

The Female Quarter

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Résumé: Le féminin occupait une place distincte dans le schéma cosmologique proto-indo-européen et la couleur associée à ce concept était le jaune. Il complétait les composants masculins présents dans la triade de couleurs blanc, rouge et noir. Dans un ensemble de huit dieux simplex, le féminin est représenté dans l'espace par une jeune déesse, associée à la vulve, et par une vieille déesse, associée à la terre. En termes de temps, le quartier féminin correspond à la saison estivale et se rapporte à l'étape de la vie des jeunes hommes mûrs et à la transition du mariage. Une partie de la mort qui précède la renaissance dans le cycle peut être liée à la quatrième fonction négative théorisée par N. J. Allen et au roi divin des morts, tandis que le roi divin des vivants occupe une position centrale comme Allen le prétendait concernant son postulat de quatrième fonction positive. Cependant, c'est l'élément féminin auquel Allen n'a pas accordé de place dans son modèle qui fait partie de la quadruple série régulière indiquée par la couleur. Il représente un quart de cette totalité tout en restant dans la troisième fonction.

Mots-clés: Déeses indo-européennes, reine, couleurs, classes d'âge, cycle de vie, Yama.

Abstract: It is argued that the female had a distinct place in the Proto-Indo-European cosmological scheme and that the colour associated with this concept was yellow and that it complemented the male components present in the white, red, black colour triad. In a set of eight simplex gods, the female is represented in space by a young goddess, associated with the vulva, and by an old goddess, associated with the earth. In terms of time, the female quarter is the summer season and relates to the life stage of junior mature men and to the transition of marriage. A death portion that comes before rebirth in the cycle can be related to N. J. Allen's negative fourth function and to the divine king of the dead, while the divine king of the living has a central position as Allen claimed in terms of his postulated positive fourth function. However, it is the female element that Allen did not accord a place in his model which forms part of the regular fourfold series indicated by colour and it represents a quarter of that totality while remaining within the third function.

Keywords: Indo-European goddesses, queen, colours, age-grading, life cycle, Yama.

I have had the pleasure of sharing with Nick Allen a long-term interest in Indo-European structure and, in this contribution to his memorial volume, I relate our two approaches and sketch out a suggested Proto-Indo-European system that incorporates gender while still giving places to a king (cf. Allen's F4+) and to death (cf. Allen's F4-).

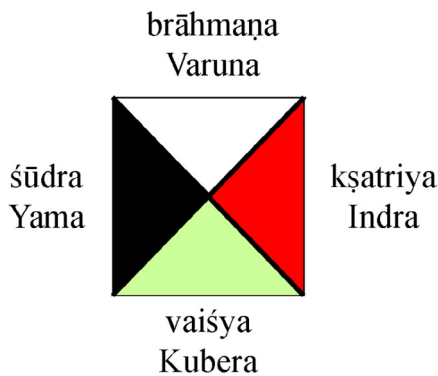
Allen's approach in relation to the present study

When Allen proposed the idea of a fourth function with positive and negative aspects (F4+ and F4-) in his article on 'The Ideology of the Indo-Europeans:

Dumézil's Theory and the Idea of a Fourth Function' in 1987, he made three statements which he later repeated on many occasions and these are responded to in this article. 1) He stated that the king (F+) should not be included in the first function but should be given a separate place relating to all three functions and I agree with this. 2) He also stated that fourfold systems of primitive classification were more common than threefold ones and thought that a fourth component would have been present in a sequence relating to the cardinal directions and I agree with this general observation but differ from Allen in finding that the fourth component is the female, related to sexuality and fertility. 3) He also stated that tribal societies normally gave a place to the idea of otherness (F4-) which he sometimes equates with death¹ and I agree that this is so. However, in the Indo-European case, I find that the realm of the dead mirrors the totality of the realm of the living and that it is ritually recognized in the temporal cycle in a period before birth at midwinter which overlaps with the cardinal and seasonal quarters.

Although Allen explored the concept of a negative otherness with a fresh intensity, the proposed structural position of his F4- is nothing new but is in accord with the historically known Indian system. His F4- is expressed by Yama, the god of death, in the system of the four *lokapālas*, the guardians of the quarters² and relates to the *śūdra* in the series of castes (*varṇas*).³ The first three in these two series have long been identified with the Dumézilian functions and Allen has added his number four in this way: 1 Varuna, 2 Indra, 3 Kubera, F4- Yama, and 1 *brāhmaṇa*, 2 *kṣatriya*, 3 *vaiśya*, F4- *śūdra*. Figure 1 shows the Indian scheme that he has followed:

Figure 1. The four varṇas and the four lokapālas



1. Allen, 1996a, p. 14; 1998, p. 168.

2. Allen, 1991, p. 149; 1999, p. 247.

3. Allen, 1999, p. 247; Smith, 1994.

In my view, this is the scheme that we have to get behind in order to understand the diachronic lines of development from a synchronic structure established in prehistory, and I suggest that one way of getting behind it is to include the roles of the female and of gender within the proposed Proto-Indo-European system. Allen expressed his position in relation to gender in his 1987 article. After describing the four-function set that he posits, he says:

To envisage an ideology of this sort, one with clusters of ideas adding up to a well-defined totality, is not of course to envisage a society which had no other ideas, no extrafunctional representations. To take just one important topic, no doubt all societies have views on gender, but it is not clear that this aspect of ideology is subsumed by the functions.⁴

However, as I aim to demonstrate in this article, the organizing principle of gender so widely found in tribal societies is present within the ‘well-defined totality’ of the Indo-European cosmological scheme and is quite apparent when the female element within it receives separate recognition. The surprise is that Allen did not identify gender there since his area of expertise included kinship where both genders are necessarily present in the structures. Part of the reason for this blind spot may lie in his coming to the topic of classification through the study of primitive classification by Durkheim and Mauss, originally published in 1903 (trans. and ed. Needham 1963). When looking through this influential article with this in mind, it becomes apparent that gender is downplayed. For example, the authors have a section on China but only briefly mention the yin and yang pair, which entails the shadowed and the female as complement to the sunlit and the male, by contrast with Marcel Granet’s presentation in *La Pensée Chinoise* (1934) which is permeated with this duality understood in structural terms.

However, despite this lack of attention to gender, Allen’s use of this study by Durkheim and Mauss did make a very positive contribution to the understanding of Indo-European cosmology. It was through it that he showed how the functional findings by Dumézil and others in the Indo-European materials known in history could throw light on prehistory. He commented: ‘The only reasonable explanation for these findings is that the speakers of proto-Indo-European, who were of course non-literate tribals, possessed a primitive classification.’⁵ This supplied a very useful basis for development and encouraged giving full weight to the exploration of structure in terms of the operation of an oral society in prehistory.⁶

The major shift proposed by Allen is the addition of a fourth function and he defines his scheme as follows:⁷

4. Allen, 1987, p. 33.

5. Allen, 2000, p. 58.

6. Lyle, 2006, 2012, 2013, 2014.

7. Allen, 2000, p. 106.

F4+	heterogenous and supreme, often transcendent
F1	pertaining to the sacred
F2	pertaining to the physical force and war
F3	pertaining to fecundity, wealth and related ideas
F4-	heterogenous and excluded or somehow devalued

He comments immediately after this: ‘The middle three are the familiar Dumézilian functions, their definitions modified only by removal of sovereignty from F1.’ As he put it elsewhere: ‘It is now becoming ever clearer that the king, the representative of society as a totality, does not fit comfortably within a single one of the standard three functions [...]; instead he often transcends the individual functions and represents their synthesis.’⁸ He locates the king, his proposed F4+, in the centre of the horizontal plane while he places the Dumézilian three functions and his proposed F4- at the periphery.⁹ In this way, in relation to the king, Allen has built a revised structure through extracting a component that Dumézil included in the first function and giving it a separate place in the system as F4+.

The identification of the female quarter can be expressed similarly as the extraction of a component within the third function, the one that is named fecundity in Allen’s listing, and giving it a separate place in the system as one of the peripheral elements, although (by contrast with the case of the king) it remains within the function where Dumézil placed it. The coverage of the third function is very broad. As Dumézil expresses it at one point,¹⁰ it is ‘fecundity, abundance in people (number) and in animals (wealth), nourishment, health, peace, desire, etc.’ (my translation). As Allen puts it in a nutshell,¹¹ it is ‘fecundity/prosperity’. My suggestion is that these two aspects can be split apart, with the first component being recognized as the female. Without the female of the species, there could be no offspring, and fecundity implies the presence of both genders. In the other three places in the series (1, 2, and the second part of 3) the male can stand alone.

The elements relating to sexuality and fertility can be extracted to form a separate female category within the third function which can contain the queen. Dumézil sometimes included a trivalent goddess in his third function¹² and he also noted that she had a separate identity, saying at one point:

As a counterbalance to the group of masculine gods, each of whom embodies distinctively and analytically one and only one of the three

8. Allen, 1998, p. 167.

9. Allen, 1991, p. 149; 1996b, p. 34; 1999, p. 249.

10. Dumézil, 1992, p. 78.

11. Allen, 1987, p. 24.

12. Dumézil, 1992, p. 114-115, 151.

basic functions, there is a goddess who synthesizes these functions, who assumes and reconciles all three.¹³

It is not clear where this goddess was being located in the structure but, with a little adjustment, she can be placed in the scheme proposed here. The female in the first part of the third function can relate to the three male components, of which the last is included in the second part of the third function. As regards the queen, Dumézil has interestingly explored the Irish Queen Mebh as a trivalent figure.¹⁴ The queen is as necessary a part of a totality as the king and it is their sexual union that is held to ensure the well-being of the kingdom. The current suggestion of a female quarter gives her a place in the system. The difficult matter of defining the rather fluid third function has been discussed partly in terms of colour.¹⁵ White was identifiable as first function and red as second function but what was to be made of the remaining colours in the cardinal directions sequence – yellow and black? Dumézil concluded that white, red, and black (or a dark colour) were linked to his functions¹⁶ but, now that I am exploring the nature of the female component and finding its place to be within the third function, I propose that the third function can be treated alternatively either as black, when seen as a unity, or as both yellow and black when the female element is separately identified.

I argue that yellow is the colour of the female and I have found the recent discussion of colour by Pierre and André Sauzeau extremely interesting and valuable in this connection.¹⁷ They show that a greenish-yellow colour is additional to the more basic white, red, and black triad. They argue that it relates to a fourth function that they place as an ‘other’ outside the system (by contrast with Allen’s theory of a fourth function inside the system) but the ‘otherness’ of yellow that they identify could equally well relate to its being on the other side of a gender divide from the male triad. Yellow will be used as an identification of the female in the following sections which explore the possibilities of understanding and re-animating a structured cosmology known in prehistory.

The female quarter in space and time

The female quarter on the horizontal (the vulva)

A quarter implies a totality of which it is a part and the first question that arises is ‘A quarter of what?’. This question will be given a fuller answer below but as a start the quarter can be said to be a world quarter lying in one of the

13. Dumézil, 1970, 1, p. 300.

14. Dumézil, 1973, p. 90-92.

15. Allen, 1998.

16. Dumézil, 1954, p. 44-61; 1983, p. 17; 1992, p. 104-105.

17. Sauzeau and Sauzeau, 2012.

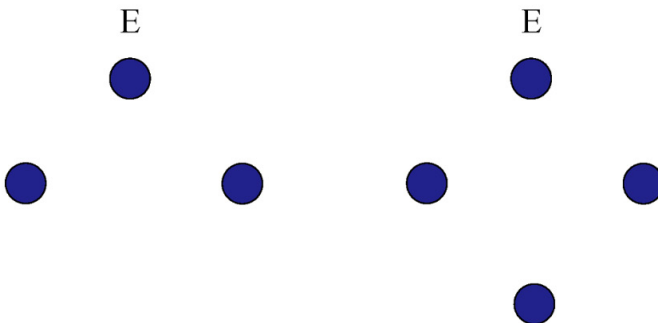
four cardinal directions stretching out from the centre. The world directions are tied to the body directions linguistically in a Proto-Indo-European system ‘that presumed the speaker was facing the rising sun’ as indicated, for example, by the Sanskrit *dāksīṇa*- ‘right, south’,¹⁸ so that the series runs: in front = east, right = south, back = west, left = north.

The same correlations are present for the Hausa of West Africa whose case gives a valuable insight into the place of the female. Guy Nicolas, after speaking of the four quarters of space round a centre, says:

There is a relationship between this spatial scheme and the human body – the ritual position of the man being always fundamentally facing east (towards the sunrise) – as is indicated by the word for this direction (*gabas*), which corresponds to the one that indicates the face (*gaba*) –, and in all the rites without exception the sacrificer places himself always to the west of the altar, facing towards it and the east.¹⁹ (My translation.)

Nicolas supplies information about the relationship of the quarters to the genitals, which may well have been a tabooed area of discourse sometimes concealed from anthropologists. At any rate, Nicolas did receive the information from the Hausa ritual specialists on this topic, the midwives. He discusses a rite that takes place at the naming ceremony seven days after the birth of a child when a midwife arranges piles of ash on the ground. He offers the following diagram (Figure 2) and explains it as below:²⁰

Figure 2. Hausa naming ceremony diagrams, boy on the left, girl on the right (after Nicolas 1968, 603 and 1966, 99)



18 Mallory and Adams, 2006, p. 294.

19 Nicolas, 1968, p. 597.

20 Nicolas, 1968, p. 603.

[The figure] is obviously based on the physiology of man and woman. In fact, all the midwives whom we have interrogated about the meaning of the figure laid out on the occasion of the ceremony of naming at the crossroads nearest the home of the new-born baby have spontaneously explained the meaning of that figure by the image of masculine or feminine sex. The three heaps of ash set out in a triangle represent the penis and testicles of the boy, and the four heaps set out in a square (or a rectangle), the clitoris, the two labia and the vulva of the girl. The midwife remarks in this connection that the masculine and feminine genders have three points in common, that is the penis or the clitoris, which are alike, and the testicles or labia, which resemble each other and are situated in the same position in relation to the first element of the sexual diagram. It is sufficient to add a single element, symmetrical to the first in relation to the two others, as the fourth element of the feminine figure, to obtain a different figure. That element is the one which corresponds to the vulva. This is incontestably the fundamental characteristic of woman, that which truly distinguishes her nature from that of man. (My translation.)

This structure shows how the female can be perceived as principally present in a single quarter but, as is apparent in the Hausa treatment of space explored by Nicolas, this placement of the female within a specific quarter does not exclude a gendered opposition between halves, with east and south being masculine and in the hierarchically superior position and west and north being feminine and in the hierarchically inferior position.

The connection of the female with the west is also found in the practice of Vedic sacrifice where the householder's wife sits by the Gārhapatya fire in the west of the ritual ground throughout the ceremony. As Stephanie Jamison remarks:

Because of the east-west orientation of Vedic geography (in which, for example, the same word *dáksiṇa* means both 'south' and 'right'), the western part of the sacrificial ground is also called the 'hind end' (*jaghana*). [...] Because of her seat there, the wife also gets this epithet.²¹

The Gārhapatya fire is the fire of the householder and man and wife together are the fertile couple from whom progeny are born and it appears that the west is related both to the female and to sexuality.²²

The female quarter on the vertical (the earth)

As Dumézil recognized, the functional triad related to the upright human body which had a hierarchical structure running from top to bottom with the three-

21. Jamison, 1996, p. 41.

22. Jamison, 1996, p. 30, 38–42, 53.

section series consisting of head, body above the waist, and body below the waist. A particularly helpful expression of the idea comes in the Irish story of the king, Lugaid of the Red Stripes, who had three fathers. His head (first function) was like that of Nár, his upper body (second function) was like that of Bres and his lower body (third function) was like that of Lothar and his body was marked out in three parts by red lines round his neck and waist²³ Lugaid literally embodies the three functions and so gives expression to the threefold nature of kingship. As regards the placement of the female within the system, it is useful to complement the vertical human body series as found in this Irish story with the Indian expression of the idea in the foundational figure of Puruṣa which has a fourfold set with two above the waist and two below it spoken of as the mouth, the arms, the thighs, and the feet.²⁴ Allen suggests glossing 'thighs' as 'genitals' and it is in any case clear that the section immediately below the waist includes the sexual organs. In this fourfold scheme, this quarter appears to be that of sexuality and so to have a connection with both genders but the specific connection with the female occurs in the parallel series on the cosmic level.

The vertical body parts relate to vertical layers of the universe and it is possible to identify the fourfold set in the Proto-Indo-European structure by putting together the two frequently found threefold sets that have been formed in different branches under the pressure of the prominence of the triad: heaven, earth, and sea, and heaven, interspace (which can be called sky), and earth.²⁵ Jointly, they form the series, heaven, sky, earth, and sea. Since the association of earth with the female is practically universal it can probably be taken for granted here. The situation is comparable to the one expressed in the passage in the *Iliad* (15.187–93) where three great gods divide the universe among them by lot, Zeus winning the sky, Hades the darkness and Poseidon the sea, while the female earth is common to all.

It is worth drawing attention to the presence of the interspace between earth and heaven as an Indo-European feature since this is not as widely found as a threefold vertical system with the centre point, the above, and the below. The latter is the system, for example, among the Hausa mentioned above and among the Zūñi as discussed by Allen²⁶ and, taken together with the four cardinal directions, it leads to an emphasis on the number seven. By contrast, this number is not prominent in the Indo-European context. By distinguishing the above into the two separate layers of heaven and sky, a fourfold set was created that can be put into a one-to-one correspondence with the four of the

23. Dumézil, 1973, p. 105; Lincoln, 1986, p. 160–161; McCone, 1990, p. 119; Lyle, 2012, p. 62–63.

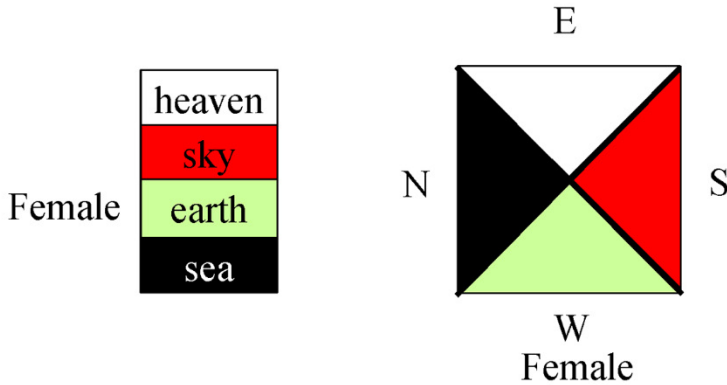
24. Allen, 2000, p. 113–114, referring to *Rig Veda* 10.90.11–12.

25. Shaw, 2012.

26. Needham, 1963, p. 43.

cardinal points (see Figure 3). The addition of the two centrally placed kings gives the total number as ten.

Figure 3. The fourfold sets in the vertical and horizontal directions, indicating the female quarter in the third position



The female quarter among eight simplex deities (two goddesses)

Allen does not distinguish the separate series of the gods on the vertical plane (the older cosmic gods) from the gods on the horizontal plane (the younger social gods) and he has only a fivefold syntagmatic row of gods including the king. When the two sets of gods are recognized, as I think must be done, there is a tenfold syntagmatic row, including the two kings (of the living and the dead). However, Allen does make a very interesting suggestion about the way in which the clusters of ideas that could be displayed paradigmatically in the associated columns (five or ten as the case might be) could be related to the gods. He remarks that in the Indo-European case ‘the native ideology provides no obvious labels for the columns (might a proto-list of “canonical” deities once have served the purpose?)’.²⁷ We do not have a set of the Proto-Indo-European names, but employing any names at all would supply a sense of personhood that is lacking from other labels such as the cardinal points and it may be possible to arrive at a consensus on some appropriate sets of historically known names in the various branches that can be applied, with due caution, to the earlier system. However, in a flat sort of way, the world levels and the cardinal points are useful indicators and unambiguously distinguish the eight simplex components of the system as shown in Figure 4. The complex kings are not included here. It can be suggested that the two goddesses have the roles of mother and wife.

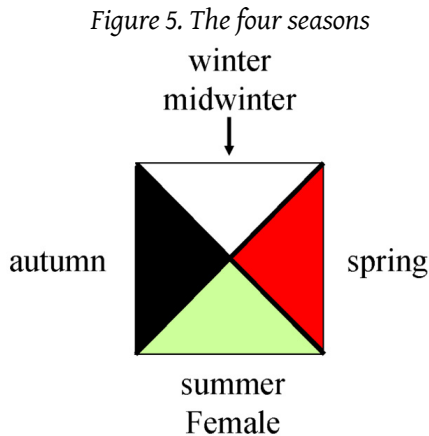
27. Allen, 2000, p. 106.

Figure 4. *The eight simplex gods, including two goddesses, identified through divisions of space*



The female quarter in time (that of marriage) and the portion of death

While the measuring of space was taken directly from the human body, the less tangible measuring of time could be taken from the human life span. Allen, in a study of a range of temporal cycles, finds, as I do, that the starting point equivalent to birth falls at midwinter in the year cycle.²⁸ Figure 5 shows this transition point in the set of the seasons that corresponds to that of the cardinal directions.



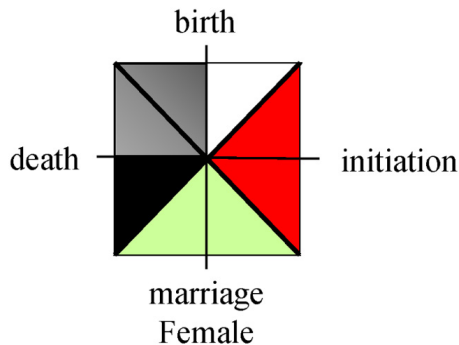
Societies differ in the way in which the transition is made between one cycle and the next; it can be either by means of a direct jump or by means of a supposed rewinding of time to return to the beginning. The Indo-European case appears to be the second of these and the total year cycle corresponds not just to a life cycle but to a life-and-death cycle which includes this ritual reversal in a period devoted to death.²⁹ As regards the period of life, it falls into divisions which are marked by rites of passage and, in an early society, these would not have related simply to the individual but would have been reflected at the level of the tribe. It is the attributes and activities of the different stages of life that seem to lie behind

28. Allen, 2001, p. 174.

29. Lyle, 2008; 2012, p. 52–54.

the three functions identified by Dumézil since an early society would not have been divided into occupational classes. It is the male that forms the basis of this age-grade system, but society could not continue without the meeting of the two genders and the female quarter is represented at the stage related to marriage. It has been particularly useful in attempting to reconstruct the Proto-Indo-European treatment of time expressed through the life cycle to study the age-grade systems of East Africa, particularly that of the Maasai.³⁰ Each class goes through the age-grade system in the sequence: young men, junior mature men, senior mature men, and old men, but, in a bird's eye view of the system, all the grades are simultaneously present and the sequence expressed in terms of the three functions including the female, runs: 1 old men, 2 young men, 3 junior mature men (female), and senior mature men. Each class among the Maasai is divided into contrasted half-classes, creating an eightfold system which is also relevant in the Indo-European context, as can be seen in the domain of the ritual year.³¹ The life-cycle scheme shown in Figure 6, which includes the Indo-European colour set and period of ritual reversal, is loosely based on the Maasai system. There is no separate category for boys and so boys in one cycle, beginning at birth, overlap with old men in the previous cycle.

Figure 6. The life-and-death cycle showing the female quarter including the point of marriage and the death period preceding the point of birth



When the death period is, as it were, carved out of the whole, what is left as the life period consists of six segments (half-classes in age-grade terms). This life period can be understood in terms of the divisions found in the Iranian account of Yima's enclosure, interpreted in terms of the functions.³² This

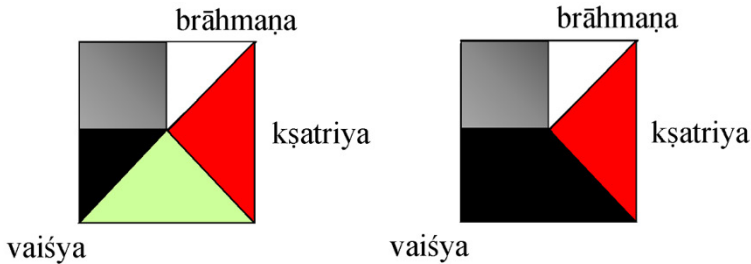
30. McCone, 1990, p. 117, 210; Lyle, 1997; 2001.

31. Lyle, 2015.

32. Dumézil, 1973, p. 48; Lyle, 2012, p. 51.

enclosure had eighteen sections of which three were for the first function, six for the second and nine for the third, giving a ratio of 1:2:3. In terms of this ratio, in the case of the sixfold division discussed here, one segment is given to the first function, two segments to the second, and three segments to the third. The third-function section can either be undivided and shown as black or may be divided into the female quarter and the male segment and shown as yellow and black (see Figure 7).

Figure 7. The portions of time outside the death period allotted to the functions in the ratio 1:2:3 with and without the separate identification of the female quarter within the third-function portion



Conclusion

As mentioned at the beginning of the article, Allen's scheme is structurally like that of the four *lokapālas* and four *varṇas*, as shown in Figure 1, and it is now possible to suggest how this scheme can be related to the proposed more complex system that preceded it. The change would have involved moving away from an organization that was based on the human body including its sexual attributes and on a human temporal cycle that included death as reversal.

The changes in society in the Indian context included the addition of a serf class, the *śūdra varṇa*, and this takes its place as the fourth in a series of occupational groups which are all given equal space. The highly valued first function which had the smallest space is now expanded to an entire quarter like the second function which already had a quarter. The third function, which had three segments is now reduced to a quarter. It had the colours yellow (female) and black, but now black has been given to the *śūdra* so that only yellow is left to be the colour of the *vaiśya* and there is no distinction within the third function of its female and male components. As part of the regularization and of the attachment of colours to social classes rather than life stages, it would probably be inevitable that, like the other elements in the set of four, this quarter would be seen as male and so the separate place for the female would be lost from this

Indian system. Restoring the place of the female should hopefully pave the way to an increased understanding of the Proto-Indo-European system as a totality.

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