of Jesus and the Father is not an invention of later church leaders, but comes directly from Christ, who refers to God as "Father." Jesus taught his disciples to call God "our heavenly Father."³⁷ Therefore, Christians have good reasons to insist on addressing God as Father, especially in the liturgy, where the Christian story is reenacted.

The embodiment of God as a man through the Father-Son figure in Christianity, Mary Daly's quote expressing the social influence of masculine language in theology and its formation as male dominance has become the motto of the feminist view: "if God is male, then the male is God."³⁸ And on the base of a simple Aristotalian logic, in the words of Miles, 'if God was man and women was not man, then wathever God was, women was not'³⁹ The certain result that feminists conclude is that sexist language, both in reference to God or people, leads to the exclusion of women.

Allison Jule, with a feminist concern, questions why, as in the examples above, the Bible uses figures as feminine such as 'mother bird' (Psalm 17:8b), 'mother bear' (Hosea 13:8a) and 'a midwife' (Psalm 22:9) and those figures are central as the father figure in Old testament, but they do not stand out as much as the Father figure and masculine images. One of the key reasons of this, according to Jule is God's transcendence beyond masculine or feminine. The figurative view of God forbids God from having a mother, father, or gender. Metaphorical

³⁵ Donald D. Hook and alvin F Kimel Jr., "Calling God 'Father', A Theoloinguistic Analysis", 215.

³⁶ Simon Chan, "Father Knows Best: Language of God's Fatherhood Communicates. Something Essential about His Nature", *Christianity Today* 57/6 (July– August 2016), 4.

³⁷ Simon Chan, "Father Knows Best: Language of God's Fatherhood Communicates. Something Essential about His Nature", 3.

³⁸ Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of women's Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), 9.

³⁹ Qouted from Lisa Isherwood and Dorothea McEwan, *Introducing Feminist Theology* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press 1993), 38.

references to God are not absolutes, but rather poetic abstractions utilized to explain God. God is no more female than God is male- but not all Christians agree on this point."⁴⁰ In a general sense, what is really in here is not the gender of God, but why God is expressed in a masculine definition.

The other fundamental reason can be added to this is that the image of the Son along with the Father was dominant for Jesus and that it entered the Bible very early on, and therefore the theological tradition was built on it.

On the other hand, despite all of this intensely patriarchal language based on the father-son figure and the interpretation of the mainstream of traditional Christianity that supports it, the Bible emphasizes that God is a Being who transcends human perception and is beyond human comprehension. He is defined as a being unlike any physical creature in that He is immaterial and so incapable of being masculine or feminine.

Bible warns us that God is beyond our comprehension. As Elihu explains to Job, "Surely God is great, and we do not know him" (Job 36:26a), or as David exclaims, "Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; his greatness is unsearchable." (Psalm. 145:3) From this perspectives, Jesus' maleness is not what reflects God's essence, therefore the masculine biblical language for God refers to grammatical, not natural, or gender. God is the source of everything, including gender, though He/She is identified with a variety of characteristics and culturally gendered roles of both females and males, identifying with both genders. The need to remember that God transcends gender, because God is Spirit and has no form, male or female. Therefore, males and females are both needed to reflect God's image.⁴¹

In this perspective, in a kind of Divine Reincarnation, the fact that Jesus is physically the son of God or has a divine identity makes him (One, who is different in nature from other beings) avoid having the same nature as God. Although the interpretation that the figure of the "Father" is only a metaphor stands out strongly, this does not eliminate the socio-cultural

⁴⁰ Allison Jule, *A Beginner's Guide to Language And Gender* (Toronto/Clevedon/Buffalo: Multilingual Matters Ltd. 2008), 71.

⁴¹ Aida Besançon Spencer, "Does God Have a Nature", 1-4.

consequences of masculine language. "there is a broad consensus that God is not biologically male, yet the dominant language and imagery for God reflect maleness."⁴²

The term father, then, excludes not feminine qualities, but rather the idea of a distant and impersonal deity, which is precisely the picture of the supreme being still seen in many primal religions. In addition, from a feminist perspective, the notion that Jesus was a man, and that God was not inherent in the embodiment or manifestation of man with a female figure can be traced back historically to early Christianity. In this interpretation, Jesus being the son of God means "the manifestation of God in humanity", it is also a higher form of "man being created in the 'image of Dei'." Jesus was sent on behalf of all humanity and crucified for the salvation of all humankind which is not exclude being male or female.

Related to this female background interpretation of Bible, J. M. Claassense argues that although the dominant language in the Bible is masculine and there are very few references to the female images, this small amount is enough to develop a feminist perspective.⁴³ Correspondingly, the Bible contains feminine divine depictions, albeit limited, and historically, from the earliest period, feminine depictions of God and divine attributes and designs have continued, especially through the mystical tradition.

Regarding that similar to the abstract and direct descriptions of Jalal-Jamal in the Qur'an, feminine-masculine descriptions are used in the Bible through different depictions and metaphors. For example, The power of God and the need to punish injustice are communicated by a dual image: God is described in the Bible as a rock, shield, fortress; an eagle, lion, fire; Alpha, and Omega; a shepherd, potter, goldsmith; a king, judge, warrior. On the other side, God resembled as a warrior shouting at his enemies and a pregnant woman shouting as her child moves through the birth canal (Isa. 42:13-17). To communicate God's great love, power, righteousness, and uniqueness, God uses the extended metaphor of a mother carrying a child from before birth to death (Isa. 45:24-46:6).

⁴² Christie Cozad Neuger, "Imagine and Imagination: why Inclusive Language Matters", 159.

⁴³ L. Juliana M. Claassens, "Rupturing God-Language: The Metaphor of God as Midwife in Psalm 22", *Engaging the Bible in a Gendered World: An Introduction to Feminist Biblical Interpretation in Honor of Katharine Doob Sakenfeld*, eds. Linda Day and Carolyn Pressler (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 166-167.

Based on these Biblical narratives, the Feminist theological approach attempts a kind of deconstruction, arguing that the traditional masculine image of God in Christianity (Christology) is problematic. This approach asserts that feminine language has also divine origin, as it is masculine one, though to a lesser extent, as seen in the biblical quotations above. This approach is traced back to the early Church based on its biblical references. So that within the early Church's history, Jesus was identified with the divine wisdom, personified within the female figure.

Clement of Alexandria's use of the metaphor of motherhood to represent God in the writings of early Christianity (although some consider this to be heretical) employed remarkable breast-feeding imagery to describe our dependence on God. Divine love, according to his writing, metamorphoses God the Father into a woman. "God is love, and for love of us has become woman. The ineffable being of the Father has out of compassion with us become mother. By loving, the Father has become woman."⁴⁴ Originating from an unknown Judeo-Christian first- or second-century source, (from Syria/Philistia) the Ode of Solomon, used the image of the breast-feeding Father God and the Holy Spirit is She who milked Him; ...the Holy Spirit opened Her bosom, and mixed the milk of the two breasts of the Father. Then She gave the mixture to the generation. (The Odes of Solomon, 1973, 13)

In this Feminist perspective, the depiction of God, who stands out with her feminine qualities, almost paints this: God is like mothers, and all females, in that God has the capacity to bear burdens, to produce life, to save, to perform the inexplicable, to be decisive, to be thorough and careful, to be constant, to be compassionate, to calm, to comfort, to care, to protect, to help, to love, to bring joy, to command fear and immediate response, to intimidate, to destroy, to guide, to educate, to feed, to preserve, to develop, to rule, and to be merciful.⁴⁵

From this perspective, mother-female image has been used in the scriptures, early, medieval, and later contemporary feminist periods, despite its higher importance in the late period. Medieval theologians like Snt. Anselm bishop of Canterbury, Snt. Francis of Assisi,

⁴⁴ Alan E. Lewis, *The Motherhood of God* (Edinburgh: St. Andrew Press 1984), 49-50. (From Lucy Reid, *She Changes Everything: Seeking a Divine on a Feminist Path* (New York: T and T Clark International, 2005), 12.

⁴⁵ From Lucy Reid, *She Changes Everything: Seeking a Divine on a Feminist Path*, 4-12.

Mechtild of Magdeburg, and Meister Eckard articulated spiritual experience in this way. Julian of Norwich then expanded on this theme in greater depth and breadth. She attributes Motherhood to God, the Trinity, Christ, and the Church. This mystical approach emphasizes the "Motherhood of God" rather than the father figure. The father figure is replaced by the mother or metaphorized as a synonym. For example: "we were created "by the motherhood of love, a mother's love which never leaves us," she declares. Julian and Teresa were writing God not as an all powerful king, but as a compassionate mother. As St. Anselm called Jesus: "You Lord God, are the great mother." this approach called as proto-feminist, for the Middle Ages.⁴⁶

According to Julian of Norwich's mystical experiences, God manifests as the mother, just as She/He was mirrored and expressed in a beloved woman for Ibn Arabi and al-Jaziri. God's mercy, and love—which are also Her/His essence—appear as the mother, as father or as a spouse: "God feels great delight to be our Father and God feels great delight to be our Mother and God feels great delight to be our true Spouse and our soul the loved Wife."⁴⁷ Norwich's words appear to be metaphorical when characterizing God as "Father," "Mother," "Wife," and "Beloved," similar to the Islamic Sufis, who aloud God as Welî(friend), Yar(beloved), Habib, Bride, Beloved, and so on. These metaphors can be used to qualify adjectives such as love, closeness, compassion, power, support, and protection.

Julian claims that God is both Absolute Mother and Absolute Wisdom, connecting this image to the biblical idea of feminine wisdom. "She is reach in her images of panentheism, as maternal: an enveloping, enreachig, welcoming, inclusive, cosmic, expansive, curved image of how we are in God and God is in us."⁴⁸ The most important feature of this motherhood is birth. For M. Eckart, creating itself is the primary birthing activity of the Creator. As represented in his this words: "All being are birthed by God and 'flow out of God to do God's will."⁴⁹

This mystical vision and experience give the impression that the maternal imagery for God is not merely a metaphor. In contrast, it reveals a profound truth regarding the very

⁴⁶ Lucy Reid, *She Changes Everythings: Seeking a Divine on a Feminist Path*, 14, 16.

⁴⁷ Brendan Doyle, (with Introduction and versions) *Meditations with Julian of Norwich*, Foreword by Patricia Vinje and Matthew Fox (New Mexico: Bear and Comapny Santo Fe, 1983), 85.

⁴⁸ Brendan Doyle, (with Introduction and versions) *Meditations with Julian of Norwich*, 14.

⁴⁹ Brendan Doyle, (with Introduction and versions) *Meditations with Julian of Norwich*, 14.

essence of God. While it deviates significantly from the conventional usage of patriarchal language, this is not simply a feminist gesture; rather, it represents an endeavor to employ the most evocative metaphors at one's disposal when discussing particular aspects of the Divine. Hence, the mystics' encounters with God embodying feminine attributes such as motherhood or love possess a degree of experiential significance that surpasses metaphor and became a meaning within their own lives. In the Islamic contemplative tradition of Ibn Arabi, the image of women most aptly represents the divine and its qualities, particularly its essence of beauty and love.

The point to be kept in mind here is that any characterization of God, whether feminine or masculine, should be considered metaphorical rather than literal meaning. Otherwise, any sexist characterization of God in a literal sense would be considered a form of idolatry and polytheism. In other words, to treat God as a literal father, lord, savior, high, one, and judge, etc., is idolatry.⁵⁰ In this regard, what is wrong is to use the metaphor literally and exclusively.

2.2. Sufi Experiences

In line with Jewish and Christian traditions, the feminine face of God is visible in the mystical idea of Islam, Sufism.

Ibn Arabi, Fariddun Attar, Dawud al-Kayseri, Ya'kup as-Sarfi, Kaşanî, Mawlana Rumî and Mulla al-Jaziri all employ the physical and spiritual attributes and beauty of the women to represent the Personality of God, His/Her attributes, and actions (ef'al). "As per their assertion, Allah manifests in the image of a woman and bestows upon them the nectar of sublime beauty, enabling them to behold the truth they long for."⁵¹ Sufis believe that God's essence is Goodness and Beauty, as well as Love.⁵² As a result, beauty, goodness, and love pervade all heavenly

⁵⁰ Spencer Aida Besançon, "Does God Have a Nature", *Priscilla Papers* 24/2 (Spring 2010), 5.

⁵¹ M. Abdalbaki Turan, *Melayê Cizîrî Dîvanı ve Şerhi* (İstanbul: Nubihar, 2012), 56; Hamdullah Arvas, "Boundaries of Mulla Ahmad al-Jazarî's Methaphysics on the Context of the Philosophical Paradigims", *Academic Research and Reviews in Social, Humanities, and Administrative Sciences* (Ankara: Platanus Publishing, 2023), 451-476.

⁵² "Mansour al-Hallaj, the Persian mystic, poet, and teacher of Sufism, diverged from the tradition of philosophical Sufism in his approach to women. Unlike many of his contemporaries, he did not employ women as tools, paths, or

activities and traits. In turn, this divine nature can be best portrayed by humans and more so by woman than by man. According to these mystics, Allah's love is a fundamental and eternal attribute without which He/She cannot create or dispose of anything divine. "This goes to show that in God is contained the creative masculine as well as the receptive feminine element, and without the feminine mirror, which is how he defined the created universe, God would not be able to contemplate His own beauty."⁵³

In the earlier and middle periods of the Sufi tradition, the concept of love was used without mediation to achieve God and connection with Him/Her. So sufis express God's love and beauty directly. After sufi philosophy was developed, allegorical and analogical language became prevalent. Thus, the beauty of God and the approach to this beauty via love are portrayed by female beauty, which includes spiritual and physiological elegances.⁵⁴

This is the Sufi's enlightenment and spiritual transformation resulting from a love-centered encounter with God. This experience best embodies the symbolism of love in woman. Hence female beauty becomes the metaphorical focal point of divine adjectives. Some of the highest emblems of all Jamal adjectives include love, beauty, mercy, compassion, elegance, grace, and creativity.

The most important and original part of this tradition is the way it explains the experience of God through female metaphors. This is the highest spiritual level in the Ibn Arabi's tradition. Even though the qualities of Jamal have always been important to sufis, it wasn't until Ibn Arabi that they became known as the experience of God through a woman. From this point of view, Ibn Arabi's and the Mystics' interest in women is for their divine vision, because woman show the divine best, as a symbol.

It is worth noting that Ibn Arabi, who had previously been indifferent in women, began his transition with a poem he penned to a Persian woman who encountered in Makkah and was highly impressed by her beauty. Though it's more like the classic love poems but as Austin

symbols for attaining divine love. His poetry remains devoid of any references to women" Amani Suleiman Daoud, *Al-Osloubiyya wa'l Sufiyyah: Dirase fi şî'r Al-Huseyin ibn Mansur al-Hallac* (Umman: Dar'ul Macdalawî, 2002),157-162.

⁵³ Annemaria Schimmel, *My Soul is a Woman*, 23

⁵⁴ Huda, Lutfi, "Feminine Element in Ibn 'Arabi's Mystical Philosophy", *Journal of Comparative Poetics* 5/1 (Spring, 1985), 7-19.

R.W.J explain the reason in details Ibn Arabi compelled to add a deeper mystical-philosophical dimensions to them. The reader is thus constantly confronted with images pointing to the divine-feminine: the 'friendly girls' (poems XIX) as 'forms of divine wisdom, which make the heart of the gnostic rejoice.' 'Beautiful women' can also be the 'helping Names of God' (poems CLIV2, XXVI 1), whereas the 'charming women(XXXIX, 1) are meant to be understood as 'divine ideas.'⁵⁵

As Schimmel explains Ibn Arabi's feminine spiritual vision and his feminine connection to the divine: "It was Ibn Arabi, however, who played the major role in explaining the significance of the feminine element with defines that plumbed ever-deeper depths. ...As he saw it, the feminine aspect is the form in which God can best be recognized."⁵⁶

Ibn 'Arabi discusses a delicate issue, something he does perhaps only once, in the last chapter of his *Fusus al-Hikam*. The matter is summarised in the fact that God (*Haq*) can never be witnessed divested of matter. And, because witnessing can only take place in the matter, a man's witnessing of God is grandest, while a woman's witnessing of God is grandest and most complete.⁵⁷ He also follows up the linguistic context which manifests woman's superiority over man, by saying: "... and had there been no honour paid to the feminine other than the fact that both the Divine Essence (*Zhat*) and quality (*sifat*) are feminine [in gender], that would have been sufficient"⁵⁸

Schimmel's claim about Ibn Arabi that "his use of feminine language sufficiently distanced him from patriarchal language and radically transformed that traditional masculine language"⁵⁹ can be taken further for al-Jaziri.

Similar to Ibn Arabi, Al-Jaziri considers the female to have two primary theological aspects: firstly, it assumes a pivotal role in his transcendent experiences; and secondly, woman has a highest role for the expression of these infallible experiences. The initial dimension may be

⁵⁵ R.W.J. Austin, "The Feminine Dimensions in Ibn 'Arabi's Thought", *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society* (JMIAS II: 198), 7-8.

⁵⁶ Annemarie Schimmel, *My Soul is a Woman*, trs. Susan H. Ray (New York: Continuum, 1997), 102.

⁵⁷ Annemarie Schimmel, *My Soul is a Woman*, 9.

⁵⁸ Annemarie Schimmel, *My Soul is a Woman*, 23.

⁵⁹ Annemarie Schimmel, *My Soul is a Woman*, 14.

referred to as "physical," comprising the female body and all its attributes that hold significant value as reflections of the sublime being, whose essence is beauty and love as well.

The reflection of this role is evident in his portrayal of this verse.

Çendî bixeml û rewneq in tezyîn ji husna mutleq in

Têk cilweyê nûra heq in 'şqa ezel pê şêwe da⁶⁰ (Qasidah 1/27)

"Whatever they have charm and ornaments, it comes from absolute beauty

They are the manifestation of the light of Absolute Truth (Haq), eternal love manifested in them"

Al-Jaziri expresses his mystical experiences with this verses how God demonstrated and unveiling as a beautiful women this is the way give him the wisdom on the garment of analogy. He attribute feminine qualities to divine and spiritual stations, including the physical attractiveness of women, particularly their faces. And the second aspect is intrinsically linked to divine essence. For al-Jaziri if a nature is to be assigned to the sublime being it should be feminine rather than masculine. Sufi encountered with this more prominent and dominant female face of God. This face molded and transformed every aspect of Sufi's interior world, including his language, mind, vision, and even extended to the transformation of his habits and body.

In fact, Jaziri's portrayal of woman is nothing more than a feminine interpretation of divine attributes, such as beauty, grace, mercy, love, affection, friendship, and a host of other qualities that are associated with femininity. In Diwan he defines God with feminine names and attributes. It is worth to mention that those description is not only the poetical depiction of beloved but a metaphorical expression of experiences about Absolute Being.

Some of the names he attributed to God are: "Dilber (extremely beautiful beloved) Xan, Xanım (spouse) Yar (a dear and cherished friend) Mahîrû (moon face beauty), Can (life/sweetheart), Mahbûb (love/beloved)

Some of these names and attributes for identifying God's love and beauty can be found in the verses below.

Aşiq ew e dilber ew e zahir ew e mezher ew e

⁶⁰ Mulla Ahmad al-Jaziri, *Diwan*, trs. (Kurdish-Turkish) Osman Tunç (Istanbul: Nûbihar, 2011), 30.

Rûh û beden gewher ew e d'her şahidek durdane da (Q1/4, 28)

"He/She is the lover, he is the beloved; he is the manifest, he is the manifested

He/She is the soul, body and substance in every beauty"

In addition to some general analogies and metaphors which represents beauty as a mirror for God's absolute beauty al-Jaziri elaborated many phisical, (such as eyes (çav), eyelashes(bru), libs(lêv), beuty spot(xal), etc.) jests, (such as quetish(cîlve/naz), looking at(dîtin), glance(awir), smile(ken),) and acts (meeting(halwet/wuslat), talking(gotin/axaftin), inviting(gazî), get angary, sulking etc.) which represented some beauty or female chracteristics refere to the beloved who is Only God.⁶¹ Some of them can be seen on the verses below:

Secdeya ber eswedan nadim bi sed hec ekberan

Sond bi wan zulfan û xalan heçwekî bêjim we ye (Q14/20, 106)

"I would not trade the prostration before the black locks and moles for a hundred pilgrimages.

By these black locks and moles, what I said is only the truth."

Eqdê îhramê dema dilber xuyabî ferzi'eyn

Secdeyek ber wan du birhan nagirit cih sed nimaz (Xazal 32/6, 304)

"When the beloved appeared, takbir for prayer became mandatory.

A hundred prayers don't cover one eyebrow prostration."

Regarding that, he also like Ibn Arabi clearly explain that with the praise of beauty of women his aim is only praise of Eternal Beauty.

Ne cemala te tecellî bikirit

⁶¹ There are some symbols which are piece of literature art of tasavvuf, used by Sufis in order to explain divine situations, such as: **Face** (ru/wech): The essence and inneity of God (personality) **beauty spot** (xal/nîşan): Unity of God. **Both eyebrows**: (Kab-ı qawseyn) Two part of Divine names wrath (jalal) and beuty (jamal) **black lock**: (zuluf) difference stage of plurality except of Unity of God, including his plurality of names, attributues, but much more referred to plurality of existences make shadow or cover the Unity of God which is mystic's final aim to achieve. The aim is to pass through all these prulatiy including the divine names and adjectives and reach only the Absolute Wahdah (Unity). For those and more Sufi terms look at: Abdurrahim Alkış, *Melayê Cizîrînin Dîvanında Tasavvufî Mazmûnlar* (İstanbul: Nûbihar, 2014), 42.

Me ji xûban bi cemaîê çî xered (X41/9, 328)

“If it is not your beauty that is manifested and seen

No more need for the charming of the beauties”

Wellah ji herdu 'aleman min husnê canan e xered

Lew min ji husna dilberan her sun'ê rehman e xered(X86/1, 456)

I swear, the beauty of the beloved is my goal in both worlds

My aim is to watch the divine art in the beauty of beauties

Depending on the nature of the qualities, Jaziri occasionally employs male or feminine imagery, even though much of the Divan constantly conveys God and his love for her through a feminine narrative he refers to God's attribute coincides with their Jalal with masculine pronoun and Jamal as Feminine pronouns occasionally.

If beauty, elegance and grace are to be attributed to the Magistry Beloved, naturally feminine pronouns and suffixes; and if handsomeness, strength, and power are to be commensurate, masculine ones are used.

Wesfên evîn û 'işqehê husn û cemala wê şehê

Nayêne şerh û medehê ehzen ji nexşê beşerê (Q20/5, 146)

“The qualities of love and affection and the beauty of the princess

His praise is inexpressible, for it is not human embroidery”

Regarding the balance of attributing masculine and feminine qualities to God, it should be noted that; one of essential complementary element in the Sufi tradition is that the adjectives of Jalal, which can also be described as masculine, are not ignored, and the adjectives of the masculine form of Sufi experience (especially the suffering experienced with spiritual difficulty) such as kahhar, jabbar, almighty, wrathful, held responsible, authoritative features of God are also shape an integral part of the Sufi experience.⁶² In the words of Jule, Sufism uses this

⁶² Abdurrahim Alkıs, *Melayê Cizîrînin Dîwanında Tasavvufî Mazmûnlar*, (İstanbul: Nûbihar, 2014), 85-98.

principle to look at Divine actions or God's relationship to what exists through adjectives/nouns, "God acts as both; masculine and feminine."⁶³

It is correct to state that the mystical-theological language created by Ibn Arabi and Jaziri is a new interpretation that is a transforming and radical manifestation against the masculine patriarchal legacy of theological approach. In a linguistic sense it is a deconstructive theological interpretation within a linguistic challenge. It approaches the formal form of language which is dominant historical, masculine one.

It is both an unorthodox discourse and successful in staying within the tradition. A breath of fresh air for religion within religion. Although it is apparently seems as contrary to the teachings of the Qur'an and religion in some respects, it is actually a deep-rooted and transformative interpretation that is appropriate to religious essence. In the other words, although these experiences do not actually contradict the picture of God in the Qur'an, it is obvious that it is a kind of new hermeneutic and deconstructionist way of theological approach.

Conclusion

For a long period of history, we can speak of a patriarchal socio-cultural structure and the determinism of the language it produces, which maintains the balance to the detriment of the female. This determinism has been much more dominant and effective in religion and theology. So much so that God Himself, His attributes and His relationship with human beings have been described through a masculine language. However, as exemplified in this study, the continuity of the feminine language that goes parallel or lesser to this masculine structure and language cannot be ignored.

In this context, historically in religion and theology, the feminine language has been prioritizing the masculine one. Archaeological invention and anthropological studies show that God/Goddess figures and religious language are feminine in almost all parts of the continent where civilization has developed.

⁶³ Allison Jule, *A Beginner's Guide to Language And Gender* (Toronto/Clevedon/Buffalo:Multilingual Matters Ltd., 2008), 68.

It is evident that male language predominates in religions later on, that is, historically, with the theistic faiths, as feminist approaches emphasize in their arguments. It is noteworthy that the holy books of theistic religions emphasize that since God is an immaterial being, He cannot be assigned a gender. Regarding that it is an inevitable conclusion for theistic religions that all sexist depictions should be perceived metaphorically.

In addition, the depiction of God as mother, lover, spouse, friend, instead of father/male figure, has been done through feminine qualities, to a lesser extent in the sacred books compared to the masculine ones, but more intensely in the mystical traditions of the religions in question. The mystical experience, which claims that this depiction is more suitable for divine description and revelation, has continued as a strong tradition. In Judaism, this approach has been followed by the Nag Hammadi Tradition, and in Christianity, in the Middle Ages, by the mystics such as Clement of Alexandria, snt. Alselm, Meister Eckhart and Julian of Norwich in the Middle Ages in Christianity, and in Islam in the tradition of Ibn Arabi, the theme of woman as the Divine mirror, which is more intensely explored in Mullah al-Jaziri.

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