

title: Hindu Goddesses : Visions of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Tradition
author: Kinsley, David R.
publisher: University of California Press
isbn10 | asin: 0520063392
print isbn13: 9780520063396
ebook isbn13: 9780585334882
language: English
subject: Goddesses, Hindu.
publication date: 1988
lcc: BL1216.2.K56 1988eb
ddc: 294.5/211
subject: Goddesses, Hindu.

Hindu Goddesses
Visions of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Tradition
With a New Preface

David Kinsley

University of California Press
Berkeley Los Angeles London

Disclaimer:

Some images in the original version of this book are not available for inclusions in the netLibrary eBook

University of California Press
Berkeley and Los Angeles, California

University of California Press, Ltd.
London, England

First Paperback Printing 1988

Copyright © 1986 by The Regents of the University of California

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Kinsley, David R.

Hindu goddesses: visions of the divine feminine in the Hindu
religious tradition / David R. Kinsley

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. Goddesses, Hindu. I. Title.

BL1216.2K56 1985 294.5'211

84-28000


ISBN 0-520-06339-2 (ppbk)

CIP

Printed in the United States of America

08 07 06 05 04 03 02 01 00

9 8 7

The paper used in this publication is both acid-free and totally chlorine-free (TCF). It meets the minimum requirements of ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992 (R 1997) (*Permanence of Paper*). 

To Margaret Airey and Louise Crittenden

Contents

Preface to the 1997 Printing	ix
Introduction	1
1. Goddesses in Vedic Literature	6
	7
Usas *	8
Prthivi*	9
Aditi	10
Sarasvati*	11
Vac*	13
Nirrti*	14
Ratri*	14
Minor Vedic Goddesses	17
Conclusion	
2. Sri-Laksmi*	19
	19
The Early History of Sri-Laksmi	23
Sri-Laksmi in Later Hinduism	29
Sri-Laksmi in the Pancaratra* and Sri* Vaisnava* Schools	32
The Worship of Sri-Laksmi	

3. Parvati*	35
	36
Early References to Parvati	
	37
The Mythology of Sati*	
	41
The Mythology of Parvati	
	46
Tension and Resolution	
	52
Devotion and Grace	
4. Sarasvati	55
	55
Sarasvati As a River	
	57
Sarasvati in Later Hinduism	
5. Sita*	65
	65
The Early History of Sita	
	67
Kings and the Fertility of the Earth	
	70
The Ideal Wife	
	78
Ideal Devotee and Intermediary	

6. Radha *	81
	82
The Early History of Radha	
	83
The <i>Gopi</i> * Tradition	
	85
Radha as Belonging to Another (<i>Parakiya</i> *)	
	92
Radha as Belonging to Krsna* (<i>Svakiya</i> *)	
7. Durga*	95
	95
The Warrior Goddess	
	106
The Worship of Durga	
8. Kali*	116
	116
Early History	
	122
The Later History and the Significance of Kali	
9. The Mahadevi*	132
	133
Central Theological and Philosophical Characteristics	
	137
Mythological Characteristics and Functions	
	139
Auspicious and Terrible Forms	
10. The Matrkas*	151
	151
The Early History of the Matrkas	
	155
The Matrkas in the Later Tradition	
11. Tara*, Chinnamasta*, and the Mahavidyas*	161

	161
The Mahavidyas	
	165
Tara	
	172
Chinnamasta	
12. Goddesses and Sacred Geography	178
	178
Earth As a Goddess/India As a Goddess	
	178
The Sakta* <i>Pithas</i> *	
	187
The Ganges and the Sacrality of Rivers	
13. Village Goddesses	197
	198
The Local Rootedness of the Village Goddesses	
	200
Mythological Themes	
	204
Festivals	
	208
Death, Disease, and Ambivalence	
Appendix: The Indus Valley Civilization	212
Notes	221
Bibliography	253
Index	265

Preface to the 1997 Printing

Looking back to my first thoughts about writing a book on Hindu goddesses, I am somewhat amused (but also pleased) that I had the courage to undertake such a daunting task. Ten years ago the project seemed much more feasible than it would today. In the past ten years there have been several excellent, lengthy, detailed studies of individual Hindu goddesses who were not even mentioned in my book, as well as many fine studies of goddesses who were included. New scholarship has indicated the immense number of Hindu goddesses and has greatly enriched our knowledge of prominent ones. Today, writing a comprehensive book on Hindu goddesses would be a much more ambitious undertaking; the result would be much longer and more detailed and, I suppose, less accessible to the general public.

The history of this book, however, pleases me. It was successful in the way I had hoped it would be. In the past decade, many fine scholars have turned their attention to Hindu goddesses. In many cases, this book was influential in attracting them to the field. It continues to serve as a useful introduction to a large and fascinating area of the divine feminine as expressed in the Hindu tradition and I hope it will continue to inspire students to take up its subject.

DAVID KINSLEY

Introduction

One of the most striking characteristics of the ancient and multifaceted Hindu religious tradition is the importance of goddess worship. A considerable number of goddesses are known in the earliest Hindu scriptures, the Vedic hymns. In contemporary Hinduism the number and popularity of goddesses are remarkable. No other living religious tradition displays such an ancient, continuous, and diverse history of goddess worship. The Hindu tradition provides the richest source of mythology, theology, and worship available to students interested in goddesses.

Although there are several books on the history of goddesses in India, 1 there is still need for a survey of Hindu goddesses which not only describes their main appearances and roles but also interprets the significance of each goddess within Hinduism. Some studies have sought to apply this kind of approach to an individual goddess,² but to my knowledge there is no study that attempts to describe and interpret all of the central Hindu goddesses. My approach in this book is to provide portraits of the most important goddesses of the Hindu pantheon. I have tried to suggest some of the history of each goddess, to summarize her most important myths and roles, and to show how she illustrates important Hindu (or human) truths. Although common themes occur in the myths, iconography, and functions of several of the goddesses treated in this book, each portrait is intended to be complete and to be appreciated by itself. The book need not be read in its entirety by people interested in just one or two of the Hindu goddesses. My intention is to provide a sourcebook on Hindu goddesses for students of the Hindu tradition and for those interested in goddesses in general.

The book also seeks to be a sourcebook for the growing study of women and religion. In recent years, especially in North America, considerable interest has developed in this field. A whole new area of religious studies now focuses on the ways in which women are perceived in

traditional religions and on the status of women within those religions. The importance of goddesses in these traditions is of particular interest to people studying this field. While this book does not attempt to rethink female self-perception in the West in light of Hindu goddesses, I hope that it will make Hindu visions of the feminine accessible to those interested in such pursuits.

This book does not pretend to be exhaustive on the subject of goddesses in Hinduism. The number of goddesses in contemporary Hinduism alone is simply overwhelming. Nor does it pretend to be exhaustive of any of the particular goddesses who are included. Most of the ones I discuss have been known and widely worshiped for hundreds of years, some of them for thousands of years. Rather, this book seeks to represent the nature and diversity of goddess worship in Hinduism and to include all of the most important Hindu goddesses.

My primary sources have been literary and to some extent iconographical. I am aware that my views of the divine feminine in Hinduism may thus be slanted in the direction of the so-called great tradition, namely, the tradition that is high caste, educated, and predominantly male. In many cases, however, the only information that we have on some goddesses and on certain aspects of other goddesses, or the only information that we have from the past, is found in such sources. The chapter on village goddesses, which draws on the work of anthropologists and sociologists, suggests a quite different vision of the divine feminine from those visions underlying the great goddesses of the Hindu pantheon. Nevertheless, this book is out of necessity weighted toward the literary stream of the Hindu tradition, which tends to ignore or look with suspicion on popular worship, in which goddesses are widely revered.

This book does not try to present the material on goddesses in a historical or chronological way. Although I begin the book by discussing the evidence for goddess worship in Vedic literature and close the study with a treatment of village goddesses which suggests a look at the modern situation, the order in which I treat the most important Hindu goddesses is not meant to suggest a historical sequence. Only in very general terms is there a discernible historical progression. The earliest evidence of goddess worship in Hinduism is discussed first. The main sources here are Vedic texts. In these sources no goddesses of great popularity or prominence appear. This situation persists in the Hindu literary tradition till after the epic period. Sometime around the fifth or sixth century A.D., however, several goddesses suddenly appear in iconographic and literary sources in situations of great importance, which indicates an acceptance (or resurgence) of goddess worship in the Hindu

tradition. All the individual goddesses that I discuss in the book (with the possible exception of Radha *) are important from that period to the present: Sri-Laksmi*, Parvati*, Sarasvati*, Sita*, Durga*, Kali*, the Matrkas*, and such geographical goddesses as Ganga*. The central focus of the book is on these goddesses, and chapters treating them form the bulk of the work. The chapters on geographical goddesses, groups of goddesses, and village goddesses shift the focus of the book toward the present and rely more on the work of contemporary observers of Hinduism. Only in this limited way, then, might the book be seen to have a very general historical or developmental character.

My interest in Hindu goddesses dates to 1968, when I went to India to undertake doctoral research on the worship, mythology, and theology of Krsna*. During that year in India I was struck by the number of goddesses popular in Bengal, by my lack of knowledge about them, and also by the central role that Radha played in Bengal Vaisnavism*. My first systematic attempt to study a Hindu goddess focused on Kali.⁴ Despite her popularity in the Hindu tradition, very little scholarly research had been done on her. I have found a similar absence of research on other important and popular Hindu goddesses.

I doubt whether this state of affairs results from an inherent male chauvinism among scholars of Hinduism, because a similar gap has existed until recently with regard to most male deities of the Hindu pantheon as well. Perhaps the situation is simply a reflection of what scholars of Hinduism, both Western and Indian, have found interesting and worthy of study. Until recently what was called popular Hinduism did not seem worthy of scholarly attention. Vedic literature and the philosophic schools of the Hindu tradition, in particular, dominated the interests of students of the Hindu religious tradition. Perhaps it seemed to scholars that there was little connection between the philosophic systems of the Hindu tradition and the beliefs, myths, and rituals that occupy the lives of most Hindus. In some cases, I suppose, there is little in common. But it seems clear to me that in most cases popular Hinduism expresses central truths of the Hindu tradition.

The goddesses, who are usually associated with popular Hinduism, often illustrate important ideas of the Hindu tradition, ideas that underlie the great Hindu philosophic visions. Several goddesses, for example, are unambiguously identified with or called *prakrti**, a central notion in most philosophic systems. *Prakrti* denotes physical (as opposed to spiritual) reality. It is nature in all its complexity, orderliness, and intensity. The identification of a particular goddess with *prakrti* is a commentary on her nature. At the same time, descriptions of her nature and behavior are a commentary on the Hindu understanding of physical reality.

Other goddesses express and explore the nature of devotion and the divine-human relationship. Rada * and Sita*, in particular, are important examples of devotional models in the Hindu tradition and suggest a significant feminine dimension to devotion as understood in Hinduism. Laksmi* expresses Hindu thinking about kingship and the relationship of the ruler to the fertility of the world. The many goddesses associated with geographical features of the Indian subcontinent suggest Hindu thinking about the relationship between sacred space and spiritual liberation.

Most goddesses in their mythologies and natures also express Hindu thinking about sexual roles and relationships. Indeed, goddess mythology to a great extent is probably a means by which the Hindu tradition has thought about sexual roles and sexual identity. Many goddess myths seem to take particular delight in casting females in roles that appear contrary to the social roles of females as described in the *Dharma-sastras**, the Hindu books on law and society. Several goddesses are cast in untraditional, "masculine" roles that express unconventional, perhaps even experimental, thinking about sexual roles.

Other goddesses, in their myths and personalities, express central tensions that characterize the Hindu tradition. The best example is the mythology of the goddess Parvati*, in which the tension between dharma, the human tendency to uphold and refine the social and physical order, and *moksa**, the human longing to transcend all social and physical limitations, is explored in the relationship between Parvati and Siva*.

Although the truths underlying the goddesses may tend to be more world-affirming, more supportive of the emphasis in Hinduism on dharma, whereas the philosophic systems, especially Advaita Vedanta*, tend to support the *moksa* thrust of the tradition, the great variety of goddesses allows one to find in their mythology and worship expressions of almost every important Hindu theme. In short, a study of Hindu goddesses is not so much a study of one aspect of the Hindu tradition as it is a study of the Hindu tradition itself.

Throughout this book I have tried to resist the theological assumption found in much scholarship on Hindu goddesses that all female deities in the Hindu tradition are different manifestations of an underlying feminine principle or an overarching great goddess. There are, indeed, certain Hindu texts, myths, and traditions that assert this position unambiguously. But to assume that every Hindu goddess in every situation is a manifestation of one great goddess prevents us from viewing such goddesses as Laksmi, Parvati, and Radha as deities containing individually coherent mythologies, theologies, and meanings of their own.

Hindu goddesses are very different from one another. Some have strong maternal natures, whereas others are completely devoid of maternal characteristics. Some have strong, independent natures and are great warriors; others are domestic in nature and closely identified with male deities. Some Hindu goddesses are associated with the wild, untamed fringes of civilization; others are the very embodiment of art and culture. Although the centrality of a great goddess is clear in some texts and although this goddess *does* tend to include within her many-faceted being most important Hindu goddesses, her presence is not indicated in the majority of texts that speak of Hindu goddesses.

The case of the male gods of the Hindu pantheon is similar. Although some texts, philosophic systems, and traditions insist that all gods are actually manifestations of one god, or one ultimate reality, most texts, myths, cults, and traditions understand such deities as Siva*, Visnu*, Brahma*, Rama*, Krsna*, Skanda, Surya, and Ganesa* as individually significant gods whose coherent mythologies and theologies are quite unrelated to an overarching great god. Scholars have long recognized this and have written about the male deities as individual beings. Why should we not do the same thing for the many Hindu goddesses? I think that we should, and this is the approach that I have followed in this book.

1 Goddesses in Vedic Literature

The Hindu tradition affirms Vedic literature as the foundation, the sacred source, of Hinduism. This body of literature, which is exceedingly vast and varied, is held to be eternal and alone is classed as *sruti* *, "that which is heard," or revelation.¹ It is therefore important to survey this literature even though goddesses do not play a central role in the religion that is central to these texts. Another important reason for looking at Vedic literature is that some scholars have argued that the great goddesses of later Hinduism are in fact the same beings mentioned in the *Vedas*, only with new names.²

The *Rg-veda**, the oldest and most important Vedic text for a study of goddesses, is a collection of mantras, or hymns, celebrating deities, divine presences, or powers. The hymns were sung by *rsis**, great sages who the Hindu tradition affirms did not compose the hymns but heard them directly and then transmitted them, probably in a cultic, sacrificial context. The beings who are celebrated in the hymns of the *rsis* are numerous and diverse. The Rg-vedic* pantheon, moreover, seems highly unstructured, and it is difficult to reconstruct a coherent Indo-Aryan mythology on the basis of the *Rg-veda*, which is primarily interested not in describing the mythological deeds of the deities but in praising the gods in a ritual contexta ritual context that unfortunately is also difficult to deduce in any detail.

It is clear nevertheless, that a few deities dominated Rg-vedic religion. Agni, Soma, and Indra, all male deities, are praised repeatedly throughout the *Rg-veda* and are the most important gods if frequency of occurrence in the hymns is any measure of their significance. Such gods as Varuna, Mitra, Surya, Brhaspati*, Visvakarman*, and Tvastr* are also fairly significant male powers. Although many goddesses are mentioned in the *Rg-veda*, none is as central to the Rg-vedic vision of reality as Agni, Soma, or Indra, and only Usas* among the goddesses could be con-

sidered on a par with the male deities of the second rank. We should therefore keep in mind while studying the goddesses in the *Rg-veda* * that although there are many female deities they do not, either individually or collectively, represent the "center" of Rg-vedic* religion. In most cases they are mentioned infrequently and must have played minor roles compared to the great male gods of the *Rg-veda*.

Usas*

In the *Rg-veda* the goddess Usas is consistently associated with and often identified with the dawn. She reveals herself in the daily coming of light to the world. A young maiden, drawn in a hundred chariots (1.48), she brings forth light and is followed by the sun (Surya), who urges her onward (3.61). She is praised for driving away, or is petitioned to drive away, the oppressive darkness (7.78; 6.64; 10.172). She is asked to chase away evil demons, to send them far away (8.47.13). As the dawn, she is said to rouse all life, to set all things in motion, and to send people off to do their duties (1.48, 92). She sets the curled-up sleepers on their way to offer their sacrifices and thus renders service to the other gods (1.113). Usas gives strength and fame (1.44). She is that which impels life and is associated with the breath and life of all living creatures (1.48). She is associated with or moves with *rta**, cosmic, social, and moral order (3.61; 7.75). As the regularly recurring dawn she reveals and participates in cosmic order and is the foe of chaotic forces that threaten the world (1.113.12).

Usas is generally an auspicious goddess associated with light (6.64) and wealth. She is often likened to a cow. In *Rg-veda* 1.92 she is called the mother of cows and, like a cow that yields its udder for the benefit of people, so Usas bares her breasts to bring light for the benefit of humankind (3.58; 4.5). Although Usas is usually described as a young and beautiful maiden, she is also called the mother of the gods (1.113.12) and the Asvins* (3.39.3), a mother by her petitioners (7.81), she who tends all things like a good matron (1.48), and goddess of the hearth (6.64).

Usas observes all that people do, especially as she is associated with the light that uncovers everything from darkness and with *rta*, moral as well as cosmic order. She is said to be the eye of the gods (7.75). She is known as she who sees all, but she is rarely invoked to forgive human transgressions. It is more typical to invoke her to drive away or punish one's enemies. Finally, Usas is known as the goddess, reality, or presence that wears away youth (7.75). She is described as a skilled huntress who wastes away the lives of people (1.92). In accordance with the ways of

rta *, she wakes all living things but does not disturb the person who sleeps in death. As the recurring dawn, *Usas** is not only celebrated for bringing light from darkness. She is also petitioned to grant long life, as she is a constant reminder of people's limited time on earth (7.77). She is the mistress or marker of time.

Prthivi*

The goddess Prthivi* is nearly always associated with the earth, the terrestrial sphere where human beings live. In the *Rg-veda**, furthermore, she is almost always coupled with Dyaus, the male deity associated with the sky. So interdependent are these two deities in the *Rg-veda* that Prthivi is rarely addressed alone but almost always as part of the dual compound *dyavaprthivi**, sky-earth. Together they are said to kiss the center of the world (1.185.5). They sanctify each other in their complementary relationship (4.56.6). Together they are said to be the universal parents who created the world (1.159) and the gods (1.185). As might be expected, Dyaus is often called father and Prthivi mother. There is the implication that once upon a time the two were closely joined but were subsequently parted at Varuna's decree (6.70). They come together again when Dyaus fertilizes the earth (Prthivi) with rain, although in some cases it is said that together they provide abundant rain (4.56); it is not clear to what extent Prthivi should be exclusively associated with the earth alone and not the sky as well.

In addition to her maternal, productive characteristics Prthivi (usually along with Dyaus in the *Rg-veda*) is praised for her supportive nature. She is frequently called firm, she who upholds and supports all things (1.185). She encompasses all things (6.70), is broad and wide (1.185), and is motionless (1.185), although elsewhere she is said to move freely (5.84). Prthivi, with Dyaus, is often petitioned for wealth, riches, and power (6.70), and the waters they produce together are described as fat, full, nourishing, and fertile (1.22). They are also petitioned to protect people from danger, to expiate sin (1.185), and to bring happiness (10.63). Together they represent a wide, firm realm of abundance and safety, a realm pervaded by order (*rta*), which they strengthen and nourish (1.159). They are unwasting, inexhaustible, and rich in germs (6.70). In a funeral hymn the dead one is asked to go now to the lap of his mother earth, Prthivi, who is described as gracious and kind. She is asked not to press down too heavily upon the dead person but to cover him gently, as a mother covers her child with her skirt (10.18.1012).

The most extended hymn in praise of Prthivi * in Vedic literature is found in the *Atharva-veda* (12.1). The hymn is dedicated to Prthivi alone, and no mention is made of Dyaus. The mighty god Indra is her consort (1.6) and protects her from all danger (12.1.11, 18). Visnu* strides over her (12.1.10), and Parjanya, Prajapati*, and Visvakarma* all either protect her, provide for her, or are her consort. Agni is said to pervade her (12.1.19). Despite these associations with male deities, however, the hymn makes clear that Prthivi is a great deity in her own right. The hymn repeatedly emphasizes Prthivi's* fertility. She is the source of all plants, especially crops, and also nourishes all creatures that live upon her. She is described as patient and strong (12.1.29), supporting the wicked and the good, the demons and the gods. She is frequently addressed as mother and is asked to pour forth milk as a mother does for a son. She is called a nurse to all living things (12.1.4), and her breasts are full of nectar. The singer of the hymn asks Prthivi to produce her breasts to him so that he might enjoy a long life. Prthivi is also said to manifest herself in the scent of women and men, to be the luck and light in men, and to be the splendid energy of maids (12.1.25).

In sum, Prthivi is a stable, fertile, benign presence in Vedic literature. She is addressed as a mother, and it is clear that those who praise her see her as a warm, nursing goddess who provides sustenance to all those who move upon her firm, broad expanse. The *Rg-veda** nearly always links her with the male god Dyaus, but in the *Atharva-veda* and later Vedic literature she emerges as an independent being.

Aditi

Although the goddess Aditi is mentioned nearly eighty times in the *Rg-veda*, it is difficult to gain a clear picture of her nature. She is usually mentioned along with other gods or goddesses, there is no one hymn addressed exclusively to her, and unlike many other Vedic deities she is not obviously associated with some natural phenomenon. Compared to Usas* and Prthivi, her character seems ill defined. She is virtually featureless physically.

Perhaps the most outstanding attribute of Aditi is her motherhood. She is preeminently the mother of the Adityas*, a group of seven or eight gods which includes Mitra, Aryaman, Bhaga, Varuna, Daksa*, and Amsa* (2.27.1). Aditi is also said to be the mother of the great god Indra, the mother of kings (2.27), and the mother of the gods (1.113.19). Unlike Prthivi, however, whose motherhood is also central to her nature, Aditi does not have a male consort in the *Rg-veda*.

As a mothering presence, Aditi is often asked to guard the one who petitions her (1.106.7; 8.18.6) or to provide him or her with wealth, safety, and abundance (10.100; 1.94.15). Appropriate to her role as a mother, Aditi is sometimes associated with or identified as a cow. As a cow she provides nourishment, and as the cosmic cow her milk is identified with the redemptive, invigorating drink *soma* (1.153.3).

The name Aditi is derived from the root *da* * (to bind or fetter) and suggests another aspect of her character. As *a-diti*, she is the *unbound*, free one, and it is evident in the hymns to her that she is often called upon to free the petitioner from different hindrances, especially sin and sickness (2.27.14). In one hymn she is asked to free a petitioner who is tied up like a thief (8.67.14). In this role as the one who binds and loosens Aditi is similar in function to Varuna, who in fact is one of her sons. Aditi thus plays the role of guardian of *rta**, the cosmic-moral order. As such she is called a supporter of creatures (1.136). She supports creatures by providing or enforcing *rta*, those ordinances or rhythms that delineate order from chaos.

Aditi is also called widely expanded (5.46.6) and extensive, the mistress of wide stalls (8.67.12), and in this respect one is reminded of Prthivi*. In fact, Aditi and Prthivi become virtually identified in the *Brahmanas**.3

Sarasvati*

The close association between natural phenomena and such Vedic goddesses as Usas* and Prthivi is also seen in the goddess Sarasvati, who is associated with a particular river. Although scholars have debated precisely which river she was identified with in Vedic times (the Sarasvati River of that period has since disappeared), in the *Rg-veda** her most important characteristics are those of a particular mighty river. Indeed, at times it is not clear whether a goddess or a river is being praised; many references hail the Sarasvati River as a mighty goddess.

Sarasvati is called mighty and powerful. Her waves are said to break down mountains, and her flood waters are described as roaring (6.61.2, 8). She is said to surpass all waters in greatness, to be ever active, and to be great among the great. She is said to be inexhaustible, having her source in the celestial ocean (7.95.12; 5.43.11). She is clearly no mere river but a heaven-sent stream that blesses the earth. Indeed, she is said to pervade the triple creation of earth, atmosphere, and the celestial regions (6.61.1112).

She is praised for the fertility she brings the earth. She is praised or

petitioned for wealth, vitality, children, nourishment, and immortality, and as such she is called *subhaga* (bountiful). As a fecund, bountiful presence, she is called mother, the best of mothers (2.41.16). As a nourishing, maternal goddess, she is described in terms similar to Prthivi *: she quickens life, is the source of vigor and strength, and provides good luck and material well-being to those whom she blesses. In one particular hymn she is called upon by unmarried men who yearn for sons. They ask to enjoy her breast that is swollen with streams and to receive from her food and progeny (7.96.46; 1.164.49). She is sometimes petitioned for protection and in this aspect is called a sheltering tree (7.95.5) and an iron fort (7.95.1), neither image being particularly fluvial.

Sarasvati* is also closely related to Vedic cult, both as a participant in or witness of the cult and as a guardian of the cult. She is invoked with and associated with the sacrificial goddesses Ida* and Bharati* and with the goddesses Mahi* and Hotra*, who are associated with prayer (7.37.11; 10.65.13). She is said to destroy those who revile the gods and to be a slayer of Vrtra*, a demon of chaos.

Sarasvati is described particularly as a purifying presence (1.3.10). Her waters cleanse poison from men (6.61.3). Along with rivers and floods in general, she cleanses her petitioners with holy oil and bears away defilements (10.17.10)

Anticipating her later nature as a goddess of inspiration, eloquence, and learning, the hymns of the *Rg-veda** also describe Sarasvati as the inciter of all pleasant songs, all gracious thought, and every pious thought (1.3.1012). In this vein she is similar to the Vedic goddess Vac* (speech), with whom she is consistently identified in the *Brahmanas**.4

Vac*

Although the significance of sound and speech as the primordial stuff of creation is primarily a post-Rg-vedic concept, it is apparent even in the *Rg-veda* that sound, and especially ritual speech, is powerful, creative, and a mainstay of cosmic-ritual order. The goddess Vac, whose name means "speech," reveals herself through speech and is typically characterized by the various attributes and uses of speech. She is speech, and the mysteries and miracles of speech express her peculiar, numinous nature. She is the presence that inspires the *rsis** and that makes a person a Brahman (10.125). She is truth, and she inspires truth by sustaining Soma, the personification of the exhilarating drink of vision and immortality (10.125). She is the mysterious presence that enables one to hear, see, grasp, and then express in words the true nature of things. She is the

prompter of and the vehicle of expression for visionary perception, and as such she is intimately associated with the *rsis* * and the rituals that express or capture the truths of their visions. In an important sense she is an essential part of the religious-poetic visionary experience of the *rsis* and of the sacrificial rituals that appropriate those visions.

Perhaps reflecting her role as the bestower of vision, Vac* is called a heavenly queen, the queen of the gods (8.89), she who streams with sweetness (5.73.3) and bestows vital powers (3.53.15). She is described as a courtly, elegant woman, bright and adorned with gold (1.167.3). She is, like most other Vedic goddesses, a benign, bounteous being. She not only bestows on people the special riches of language, she is praised in general terms for giving light and strength; one hymn says that she alone provides people with food. She is, then, more than a kind of artificial construct, a personified abstract. She is a pervasive, nourishing deity who stimulates organic growth as well as providing the blessings of language and vision. She is often invoked as a heavenly cow (4.1.16; 8.89) that gives sustenance to the gods and men. She is also called mother, as it is she who has given birth to things through naming them. Her benign nature is also celebrated for enabling people to see and recognize friends. Bearing her mark of intelligible, familiar speech, one friend may recognize and commune with another (10.71). Thus Vac is a bounteous cow who provides, first, the lofty, discerning vision of the *rsi**; second, the ritual formulas of the priest; and third, the everyday language of people which enables them to establish themselves as a community of friends.

Vac's* character is richly developed in the *Brahmanas** in a series of myths and images that associate her with creation and ritual. Vac's indispensability in ritual and cult (in which spoken or chanted mantras are essential) is emphasized in myths that tell of how the gods stole her or seduced her away from the demons after the creation of the world and, having obtained her, instituted sacrificial rituals that sustain the creation and produce bounty, life, and immortality for the gods.⁵ Without her the divine rituals would not have been possible. In her role as creator, Vac is said to create the three *Vedas*,⁶ and the three *Vedas* are in turn equated with the earth (*Rg-veda**), the air (*Yajur-veda*), and the sky (*Sama-veda*).⁷ At another place she is said to have entered into the sap of plants and trees, thus pervading and enlivening all vegetation.⁸ Prajapati*, the central deity in the *Brahmanas*, is described as initiating creation by impregnating himself by comingling his mind and his speech.⁹ Elsewhere it is said that Vac, having been created by Prajapati's* mind, wished to become manifest, to multiply herself, to extend herself, and so it was that creation proceeded, impelled by Vac's urge to create.¹⁰

Vac * plays a significant role in Vedic literature, not only in terms of being mentioned often but also from a theoretical point of view. Theologically it is suggested that she is coeternal with Prajapati*. Although the *Brahmanas** are not consistent, sometimes stating that Vac is created by Prajapati, she does seem to have a theologically exalted position in these texts. There are also hints that it is through Vac, or in pairing with her, that Prajapati creates. This is different from the role of *sakti** in later Hindu philosophic schools, in which the male counterpart of *sakti* tends to be inactive. Prajapati toils and desires the creation. Nevertheless, her role in the *Brahmanas* is suggestive of the nature of *sakti* in later Hinduism. Her role vis-à-vis Prajapati is also suggestive of the theory of *Sabda-brahman** (the absolute in the form of sound) and the *sphota** theory of creation (in which the world is created through sound).

Nirrti*

The Vedic goddesses we have looked at so far are generally benign, protective deities to whom the hymnist typically appeals for wealth, strength, and general well-being. The goddess Nirrti has no such benign qualities. She is not mentioned very often in the *Rg-veda**, but when she is, the concern of the hymn is to seek protection from her or to ask that she be driven away. The scattered references to her seem to equate her with death, ill luck, and destruction. There is just one hymn in the *Rg-veda*, 10.59, in which she is mentioned several times, but that hymn sums up very well Nirrti's* nature. After four verses in which renewed life, wealth, food, glorious deeds, youth, and continued long life are requested from the gods, the following refrain is invoked: "Let Nirrti depart to distant places." Decay, need, anger, cowardice, old age, and death: these are the ways in which Nirrti manifests herself. She thus represents a dark side to the Vedic vision of the divine feminine.

Later Vedic literature describes Nirrti in far more detail and mentions her more frequently than does the *Rg-veda*. Appropriately, she is said to be dark, to dress in dark clothes, and to receive dark husks for her share of the sacrifice,¹¹ although once she is said to have golden locks.¹² She lives in the South, the direction of the kingdom of the dead,¹³ is associated with pain,¹⁴ and is repeatedly given offerings with the specific intention of keeping her away from the sacrificial rituals and from the affairs of people in general.

Ratri *

The goddess Ratri is almost always associated with the night. Indeed, she is the night, and as such she is the presence or power that is petitioned by people for comfort and security in the dark hours before the triumphant return of the dawn. Her physical appearance is rarely mentioned, although she is sometimes described as a beautiful maiden along with her sister, Usas*, the dawn. She is called glorious and immortal and is praised for providing light in the darkness, bedecked as she is with countless stars. Generally she is pictured as a benign being. She is lauded for giving rest to all creatures.¹⁵ She is praised for bestowing life-sustaining dew¹⁶ and with Usas is said to provide and strengthen vital powers.¹⁷ She is especially invoked to protect people from dangers peculiar to the night. Thus, she is petitioned to keep wolves away, to protect against thieves,¹⁸ and to protect people from any creature that might do them harm in the night.¹⁹

Despite Ratri's* usually benign nature, some texts refer to her in negative terms or associate her with things inimical to people. In the *Rg-veda** she is chased away by Agni, the god of fire (10.3.1), and also by Usas (1.92.11). Ratri is called barren (1.122.2) and gloomy (10.172.4) in comparison with her bright and bounteous sister, Usas. Occasionally she is associated with the very creatures or dangers of the night from which she is elsewhere asked to protect people.²⁰ Ratri, then, is not only the guardian of the night, the protectress of people during the dark hours of their rest, but the night itself and those things, both benign and hostile, which inhabit the night.

The majority of references to Ratri in the *Rg-veda* link her with Usas, who is said to be her sister. Usually they are said to be two lovely maidens, sometimes twins. Together they are called powerful mothers (1.142.7) and strengtheners of vital power (5.5.6). They are also called weavers of time and mothers of eternal law. In their alternating, cyclical, and endless appearances, they represent the stable, rhythmic patterns of the cosmos in which light and dark inevitably follow each other in an orderly, predictable manner. Together they illustrate the coherence of the created order: the ordered alternations of vigor and rest, light and dark, and the regular flow of time.

Minor Vedic Goddesses

Several goddesses known to the *Rg-veda* are mentioned so infrequently that it is difficult to perceive what their distinctive natures might

have been. Some of these minor goddesses seem to be synonymous with abundance. Puramdhi *, Parendi*, Raka*, and Dhisana*, none of whom is mentioned more than about a dozen times in the *Rg-veda**, are all associated with bounty and riches. As is the case with most Vedic goddesses, their natures appear to be benign and their presences revealed through material well-being. Sinivali* is also a benign goddess but is specifically associated with progeny. She is described as mistress of the family, broad-hipped, and prolific. When she is invoked it is to grant the petitioner offspring (2.32; 10.184).

Another group of minor goddesses seems to be associated primarily with the sacrificial cult of the *Rg-veda*. When Ila*, Bharati*, Mahi*, and Hotra* are mentioned, they are almost always being summoned to take their place on the sacrificial grass prior to a ritual. They are also almost invariably grouped with Sarasvati*. Ila (Ida* in the *Brahmanas**) seems to be associated with the sacrificial offering itself, specifically the cow from which many sacrificial objects were taken. She is called butter-handed and butter-footed, which is reminiscent of Agni's description as the presence or deity who actually takes the sacrifice and transmits it to the other gods. While it may be the case that these goddesses are some type of personification of certain aspects of the sacrificial ritual, they are mentioned so seldom, and almost always along with a list of many other deities, that such a conclusion seems only a guess, with the possible exception of Ila (Ida). Why these goddesses happen to be invoked with Sarasvati is also not clear. There is no indication that they are associated with rivers, and Sarasvati is not a particularly important goddess in the sacrificial ritual itself.

The most interesting references in the *Rg-veda* to the goddess Surya*, the daughter of the sun god Surya (sometimes Savitr*), concern her wedding. All the gods desire her, but her father wishes to give her to Soma; however, it is settled that the first to reach the sun will wed her. The twin gods, the Asvins*, win the race and the bride, and although Surya is said to be given to the god Pusan (6.58.4) and to be wooed by Soma (10.85.9), the other references to her in the *Rg-veda* almost always describe her as riding in the chariot of her twin husbands, the Asvins, who after winning her are said to have attained all that they desired (8.8.10). Although it may be implied that Surya is fair and desirable, there is actually little description of her beyond the rather obscure picture of her in the *Rg-veda* (10.85) in which she seems to be likened to the sacrifice and is said to pervade the cosmos. Her husband in this hymn is Soma; the hymn may be describing the interdependence of Soma and the sacrifice (personified as Surya) in the metaphor of a marriage. The Asvins in this hymn are the groomsmen of her father, which is unusual.

References to Danu *, Saranyu*, and Sarama* are so infrequent and so lacking in description that it is difficult to even speculate on what their distinctive natures might have been. Danu is identified as the mother of the cosmic demon Vrtra*, who is defeated by the god Indra. She is compared to a cow (1.32.9), although her son, who is described as without hands and feet, is more reptilian in appearance. The word *danu** is used elsewhere in reference to the waters of heaven; it may be that Danu was associated with the formless, primordial waters that existed prior to creation, the waters in which Vrtra hid and which he withheld from creation until they were freed by Indra's mighty deed.

Saranyu is the daughter of Tvastr* and the sister of Visvarupa*. She is said to marry the god Vivasvat (10.17.1) and to give birth to twins, Yama and Yami* (the progenitors of the human race). It has been suggested that her nature is essentially impetuous, for her name means "quick, speedy, nimble,"²¹ but there are no references to this aspect of her nature in the *Rg-veda**. Sarama, whose name has a similar meaning, "the fleet one," is in later literature known as the mother of dogs, a heavenly bitch. But there is no indication of this aspect in the *Rg-veda*. In the *Rg-veda* her only significant action is to seek out the thieving Panis*, who have stolen cows, and to act as Indra's messenger to the Panis in negotiating the return of the cows. Perhaps her ability to track and cross rivers hints at her later canine nature.

One hymn of the *Rg-veda* (10.146) refers to a goddess of the forest, Aranyani*. From this one hymn we get a rather clear picture of the goddess. She is an elusive figure who vanishes from sight and avoids villages. She is more often heard than seen. She speaks through the sounds of the forest, or one may even hear her tinkling bells. She seems to make her presence known especially at evening, and those who spend the night in the forest sometimes think they hear her scream. She never kills unless provoked by some murderous enemy. She is sweetly scented, is mother of all forest things, and provides plenty of food without tilling.

This goddess is interesting for two reasons. First, she hints at an archaic type of goddess known as the mistress of animals, although there is no specific reference to her guarding animals or providing them for human hunters. Second, she sounds very much like the Yaksis* of the later Indian tradition, those female beings who dwell in the forest, are worshiped away from the village, and who have, despite their generally benign qualities, certain uncanny characteristics. This late hymn of the *Rg-veda* may well be an early literary reference to a Yaksi* or to a goddess modeled on those indigenous creatures of the Indian forests.

Several important Vedic gods are said to have wives or consorts. None of these goddesses is mentioned very often in Vedic literature, but

it is important to note their existence in light of subsequent Hindu mythology, in which many of the most important goddesses are consorts of well-known Hindu gods, and also in light of the later Hindu concept of *sakti* *. The names of these early goddesses are usually formed simply by the addition of a feminine suffix to the god's name: for example, Indrani*, Varunani*, Agnaya*, and in later Vedic literature Rudrani* (the wife of Rudra). With the exception of Indrani, these goddesses have no independent character of their own. They are mentioned so infrequently and are so lacking in descriptive detail that they appear to be mere minor appendages to their husbands, who are powerful beings in the Vedic pantheon. Indrani is mentioned far more often than any other goddess of this type, but even so it is clear that she is greatly overshadowed by her husband, Indra. She is described as beautiful, and one hymn of the *Rg-veda** pictures her as jealous of rivals (10.86). She is also called by the name Saci*, which denotes power and suggests the later idea of *sakti*, the feminine, personified might of the gods of later Hindu mythology. Indeed, in another hymn (10.159) IndraniSaci* boasts of having won her husband by conquering him and brags that he is submissive to her will. In the same hymn, however, she goes on to petition the gods to rid her of rivals for Indra's favor, and elsewhere she is said to stay at home (3.53.6). Despite suggestions of the later *sakti* idea, then, Indrani is actually a minor goddess of little power, despite her boasts to the contrary.

Conclusion

Several conclusions concerning goddesses in Vedic literature are clear. First, none of them rivals the great male gods in these texts. Indeed, Usas*, the most popular goddess (in terms of the number of times she is mentioned and the number of hymns addressed specifically to her), is only a deity of the third rank. In short, male deities dominate the Vedic vision of the divine.

Second, there is evidence that some of the Vedic goddesses survive in the later Hindu tradition. Prthivi* persists in later Hinduism and becomes associated with the god Visnu*. She is often called Bhudevi* (the goddess of the earth) and appears in myths primarily in the role of supplicant to the gods because of the burden of having to sustain a notoriously evil demon. Sarasvati* also continues to be known in the later tradition and becomes popular primarily as a goddess of learning, wisdom, and culture.²² Although the goddess Vac* disappears, in later Hinduism Sarasvati might be said to express Vac's* primary meaning as

inspired speech, and the idea of the creation of the world through sound probably finds inspiration in the ideas about Vac * in Vedic literature. Similarly, the idea of *sakti**, though it is not developed in Vedic literature, is suggested in the various consorts of the male deities, especially in Saci* (Indrani*). Many of the Vedic goddesses, however, simply disappear in the later Hindu tradition. Usas* and Aditi, for example, are rarely found in later texts.

Third, many of the most important goddesses of the later tradition are not found at all in Vedic literature or are simply mentioned by name in passing. Such important goddesses as Parvati*, Durga*, Kali*, Radha*, and Sita* are unknown in early Vedic literature. Sri*, though she appears in later Vedic literature, is not fully developed and does not occupy the central role that she does in the later tradition. Furthermore, none of the Vedic goddesses is clearly associated with battle or blood sacrifice, both of which are important associations in the myths and cults of several later Hindu goddesses.

Fourth, there is no one great goddess in the Vedic literature. Although some scholars have affirmed her existence in this literature,²³ she quite simply is nowhere mentioned. There is no evidence that the authors of the Vedic texts supposed that all the individual goddesses are manifestations of one great goddess. Since the Vedic texts do not assume a great god who manifests himself in individual gods, I fail to understand why such an assumption should be made for the female deities. It is as if the sexual identification of the goddesses is so overwhelmingly significant that one is justified in lumping them all together. But clearly the goddesses vary greatly and are as distinct from one another as the male gods are from one another.²⁴ The Mahadevi* (great goddess) does not appear until the medieval period in Hinduism, and she is the product of a carefully articulated theology.²⁵ Although some goddesses *are* conflated with one another at certain times and places and in certain texts, even in Vedic literature,²⁶ this does not justify imposing on such examples a much later, systematic *sakta** theology.

2

Sri-Laksmi *

The goddess Sri*, who is also commonly known by the name Laksmi*, has been known in the Hindu tradition since pre-Buddhist times. She is one of the most popular goddesses in the Hindu pantheon. She has a considerable body of mythology and is widely worshiped by Hindus of all castes throughout India to this day. Since the late epic period (ca. A.D. 400) she has been particularly associated with the god Visnu* as his wife or consort. In this role she plays the part of a model Hindu wife, obediently serving her husband as lord. Throughout her history Sri has been associated with prosperity, well-being, royal power, and illustriousness. In many respects she is the embodiment of these qualities, and it is commonly understood that when these qualities are evident, Sri herself is present or reveals herself.

The Early History of Sri-Laksmi

The goddess Sri-Laksmi* does not appear in the earliest Vedic literature.¹ The term *sri**, however, does occur quite often, and it is clear that the meanings of the term are related to the nature of the later goddess Sri-Laksmi. As used in the Vedic hymns the term *sri* suggests capability, power, and advantageous skills. As an external quality *sri* suggests beauty, luster, glory, and high rank. The term is especially used in later Vedic literature to refer to the ruling power, dominion, and majesty of kings. As such it seems to be a distinct, disembodied power that is acquired by kings in various ways. It seems to be a power associated more with the office of the king than with the king himself. At one point *sri* is identified with the cushion upon which the king sits. The idea is that the cushion or seat, *sri*, ruling power, is temporarily possessed by the current owner of the seat.² *Sri** also refers to riches, prosperity, and

abundance in general. In that sense it is something that may be acquired or possessed by anyone. In short, *sri* * refers to most auspicious qualities and suggests general well-being in terms of physical health, material prosperity, bodily beauty, and ruling majesty.

In what may be the earliest myth that speaks of Sri* as a goddess, she is the personification or embodiment of auspicious, particularly royal, qualities.³ She is born as a result of the austerities of Prajapati*. Seeing Sri, the other gods covet her qualities and proceed to steal them from her. Ten qualities, or objects, are listed: food, royal power, universal sovereignty, noble rank, power, holy luster, kingdom, fortune, bounteousness, and beauty.⁴ In Vedic literature, then, the goddess Sri's* origin seems to be the result of the personification of auspicious qualities, particularly those associated with royal power and riches.

The most detailed picture of Sri-Laksmi* in Vedic literature is found in the *Srisukta**, a hymn in praise of Sri which is part of an appendix to the *Rg-veda** and which is probably pre-Buddhist in date.⁵ This is surely one of the earliest hymns to Sri and associates her with certain symbols and qualities that persist throughout her history in the Hindu tradition. Not surprisingly, and in conformity with the meanings of the term *sri* in early Vedic literature, Sri is invoked to bring fame and prosperity (verse 7). She is said to be bountiful and to give abundance (5). She is said to bestow on her worshiper gold (14), cattle, horses (1), and food (10). She is asked to banish her sister Alaksmi*, "misfortune" (5, 6, 8), who appears in such inauspicious forms as need, poverty, hunger, and thirst (8). Royal qualities are suggested when she is described as seated in the middle of a chariot, possessed of the best horses, and delighted by the sounds of elephants (3). In outward appearance she is glorious and richly ornamented. She is radiant as gold, illustrious like the moon, and wears a necklace of gold and silver (1). She is often said to shine like the sun (6, 13) and to be lustrous like fire (4).

An important feature of Sri in this hymn is her association with fertility, a feature that was not significantly emphasized in earlier usages of the term *sri* in Vedic literature. In the *Sri-sukta* she is described as moist (13,14), perceptible through odor (9), abundant in harvest, and dwelling in cow dung (9). Her son is said to be Kardama, which means mud, mire, or slime (11). Clearly, Sri is associated with growth and the fecundity of moist, rich soil. Her presence is affirmed to be discernible in the mysterious potency of the earth. Although Sri's association with agricultural fertility does not play a central role in her later literary history in Hinduism, this aspect of Sri remains important to this day at the village level. Villagers, particularly women, are reported to worship Sri in the

form of cow dung on certain occasions, and this form of worship is actually enjoined in the *Nilamata-purana* *.6

The hymn to Sri* also mentions two objects that come to be consistently associated with Sri throughout her history: the lotus and the elephant. She is seated on a lotus, is the color of a lotus (4), appears like a lotus (5), is covered with lotuses, and wears a garland of lotuses (14). Throughout her history, in fact, Sri-Laksmi* is often called Padma* and Kamala*, "lotus." The popularity of the lotus in Indian art and iconography, both Buddhist and Hindu, suggests a complex and multivalent meaning associated with the lotus.

As expressive of Sri-Laksmi's* nature two general meanings seem apparent. First, the lotus is a symbol of fertility and life which is rooted in and takes its strength from the primordial waters.⁷ The lotus symbolizes vegetative growth that has distilled the life-giving power of the waters into embodied life.⁸ The lotus, and the goddess Sri-Laksmi by association, represents the fully developed blossoming of organic life. At the macrocosmic level the lotus might be taken as a symbol of the entire created world. The lotus growing from the navel of Visnu* marks the beginning of a new cosmic creation. The frequent use of the lotus in Tantric *mandalas** also points to the lotus as a symbol of the entire created universe.⁹ The lotus suggests a growing, expanding world imbued with vigorous fertile power. It is this power that is revealed in Sri-Laksmi. She is the nectar (the *rasa*) of creation which lends to creation its distinctive flavor and beauty. Organic life, impelled as it is by this mysterious power, flowers richly and beautifully in the creative processes of the world.

The second meaning of the lotus in relation to Sri-Laksmi refers to purity and spiritual power. Rooted in the mud but blossoming above the water, completely uncontaminated by the mud, the lotus represents spiritual perfection and authority. A common motif in Hindu and Buddhist iconography is the lotus seat. The gods and goddesses, the buddhas and bodhisattvas, typically sit or stand upon a lotus, which suggests their spiritual authority. To be seated upon or to be otherwise associated with the lotus suggests that the being in question god, buddha, or human being has transcended the limitations of the finite world (the mud of existence, as it were) and floats freely in a sphere of purity and spirituality. Sri-Laksmi thus suggests more than the fertilizing powers of moist soil and the mysterious powers of growth. She suggests a perfection or state of refinement that transcends the material world. She is associated not only with royal authority but with spiritual authority as well and she combines royal and priestly powers in her presence.

One of the most popular and enduring representations of Sri-Laksmi * shows her flanked by two elephants in the so-called Gaja-Laksmi* images. The elephants shower her with water from their trunks or empty pots of water over her.¹⁰ The elephants seem to have two related meanings. First, they most likely represent fertilizing rains. An ancient Hindu tradition says that the first elephants had wings and flew about the sky. In fact, they were clouds and showered the earth with rain wherever they went. These sky elephants, however, were cursed by a sage when they landed on a tree under which he was meditating and broke his concentration. Stripped of their wings, they henceforth had to remain earthbound. But these earth elephants are still regarded as cousins of clouds, and their presence is supposed to attract their "white cousins," who bring fertilizing rains with them.¹¹ The flanking, showering elephants in images of Sri-Laksmi reinforce one of the principal themes that we have already noted in her nature, her association with the fertility of crops and the sap of existence. Where Laksmi* is, there elephants are, and where elephants are, there is produced the fertilizing potency of rain.

Second, elephants suggest royal authority. Kings in ancient India kept stables of elephants, which formed their heavy artillery in military campaigns. Kings often traveled on elephants in ceremonial processions, and in general elephants were considered an important indication of royal authority. Kings in ancient India were also believed to be responsible for rain and the fertility of the crops.¹² To ensure the kings' beneficial influence, it was probably important for them to keep several elephants for their power to bring fertilizing rains. In the king and the elephant, then, are brought together two central themes in the imagery of Sri-Laksmi, royal authority and fertility.

Images of Sri* with elephants are probably meant to portray the act of royal consecration. The central ritual action of the Vedic royal-consecration ceremony, the Rajasuya*, was the *abhisekha** ritual, in which the king was consecrated by having auspicious waters poured over him to bestow authority and vigor on him.¹³ Insofar as the elephants in these images of Laksmi may be understood to be portraying the *abhisekha*, they bestow the qualities of fertility and royal authority on Laksmi, herself the source of these very qualities.¹⁴ The elephants, furthermore, are often shown standing on lotuses,¹⁵ the preeminent symbol of Laksmi. The elephants thus imbue Laksmi with those very qualities that she possesses to the highest degree, and she in turn infuses the elephants with the same qualities. A more highly charged image denoting the increase of royal authority, fertility, and vigor would be difficult to imagine."¹⁶

Sri-Laksmi * in Later Hinduism

In the course of her history Sri-Laksmi* has been associated with male deities, each of whom is significant in suggesting characteristics of the goddess. Some texts associate her with the god Soma. Sri-Laksmi, along with several other deities, attends Soma after he performs a great royal sacrifice.¹⁷ The association of Laksmi* with Soma is noteworthy for two reasons. First, in attending him after he has assumed the position of royal authority, she demonstrates one of her main characteristics, that of bestowing royal authority or being present where royal authority exists. Second, Soma is well known as the lord of plants and is often identified with the fertile sap that underlies vegetative growth. It is fitting that Sri-Laksmi, who is similarly identified, should be associated with Soma in these texts. They complement and reinforce each other as symbols of the sap of existence.

A few texts say that Laksmi is the wife of Dharma. She and several other goddesses, all of whom are personifications of certain auspicious qualities, were given to Dharma in marriage by her father, Daksa*. This association seems primarily to represent a thinly disguised "wedding" of Dharma (virtuous conduct) with Sri-Laksmi (prosperity and well-being). The point of the association seems to be to teach that by performing dharma one obtains prosperity.¹⁸

A more interesting and fully developed association is between Sri and the god Indra.¹⁹ Several myths relate the theme of Indra's losing, acquiring, or being restored to the boon of Sri-Laksmi's* presence. In these myths it is clear that what is lost, acquired, or restored in the person of Sri is royal authority and power. Indra is traditionally known as the king of the gods, the foremost of the gods, and he is typically described as a heavenly king. It is therefore appropriate for Sri to be associated with him as his wife or consort. In these myths Sri-Laksmi appears as the embodiment of royal authority, as a being whose presence is essential for the effective wielding of royal power and the creation of royal prosperity.

Several myths of this genre describe Sri-Laksmi as being persuaded to leave one ruler for another. She is said, for example, to dwell with the demons Bali and Prahlada*. While she dwells with these demons they are demons in name only. Under her gracious presence they rule their kingdoms righteously, society operates smoothly, the lands are fertile, and the demon kings themselves shimmer with sublime inner and outer qualities. When she leaves Prahlada, at Indra's request, the demon loses his luster and fears for his well-being.²⁰ Along with Sri, the following

Image not available.

Sri-Laksmi *. Pratapaditya Pal, Indo-Asian Art from the John Gilmore Ford Collection (Baltimore: Walters Art Gallery, 1971), fig. 19. Reprinted by permission of the Walters Art Gallery.

qualities depart from Prahlada *: good conduct, virtuous behavior, truth, activity, and strength. With Sri's* departure, Prahlada is left emptied of his royal might and his predilections toward virtuous conduct.

The myths concerning the demon Bali make clear the same association between Laksmi* and victorious kings. In these myths Bali defeats Indra. Laksmi is attracted to Bali's winning ways and bravery and joins him, along with her attendant auspicious virtues. In association with the auspicious goddess, Bali rules the three worlds with virtue, and under his rule the three worlds prosper.²¹ Only when Visnu*, at the request of the dethroned gods, tricks Bali into surrendering the three worlds does Sri-Laksmi* depart from Bali, leaving him lusterless and powerless.

Sri-Laksmi's* presence ensures a king more than ruling power. One of the myths associating her with Indra tells us that when she sat down next to Indra he began to pour down rain and the crops grew abundantly. Cows gave plenty of milk, all beings enjoyed prosperity, and the earth flourished.²² Indra is associated with fertility in Vedic texts, and well into the medieval period festivals celebrated in his honor associated him with the fertility of the crops. From the earliest Vedic texts he is described as wielding the *vajra* (the thunderbolt) as his favorite weapon, and to the present day he is associated with bringing rain. As a couple, Sri-Laksmi and Indra are a clear example of a common type of divine pair in the world's religions: a female earth goddess and a male sky/rain god. Together they combine to generate the fertility that is necessary to all life. In the *Vedas* the deities Dyaus and Prthivi* are a good example of this type of divine pair and the reciprocal roles they play in generating and sustaining life. Sri-Laksmi in association with Indra seems to represent a later version of the DyausPrthivi¹ couple. In this symbiotic relationship the male deity, associated with the sky, is said to fertilize the female deity with his rain. Indra also seems to have had phallic associations in his identification with the plow, and it seems appropriate that he would become associated with a goddess representing the fertile earth.²³

Some traditions also associate Sri-Laksmi with the god Kubera. Kubera is lord of the *Yaksas**, a race of supernatural beings who in general frequent forests and uncivilized areas, and he is in particular the possessor and distributor of wealth. He is the possessor and guardian of the earth's treasures in the form of gems. Sri's relationship to Kubera is appropriate insofar as each of them is preeminently associated with prosperity and wealth.²⁴ Where wealth and abundance are, one or the other deity, and probably both, is certain to be found. So the two deities become associated as a couple.²⁵ Sri's identification through Kubera with the *Yaksas*, in addition, emphasizes her identity with the mysterious

powers of growth and fertility. 26 Yaksas* often play the part of fertility symbols in Indian art and generally are associated iconographically with trees, vines, and vegetative growth. They are often shown embracing trees, leaning against trees,²⁷ or pouring forth vegetation from their mouths or navels.²⁸ The identification of Sri-Laksmi*, the goddess who embodies the potent power of growth, with the Yaksas is natural. She, like them, involves herself and reveals herself in the irrepressible fecundity of plant life.

Sri-Laksmi's* association with so many different male deities and with the notorious fleetingness of good fortune earned her a reputation for fickleness and inconstancy.²⁹ In one text she is said to be so unsteady that even in a picture she moves and that if she associates with Visnu* it is only because she is attracted to his many different forms (*avataras**).³⁰ By the late epic period (ca. A.D. 400), however, Sri-Laksmi becomes consistently and almost exclusively associated with Visnu; as his wife she becomes characterized by steadfastness.³¹ It is as if in Visnu she has finally found the god she was looking for and, having found him, has remained loyal to him ever since.

Mythologically Sri-Laksmi's association with Visnu comes about in the context of the churning of the milk ocean by the gods and demons, who seek the elixir of immortality (*amrta**). Laksmi* does not figure at all in some versions of this story,³² but in others she is the central focus of the myth.³³ What seems clear is that a myth concerning the churning of the ocean to obtain various valuable things existed from ancient times in India and that at some point Laksmi's* origin was felt to be related to this mythological event. The interesting question is why Laksmi's origin makes sense in the context of this myth and how her association with Visnu comes about in later versions of the myth.

An ancient Indian tradition asserts that creation proceeds from an infinite body of primordial water, that the world or the multitude of universes of later Hinduism ultimately arises from and rests upon this limitless expanse of waters. In its unrefined state this watery world is chaotic, or at least formless and overwhelming. Creation, or ordered existence, only takes place when this watery mass is somehow agitated, processed, or refined in such a way that form and growth take place. Within the watery formlessness resides the potency or essence of life, *rasa*, *amrta**, or *soma*. When this potency is released by the primordial waters, creation can proceed.³⁴ The churning of the ocean by the gods and demons is intended to obtain the nectar of immortality, the essence of creative power that will make the churners immortal and grant them their status as ordainers and overseers of creation. The act of churning dramatically illustrates the process of distilling the essence of the primor-

dial waters. By churning milk one thickens and refines it until it yields a richer substancebutter. Similarly, the milk ocean when churned yields valuable essences, among them, in most later versions of the myth, the goddess Sri-Laksmi *.

The role or place of Sri-Laksmi in this myth of creation seems fairly clear. Although the nectar of immortality is described as a separate entity that arises from the churning of the ocean, Sri-Laksmi has many and obvious associations with the sap of existence that underlies or pervades all plant and animal life. She herself represents the miraculous transformation of the formless waters into organic life.³⁵ The extent to which Sri-Laksmi is necessary to the ongoing created order, and hence may be identified or associated with the essence of the creation, is indicated in some later variants of the myth. These versions tell us that Sri-Laksmi disappears from the three worlds when Indra insults her. As a result, all sacrifices cease to be performed, all austerities are discontinued by the sages, all generosity ends, the sun and moon lose their brilliance, the gods lose their strength, and fire loses its heat.³⁶ In the absence of the goddess the worlds become dull and lusterless and begin to wither away. When she returns, the worlds again regain their vitality, and the society of humans and the order of the gods regain their sense of purpose and duty.

Most variants of the myth say that Sri-Laksmi's* association with Visnu* took place at the churning of the ocean. The relationship of Sri* and Visnu seems appropriate in the context of the myth and at a general symbolic level in several ways. During her early history Sri's* attraction to powerful rulers among the gods (and demons) was firmly established. In the churning-of-the-ocean myth Visnu is clearly the dominant god. He oversees the entire operation and actually makes the churning possible by providing two indispensable participants: Vasuki*, the cosmic serpent who is used as the churning rope, and the cosmic tortoise, upon which the churning stick rests. Furthermore, both Vasuki and the tortoise are actually forms of Visnu himself. When Sri comes forth from the ocean, she is naturally attracted to Visnu, the god who is obviously superior to the others. Conversely, Visnu, as the divine overseer of the event, is the natural recipient of the treasures that result from the churning. As the master of ceremonies, Visnu is entitled to the lovely goddess who emerges as a result of the efforts of the gods and demons.

Visnu's* royal nature is also significant in Sri's association with him. By the medieval period (fifth through thirteenth century A.D.) Visnu is considered the divine king par excellence. He is described as dwelling in a heavenly court, Vaikuntha*, and he is depicted iconographically as a mighty king. His primary role as king is to institute and maintain

dharmic order. This he does by means of his various *avatars* *, who intervene in the world from time to time to combat the forces of disorder. Visnu*, however, is also present wherever righteous kings rule and maintain order. He maintains order on the earth, that is, through certain human agents, namely, righteous kings.³⁷ We noted earlier that kings cannot rule without the authority that is bestowed by Sri*. Where she is present, royal authority waxes strong. Where she is absent, would-be rulers become weak and ineffectual. The association of Sri with Visnu, the supreme divine king, as her husband is therefore fitting. She follows him when he becomes part of his human agents—the righteous kings and she bestows on these kings her royal power, prosperity, and fertility. In effect Visnu designates his human agents, and Sri then empowers them, enabling them to be effective maintainers of Visnu's* cosmic scheme.

As Visnu's wife, Laksmi* loses her fickle nature. As the great cosmic king's queen she is depicted as a model Hindu wife, loyal and submissive to her husband. One of her most popular iconographic depictions shows her kneeling before Visnu to massage his feet.³⁸ In her early history Sri-Laksmi* was strongly associated with growth and fecundity as manifested in vegetation. A teeming vitality animated her presence, a power that gave birth inexhaustibly to life. In her association with Visnu her character seems more restrained. Although she does not lose her association with fertility and growth, she seems more clearly involved in or revealed in the order of dharma that her husband creates and oversees. When Visnu assumes his various *avatars* in order to uphold dharma, she incarnates herself as his helpmate, assuming an appropriate form as his spouse or consort. She thus assists and accompanies him in his world-maintaining role. The *Visnu-purana** says:

. . . as Hari descends in the world in various shapes so does his consort Sri. Thus when Hari was born as a dwarf, as a son of Aditi, Laksmi appeared from a lotus; . . . when he was Raghava*, she was Sita*, and when he was Krsna*, she became Rukmini*. In the other descents of Visnu, she is his associate. If he takes a celestial form, she appears as divine; if a mortal, she becomes a mortal too, transforming her own person agreeably to whatever character it pleases Visnu to put on. (1.9.142-146)³⁹

Her role as a model wife typifies her more subdued nature. She is occupied in this role with household order. Indeed, she is said to cook food at the Jagannatha* temple for those who come for *prasad**.⁴⁰ In her role as an ideal wife she exemplifies the orderliness of human society and human relations. Iconographic representations of Visnu and Sri together typically show her as subservient to Visnu, which is in harmony with

sexual roles as described in the *Dharma-sastras* *. She is usually shown as considerably smaller than Visnu* and as having only two arms instead of the four arms that she usually has when shown alone. Her submissive position is nicely conveyed in an image of the divine pair from Badami* in which Visnu sits on a high stool while Laksmi* sits on the ground and leans on him, her right hand placed on his knee.⁴¹

Reflecting her increasing association with social order, several texts locate Laksmi's* presence in righteous behavior, orderly conduct, and correct social observance. She is said, for example, to live with those who tell the truth and are generous.⁴² She dwells with those who have clean bodies and are well dressed,⁴³ who eat with moderation, who have intercourse with their wives on a regular basis (something prescribed in the Hindu law books), and who cover themselves when asleep.⁴⁴ In the *Mahabharata** she says: "I dwell in truth, gift, vow, austerity, strength and virtue" (12.218.12). Orderly social relations and traditional social virtues attract Sri-Laksmi*, herself a model of social decorum as Visnu's* wife.

In association with Visnu, Laksmi provides a picture of marital contentment, domestic order, and satisfying cooperation and beneficial interdependence between male and female. Most iconographic representations picture the pair as a smiling, happy couple; they are often shown touching each other intimately. In images of the Laksmi-Narayana* type, Laksmi is usually depicted seated on Visnu's left thigh. Her right hand is around his neck while his left arm encircles her waist.⁴⁵ Sometimes the two are shown holding hands,⁴⁶ and it is not unusual for them to be shown gazing into each other's eyes.

The intimacy of the two, indeed, their underlying unity, is dramatically shown in images in which they are merged into one bisexual figure, Visnu constituting the right half of the figure and Laksmi the left.⁴⁷ The interdependence of the two is the subject of a long passage in the *Visnu-purana* *. There Visnu is said to be speech and Laksmi meaning; he is understanding, she is intellect; he is the creator, she is the creation; she is the earth, he the support of the earth; she is a creeping vine, he is the tree to which she clings; he is one with all males, and she is one with all females; he is love, and she is pleasure (1.8.15 ff.).⁴⁸

Sri-Laksmi* in the Pancaratra* and Sri* Vaisnava* Schools

Sri-Laksmi's* association with Visnu eventually leads to her playing important roles in the mythological and philosophic visions of the Pancaratra and Sri Vaisnava schools of thought and devotion. In the

Pancaratra * school Laksmi* comes to play the central role in the creation and evolution of the universe as the *sakti** of Visnu*. In the Pancaratra creation scenario Visnu remains almost entirely inactive, relegating the creative process to Laksmi. After awakening Laksmi at the end of the night of dissolution, Visnu's* role in the creation of the universe is restricted to that of an inactive architect whose plan is put into effect by a builder. Laksmi alone acts, and the impression throughout the cosmogony is that she acts independently of Visnu, although it is stated that she acts according to his wishes.⁴⁹

The practical effect of Visnu's inactive role in creation is that he becomes so aloof that Laksmi dominates the entire Pancaratra vision of the divine. In effect she acquires the position of the supreme divine principle, the underlying reality upon which all rests, that which pervades all creation with vitality, will, and consciousness. The *Laksmi-tantra** a popular Pancaratra text, says that Laksmi undertakes the entire stupendous creation of the universe with only a one-billionth fraction of herself (14.3). So transcendent is she, so beyond the ability of the mind to circumscribe her, that only a miniscule fraction of her is manifest in the creation of the universe. Elsewhere in the same text she describes herself as follows:

Inherent in the (principle of) existence, whether manifested or unmanifested, I am at all times the inciter (potential element of all things). I manifest myself (as the creation), I ultimately dissolve myself (at the time of destruction) and I occupy myself with activity (when creation starts functioning).

I alone send (the creation) forth and (again) destroy it. I absolve the sins of the good. As the (mother) earth towards all beings, I pardon them (all their sins). I mete everything out. I am the thinking process and I am contained in everything. (50.65.67)⁵⁰

Functionally Laksmi has taken over the cosmic functions of the three great male gods of the Hindu pantheon: Brahma*, Visnu, and Siva*. In the Pancaratra vision, by creating, sustaining, and periodically destroying the universe, she completely dominates the divine, mythological landscape. She also occupies the central position as the object of devotion, the dispenser of grace, and the final bestower of liberation (50.131132). Throughout the *Laksmi-tantra* it is she, not Visnu, who is described as the object of devotion, the one who grants all desires and whose special mantra embodies salvific power. It is she, not Visnu, whose form is described in detail and presented as the supreme object of meditation.⁵¹

Although Laksmi * has been elevated functionally to a position of supreme divinity in the Pancaratra* school and has been identified with various philosophic absolutes, she retains her nature as the goddess who both imbues creatures with illustriousness and well-being and pervades the creation as the sap of existence. At one point in the *Laksmi-tantra**, for example, she says of herself: "Like the fat that keeps a lamp burning I lubricate the senses of living beings with my own sap of consciousness" (50.110). Elsewhere she is said to be *prakrti** (50.64, 96), the principle of nature in Hinduism which spontaneously creates all material reality. *Prakrti** is the creation's dynamic aspect, which tends toward multiplication, diversification, and specificity.⁵² It is an active, fertile principle that is similar to the sap of existence with which Laksmi is identified during her early history. Laksmi's* identification throughout the Pancaratra system with Visnu's* *sakti** is also a way of declaring her association with fertile power. Although the idea of *sakti* is somewhat more refined and inorganic than *rasa*, *soma*, *amrta**, or the powers of fertility, *sakti* does suggest unambiguously the idea of vigorous, dynamic power associated with life and growth. Despite her promotion, therefore, it is clear that Laksmi retains her essential character as a dynamic, positive force that underlies growth, fertility, and prosperity.

A central presupposition in Sri* Vaisnavism* is that Visnu*, the supreme deity for this school, is always accompanied by, attended by, or otherwise associated with his consort Sri. But Sri does not play the central cosmological role as she does in the Pancaratra school. In Sri Vaisnavism Visnu is clearly the central actor on the mythological stage and is equated with the highest philosophic principles. Sri-Laksmi* has nevertheless acquired an important role among certain Sri Vaisnava theologians as the mediator between Visnu and his devotees.⁵³

The central aim of the Sri Vaisnava devotee is to cultivate and perfect his inherent duty, which is to love his Lord, and in so loving his Lord to identify himself with God as closely as possible. The writings of some philosophers of the school say that in approaching the Lord and requesting purity and grace Laksmi acts as a mediating presence between the devotee and Visnu. For Vedanta* Desika* (A.D. 1268-1368) Laksmi seems indispensable in approaching Visnu. She is described in his writings as a gracious mother who willingly intervenes with her often-stern husband on the devotee's behalf. "O Mother who resides on the lotus, hearken to my plea! I babble like a child; with your grace (*prasada**) make the Lord who is your beloved listen to my [petition]." ⁵⁴ Elsewhere he writes: "The mother . . ., whose nature is such that her grace is unmixed with any anger and is showered on all, does not spare any effort to make the punishing Lord be pleased with those who have committed

several faults. She cools the heat of His anger, which arises because He is the father." 55

Other Sri* Vaisnava* theologians share this view of Sri as an intermediary between the sinful devotee and Visnu*. Periyavaccan* Pillai (b. 1228) describes a conversation between Sri and Visnu in which Sri acts as a devotee's advocate. Visnu speaks first: "Since beginningless time this human has been disobeying my laws and has been the object of my anger. If I condone his faults and accept them patiently, instead of punishing him, I will be disregarding the injunctions of *Sastra**.' Sri replies: 'But if you punish the human, instead of saving him, your quality of grace will not survive.'" 56 In this passage Sri takes the side of the devotee by arguing that if Visnu does not save the sinner his reputation as merciful will be threatened. Her argument plays on Visnu's* own conception of himself. Elsewhere Sri is said to resort to distracting Visnu from his intention to punish a devotee by enticing him with her beauty. Manavala Mamunikal* (13701443) says of Sri: "She uses her beauty to entice and enslave [the Lord]. She makes eyes at Him, she lets her dress slip down a little." 57

In Sri Vaisnavism* Sri embodies divine compassion. While Visnu, as the mighty king of heavenly Vaikuntha*, may seem so awesome and transcendent as to be all but unapproachable to the lowly devotee, Sri provides an aspect of the divine that is eminently approachable. In this role as mediator she considerably softens the Sri Vaisnava vision of the divine and allows feelings of intimacy and warmth to pervade the devotee's devotional moods toward the divine.

It should be noted that in Sri Vaisnavism the goddess is still renowned for bestowing all good things. Indeed, she is sovereignty. 58 It is fitting that as the mediator between Visnu and the devotee she bestows on the devotee the most cherished of all boons, her husband's grace.

The Worship of Sri-Laksmi*

Sri-Laksmi is today one of the most popular and widely venerated deities of the Hindu pantheon. Her auspicious nature and her reputation for granting fertility, luck, wealth, and well-being seem to attract devotees in every Indian village. "All of India's back country is the dominion of Laksmi*, the goddess of the lotus She accompanies every mile traveled through central India, every visit to a temple Her likenesses are omnipresent on the walls and pillars, lintels and niches of sanctuaries, regardless of the deity of their specific dedication. 59

Laksmi * is worshiped throughout the year in a variety of festivals,⁶⁰ and she is the constant object of *vratas*, "religious vows," by means of which devotees ask her for a blessing in return for undertaking some act of devotion or piety on her behalf. The blessings requested vary according to the devotee and according to whether the *vrata* is undertaken during a festival in which certain kinds of blessings are traditional. The most common boons, however, have to do with marital fidelity or the longevity of one's spouse, the fertility of the crops, and the bestowal of material well-being.

The most important festival in which Laksmi is worshiped today (except in Bengal) is Dipavali* (Divali*), which is held in the late autumn. Three important and interrelated themes are seen in this festival: Laksmi's* association with wealth and prosperity, her association with fertility and abundant crops, and her association with good fortune in the coming year. Perhaps the most obvious indication that Laksmi is identified with prosperity is her popularity among merchants. During this festival it is customary for people, especially businessmen, to worship their account books.⁶¹ It seems to be clearly understood by merchants that wealth will not arise without Laksmi's blessing or presence.

Agricultural motifs are also fairly clear in this festival as it is celebrated in some places. Cultivators are enjoined to worship their crops (which at this time of year have been harvested) and offer sacrifices of goats and sheep. "Moreover they visit the dunghill which is collected for manuring the field for future crops and fall prostrate and beg to fertilize their lands and to procure abundant crops. In the Decan and in Orissa the heap of cowdung is also worshiped by every householder on this day."⁶²

Laksmi is also associated with crops and food in Orissa on the occasion of the Kaumudi-purnima* festival. On these days women invoke Laksmi on a mound of new grain and recall a story in which Laksmi's disappearance results in the disappearance of crops and food and her return prompts the return of abundance.⁶³ The worship of Laksmi during Durga* Puja* is also significant in terms of her association with agriculture. Although Durga Puja as it is celebrated today in India is not primarily a harvest festival, there are many indications that the renewed vigor of the crops is still an aspect of the festival.⁶⁴

The association of Laksmi with good fortune in the coming year is also a significant aspect of the Dipavali festival. During this festival end-of-the-year motifs are clear. At this time ghosts of the dead are said to return,⁶⁵ Bali, a demon, is said to emerge from the underworld to rule for three days, goblins and malicious spirits are about,⁶⁶ and gambling, profligate spending, and boisterous activity are commanded. Throughout the festival Laksmi is invoked to ward off the dangerous effects of the returned

dead and the emergent demon king and his hosts and to bless the gambler with success that will betoken his good luck during the entire coming year. The banishment of Alaksmi *, the female spirit associated with bad luck and misfortune, is also associated with this festival. It is believed in many places that Alaksmi is driven away for the coming year by lighting lamps, which is one of the most beautiful and characteristic features of this festival, and by making noise with pots and pans or instruments.⁶⁷ On another occasion in Bengal an image of Alaksmi is made and ceremoniously disfigured by cutting off its nose and ears, after which an image of Laksmi* is installed to signify the presence of good luck in the future.⁶⁸

During Dipavali* people also replace the small clay images of Laksmi and Ganesa* which are revered in many homes and shops in North India. Laksmi's* association with Ganesa, the elephant-headed son of Siva* and Parvati*, is prominent in North India. Indeed, it is more common to see Laksmi beside Ganesa than beside Visnu* in most parts of North India today. This association represents the continuity of some important themes in Laksmi's character. Laksmi is often associated with elephants, the Gaja-Laksmi* motif being ancient and consistent throughout her history. Her current association with Ganesa probably suggests meanings similar to those inherent in the Gaja-Laksmi scenes. In addition, Ganesa is a Yaksa-type* figure, associated with riches and good luck. It is appropriate that, like Kubera, he should be revered along with Laksmi, herself the embodiment of wealth and luck.

Another aspect of Laksmi is the focus of a summer festival in honor of her and Visnu. This festival signals the point at which Visnu is believed to fall asleep for several months. It is common to pray to Visnu at this time to prevent the loss of one's wife or husband. In this festival Laksmi and Visnu are the embodiment of marital harmony and bliss. Laksmi is understood to be the faithful, loving, and obedient wife.⁶⁹ At another festival in honor of her and Visnu, Laksmi plays the role of a jealous wife and protector of the home. Visnu is said to go off with another consort during this festival, and Laksmi, in anger over his unfaithfulness, breaks his vehicle and temporarily locks him out of their home (the temple).⁷⁰

3

Parvati *

Rivaling Sri-Laksmi* in popularity in the Hindu tradition is the goddess Parvati. Unlike Sri-Laksmi, Parvati has hardly any independent history of her own. Her identity and nature and nearly all her mythological deeds are defined or acted out vis-à-vis her consort/husband, the great ascetic god Siva*. Since epic times, when Parvati first appeared as a significant deity, she has been identified as a reincarnation of the goddess Sati*, Siva's* first wife, who committed suicide because of an insult to her husband. So closely associated is Parvati with Sati that the two goddesses are usually treated as one, and their mythologies eventually come to sound very much alike. Both are defined in terms of their courtship and marriage with Siva, and Parvati's* mythology is almost always treated as the ongoing story of Sati.

In classical Hindu mythology the *raison d'être* of Parvati's (and Sati's*) birth is to lure Siva into marriage and thus into the wider circle of worldly life from which he is aloof as a lone ascetic living in the wilds of the mountains. This goddess (in both persons, as Sati and Parvati) represents the complementary pole to the ascetic, world-denying pole in the Hindu tradition. In her role as maiden, wife, and later mother (as Parvati) she extends Siva's circle of activity into the realm of the householder, where his stored-up energy is released in positive ways.

As is the case with Laksmi*, Parvati comes to represent certain philosophic absolutes in her association with Siva. As his *sakti**, or embodied power, she becomes identified with the creative force of the cosmos and the underlying potency of things. Also like Laksmi she takes on a paradigmatic role as the ideal wife and mother. In fact, the act of suttee (Sanskrit *sati**), in which a Hindu widow immolates herself on her husband's funeral pyre as a final and consummate act of loyalty and devotion, is patterned on the goddess Sati, from whom the name of the act is derived. In some schools of Saivism* Parvati also assumes the role of

ideal devotee. Finally, in SaivaSiddhanta *, a southern school of Saivism*, Parvati* sometimes takes on the role of Siva's embodied grace and thus comes to play a role somewhat similar to Sri-Laksmi's* role in Sri* Vaisnavism*.

Early References to Parvati

The goddess Sati-Parvati* does not appear in Vedic literature. Several references to Siva's sister or wife do occur in Vedic texts, but the names for these deities only connect them tenuously, if at all, to the later Sati-Parvati. A being named Ambika* (a common epithet for several goddesses in the later tradition, especially Durga*) is called Siva's sister in one passage,¹ while in another text she is said to be his consort.² Elsewhere in Vedic literature Siva's wife is called Rudrani*. These references are never detailed enough to enable us to know if the deity named has any resemblance to the later, fully developed goddess Sati-Parvati.

The *Kena-upanisad** contains a goddess named Uma* Haimavati* (3.12). This is one of the most common names of the later Sati-Parvati, but this reference does not associate the goddess with Siva*, nor does it associate her with mountains, except by name (Haimavati* meaning "she who belongs to Himavat," who is the Himalaya Mountains personified as a god). Her primary role in this text is that of a mediator who reveals the knowledge of *brahman* to the gods. She appears in the text suddenly, and as suddenly disappears. It is little more than conjecture to identify her with the later goddess Sati-Parvati, although quite naturally later writers do make the identification when describing the exploits of Sati* or Parvati. To devotees of the goddess this early Upanisadic reference provides proof of her venerable history in the Hindu tradition; later texts that extol Siva and Parvati retell the episode in such a way as to leave no doubt that it is Siva's spouse who appears before the assembled gods in order to reveal to them the truth that Siva is absolute reality and underlies them all.³

Both textual and archaeological evidence for the existence of Sati-Parvati appear by the epic period (400 B.C.-A.D. 400). Both the *Ramayana** and *Mahabharata** present Sati-Parvati as the wife of Siva. Several important mythological events, though not told in detail, are referred to in the epics, and it is clear that the central themes of the later, developed mythology featuring Sati-Parvati are known to the epic writers. The *Mahabharata* describes the destruction of Daksa's* sacrifice (10.18; 12.274), mentions the birth of Karttikeya* and the defeat of

the demon Taraka* (3.213216; 13.8384), and describes Siva* and Parvati* as dwelling in the Himalayas, where they sport and play dice (13.140.4344). Although not numerous, some images of Parvati, or at least a goddess associated with Siva or a Saiva* symbol, appear on coins in this period.⁴

The Mythology of Sati*

Not until the plays of Kalidasa* (fifth to sixth century A.D.) and the *Puranas** (A.D. 350 through the thirteenth century) do we find the central myths of Sati* and Parvati told in detail. Two distinct goddesses emerge in this fully developed mythology: Sati, the daughter of Daksa*, who becomes Siva's* first wife, and Parvati, daughter of Himavat and his wife Mena*, who is a reincarnation of Sati and becomes Siva's second wife. Although the mythologies of the two goddesses (or the two lives of the same goddess) are similar in many details (and have probably influenced each other), each goddess (or each life of the goddess) is distinctive enough to be treated separately.

The goddess Sati sets out to win the great god Siva for her husband.⁵ In some versions of the myth Sati's* quest is instigated by the god Brahma*, Daksa's* father, who wants to humiliate Siva because Siva had insulted him earlier.⁶ Siva had laughed at Brahma when Brahma had lusted after his own daughter, and Brahma vowed to seduce Siva into the pangs of sexual passion. Elsewhere the motive is more vague. In the *Rudra-samhita** of the *Siva-purana** Brahma says that if Siva is not involved in the created world the creation will lack auspiciousness (in fact Siva means "auspicious") (2.11.27) or that the creation simply will not be able to continue (2.11.43). In fact, these latter reasons for involving Siva in sex and marriage are more helpful in understanding the underlying meanings of the Sati myths than the more common reason of Brahma's getting even with Siva.

Sati is usually described as beautiful, but in most versions of her mythology it is her devotion and asceticism that attract Siva's attention (2.16.39, 44, 50). At times she is tested by Siva, or an agent of Siva, but she always persists, and in the end Siva grants her a boon for her austerities. She asks to marry him, and he agrees, having discovered at some point the presence of desire (*kama**), which has made her extremely desirable. She insists upon a proper marriage involving rituals and guests, despite Siva's impatience. Brahma acts as the divine priest, and the two are duly married. At some point in the narrative, tension begins to develop between Daksa (Sati's father) and Siva. The tension arises

from Daksa's * distaste for Siva's* odd appearance and strange habits. As a world renouncer Siva* does not behave according to the ways of the world, and his appearance is most unconventional (2.26.1416).

Siva and Sati* retire to Siva's mountain abode and dally there for many years. Daksa* in the meantime plans a great sacrifice and invites all divine beings of any importance, except Siva and Sati. Siva is quite undisturbed by this deliberate snub. Sati, however, is furious at the insult to her husband (2.28). She storms off to her father's abode, where he snubs her. Outraged by the way in which her father has treated Siva, she kills herself (2.2930). Hearing the news of Sati's* death, Siva becomes angry and creates Virabhadra* and, in some versions of the mythology, other fierce beings. The demons proceed to Daksa's sacrificial arena, where they defeat the assembled divine hosts and destroy the sacrifice. Daksa himself is usually said to be killed in the battle (2.3237). Most versions of the story then tell of the reinstatement of the sacrifice and the resuscitation of Daksa (2.42.2131). Siva is included in the sacrifice along with the other gods, and the sacrifice proceeds smoothly (2.43).

In some versions of the myth, either before or after the reinstatement of the sacrifice, Siva discovers Sati's body. He picks her up and, sobbing in grief, carries her about the universe. This causes cosmic disruptions, and Visnu* is summoned to end Siva's grief. Visnu follows the grieving Siva about and gradually slices bits and pieces from Sati's body until nothing remains. The pieces of her corpse fall to the earth; wherever a bit of her body lands a sacred place, called a *pitha**, is established, where goddesses of various names and types become the objects of worship.⁷ Realizing that Sati's corpse has disappeared, Siva ends his grief and returns to his mountain retreat, where he retires into ascetic aloofness. In some versions Siva comes to earth in search of Sati. Finding her yoni established at Kamarupa* in Assam,⁸ Siva assumes the form of the *linga** and plunges himself into her, where the two remain conjoined permanently.⁹

In general terms the underlying theme or meaning of this myth seems fairly clear. The theme of Siva's alternation between the poles of asceticism and eroticism¹⁰ and the creative (sometimes destructive) tension that results from this alternation pervades the entire corpus of Siva mythology. Underlying the mythology seems to be the assumption that Siva's stored-up potency, which accumulates during asceticism, should be released into the world to invigorate or enliven creation. In the logic of this mythology Sati plays the role of luring Siva from ascetic isolation into creative participation in the world. This theme is further developed and embellished in the Parvati cycle of myths in which Siva actually

becomes involved in an ongoing family situation and becomes a divine householder.

In the Sati * myths Siva's* involvement in the world is most clearly suggested in the destruction and reinstatement of the sacrifice and his descent to earth to dwell with Sati's* yoni in the form of the linga*. In the Vedic tradition Siva* is an ambiguous deity at best. He has many fearsome and inauspicious qualities, and when offerings are made to him they are made outside inhabited areas.¹¹ The theme in the Sati myths of Siva's exclusion from the sacrifice thus has considerable historical justification. Siva was undoubtedly a non-Aryan* indigenous deity who was looked upon with considerable suspicion by the Brahman custodians of the sacrificial cult. His association with world renunciation, asceticism, and the powers of fertility as symbolized by the linga probably marked him as a deity who belonged to the fringes of society from the point of view of the Brahman establishment. The antagonism between Siva and Daksa* probably reflects this underlying conflict. Eventually, of course, Siva became one of the most important and dynamic deities in the Hindu pantheon. The reinstatement of the sacrifice with Siva included among those who partake of it probably represents his incorporation into established Brahman religion.

Sati's devotion to Siva and her outrage at the way he is treated eventually bring him within the sacrificial arena. He is indifferent to the doings of Daksa until Sati kills herself because of the insult to her husband. Sati comes from the realm of established religion, the order of dharma, and marries into the realm of asceticism, thus combining in herself the two opposing worlds. When she kills herself she precipitates a clash between these two worlds, between Daksa and Siva, which is initially destructive but ultimately beneficial and creative. Sati's role is as a mediating influence between the two religious poles, both affirmed to be central, in the Hindu tradition. Her ability to involve Siva in the sacrifice makes Siva, previously aloof from the world, accessible in the sacrificial cult, the primary point of which is to maintain and nourish the creation.

Sati performs a similar feat when her body is cut to pieces and falls to earth. By following her to earth and embedding himself in her yoni, Siva is literally brought down to earth. Where previously he dwelled in the mountains and engaged in austerities, indifferent to the ongoing creation, he now is fully engaged in the creation as symbolized by the conjunction of the yoni and linga. Sati, in her role as mediator, has succeeded in involving the great ascetic god in the creation by transforming him into the great god of sexual power and vigor. Again, her role has

been primarily that of making Siva * accessible to the world by attracting him to her in the form of the yoni. While Siva may continue to perform heroic asceticism in his mountain retreat in one of his several forms, he continues to be accessible to the world in the form of the linga*. In the myths of Sati*, this is her triumph.

The establishment of centers of worship on earth where pieces of Sati's* body fell repeats the theme of making the divine accessible vis-à-vis Sati herself. In this myth the earth is sacralized (the earth being understood primarily as the Indian subcontinent). The earth itself is seen as the body of the goddess Sati. She becomes the earth and as such is made accessible to her devotees or to those who seek her powers.¹²

Sati's death is thus transformative. Through her death she provokes Siva into a direct conflict with the sacrificial cult and then an accommodation with it. In this way Siva is brought within the circle of dharma, within the order of established religion. Similarly, Sati's corpse, or pieces of her corpse, sacralize the earth. In dying she gives herself up to be accessible on earth to those who need her power or blessing. In transplanting or transforming herself into the earth, she also brings into the sphere of human society the invigorating power of Siva in the form of the linga.

The Sati myth again reminds us of the archaic type of divine pair in which a male deity is associated with the sky and a female deity with the earth. Their union or marriage is necessary for life to be generated and sustained. Sati's identification with the earth and Siva's identification with the distant Himalayas and their subsequent union as yoni and linga seem to be a variant on this theme. The main point of the Sati mythology is to bring about a marriage between these two deities so that creation may continue and prosper. The concluding chapter of Sati's mythology makes it clear that this has been accomplished. In the form of the yoni (all individual women) she attracts Siva (all individual men) eternally.

The goddess Sati is also associated with the practice of widow suicide in Hinduism.¹³ During the medieval period the custom of widows' burning themselves to death on their husbands' funeral pyres became accepted as the act of a faithful wife. The word *sati** (suttee) came to be applied to this practice. The term means "faithful wife," and its relation to the goddess Sati is clear in the sense that Sati is portrayed as a faithful wife of Siva. It is not altogether clear, however, that Sati's suicide provides the mythological paradigm for suttee. Sati's suicide, although provoked by an insult to her husband, causes her husband considerable grief and outrage. The whole point of suttee is for the widow to follow her dead husband. She affirms in this act that she cannot live without

him, that her entire identity is bound up with his. Sati's * suicide, although perhaps the act of a faithful wife who cannot endure insults to her husband, results not in her maintaining a relationship with her husband but in her breaking that relationship.

The Mythology of Parvati*

Parvati's* name, which means "she who dwells in the mountains" or "she who is of the mountain," and her many epithets, such as Sailasuta* (daughter of the mountain peaks), Giriputri* (daughter of the mountains), Girirajaputri* (daughter of the king of the mountains), Girisa* (mistress of the mountains), identify her with mountainous regions. It is quite possible that Parvati's early history and origin may lie with a goddess who dwelled in the mountains and was associated with non-Aryan* tribal peoples. Such goddesses are sometimes referred to in Sanskrit texts.¹⁴ Such a goddess would be an appropriate mate for Siva* himself a deity who dwells in mountainous regions and on the fringes of society. Indeed, Parvati herself is described as a female forester in the company of Siva, who is also described as a forester in the *Mahabharata** (3.40.15). For the most part, however, Parvati's mythology does not describe her as a goddess associated with wild places or with people living on the fringes of culture. She is not usually included in lists of the group of goddesses called Matrkas* (mothers), who are described as bloodthirsty, the bringers of disease, the speakers of foreign tongues, and fond of inaccessible places (9.45). If Parvati ever was associated with such a tradition, almost every trace of that identity is gone by the time we find her mentioned in the Hindu literary tradition.

Parvati's mythology is almost entirely dominated by her association with Siva. Her nature, too, develops or is characterized by her relationship with Siva. Although in certain Sakta* texts she is said to transcend Siva and to subsume within herself all male deities¹⁵ or in other texts is identified with certain philosophic absolutes, for the most part these are late embellishments on her mythology and character and are the result of a theological effort on the part of devotees partial to various goddesses (the Saktas*) to assert the underlying unity of all goddesses.¹⁶ Parvati is primarily the goddess who is Siva's* wife, she who won him as her husband after heroic efforts and who persuaded or provoked him into creating a child, who was necessary for the preservation of the world.

Most renditions of Parvati's mythology explain the goddess's birth as necessary for producing a child of Siva.¹⁷ The demon Taraka* has been

granted the boon of being invincible to any creature except a child of Siva *. As Siva is an ascetic, the gods have to find a woman or goddess capable of luring Siva into a sexual encounter or marriage. Parvati* is usually understood to be a reincarnation of Sati* and sometimes is described as consenting to be reborn for the help of the gods when she is petitioned by them.¹⁸ In some versions Parvati (and Sati) are understood to be manifestations of the supreme reality in the universe, the Mahadevi* (great goddess), who condescends to incarnate herself for much the same reason that Visnu* does in his *avatars**, to maintain the balance between dharma and *adharma*.¹⁹ Sometimes the reason given by Parvati for her birth is her desire to reward Mena*, the wife of Himavat, for her great devotion to Parvati in her former life as Sati.²⁰

Parvati, then, is born to Himavat and Mena. She is usually described as dark and in some versions is given the name Kali*, "the dark one," because of her complexion.²¹ She is also described as very beautiful. In some accounts she shows a keen interest in Siva from the outset, repeating his name to herself and taking delight in hearing about his appearance and deeds. While she is a child a sage comes to her home and after examining the marks on her body predicts that she will marry a naked yogi.²² When it becomes clear that she is destined to marry Siva, her parents are usually described as feeling honored. Parvati is delighted, and she is sometimes said to remember Siva from her past life as Sati.

At some point prior to or during Parvati's* attempts to attract Siva's* attention for the purpose of marriage, the god Kama* is sent by the gods to awaken Siva's lust. When he attracts Siva's attention with sounds and scents of spring and tries to perturb Siva with his intoxicating weapons, Siva burns him to ashes with the fire from his middle eye. Although the gods and Parvati lament Kama's* destruction, it is clear later in the story that Kama's powers were not destroyed when he was burned, for Siva eventually falls in love with Parvati and recreates Kama in bodily form at the request of Kama's wife, Rati.²³

Parvati persists in her quest to win Siva as her husband by setting out to perform austerities. One of the most effective ways to achieve what a person wants in traditional Hinduism is to perform *tapas*, "ascetic austerities." If one is persistent and heroic enough, one will generate so much heat (also called *tapas*) that the gods will be forced to grant the ascetic a wish in order to save themselves and the world from being scorched. Parvati's method of winning Siva is thus a common approach to fulfilling one's desires. It is also appropriate, however, in terms of demonstrating to Siva that she can compete with him in his own realm, that she has the inner resources, control, and fortitude to cut

herself off from the world and completely master her physical needs. By performing *tapas* Parvati * abandons the world of the householder and enters the realm of the world renouncer, Siva's* world. Most versions of the myth describe her as outdoing all the great sages in her austerities. She performs all the traditional mortifications, such as sitting in the midst of four fires in the middle of summer, remaining exposed to the elements during the rainy season and during the winter, living on leaves or air only, standing on one leg for years, and so on.²⁴ Eventually she accumulates so much heat²⁵ that the gods are made uncomfortable and go to Siva* to persuade him to grant Parvati's* wish so that she will cease her efforts.²⁶

In some versions of the myth Parvati is tempted by an agent of Siva, or by Siva himself in disguise. She is told that Siva's appearance is terrible and that his habits are uncivilized and inauspicious.²⁷ She is urged to desist from her desire to marry such a distasteful character. Parvati is never dissuaded from her purpose by these temptations, and as a result of her steadfastness Siva agrees to marry her.

The marriage is duly arranged and elaborately undertaken. Siva's marriage procession, which includes most of the Hindu pantheon, is often described at length. A common motif during the marriage preparations is Mena's* outrage when she actually sees Siva for the first time. She cannot believe that her beautiful daughter is about to marry such an outrageous-looking character; in some versions Mena* threatens suicide and faints when told that the odd-looking figure in the marriage procession is indeed her future son-in-law.²⁸

After the two are married they depart to Mount Kailasa, Siva's favorite dwelling place, and immerse themselves completely in sexual dalliance, which continues uninterrupted for long periods of time. Their lovemaking is so intense that it shakes the cosmos, and the gods become frightened.²⁹ In some versions the gods are also frightened at the prospect of what a child will be like from the union of two such potent deities. They fear the child's extraordinary powers. For whichever reason (sometimes the gods are simply impatient), the gods interrupt Siva and Parvati's lovemaking. As a result Siva spills his semen outside Parvati. The potent seed, which is extremely fiery and hot, passes from one container to another, the container varying in different versions of the myth, until it is finally contained in a suitable place, often the Ganges River, where it is incubated and born as the child Kartikeya*. Kartikeya eventually finds his way back to his father and mother and by defeating the demon Taraka* rescues the world. Parvati accepts the child as her own, and sometimes we are told that her breasts ooze milk in affection for the child when she first sees him.³⁰

A second child completes the divine family of Siva * and Parvati* when Ganesa* is born. Parvati, desiring privacy, wishes to have a child of her own who will protect her from unwanted intrusions. She creates Ganesa from the dirt and sweat of her body and commands him to guard the entrance to her house against any intruder. When Siva himself tries to enter her apartments, Ganesa refuses to admit him. Siva becomes angry and decapitates the boy. Parvati is furious and demands that Ganesa be restored to life. Siva duly restores him to life by replacing his human head with an elephant head and puts him in charge of all his troops and heavenly attendants.³¹

For the most part Siva and Parvati's* married and family life is portrayed as harmonious, blissful, and calm. In iconography the two are typically shown sitting in happy, intimate embrace.³² As a family the four deities are also typically shown in harmonious association.³³ A scene of the divine family in a painting from the Kangra school of art shows the foursome seated around a fire. Karttikeya* and Parvati are helping each other thread a garland of skulls, while Siva and Ganesa play idly with one of Siva's* serpent ornaments.³⁴ Many devotional hymns describe intimate family details, such as Karttikeya's* playing with Siva's skull ornaments or mistaking Siva's crescent moon for a lotus bud.

He touches the garland made of skulls
in hope that they are geese
and shakes the crescent moon with eagerness to grasp
a lotus filament.
Thinking the forehead-eye a lotus flower,
he tries to pry it open.
May Skanda thus intent on play
within his father's arms protect you.³⁵

Siva and Parvati do argue and insult each other from time to time. Bengali accounts of Siva and Parvati often describe Siva as an irresponsible, hemp-smoking husband who cannot look after himself. Parvati is portrayed as the long-suffering wife who complains from time to time to her mother but who always remains steadfast to her husband.³⁶ Sometimes the outcome of a game of dice results in a quarrel, particularly when Siva loses his loincloth to Parvati and she laughs at him. In another incident Siva becomes angry at her when she playfully covers his eyes with her hands from behind and the world is plunged into darkness.³⁷ On another occasion Parvati feels pique when Siva calls her by the nickname Kali* (blackie), which Parvati takes as a slur on her appearance. She resolves to rid herself of her dark complexion and does so by performing austerities.³⁸ Having assumed a golden complexion she

Image not available.

Parvati * with Ganesa*. Pratapaditya Pal, Indo-Asian Art from the
John Gilmore Ford Collection (Baltimore: Walters Art Gallery, 1971), fig. 51.
Reprinted by permission of the Walters Art Gallery.

then becomes known by the name Gauri * (the bright or golden one). In some versions of the myth her discarded, dark complexion or sheath gives birth to or becomes a warrior goddess who undertakes heroic feats of combat against demons.³⁹

The presence of an alter ego or a dark, violent side to Parvati* is suggested in several myths in which demons threaten the cosmos and Parvati is asked to help the gods by defeating the demon in question. Typically, when Parvati grows angry at the prospect of war, a violent goddess is born from her wrath and proceeds to fight on Parvati's* behalf. This deity is often identified as the bloodthirsty goddess Kali*.⁴⁰ For the most part, however, the myths emphasize Parvati's milder side. So out of character is Parvati on the battlefield that another goddess, it seems, must be summoned to embody her wrath and dissociate this fury from Parvati herself.

Tension and Resolution

The main theme of the Parvati cycle of myths is clear. The association between Parvati and Siva represents the perennial tension in Hinduism between the ascetic ideal and the householder ideal. Parvati, for the most part, represents the householder. Her mission in almost all renditions of the myth is to lure Siva into the world of marriage, sex, and children, to tempt him away from asceticism, yoga, and otherworldly preoccupations. In this role Parvati is cast as a figure who upholds the order of dharma, who enhances life in the world, who represents the beauty and attraction of worldly, sexual life, who cherishes the house and society rather than the forest, the mountains, or the ascetic life. In this role she repeats the feat of Sati in luring Siva into an erotic relationship, which this time eventually brings him within the sacrificial, priestly order permanently. Parvati civilizes Siva with her presence; indeed, she domesticates him. Of her role in relation to Siva in the hymns of Manikkavacakar*, a ninth-century poet-saint from South India, it has been said: "Siva, the great unpredictable 'madman' (*pittan**, *piccan**), as Manikkavacakar occasionally addresses him . . ., is rendered momentarily sane (i.e., behaves in a socially acceptable manner) when in the company of the goddess Contact with his properly cultured spouse seems to connect him with ordinary social reality and temporarily domesticates him."⁴¹

The tension between Parvati and Siva as representatives of the main types of religiosity in Hinduism is stated in various ways in the myths. Siva is always said to have no family, no lineage, and no interest

in progeny, which is one of the central concerns of the order of dharma and the householder's religion. Parvati*, on the contrary, is born into an established family and longs for marriage, children, and a home. Siva* is associated with fire, which dries up or burns up the juices of life. His inner fire is so intense that in one myth he is shown to contain ashes in his veins instead of blood.⁴² In one of the most famous of his myths he burns the god of lust to ashes with the fire from his middle eye. Parvati is associated with Soma, the deity or substance associated with the life essence of all plants. In many myths it is she who asks Siva to revive Kama*, as she realizes that the god of sexual desire is at the root of the householder's life. In relation to Kama, then, Siva is a destructive fire, whereas Parvati is a refreshing, liquid glance: "While the fiery glance is Siva, the Soma glance is Parvati, who revives Kama when Siva has burnt him."⁴³ Siva is often said to wear on his body the ashes of the burnt Kama. Kama is resuscitated when Siva embraces Parvati and the sweat from her body mingles with the ashes of the burned god.⁴⁴ Elsewhere it is said that when Kama was burned by Siva he entered the limbs of Parvati.⁴⁵ In the most general terms, Siva as Agni is the fire that destroys the world at the end of each cosmic age. Parvati as Soma, in contrast, is the cosmic waters from which the world is inevitably reborn.

Throughout Hindu mythology it is well known that one of Siva's* principal functions is the destruction of the cosmos. In fact, Siva has about him a wild, unpredictable, destructive aspect that is often mentioned. As the great cosmic dancer he periodically performs the *tandava**, an especially violent dance. Wielding a broken battle-ax, he dances so wildly that the cosmos is destroyed completely. In descriptions of this dance Siva's whirling arms and flying locks are said to crash into the heavenly bodies, knocking them off course or destroying them utterly. The mountains shake and the oceans heave as the world is destroyed by his violent dancing.⁴⁶ Parvati, in contrast, is portrayed as a patient builder, one who follows Siva about, trying to soften the violent effects of her husband.⁴⁷ She is a great force for preservation and reconstruction in the world and as such offsets the violence of Siva. A seventeenth-century Tamil work pictures Parvati as a patient child who creates the worlds in the form of little houses. Siva is pictured as constantly frustrating her purpose by destroying what she has so carefully built.

The crazy old madman stands in front,
dancing, destroying the beautiful little house that
you have built in play.
You don't become angry, but every time (he destroys
it) you build it again.⁴⁸

When Siva * does his violent *tandava** dance Parvati* is described as calming him with soft glances, or she is said to complement his violence with a slow, creative step of her own.⁴⁹

Parvati's* goal in her relationship with Siva is nothing less than the domestication of the lone, ascetic god whose behavior borders on madness.⁵⁰ Siva is indifferent to social propriety, does not care about offspring, declares women to be a hindrance to the spiritual life, and is disdainful of the trappings of the householder's life.⁵¹ Parvati tries to involve him in the worldly life of the householder by arguing that he should observe conventions if he loves her and wants her. She persuades him, for example, to marry her according to the proper rituals, to observe custom, instead of simply running off with her.⁵² She is less successful, however, in getting him to change his attire and ascetic habits. She often complains of his nakedness and finds his ornaments disgraceful.⁵³ Usually prompted by her mother, Parvati sometimes complains that she does not have a proper house to live in. Siva, as is well known, does not have a house but prefers to live in caves, on mountains, or in forests or to wander the world as a homeless beggar. Many myths delight in Siva's response to Parvati's domestic pleas for a house. When she complains that the rains will soon come and that she has no house to protect her, Siva simply takes her to the high mountain peaks above the clouds where it does not rain.⁵⁴ Elsewhere he describes his "house" as the universe and argues that an ascetic understands the whole world to be his dwelling place.⁵⁵ These philosophic arguments never satisfy Parvati, but she rarely, if ever, wins this argument and gains a house. In the final analysis, despite her success in involving Siva in marital and family affairs, despite her initiating sexual desire in him, Siva always remains in part antisocial and ascetic, a god who lives on the fringes of society.

The theme of Parvati's domesticating Siva, or trying to domesticate him, is also seen in her tempering, or taming, his *tapas* and his sexual vigor, both of which are dangerous in excess. The theme of an ascetic's great austerities causing such heat that the world itself is scorched is common in Hindu mythology. The solution to this threat to the world is almost always either having a woman seduce the ascetic (women hardly ever play the role of the ascetic), granting a boon to the ascetic which distracts him from his asceticism, or granting the boon for which he undertook his asceticism in the first place. Siva, too, does excessive *tapas* and thus threatens the world,⁵⁶ and it is Parvati's role to distract him from his asceticism or seduce him into erotic or domestic entanglements. In many myths Parvati is not so much Siva's complement as his rival, tricking, seducing, or luring him away from ascetic practices.

Siva's sexual vigor is also threatening to the world in quantity and

intensity, and again it is Parvati * who subdues, tames, or otherwise controls Siva's* immense sexual vitality.

The sages cursed Siva's *linga** to fall to the earth, and it burnt everything before it like a fire. Never still, it went to the underworld and to heaven and everywhere on earth. All creatures were troubled, and the sages went in desperation to Brahma*, who said to them, "As long as the *linga* is not still, there will be nothing auspicious in the universe. You must propitiate Devi* so that she will take the form of the *yoni*, and then the *linga* will become still." They honoured Siva*, and he appeared and said, "If my *linga* is held in the *yoni*, then all will be well. Only Parvati can hold the *linga*, and then it will become calm." They propitiated him, and thus *linga*-worship was established.⁵⁷

Siva is a god of excesses, both ascetic and sexual, and Parvati plays the role of modifier. As a representative of the householder ideal she represents the ideal of controlled sex, namely, married sex, which is opposed to both asceticism and eroticism.

The theme of the conflict, tension, or opposition between the way of the ascetic and the way of the householder in the mythology of Parvati and Siva yields to a vision of reconciliation, interdependence, and symbiotic harmony in a series of images that combine the two deities. Three such images or themes are central to the mythology, iconography, and philosophy of Parvati: (1) the theme of Siva-*sakti**, (2) the image of Siva as Ardhnanarisvara* (the Lord who is half woman), and (3) the image of the *linga* and *yoni*.

The idea that the great male gods all possess an inherent power by which or through which they undertake creative activity is assumed in medieval Hindu mythology. When this power, or *sakti**, is personified it is always in the form of a goddess. Parvati, quite naturally, assumes the identity of Siva's *sakti* in many myths and in some philosophic systems. In the role of Siva's *sakti*, Parvati performs functions, or assumes meanings, which imply an underlying harmony or interdependent relationship between herself and Siva. She is often identified with the force underlying and impelling creation. While Siva remains more or less aloof in the creation of the world, Parvati as *sakti* is active, pervading the creation as its underlying strength and power.⁵⁸ In this active, creative role she is sometimes identified with *prakṛti** (nature), whereas Siva is identified with *purusa** (pure spirit).⁵⁹ As *prakṛti*, Parvati represents the inherent tendency of nature to express itself in concrete forms and individual beings. In this task, however, whether as *sakti* or *prakṛti*, it is

understood that Parvati * either must be set in motion by Siva* or must act according to his will, wish, or design. She is not seen as antagonistic to him. Her role as his *sakti** is almost always interpreted as positive. Through Parvati, Siva (the Absolute) is able to express himself in the creation. Without, her he would remain inert, aloof, inactive. Just as in the mythology Parvati is necessary for involving Siva in creation, so as his *sakti* she is necessary for his self-expression in creation. It is only in association with her that Siva is able to realize or manifest his full potential. Without Parvati Siva's* great power does not, or cannot, manifest itself in creation. Parvati as *sakti* not only complements Siva, she completes him.

A variety of images and metaphors are used to express the harmonious interdependence and close identity of Parvati as *sakti* and Siva as the *saktiman**, the possessor of *sakti*. Siva is said to be the male principle throughout creation, Parvati the female principle;⁶⁰ Siva is the sky, Parvati the earth;⁶¹ Siva is subject, Parvati object;⁶² Siva is the ocean, Parvati the seashore;⁶³ Siva is the sun, Parvati its light;⁶⁴ Parvati is all tastes and smells, Siva the enjoyer of all tastes and smells;⁶⁵ Parvati is the embodiment of all individual souls, Siva the soul itself;⁶⁶ Parvati assumes every form that is worthy to be thought of, Siva thinks of all such forms;⁶⁷ Siva is day, Parvati night;⁶⁸ Parvati is creation, Siva the creator;⁶⁹ Parvati is speech, Siva meaning;⁷⁰ and so on. In short, the two are actually onedifferent aspects of ultimate realityand as such are complementary, not antagonistic.

The meaning of the Ardhanarisvara* form of Siva is similar. The image shows a half-male, half-female figure. The right side is Siva and is adorned with his ornaments; the left side is Parvati and adorned with her ornaments.⁷¹ In the *Siva-purana** the god Brahma* is unable to continue his task of creation because the creatures that he has produced do not multiply. He propitiates Siva and requests him to come to his aid. Siva then appears in his half-male, half-female form. The hermaphrodite form splits into Siva and Parvati, and Parvati, at Brahma's* request, pervades the creation with her female nature, which duly awakens the male aspect of creation into fertile activity.⁷² Without its female half, or female nature,⁷³ the godhead as Siva is incomplete and is unable to proceed with creation. To an even greater extent than the Siva-*sakti* idea, the androgynous image of Siva and Parvati emphasizes that the two deities are absolutely necessary to each other, and only in union can they satisfy each other and fulfill themselves. In this form the godhead transcends sexual particularity or, perhaps more accurately, includes both dimensions of sexual particularity. God is both male and female, both father and mother, both aloof and active, both fearsome and gentle, both destructive and constructive, and so on.

Image not available.

Ardhanarisvara *, the Lord as half woman. South Indian bronze, Chola*, eleventh century A.D. Government Museum, Madras. Mario Bussagli and Calembus Sivaramamurti, 5000 Years of the Art of India (New York: Harry Abrams, 1981), fig. 314, p. 255. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

The image of the linga * in the yoni, which is the most common image of the deity in Siva* temples,⁷⁴ similarly teaches the lesson that the tension between Siva and Parvati* is ultimately resolved in interdependence. Sati* and Parvati as sexual objects succeed in tempering both Siva's* excessive detachment from the world and his excessive sexual vigor. In the form of the yoni in particular Sati-Parvati* fulfills and completes, while at the same time tempering, Siva's creative tendencies. As the great yogi who accumulates immense sexual potency he is symbolized by the linga. This great potency is creatively released in sexual or marital contact with Sati-Parvati. The ubiquitous image of the linga in the yoni symbolizes the creative release in the ultimate erotic act of power stored through asceticism. The erotic act is thus enhanced, made more potent, fecund, and creative, by the stored-up power of Siva's asceticism. The linga and the yoni symbolize a creative interaction between the world of the ascetic, in which sexual abstinence is mandatory, and the life of the householder, in which sex is necessary.⁷⁵

While many of the myths of Siva and Parvati seem to accentuate the tension between the two, certain iconographic and philosophic themes concerning the divine pair show a preference for depicting or understanding them as in basic harmony. As a couple they are usually shown as affectionate. The half-male, half-female image also emphasizes the uniting of opposites. The lesson seems to be that the two poles that they represent, dharma and *moksa**, should not be isolated from each other. In relationship with Parvati, Siva does not give up asceticism entirely, nor does Parvati give up asceticism entirely after having used it as a means of marrying Siva. Nonetheless, the mutual bliss of Siva and Parvati also seems to teach that asceticism enhances the intensity of sexuality and makes the orderliness of the householder's world even more attractive. Held together, or in creative tension, yoga and *bhoga* (worldly or bodily pleasure), dharma and *moksa*, may be seen to complement and complete each other in the divine pair.

Devotion and Grace

Another important facet of Parvati is her role as a model of devotion to Siva, as the devotee of the Lord par excellence. At several points in her mythology Parvati is described as devoted to Siva, as unswerving in her attachment to him, and as incapable of being dissuaded from dotting on him despite the most outrageous reports concerning his uncivilized, bizarre habits.⁷⁶ Her remarkably steadfast, indeed, stubborn,

devotion to him is most obvious during her long period of asceticism when she undertakes heroic bodily mortifications in order either to be granted the boon of having Siva * for her husband or to attract the attention of Siva himself.⁷⁷ In these scenes Parvati* is portrayed as a devotee who seeks Siva's* attention and blessing; it is easy to see how she might become the paradigm for devotees of Siva, which she does, for example, in the devotional hymns of Manikkavacakar*, a Saivite* saint from Tamilnad.

Parvati appears in Manikkavacakar's* hymns in the role of the ideal devotee, or in a position that the devotee longs to achieve, in at least two ways. First, Manikkavacakar uses the imagery of a love relationship, casting himself in the role of a woman who longs for her lover or husband, Siva. In placing himself (and by extension other devotees) in this role, he identifies himself with Siva's beloved, Parvati, who thus becomes the model, or vehicle, for devotion.⁷⁸ In this role Manikkavacakar imagines himself, along with women and goddesses, to be doing domestic chores for "her" husband.⁷⁹ Manikkavacakar approaches Siva by assuming the role and duties of Parvati. In this way he is able to relate to Siva in a most intimate way. Second, Manikkavacakar refers several times to the half-male, half-female image of Siva and Parvati and sees in it the ultimate goal of the devotee, to be inextricably united with Siva. In his longing to be with Siva, to be consumed by and overcome by his Lord, Manikkavacakar sees in this image his desire graphically realized by Parvati.⁸⁰

Another facet of Parvati is evident in Tamil Saivism*. Parvati tends to have a calming, civilizing effect on Siva. Under her influence or in her presence, Siva is often tamed, distracted from his wild, rude, mad behavior. In Manikkavacakar's hymns, for example, Siva never appears before Parvati in his outrageous forms, such as the dancer in the cremation ground or the destroyer of Daksa's sacrifice.⁸¹ In her presence, it seems, such behavior is inappropriate, and Siva almost always behaves in properly domestic ways when she is present. Becalmed, Siva is more attentive to the needs of his devotees (and to the needs and desires of his spouse) and more prone to grant them blessings. As the domesticator of Siva, as the one who is able to distract him from his antisocial behavior and make him turn his attention to the world and to his devotees within the world, Parvati may be understood as playing the role of a mediator between the devotee and Siva. She is a mediator in the sense that she is the one who awakens his grace or the one who is the key to activating his grace. Immersed in yoga, preoccupied with asceticism, dancing wildly with his ghastly companions in the cremation ground, Siva is indifferent

to his spouse, to the world, and to his devotees. In the presence of Parvati *, in his role as her husband or Lord, Siva* is attentive to the world and to his devotees.

Although Parvati's* role as intermediary is never developed in Saivism* to the extent that Sri-Laksmi's* role is developed in Sri* Vaisnavism*, Parvati does come to be identified with Siva's* grace in Saiva Siddhanta* a Tamil Saivite* school of thought and devotion.⁸² In this school Siva's grace (*arul**) is said to play an active role, indeed, almost to have an identity of its own or an independent function. In its active role it is referred to as *arul-catti** (*arul-sakti**), "the power of grace." This power is sometimes personified, and when it is, it is identified with Parvati.⁸³ Furthermore, the *arul-catti* is often said to reside inherently in every human being. Devotion is the means by which this power is awakened and provoked. The implication is that Parvati, in subtle form, resides within every human being.⁸⁴ She is awakened by means of devotion to Siva, which expresses her most essential nature. Having been awakened, she infuses the devotee with her great devotion to Siva, and thus the two, Parvati and the devotee, merge into one. So it is that Parvati's roles as ideal devotee and as Siva's personified grace also merge into a unity.

Finally, Parvati often plays the role of the student in relation to Siva. In many texts,⁸⁵ especially *Tantras*,⁸⁶ Parvati inquires of Siva concerning a great many subjects: ritual, meditation, mythology, dharma, and philosophy. At her prompting or in response to her queries, Siva reveals everything from the particulars of esoteric Tantric rituals to the nondual wisdom of Vedanta*. Again, it is Parvati who succeeds in capturing Siva's attention, in awakening his concern for the world, so that his great wisdom and knowledge, gained by his heroic eons of yogic meditation and brooding, can be revealed. In the role of curious student Parvati represents human beings who are anxious for and will benefit from all that Siva reveals. In her role as student she again might be seen as a kind of mediator, one who coaxes from Siva what is ultimately beneficial for human beings. Although Parvati is not the only one to whom Siva gives instruction, she is by far the most common figure to be cast in this role.

4

Sarasvati *

Sarasvati is one of the few important goddesses in the *Vedas* who remain significant in later Hinduism.¹ In the *Vedas* her character and attributes are clearly associated with the mighty Sarasvati River. She is the earliest example of a goddess who is associated with a river in the Indian tradition. As a river goddess she is praised for her ability both to cleanse and to fertilize. Later Vedic literature (the *Brahmanas**) consistently associates her, even equates her, with the goddess of speech, Vac*. Increasingly in her later history her association with a river is deemphasized and her association with speech, poetry, music, and culture in general is affirmed. In classical and medieval Hinduism Sarasvati is primarily a goddess of poetic inspiration and learning. She becomes associated with the creator god Brahma* as either his daughter or wife. In this role she is creative sound, which lends to reality a peculiar and distinctive human dimension. She becomes identified with the dimension of reality that is best described as coherent intelligibility. Sarasvati to this day is worshiped throughout India and on her special day is worshiped by school children as the patron goddess of learning.

Sarasvati As a River

Sarasvati as the embodiment of the Sarasvati River is significant in both a historical and a theological sense. The religion of the Vedic Aryans* was primarily a portable religion. It centered around a fire cult that did not require permanent temples or places of worship. The domestic hearth itself was a center of worship. By and large Vedic religion was appropriate for a nomadic people or for a people who only recently had ceased to be nomadic. In fact, the Aryans of the *Vedas* migrated into Northwest India sometime during the second millennium B.C.E. and gradually spread

throughout the subcontinent in the course of many generations. The reverence given to Sarasvati * as the embodiment of a river in Northwest India is important because it indicates that the Aryans* had begun to identify their culture with a specific geographical location and were beginning to settle down to a non-nomadic way of life.

The transition from a nomadic to an agricultural, village culture is central in the transition from the religion of the Vedic Aryans to classical Hinduism. In classical Hinduism India herself is affirmed to be the center of the world, the navel of the earth, the special and sacred location of the divine. This is dramatically specified in the sacrality of many individual features of the Indian subcontinent, especially the sacredness of the major rivers of the land.² The goddess Sarasvati, then, represents a very early example of this tendency in the Hindu tradition toward affirming the land itself as holy. The river goddess Sarasvati of the *Vedas* is a prototype of such important later river goddesses as Ganga* and Jumna*.

The river goddess Sarasvati is also important in a theological or religious sense in that she suggests the sacrality inherent in rivers or water in general. While the symbolism of water is rich and complex in the religions of the world,³ two typical associations are important in Vedic descriptions of Sarasvati. First, she is said to bestow bounty, fertility, and riches. Her waters enrich the land so that it can produce. The waters of the river represent life itself in a dry environment, which Northwest India may have already been at the time of the Aryan migrations. Second, Sarasvati represents purity, as does water, particularly running water. Although this characteristic is rarely mentioned directly vis-à-vis Sarasvati, it is stated frequently in the *Vedas* that rituals were often performed on the banks of the Sarasvati, which were held to be especially sacred for ritual purposes. This probably suggests the purifying powers of the river.

Sarasvati's* purifying power in the Vedic texts is also suggested in her association with medicine and healing. In the *Satapatha-brahmana** in particular she is called upon to heal sickness and is referred to as a healing medicine.⁴ In the *Rg-veda** she and the Asvins*, twin gods often associated with healing, are said to heal the god Indra (10.131). As a divine physician, then, Sarasvati is petitioned to cleanse the petitioner of disease.

A particularly Indian association with rivers is the imagery of crossing from the world of ignorance or bondage to the far shore, which represents the world of enlightenment or freedom. The religious quest in all three native Indian religions—Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism—is expressed by the metaphor of fording or crossing a wide stream. The river in this metaphor represents the state of transition, the period of re-

birth, in which the spiritual sojourner undergoes a crucial metamorphosis. The river represents a great purifying power in which the pilgrim drowns his old self and is born anew, free and enlightened. This imagery is not expressly used in connection with Sarasvati * in the *Vedas*, but it may have been understood implicitly and may help to explain the association of Sarasvati with inspiration, speech, and wisdom in her later history.

Although Sarasvati's* nature and characteristics are overwhelmingly associated with a mighty river, this is no ordinary river. Early Vedic references make it clear that the Sarasvati River originates in heaven and flows down to the earth.⁵ This idea, also affirmed in the case of such important later river goddesses as Ganga*, is a way of asserting the sacred nature of the rivers in question. The Sarasvati (and later the Ganga) represents an ever-flowing stream of celestial grace which purifies and fertilizes the earth. The earthly manifestation of Sarasvati as a river thus represents only a partial disclosure of her being. Physical contact with her earthly manifestation, however, connects one with the awesome, heavenly, transcendent dimension of the goddess and of reality in general.

Sarasvati* in Later Hinduism

Sarasvati's connection with a river steadily decreases in later Hinduism. Although she continues to be associated with a river in some late sources,⁶ her characteristics and appearance increasingly bear little or no relation to a goddess who embodies the sacrality of a river.

As early as the *Brahmanas** Sarasvati is consistently identified with Vagdevi*, the goddess of speech. It is not at all clear what intrinsic connection between Sarasvati and Vagdevi led to this association. Perhaps the centrality of sacred speech in Vedic cult and the importance of Vedic rituals being performed on the banks of the Sarasvati River led to the identification of the two goddesses. In any case, Sarasvati increasingly becomes a goddess associated with speech, learning, culture, and wisdom; most post-Vedic references to her do not even hint that at one time she was identified with a river.

In later Hinduism Sarasvati is sometimes said to have been born from the god Brahma*. Brahma, desiring to create the world, goes into meditation, whereupon his body divides in two, half male and half female. Enraptured by his female half, who is Sarasvati, Brahma desires her, mates with her, and creates the demigod Manu, who subsequently creates the world.⁷ A similar version of her origin is found in the

*Brahma-vaivarta-purana** and the *Devi-bhagavata-purana**. According to these texts, Krsna*, who is identified with absolute reality (*brahman*), divides himself into male and female, *purusa** and *prakrti**, spirit and matter, in order to proceed with creation. His female half takes on five forms or five *saktis**, dynamic powers, one of which is Sarasvati*.⁸ Her specific creative function in relation to the other *saktis* is to pervade reality with insight, knowledge, and learning.⁹ In relation to *prakrti* she is said to be purely *sattvic*, spiritual.¹⁰ These same texts also describe Sarasvati's* origin from the tip of Krsna's* *sakti**'s tongue. Suddenly, they say, a lovely girl appears dressed in yellow clothes, adorned with jewels, and carrying a book and a *vina* (lute).¹¹ Sarasvati is also often said to have her origin in and to reside in the mouths or on the tongues of the god Brahma* (Brahma has four or five heads).¹² That is, when Brahma undertakes the creation of the world through creative speech, the goddess Sarasvati is born in his mouths.

Sarasvati is also said to have had her origin from the god Visnu*. In several places she is said to be his tongue or to be held in his mouth.¹³ Her association with Visnu makes her the co-wife of Laksmi* in many myths. In this relationship Sarasvati for the most part represents spiritual, ascetic, or religious goals and values, whereas Laksmi represents worldly well-being as manifest in wealth, material power, and fertility. In some texts the two goddesses do not get along very well, suggesting, perhaps, a tension between *bhukti* (sensual enjoyment) or *dharma* and *mukti* (spiritual liberation or perfection) in Hinduism.¹⁴

Although Sarasvati's nature and appearance change dramatically from the Vedic period to later Hinduism as her association with a river decreases, she does maintain some characteristics of her earlier history, in a few cases even maintaining her association with a river.¹⁵ She is associated, for example, with clouds, thunder, and rain and is said to be the presiding deity of rain.¹⁶ In the *Vamana-purana** she is described as moving through the clouds and producing rain (40.14).¹⁷ The *Vamana-purana* also identifies Sarasvati with all waters (40.14). Her association with Soma in some texts¹⁸ and with water in general suggests that Sarasvati is identified with the underlying sap of vitality necessary for all living things, that she nourishes life and promotes fertility. These continued associations with water, and sometimes with rivers, indicate a certain continuity between the river goddess of the *Vedas* and the later goddess. Even in reference to her association with waters, though, Sarasvati's character is much changed. In the later tradition she is not so much a river goddess as a goddess who manifests herself through the life-giving and purifying nature of all water: rain, rivers, ponds, and so on. Like Soma she pervades creation; she has transcended her association with a specific river.

Far more characteristic of the later Sarasvati * is her association with speech. Even in the *Rg-veda** she is called impeller of true and sweet speech and awakener of happy and noble thoughts (6.61.9). Such epithets as Vagdevi* (goddess of speech), Jihvagravasini* (dwelling in the front of the tongue), Kavijihvagravasini* (she who dwells on the tongues of poets), Sabdavasini* (she who dwells in sound), Vagisa* (mistress of speech), and Mahavani* (possessing great speech)¹⁹ are often used for Sarasvati. Her mythological identification with the tongues of Brahma*, Krsna*, and Visnu* also underlines her identification with speech or creative sound.

The importance of speech in Hinduism is both ancient and central. The entire creative process is held to be distilled in the syllable *om**, and the idea of creation proceeding from *sabda-brahman** (ultimate reality in the form of sound) is often mentioned in Hindu texts. The potency of speech and sound is also seen in the centrality of mantras in Hinduism. A mantra, which may consist of words or of sounds alone, is held to possess great power. Indeed, the mantra of a given deity is declared to be equivalent to the deity itself. To pronounce a mantra is to make the deity present. The name of the deity and the deity itself are equivalent. There resides in sound a potent quality, and this quality is embodied in the goddess Sarasvati.

Speech is also important and revered because it permits communication between people. Speech, to a great extent, sets human beings apart from all animals. Speech is also associated with rationality and refinement. Speech represents coherent sound that permits the transmission of ideas, wisdom, and culture. As the embodiment of speech, then, Sarasvati is present wherever speech exists. And so it is that she is preeminently associated with the best in human culture: poetry, literature, sacred rituals, and rational communication between individuals.

Sarasvati is also identified with thought and intellect. Not only is she speech in the form of coherent sound, she is that which underlies or makes speech possible, namely, intelligence and thought. This association is indicated in such epithets for her as Smrtisakti* (the power of memory), Jnanasakti* (the power of knowledge), Buddhisaktisvarupini* (whose form is the power of intellect), Kalpanasakti* (who is the power of forming ideas), and Pratibha* (intelligence, or she who is intelligence).²⁰ As thought and intellect, Sarasvati is thus identified with the distinctive ability that distinguishes human beings as special, reasoning. She represents the peculiar human ability to think, which is precisely the ability that has permitted human beings to create and imagine their innumerable cultural products, from cooking pots to philosophic systems.

Sarasvati's* association with science, learning, and knowledge further reinforces her nature as the goddess of speech and thought. She is

called, for example, Vedagarbha* (the womb or source of the *Vedas* or knowledge), Sarvavidyasvarupini* (whose form is all the sciences), Sarvasastravasini* (who dwells in all books), Granthakarini* (who causes books to be made), and many other such names.²¹ As mind, intellect, and thought, she inspires the arts and sciences. She is also the accumulated products of human thought. She is the sum of the human intellectual tradition as preserved in the sciences. As the great goddess who bears culture, or who embodies culture, she is sometimes associated with the Brahmans, whose special duty is to preserve culture. She is manifest and especially revered in schools and wherever education takes place.

Sarasvati* is also said to underlie, inspire, or embody the arts. She is said to provide inspiration to poets and to be present wherever artistic excellence is evident. Poets often praise her assistance or ask for her help. She is said to be associated with the Gandharvas, a supernatural race that excels at dancing,²² and she is often associated with music, both instrumental and vocal. In short, Sarasvati is manifest wherever human culture exists. Inspiring and embodying both the arts and sciences in human culture, she represents the greatness of human civilization in all its richness and diversity.

Beyond Sarasvati's* associations with culture, which dominate her character, are certain cosmic associations or certain tendencies and epithets that suggest her primordial, absolute nature. Such names as the following identify Sarasvati as a great, universal goddess whose functions extend to the creation of the worlds: Jaganmata* (mother of the world), Saktirupini* (whose form is power or *sakti**), and Visvarupa* (containing all forms within her).²³ It is fairly easy to imagine how Sarasvati's character as the inspiration and embodiment of culture might lead to her assuming such cosmic characteristics. As the reality that permits human beings to achieve dominion over all other creatures, that permits or inspires the beauty and grace manifest in the arts, that has enabled human beings to achieve an almost godlike nature in the physical world as its masters and molders, this goddess of culture comes to be extolled or equated with the highest powers of the cosmos.

Sarasvati's iconography illustrates her associations with culture, particularly the arts and sciences, and shows her to be a goddess who is for the most part set apart from the natural realm of growth, fertility, blood, and other phenomena often associated with or central in the iconography and mythology of other goddesses. She is usually depicted as having four hands, and the most common items held by her are a book, a lute (*vina*), a rosary, and a water pot.²⁴ The book associates her with the sciences and with learning in general. The lute associates her with the arts, particularly the musical arts, and the rosary and the water pot associate her with the spiritual sciences and with religious rites.²⁵

Image not available.

Sarasvati *. Sixteenth century A.D. Rumtek Monastery, Sikkim. Madanjeet Singh, Himalayan Art (London: MacMillan, 1968), p. 20.

The predominant themes in Sarasvati's * appearance are purity and transcendence. She is almost always said to be pure white like snow, the moon, or the *kunda* flower²⁶ or to shine brilliantly and whitely like innumerable moons.²⁷ Her garments are said to be fiery in their purity, or they are described as white,²⁸ and she is sometimes said to be smeared with sandalwood paste.²⁹ Sarasvati's gleaming white body and garments express well her purity and transcendence, and these themes are in keeping with her typical association with the *sattva guna**, the pure, spiritual thread of *prakrti**.³⁰ Sarasvati* is rarely described as having fearsome aspects³¹ and is usually portrayed as calm and peaceful. These qualities are conveyed in the serene, white images of her in Hindu art.³²

Sarasvati's transcendent nature, which removes her from the impurities of the natural world and its rhythms of growth and fertility, is also suggested in her vehicle, the swan. The swan is a symbol of spiritual transcendence and perfection in Hinduism. Spiritual masters and heroes are sometimes called supreme swans (*paramahansa**) in that they have completely transcended the limitations and imperfections of the phenomenal world. Sarasvati, astride her swan, suggests a dimension of human existence that rises above the physical, natural world. Her realm is one of beauty, perfection, and grace; it is a realm created by artistic inspiration, philosophic insight, and accumulated knowledge, which have enabled human beings to so refine their natural world that they have been able to transcend its limitations. Sarasvati astride her swan beckons human beings to continued cultural creation and civilized perfection.

Sarasvati is also typically shown seated on a lotus. Like the swan, the lotus seat of the goddess suggests her transcendence of the physical world. She floats above the muddy imperfections of the physical world, unsullied, pure, beautiful. Although rooted in the mud (like man rooted in the physical world), the lotus perfects itself in a blossom that has transcended the mud. Sarasvati inspires people to live in such a way that they may transcend their physical limitations through the ongoing creation of culture.

The benefits to be derived from the worship of Sarasvati, of the blessings that she is expected to bestow on her devotees, usually relate to the themes that we have noted as central to her character. She gives eloquence, wisdom, poetic inspiration, and artistic skill.³³ She removes speech defects and dumbness and grants charming speech and a musical voice.³⁴ Although she is sometimes said to grant wealth, long life, worldly enjoyments, and final salvation, she is primarily the goddess of wisdom and learning and specializes in promoting success among philosophers, scholars, and artists, who are her special devotees.

A persistent theme in the Hindu tradition is that human destiny involves the refinement of nature. Although the ultimate goal of the religious quest may be *moksa* *, the complete release from the phenomenal world, Hindus affirm that being fully human necessitates molding, enhancing, and refining the natural world in order to make it habitable for human beings. Such important Hindu ideas as dharma, the *samskaras** (life-cycle rituals), and the *varna-jati* (caste) system all suggest this emphasis. The arts and sciences, however, seem to be the most obvious and concrete manifestations of this theme in the Hindu tradition. Artistic creation and the accumulated knowledge of the sciences, including philosophy, epitomize human culture and demonstrate the extraordinary ability of human beings to mold and refine the natural world into something beautiful and specially human. Sarasvati* presides over and inspires this dimension of being human in the Hindu tradition.

Many goddesses both within and outside the Hindu tradition gain their immense vitality and popularity through their associations with certain aspects of the natural world. Fertility, sexuality, growth, blood, and the sap of life in general seem to be embodied in many goddesses. Hinduism also attributes great power to goddesses. They are typically referred to as *saktis** (powers), and several Hindu goddesses are particularly adept at warfare and are most at home on the battlefield. Several other Hindu goddesses seem to be particularly popular among women and to specialize in family and domestic blessings. Many goddesses provide models for the most significant female roles in Hindu culture, or at least they participate in these roles, albeit in ways that do not always conform to dharmic models. Sarasvati has very few of these associations. Her pure, milky-white appearance and completely *sattvic* nature dissociate her from the mud of existence, from the vigorous, fecund sap of fertility. Her sexual encounters are not emphasized, and when her father/husband Brahma* does desire her, she seeks to flee from him. Her motherhood is usually only metaphorical: she is said to give birth to artistic creations by providing inspiration or to have given birth to the *Vedas* in the sense that she personifies wisdom. In the *Devi-bhagavata-purana** she is said to be ascetic in nature and to grant boons to those who perform asceticism (9.1.35). Her presence is therefore not usually sought in the home. She is not a domestic goddess. Nor is her presence sought in the fields, where fertility is crucial, or in the forests and mountains, where isolation from culture is desired in the quest for *moksa*. Her presence is sought in libraries and schools, by those who create and bear culture in the ongoing task of transforming the natural world into a refined and civilized habitation for human beings.

Throughout North India today Sarasvati's* special *puja** is celebrated

in early spring. On this day images of the goddess are established in schools and universities, and special cultural programs take place. At Banares Hindu University there is a procession of faculty and students on this day (which corresponds to the anniversary of the university's founding). This is also the day when books, pens, musical instruments, and gurus are formally worshiped.

5

Sita *

One of the most popular heroines in Hindu mythology is Sita. She is known primarily as the wife of Rama*, the hero of the epic *Ramayana**. As one of the protagonists of the *Ramayana*, Sita is revered as the model Hindu wife, who, although the victim of injustices, always remains loyal and steadfast to her husband. The divinity of Rama and Sita is not stressed in the early *Ramayana* of Valmiki* (written sometime between 200 B.C. and A.D. 200), but they increasingly become identified as manifestations of the god Visnu and his consort Sri-Lakshmi* in later vernacular renditions of the tale. As early as the fourteenth century Rama is praised as the supreme manifestation of the divine,¹ and in North India today millions of Hindus consider him and Sita the supreme divine couple. Throughout this period of divinization, Sita has achieved her status primarily in relation to Rama. It is her wifely role, which has come to serve as a paradigm in Hindu mythology, legend, and folktale, which has defined Sita and made her dear to so many Hindus. Sita is the perfect model of wifely devotion.

Although Sita is associated with the wife of Rama in the minds of all Hindus today, a female divinity named Sita was known prior to Valmiki's* *Ramayana*, and this deity was associated with agricultural fertility. Just why Valmiki associated the name of this deity with his heroine is not entirely clear, but that he did so consciously seems beyond doubt.

The Early History of Sita

The word *sita** means "furrow," "the line made by the plow," and is the name of a goddess associated with plowed fields in Vedic literature.

In a hymn addressed to the lord of the fields, Ksetrapati *, Sita* is invoked as follows:

Auspicious Sita, come thou near:
we venerate and worship thee
That thou mayst bless and prosper us
and bring us fruits abundantly.

May Indra press the furrow down,
may Pushan* guide its course aright.
May she, as rich in milk, be drained for us
through each succeeding year.²

In the *Kausika-sutra** Sita is the wife of Parjanya, a god associated with rain. She is the "mother of gods, mortals and creatures" (7c)³ and is petitioned for growth and prosperity (6).⁴ In the *Paraskara-sutra** Sita is the wife of Indra, a god often associated with rain and fertility, and is offered cooked rice and barley in the sacrificial fire (2.17.119).⁵ In the *Vajasaneyi-samhita** Sita is invoked when four furrows are drawn during a sacrificial ritual (12.6972). This is reminiscent of plowing the ground upon which the fire altar is built during the Agnicayana ritual, an act apparently intended to ensure the abundance and fertility of the crops.⁶ Sita is also invoked as one of the names of the goddess Arya* in the *Harivamsa** (2.3.14).

O goddess, you are the altar's center in the sacrifice,
The priest's fee,
Sita to those who hold the plough,
And Earth to all living beings.⁷

Sita is not a very significant deity prior to the *Ramayana** of Valmiki*. She is not mentioned very often and is overshadowed by much more popular goddesses associated with fertility, such as Sri-Laksmi*. Nevertheless, Sita does seem to be part of a fundamental intuition concerning the fertility of the plowed earth and the necessity of a male power to awaken, arouse, and inseminate her. Underlying Sita's* connection with Indra, Parjanya, and other male deities associated with the inseminating effects of rain seems to be the basic perception that the ongoing fertility of the cosmos is the result of the interaction between the sky and the earth, between male and female, between the latent powers of the field and the inseminating effects of the plow, which opens the earth for the insertion of seeds into her fertile interior.

Kings and the Fertility of the Earth

Identification of Rama's * wife with a goddess of the plowed fields, with a goddess of fertility, seems to be related to the central role that kings in ancient India were assumed to play in promoting the fertility of the land.⁸ The interrelation between fertility and the manly vigor and power of the ruler or king finds its prototype in the *Rg-veda*, where the mighty god Indra combats the demon Vrtra*, who withholds the creative, nourishing waters of creation. Indra having defeated the demon, the waters rush forth to fructify the earth and create a fertile, habitable cosmos fit for human civilization.⁹

The theme of the king's bringing forth the abundance and fertility of the earth is central in the myths concerning Prthu*, the first human king. In these myths the necessity of a king is related in part to the chaotic and barren nature of the earth in the mythic past. Prior to Prthu's* reign the earth was inhospitable, her terrain was impossible to cultivate, and her fertility remained untapped. The *Mahabharata** describes Prthu as leveling the earth's mountains and hills to make her fit for agriculture and as milking the earth like a cow (7.69). As the legendary model for kings, one of Prthu's chief functions is to bring forth the fertility of the earth. According to the Prthu myths, the earth, although fertile and potent, does not or cannot yield the abundance of her interior without being stimulated, activated, or, in the image of the *Mahabharata*, "milked" by a heroic, royal figure. Conversely, it is understood that the king's reign will not be fruitful, that he will not be successful, unless he can draw forth the richness of the earth. Just as the king is needed to activate or provoke the earth into life and fertility, so the earth's fruitfulness is necessary to the king's success as a ruler.

Certain myths and certain Vedic rituals indicate the theme of the king's winning the fruits of the earth. In various ways the king relates to, interacts with, or captures things that are related to the earth, such as cows. These acts symbolize the king's ability to draw forth from the earth her treasures and abundance. They symbolize the king's ability to "milk" the earth of her richness for the benefit of all living creatures.¹⁰

The myth of the churning of the ocean may also be understood in this vein.¹¹ Visnu*, as the cosmic ruler in this myth, usually plays the central role and dominates the action in his various forms: as the tortoise that provides the foundation for the churning stick; as the cosmic serpent, Vasuki*, who provides the churning rope; as the seductress Mohini*, who prevents the demons from partaking of the nectar of immortality; and as the leader of the gods. The central action of the myth is the churning of the ocean of milk to make it yield the nectar of immortality. Visnu

represents the active ruler who brings his power and ingenuity to bear on the passive fertility of the cosmos. The result of Visnu's * action is the drawing forth of representations of the abundance of the earth. Central among these are the nectar of immortality and the goddess Sri-Laksmi*. Sri* represents good luck, well-being, abundance, and fertility and is well known as dwelling wherever a righteous king reigns. She is sovereignty personified, and where she dwells there always exist wealth and abundance of all good things.

The *Ramayana** takes care to portray Rama* as the ideal king and his rule as a model of social perfection. It is therefore not surprising that we would encounter the theme of Rama relating to, interacting with, or winning the riches of the earth. In fact, his winning Sita* at her *svayamvara* (a suitor's contest for a bride), their subsequent marriage, and Rama's* regaining Sita from the clutches of the demon Ravana* should probably be understood as an expression of this basic and ancient pattern in Indian religion. It is clear in the *Ramayana* that Sita is no mere human being. Her birth is supernatural, and her abilities and appearance are exalted throughout the text. She is, for example, called *ayonija**, "not born of a womb" (1.66; 2.30), and in appearance she is often likened to Sri-Laksmi (5.12).¹² The nature of her birth (as well as her name) also makes it clear that Sita fits the theme of the mutual and necessary interaction between a king and the earth, which alone leads to fertility and abundance. According to the *Ramayana*, Sita is literally unearthed when her father, King Janaka, is plowing (1.66). Given Janaka's position as a great king, ruler of Videha, it seems extremely unlikely that he was simply in the fields farming when Sita was discovered. What is more likely is that Janaka was involved in some royal ritual, part of which involved the king's plowing the earth to bring about fertility.¹³ It is also probable that the act of the king's plowing the field was likened to sexual intercourse, a symbolic coupling of the king (and the powers he represented or contained) with the latent powers of the earth.¹⁴ The effectiveness of the ritual plowing, then, is manifest in the birth of Sita, the earth's personified fertility, abundance, and well-being, which has been brought forth by Janaka.

The marriage of Rama and Sita represents a further interplay between a vigorous, virtuous, powerful king and a woman who symbolizes the fecund forces of the earth, a woman who is literally the child of the earth. Their marriage institutes a relationship in which Sita is, as it were, plowed by Rama the king. The ultimate result of this auspicious relationship between kingly virility and earthly fertility is the inauguration of Ramrajya*, "the rule of Rama," an idealized reign in which harmony, longevity, order, fruitful crops, and all social, political, and economic virtues dominate society to the exclusion of all ills.

Image not available.

Sita *. South Indian bronze, early Chola*, ca. 1000 A.D.
Government Museum, Madras. C. Sivaramamurti, South Indian Bronzes
(New Delhi: Lalit Kala Akademi, 1963), fig. 41. Reprinted by
permission of the publisher.

Interposed between the marriage of Rama * and Sita* and the inauguration of Ramrajya* is the central part of the epic narrative in which Rama is banished from the capital city, Sita is abducted by the villain Ravana*, and Rama and his allies defeat Ravana and recapture Sita. During Rama's* exile, Ayodhya, the capital of Rama's kingdom, is desolate. The citizens bemoan Rama's absence, and in all respects the situation is contrasted with the times when Rama was present there.¹⁵ Doubly traumatic is the situation later in the forest when Sita is kidnapped and separated from Rama. At one point Rama is reduced to a blubbering, half-maddened wreck and must be returned to sobriety by the appeals of his brother Laksmana*, who tells him it is unmanly and improper to lament so.¹⁶

In summary, traditional Indian religion viewed the king as a figure who could stimulate, activate, or somehow draw forth from the earth her creative potential. Indeed, it was held that without the king's beneficial influence, without the manly vigor of the king, the earth's fecundity would remain untapped; the earth would remain unproductive. The king entered into a relationship with the earth in which he could stimulate her, a relationship that was understood as not unlike a marriage. "This marital relation of the ruler to the earth is directly expressed in the word *Bhupati* 'lord of the earth,' i.e. king."¹⁷ In the *Ramayana** Rama's wife is associated with the powers of the earth, or the earth itself, through her name and through her unusual birth. Underlying Sita's* epic character and personality is the ancient fertility goddess associated with the plowed field, who was worshiped for abundant crops and who was ritually activated by rulers in certain contexts. Sita, the epic heroine, has ancient roots, and one important dimension of her character associates her with the primordial powers of the earth.

The Ideal Wife

Sita is defined in the *Ramayana* and in the subsequent cult of Rama almost entirely in relation to her husband. She is portrayed as the ideal Hindu wife, whose every thought revolves around her husband. For Sita Rama is the center of her life. She is always steadfast in her loyalty to him. His welfare, reputation, and wishes are uppermost in her mind. The *Manu-dharma-sastra** describes the ideal wife as a woman who always remains faithful to her husband, no matter what his character might be: "Though destitute of virtue, or seeking pleasure elsewhere, or devoid of good qualities, a husband must be constantly worshiped as a god by a faithful wife" (5.154).¹⁸ The same text, commenting on the necessity for protecting women throughout their lives, says: "Her father

protects her in childhood, her husband protects her in old age; a woman is never fit for independence" (9.3). 19 Sita* is the ideal *pativrata**, the wife devoted entirely to her husband. In her selfless devotion and sexual fidelity the *pativrata* nourishes an inner heat that both purifies her and provides her with a destructive weapon that can be used against those who might threaten her purity.²⁰ This inner heat generated as a result of marital fidelity seems to be similar to *tapas* in the context of asceticism. *Tapas* is both the act of doing asceticism, or something virtuous, and the result of doing that action, namely, an inner heat or fire.

Sita's* mythological role as the ideal wife and *pativrata* is illustrated in several incidents in the *Ramayana**. When Rama* is told by his father that he will not inherit the kingdom and that he must go into exile in the forest for fourteen years, he prepares to leave Sita behind in the city of Ayodhya because he thinks that she could not bear the ordeals and discomforts of the forest. She is grief stricken at this plan and delivers a long discourse to him on her desire to go into exile with him. The point to which she returns often is that a husband is a god to his wife and that apart from him a wife might as well commit suicide, so meaningless would be her existence. She threatens to kill herself unless he relents and allows her to go with him to the forest. She begins her plea with these words:

O Son of an illustrious monarch, a father, a mother, a brother, a son or a daughter-in-law enjoy the fruit of their merits and receive what is their due, a wife alone follows the destiny of her consort, O Bull among Men; therefore, from now on, my duty is clear, I shall dwell in the forest! For a woman, it is not her father, her son, nor her mother, friends nor her own self, but the husband, who in this world and the next is ever her sole means of salvation. If thou dost enter the impenetrable forest to-day, O Descendant of Raghu, I shall precede thee on foot, treading down the spiky Kusha Grass I shall willingly dwell in the forest as formerly I inhabited the palace of my father, having no anxiety in the Three Worlds and reflecting only on my duties towards my lord. Ever subject to thy will, docile, living like an ascetic, in those honey-scented woodlands I shall be happy in thy proximity, O Rama, O Illustrious Lord. (2.27)²¹

Rama replies to her by describing all the dangers and discomforts of the forest and tells her that he cannot bear to inflict these things on her, that she must stay behind in the comfort of the city under the protection of her in-laws. She replies by saying:

The hardships described by thee, that are endured by those who dwell in the forest, will be transmuted into joys through my devotion to thee separated from thee I should immediately yield up my life Deprived of her consort a woman cannot live, thou canst not doubt this truth where I am concerned O Thou of pure soul, I shall remain sinless by following piously in the steps of my consort, for a husband is a God. (2.29) 22

In her utter loyalty to Rama* she compares herself to Savitri*, who followed her husband to the realm of the dead, and says that she has never seen the face of another man, even in her thoughts (2.30). She says that the forest discomforts will be enjoyed by her as pleasures as long as she can be with him. She sums up her plea to Rama by saying: "To be with thee is heaven, to be without thee is hell, this is the truth!" (2.30).23

When Ravana* abducts Sita* and takes her to Lanka*, he keeps her prisoner in a garden surrounded by demonesses. Several long descriptions portray Sita's* pitiful condition in the absence of Rama. Through a series of metaphors Valmiki* tries to capture both Sita's great beauty and her great grief. The latter has clearly eclipsed the former but cannot altogether hide it. In the words of the *Ramayana** she was

resplendent with a radiance which now shone but dimly so that she seemed like a flame wreathed in smoke.

. . .she resembled a lotus pool stripped of its flowers. Oppressed, racked with grief, and tormented, she was like unto Rohini pursued by Ketu

Entangled in a mighty web of sorrow, her beauty was veiled like a flame enveloped in smoke or a traditional text obscured by dubious interpretation or wealth that is melting away or faith that is languishing or hope that is almost extinguished or perfection unattained on account of obstacles or an intellect which is darkened or fame tarnished by calumny. (5.15)24

Musing on her appearance, Hanuman, the loyal monkey ally of Rama, says: "For a woman the greatest decoration is her lord and Sita, though incomparably beautiful, no longer shines in Rama's absence" (5.16).25

Although her beauty is dimmed, although she lacks the presence of Rama, who alone gives her life meaning, she is described throughout this section of the narrative as constantly remembering Rama. Keeping him always in her mind, she is sometimes described as shining beautifully as a result of this steadfastness. "Though that blessed one was shorn of

her beauty, yet her soul did not lose its transcendency, upheld as it was by the thought of Rama's * glory and safeguarded by her own virtue" (5.17).26

Ravana* comes to the garden and proposes that Sita* abandon Rama* and take him as her husband. She is shocked at this suggestion and refuses. Ravana then threatens that he will give her two months to agree to his wishes. If, after that time, she refuses, he will cut her up and have her for breakfast (5.22). Sita shows great pride and courage in the face of Ravana's* threats. At one point she tells him that if she wished she could burn him to ashes with the fire that she has accumulated from her chastity (5.22). She refuses to do so, she says, simply because she has not been given Rama's permission.

When Hanuman finds Sita in her garden prison he proposes to return her to India by carrying her on his back. Given Sita's* predicament and her longing to see Rama again, it would be natural for her to accept this offer of rescue joyfully. She does not agree to return with Hanuman, however, because to do so would mean touching another male besides her husband, which would violate her devotion to Rama. She also refuses to accept Hanuman's offer because it would mean that Rama would not obtain the glory involved in rescuing her. Sita displays in this scene her habit of always thinking of Rama first. His welfare and reputation are uppermost in her mind. To her it would be wrong to think of her own safety first if it would mean adversely influencing Rama's reputation or opportunity for fame and glory (5.37).

Ravana attempts to persuade Sita to accept him as her new husband by having his court magician create a head that resembles Rama's and a bow like Rama's. Taking these to Sita, Ravana claims that Rama has been defeated in battle and slain. In her shock and lamentation Sita's chief thought is that it must have been some fault of hers which resulted in Rama's untimely and undignified death. A virtuous woman sustains her husband and prevents his untimely death. Only some shortcoming or unvirtuous act, she thinks, can explain the tragedy. She begs Ravana to take her to the body of her husband and slay her there so that she can be united with him in death (6.3132).

After Rama defeats Ravana, Sita's loyalty to her husband is severely tested. Sita is brought before Rama, and she beams with joy at seeing him. He, however, scowls at her and announces that he has only undertaken the defeat of Ravana in order to uphold his family's honor and not out of love for her. He says that it would be lustful and ignoble for him to take her back after she had spent time under the control of another man. He disclaims her and even invites her to associate with one of his

brothers or one of the surviving demon heroes. He concludes this frosty interview with her by saying: "Assuredly Ravana *, beholding thy ravishing and celestial beauty, will not have respected thy person during the time thou didst dwell in his abode" (6.17).27

Sita* is shocked at this accusation and protests her innocence, saying that although it is true that Ravana handled her, she could have done nothing to prevent it, that he abducted her by means of superior strength, and that throughout her ordeal and stay in Lanka* she remained completely faithful to her husband and thought of him constantly. Grieved by Rama's* false accusations, she asks Laksmana* to make a funeral pyre for her. Having displeased Rama and having been renounced by him publicly, she wishes to die (6.118). When the fire has been kindled Sita prepares to enter it by circumambulating Rama and then addressing Agni, the god of fire, with the words: "As my heart has never ceased to be true to Raghava, do thou, O Witness of all Beings, grant me thy protection! As I am pure in conduct, though Rama looks on me as sullied, do thou, O Witness of the Worlds, grant me full protection!" (6.118).28 Because of her innocence and purity, Agni refuses to harm her and returns her to Rama so unscathed that even her flower garland remains unwithered by the heat of the flames. Rama, convinced of her purity, accepts her back and says that he will protect her forever (6.120).

Back in Ayodhya, however, when everyone is living happily ever after and the glorious era of Ramrajya* is under way, Rama hears that his citizens are gossiping about Sita and are unhappy that he accepted her back after she was under Ravana's* control. To stop this gossip and to set a stainless example for his subjects, Rama decides to banish Sita from his kingdom, even though he has just learned of her pregnancy. He commands his brother Laksmana to take Sita to a deserted place and abandon her (7.45). When Laksmana tells Sita of Rama's decision, her predilection is again to blame some fault of her own, either in this life or a past life, for bringing about her ill luck. She does not blame Rama, nor does it seem to occur to her that he might be in the wrong (7.48). She asks Laksmana to send Rama this message:

O Raghava, thou knowest I am truly pure and that I have been bound to thee in supreme love, yet thou hast renounced me in fear of dishonour, because thy subjects have reproached and censured thee, O Hero As for me, I am not distressed on mine own account, O Prince of Raghu, it is for thee to keep thy fair name untarnished! The husband is as a God to the woman, he is her family, and her spiritual preceptor, therefore, even at the price of her life, she must seek to please her lord. (7.48)29

Image not available.

The test of Sita *. Kulu, about 1720 A.D. Jagdish and Kamla Mittal Museum of Indian Art, Hyderabad. In the Image of Man: The Indian Perception of the Universe through 2000 Years of Painting and Sculpture, Hayward Gallery, London, March 25-June 13, 1982 (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1982), fig. 386, p. 73.
Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

After Sita * has given birth to twin sons and has spent several years in exile in a forest hermitage, Rama* summons her back to Ayodhya to undergo an ordeal that will absolve him of all shame and demonstrate her innocence once and for all. Although he himself is convinced of her innocence, he demands a public ordeal in order to convince his subjects. Sita agrees, but it seems that she no longer relishes life; she asks, on the basis of her purity and loyalty to Rama, to be taken back into the bosom of her mother, the goddess Earth. She says: "If, in thought, I have never dwelt on any but Rama, may the Goddess Madhavi receive me!" (7.97).³⁰ As she finishes this act of truth, a throne rises from the ground supported by serpents. Earth embraces Sita, seats her on the throne, and then the throne and Sita sink back into the ground (7.97). Although Rama angrily demands Sita's* return, the earth remains silent and closed, and Rama lives out his life in sorrow. He does not marry again and has a golden image of Sita made, which he uses in her place at religious rituals requiring the presence of a wife.

Sita's self-effacing nature, her steadfast loyalty to her husband, and her chastity make her both the ideal Hindu wife and the ideal *pativrata**. In a sense Sita has no independent existence, no independent destiny. In all things she sees herself as inextricably bound up with Rama. Apart from him her life is meaningless.

Throughout the *Ramayana** she constantly thinks of Rama and his welfare and always remains faithful to him despite provocations on his part. Although Rama is considered the ideal king, he is not a very good husband to Sita. He would be perfectly willing to leave her behind for fourteen years during his exile, he entertains doubts about her chastity while she was under Ravana's* control, he allows her to undergo an ordeal by fire, he exiles her from his kingdom to stop the gossip of the citizens and to protect his own reputation, and finally he demands that she undergo a public ordeal. Throughout all this Sita remains steadfast and usually tries to blame herself instead of Rama for events that cause her suffering and separation from Rama. In her loyalty and chastity, furthermore, it is understood that she supports and nourishes Rama's strength and reputation. A common Hindu belief is that a man is strengthened, indeed, is made nearly invulnerable, by his wife's chastity, whereas he is weakened and endangered by her faithlessness. Thus when Ravana* shows Sita Rama's head and bow, she immediately blames herself. Although she cannot remember being faithless in act or thought, she assumes that she must have been at some time (perhaps in a past life) in order for Rama to meet such an untimely end. It does not occur to her that some fault of Rama's own might have led to his misfortune.

Although in Hinduism there are differing marital-role expectations

and traditions concerning where brides are expected to live after marriage, it is generally true that the good woman and ideal wife should express submission and docility to her in-laws. Speaking of the training of girls in Mysore, M. N. Srinivas says:

It is the mother's duty to train her daughter up to be an absolute docile daughter-in-law. The *summum bonum* of a girl's life is to please her parents-in-law and her husband. If she does not "get on" with her mother-in-law, she will be a disgrace to her family, and cast a blot on the fair name of her mother. The Kannada mother dins into her daughter's ears certain ideals which make for harmony (at the expense of her sacrificing her will) in her life. 31

In the Hindu tradition a woman is taught to understand herself primarily in relation to others. She is taught to emphasize in the development of her character what others expect of her. It is society that puts demands on her, primarily through the agents of relatives and in-laws, and not she who places demands on society that she be allowed to develop a unique, independent destiny. A central demand placed on women, particularly vis-à-vis males, is that they subordinate their welfare to the welfare of others. Hindu women are taught to cultivate an attitude that identifies their own welfare with the welfare of others, especially that of their husbands and children.

In the *bratas*, the periodical days of fasting and prayer which unmarried girls keep all over India, the girl's wishes for herself are almost always in relation to others; she asks the boons of being a good daughter, good wife, good daughter-in-law, good mother, and so forth. Thus, in addition to the "virtue" of self-effacement and self-sacrifice, the feminine role in India crystallizes a woman's connections to others, her embeddedness in a multitude of familial relationships.³²

In inculcating the nature of the ideal woman in India, Sita* plays an important role, perhaps the dominant role of all Hindu mythological figures. The *Ramayana**, either in its original Sanskrit version or in one of several vernacular renditions, is well known by almost every Hindu. Many of the leading characters have come to represent Hindu ideals. In the context of the Dasa* Puttal Vrata, for example, Bengali girls wish that "I shall have a husband like Rama*, I shall be *sati* like Sita, I shall have a Devara [younger brother-in-law] like Lakshman. I shall have a father-in-law like Dasaratha; I shall have a mother-in-law like Kousalya."³³

Sita * represents all the qualities of a good woman and ideal wife. Although other goddesses, such as Parvati* and Laksmi*, and other heroines from Hindu mythology, such as Savitri* and Damayanti*, express many of these qualities, Sita is by far the most popular and beloved paradigm for wifely devotion, forbearance, and chastity.

From earliest childhood, a Hindu has heard Sita's* legend recounted on any number of sacral and secular occasions; seen the central episodes enacted in folk plays like the *Ram Lila*; heard her qualities extolled in devotional songs; and absorbed the ideal feminine identity she incorporates through the many everyday metaphors and similes that are associated with her name. Thus, "She is as pure as Sita" denotes chastity in a woman, and "She is a second Sita," the appreciation of a woman's uncomplaining self-sacrifice. If, as Jerome Bruner remarks, "In the mythologically instructed community there is a corpus of images and models that provide the pattern to which the individual may aspire, a range of metaphoric identity," then this range, in the case of a Hindu woman, is condensed in one model. And she is Sita.³⁴

Ideal Devotee and Intermediary

After Valmiki's* *Ramayana**, Rama* increasingly ascended to a position of supreme deity for many Hindus. Today in India he is one of the most popular deities and is the recipient of fervent devotion from millions of devotees. The shift in Rama's* status from that of a human hero or incarnation of Visnu* in Valmiki's *Ramayana* to that of the lord of the worlds is evident in the sixteenth-century Hindi work of Tulsi* Das*, the *Ramcarit-manas**, an extremely popular devotional work in North India. Although the central narrative remains the same, even in most particulars, Tulsi Das frequently alters the story in such a way that opportunities are afforded to express devotion to Rama as the Lord. Throughout the text it is clear that the central point of the narrative is Rama's* descent to the earth in order to provide his devotees a chance to worship him.³⁵

In the process of Rama's elevation to divine supremacy, Sita also underwent certain changes. Her status becomes similarly elevated when Rama becomes identified with the highest god. In his poem *Kavitavali** Tulsi Das refers to Sita as the world's mother and to Rama as the world's father (1.15).³⁶ Elsewhere in the poem Rama and Sita are praised in fervent, devotional language by village women who see them walking along the road. The two are compared to various divine couples, and the very sight of them has redemptive effects (2.1425; 7.36). In another

of Tulsi * das's* works Rama* and Sita* are worshiped and addressed in devotional tones: "My mind now tells me that save for Rama's* and Sita's* feet I shall go nowhere else."³⁷ In his invocation to his *Ramcarit-manas** Tulsi Das invokes several deities and includes this verse to Sita: "Hail to Rama's own beloved Sita, victor o'er all suffering, / Mistress of birth, life, death, and of all happiness the giver."³⁸ In the popular folk dramas of North India, the *Ram* Lilas**, in which whole villages act out the story of Rama over the course of several weeks, the actors playing the roles of Rama and Sita are worshiped by the spectators as deities.³⁹

Consistent with her role in Valmiki's* *Ramayana** as the ideal wife who subordinates herself to her husband, Sita never achieves the position of a great, powerful, independent deity. Even compared to such goddesses as Laksmi* and Parvati*, who in most respects are portrayed as ideal wives in Hindu mythology, Sita lacks an identity, power, and will of her own. She remains in Rama's shadow to such an extent that she is often hardly visible at all. Sita is rarely mentioned in such devotional works as Tulsi Das's *Kavitavali** and *Vinaya-patrika**. Hanuman and Laksmana*, in fact, are mentioned more often than she is. And when Rama's consort is specified, Tulsi Das often prefers to identify her as Laksmi, not as Sita.⁴⁰ In fact, Tulsi Das expresses devotion more often to Parvati and Ganga* as goddesses than he does to Sita.⁴¹

In popular Hinduism today Sita is revered as a deity, and in the numerous Ram Lila* performances throughout the Hindi-speaking area of North India the actor who plays Sita (all actors are males) is worshiped as a deity. But Sita is rarely worshiped in her own right. It would be very unusual to find a temple dedicated to Sita alone. In Rama and Hanuman temples an image of Sita is installed alongside or between Rama and Laksmana, where she receives worship along with her husband and brother-in-law. Though she is honored along with Rama, it is understood that she is not his equal.

If Sita does not assume the role of a popular, powerful goddess more or less equal to her husband Rama, she does play two important roles in the context of devotion to Rama: the role of intermediary and the role of ideal devotee. Addressing her as world mother, Tulsi Das petitions Sita to act as his advocate before Rama.⁴² She is not approached directly for divine blessing but as one who has access to Rama, who alone dispenses divine grace. Again, consistent with her subordinate position vis-à-vis Rama in the *Ramayana*, consistent with her role as one who always subordinates her will to his, Sita here acts primarily as a messenger between Rama and his devotees. In her loyalty and devotion she has gained the Lord's ear, and because of this she is sometimes approached by his devotees for help in seeking Rama's favor.

Sita also assumes the role of devotee in the later Rama cult and thus

assumes a place as model to Rama's * devotees. Although Hanuman is the most popular model of Rama* devotion in the later Rama cults, Sita* is often pictured as an ardent devotee. In the *Ramcarit-manas**, for example, she is typically pictured as intoxicated by the appearance of Rama and steadfastly devoted to him. Indeed, in the *Ramcarit-manas* Tulsi* Das* has sometimes altered the narrative in such a way as to emphasize Sita's* devotion and love for Rama. For example, in the Valmiki* *Ramayana** Sita pleads to accompany Rama to the forest by appealing to law and custom. She argues that a wife's duty is to be with her husband. In the *Ramcarit-manas*, however, Rama and others argue that religious custom and law dictate that she should stay behind and take care of her in-laws. Backing up these arguments are other reasons why she should stay behind, including the argument that someone as delicate as Sita could not endure the difficulties of the forest life. Sita's reply does not dwell on the social norm that a wife always be with her husband, as in the Valmiki *Ramayana*, but on the unbearable agony that separation from her husband will inflict. It is not her sense of duty but her love for and devotion to Rama which give Sita's plea its force and passion in the *Ramcarit-manas*.⁴³

Sita's role as devotee, like her role as intermediary, casts her in a subsidiary position vis-à-vis Rama. He is the supreme deity, the object of devotion; she is the ideal devotee, the model for the human devotee. Wifely devotion has here become a metaphor for ideal devotion to God.

6

Radha *

Radha, like Sita*, is understood primarily in relation to a male consort. Throughout her history Radha has been inextricably associated with the god Krsna*. Unlike Sita, however, Radha's* relationship to Krsna is adulterous. Although she is married to another, she is passionately attracted to Krsna. Radha's illicit relationship with Krsna breaks all social norms and casts her in the role of one who willfully steps outside the realm of dharma to pursue her love. In contrast to Sita, who is the model of wifely devotion and loyalty, whose foremost concern is the reputation and well-being of her husband, Radha invests her whole being in an adulterous affair with the irresistibly beautiful Krsna.

This relationship takes place during Krsna's* youth or adolescence, before his adult years, when he marries Rukmini*, Satyabhama*, and others, and before his part in the *Mahabharata** war. Radha and Krsna's love affair takes place in the cowherd village of Vraja and in the woods and bowers of Vrndavana*. In many ways the setting is idyllic, removed from the pragmatic world of social duty, a setting often described as filled with natural beauty, where spring is eternal, and where the vigor and excitement of youth are expressed through Krsna's sports. In most ways Vraja is heaven on earth.¹

But all is not blissful fulfillment for Radha. Her liaison with Krsna is brief, and even at its passionate height Krsna arouses Radha's jealousy by consorting with other lovers. The theme of love in separation is a dominant one in their relationship (particularly from Radha's point of view) and counterbalances the frenzy and ecstasy of their union.

Radha's popularity develops primarily in the context of devotion to Krsna. In religious movements in which devotion to the cowherd god is central, such as the Bengal Vaisnavas* and the Vallabhacarins*, Radha becomes the model of love for the Lord. It is primarily Krsna devotees who write poems celebrating the many nuances of Radha and Krsna's

love; for these devotees Radha's * frenzied love for Krsna* is an emotion and an attitude to be emulated. The love affair of Radha* and Krsna in this devotional context becomes a metaphor for the divine-human relationship. Radha represents the human devotee who gives up everything in order to cling to the Lord, and Krsna represents God, irresistibly beautiful and attractive. The aim of Krsna devotees is to develop or uncover the Radha dimension within themselves, that tendency within all human beings to devote themselves entirely and passionately to Krsna.

The Early History of Radha

Radha does not appear as a fully developed figure until quite late in the Hindu tradition. Prior to Jayadeva's *Gitagovinda** (twelfth century) she is mentioned in only a few brief references.² The *Padma*-, *Brahma-vaivarta*-, and *Devi-bhagavata-puranas**, which describe her affair with Krsna in detail, are all considered late. Although the early references are few and although they never supply lengthy descriptions of Radha, her character is nevertheless clearly suggested.

In these passages Radha is a lovesick girl or woman who is overcome by her emotions. The *Venisamhara** of Bhatta Narayana* (antedates A.D. 800) describes Radha as being angered while making love to Krsna and as leaving him while choking on her tears.³ In the *Dhvanyalokalo-cana** of Abhinavagupta (early tenth century) Radha weeps pitifully when Krsna leaves the village of Vraja for Mathura*, where he begins his adult life.⁴ She is described in Ksemendra's* *Dasavataracarita** (1066) as barely able to speak when Krsna leaves for Mathura.

With tears, flowing away like life in Madhava's* desertion,
Falling on her breasts' firm tips, Radha was like a laden
kadamba tree
As tears were strewn by her endless sighing and trembling
gait
Darkened by the delusion that was bound to all her hopes,
She became like the new rainy season engulfed in darkness.⁵

Although the adulterous aspect of her love is not mentioned explicitly in any of these early references, the centrality of love in separation (*viraha*²) is clear in almost every one. In later texts it is the illicit nature of Radha's love for Krsna that usually necessitates long periods of separation and dictates that she cannot leave with him when he goes away to

Mathura* or later to Dvaraka*; it is probable that the authors of these earlier passages also understood Radha* to be married to another man, to be *parakiya** (belonging to another) in her relationship with Krsna*.

Another characteristic of Radha is clear in these early references: she is always associated with Krsna. None of the references shows interest in Radha per se. It is only her love for Krsna, or his love for her, which is mentioned. In several of these texts Krsna is as hopelessly impassioned and maddened by love as Radha. When he mounts his chariot to leave Vraja he is described in Ksemendra's* *Dasavatacarita** as looking longingly for a sight of Radha, as being disconsolate, and as sighing unhappily.⁶ In the *Siddhahemasabdanusana** of Hemacandra (10881172) we read:

Though Hari sees every person with full regard,
Still his glance goes wherever Radha is
Who can arrest eyes ensnared by love?⁷

Prior to her appearance as a fully developed heroine in Jayadeva's *Gitagovinda**, then, Radha is known to the Indian literary tradition as a young girl who is passionately in love with Krsna; that love is often expressed in terms of separation from him, which suggests an illicit quality to their affair.

The *Gopi** Tradition

Another historical thread is important in understanding Radha's* central role in Jayadeva's writing and in the later devotional movements of North India. This is the mythological tradition surrounding Krsna's* sojourn in Vraja and his dalliance there with the *gopis**, the cowherd women of the village. This tradition dates back to the *Harivamsa** (ca. A.D. 500) and is a central part of most later Vaisnava* *Puranas**. The most popular and detailed rendering of the tradition prior to Jayadeva is found in the *Bhagavata-purana**, written in South India sometime during the tenth century.⁸ According to this mythological tradition, Krsna's father spirits him away from Mathura, where he was born, to escape the threat of his murderous uncle, Kamsa*. Krsna's father leaves the infant in the home of Nanda and Yasoda*, a cowherd couple, who raise the child as their own in the village of Vraja. On reaching maturity Krsna leaves Vraja, returns to Mathura, and slays Kamsa. According to early renditions of this tradition, Krsna is an incarnation of Visnu*, and the purpose

of his incarnation as Krsna * is to slay Kamsa*, who is oppressing the earth with his wickedness. The primary focus of the narrative in the *Bhagavata-purana**, however, and the central interest of the later devotional traditions in North India, is Krsna's* sojourn in Vraja, where he sports with his young companions and, on reaching adolescence, dallies with the women of the village.

The village women dote on Krsna as a child. They tolerate and are often amused by his pranks. But their interest in him changes to passionate longing when he grows older. They are all married women, but none is able to resist Krsna's beauty and charm. He is described as retiring to the woods, where he plays his flute on autumn nights when the moon is full. Hearing the music, the women are driven mad with passion and give up their domestic roles and chores to dash away to be with Krsna in the bowers of Vrndavana*. They jump up in the middle of putting on their makeup, abandon their families while eating a meal with them, leave food to burn on the stove, and run out of their homes to be with Krsna. They are so distraught and frenzied as they rush to his side that their clothes and jewelry come loose and fall off (10.29.37).

In the woods the *gopis** sport and play with Krsna. They make love in the forest and in the waters of the Jumna River. In some accounts of the tradition Krsna is said to multiply himself so that each woman has a Krsna to herself. The mood is joyous, festive, and erotic. The text makes no attempt to deny the impropriety of the *gopis'* leaving their husbands and abandoning their social responsibilities in order to make love to Krsna. Krsna even teases some of the women for behaving illicitly (10.29.2627).

No mention is made of Radha* in any of these early accounts of the *gopi** tradition. The *gopis*, in fact, are not mentioned by name but are usually treated as a group. In general, Krsna is portrayed as sporting with many women at once. The *Bhagavata-purana** mentions a favorite *gopi*. Krsna goes off with her alone, but when she begins to feel proud of herself for being singled out by Krsna and asks him to carry her, he disappears, reducing her to tears and remorse (10.30.3538). The lesson seems clear: Krsna's love is not exclusive. He loves all the cowherd women and encourages them all to love him in return.

The role of the cowherd women in the context of devotion is made fairly clear in the *Bhagavata-purana* itself. The nature of true devotion, the text says, is highly emotional and causes horripilation, tears, loss of control, and frenzy (11.14.2324). Those who love the Lord truly behave like the *gopis*. They let nothing come between themselves and the Lord. When they hear his call they abandon everything to be with him. Even though they are married and have household duties to attend

to, even though they incur the censure of society, they rush off to be with Krsna * when they hear his call. So too should the ardent devotee behave in loving Krsna. In their disregard for normal social roles, in their extreme emotion and frenzy, the *gopis** serve as an appropriate metaphor for the divine-human love affair. Radha*, as we shall see, inherits this role in the later devotional movements, particularly in Bengal.

Radha* as Belonging to Another (*Parakiya**)

Not until Jayadeva's *Gitagovinda** in the twelfth century do we find a sustained rendition of Radha as the central figure in the love drama between Krsna and the cowherd women of Vraja. In this poem the tradition of Radha as Krsna's* favorite and the tradition of the *gopis* came together to form the central heroine of the text. The poem is dominated by the lovesick Radha, who ventures out at night to search the woods for her lover, Krsna. Several familiar allusions to Vraja and to Krsna's foster parents make it clear that the context of the drama is set in the cowherd village described in the earlier *gopi** tradition. The whole flavor of the poem, however, lacks the festive, joyful, carnival-like atmosphere of earlier descriptions of Krsna's love play with the cowherd women. The *Gitagovinda* is written almost entirely from Radha's* point of view, and the dominant emotion is love in separation (*viraha*).

The texts in the *gopi* tradition prior to Jayadeva focused primarily on the external characteristics of the women's attachment to Krsna. Frenzy, horripilation, frantic haste, and shuddering characterize the *gopis* when they hear Krsna's flute and dally with him in the woods. With Radha the focus changes to the internal, shifting moods of a specific woman. Whereas the early *gopi* tradition concentrated on exterior landscapes, painting lush pictures of Krsna's dalliance with hundreds of smitten women in the woods of Vrndavana*, the *Gitagovinda* through the heroine Radha explores interior landscapes and paints moody pictures of obsessive love. Almost the entire *Gitagovinda* deals with Radha separated from and searching for Krsna. She experiences longing, jealousy, and sorrow. The overall mood is not that of joyful union, although the two do unite blissfully at the end of the poem, but of love in separation, which causes Radha pain. In the flowering bowers of Vrndavana, amid the joyful celebration of spring throughout the natural world, Radha is tormented by her love.

When spring came, tender-limbed Radha wandered
Like a flowering creeper in the forest wilderness,

Seeking Krishna in his many haunts.
 The god of love increased her ordeal,
 Tormenting her with fevered thoughts,
 And her friend sang to heighten the mood. 9

Although Radha's* marital status is not specified in the *Gitagovinda**, there are hints that she belongs to another man.¹⁰ The whole drama takes place at night in the woods and is surrounded by secrecy. It is not a relationship that takes place under the approving eye of society. Whether or not Radha* is married to another man, Krsna* certainly is not married to her and consorts with other women, which makes Radha jealous. The whole mood suggests that Radha's love for Krsna is illicit, that she has no formal claim on him, and that in order to be with him she must risk the dangers of the night, the woods, and public censure.

Radha's illicit love for Krsna is the central theme in the poetry of Vidyapati* (1352-1448) and Candidas* (ca. fourteenth to fifteenth century). Both authors make it clear that she is married to another man and that she risks social ostracism by pursuing her affair with Krsna. Vidyapati describes Radha as a woman of noble family, but he portrays Krsna as a common villager. In loving Krsna Radha sacrifices her status and reputation.

I who body and soul
 am at your beck and call,
 was a girl of noble family.
 I took no thought for what would be said of me,
 I abandoned everything. 11

Many poems portray Radha as torn between seeking out Krsna and protecting her reputation. Her love for him totally possesses her but is extremely dangerous to reveal. The matter is put succinctly by Radha at one point: "If I go [to Krsna] I lose my home / If I stay I lose my love."¹² As always happens when Radha is so torn, she decides in favor of going to Krsna, in this case despite a full moon that lights up the village and forest so that she fears she will be discovered.

The theme of Radha's abandoning her social duty to love Krsna is central in the poems of Candidas. Candidas describes Radha as a forthright, strong-willed woman who, although married to a man named Ayana*, does not hesitate to incur the wrath of her family and village to be with Krsna. In Candidas's* poems Radha is not secretive about her illicit love, although the dire social consequences of her adultery are mentioned repeatedly. Realizing that it will entail social censure, she

Image not available.

Radha * and Krsna*. Kangra, 1785 A.D. Victoria and Albert Museum. Philip Rawson,
Oriental Erotic Art (New York: A and W Publishers, 1981), fig. 44, p. 50.

knowingly and willfully makes a choice to love Krsna *; having made that choice she is not inclined to keep her adultery a secret.

Casting away
All ethics of caste
My heart dotes on Krishna
Day and night.
The custom of the clan
Is a far-away cry
And now I know
That love adheres wholly
To its own laws.13

Radha* is rebellious in her attitude, cursing her fate and the society that would keep her married to her husband, whom she describes as a dolt, and away from Krsna. Impatient and angry with her painful situation, she threatens to burn down her house, which represents a social identity and destiny that would keep her away from her beloved.

I throw ashes at all laws
Made by man or god.
I am born alone,
With no companion.
What is the worth
Of your vile laws
That failed me
In love,
And left me with a fool,
A dumbskull [Ayana*]?

My wretched fate
Is so designed
That he is absent
For whom I long.
I will set fire to this house
And go away.14

In the sixteenth century a devotional movement centered on the worship of Krsna arose in Bengal. At the center of this movement was Caitanya (1486-1533), who in his own devotion to Krsna imitated the emotional traumas of the lovesick Radha. In the subsequent history of the movement Radha continued to play a central role as the devotee par excellence of Krsna. According to the theologians of the movement, a

devotee may approach the Lord in a variety of moods or modes: the contemplative mood, in which the Lord is approached as transcendent; the mood of the servant, in which the Lord is approached as a master; the mood of a friend; the mood of a parent; and the mood of the lover. Furthermore, the theologians have ranked these moods. The least worthy modes of approach to Krsna * emphasize his transcendent qualities of lordship; the most worthy modes maximize the intimacy between the devotee and Krsna. The mood of the lover is affirmed to be the best approach, the mood most cherished by the Lord himself, and of all lovers of the Lord Radha* is affirmed to be Krsna's* favorite. Throughout the poetry, literature, and devotion of the movement, Radha plays a central role. Her *parakiya** (belonging to another man) status vis-à-vis Krsna is also maintained in the mythology, worship, and theology of the Bengal Vaisnavas*.

What seems clear is that the Bengal Vaisnavas and other devotional movements that center on Krsna devotion, such as the Vallabhacarins*,¹⁵ understand quite well that the adulterous nature of Radha's* love for Krsna is appropriate as a devotional metaphor. In fact, the superiority of illicit love is argued by the Bengal Vaisnava* theologians in some detail. Their main point is that illicit love is given freely, makes no legal claims, and as such is selfless. Married love, they argue, functions according to rights and obligations in which both partners have specific expectations of each other, including sexual gratification. Married love, it is argued, is characterized by *kama** (sexual lust), while Radha's love, illicit and adulterous though it may be, is characterized by *prema* (selfless love for the beloved).¹⁶ And selfless love is what Krsna desires.

The illicit nature of Radha's love is deemed appropriate for other reasons as well. Because of the adulterous nature of her love, Radha must overcome many obstacles in order to satisfy her love. The impediments put in her way serve to increase that love. The long periods of separation, far from cooling her emotions, serve to enhance her feelings. Married love, in contrast, operates without any obstacles or impediments. There is very little separation, and it can become routine and boring. Radha's love for Krsna is full of risk, insecurity, painful separation, and hence periodic thrills of union. As a metaphor of the divine-human relationship, the illicit nature of Radha's love is held to be superior to any example of married love. The devotional attitude held in highest esteem by the Bengal Vaisnavas is characterized by uncontrolled frenzy, weeping, and ecstatic feelings. The Lord's presence is held to be surpassingly beautiful and irresistible and its effect on the devotee devastating. The devotee, however, in responding to the Lord's presence, can never count on binding the Lord through love. Krsna is always

free to come and go, and the devotee often spends long periods in painful separation from Krsna *. These feelings and experiences, seen as rare in married love, are epitomized in Radha's* adulterous love.

It is probably not surprising that some Bengal Vaisnavas* were tempted to argue that Radha* was *svakiya** (married to Krsna) in her affair with Krsna. An adulterous sexual affair at the center of their devotional mythology was understandably embarrassing to some devotees. The illicit nature of Radha's love, however, her *parakiya** status, eventually came to be declared the orthodox position. The issue was even the subject of a formal debate in 1717. The proponents of the *parakiya* position were declared the winners.¹⁷

Given Radha's central position in Bengal Vaisnavism* it is understandable that she herself tended to become an object of devotion and the subject of metaphysical speculation in the writings of the movement. The sixteenth-century dramas of Rupa* Gosvamin*, the leading theologian of the movement, cast Radha in the familiar role as the foremost lover of the Lord, the paradigm of complete devotion. Her mind is totally obsessed with Krsna to the point that, in pique, she tries in vain to forget him. Her utter preoccupation with him is contrasted to those mere fleeting glimpses that sages and ascetics attain of the Lord after arduous meditation and spiritual exercises.

Seeking to meditate for a moment upon Krishna,
The sage wrests his mind from the objects of sense;
This child [Radha] draws her mind away from Him
To fix it on mere worldly things.
The *yogi** yearns for a tiny flash of Krishna in his heart;
Look this foolish girl strives to banish Him from hers!¹⁸

Radha has also achieved the position of receiving devotion herself in these plays. The most sustained example in Rupa's* plays is the devotion of Krsna himself to Radha. He is often pictured doting on Radha, concentrating his mind on her with the single-minded attention of a yogi and losing sleep because of her.¹⁹ Just as Radha in her total preoccupation with Krsna sees him everywhere, so Krsna is similarly entranced and sees Radha everywhere. "Radha appears before me on every side; how is it that for me the three worlds have become Radha?"²⁰ And just as Radha makes gestures of adoration toward Krsna in the dramas, so too Krsna makes worshipful gestures to Radha, which indicate to the audience Radha's status as a being worthy of reverence.

Other characters in the plays also revere Radha. The elderly go-between, Paurnameśī*, Radha's two female friends, Lalitā* and Visakhā*,

and Krsna's * foster mother, Yasoda*, all admire and dote on Radha* in various moods that are held appropriate for devotion to Krsna*.21 In many cases Radha's* own emotions toward Krsna are echoed in the emotions of Radha's friends toward her. Lalita*, for example, cries in grief at the thought of Radha's leaving, just as Radha grieves at the thought of Krsna's leaving.22 Rupa's* aim in the drama seems clear: he is portraying Radha as worthy of devotion by Krsna devotees. In doing this, however, he is not detracting from the centrality of Krsna himself, who throughout the dramas is the object of Radha's passion.

Radha's status as a being worthy of worship by Krsna devotees is explained in the philosophic teachings of the Bengal Vaisnavas*. Krsna, the ultimate godhead, includes within himself various *saktis**, powers through which he reveals and displays himself. For example, by means of certain *saktis* he creates the world. His essential nature, however, is displayed through his *svarupa* sakti** (own form). Within this *svarupa sakti* are contained other *saktis*, the most essential of which is the *hladini* sakti*, the *sakti* of bliss. This *sakti* is understood to be the most refined essence of the godhead, Krsna in his most sublime and complete form. And this *hladini sakti* is identified with none other than Radha herself.23

If Radha is Krsna, if Krsna is Radha which is the import of this theological doctrine then Radha is essentially divine and as such worthy of the devotee's adoration. From the point of view of the devotee, Radha's centrality to devotion is not limited to her role as a model to be imitated or an ideal to be pursued. She herself may now be doted on with efficacious results, as she herself is part of, indeed, is the essence of, the godhead. In this theological vision Radha has assumed the position of Krsna's eternal *sakti*. Her role as the ideal human devotee is necessarily played down as her divine status as Krsna's *sakti* is emphasized. On the model of other divine couples Siva-Parvati*, Rama-Sita*, Visnu* Laksmi* Radha* assumes the position of a heavenly deity whom the devotee supplicates.

Another significant implication of this theological vision is that Radha is no longer necessarily seen as *parakiya** to Krsna. Although their dalliances may be described as illicit, although Radha is said to be married to another man, ultimately she is an aspect of Krsna's own being and thus really belongs to him. His sport with her is an eternal self-dalliance by which or in which he is enabled to appreciate his own paramount beauty.24

Although the theology of the Bengal Vaisnavas provides an avenue for reinterpreting Radha as belonging to Krsna and not to another man, the movement steadfastly resisted playing down the illicit, adulterous

dimension of Radha's * love for Krsna* and even declared the *parakiya** position the orthodox doctrine. From the devotional point of view, Radha's love for Krsna would lose some of its intensity, fervor, and passion if she were understood to be married to him. To this day, among Krsna devotees for whom the mode of the lover is the most sublime approach to Krsna, it is understood that Radha's love for Krsna, which is always described as selfless love (*prema*), expresses itself without any formal obligation or legal duty on her part. Her love is spontaneous and complete. In her relationship with Krsna she gains nothing (from the worldly point of view), losing her reputation, pride of family, and so on. She clearly goes against the ways of the world to express her emotions. It is as an adulteress that these dimensions of her love are best expressed. Radha* loves Krsna *in spite* of everything, not because she has an obligation to him.

Radha as Belonging to Krsna (*Svakiya**)

Although Radha's position as Krsna's* legal, divine consort never became very popular in Krsna devotional movements, there is a sustained rendition of Krsna mythology in which Radha is cast in this role. The *Brahma-vaivarta-purana** assumes Radha's status as a goddess.²⁵ She is inextricably associated with Krsna philosophically as his *sakti**, as his underlying power or that dimension of himself that empowers him, indeed, enables him, to create the world and display himself in his various forms. Several passages compare Radha to Krsna in such a way that her status is affirmed to be comparable, equal, or even superior to his own. For example, a familiar analogy likens Radha to the clay with which Krsna, the potter, creates the world.²⁶ She is identified with *prakrti**, the primordial matter or substance of creation; Krsna is identified with *purusa**, the spiritual essence of reality that stirs *prakrti* to evolve into various forms. Elsewhere the two are identified on the analogy of attribute and substance. Krsna says to Radha:

As you are, so am I; there is certainly no difference
between us.
As whiteness inheres in milk, as burning in fire,
my fair Lady,
As smell in earth, so do I inhere in you always.²⁷

Another passage describes the two as initially forming an androgynous figure, of which Krsna is one half and Radha the other. Radha says to Krsna:

I have been constructed by someone out of half your body;
 Therefore there is no difference between us, and my
 heart is in you.
 Just as my Self (Atman *), heart, and life has been placed
 in you,
 So has your Self, heart, and life been placed in me.28

The text elevates Radha* to such an extent that in several places it states that she is superior in status to Krsna* himself. In one passage, for example, Krsna is speaking to Radha and says that all things in the universe have some kind of support, that without some kind of support they could not exist. His support, he concludes, is Radha, upon whom he rests eternally.²⁹ She alone, by implication, has no support and as such is the supreme reality. In another place Krsna likens Radha to his *atman**: "You are my life; I am dead without you."³⁰ In another passage Radha is called mother of the world and Krsna father of the world. The mother, however, is declared to be the guru of the father and as such is said to be worshiped as supreme.³¹

Radha's* elevated status, her role as cosmic queen equal to or superior to Krsna, gives her a central role in the cosmogony in the *Brahma-vaivarta-purana**. In one version of creation Krsna desires to create and so divides himself into two, male and female. The two undertake sexual intercourse for a long time, during which his sighs and the sweat from her body create the winds and primordial oceans. Eventually he ejaculates into her; after bearing his seed for many years, she gives birth to a golden egg, the universe itself. The egg floats in the cosmic waters for a long time, then splits, and the god Visnu* is born; he in turn creates innumerable worlds.³² As creator of the universe we find Radha playing a role that is extremely atypical of her earlier history, namely, the role of mother. Nowhere in earlier literature is Radha a mother. In the *Brahma-vaivarta-purana*, however, she is often called by names that suggest her motherly role vis-à-vis the created world. She is called mother of Visnu (Mahavisnormatr*, Mahavisnudhatri*), mother of the world (Jaganmatr*, Jagadambika*), and mother of all (Sarvamatr*).³³

Radha's personal relationship to Krsna has also undergone significant changes in this text. In earlier literature her relationship to him was consistently described as nonpossessive and was characterized by love in separation. These qualities stemmed in good measure from the illicit nature of their love, in which neither could exert legal or formal controls over the other. As a woman married to another man, Radha owed Krsna nothing. In the *Brahma-vaivarta-purana*, however, in which the two are understood to be eternally related to each other as husband and wife (or as god and goddess), Radha's love takes on a possessive quality. As the

queen of the cosmos, as consort of the great god Krsna *, she is described as surrounded and worshiped by millions of cowherd devotees and as acting the part of the chaste and jealous wife of Krsna. At several points in the text Radha* discovers Krsna dallying with other women. Her reaction is always the same: she is outraged, jealous, and vengeful. She terrifies Krsna in her rage and curses her rivals to miserable fates. In one case a woman named Viraja* is so scared of Radha's* wrath that she commits suicide.³⁴ Radha's love is described in many episodes as cruel, selfish, and demanding. In several cases she nags Krsna about which consort he loves best and is only contented when he flatters her.³⁵ In contrast to earlier descriptions of her love for Krsna, in the *Brahma-vaivarta-purana** she is a selfish, vindictive, and insecure wife who makes life miserable for Krsna, herself, and the other women of heavenly Vraja. If Radha has gained metaphysical promotion in the *Brahma-vaivarta-purana*, it seems to have been at the expense of losing her intrinsic appeal as the lovesick girl of Vraja, who is unable to make any claims on her lover. The Radha of the *Brahma-vaivarta-purana* has lost her innocence, her intensity, and a considerable part of her charm.

Nevertheless, although most Krsna devotional movements rejected this portrait of Radha as *svakiya** (the text is undoubtedly quite late, dating from the fifteenth or sixteenth century), a few small groups revere Radha in her role as cosmic queen. Both the Radhavallabhins* and the Sakhibhavas*, movements that arose sometime during the sixteenth century in and around Brindaban in North India, place Radha in a position similar to her position in the *Brahma-vaivarta-purana*. The Radhavallabhins in their actual devotion concentrate on Radha more than on Krsna. The Sakhibhavas express their piety by concentrating on becoming servants or friends of Radha. In their rituals they dress like women and express their devotion by doting on Radha and serving her in every way. The attitude of these movements is nicely expressed in the words of one of their members: "Krishna is the servant of Radha. He may do the coolie-work of building the world, but Radha sits as Queen. He is at best but her Secretary of State. We win the favor of Krishna by worshipping Radha."³⁶

7

Durga *

One of the most impressive and formidable goddesses of the Hindu pantheon and one of the most popular is the goddess Durga. Her primary mythological function is to combat demons who threaten the stability of the cosmos. In this role she is depicted as a great battle queen with many arms, each of which wields a weapon. She rides a fierce lion and is described as irresistible in battle. The demon she is most famous for defeating is Mahisa*, the buffalo demon. Her most popular epithet is Mahisa-mardini*, the slayer of Mahisa, and her most common iconographic representation shows her defeating Mahisa.

At a certain point in her history Durga becomes associated with the god Siva* as his wife. In this role Durga assumes domestic characteristics and is often identified with the goddess Parvati*. She also takes on the role of mother in her later history. At her most important festival, Durga Puja*, she is shown flanked by four deities identified as her children: Karttikeya*, Ganesa*, Sarasvati*, and Laksmi*.

It also seems clear that Durga has, or at least at some point in her history had, a close connection with the crops or with the fertility of vegetation. Her festival, which is held at harvest time, associates her with plants, and she also receives blood offerings, which may suggest the renourishment of her powers of fertility.

The Warrior Goddess

Although several Vedic deities play central roles as demon slayers and warriors, no goddesses are cast in this function in Vedic literature. The name Durga is mentioned in Vedic literature,¹ but no goddess resembling the warrior goddess of later Hinduism is to be found in these early texts.

Around the fourth century A.D. images of Durga * slaying a buffalo begin to become common throughout India.² By the medieval period (after the sixth century) Durga has become a wellknown and popularly worshiped deity. Her mythological deeds come to be told in many texts, and descriptions of and injunctions to undertake her autumnal worship are common in several late *Upa-puranas*.*.³

Durga's* historical origin seems to be among the indigenous non-Aryan* cultures of India. In addition to there being no similar goddesses among the deities of the Vedic tradition, many early references to Durga associate her with peripheral areas such as the Vindhya Mountains, tribal peoples such as the Sabaras*, and nonAryan habits such as drinking liquor and blood and eating meat.⁴ Although Durga becomes an establishment goddess in medieval Hinduism, protecting the cosmos from the threat of demons and guarding dharma like a female version of Visnu*, her roots seem to be among the tribal and peasant cultures of India, which eventually leavened the maledominated Vedic pantheon with several goddesses associated with power, blood, and battle.

Hindu mythology includes several accounts of Durga's origin. She is sometimes said to arise from Visnu as the power that makes him sleep or as his magical, creative power. In the *Visnu-purana** Visnu enlists her aid to help delude a demon king who is threatening the infant Krsna* (5.1.93). In the *Devi-mahatmya** she comes to the aid of the god Brahma* and ultimately of Visnu himself when Brahma invokes her to leave the slumbering Visnu so that Visnu will awaken and fight the demons Madhu and Kaitabha (1). The *Skanda-purana** relates that once upon a time a demon named Durga threatened the world. Siva* requested Parvati* to slay the demon. Parvati then assumed the form of a warrior goddess and defeated the demon, who took the form of a buffalo. Thereafter, Parvati was known by the name Durga (2.83).⁵ A similar account of her origin occurs in myths relating her defeat of the demons Sumbha* and Nisumbha*. Durga emerges from Parvati in these accounts when Parvati sheds her outer sheath, which takes on an identity of its own as a warrior goddess.⁶

The bestknown account of Durga's origin, however, is told in connection with her defeat of the demon Mahisa*. After performing heroic austerities, Mahisa was granted the boon that he would be invincible to all opponents except a woman. He subsequently defeated the gods in battle and usurped their positions. The gods then assembled and, angry at the thought of Mahisa's* triumph and their apparent inability to do anything about it, emitted their fiery energies. This great mass of light and strength congealed into the body of a beautiful woman, whose splendor spread through the universe. The parts of her body were formed from

the male gods. Her face was formed from Siva *, her hair from Yama, her arms from Visnu*, and so on. Similarly, each of the male deities from whom she had been created gave her a weapon. Siva gave her his trident, Visnu gave her his *cakra* (a discuslike weapon), Vayu his bow and arrows, and so on. Equipped by the gods and supplied by the god Himalaya with a lion as her vehicle, Durga*, the embodied strength of the gods, then roared mightily, causing the earth to shake.⁷

The creation of the goddess Durga thus takes place in the context of a cosmic crisis precipitated by a demon whom the male gods are unable to subdue. She is created because the situation calls for a woman, a superior warrior, a peculiar power possessed by the goddess with which the demon may be deluded, or a combination of all three. Invariably Durga defeats the demon handily, demonstrating both superior martial ability and superior power. On the battlefield she often creates female helpers from herself. The most famous of these are the goddess Kali* and a group of ferocious deities known as the *Matrkas** (mothers), who usually number seven.⁸ These goddesses seem to embody Durga's* fury and are wild, bloodthirsty, and particularly fierce.⁹ Durga does not create male helpers, and to my knowledge she does not fight with male allies. Although she is created by the male gods and does their bidding and although she is observed and applauded by them, she (along with her female helpers and attendants) fights without direct male support against male demons and she always wins.

Durga's distinctive nature, and to a great extent probably her appeal, comes from the combination of worldsupportive qualities and liminal characteristics that associate her with the periphery of civilized order.¹⁰ In many respects Durga violates the model of the Hindu woman. She is not submissive, she is not subordinated to a male deity, she does not fulfill household duties, and she excels at what is traditionally a male function, fighting in battle. As an independent warrior who can hold her own against any male on the battlefield, she reverses the normal role for females and therefore stands outside normal society. Unlike the normal female, Durga does not lend her power or *sakti** to a male consort but rather *takes* power from the male gods in order to perform her own heroic exploits.¹¹ They give up their inner strength, fire, and heat to create her and in so doing surrender their potency to her.

Many renditions of Durga's mythological exploits highlight her role reversal by portraying her male antagonists as enamored of her and wanting to marry her. They have no wish to fight her at all, assume that she will be no match for them in battle, and proceed to make offers of marriage to her.¹² In some variants of the myth Durga explains to her antagonist and would-be suitor that her family has imposed a condition on

Image not available.

Durga * slaying Mahisa*. Miniature painting from School of Nupur, about 1765 A.D. Victoria and Albert Museum. Marguerite-Marie Deneck, Indian Art (London: Paul Hamlyn, 1967), fig. 46.

her marriage, namely, that her husband must first defeat her in battle. The suitor is unable to do this, of course, and is annihilated in his attempt. In some forms of the myth the goddess rejects the offer of marriage with fierce, combative language, foretelling how she will tear her wouldbe suitor to pieces in battle. The antagonist, however, insists on interpreting this language as a metaphor for love play and blindly insists on trying to overcome the goddess in battle. 13 In the Mahisa* myth as told in the *Devi-bhagavata-purana**, for example, a long dialogue takes place between Durga* and the demon in which Mahisa insists that as a woman the goddess is too delicate to fight, too beautiful for anything but love play, and must come under the protection and guidance of a man in order to fulfill her proper proclivities (5.16.4665).

Because Durga is unprotected by a male deity, Mahisa assumes that she is helpless (5.12.1430), which is the way that women are portrayed in the *Dharma-sastras**.14 There women are said to be incapable of handling their own affairs and to be socially inconsequential without relationships with men. They are significant primarily as sisters, daughters, and mothers of males and as wives. Nearly all forms of Durga's* mythical exploits portray her as independent from male support and relationships yet irresistibly powerful. She is beautiful and seductive in appearance, but her beauty does not serve its normal function, which is to attract a husband. It serves to entice her victims into fatal battle.

In short, this beautiful young woman who slays demons seeking to be her lovers and who exists independent from male protection or guidance represents a vision of the feminine that challenges the stereotyped view of women found in traditional Hindu law books. Such a characterization perhaps suggests the extraordinary power that is repressed in women who are forced into submissive and socially demeaning roles. In her role reversal Durga exists outside normal structures and provides a version of reality that potentially, at least, may be refreshing and socially invigorating.15

Durga's liminal nature is also evident in her favorite habitats and in some of her favorite habits. Nearly all of Durga's myths associate her with mountains, usually the Himalayas or the Vindhya. One of her common epithets is Vindhyavasini*, "she who dwells in the Vindhya Mountains." These mountainous regions are areas considered geographically peripheral to civilized society and inaccessible except through heroic efforts. The Vindhya, in particular, are also regarded as dangerous because of the violent and hostile tribal peoples who dwell there. Indeed, Durga is said to be worshiped by tribal groups such as the Sabaras*. In this worship, furthermore, she is said to receive (and to enjoy) meat and blood, both of which are regarded by civilized Aryan* society as

highly polluting. In the *Devi-mahatmya* *Durga* is also described as quaffing wine during battle in her fight with Mahisa* (3.33) and as laughing and glaring with reddened eyes under its influence. In the concluding scene of the *Devi-mahatmya* her devotees are instructed to propitiate her with offerings of their own flesh and blood (13.8). Durga's* preference for inaccessible dwelling places, her worship by tribal peoples, her taste for intoxicating drink, meat, and blood, her ferocious behavior on the battlefield, and her preference for the flesh and blood of her devotees convey a portrait of a goddess who stands outside the civilized order of dharma; her presence is to be found only after stepping out of the orderly world into the liminal space of the mountainous regions where she dwells.

Reinforcing Durga's tendencies to the antistructural or liminal are certain associations with negative, or at least inauspicious, qualities or powers such as sleep, hunger, and *maya** (in the sense of delusion). In the Mahisa episode of the *Devi-mahatmya* she is called she whose form is sleep (5.15), she whose form is hunger (5.16), she whose form is shadow (5.17), and she whose form is thirst (5.19).

These associations are particularly emphasized in versions of the myth that tell of Durga's aid to Brahma* and Visnu* against the demons Madhu and Kaitabha. In this myth as told in the *Devi-mahatmya* Madhu and Kaitabha are born from Visnu's* ear wax. They threaten to kill the god Brahma, who in turn has been born from a lotus sprung from Visnu's navel. Brahma appeals to the goddess in the form of sleep to come forth from Visnu so that he will awaken and slay the demons. Throughout the episode the goddess is called Mahamaya*, the power that throws people into the bondage of delusion and attachment (1.40). Indeed, Visnu is successful in slaying Madhu and Kaitabha only because the goddess deludes them into offering Visnu a boon; he accepts and asks that they permit him to slay them (1.7374). She is also called great delusion (Mahamoha*) (1.58); the great demoness (Mahasuri*) (1.58); the black night, the great night, the night of delusion (1.59); darkness (Tamasi*) (1.68); the force that seizes those of knowledge and leads them to delusion (1.42); and the cause of bondage in the world (1.44). The entire MadhuKaitabha episode as told in the *Devi-mahatmya* hinges on Visnu's helplessness as long as he is pervaded by the goddess, whose primary effect on him is to keep him unconscious. In this episode, then, the goddess has numbing, deluding, dark qualities, even though she is called by many positive terms. Again, Durga's role visàvis Visnu seems exactly the opposite of the normal role of a goddess as a male deity's *sakti**, the power that enables the god to act in the world. In this myth Visnu is only enabled to act when the goddess *leaves* him. She does not em-

power, enliven, or strengthen Visnu *; she puts him to sleep, reducing him to powerlessness.

Counterbalancing Durga's* liminal, peripheral nature, which at times seems to threaten dharmic stability and to inhibit the spiritual quest for *moksa**, is her role as protectress of the cosmos. Dominating her mythology is her role as the destroyer of demons who have usurped the position of the gods. As a great warrior she is created by the gods and acts on their behalf. While she is often said to transcend the male gods who create her and to excel them on the battlefield, she acts for their welfare. In doing this she acts to maintain or restore cosmic harmony and balance.

The theology underlying Durga's appearances and exploits is clear in the *Devi-mahatmya**, the most famous text extolling her deeds. Durga* is said to underlie or pervade the cosmos; to create, maintain, and periodically destroy it according to the rhythmic sequences of Hindu cosmology (12.3335); and to assume different forms from time to time when cosmic balance is threatened by enemies of the lesser gods (11.3851). The *Devi-mahatmya* puts the matter succinctly: "Though she is eternal, the goddess becomes manifest over and over again to protect the world" (12.32).

The *Devi-mahatmya* itself relates three of Durga's cosmic interventions on behalf of the gods: the battle with Madhu and Kaitabha; the battle with Mahisa* and his army; and the battle with Sumbha* and Nisumbha* and their generals, Canda*, Munda*, and Raktabija*. The text also refers specifically to five other appearances of the goddess (11.3851) and implies that she is incarnate in many more forms (12.32). The myths that are told in detail in the *Devi-mahatmya* conform to a structure that underlines Durga's role as the upholder and protector of the dharmic order. Because the myths are cast in traditional structure, they also make the point that Durga transcends the great male gods of the Hindu pantheon, who in other texts usually have the central role in these myths.

The structure to which the demon-slaying myths of Durga conform is found throughout Hindu mythological texts and is consistent despite the specific deity who is featured in the myth. In basic outline the structure is as follows: (1) a demon gains great power through doing austerities, is granted a boon as a reward, and becomes nearly invincible; (2) the demon defeats the gods and takes over their positions; (3) the gods prepare their revenge by creating a special being who can defeat the demon despite the boon, or else the lesser gods petition one of the great deities (Siva*, Visnu, or a great goddess) to intervene on their behalf; (4) the battle takes place and often includes the creation of helpers by

the hero or heroine; (5) the demon is defeated, either slain or made subservient to the gods; (6) the gods praise the demon slayer. 16 In the Madhu and Kaitabha myth and the myth of Sumbha* and Nisumbha*, Durga* is petitioned to help the gods, whereas in the Mahisa* myth she is specially created by the gods. In the Mahisa and Sumbha and Nisumbha myths the goddess takes a direct, active part in the battle itself, demonstrating her superior martial skills against her opponents. In the Sumbha and Nisumbha myth she also creates helpers in the form of ferocious goddesses. In all three episodes the gods collectively praise Durga during the battle or after she has defeated the demons.

The theology underlying Durga's* cosmic interventions and the structure of the demonslaying myths thus conform to wellknown Hindu ideas and forms. The idea of a deity's descending to the world from time to time in various forms to maintain the balance of cosmic order is a central Vaisnavite* idea. Ever since the time of the *Bhagavad-gita** the idea of Visnu's* descending to the world in different forms in order to combat disorder has been well known in the Hindu tradition. Durga, in the *Devi-mahatmya**, is heir to this *avatara** theology. In fact, in many ways Durga is a female version of Visnu*. She, like him, creates, maintains, and destroys the world; intervenes on a cosmic scale whenever disorder threatens to disrupt the world in the form of certain demons; and is approached by the other gods as their savior in times of distress. This conformity to a wellknown type of theology does not detract from Durga's appeal, power, or prestige. On the contrary, by creating her in this familiar role and by telling her myths according to a familiar structure, the author of the *Devi-mahatmya* underlines Durga's supremacy and might.¹⁷

Durga's role as cosmic queen is complemented by her role as a personal comforter who intervenes on behalf of her devotees. Near the end of the *Devi-mahatmya*, after the world has been restored to order, Durga herself says that she is quick to hearken to the pleas of her devotees and that she may be petitioned in times of distress to help those who worship her. She mentions specifically forest fires, wild animals, robbers, imprisonment, execution, and battle as some threats from which she will save her devotees (12.2428). At the end of the *Devi-mahatmya*, after being petitioned by two of her devotees (part of whose petition has included offering their own blood to the goddess), she appears before them and grants their desires. To one she returns his wealth and kingdom and to the other she grants ultimate liberation (13.1115). Durga, then, is not just a powerful, transcendent force whose sole concern is maintaining the cosmic rhythms, who is moved to action only when the

Image not available.

Durga *. South Indian bronze, early Chola*, ca. 1000 A.D.
Government Museum, Madras. C. Sivaramamurti, South Indian Bronzes (New
Delhi: Lalit Kala Akademi, 1963), plate 50. Reprinted by permission of the
publisher.

world itself is threatened. She is attentive to the needs of her devotees and intervenes on their behalf if asked to do so. She is a personal savior as well as a great battle queen who fights to defeat the enemies of the gods.

Durga's * distinctive nature also has to do with her identification with certain important Hindu philosophic ideas. The *Devi-mahatmya** and other texts extolling Durga* state that she is identical with or associated with *sakti**, *maya**, and *prakrti**. This is to say that in some way Durga represents a dramatic illustration of these ideas or that these ideas can be discerned in her nature. *Sakti** is almost always understood to be the underlying power of the divine, the aspect of the divine that permits and provokes creative activity. *Sakti*, furthermore, is almost always understood to be a positive force. When viewed in concrete form, *sakti* is usually personified as a goddess. A common belief is that without his *sakti*, without his female counterpart, a male deity is ineffective, weak, and immobilized. Durga's creation by the assembled male deities in the Mahisa* episode dramatically depicts the goddess as *sakti*. Although the energy and heat that the deities contribute to her formation is called *tejas*, not *sakti*, it is clear that the male gods are contributing their strength and vigor to the goddess, who epitomizes power, action, and strength in the battle with the demon.¹⁸ Durga, particularly in her role as battle queen, is action and power personified and as such is a fitting representation of the idea of *sakti*.

Durga as a personification of *maya* is most clearly seen in the Madhu and Kaitabha episode, in which she deludes the demons so that Visnu* can slay them and in which she is repeatedly referred to as Mahamaya* and as Visnu's* *maya*. *Maya** has negative connotations in Hindu philosophy and mythology, as does Durga, particularly in this episode. *Maya* is that which deludes individuals into thinking themselves to be the center of the world, the power that prevents individuals from seeing things as they really are. *Maya* is that which impels individuals into selfcentered, egotistical actions. *Maya* is the sense of ego, personal identity, and individuality which clouds the underlying unity of reality and masks one's essential identity with *brahman* or some exalted being such as Visnu, Siva*, or Durga. *Maya*, however, may also be understood as a positive, creative force not unlike *sakti*. *Maya* may be understood as the power that enables a deity to display or embody himself or herself and therefore as the power that enables a deity to act.

When Durga is called *Maya**, or equated or associated with it, both connotations delusion and creation are suggested. Like Visnu, Durga creates the world through her extraordinary power, but then she be-

witches the creatures she has created. Underlying this apparently incomprehensible "game" is the idea of divine *lila* * (sport, play, or dalliance), according to which the gods never act out of necessity but only out of a sense of play.¹⁹ Unlike mere mortals, the gods (in this case Durga*) act not from pragmatic motives but only to amuse themselves or to display themselves. The way in which Durga's* defeat of Mahisa* is often depicted in Indian art suggests this theme. Typically she is shown bringing a blizzard of weapons to bear on the hapless demon, who is halfemerging in his human form from the carcass of his former buffalo form. Durga's many arms are all in motion, and she is a perfect vision of power in action. Her face, however, is calm and shows no sign of strain. For her this is mere sport and requires no undue exertion. It is a game for her, it is *lila*.²⁰ She enters into the cosmic struggle between the lesser gods and the demons because it pleases her, not out of any sense of compulsion.

Durga's identification with *prakrti** and with the earth itself makes another theological point. *Prakrti** is the physical world as well as the inherent rhythms within this world that impel nature to gratify and produce itself in its manifold species. *Prakrti* is both the primordial matter from which all material things come and the living instincts and patterns that imbue the material world with its proclivities to sustain and recreate itself in individual beings. As *prakrti*, then, Durga is inextricably associated with the physical world, the world she creates, sustains, and protects in her various forms. Durga's identification with the world is unambiguous. The *Devi-mahatmya** makes a point at several places to say that she *is* the world, she *is* all this (11.23, 56). As the earth itself she conveys cosmic stability. She is the foundation of all creatures and that which nourishes all creatures. As the embodiment of the earth she supports, protects, and mothers all beings. As Sakambhari* she provides the world with food from her own body (11.45). In her role as cosmic queen, warrior goddess, and demon slayer, Durga in effect protects herself in her aspect as the earth itself. As immanent in the world Durga is equated with the earth. As transcendent, she is the heavenly queen who descends from time to time to maintain harmony on earth.

Durga's association or identification with *sakti**, *maya**, and *prakrti* lends to the great demonslaying goddess an immediate, tangible dimension. As an expression of these ideas she is identified with the creation itself. Her presence is affirmed to pervade and underlie the actual world in which people live, and her power and strength are affirmed to imbue all creatures with the will to prosper and multiply.

The Worship of Durga *

One of the most important festivals in North India is Durga Puja*, which is celebrated in the autumn during the month of Asvin*. The festival takes place over a period of nine days and is often called the Navaratra* festival. The central image of the festival shows Durga slaying Mahisa*. The iconographical details of the images are usually faithful to the scene as described in the *Devi-mahatmya** and other scriptures. Durga has many arms, each of which bears a weapon; she stands on her lion vehicle; and she is thrusting her trident into the chest of Mahisa, who is in human form, halfemerged from the carcass of a slain buffalo. During the festival it is customary to recite the *Devi-mahatmya* in its entirety several times.²¹ The Durga Puja festival clearly asserts Durga's* central role as a battle queen and the regulator of the cosmos. In part, at least, the festivities celebrate Durga's defeat of Mahisa and the restoration of cosmic order.

This festival, in which Durga is worshiped in the form of a mighty warrior goddess, seems to be, or to have been until recently, part of a pattern of worship undertaken by rulers for success in battle. The festival of Dasara*, which falls on the tenth *tithi* (lunar day) of the bright half of Asvin* and thus immediately follows Durga Puja (which occupies the first through ninth *tithis* of the bright half of Asvin), was in many parts of India primarily an occasion in which to celebrate military might and royal power and to petition for military success in the coming year. Worship of weapons was also a part of the festival in many cases.

Writing in the early nineteenth century, when the festival of Dasara was still widely undertaken, the Abbé Dubois wrote of the celebrations in Mysore:

The *Dasara** is likewise the soldier's feast. Princes and soldiers offer the most solemn sacrifices to the arms which are made use of in battle. Collecting all their weapons together, they call a Brahmin *purohita*, who sprinkles them with *tirtham* (holy water) and converts them into so many divinities by virtue of his *mantrams*. He then makes *puja* to them and retires. Thereupon, amidst the beat of drums, the blare of trumpets and other instruments, a ram is brought in with much pomp and sacrificed in honour of the various weapons of destruction. This ceremony is observed with the greatest solemnity throughout the whole Peninsula It is known by the special name of *ayudapuja* (sacrifice to arms), and is entirely military.²²

Alexander Forbes, who wrote in the second half of the nineteenth century, described Dasara among the Rajputs: "The Rajpoot chiefs, on the

evening of Dussera, worship also the *FortProtectress*, the goddess Gudeychee. On their return from the Shumee worship into the city, they join together in bands, brandishing their spears, galloping their horses, and enacting in other ways the part of an army taking the field." 23

Although the worship of a goddess is not always part of Dasara* celebrations, there are many indications in ritual and mythological texts that the annual (usually autumnal) worship of a warrior goddess, often specified to be Durga*, was part of festivals associated with military success. Mantras to be uttered by kings on the occasion of Dasara, for example, sometimes invoke a goddess. In the *Dharmasindhu* the king is to speak this prayer: "May Aparajita* [the unconquerable one] wearing a striking necklace and resplendant golden girdle and fond of doing good bestow victory on me."24 In the *Nirnayasindhu* this prayer is to be said at the time of blessing weapons: "O goddess, ruling over gods! may my army divided into four sections (elephants, chariots, horsemen, and footsoldiers) attain to the position of having no enemy left in this world and may victory come to me everywhere through your favour."25

An eleventh or twelfthcentury Jain text, the *Yasatilaka** of Somadeva, mentions the worship of Aparajita, who is also called Ambika*. She is said to give victory in war and to be present in the king's weapons.26 The text also says that she is worshiped on Mahanavami*, which is the last day of Durga Puja*. Some *Puranas**, furthermore, say that *nirajana**, the worship of weapons, is held on Mahanavami.27 In the Prakrit drama *Gaudavaho**, King Yasovarman* undertakes a military campaign in the autumn. Shortly after beginning his march he reaches the Vindhya Mountains and there undertakes the worship of the goddess Vindhyavasini* (she who dwells in the Vindhyas), an epithet of Durga in some texts.28

The worship of Durga also came to be associated with the military success of both the Pandava* brothers in the *Mahabharata** and Rama* in the *Ramayana**. Although her worship by the heroes was not part of either epic tradition initially (the incidents are not found in the critical editions of either epic), a tradition has developed that insists that the worship of Durga was necessary to the success of the heroes in both epics. Durga is worshiped twice in the *Mahabharata*: in Virata-parva* 6 by Yudhisthira* and in Bhisma-parva* 23 by Arjuna. In the latter case the occasion of Durga's* praise is clear. The setting is just before the great battle that is the highpoint of the entire epic. Krsna* instructs Arjuna as follows: "O one having great arms, standing in the face of battle, say a hymn to Durga for the purpose of defeating your enemies" (4.6.2). The hymn that Arjuna then offers is full of references to Durga's military might and prowess. The goddess appears to Arjuna and promises him

victory, after which the text says that anyone who hears or recites the hymn will be victorious in battle.

The placement of the second hymn to Durga * in Virata-parva* is more difficult to understand. The Pandava* brothers have just emerged from twelve years of exile in the forest and are about to begin a year of life in the world during which they must remain in disguise lest their enemies discover them. Before entering the city of Virata* and taking up their disguises they hid their weapons in a *sami** tree near a cremation ground. Yudhisthira* asks Durga for protection from being discovered during the coming year and for later success against their enemies. She appears at the end of the hymn and grants his wishes. It seems that the hymn was placed at this point in the text because worship of a *sami* tree on the outskirts of a town is often a part of Dasara* festivals.²⁹ The author or editor of the hymn probably thought this an appropriate place to insert a hymn to Durga for military success.

The association of Durga with Ramas* success in battle over Ravana* in the *Ramayana** tradition, although not part of Valmiki's* *Ramayana*, has become a wellknown part of the Rama* story throughout India. In the *Kalika-purana** we are told:

In former times, the great Goddess was waked up by Brahma* when it was still night, in order to favour Rama and to obtain the death of Ravana.

On the first day of the bright half of the month of Asvina*, she gave up her sleep and went to the city of Lanka*, where Raghu's son formerly lived.

When she came there, the great Goddess caused Rama and Ravana to be engaged in battle, but Ambika* herself remained hidden

Afterwards, when the seventh night had gone by, Mahamaya*, in whom the worlds are contained, caused Ravana to be killed by Rama on the ninth day

After the hero Ravana had been killed on the ninth day, the Grandfather of the worlds (Brahma) together with all the gods held a special worship for Durga.

Afterwards the Goddess was dismissed with Sabara-festivals*, on the tenth day; Indra on his part held a lustration of the army of the gods for the appeasement of the armies of the gods and for the sake of prosperity of the kingdom of the gods

All the gods will worship her and will, on their part, lustrate the army; and in the same way all men should perform worship according to the rules.

A king should hold a lustration of the army in order to strengthen his army; a performance must be made with charming women adorned with celestial ornaments; . . .

After one has made a puppet of flour for Skanda and Visakha *, one should worship it in order to annihilate one's foes and for the sake of enjoying Durga*.30

In the *Devi-bhagavata-purana** Rama* is despondent at the problems of reaching Lanka*, defeating Ravana*, and getting back his beloved Sita*. The sage Narada*, however, advises him to call on Durga for help. Rama asks how she should be worshiped, and Narada instructs him concerning the performance of Durga Puja* or Navaratra*. The festival, which Narada assures Rama will result in military success, is said to have been performed in previous ages by Indra for killing Vrtra*, by Siva* for killing the demons of the three cities, and by Visnu* for killing Madhu and Kaitabha (3.30.2526). Rama duly performs Durga's* worship, and she appears to him mounted on her lion. She asks what he wishes, and when he requests victory over Ravana she promises him success (3.30). The traditions of Ramas* inaugurating Durga Puja* for the purpose of defeating Ravana is also found in the *Brhaddharma-purana** (1.2122) and the Bengali version of the *Ramayana** by Krttivasa* (fifteenth century).31 Bengali villagers tell of a tradition in which it was customary to worship Durga during the spring. Rama, however, needed the goddess's help in the autumn when he was about to invade Lanka. So it was that he worshiped her in the month of Asvin* and inaugurated autumnal worship, which has become her most popular festival. "When Rama . . . came into conflict with Ravan* . . . Rama performed the puja* when he was in trouble, without waiting for the proper time of the annual puja He did the puja in the autumn, and later this puja became the most popular ritual of the goddess."32

Durga's association with military prowess and her worship for military success undoubtedly led to her being associated with the military success of both sets of epic heroes sometime in the medieval period. Her association with these great heroes in turn probably tended to further promote her worship by kings for success and prosperity.

Durga's association with military might is probably also part of a tradition, most evident in recent centuries, in which goddesses give swords to certain rulers and in which swords are named for goddesses. In the *Devi-purana** it is said that the goddess may be worshiped in the form of a sword (98). Sivaji*, the seventeenth-century Marathi military leader, is said to have received his sword from his family deity, the goddess Bhavani*. One account of how Sivaji obtained his sword is phrased as if Sivaji himself were speaking:

I received that famous sword very early in my career as a token of a compact with the Chief Gowalker Sawant. It had been

suggested to me on my way to the place where it was being kept that I should take it by force, but remembering that tremendous storms are sometimes raised by unnecessary trifles, I thought it better to leave it to its owner In the end the wise chief brought the sword to me as a sign of amity even when he knew that its purchase-price was not to be measured in blood. From that day onward the sword, which I reverently named after my tutelary deity *Bhavani* *, always accompanied me, its resting place when not in use generally being the altar of the goddess, to be received back from her as a visible favour from heaven, always on the *Dasara* day when starting out on my campaigns.³³

In other legends concerning Sivaji's* sword the goddess Bhavani* speaks directly to Sivaji*, identifies herself with his sword, and is described as entering his sword before battle or before urging Sivaji to undertake the task of murdering his enemy, Afzalkhan.³⁴

The Pandyan* prince Kumara* Kampana* (fourteenth century), before going to battle against the Muslims in the Madura area, is said to have been addressed by a goddess who gave him a sword: "A goddess appeared before him and after describing to him the disastrous consequences of the Musselmen invasions of the South and sad plight of the Southern country and its temples exhorted him to extirpate the invaders and restore the country to its ancient glory, presenting him at the same time with a divine sword."³⁵

A sacred sword also belonged to the Rajput kingdom of Mewar. The sword was handed down from generation to generation and was placed on the altar of the goddess during Navaratra*.³⁶ According to legend, the founder of the dynasty, Bappa, undertook austerities in the woods. Near the end of his ascetic efforts a goddess riding a lion appeared to him: "From her hand he received the panoply of celestial fabrication, the work of Viswacarma The lance, bow, quiver, and arrows; a shield and sword . . . which the goddess girded on him with her own hand."³⁷

The autumnal worship of Durga*, in which she is shown in full military array slaying the demon Mahisa* in order to restore order to the cosmos, thus seems to have been part of a widespread cult that centered around obtaining military success. The central festival of this cult took place on Dasara* day, immediately following the Navaratra festival, and included the worship of weapons by rulers and soldiers. The worship of a goddess for military success, though not always a part of the Dasara festival, was associated with the festival. Indeed, the two festivals, Na-

varatra * and Dasara*, probably were often understood to be one continuous festival in which the worship of Durga* and the hope of military success were inseparably linked.

Although the military overtones of Durga Puja* are apparent, other themes are also important during this great festival, and other facets of Durga's* character are brought out by the festival. Durga Puja is celebrated from the first through the ninth days of the bright half of the lunar month of Asvin*, which coincides with the autumn harvest in North India, and in certain respects it is clear that Durga Puja is a harvest festival in which Durga is propitiated as the power of plant fertility. Although Durga Puja lacks clear agricultural themes as celebrated today in large cities such as Calcutta or as celebrated by those with only tenuous ties to agriculture, there are still enough indications in the festival, even in its citified versions, to discern its importance to the business of agriculture. A central object of worship during the festival, for example, is a bundle of nine different plants, the *navapattrika**, which is identified with Durga herself.³⁸ Although the nine plants in question are not all agricultural plants, paddy and plantain are included and suggest that Durga is associated with the crops.³⁹ Her association with the other plants probably is meant to generalize her identification with the power underlying all plant life: Durga is not merely the power inherent in the growth of crops but the power inherent in all vegetation. During her worship in this form, the priest anoints Durga with water from auspicious sources, such as the major holy rivers of India. He also anoints her with agricultural products, such as sugarcane juice⁴⁰ and sesame oil,⁴¹ and offers to her certain soils that are associated with fertility, such as earth dug up by the horns of a wild boar, earth dug up by the horns of a bull, and earth from the doors of prostitutes.⁴² It seems clear that one theme of this aspect of the worship of Durga is to promote the fertility of the plants incorporated into the sacred bundle and to promote the fertility of crops in general.

At another point in the ceremonies a pot is identified with Durga and worshiped by the priest. Edible fruit and different plants from those making up the *navapattrika* are placed in the pot.⁴³ The pot, which has a rounded bottom, is then firmly set up on moist dough. On this dough are scattered five grains: rice, wheat, barley, "mas (*Phaseolus Roxburghii*, *Wight*)," and sesame.⁴⁴ As each grain is scattered on the dough, a priest recites the following invocation: "Om you are rice [wheat, barley, etc.], om you are life, you are the life of the gods, you are our life, you are our internal life, you are long life, you give life, om the Sun with his rays gives you the milk of life and Varuna nourishes you with

water." 45 The pot contains Ganges water in addition to the plants; in a prayer the priest identifies the pot with the source of the nectar of immortality (*amrta**), which the gods churned from the ocean of milk.

Durga*, then, in the form of the pot, is invoked both as the power promoting the growth of the agricultural grains and as the source of the power of life with which the gods achieved immortality. In the forms of the *navapatrika** and the *ghata** (pot) Durga reveals a dimension of herself that primarily has to do with the fertility of the crops and vegetation and with the power that underlies life in general. In addition to granting freedom from troubles and bestowing wealth on those who perform her *puja**, Durga is also affirmed to grant agricultural produce,⁴⁶ and at one point in the festival she is addressed as she who appeases the hunger of the world.⁴⁷

Durga's* beneficial influence on crops is also suggested at the very beginning of the festival when her image is being set up. The image is placed on a low platform or table about eighteen inches high. The platform is set on damp clay, and the five grains mentioned above are sprinkled in the clay. Although not specifically stated, it appears that the presence of the goddess is believed to promote the growth of these seeds.⁴⁸ Furthermore, on the eighth day of the festival the priest worships several groups of deities while circumambulating the image of Durga. Among these are the *ksetrapalas**, deities who preside over cultivated fields.⁴⁹

Two other distinctive features of Durga Puja* suggest its importance as a festival affecting the fertility of the crops: the animal sacrifices and the ribald behavior that is specifically mentioned in certain religious texts as pleasing to the goddess. Certainly the sacrifice of an animal, particularly when that animal is a buffalo, suggests the reiteration of the slaying of Mahisa* by Durga. But the custom of offering other animals such as goats and sheep and the injunctions to offer several victims during the festival suggest that other meanings are also intended. These blood sacrifices occupy a central role in Durga Puja. Durga's thirst for blood is established in various texts,⁵⁰ and this thirst is not limited to the battlefield. Her devotees are said to please her with their own blood,⁵¹ and she is said to receive blood from tribal groups who worship her.⁵² Furthermore, other goddesses to whom Durga is closely affiliated, such as Kali*, receive blood offerings in their temples daily with no reference at all to heroic deeds in battle. Blood offerings to Durga therefore seem to contain a logic quite apart from the battlefield, or at least quite apart from the myth of the goddess's slaying of Mahisa on behalf of cosmic stability.

My suggestion is that underlying blood sacrifices to Durga is the

perception, perhaps only unconscious, that this great goddess who nourishes the crops and is identified with the power underlying all life needs to be reinvigorated from time to time. Despite her great powers she is capable of being exhausted through continuous birth and the giving of nourishment. To replenish her powers, to reinvigorate her, she is given back life in the form of animal sacrifices. The blood in effect resupplies her so that she may continue to give life in return. Having harvested the crops, having literally reaped the life-giving benefits of Durga's * potency, it is appropriate (perhaps necessary) to return strength and power to her in the form of the blood of sacrificial victims. This logic, and the association of blood sacrifices with harvest, is not at all uncommon in the world's religions. It is a typical ceremonial scenario in many cultures, and it seems likely that at one time it was important in the celebration of Durga* Puja*.53

Promotion of the fertility of the crops by stimulating Durga's powers of fecundity also seems to underlie the practice of publicly making obscene gestures and comments during Durga Puja. Various scriptures say that Durga is pleased by such behavior at her autumnal festival,⁵⁴ and such behavior is suggested in the wild, boisterous activities that accompany the disposal of the image of Durga in a river or pool.⁵⁵ The close association, even the interdependence, between human sexuality and the growth of crops is clear in many cultures;⁵⁶ it is held to be auspicious and even vital to the growth of crops to have couples copulate in the fields, particularly at planting and harvest time. Again, the logic seems to be that this is a means of giving back vital powers to the spirit underlying the crops. The sexual fluids, like blood, are held to have great fertilizing powers, so to copulate in the fields is to renourish the divine beings that promote the growth of the crops. While such outright sexual activity is not part of Durga Puja, the sexual license enjoined in some scriptures is certainly suggestive of this well-known theme.

Another facet of Durga's character emerges in Durga Puja but is not stressed in the texts casting her in the role of battle queen; that is her domestic role as the wife of Siva* and mother of several divine children. In North India, which is primarily patrilocal and patriarchal in matters of marriage, it is customary for girls to be married at an early age and to leave their parents' home when quite young. This is traumatic for both the girl and her family. In Bengal, at least, daughters customarily return to their home villages during Durga Puja. The arrival home of the daughters is cause for great happiness and rejoicing, and their departure after the festival is over is the occasion for painful scenes of departure. Durga herself is cast in the role of a returning daughter during her great festival, and many devotional songs are written to welcome her home or

to bid her farewell. These songs contain no mention whatsoever of her roles as battle queen or cosmic savior. She is identified with Parvati *, who is the wife of Siva* and the daughter of Himalaya and his wife Mena. In this role Durga* is said to be the mother of Ganesa*, Karttikeya*, Sarasvati*, and Laksmi*.

The dominant theme in these songs of welcome and farewell seems to be the difficult life the goddess/daughter has in her husband's home in contrast to the warm, tender treatment she receives from her parents when she visits them. This theme undoubtedly reflects the actual situation of many Bengali girls, for whom life in their husband's village can be difficult in the extreme, particularly in the early years of their marriage when they have no seniority or children to give them respect and status in the eyes of their in-laws. Siva is described as inattentive to his wife and as unable to take care of himself because of his habit of smoking hemp and his habitual disregard for social convention.⁵⁷ The songs contrast the poverty that Durga must endure in her husband's care with the way that she is spoiled by her parents. From the devotee's point of view, then, Durga is seen as a returning daughter who lives a difficult life far away from home. She is welcomed warmly and provided every comfort. The days of the festival are ones of intimacy between the devotee and the goddess, who is understood to have made a long journey to dwell at home with those who worship her. The clay image worshiped during Durga Puja* may show a mighty, many-armed goddess triumphing over a powerful demon, but many devotees cherish her as a tender daughter who has returned home on her annual visit for family succor, sympathy, and the most elaborate hospitality. This theme places the devotee in the position of a family member who spoils Durga with every sort of personal attendance in order to distract her from her normal life with her mad husband, Siva. At the end of Durga Puja, when the image of the goddess is removed from its place of honor and placed upon a truck or some other conveyance to be carried away for immersion, many women gather about the image to bid it farewell, and it is a common sight to see them actually weeping as the goddess, their daughter, leaves to return to her husband's home far away.

The sacrifice of a buffalo to Durga is practiced in South India too. While agricultural fertility and her cosmic victory on behalf of divine order are themes in this ceremony, Tamil myths and rituals emphasize a quite different aspect of her character. In the *Puranas**, and in North Indian traditions, there is an implied sexual tension between Durga and Mahisa*, her victim. In the South this sexual tension is heightened and becomes one of the central themes of Durga's* defeat of Mahisa. In fact, most Southern myths about Durga identify Mahisa as her suitor, her

would-be husband. Independent in her unmarried state, Durga * is portrayed as possessing untamed sexual energy that is dangerous, indeed, deadly, to any male who dares to approach her.⁵⁸ Her violent, combative nature needs to be tamed for the welfare of the world. Mahisa* is unsuccessful in subduing her and is lured to his doom by her great beauty. A central point of the South Indian myths about Durga and Mahisa is that any sexual association with the goddess is dangerous and that before her sexuality can be rendered safe she must be dominated by, made subservient to, defeated by, or humiliated by a male.⁵⁹ In most myths she eventually is tamed by Siva*.⁶⁰

The South Indian tradition of Durga as a dangerous, indeed, murderous, bride who poses a fatal threat to those who approach her sexually contrasts sharply with the North Indian tradition of Durga Puja*, which stresses Durga's* character as a gentle young wife and daughter in need of family tenderness. The South Indian role suggests again the liminal aspect of the goddess. Unlike the weak, submissive, blushing maiden of the *Dharma-sastras**, Durga presents a picture of determined, fierce independence, which is challenged only at great risk by her suitors.

8

Kali *

The goddess Kali is almost always described as having a terrible, frightening appearance. She is always black or dark, is usually naked, and has long, disheveled hair. She is adorned with severed arms as a girdle, freshly cut heads as a necklace, children's corpses as earrings, and serpents as bracelets. She has long, sharp fangs, is often depicted as having clawlike hands with long nails, and is often said to have blood smeared on her lips. Her favorite haunts heighten her fearsome nature. She is usually shown on the battlefield, where she is a furious combatant who gets drunk on the hot blood of her victims, or in a cremation ground, where she sits on a corpse surrounded by jackals and goblins.

Many texts and contexts treat Kali as an independent deity, unassociated with any male deity. When she is associated with a god, however, it is almost always Siva*. As his consort, wife, or associate, Kali often plays the role of inciting him to wild behavior. Kali's* association with Siva, unlike Parvatis*, seems aimed at exciting him to take part in dangerous, destructive behavior that threatens the stability of the cosmos. Kali is particularly popular in Bengal, although she is known and worshiped throughout India. In Bengal she is worshiped on Dipavali*. In this festival, and throughout the year at many of her permanent temples, she receives blood offerings. She is also the recipient of ardent devotion from countless devotees, who approach her as their mother.

Early History

The earliest references to Kali in the Hindu tradition date to the early medieval period (around A.D. 600) and usually locate Kali either on the battlefield or in situations on the periphery of Hindu society. In the

Agni- and *Garuda-purana's* * she is mentioned in invocations that aim at success in war and against one's enemies. She is described as having an awful appearance: she is gaunt, has fangs, laughs loudly, dances madly, wears a garland of corpses, sits on the back of a ghost, and lives in the cremation ground. She is asked to crush, trample, break, and burn the enemy.¹ In the *Bhagavata-purana** Kali* is the patron deity of a band of thieves whose leader seeks to achieve Kali's* blessing in order to have a son. The thief kidnaps a saintly Brahman youth with the intention of offering him as a blood sacrifice to Kali. The effulgence of the virtuous youth, however, burns Kali herself when he is brought near her image. Emerging from her image, infuriated, she kills the leader and his entire band. She is described as having a dreadful face and large teeth and as laughing loudly. She and her host of demons then decapitate the corpses of the thieves, drink their blood until drunk, and throw their heads about in sport (5.9.1220).

Banabhattas* seventh-century drama *Kadambari** features a goddess named Candi*, an epithet used for both Durga* and Kali, who is worshiped by the Sabaras*, a tribe of primitive hunters. The worship takes place deep in the forest, and blood offerings are made to the goddess.² Vakpatis* *Gaudavaho** (late seventh or early eighth century) portrays Kali as an aspect of Vindhyaivasini* (an epithet of Durga). She is worshiped by Sabaras, is clothed in leaves, and receives human sacrifices (verses 285347).³ In Bhavabhuti's *Malatimadhava**, a drama of the early eighth century, a female devotee of Camunda*, a goddess who is very often identified with Kali, captures the heroine, Malati*, with the intention of sacrificing her to the goddess. Camunda's* temple is near a cremation ground. A hymn to the goddess describes her as dancing wildly and making the world shake. She has a gaping mouth, wears a garland of skulls, is covered with snakes, showers flames from her eyes that destroy the world, and is surrounded by goblins.⁴

Somadeva's *Yasatilaka** (eleventh to twelfth century) contains a long description of a goddess called Candamari*. In all respects she is like Kali, and we may understand the scenario Somadeva describes as suggestive of Kali's appearance and worship at that time. The goddess adorns herself with pieces of human corpses, uses ooings from corpses for cosmetics, bathes in rivers of wine or blood, sports in cremation grounds, and uses human skulls as drinking vessels.⁵ Bizarre and fanatical devotees gather at her temple and undertake forms of ascetic self-torture. They burn incense on their heads, drink their own blood, and offer their own flesh into the sacrificial fire.⁶

Kali's association with the periphery of Hindu society (she is worshiped by tribal or low-caste people in uncivilized or wild places) is also

seen in an architectural work of the sixth to eighth centuries, the *Manasara-silpa-sastra* *. There it is said that Kali's* temples should be built far from villages and towns, near the cremation grounds and the dwellings of Candalas* (very low-caste people) (9.289).

Kali's most famous appearances in battle contexts are found in the *Devi-mahatmya* *. In the third episode, which features Durga's* defeat of Sumbha* and Nisumbha* and their allies, Kali* appears twice. Early in the battle the demons Canda* and Munda* approach Durga* with readied weapons. Seeing them prepared to attack her, Durga becomes angry, her face becoming dark as ink. Suddenly the goddess Kali springs from her forehead. She is black, wears a garland of human heads and a tiger skin, and wields a skull-topped staff. She is gaunt, with sunken eyes, gaping mouth, and lolling tongue. She roars loudly and leaps into the battle, where she tears demons apart with her hands and crushes them in her jaws. She grasps the two demon generals and in one furious blow decapitates them both with her sword (7.322). Later in the battle Kali is summoned by Durga to help defeat the demon Raktabija*. This demon has the ability to reproduce himself instantly whenever a drop of his blood falls to the ground. Having wounded Raktabija with a variety of weapons, Durga and her assistants, a fierce band of goddesses called the Matrkas*,⁷ find they have worsened their situation. As Raktabija bleeds more and more profusely from his wounds, the battlefield increasingly becomes filled with Raktabija duplicates. Kali defeats the demon by sucking the blood from his body and throwing the countless duplicate Raktabijas* into her gaping mouth (8.4961)

In these two episodes Kali appears to represent Durga's personified wrath, her embodied fury. Kali plays a similar role in her association with Parvati*. In general, Parvati is a benign goddess, but from time to time she exhibits fierce aspects. When this occurs, Kali is sometimes described as being brought into being. In the *Linga-purana** Siva* asks Parvati to destroy the demon Daruka*, who has been given the boon that he can only be killed by a female. Parvati then enters Siva's* body and transforms herself from the poison that is stored in Siva's throat. She reappears as Kali, ferocious in appearance, and with the help of flesh-eating *pisacas** (spirits) attacks and defeats Daruka and his hosts. Kali, however, becomes so intoxicated by the blood lust of battle that she threatens to destroy the entire world in her fury. The world is saved when Siva intervenes and calms her (1.106). Kali appears in a similar context elsewhere in the same text. When Siva sets out to defeat the demons of the three cities, Kali is part of his entourage. She whirls a trident, is adorned with skulls, has her eyes half-closed by intoxication from drinking the blood of demons, and wears an elephant hide. She is

also praised, however, as the daughter of Himalaya, a clear identification with Parvati *. It seems that in the process of Parvati's* preparations for war, Kali* appears as Parvati's personified wrath, her alter ego, as it were (1.72.6668).

The *Vamana-purana** calls Parvati Kali (the black one) because of her dark complexion. Hearing Siva* use this name, Parvati* takes offense and undertakes austerities in order to rid herself of her dark complexion. After succeeding, she is renamed Gauri* (the golden one). Her dark sheath, however, is transformed into the furious battle queen Kausiki*, who subsequently creates Kali in her fury. So again, although there is an intermediary goddess (Kausiki), Kali plays the role of Parvati's dark, negative, violent nature in embodied form (2529).

Kali makes similar appearances in myths concerning both Sati* and Sita*. In the case of Sati, Kali appears when Sati's* father, Daksa*, infuriates his daughter by not inviting her and Siva to a great sacrificial rite. Sati rubs her nose in anger and Kali appears.⁸ Kali also appears in other texts when Sati, in her wrath over the same incident, gives birth to or transforms herself into ten goddesses, the *Dasamahavidyas**. The first goddess mentioned in this group is usually Kali.⁹ In the case of Sita, Kali appears as her fierce, terrible, bloodthirsty aspect when Rama*, on his return to India after defeating Ravana*, is confronted with such a terrible monster that he freezes in fear. Sita, transformed into Kali, handily defeats the demon.¹⁰

In her association with Siva Kali's* tendency to wildness and disorder persists. Although she is sometimes tamed or softened by him, at times she incites Siva himself to dangerous, destructive behavior. A South Indian tradition tells of a dance contest between the two. After defeating Sumbha* and Nisumbha*, Kali takes up residence in a forest with her retinue of fierce companions and terrorizes the surrounding area. A devotee of Siva in that area becomes distracted from doing austerities and petitions Siva to rid the forest of the violent goddess. When Siva appears, Kali threatens him, claiming the area as her own. Siva challenges her to a dance contest and defeats her when she is unable (or unwilling) to match his energetic *tandava** dance.¹¹

Although this tradition says that Siva defeated and forced Kali to control her disruptive habits, we find few images and myths depicting her becalmed and docile.¹² Instead, we find references or images that show Siva and Kali in situations where either or both behave in disruptive ways, inciting each other, or in which Kali in her wild activity dominates an inactive or sometimes dead Siva.¹³

In the first type of relationship the two appear dancing together in such a way that they threaten the world. Bhavabhuti's* *Malatimadhava**

describes the divine pair as they dance wildly near the goddess's temple. Their dance is so frenzied that it threatens to destroy the world. Parvati * stands nearby, frightened.¹⁴ Here the scenario is not a dance contest but a mutually destructive dance in which the two deities incite each other. This is a common image in Bengali devotional hymns to Kali*. Siva* and Kali complement each other in their madness and destructive habits.

Crazy is my Father, crazy my Mother,
 And I, their son, am crazy too!
 Shyama [the dark one, an epithet of Kali] is my
 Mother's name.
 My Father strikes His cheeks and makes a hollow sound:
Ba-ba-boom! Ba-ba-boom!
 And my Mother, drunk and reeling,
 Falls across my Father's body!
 Shyama's streaming tresses hang in vast disorder;
 Bees are swarming numberless
 About her crimson Lotus Feet.
 Listen, as She dances, how Her anklets ring!¹⁵

Iconographic representations of Kali and Siva nearly always show Kali as dominant. She is usually standing or dancing on Siva's* prone body, and when the two are depicted in sexual intercourse, she is shown above him. Although Siva is said to have tamed Kali in the myth of the dance contest, it seems clear that she was never finally subdued by him and is most popularly represented as a being who is uncontrollable and more apt to provoke Siva to dangerous activity than to be controlled by him.

In general, then, we may say that Kali is a goddess who threatens stability and order. Although she may be said to serve order in her role as slayer of demons, more often than not she becomes so frenzied on the battlefield, usually becoming drunk on the blood of her victims, that she herself begins to destroy the world that she is supposed to protect. Thus even in the service of the gods, she is ultimately dangerous and tends to get out of control. In association with other goddesses, she appears to represent their embodied wrath and fury, a frightening, dangerous dimension of the divine feminine that is released when these goddesses become enraged or are summoned to take part in war and killing. In relation to Siva, she appears to play the opposite role from that of Parvati*. Parvati calms Siva, counterbalancing his antisocial or destructive tendencies. It is she who brings Siva within the sphere of domesticity and who, with her soft glances, urges him to moderate the destructive

Image not available.

Kali * and Siva*. Ann and Bury Peerless. Philip Rawson,
Oriental Erotic Art (New York: A and W Publishers, 1981), fig. 16,
p. 22.

aspects of his *tandava* * dance.¹⁶ Kali* is Siva's* "other" wife, as it were, provoking him and encouraging him in his mad, antisocial, often disruptive habits. It is never Kali who tames Siva* but Siva who must be calm Kali. Her association with criminals reinforces her dangerous role vis-à-vis society. She is at home outside the moral order and seems to be unbounded by that order.

The Later History and the Significance of Kali

Given Kali's intimidating appearance and ghastly habits, it might seem that she would never occupy a central position in Hindu piety, yet she does. She is of central importance in Tantrism, particularly left-handed Tantrism, and in Bengali Sakta* devotionism. An underlying assumption in Tantric ideology is that reality is the result and expression of the symbiotic interaction of male and female, Siva and *sakti**, the quiescent and the dynamic, and other polar opposites that in interaction produce a creative tension. Consequently, goddesses in Tantrism play an important role and are affirmed to be as central to discerning the nature of reality as the male deities are. Although Siva is usually said to be the source of the *Tantras*, the source of wisdom and truth, and Parvati*, his spouse, to be the student to whom the scriptures are given, many of the *Tantras* emphasize the fact that it is *sakti** that pervades reality with her power, might, and vitality and that it is she (understood in personified form to be Parvati, Kali, and other goddesses) who is immediately present to the adept and whose presence and being underlie his own being. For the Tantric adept it is her vitality that is sought through various techniques aimed at spiritual transformation; thus it is she who is affirmed as the dominant and primary reality.

Although Parvati is usually said to be the recipient of Siva's wisdom in the form of the *Tantras*, it is Kali who seems to dominate Tantric iconography, texts, and rituals, especially in left-handed Tantra. In many places Kali is praised as the greatest of all deities or the highest reality. In the *Nirvana-tantra** the gods Brahma*, Visnu*, and Siva are said to arise from her like bubbles from the sea, endlessly arising and passing away, leaving their source unchanged. Compared to Kali, proclaims this text, Brahma, Visnu, and Siva are like the amount of water in a cow's hoofprint compared to the waters of the sea.¹⁷ The *Nigama-kalpitaru* and the *Picchila-tantra** declare that of all mantras Kali's is the greatest.¹⁸ The *Yogini-tantra**, the *Kamakhya-tantra**, and the *Niruttara-tantra* all proclaim Kali the greatest of the *vidyas** (the manifestations of the Mahadevi*, the "great goddess") or divinity itself; indeed, they declare her to

be the essence or own form (*svarupa* *) of the Mahadevi*.¹⁹ The *Kamada-tantra** states unequivocally that she is attributeless, neither male nor female, sinless, the imperishable *saccidananda** (being, consciousness, and bliss), *brahman* itself.²⁰ In the *Mahanirvana-tantra**, too, Kali is one of the most common epithets for the primordial *sakti**,²¹ and in one passage Siva* praises her as follows:

At the dissolution of things, it is Kala* [Time] Who will devour all, and by reason of this He is called Mahakala* [an epithet of Siva], and since Thou devourest Mahakala Himself, it is Thou who art the Supreme Primordial Kalika*.

Because Thou devourest Kala, Thou art Kali, the original form of all things, and because Thou art the Origin of and devourest all things Thou art called the Adya* [primordial] Kali. Resuming after Dissolution Thine own form, dark and formless, Thou alone remainest as One ineffable and inconceivable. Though having a form, yet art Thou formless; though Thyself without beginning, multiform by the power of Maya*, Thou art the Beginning of all, Creatrix, Protectress, and Destructress that Thou art. (4.3034)²²

Why Kali, in preference to other goddesses, attained this preeminent position in Tantrism is not entirely clear. Given certain Tantric ideological and ritual presuppositions, however, the following logic seems possible. Tantrism generally is ritually oriented. By means of various rituals (exterior and interior, bodily and mental) the *sadhaka** (practitioner) seeks to gain *moksa** (release, salvation). A consistent theme in this endeavor is the uniting of opposites (male-female, microcosm-macrocosm, sacred-profane, Siva**sakti**). In Tantrism there is an elaborate, subtle geography of the body that must be learned, controlled, and ultimately resolved in unity. By means of the body, both the physical and subtle bodies, the *sadhaka* may manipulate levels of reality and harness the dynamics of those levels to the attainment of his goal. The *sadhaka*, with the help of a guru, undertakes to gain his goal by conquest by using his own body and knowledge of that body to bring the fractured world of name and form, the polarized world of male and female, sacred and profane, to wholeness and unity.

*Sadhana** (spiritual endeavor) takes a particularly dramatic form in left-handed (*vamacara**) Tantrism. In his attempt to realize the nature of the world as completely and thoroughly pervaded by the one *sakti**, the *sadhaka* (here called the "hero," *vira**) undertakes the ritual of the *pancatattva**, the "five (forbidden) things" (or truths). In a ritual context and under the supervision of his guru, the *sadhaka* partakes of wine, meat,

fish, parched grain (perhaps a hallucinogenic drug of some kind), and illicit sexual intercourse. In this way he overcomes the distinction (or duality) of clean and unclean, sacred and profane, and breaks his bondage to a world that is artificially fragmented. He affirms in a radical way the underlying unity of the phenomenal world, the identity of *sakti* * with the whole creation. Heroically, he triumphs over it, controls and masters it. By affirming the essential worth of the forbidden, he causes the forbidden to lose its power to pollute, to degrade, to bind.²³

The figure of Kali* conveys death, destruction, fear, terror, the all-consuming aspect of reality. As such she is also a "forbidden thing," or the forbidden par excellence, for she is death itself. The Tantric hero does not propitiate, fear, ignore, or avoid the forbidden. During the *pancatattva** ritual, the *sadhaka** boldly confronts Kali and thereby assimilates, overcomes, and transforms her into a vehicle of salvation. This is particularly clear in the *Karpuradi-stotra**, a short work in praise of Kali, which describes the *pancatattva* ritual as performed in the cremation ground (*smasana-sadhana**). Throughout this text Kali is described in familiar terms. She is black (verse 1), has disheveled hair and blood trickling from her mouth (3), holds a sword and a severed head (4), wears a girdle of severed arms, sits on a corpse in the cremation ground (7), and is surrounded by skulls, bones, and female jackals (8). It is she, when confronted boldly in meditation, who gives the *sadhaka* great power and ultimately salvation. In Kali's* favorite dwelling place, the cremation ground, the *sadhaka* meditates on every terrible aspect of the black goddess and thus achieves his goal.

He, O Mahakali*, who in the cremation-ground, naked, and with dishevelled hair, intently meditates upon Thee and recites Thy *mantra*, and with each recitation makes offering to Thee of a thousand *Akanda** flowers with seed, becomes without any effort a Lord of the earth.

O Kali, whoever on Tuesday at midnight, having uttered Thy *mantra*, makes offering even but once with devotion to Thee of a hair of his *Sakti** [his female companion] in the cremation-ground, becomes a great poet, a Lord of the earth, and ever goes mounted upon an elephant. (1516)²⁴

The *Karpuradi-stotra** clearly makes Kali more than a terrible, ferocious slayer of demons who serves Durga* or Siva on the battlefield. In fact, she is by and large dissociated from the battle context. She is the supreme mistress of the universe (12), she is identified with the five elements (14), and in union with Siva (who is identified as her spouse)²⁵ she creates and destroys the worlds. Her appearance has also been modified,

befitting her exalted position as ruler of the world and the object of meditation by which the *sadhaka* * attains liberation. In addition to her terrible aspects (which are insisted upon), there are now hints of another, benign dimension. So, for example, she is no longer described as emaciated or ugly. In the *Karpuradi-stotra** she is young and beautiful (1), has a gently smiling face (18), and makes gestures with her two right hands that dispel fear and offer boons (4). These positive features are entirely apt, as Kali* no longer is a mere shrew, the distillation of Durga's* or Parvati's* wrath, but is she through whom the hero achieves success, she who grants the boon of salvation, and she who, when boldly approached, frees the *sadhaka* from fear itself. She is here not only the symbol of death but the symbol of triumph over death.

Kali also attains a central position in late medieval Bengali devotional literature.²⁶ In this devotion Kali's appearance and habits have not changed very much. She remains terrifying in appearance and fearsome in habit. She is eminently recognizable. Ramprasad* Sen (1718-75), one of her most ardent devotees, describes his beloved Kali in almost shocked tones:

O Kali! why dost Thou roam about nude?
 Art Thou not ashamed, Mother!
 Garb and ornaments Thou hast none; yet Thou
 pridest in being King's daughter.
 O Mother! is it a virtue of Thy family that
 Thou placest thy feet on Thy Husband?
 Thou are nude; Thy Husband is nude; you both
 roam cremation grounds.
 O Mother! we are all ashamed of you; do put on
 Thy garb.
 Thou hast cast away Thy necklace of jewels,
 Mother, and worn a garland of human heads.
 Prasada* says, "Mother! Thy fierce beauty has
 frightened Thy nude Consort."²⁷

The approach of the devotee to Kali, however, is quite different in mood and temperament from the approach of the Tantric *sadhaka*. The Tantric adept, seeking to view Kali in her most terrible aspect, is heroic in approach, cultivating an almost aggressive, fearless stance before her. The Tantric adept challenges Kali to unveil her most forbidding secrets. The devotee, in contrast, adopts the position of the helpless child when approaching Kali. Even though the child's mother may be fearsome, at times even hostile, the child has little choice but to return to her for

protection, security, and warmth. This is just the attitude Ramprasad * expresses when he writes: "Though she beat it, the child clings to its mother, crying 'Mother.'"²⁸

Why Kali* is approached as mother and in what sense she is perceived to be a mother by her devotees are questions that do not have clear or easy answers. In almost every sense Kali is not portrayed as a mother in the Hindu tradition prior to her central role in Bengali devotion beginning in the eighteenth century. Except in some contexts when she is associated or identified with Parvati* as Siva's* consort, Kali is rarely pictured in motherly scenes in Hindu mythology or iconography. Even in Bengali devotion to her, her appearance and habits change very little. Indeed, Kali's* appearance and habits strike one as conveying truths opposed to those conveyed by such archetypal mother goddesses as Prthivi*, Annapurna*, Jagaddhatri*, Sataksi*, and other Hindu goddesses associated with fertility, growth, abundance, and well-being.²⁹ These goddesses appear as inexhaustible sources of nourishment and creativity. When depicted iconographically they are heavy hipped and heavy breasted. Kali, especially in her early history, is often depicted or described as emaciated, lean, and gaunt. It is not her breasts or hips that attract attention. It is her mouth, her lolling tongue, and her bloody cleaver. These other goddesses, "mother goddesses" in the obvious sense, give life. Kali takes life, insatiably. She lives in the cremation ground, haunts the battlefield, sits upon a corpse, and adorns herself with pieces of corpses. If mother goddesses are described as ever fecund, Kali is described as ever hungry. Her lolling tongue, grotesquely long and oversized, her sunken stomach, emaciated appearance, and sharp fangs convey a presence that is the direct opposite of a fertile, protective mother goddess. If mother goddesses give life, Kali feeds on life. What they give, she takes away.

Although the attitude of the devotee to Kali is different from that of the Tantric hero, although their paths appear very different, the attitude and approach of the devotee who insists upon approaching Kali as his mother may reveal a logic similar to that of the Tantric hero's. The truths about reality that Kali conveys—namely, that life feeds on death, that death is inevitable for all beings, that time wears all things down, and so on³⁰—are just as apparent to the devotee as they are to the Tantric hero. The fearfulness of these truths, however, is mitigated, indeed is transformed into liberating wisdom, if these truths can be accepted. The Tantric hero seeks to appropriate these truths by confronting Kali, by seeking her in the cremation ground in the dead of night, and by heroically demonstrating courage equal to her terrible presence. The devotee,

in contrast, appropriates the truths Kali * reveals by adopting the attitude of a child, whose essential nature toward its mother is that of acceptance, no matter how awful, how indifferent, how fearsome she is. The devotee, then, by making the apparently unlikely assertion that Kali is his mother, enables himself to approach and appropriate the forbidding truths that Kali reveals; in appropriating these truths the devotee, like the Tantric adept, is liberated from the fear these truths impose on people who deny or ignore them.

Through devotion to Kali the devotee becomes reconciled to death and achieves an acceptance of the way things are, an equilibrium that remains unperturbed in Kali's* presence. These themes are expressed well in this song of Ramprasad's*:

O Mother! Thou has great dissolution in Thy hand;
 Siva* lies at Thy feet, absorbed in bliss.
 Thou laughest aloud (striking terror); streams of
 blood flow from Thy limbs.
 O Tara*, doer of good, the good of all, grantor of safety,
 O Mother, grant me safety.
 O Mother Kali*! take me in Thy arms; O Mother Kali!
 take me in Thy arms.
 O Mother! come now as Tara with a smiling face and
 clad in white;
 As dawn descends on dense darkness of the night.
 O Mother! terrific Kali! I have worshiped Thee alone
 so long.
 My worship is finished; now, O Mother, bring down Thy
 sword.31

Ramprasad* complains in many of his songs that Kali is indifferent to his well-being, that she makes him suffer and brings his worldly desires to naught and his worldly goods to ruin.

Mother who art the joy of Hara's [Siva's*] heart,
 and who dost bring to naught the hopes of men, thou hast
 made void what hope was left to me.
 Though I place my soul an offering at thy feet, some
 calamity befalls. Though I think upon thy loveliness, unceas-
 ing death is mine.
 Thou dost frustrate my desires, thou art the spoiler of
 my fortunes. Well do I know thy mercy, Mother of mine.

Great were my desires, and I spread them all out as a salesman does his wares. Thou didst see the display, I suppose, and didst bring confusion upon me

My wealth, my honour, kith and kin, all have gone, and I have nothing now to call my own.

What further use is there for me? Wretched indeed am I.

I have sought my own ends, and now there is no limit to my grief.

Thou who dost take away sorrow, to me most wretched hast thou given sorrow. And I must all this unhappy lot endure. 32

He complains that she does not behave in the ways mothers are supposed to behave, that she does not hearken to his pleas.

Can mercy be found in the heart of her who was born of the stone [a reference to her being the daughter of Himalaya*]?

Were she not merciless, would she kick the breast of her lord?

Men call you merciful, but there is no trace of mercy in you, Mother.

You have cut off the heads of the children of others, and these you wear as a garland around your neck.

It matters not how much I call you "Mother, Mother."
You hear me, but you will not listen.33

To be Kali's* child, Ramprasad* often asserts, is to suffer, to be disappointed in terms of worldly desires and pleasures. Kali* does not give what is normally expected. She does allow her devotee/child, however, to glimpse a vision of himself that is not circumscribed by physical and material limitations. As Ramprasad says succinctly: "He who has made Kali . . . his only goal easily forgets worldly pleasures."³⁴ Indeed, that person has little choice, for Kali does not indulge her devotees in worldly pleasures. It is her very refusal to do so that enables her devotees to reflect on dimensions of themselves and of reality that go beyond bodily comfort and world security.

An analysis of the significance of Kali to the Hindu tradition reveals certain constants in her mythology and imagery. She is almost always associated with blood and death, and it is difficult to imagine two more polluting realities in the context of the purity-minded culture of Hinduism. As such, Kali is a very dangerous being. She vividly and dramatically thrusts upon the observer things that he or she would rather

not think about. Within the civilized order of Hinduism, within the order of dharma, blood and death are acknowledged it is impossible not to acknowledge their existence in human life but they are acknowledged within the context of a highly ritualized, patterned, and complex social structure that takes great pains to handle them in "safe" ways, usually through rituals of purification. These rituals (called *samskaras* *, "refinements") allow individuals to pass in an orderly way through times when contact with blood and death are unavoidable. The order of dharma is not entirely naive and has incorporated into its refined version of human existence the recognition of these human inevitabilities.

But the Hindu *samskaras* are patterned on wishful thinking. Blood and death have a way of cropping up unexpectedly, accidentally, tragically, and dangerously. The periodic flow of menstrual blood or the death of an aged and loved old woman (whose husband has cooperatively died before her) are manageable within the normal order of human events. But the death of an infant or a hemorrhage, for instance, are a threat to the neat vision of the order of dharma.³⁵ They can never be avoided with certainty, no matter how well protected one thinks one is.

Kali* may be one way in which the Hindu tradition has sought to come to terms, at least in part, with the built-in shortcomings of its own refined view of the world. It is perhaps best and even redemptive to recognize that the system does not work in every case. Reflecting on the ways in which people must negate certain realities in their attempts to create social order, anthropologist Mary Douglas writes:

Whenever a strict pattern of purity is imposed on our lives it is either highly uncomfortable or it leads into contradiction if closely followed, or it leads to hypocrisy. That which is negated is not thereby removed. The rest of life, which does not tidily fit the accepted categories, is still there and demands attention. The body, as we have tried to show, provides a basic scheme for all symbolism. There is hardly any pollution which does not have some primary physiological reference. As life is in the body it cannot be rejected outright. And as life must be affirmed, the most complete philosophies . . . must find some ultimate way of affirming that which has been rejected.³⁶

Kali puts the order of dharma in perspective, perhaps puts it in its place, by reminding Hindus that certain aspects of reality are untamable, unpurifiable, unpredictable, and always a threat to society's feeble attempts to order what is essentially disorderly: life itself.

Kali's * shocking appearance and unconventional behavior confront one with an alternative to normal society. To meditate on the dark goddess, or to devote oneself to her, is to step out of the everyday world of predictable dharmic order and enter a world of reversals, opposites, and contrasts and in doing so to wake up to new possibilities and new frames of reference. In her differentness, strangeness, indeed, in her perverseness, Kali* is the kind of figure who is capable of shaking one's comforting and naive assumptions about the world. In doing this she allows a clearer perception of how things really are.³⁷

Kali allows (or perhaps forces) better perception by enabling one to see the complete picture. She allows one to see behind the bounteousness of the other goddesses who appear in benign forms. Kali reveals the insatiable hunger that logically must lie behind their amazing fecundity and liberality. Similarly, Kali permits individuals to see their overall roles in the cosmic drama. She invites a wider, more mature, more realistic reflection on where one has come from and where one is going. She allows the individual to see himself or herself as merely one being in an endless series of permutations arising from the ever-recurring cycles of life and death that constitute the inner rhythms of the divine mother. As cycling and recycled energy, as both the creation and the food of the goddess, the individual is permitted to glimpse social roles and identities in perspective, to see them as often confining and as obscuring a clear perception of how things really are and who he or she really is. Kali reveals that ultimately all creatures are her children and also her food and that no social role or identity can remove the individual from this sacrificial give and take. While this truth may appear grim, its realization may be just what is needed to push one over the threshold into the liberating quest for release from bondage to *samsara**.

The extent to which Kali invites or provokes one over the threshold from order to antistructure is seen in the roles she requires of those who would establish any intimacy with her.³⁸ Iconographically, it is Siva* who participates in the most intimate relations with Kali. In probably her most famous pose, as Daksinakali*, she stands or dances upon Siva's* prone body in the cremation ground. His eyes are closed in bliss, sleep, trance, or death it is difficult to say which. His attitude is utterly passive and, whether he is dead or not, his appearance corpse-like. The myth that explains the origin of this pose says that once upon a time Kali began to dance out of control on the battlefield after having become drunk on the blood of her victims. To stop her rampage, Siva lay down on the battlefield like a corpse so that when she danced on his body she would stop, recognizing him as her husband. It is thus as a corpse, as one of her victims, that Siva calms Kali and elicits her grace.³⁹

In another myth it is the infant Siva * who calms Kali* and stops her rampage by eliciting motherly emotions from her. In this story Kali again has defeated her enemies on the battlefield and begun to dance out of control, drunk on the blood of those she has slain. To calm her and protect the stability of the world, Siva appears in the midst of the battlefield as an infant, crying out loudly. Seeing the child's distress, Kali stops her dancing, picks him up, and kisses him on the head. Then she suckles him at her breasts.⁴⁰

Both the dead and infants have a liminal nature. Neither has a complete social identity. Neither fits neatly or at all into the niches and structures of normal society. To approach Kali it is well to assume the identity of a corpse or an infant. Having no stake in the orderly structures of society, the devotee as corpse or infant is free to step out of society into the liminal environment of the goddess. The corpse is mere food for her insatiable fires, the infant mere energy, as yet raw and unrefined. Reduced to either extreme, one who approaches Kali in these roles is awakened to a perception of reality that is difficult to grasp within the confines of the order of dharma and a socialized ego.

9

The Mahadevi *

There is a tendency in many texts, myths, and rituals concerning goddesses to subsume them all under one great female being. This goddess has many names, but her most common designation is simply Devi* (goddess) or Mahadevi (great goddess). The early Hindu tradition tended to speak of discrete goddesses Sri*, Parvati*, Sita*, and so on.¹ Sometime in the medieval period, however, the tendency to think of all goddesses as related beings began to dominate certain texts. Perhaps the earliest example of this trend is the *Devi-mahatmya**, which is usually dated around the sixth century.²

Affirmation of a unity underlying all goddesses is usually expressed in one of two ways. First, a particular goddess, such as Parvati or Laksmi*, will be affirmed as the highest deity, or perhaps the consort or *sakti** of the highest deity, and all other goddesses will be understood as portions or manifestations of her. This approach is also seen in the case of male deities and often involves a sectarian desire to demonstrate the superiority of one deity over others. The second way in which the unity of all goddesses is asserted is by assuming the existence of one transcendent great goddess who possesses most classical characteristics of ultimate reality as understood in the Hindu tradition and then subsuming all particular goddesses under her as partial manifestations of her.

It is often difficult to separate these two approaches. In the former case, the particular goddess who is elevated to supremacy, be she Parvati, Durga*, or Laksmi, will be given all the attributes of ultimate reality but at the same time will keep most of her distinctive mythology and appearance. In the latter case, when the supreme goddess is described concretely, the description will often be similar to the appearance of a specific goddess well known in the tradition. That is, the author will usually betray a preference for a particular goddess tradition in actually describing the supreme goddess, and she will tend to appear more like

one goddess than another. Both approaches, however, tend to assert a definite theological position, namely, that underlying all female deities there is a unified power or essence. This power, furthermore, tends to display itself in almost innumerable forms, for a variety of purposes.

Central Theological and Philosophical Characteristics

An underlying theological assumption in texts celebrating the Mahadevi * is that the ultimate reality in the universe is a powerful, creative, active, transcendent female being. The *Lalita-sahasranama** gives many names of the Mahadevi, and several of her epithets express this assumption. She is called, for example, the root of the world (Jagatikanda*, name 325), she who transcends the universe (Visvadhika*, 334), she who has no equal (Nirupama*, 389), supreme ruler (Paramesvari*, 396), she who pervades all (Vyapini*, 400), she who is immeasurable (Aprameya*, 413), she who creates innumerable universes (Anekakotibrahmandajanani*, 620), she whose womb contains the universe (Visvagarbha*, 637), she who is the support of all (Sarvadhara*, 659), she who is omnipresent (Sarvaga*, 702), she who is the ruler of all worlds (Sarvalokesi*, 758), and she who supports the universe (Visvadhagini*, 759). In the *Devi-bhagavata-purana**, which also assumes the ultimate priority of the Mahadevi, she is said to be the mother of all, to pervade the three worlds, to be the support of all (1.5.4750), to be the life force in all beings, to be the ruler of all beings (1.5.5154), to be the only cause of the universe (1.7.27), to create Brahma*, Visnu*, and Siva* and to command them to perform their cosmic tasks (3.5.4), to be the root of the tree of the universe (3.10.15), and to be she who is supreme knowledge (4.15.12). The text describes her by many other names and phrases as it exalts her to a position of cosmic supremacy.

One of the central philosophic ideas underlying the Mahadevi, an idea that in many ways captures her essential nature, is *sakti**. *Sakti** means "power"; in Hindu philosophy and theology *sakti* is understood to be the active dimension of the godhead, the divine power that underlies the godhead's ability to create the world and to display itself.³ Within the totality of the godhead, *sakti* is the complementary pole of the divine tendency toward quiescence and stillness. It is quite common, furthermore, to identify *sakti* with a female being, a goddess, and to identify the other pole with her male consort. The two poles are usually understood to be interdependent and to have relatively equal status in terms of the divine economy.⁴

Image not available.

Silver mask of Devi *. Sixteen or seventeenth century A.D. Madanjeet Singh, Himalayan Art (London: MacMillan, 1968), p. 143.

Texts or contexts exalting the Mahadevi *, however, usually affirm *sakti** to be a power, or *the* power, underlying ultimate reality, or to be ultimate reality itself. Instead of being understood as one of two poles or as one dimension of a bipolar conception of the divine, *sakti* as it applies to the Mahadevi is often identified with the essence of reality. If the Mahadevi as *sakti* is related to another dimension of the divine in the form of a male deity, he will tend to play a subservient role in relation to her.⁵ In focusing on the centrality of *sakti* as constituting the essence of the divine, texts usually describe the Mahadevi as a powerful, active, dynamic being who creates, pervades, governs, and protects the universe. As *sakti*, she is not aloof from the world but attentive to the cosmic rhythms and the needs of her devotees.

In a similar vein the Mahadevi is often identified with *prakrti** and *maya**. Indeed, two of her most common epithets are Mulaprakrti* (she who is primordial matter) and Mahamaya* (she who is great *maya**). These ideas have negative connotations in certain schools of Hindu philosophy. Samkhya* philosophy and yogic spiritual techniques describe *prakrti* as the web of matter in which one's spiritual essence, *purusa** (literally, the male), is enmeshed. Yogic exercise aims at reversing the spontaneous tendencies of *prakrti* to reproduce and specify itself. In the quest for liberation *prakrti* represents that from which one seeks freedom. Similarly, most schools of Hindu philosophy identify *maya* with that which prevents one from seeing things as they really are. *Maya** is the process of superimposition by which one projects one's own ignorance on the world and thus obscures ultimate truth. To wake up to the truth of things necessarily involves counteracting or overcoming *maya*, which is grounded in ignorance and selfinfatuation. Liberation in Hindu philosophy means to a great extent the transcendence of embodied, finite, phenomenal existence. And *maya* is often equated precisely with finite, phenomenal existence.⁶ To be in the phenomenal world, to be an individual creature, is to live enveloped in *maya*.

When the Mahadevi is associated with *prakrti* or *maya*, certain negative overtones sometimes persist. As *prakrti* or *maya* she is sometimes referred to as the great power that preoccupies individuals with phenomenal existence or as the cosmic force that impels even the gods to unconsciousness and sleep.⁷ But the overall result of the Mahadevi's* identification with *prakrti* and *maya* is to infuse both ideas with positive dimensions. As *prakrti* or *maya*, the Devi* is identified with existence itself, or with that which underlies all existent things. The emphasis is not on the binding aspects of matter or the created world but on the Devi as the ground of all things. Because it is she who pervades the material world as *prakrti* or *maya*, the phenomenal world tends to take

on positive qualities. Or perhaps we could say that a positive attitude toward the world, which is evident in much of popular Hinduism, is affirmed when the Devi * is identified with *prakrti** and *maya**. The central theological point here is that the Mahadevi* is the world, she is all this creation, she is one with her creatures and her creation. Although a person's spiritual destiny ultimately may involve transcendence of the creation, the Devi's* identification with existence per se is clearly intended to be a positive philosophic assertion. She is life, and to the extent that life is cherished and revered, she is cherished and revered.

As *sakti*`*, *prakrti*, and *maya*, the Devi is portrayed as an overwhelming presence that overflows itself, spilling forth into the creation, suffusing the world with vitality, energy, and power. When the Devi is identified with these wellknown philosophic ideas, then, a positive point is being made: the Devi creates the world, she is the world,⁸ and she enlivens the world with creative power. As *sakti*, *prakrti*, and *maya*, she is not understood so much as binding creatures to finite existence as being the very source and vitality of creatures. She is the source of creatures their mother and as such her awesome, vital power is revered.

The idea of *brahman* is another central idea with which the Devi is associated. Ever since the time of the *Upanisads**, *brahman* has been the most commonly accepted term or designation for ultimate reality in Hinduism. In the *Upanisads*, and throughout the Hindu tradition, *brahman* is described in two ways: as *nirguna** (having no qualities or beyond all qualities) and *saguna** (having qualities). As *nirguna*, which is usually affirmed to be the superior way of thinking about *brahman*, ultimate reality transcends all qualities, categories, and limitations. As *nirguna*, *brahman* transcends all attempts to circumscribe it. It is beyond all name and form (*namarupa**). As the ground of all things, as the fundamental principal of existence, however, *brahman* is also spoken of as having qualities, indeed, as manifesting itself in a multiplicity of deities, universes, and beings. As *saguna*, *brahman* reveals itself especially as the various deities of the Hindu pantheon. The main philosophical point asserted in the idea of *saguna brahman* is that underlying all the different gods is a unifying essence, namely, *brahman*. Each individual deity is understood to be a partial manifestation of *brahman*, which ultimately is beyond all specifying attributes, functions, and qualities.

The idea of *brahman* serves well the attempts in many texts devoted to the Devi to affirm her supreme position in the Hindu pantheon. The idea of *brahman* makes two central philosophic points congenial to the theology of the Mahadevi: (1) she is ultimate reality itself, and (2) she is the source of all divine manifestations, male and female (but especially female). As *saguna brahman*, the Devi is portrayed as a great cosmic queen enthroned in the highest heaven, with a multitude of deities as the

agents through which she governs the infinite universes. In her ultimate essence, however, some texts, despite their clear preference for the Devi's * feminine characteristics, assert in traditional fashion that she is beyond all qualities, beyond male and female.⁹

Mythological Characteristics and Functions

The central role the Devi* plays in mythology is that of creator and queen of the cosmos. When she is portrayed in her own form (*svabhava**), she is usually described as a beautiful young woman in regal attire surrounded by thousands of attendants and seated on a throne in the highest heaven.¹⁰ As cosmic queen she oversees or performs directly the three primary cosmic functions of creation, preservation, and destruction. The world is said to be destroyed when she blinks her eyes and to be recreated when she opens her eyes.¹¹

Many Hindu mythological texts attribute the three cosmic functions to Brahma* (creation), Visnu* (preservation), and Siva* (destruction). While texts extolling the Devi often picture these three male deities in their familiar roles, it is made clear that the male gods only act according to the Devi's will and at her command.¹² Some myths make the point that the great male gods are entirely dependent on the Devi for their strength and power and that if she withdraws her power they are impotent and helpless.¹³ The *Devi-bhagavata-purana** also makes it clear that the traditional heavenly abodes of these deities are far below and inferior to the Devi's heaven. Indeed, the text asserts that there are innumerable Brahmas*, Visnu's*, and Siva's*, whose tasks are to govern the innumerable universes that ceaselessly bubble forth from the inexhaustibly creative Devi (3.4.1467). In the *Lalita-sahasranama** the Devi is called she from whose ten fingernails spring the ten forms of Visnu (Karanguli-nakhotpanna-narayana-dasakrtih*, 80). In the *Saundaryalahari** the entire universe is formed from a tiny speck of dust from the Devi's foot. Brahma takes that speck and from it fashions worlds that Visnu, in his form as the manyheaded cosmic serpent, can barely support with his thousand heads (verse 2). In a particularly humbling scene for the male deities, the Devi is described in her heaven as seated upon a couch, its four legs consisting of the great male deities of the Hindu pantheon.¹⁴ The point is clear: the great male gods still have important roles to play, but ultimately they are the servants of the Devi and do her bidding. She has created them, indeed, she has created innumerable copies of each of them, and they act as her cosmic agents, overseeing the universes she has created.

Although the male deities are frequently portrayed as carrying out

their traditional cosmological functions at the Devi's * command, she herself is also often pictured as taking an active role in the cosmic processes. She is ever attentive to the world, particularly to her devotees, and in various forms she acts to uphold cosmic order and protect her creatures. Although her concern is that of a mother for her children, hence a passionate and everwatchful concern, her favorite role as protector and preserver of the cosmos is that of the warrior, a traditionally male role. Many of her epithets emphasize this aspect of her character. The *Lalita-sahasranama** calls her she who slays demons (Raksasaghni*, 318), she who grants boons to great warriors (Mahavirendravara*, 493), ruler of armies (Caturangabalesvari*, 691), she who is worshiped by warriors (Viraradhya*, 777), and mother of warriors (Viramata*, 836).

The Devi's most famous mythological exploits usually involve the defeat of demons who have taken over the world and displaced the gods from their positions as rulers of the cosmos. The three episodes featuring the goddess Durga* are particularly popular in texts celebrating the Mahadevi*, and she is identified with Durga in various renditions of the tales. To a great extent Durga is the Devi's most common or favorite form, and Durga's* exploits are the most commonly celebrated events in Devi* mythology. From the point of view of Mahadevi theology the two are essentially the same deity. The account of Durga's defeat of Mahisa* in the *Devi-bhagavata-purana**, for example, explicitly states that the Devi, though *nirguna** in her ultimate essence, assumes for her pleasure a great variety of forms in order to maintain cosmic order and that her form as Durga is simply one of those forms, though undoubtedly a very important one.¹⁵ As Durga, the Mahadevi is typically described as a ferocious, invincible warrior who descends into the world from time to time to combat evil of various kinds, especially demons who have stolen the positions of the gods.

As Durga, the Mahadevi is in many ways like the great god Visnu*. Visnu is usually pictured as a cosmic king who oversees the stability of the world. When the world is threatened by demons, he descends in different forms to combat the danger. The Mahadevi is also said to assume forms appropriate to cosmic threats. Visnu is traditionally said to have ten *avatars**. In each universal cycle he takes ten different forms to combat ten different demons. The Mahadevi, too, is said to have ten forms, the Dasamahavidyas* (the ten great scenes or insights). These ten forms include several wellknown Hindu goddesses, and like the Vaisnavite* idea of *avatars* the ten forms of the Devi effectively bring together distinct strands under a unifying great deity.¹⁶ From the point of view of Devi theology and cosmology the Hindu goddesses are varying manifestations of the Devi's activity on behalf of the world. Durga, Laksmi*,

Parvati *, and other goddesses are all understood to be parts of a transcendent divine economy that is governed by the the Devi* in her own form (*svabhava**) or in her aspect as *brahman*. This economy, with a few important exceptions, is oriented toward upholding and protecting the world.

The Devi, like Visnu*, also plays the role of protector and preserver in less grand, cosmic ways by making periodic and dramatic appearances on behalf of her individual devotees. In this role she plays the savior. Her devotees Samadhi* and Suratha propitiate her in the closing scene of the *Devi-mahatmya**. She appears before them and graciously grants their desires (13.716). In the *Devi-bhagavata-purana** when her devotee Sudarsana* is surrounded by his enemies and prays to her for help, she appears as a great warrior riding on her lion and quickly routs them (3.23.1841). She appears to aid Rama* when he prays to her for help in defeating Ravana*. She empowers him to build a bridge from India to Lanka* and announces that she will cause him to defeat Ravana (3.30.4361). In the *Devi-bhagavata-purana's* account of the wellknown story of Hariscandra*, who is reduced to poverty and the pitiable status of an outcaste, the Devi answers Hariscandra's* prayer by appearing and restoring him to his former state and reviving his child from the dead (7.27.17). The Mahadevi*, then, though typically pictured as a distant, awesome figure who sits in majesty on a heavenly throne surrounded by divine attendants, is responsive to the pleas of her individual devotees and is quick to come to their aid in times of distress. She is understood to be an approachable, motherly figure who is never deaf to the cries of her children.

Auspicious and Terrible Forms

Another important feature of Mahadevi mythology and theology is the insistence that she assumes both benign and terrible forms. Most texts extolling the Devi are preoccupied with her benign and auspicious forms, but many texts affirm that she has several manifestations that are dreadful, dangerous, or bloodthirsty.¹⁷ In the *Devi-bhagavata-purana* (7.33.2156), in a passage reminiscent of the scene in the *Bhagavad-gita** when Arjuna asks to see Krsna's* cosmic form, the gods ask the Devi for a glimpse of her universal form. She obliges, and the gods are stunned and terrified by what they behold. She assumes a form having thousands of heads, eyes, and feet. Her entire body blazes with fierce, destructive flames, and her teeth make horrible grinding noises. Her eyes blaze with flames brighter than millions of suns, and the gods tremble as they see

her consume the universes. They plead with her to resume her gentle form, which she does, reappearing as a beautiful woman with a soft and gentle body and a smiling face. The *Kurma-purana* * describes the Devi*, who is identified primarily with Parvati*, as showing her cosmic form to Himavat. She blazes brightly, has dreadful teeth, wears a tiger skin, is armed with many weapons, and is of terrible form. When Himavat trembles with fear at her sight, she changes her appearance, presenting herself to him in her beautiful, tranquil, approachable form (11.6773, 214217). The *Mahanirvana-tantra** describes her as drenched in blood from grinding up the world at the time of dissolution; the next verse says that she protects all beings, dispels fear, and grants blessings (13.910).

Many epithets in the *Lalita-sahasranama** emphasize the Devi's* graciousness, and her physical appearance from head to toe is described as surpassingly beautiful (1351). Other names, however, suggest a destructive side to her nature: she who is seated on a throne of five corpses (Pancapretasanasina*, 249), the terrible one (Bhairavi*, 276), she who destroys (Samharini*, 268), she who has flaming tusks (Damstrojjvala*, 488), she who is a great devourer (Mahagrasa*, 752), she who is a great eater (Mahasana*, 753), and she who is wrathful (Pracanda*, 827). The Devi is also often referred to by names that suggest her thirst for intoxicants: she who is drunk with the wine of dates (Varunimadavihvala*, 333), she whose eyes roll about from drinking wine (Madaghur-nitaraktaksi*, 432), and she who is fond of wine (Madhuprita*, 510). Other names suggest that the Devi is mad: she who is mad, or drunk (Matta*, 576), or causes madness or bewilderment; she who bewilders all (Sarvamohini*, 703).

The *Aryastava**, a hymn to the Devi in the *Harivamsa**, similarly juxtaposes the Devi's auspicious and terrible characteristics. She is said to be success itself (*siddhi*), life (*jivanam**), victory (*vijaya**), mercy, nourishment, and many other auspicious things. She is also described as the night of death (Kalaratri*), she who is fond of violence and quarreling (Kalahapriya*), she who is death (Nistha*), and she who is fond of offerings of meat and wine (Suramangsabalipriya*).¹⁸

Before reflecting on the meaning of the juxtaposition of the Devi's auspicious and terrifying aspects, it may be helpful to clarify what the two facets of the Devi are. The Devi's auspicious aspect is manifest in several of the goddesses we have already discussed: Laksmi*, Parvati, Sati*, and Prthivi*. In these and other forms she displays positive roles: fertility, the protection and establishment of dharmic order, cultural creativity, wifely duty, and material abundance. Three other roles are also important in connection with the Devi's auspicious forms: (1) her

role as granter of wisdom, learning, and liberation, (2) her role as the embodiment of female beauty and the exciter of desire, and (3) her role as the source of food and nourishment.

In the *Aryastava* * she is called liberation (*mukti*), she who speaks of the knowledge of *brahman*, and she who is the knowledge of *brahman*.¹⁹ A hymn addressed to the Devi* in the *Mahabharata** calls her liberation and knowledge of *brahman* as well as mother of the *Vedas*.²⁰ Another hymn of the *Mahabharata* calls her intelligence and knowledge and says that she destroys ignorance and all of mankind's fetters.²¹ In the *Lalita-sahasranama** she is called she who is great intelligence (Mahabuddhi*, 223), she whose form is a mass of knowledge (Vijnanabhanarupini*, 253), she who is wisdom itself (Prajnatmika*, 261), she who releases creatures from bondage (Pasupasavimocini*, 354), she who removes darkness (Tamopaha*, 361), intelligence (Mati, 445), she who removes bonds (Bandhamocani*, 546), knowledge (Vidya*, 549), she who is knowledge of the *atman** (Atmavidya*, 583), she who is great and auspicious knowledge (Mahavidya* and Srividya*, 584 and 585), she whose form is the guru (Gurumurti*, 603), she who bestows knowledge (Jnanada*, 643), she who gives salvation (Muktida*, 736), she who bestows heaven and liberation (Svargapavargada*, 764), she whose form is truth, wisdom, and bliss (Satyajnananandarupa*, 791), she who brings peace to people consumed by birth, death, and decrepitude (Janmamrtyujarataptajanavisrantidayini*, 851), she who removes all misfortune (Sarvapadivinivarini*, 913), and she who is the lamp that dispels the darkness of ignorance (Ajnanadhvantadipika*, 993).

In many ways the Devi assumes the role and displays the characteristics of Sarasvati* as the granter of wisdom and learning. She is associated with practical knowledge and civilization in general. The Devi in this aspect is not a goddess revealed in nature but a goddess associated with culture. Her association with spiritual knowledge, wisdom, and liberation also makes the point that the Devi transcends the world she creates, that she not only underlies the world and is its creator but is the means to transcend the world, which is the ultimate spiritual goal in Hinduism.

Many texts extolling the Devi emphasize her extraordinary beauty. It is common for hymns that praise her to describe her physical appearance from head to toe. The *Saundaryalahari**, perhaps the most famous hymn praising the Devi, dotes on each physical detail of her body, devoting verses 4288 to her physical praise. The *Lalita-sahasranama* similarly describes her every feature in names 1351. These texts emphasize the desirability of actually seeing or visualizing the Devi, which is

a redemptive event in itself and is longed for by her devotees. Even though the Devi's *7 devotees never approach her as lovers, almost invariably preferring to come to her in the mood of children, her physical appearance is held to epitomize feminine beauty and to arouse those deities who are associated with her, especially Siva*. She is also often given epithets that identify her with sexual desire, and the hymns that praise her make the point that she reveals herself or is manifest in the sexual attraction of creatures, that she is identified with the power of sexuality. The *Saundaryalahari** says that Kama's* great power, by which he arouses all creatures to sexual desire, was given by a glance of the Devi (verse 6). Her sexually stimulating effect is vividly described in the same text:

A wornout old man, distasteful to the sight,
 sluggish in love's art,
 if he but fall within a side glance from you, there
 run after him by the hundreds,
 with hair ribbons flying loose and clothes slipped from
 their jarlike breasts,
 young women, their girdles violently bursting and their
 garments dropped down.²²

Several names in the *Lalita-sahasranama** stress the Devi's physical beauty or her association with sexual vitality: the beautiful one (Ramya*, 307), loveliness (Kanta*, 329), she who has beautiful eyes (Vamanayana*, 332), she who has beautiful hair (Vamakesi*, 351), she whose form is Rati (Ratirupa*, 315; Rati is the wife of the god Kama*; her name literally means "sexual intercourse"), the one who is desired (Kamya*, 321), she who is filled with the erotic sentiment (Srngararasasampurna*, 376), she whose form is the desire of women (Lolaksikamarupini*, 454), she who causes emotion (Ksobhini*, 466), enchantress (Mohini*, 562), she whose form is sexual desire (Kamarupini*, 796), and she who overflows with desire and pleasure (Kamakelitarangita*, 863).

The Devi's association or identification with life and the rhythms of the physical world is clear in her aspect as instigator of desire. As *prakrti** and *sakti**, the Devi* impels creation forward. In the *Lalita-sahasranama* she is called vitality (Ojovati*, 767), she who gives life (Pranada*, 783), and she whose form is life (Pranarupini*, 784). The immediate, dramatic, forceful expression of this impulse is sexual attraction, which characterizes most created beings and often powerfully dominates human beings. Although the male deity Kama is traditionally given the role of instigator of sexual desire in Hindu mythology, the Devi nonetheless is often

celebrated as manifesting herself wherever sexual desire appears. In the texts that praise her, Kama * acts as her agent and is empowered by her sexual vitality.²³

The Devi's* association with nourishment and food is another of her distinctive characteristics. As she is often identified with the earth itself (she is called Mahi* and Dhara*, "earth," in the *Lalita-sahasranama**, 718 and 955) it is not surprising that the Devi* is also identified with food, which comes from the earth. The *Lalita-sahasranama* calls her she who gives food (Annada*, 669) and nourishment (Pusti*, 444). Texts celebrating the Mahadevi* relate a myth concerning a great drought that resulted in a dreadful famine.²⁴ In desperation the Brahmans approached the Devi and begged her for relief. The Devi obligingly appeared in a form having many eyes. Seeing the pitiful condition of her creatures, she began to weep. She cried for nine nights, causing heavy rains to fall on the earth from her eyes. The rivers again flowed, the lakes and ponds were filled, and life once more returned to the earth in abundance.²⁵ In this manifestation she is called Sataksi* (she who has one hundred eyes), Sakambhari* (she who bestows vegetables), and Annapurna* (she who is full of food). Images of Sataksi show her carrying various kinds of food.²⁶ Images of Annapurna typically show her holding a cooking pot and spoon.²⁷ Her most popular festival in Banaras takes place in the fall and celebrates her role as the sustainer of life. During the Annakuta* (food mountain) festival, a mountain of food is indeed constructed and fills her temple.²⁸ In the spring during a festival that associates her with the sprouting rice, her image and temple are decorated with green rice sprouts.²⁹ Another wellknown epithet of the Devi which emphasizes her nourishing aspect is Jagaddhatri*, which may mean either "she who supports the world" or "world nurse."³⁰

A basic human perception seems to underlie the Devi's association with food. The mysterious power by which apparently lifeless seeds produce vegetation when inserted into the earth impresses itself on people as revealing an awesome, potent presence associated with the solid earth itself. It is natural, furthermore, that this presence be apprehended as a female in whom the same mysterious fertile powers are evident. The earth and the Devi possess an immense reservoir of power that can renourish declining vigor and make it fresh and new. Crops, foodall living things that teem upon the surface of earthare the natural bubblings of the great fertile power that resides in the earth and is identified with the Devi. As *sakti** (power) and *prakrti** (the tendency of nature to specify and multiply), the Devi manifests herself in infinite concrete organisms that in turn feed more complex organisms, and so the continued impulse of life is sustained and maintained by the Devi as food. As food, or as

the giver or source of food, the emphasis is on the Devi's * benign, fructifying aspects. The other side of her nature, however, is that in her bloodthirsty forms she demands to be renourished by blood and ultimately by the lives of all creatures.³¹

Although the Devi's auspicious, benign forms tend to dominate her character, sometimes to the extent that no fierce or destructive aspects appear,³² most texts that celebrate her insist that she possesses fierce or terrible forms that are associated with war, blood, destruction, death, and hunger. The terrible forms of the Devi* often arise in the context of one of her most fundamental protective roles, guardian of the cosmos in the form of a formidable warrior. Sometimes the Devi, in one of her auspicious, gentle forms, will be petitioned to defeat a demon on behalf of the gods. Hearing of the demon's activity, or perhaps simply contemplating the idea of war, the Devi takes on a fierce, terrible form and proceeds to enter into battle.³³ Sometimes her fierce forms only arise once she has actually entered the battle. Having worked herself up, having gotten the taste of blood and death, or provoked by the insults of her enemies, the Devi transforms herself,³⁴ splits herself,³⁵ or multiplies herself³⁶ into a ferocious goddess or goddesses and tears into her enemies with awful glee.³⁷ Although ostensibly performing a positive function in these scenes, the Devi's terrible forms betray qualities that often threaten the world and suggest dangerous, uncontrollable facets of her character. More often than not the ferocious goddess (or goddesses) loses control. She is described as rending her enemies limb from limb, tearing their flesh with her teeth, and drinking their blood, which then intoxicates her. Thirsting for more blood or dancing drunkenly out of control, she herself becomes a threat to the cosmos and must be tamed or subdued.³⁸ In these instances the terrible forms of the Devi appear to represent her personified wrath, her destructive power intensified, or her loss of temper and control.

The context of combat arouses an aspect of the Devi that delights in the blood lust of battle and is reminiscent of the berserk qualities of warriors by which they undertake bloodcurdling deeds. In this aspect the Devi is dangerous, even to her own allies. She is allconsuming. She lacks finesse. Typically she does not use weapons, such as a bow and arrow, spear, or chariot. She uses her own formidable teeth and sharp nails to tear her enemies to pieces. It is not the art of war that delights her in this aspect but the blood lust of battle. It is the clamor, tumult, terror, and frenzy of the battlefield which please and excite her and summon her into existence in the first place. She is the distillation of the furious, raw, savage power and lust of the frenzied warrior, and as such she is truly a terrible being, feared by her enemies, to be sure, but a threat to the overall stability of the world itself.

Many fierce, terrible goddesses also exist outside the battle context. They are not related in any clear way to the Mahadevi's * central role as cosmic guardian, but they are definitely affirmed to be aspects of her being. Besides their terrible appearances and fierce natures, their most distinctive characteristic is often their taste for blood. There are many examples from all over India of goddesses who are worshiped with blood sacrifices.³⁹ The tradition of goddesses who are pleased with blood and particularly human blood, often the blood of their most ardent devotees dates back at least to medieval times in Hinduism.⁴⁰ Although human sacrifice is not usually sanctioned in texts extolling the Devi*, there are several indications that human sacrifice was performed in her honor. The *Kalika-purana** devotes a whole chapter to sacrifices acceptable to the Devi and includes human beings as particularly pleasing to her (71.73). A goddess named Kesai Khati (eater of raw flesh) was worshiped in Assam, and sometimes human sacrifices were made to her.⁴¹ The *Manimekalai**, a Tamil epic, describes the temple of a goddess which has an altar surrounded by posts from which human heads are hung.⁴² In Bhavabhuti's *Malatimadhava** a devotee of the goddess Camunda* kidnaps the heroine with the intention of sacrificing her to the goddess.⁴³ The hero of the *Varangacarita** is also kidnapped, in this case by tribal people, to be sacrificed to a forest goddess (13.58).⁴⁴ In the not too distant past the goddess Kamakhya* was offered 140 human heads when her new temple was dedicated.⁴⁵

Iconography and literature contain many examples of people who sacrifice their own blood and pieces of their flesh to goddesses; ritual suicide, usually self-decapitation, is also well documented as an act of devotion to goddesses.⁴⁶ The *Kalika-purana* says that the Devi is satisfied when her devotees offer flesh from near their hearts (71.74 ff.); the *Kumari-tantra** says that one who offers his own blood to the Devi will achieve royalty.⁴⁷ In the *Devi-mahatmya** two devotees of the Devi petition her to grant them boons, and as part of their spiritual exercises they offer their own blood and pieces of their flesh (13.8).

Although to my knowledge there exists no textual sanction for ritual suicide to the Devi, many cases of self-immolation as an act of devotion to goddesses have been noted.⁴⁸ In Ksemendra's* *Brhatkathamajari** a washerman and his brother-in-law cut off their heads in a fit of devotional fervor to the goddess Gauri*. In an inscription dated A.D. 991 from the Kannada area we hear of a loyal subject named Katega who offered his head to the goddess Gundadabbe* to fulfill a vow when the king succeeded in fathering a son.⁴⁹ Four similar scenes from Pallava and early Chola sculpture depict kneeling male devotees offering their heads to a four-armed goddess.⁵⁰ In the Tamil epic *Silappadhikaram** the goddess Aiyai, who is worshipped by hunters, is adorned with snakes, tiger's

teeth, and a leopard skin and is armed with a bow. She receives blood sacrifices and accepts the blood that flows from the severed heads of her devotees. 51

Human sacrifices and selfimmolation to goddesses represent only the extreme aspect of the blood offerings to these deities and were probably never widely practiced. Animal sacrifices, however, are a very common part of the worship of local goddesses throughout India. Goats are sacrificed daily to Kali* at the Kalighat* temple in Calcutta to the present day, and this is nothing unusual in terms of her worship elsewhere in Bengal and India. On her festival day in the autumn in Bengal goats are sacrificed to her at temporary shrines set up all over the state. Similarly, during Durga* Puja* goats and sometimes buffaloes are offered in great numbers to the goddess wherever she is worshiped. An inscription from South India mentions daily offerings of sheep to Camunda*.52 Mariyamman*, the popular village goddess of South India, receives blood offerings at her festivals.53 Indeed, so common is blood sacrifice to goddesses in South India that the practice has been singled out as one of the characteristic aspects of local worship of goddesses in the South: "The village deities are almost universally *worshiped with animal sacrifices*. Buffaloes, sheep, goats, pigs, and fowls are freely offered to them, sometimes in thousands."54

The centrality of blood offerings to goddesses is all the more remarkable in light of the emphasis in much of the Hindu tradition, both Brahmanic and popular, on *ahimsa**, "noninjury." Despite the insistence on noninjury as an ethic to be followed by all Hindus (except where their traditional occupations make this impossible), and despite outspoken criticism of animal sacrifice by influential Hindu figures in recent times,55 goddesses throughout India continue to receive blood offerings. It seems clear that the practice of offering goddesses animal (and sometimes human) sacrifices is extremely ancient56 and also central to the meaning and logic of their worship. In the eyes of their devotees these goddesses, usually fierce in nature, need or demand blood and will not bless their devotees unless they receive blood from them. As in the case of Kali discussed in chapter 8, the underlying intuition or perception in these cults seems to be that these goddesses, who are associated with fertility, must be periodically renourished. In order to give life, they must receive life back in the form of blood sacrifices.

In addition to being associated with battle and blood sacrifice, the terrible forms of the Mahadevi* (or those terrible goddesses who are incorporated into Mahadevi mythology) are often associated with destruction, death, and hunger. Their untamed, wild behavior threatens cosmic stability. In Somadeva's *Yasastilaka** the goddess Candamari* is described as follows:

The impetuous movements of the goddess are such that the waters of the ocean are splashed by the heavy impact of her feet; the moon (on her forehead) is terrified by the horrid mass of her matted hair, entwined with madly excited serpents; while the bells of her club ring out as the human skulls, swaying at her side, move to and fro; and the mountains are laid low by her massive hands as she vehemently waves them in an outburst of joy at the destruction of demons. 57

A hymn of praise to the goddess Camunda* in Bhavabhuti's* *Malatimadhava** describes her as dancing so wildly that she threatens to destroy the world. She has a gaping mouth, wears a garland of skulls that laugh and terrify the worlds, is covered with snakes, showers flames from her eyes that destroy the worlds, and is surrounded by fiends and goblins.58 In Ratnakara's *Haravijaya* the goddess Camunda does a dance that destroys the world. As she dances she plays a musical instrument whose shaft is Mount Meru, whose string is the cosmic serpent Sesa*, and whose gourd is the crescent moon. She tunes this great instrument during the deluge that destroys the world and then plays it during the night of the end of the world.59

Appropriate to the wild, destructive natures of these goddesses is the association with death and places of death. The *Manasara-silpa-sastra**, a text on architecture, specifies that temples to Kali* should be built far from villages and towns, near cremation grounds (9.289). In Tantric worship of Kali it is not uncommon for texts to recommend confronting her in cremation grounds, which are well known as one of her favorite haunts.60 Camunda is also typically described as haunting cremation grounds. In the *Malatimadhava* of Bhavabhuti* a devotee of Camunda propitiates her in a temple adjacent to a cremation ground.61 A South Indian image of Camunda is described as follows: "She holds a skullmace (*khattvanga**), a snake, a wine cup (*modakabhanda**) in her different hands. She has a third eye and below her is a jackal gnawing at the left hip of a corpse lying on the floor."62 The goddess Tripura Bhairavi* is described in the *Kalika-purana** as wearing red clothes and as having four arms, a red complexion, and a dazzling appearance. She stands on a corpse and wears garlands of skulls on her head and around her neck and waist. Her eyes show she has been drinking liquor (74.9094). The goddess Sivaduti* is similarly described in the *Kalika-purana*. Her teeth are red, her hair is matted, and she wears skulls as a garland, snakes as ornaments, and a panther skin as clothing. She places a foot on a corpse and the other on a jackal and is surrounded by thousands of jackals (63.104108).63 The goddess Carmamunda* is also said to have a fearful form. She is black, fond of meat and wine, and surrounded by ghosts. She is seated on a corpse and holds in her hands a noose and a

pot full of blood. 64 A particularly gruesome description of Candamari* from Somadeva's *Yasastilaka** vividly shows the association of these terrible goddesses with death and cremation grounds.

Garlands of human skulls are her headornaments. Corpses of children are her earornaments. The elbows of dead men are her earrings. Balls made from the bones of dead bodies form her necklaces. The ooziings from the legbones of corpses serve as her cosmetics. Skeletons play the part of toylootuses in her hands. Rivers of wine are the streams wherein she performs her evening ablutions. Charnelfields are her pleasure grounds. The ashes of funeral pyres are her faceornament. Raw hides constitute her robe. The intestines of dead bodies form her girdle. The bosoms of dead men are her dancing floor. She plays with heads of goats as with balls. Her watersports take place in lakes of blood. The blazing fires of cremationgrounds serve as her votive lamps at night. Human skulls are the vessels she eats from. Her greatest pleasure is when living creatures of all kinds are sacrificed at her altar.65

These goddesses are also often described as lean, skinny, or emaciated. They are also said to have prominent teeth or fangs. There is a clear emphasis on these goddesses' everhungry and allconsuming nature. They rip and tear their way through the world, seeking to satisfy a primordial hunger that is the opposite of the everfruitful forms of the Mahadevi*, which perpetually give birth to all creatures. Some of the terrible goddesses have epithets that emphasize their hungry natures. In the *Devi-mahatmya** the Devi* mentions one of her incarnations named Raktadantika* (the redtoothed one) (11.42). The goddess Dantura* (she having fangs) is described as having "bare canine teeth, rounded eyes, ghastly smile, emaciated body, lean and pendulous breasts, sunken belly and peculiar sitting posture."66 An image of Camunda* adorning a temple in Bubhanesvar* is so emaciated in appearance that her bones are all clearly visible. Her eyes pop from her head, her breasts are withered, and her expression is fierce.67 Another awesome image of Camunda is found at Jajpur in Orissa. She is described in this sculpture as follows:

She has four arms, emaciated body and shrunken belly showing the protruding ribs and veins, skullgarland (*mundamala**), her corpse seat (*pretasana** . . .), bare teeth and sunken eyes with round projecting eyeballs, bald head with flames issuing from it. She holds in her back hands a *kartr* (chopper) and a *sula**, while her front right and left ones hold a *kapala** and a *munda** (human head) respectively; the skull on the armlet on

her right hand has a grinning smile on its face, while the severed head in her left hand has a lifelike expression. 68

The juxtaposition of auspicious and terrible qualities in most portraits of the Mahadevi* underlines one of her central features. She *is* the world in the form of a great being. The world, as perceived through the person of the Devi*, is a living organism. In her auspicious forms the Devi represents the world as unceasingly fruitful, full of awesome energy that pervades and nourishes all creatures. In her aspect as mother she is understood to dote on her children, to spoil them with all the bounties at her disposal. As food she gives herself to be eaten by her creatures, and as the essence of sexual desire she prompts all creatures to take part in the great dance of continued creation and life.

The mother herself, however, must also be nourished. She must eat, for her energy is not inexhaustible. If she were only to give birth to and nourish her creatures she would soon grow weak, and creation would cease. This seems to be the perception underlying the insistence in Mahadevi theology that she possesses a variety of terrible manifestations. The Mahadevi needs to be renourished as continually as she gives birth. Her awesome creative power must be matched by her awesome hunger. The intuition here seems to be that there is only so much energy in the world, there is only so much energy possessed by the Mahadevi. If she gives her fertile power at one point, she must be renourished at another point. The world in Mahadevi theology is perceived as a steady-state system.

In this view . . . any gain somewhere is a loss somewhere else, every loss a gain. The world is a body, and just as its blood must continually flow both out and back, so at every cell in that body the lifeblood must continually both arrive and depart. Any local blockage and eventually something has to give. The world is an economy, an integrated system of ongoing exchanges, and excessive hoarding anywhere in the system, by either producers or consumers, creates trouble and again, eventually something has to give. In such a system there is, over the long run, no getting without giving.69

The Mahadevi gives unstintingly. She is indeed life itself. But she must receive back unstintingly too. She is also death itself, which is always necessary to sustain life. The Devi's* auspicious and ferocious aspects, her associations with life on the one hand and with death on the other, do not teach primarily that she is a twofaced, ambivalent being who is unpredictable in her activity and nature. Her two facets are clearly interrelated; indeed, each facet demands the existence of the other.

Insofar as the Devi * is this world, she reveals a basic truth that is at the very heart of things: namely, that life, metabolism, nourishment necessitate continual massive killing and death. Food that sustains life is only procured through death and killing. Life and death constitute a process of giving and getting, a process through which the energy of the Mahadevi* is continuously recycled.

10

The Matrkas *

The Early History of the Matrkas

Certain groups of goddesses occupy an important place in the Hindu perception of the divine feminine. A band of divinities known simply as the Matrkas*, "mothers," is among the most significant groups of goddesses. Early references to the Matrkas date to around the first century A.D., but they rarely specify their number; the implication in some passages is that they are innumerable. The goddesses are only mentioned as a group, and it is as a group that they function and are characterized in almost all references throughout the tradition. In most early references the Matrkas have inauspicious qualities and are often described as dangerous. In the medieval period their number and names become more standardized. They are usually said to number seven, although some texts mention eight or sixteen. In this period the Matrkas also take on names and characteristics that associate them with important male gods in the Hindu pantheon. They also come to play a protective role visàvis the world in later mythology, although some of their early inauspicious, wild characteristics tend to persist in these accounts.

Although some scholars have sought to demonstrate that the Matrkas were known in Vedic literature,¹ the earliest clear descriptions of a group of goddesses known as Matrkas appear in the *Mahabharata**. The sections in which these references occur do not belong to the earliest layers of the epic and probably date to around the first century A.D. Several groups of female beings are called Matrkas in the *Mahabharata*. The Vanaparva mentions a group of goddesses called the mothers of the world (215.16). They are sent by Indra to kill the youth Karttikeya* shortly after his birth. When they approach the child, however, their breasts ooze milk, and they ask him to adopt them as his mothers (215.18). Two of these goddesses are described. One is said to have been

born of anger and to carry a spike in her hand. The other is said to be bad tempered, of red complexion, the daughter of the sea, and to live on blood. Although only these two goddesses are described, it seems likely that the others (the text does not specify how many there are) are also characterized by inauspicious qualities and habits (215.2122).

In a subsequent episode in the story of Karttikeyas * birth, a host of ferocious and terrifying goddesses are born from the child when Indra strikes him with his thunderbolt. Among this host of fierce goddesses are Kaki*, Halima*, Malini*, Brhali*, Arya*, Palala*, and Vaimitra*. Although Karttikeya* adopts them as his mothers and divides them into *siva** and *asiva** spirits, good and evil spirits, they are collectively characterized as stealing children.²

The dangerous nature of the Matrkas* is elaborated and underlined later in the narrative of Karttikeya. The wives of six sages, who have been unjustly accused of having been Karttikeya's real mothers and consequently have been divorced by their husbands for being adulterous, come to Karttikeya and appeal to him to adopt them as his mothers. As a group they are called the Mahamatrkas* (great mothers). He agrees to become their adopted son and then asks them if there is anything else they wish. They make two requests. The first is to be recognized and worshiped as great goddesses throughout the world. The second request is to live off the children of men because they themselves have been divorced and therefore cheated of the possibility of having their own children. Karttikeya is reluctant to allow these women to destroy children and says he finds it painful to grant their request. He asks them to protect children instead of harming them, and they agree. In the closing lines of his speech to them, however, as he gives them their functional mandate, he says to them: "In your various forms may you torment children until they reach sixteen years old. I grant you an imperishable, violent nature. You shall live happily with that (nature) worshiped by all."³

Another list of female spirits is mentioned in the following episode of the story. Ten spirits are named, and all of them serve inauspicious functions or are described in fierce terms. They are Vinata*, Putana*, Raksasi*, Aditi (or Revati), Diti, Surabhi, Sarama*, Kadru*, Lohitayani, and Arya. All but two of these goddesses (Vinata and Lohitayani) devour or afflict children or pregnant women. They like flesh, drink strong liquor, and lurk in the confinement chamber (where birth takes place) for the first ten days of a child's life. The text repeats the idea that these beings afflict children until the age of sixteen, whereafter they act as positive influences.⁴

Chapter 45 of the Salyaparva* of the *Mahabharata** tells of the eleva-

tion of Karttikeya * to supreme command of the divine army. In keeping with the description of the Matrkas* from the Vanaparva is a description of a host of female beings (ninetytwo names are given, but the text says there are many more besides those actually named) who are said to be among Karttikeyas* hosts when he confronts the demon armies in battle. As a group this host of Matrkas is characterized in different ways, and although some are said to be lovely of form, cheerful, fair of skin, and youthful, they are generally characterized by inauspicious qualities. They have long nails, large teeth, and protruding lips; they inspire their foes with terror; they are like Indra in battle; they live in trees, at crossroads, in caves, on mountains, at springs, in burning grounds; and they speak a variety of languages. Some of them are dark.

Most references in the *Mahabharata** to groups of divinities called Matrkas make it clear that these goddesses were understood to be dangerous. Their physical descriptions emphasize their fearsome natures, and their behavior is consistently said to be violent. Although they eventually end up serving Karttikeya in one way or another, as his mothers or as his allies in battle, their initial task in the Vanaparva is to kill him. In fact, one of the main points emphasized in the association of Karttikeya with the Matrkas is the danger that they represent to newborn children. The infant Karttikeya is particularly vulnerable to these beings. The Matrkas are most attracted to children and express their wrathful, dangerous natures primarily against children. Although Karttikeya is portrayed as transforming these goddesses into benign presences, indeed, into mothers who protect infants, the transformation is sometimes unconvincing, for example, when he refuses the request of the sages' wives to destroy children but then commands them a few verses later to torment children until the age of sixteen (219.2223).

Goddesses who are inimical to children are found elsewhere in the Indian religious traditions. The goddess Hariti*, who is mentioned in several Buddhist sources, was well known in the Magadha area of North India, where the Buddha lived and preached. She is described as stealing children from the people of Rajagrha* and feeding herself and her many sons on them. Her name literally means "she who steals." The Buddha transformed her into a benign being and promised her that pious people in the future would worship her and make images of her and her children in their homes.⁵

A demon goddess named Jara* is described in the Sabha-parva* of the *Mahabharata* (16.4017.5). When two sisters each give birth to half a child, they abandon the deformed creatures at a crossroads. Jara, who feeds on flesh and blood, takes the children away. Inadvertently, however, she combines the two infants into a whole being. She gives the

whole child to the king of the area, and in gratitude he orders that she be worshiped throughout the region at a great festival in her honor.

The demoness Putana *, who is actually named in one of the lists of the Matrkas* in the *Mahabharata**, where she is described as a stalker of the night and evil in her ghastly shape,⁶ seeks to kill the infant Krsna* by poisoning her breasts and then asking Krsna's* mother if she might suckle the child. She disguises herself as an attractive woman, but when Krsna sucks the life from her and she dies, she is revealed in her true form as an ugly hag.⁷

The goddess Jyestha*, although not specifically said to harass children, may well have been another goddess of this type. She is described as having "large pendulous breasts descending as far as her navel, with a flabby belly, thick thighs, raised nose, hanging lower lip, and is in colour as ink."⁸ According to the *Linga-purana** she is born when the gods and demons churn the ocean of nectar to obtain immortality. She is given as a wife to the sage Dussaha, who soon discovers that his unattractive wife cannot bear the sound or sight of any kind of pious activity. When he complains to Visnu*, Visnu tells Dussaha to go with his wife only to places where inauspicious things occur, hence Jyesthas* popular epithet Alaksmi*, "she who is inauspicious." Among places specifically mentioned where she should reside are homes where family members quarrel and where the elders eat food while disregarding the hunger of their children (2.6). Eventually Jyestha is abandoned by her husband. She complains to Visnu that she cannot sustain herself without a husband. He dictates that she will be sustained by offerings from women (2.6.8387). Although the text does not say so, it is probably to be understood that Jyestha will not enter the homes of those who propitiate her.

Behind childafflicting goddesses such as the Matrkas is probably the belief that women who die childless or in childbirth linger on as inimical spirits who are jealous of other women and their children and whose jealousy is appeased by stealing or harming their children.⁹ Worship of the Matrkas is aimed primarily at keeping them away. Not referring to one's children as beautiful or attractive and marking children with collyrium to hide their beauty are practices probably related to keeping these goddesses from noticing one's children lest their jealousy be aroused and they harm the children. To make much of one's children might attract the Matrkas' attention and risk incurring their dread afflictions.

Despite the name Matrkas, then, and despite the fact that Hindu iconography usually shows them holding small children, early in their history they represent inimical spirits who are particularly attracted to

small children. Although they, and goddesses like them, are described as being thwarted and even transformed in nature by such powerful heroes as Karttikeya * and the Buddha, in fact the Matrkas* continue to threaten children and must be worshiped to forestall their afflictions.

The references to the Matrkas in the *Mahabharata** also make it clear that they were initially associated with non-Aryan*, or at least nonBrahmanic, traditions. They are said to speak a variety of languages, to be dark, and to live in peripheral areas such as mountains and caves.¹⁰ Their association with Karttikeya in the epic, and later with Siva*, reinforces this point. Karttikeya is a deity who only enters the Brahmanic tradition at the time of the epic, and Siva is well known as possessing many nonBrahmanic attributes and tendencies.¹¹

It is hard to resist the conclusion that the groups of goddesses called Matrkas in the *Mahabharata* represent the many village goddesses throughout India who are widely worshiped by the common people and who are often associated with disease or the prevention of diseases, especially those that afflict children. Such deities are not found in the Vedic pantheon but are probably indigenous to a nonBrahmanic, if not pre-Aryan*, religious universe. The Brahman editors of the *Mahabharata* probably apprehended such goddesses with considerable suspicion. The epic does not yet admit a theology or mythology in which goddesses play a central part, and the Matrkas are depicted as dangerous, often malevolent, and are associated with a divine newcomer (Karttikeya) and peripheral geographical places. Although the Matrkas probably are grounded in villagegoddess cults that are central to the majority of common folk in India, the epic is suspicious of their powers and tends to emphasize their inauspicious aspects and peripheral associations.¹²

The Matrkas* in the Later Tradition

The popularity of the Matrkas in the postepic period (after A.D. 400) is attested by the many casual references to them in literary works. The *Natya-sastra** recommends that the Matrkas be worshiped prior to setting up the theater and stage for dance performances (13.66).¹³ Both the *Carudatta** of Bhasa* and the *Mrcchakatika** of Sudraka* refer to offerings made to the Matrkas at crossroads.¹⁴ The *Harsacarita** of Banabhata* mentions an ascetic who dwells at an old *matr-grha**, a "house (or temple) of the Mothers," where young nobles perform rites on behalf of the king's health. "There young nobles were burning themselves with lamps to propitiate the Mothers."¹⁵ In the *Kadambari** the queen Vilasavati* wishes to have a son. She performs a variety of rites and resorts to

a nearby shrine to the Matrkas *, "in whom faith was displayed by the people." 16 The many literary references to the Matrkas in the postepic period are echoed by their numerous images and by the many inscriptions that mention them and their temples. 17

The number and names of the Matrkas become increasingly standardized in the postepic period until a moreorless standard list of seven goddesses begins to become synonymous with the Matrkas. The appearance of these seven goddesses is quite modified from the Matrkas of the epic. In the medieval period they are patterned (at least in appearance) on male deities of the Hindu pantheon. Furthermore, they are usually portrayed in mythology as combating demons who threaten the gods or the stability of the cosmos. Thus, in some ways, the Matrkas seem to have been Brahmanized and domesticated.

Perhaps the bestknown mythological account of the Matrkas in the medieval period is found in the third episode of the *Devi-mahatmya**. There the demons Sumbha* and Nisumbha*, who have usurped the gods from their positions, are confronted in battle by the Devi*. When the demon armies approach her, the male gods, who are watching from the sidelines, create *saktis**, female counterparts of themselves, to help the Devi on the battlefield. Seven such *saktis* are created, and in appearance they closely resemble the male gods from whom they are said to arise: Brahmani*, created from the god Brahma*, holds a rosary and water pot; Mahesvari*, created from Siva*, is seated on a bull, holds a trident, wears serpent bracelets, and is adorned with the crescent moon; Kaumari*, created from Karttikeya*, rides a peacock and holds a spear; Vaisnavi*, created from Visnu*, is seated on Garuda and holds a conch, *cakra* (discus), mace, bow, and sword; Varahi*, created from the boar *avatara** of Visnu, has the form of a boar; Narasimhi*, created from the manlion *avatara* of Visnu, has the form of a womanlion and throws the stars into disarray with the shaking of her lion's mane; and Aindri*, created from the god Indra, holds a thunderbolt and is seated on an elephant (8.1120). Charging into the fray, this group of *saktis*, collectively called the Matrkas (8.38, 44, 49, 62), tears into the demon army and begins to slaughter them. Along with Kali* (who is also called Camunda*), Sivaduti* (a goddess formed from the *sakti** of the Devi), and the Devi herself, the Matrkas devastate the demons. After the battle the Matrkas dance, drunk with the blood of their victims (8.62). This description of the Matrkas is repeated with very little variation in the *Devi-bhagavata-purana** (5.2829) and the *Vamana-purana** (30).

Despite the names, appearances, and origins of the Matrkas in the *Devi-mahatmya* and *Devi-bhagavata-purana* accounts, it seems clear that they are to be understood not primarily as the divine consorts or the

Image not available

Varahi *, one of the Matrkas*. Thirteenth or fourteenth century
A.D. Pratapaditya Pal, Nepal, Where the Gods are Young (New York: Asia
Society, 1975), fig. 70, p. 102. Reprinted by permission of Eric D. Morse.

saktis * of the male deities but rather as extensions or forms of the Devi* herself. Indeed, in the later episode of the *Devi-mahatmya**, after Nisumbha* has been killed by the Devi and her female cohorts, the demon Sumbha* challenges the Devi to single combat, in effect complaining about her many female allies. In response to his challenge, she absorbs into herself all the Matrkas*. She refers to them as just so many of her different forms (10.2.5). In the *Vamana-purana** account of the Matrka episode the situation is even clearer. There the Matrkas arise from the different parts of the Devis* body and not from the male gods at all, although they are described and named after the male deities (30.39).

The different versions of this episode do not stress the individuality of the seven goddesses. By and large the seven act as a group and share the same characteristics: they fight ferociously and get drunk on blood. In the *Matsya-purana** the Matrkas appear in a slightly different context. They are created by Siva* to combat the demon Andhaka, who has the ability to duplicate himself from each drop of blood that spills from him when he is wounded.¹⁸ The Matrkas are instructed to drink up his blood and thus defeat him. This they gladly agree to do. Although the traditional seven Matrkas are mentioned in the text at the head of the list of goddesses, roughly 190 names are given, along with the comment that there are many others.¹⁹ It is difficult to escape the conclusion that the *Purana** writers are primarily describing a group of goddesses whose individual members are not significant in themselves.²⁰ This is also quite in keeping with references to the Matrkas in the *Mahabharata**. By restricting their number and relating them to male gods, the *Purana* writers have to some extent brought the Matrkas into the mainstream literary and mythological tradition.

The *Purana* writers have also sought to modify the inimical character of the Matrkas by describing their primary role as the Devi's (or Siva's*) assistants in combating demons. In the Puranic* accounts they are seen as primarily fierce, effective warriors who protect the stability of the world by combating demons. They are understood as extensions of the Devi in her role as guardian of the cosmic order. The wild, inimical, bloodthirsty character of the Matrkas is not entirely hidden in these accounts, however, and probably testifies to the fact that they have not changed much over the centuries and are in some ways the same dangerous beings mentioned in the *Mahabharata*. Their taste for blood, for instance, remains in some of the Puranic accounts. The *Devi-mahatmya* also describes the Matrkas as getting drunk on the blood of their victims (8.62).

Similarly, in the *Matsya-purana* account the Matrkas, at Siva's command, defeat Andhaka. They are described as terrible in appearance and as drinking the blood of the demons they slay. After the battle the

Matrkas * announce that they will now proceed to devour all the gods, demons, and people of the world. Siva* commands them not to do this, but they ignore him and begin a rampage of destruction. Siva summons Narasimha*, Visnu's* manlion *avatara**, who creates a host of benign goddesses; they in turn calm down the terrible Matrkas and stop their destruction. At the end of the episode it is said that Siva's* own terrible form as Bhairava is enshrined with the images of the Matrkas at the place where this battle took place (179.890).

In the *Varaha-purana** the Devi*, who is called Vaisnavi* in this account of the creation of the Matrkas, is doing asceticism on Mount Mandara. At one point she loses her concentration; from her distracted mind are created several beautiful female attendants, who later become the Devis* helpmates on the battlefield when she fights demons. Although the Matrkas are described as lovely in this account, it is important to note that they are born when the Devi loses control of her concentration. This suggests the Matrkas' essentially uncontrolled natures. Born from lack of mental control, they lack control themselves.²¹

The malevolent nature of the Matrkas also seems clear in several passages from the *Bhagavata-purana**. When the races and species of beings created by Visnu* are listed, the Matrkas are mentioned with the *uragas*, *raksasas**, *pisacas**, *bhutas**, and other dangerous kinds of beings (2.10.3739).²² It is difficult not to suppose that the Matrkas, like these other beings, are terrible in character. Elsewhere in the *Bhagavata-purana** they are mentioned with the *bhutas*, *dakinis**, *vetalas**, *pretas*, *pisacas*, and other malign beings as part of Siva's army (10.63.6 ff.).²³ Again, from the context, it appears certain that the Matrkas are understood as a dangerous group of goddesses. When Krsna* kills the demoness Putana*, who has tried to kill the baby god by suckling him with her poisoned nipples, the cowherd women carry out protective rites to keep Krsna safe from future harm. At the end of their rituals, they say: "May the Dakinis*, the Jatadharis*, . . . the goblins, the Matr*s, the Pisacas*, . . . etc. [and] other evil omens and calamities dreamt of, the slayers of the old and the young, and these and other evil spirits be destroyed, being terrified at the recital of the name of Visnu" (10.6.2729).²⁴

In the *Visnudharmottara-purana**, after the Matrkas defeat the demon Andhaka, the text dwells at length on how the evil influences of the Matrkas can be avoided (1.227).²⁵ The *Varaha-purana* relates them to vices or inauspicious emotions: "Yogisvari* is the symbol of lust, Mahesvari* of anger, Vaisnavi* of greed, Kaumari* of attachment, Brahmani* of pride, Aindri* of jealousy, Camunda* of depravity and Varahi* of envy" (17.3337).²⁶

Although the Matrkas * are reduced to seven, eight, or sixteen goddesses, each related to a male deity of the Hindu pantheon, and although they are made to serve a role supportive of the dharmic order in many Puranic* accounts, throughout their history they remain primarily a group of goddesses, unspecified in number, who are inimical in nature and particularly dangerous to children. None of the Matrkas is significant by herself, either as an independent goddess or as the spouse or *sakti** of her male counterpart.²⁷ The restriction of the number of Matrkas and their association with male deities, then, is artificial and to some extent arbitrary. The Matrkas are primarily an independent group of goddesses who have violent natures, are associated with diseases, and are particularly prone to afflict small children. Many local or village goddesses are also associated with diseases that afflict children, are routinely served with blood, and are held to have violent natures. It is quite likely that the Matrkas of the Hindu literary tradition beginning with the *Mahabharata** can be identified with those goddesses, who are so central to the religious life of most Hindu villagers.²⁸

11

Tara *, Chinnamasta*, and the Mahavidyas*

The Mahavidyas

The Mahavidyas (great revelations or manifestations) are a group of ten goddesses who are mentioned rather late in the Hindu literary tradition. Although some of the goddesses in this group are individually important and date back to a much earlier time (Kali*, for example), the group as a whole seems to be a medieval iconographic and mythological expression of an aspect of Mahadevi* theology. An important point in Mahadevi theology is the Devis* tendency to display or manifest herself in a great variety of forms.¹ Many myths about the Devi* describe her as producing goddesses from different parts of her body,² and she often announces to her petitioners that she assumes different forms at different times in order to maintain cosmic stability.³ All ten of the Mahavidyas are often depicted in goddess temples throughout India today. They seem to be fairly well known to many Hindus. They do not seem to be individually revered when shown as a group but rather seem to represent a common way of expressing the idea that the particular goddess who dwells in the temple takes many forms.

The ten Mahavidyas, at least in part, are probably a Sakta* version of the central Vaisnava* idea of Visnu's* ten *avatars**, who appear from time to time to maintain the order of dharma. Indeed, the *Guhyatiguhya-tantra** gives a list of the Mahavidyas and identifies each one with an *avatara** of Visnu*, stating that the *avatars* of Visnu arose initially from the different Mahavidyas. Kali* is said to have become Krsna*, Chinnamasta* to have become Narasimha*, and so on.⁴ The Devi, like Visnu, is understood in Mahadevi theology to be the creator and maintainer of cosmic order. Indeed, one might argue that the authors of some Sakta texts extolling the Devi have patterned her quite selfconsciously on Visnu himself.⁵ The ten Mahavidyas, however, are more than a Sakta version of the Vaisnava* ten

avataras *, or at least the Mahavidyas* differ significantly from the *avataras* in appearance and function.

The origin of the ten Mahavidyas in Hindu mythology takes place in the context of the story of Sati* and Siva*. Satis* father, Daksa*, decides to perform a great sacrifice and invites all the inhabitants of the heavenly spheres to attend. The only couple he does not invite are Siva and Sati. Daksa does not like his son-in-law because of Siva's* uncivilized habits and disheveled appearance and so purposely neglects to invite him to the sacrifice. Siva is not offended by this social slight, but his wife Sati is greatly insulted and announces to Siva that she will go to the sacrifice to disrupt it. Siva is not pleased to hear this and forbids her to attend the sacrifice. Sati is unable to change Siva's mind and eventually loses her temper. First she assumes a dreadful form,⁶ and then she multiplies herself into ten forms, the Mahavidyas: Kali*, Tara*, Chinnamasta*, Bhuvaneshvari*, Bagala*, Dhumavati*, Kamala*, Matangi*, Sodasi*, and Bhairavi*.⁷

The ten forms that Sati takes are not consistently described, and some of the forms, such as Kali and Tara, have several manifestations. The following descriptions, however, are typical of the way in which each of the forms is described.

Kali has a fierce countenance, is naked, dwells in the cremation ground, holds a severed head and a bloodied cleaver, has disheveled hair, and sports a garland of decapitated heads and a girdle of severed arms.⁸

When Tara is included in the list of Mahavidyas, she is described as nearly identical with Kali. Tara is dark, rests her left foot on a corpse, wears a tiger skin and a necklace of severed heads, laughs terribly, has her hair in a single matted braid, stands on a funeral pyre, and is pregnant.⁹

Chinnamasta stands in a cremation ground on the copulating bodies of Kama* and Rati (sometimes Radha* and Krsna*), the god of sexual lust and his wife. She has decapitated herself with a sword, which she holds in one hand. In her other hand she holds a platter bearing her severed head. Three jets of blood spurt from her neck and stream into the mouths of two female attendants and into the mouth of her own severed head.¹⁰

Bhuvaneshvari is said to nourish the three worlds and is described as holding a piece of fruit in one of her four hands. Her breasts are large and ooze milk. She has a bright, light complexion, smiles pleasantly, and holds a goad and a noose.¹¹

Bagala* has the head of a crane, is seated on a throne of jewels, is yellow, and in one hand holds a club with which she beats an enemy while another of her hands is pulling her enemy's tongue.¹²

Dhumavati * has a pale complexion, is tall, and has a stern, unsmiling expression. Dressed as a widow, she wears dirty clothes, her hair is disheveled, she has no teeth, her breasts are long and pendulous, she is afflicted with hunger and thirst, her nose is large and crooked, she has a quarrelsome nature, she holds a winnowing fan, and she rides a crow.13

Kamala* is described as a beautiful woman of golden complexion who is surrounded by elephants pouring pitchers of water over her. She is seated on a lotus and holds two lotuses in her hands. She is in most respects portrayed like the goddess Laksmi*, one of whose epithets, in fact, is Kamala.14

Matangi* is black. Her eyes roll in intoxication, and she reels about like an impassioned elephant.15

Sodasi* is a girl of sixteen with a red complexion. She is shown astride the prone body of Siva*, with whom she is having intercourse. They are on a pedestal made of the gods Brahma*, Visnu*, Rudra, and Indra. Sodasi is identified with Tripurasundari* in some lists of the Mahavidyas*.16

Bhairavi* (also known as Tripura Bhairavi) has a reddish complexion and wears a garland of severed heads, holds a rosary and a book in two of her four hands, and makes the signs of fearlessness and conferring boons with her other two hands. Her breasts are smeared with blood.17 In the *Kalika-purana** Tripura Bhairavi is said to have eyes that roll from intoxication and to stand on a corpse (74.9094).

Siva is frightened by Satis* fearful appearance and the terrible forms that she has assumed, which completely surround him. He gives her permission to go to her father's sacrifice if she will withdraw them. In the *Mahabhagavata-purana** account Sati* takes the form of Kali*, goes to her father's sacrifice, and then kills herself. In this account Daksa* is said to weep at the sight of his daughter in the form of Kali, who is dark, naked, and disheveled (89). In the Madhyakhanda of the *Brhaddharma-purana** Sati assumes her own benign form before going to the sacrifice (67).

The mythological context of the appearance of the Mahavidyas makes it clear that they are meant to be fearsome deities. Even though a few of the goddesses who belong to this group are described as beautiful and unthreatening, for the most part they are formidable and fearsome. Furthermore, the fearsomeness of the goddesses does not seem to be related to upholding the cosmic order.18 They are not described as warriors, and the goddesses mentioned (with the exception of Kali) are not known for playing the roles of warriors. In this respect the Mahavidyas are not mere feminine versions of the Vaisnava* *avatars**, most of whom

appear precisely to defeat demons who threaten the world. In no clear way are the Mahavidyas * said to play the role of guardians of cosmic order. Their primary function in the myth is to frighten Siva* so that Sati* may have her own way. The emphasis is on their terrible appearance, which causes Siva to tremble and attempt to flee.

The Mahavidyas also play the role of asserting Sati's* power as greater than that of Siva. In the context of the myth he is simply no match for her. By means of the Mahavidyas she overpowers him. It is difficult to escape the conclusion that the authors of these myths were trying, at least in part, to assert the superiority of the Devi* over Siva (and by implication other male gods as well). Although the Devi plays the part of the gracious, submissive wife in her form as Sati, willingly submitting herself to her husband Siva, she contains fearsome, independent aspects that easily overwhelm Siva when they do appear. Sati's transformation into a dreadful form, and then into several dreadful forms, dramatically alters the traditional myth of Sati, in which she remains loyal and subordinate to Siva throughout her life. These late versions of the myth show Sati exerting her will over Siva, scaring him into submission when he resists her.

The fearsomeness of these goddesses also seems to be related to the context in which they are propitiated. Most of these deities are known primarily in Tantric literature; even the goddess Kali*, who is well known outside Tantrism, plays an important part in Tantric texts and practices. In the *Brhaddharma-purana** Sati in her dreadful form commands Siva to give mantras and instructions for worshiping the Mahavidyas.¹⁹ In both that account and the *Mahabhagavata-purana** Sati announces that she has appeared in these dreadful forms so that her devotees not only may achieve ultimate release (*moksa**) but may achieve desires and invoke magical powers over others. Both texts specifically mention *marana**, rituals causing the destruction of enemies; *uccatana**, rituals causing a person to stop what he is doing; *ksobhana**, rituals causing shaking and emotional disturbance; *mohana*, rituals causing infatuation, loss of consciousness, or delusion; *dravana**, rituals causing people to flee; *jrbhavana**, rituals causing people to yawn or become slack; and *stambhana*, rituals causing people to become paralyzed.²⁰ The specific powers are not related to specific goddesses in the texts; it seems that these powers are associated with the goddesses' fearsome aspects and terrifying powers in general. Just as the appearance of the Mahavidyas causes Siva to be overcome by these various emotions, so these goddesses will subdue, defeat, or terrify the enemies of the adept or devotee who invokes them.

Although the Mahavidyas act primarily as a group in the Puranic*

myths, terrifying Siva * together, three of the Mahavidyas* are important individually: Kali*, Tara*, and Chinnamasta*. Kali, who is almost always mentioned first in lists of the Mahavidyas, has an ancient history in the Hindu tradition and is an important goddess in many parts of India. Her association with the Mahavidyas, particularly as the first in the list of ten, sets the tone for the rest of the goddesses, who for the most part are fearsome beings. Kali's* appearance in this myth is typical of her appearance elsewhere. She appears as Satis* personified wrath, just as in other myths she appears as the personified wrath of goddesses such as Durga* and Parvati*.21

Tara*

The goddess Tara does not figure prominently in the Hindu tradition. Her place in Tibetan Buddhism, however, is central and quite ancient. Her appearance in the list of the Mahavidyas can probably be explained, at least in part, by the religious communication that existed for centuries between Tibet and Bengal (where the texts that mention the Mahavidyas were written). Many important Buddhist missionaries to Tibet came from Bengal, and Buddhists continued to be mentioned in Bengali texts until the sixteenth century.²² In the late medieval period, when such texts as the *Mahabhagavata-purana** and the *Brhaddharma-purana** were written, Tara was probably fairly well known in Bengal. Ramprasad* Sen, the eighteenth century Bengali devotee of Kali, often used the name Tara as an epithet of Kali, and it seems clear that for him the two goddesses were more or less the same and that he understood Tara to be as much a Hindu goddess as a Buddhist goddess.

The earliest reference to Tara is found in Subandhu's *Vasavadatta**, which was probably written around the middle of the seventh century. The reference occurs as part of a pun and situates Tara in the context of Buddhist devotion. The passage reads: "The Lady Twilight was seen, devoted to the stars and clad in red sky, as a Buddhist nun (is devoted to Tara and is clad in red garments)."²³ In Buddhist Tantric mythology Tara belongs to the family of the Dhyani* Buddha Amoghasiddhi, but she is also related to the bodhisattva Avalokitesvara*, who is in the family of the Dhyani Buddha Amitabha*. In one account all the creatures lament the thought of Avalokitesvaras* abandoning them as he is about to achieve *nirvana**. Hearing them, Avalokitesvara sheds a tear of compassion for all beings. That tear becomes Tara, who is thus understood to be the essence of the essence of compassion.²⁴ As we shall see, Taras* essential nature in Tibetan Buddhism is that of a compassionate savior

who rescues her devotees from peril. Her inclusion in the Amitabha * family therefore seems fitting, since both Amitabha and Avalokitesvara* are renowned for their great compassion.

Tibetan Buddhists know other legendary or mythological accounts of Taras* origin. One legend identified Tara* with the wives of the first great Tibetan king, Songsten gampo (A.D. 617-650). The king himself is said to have been an incarnation of Avalokitesvara, while his Chinese wife is said to have been an incarnation of Green Tara and his Nepalese wife an incarnation of White Tara (there are several different forms of Tara, as we shall see).²⁵ Another Tibetan legend says that the Tibetan people arose from the union of a monkey and a rock ogress. This legend is ancient and preBuddhist in origin. By the fourteenth century, when Buddhism had come to dominate Tibet, however, the monkey had come to be identified with Avalokitesvara and the rock ogress, despite her lustful nature, with an incarnation of the goddess Tara.²⁶ What is interesting about these Tibetan legends is that they associate Tara with the origins of the Tibetan people and the Tibetan royal line. They affirm that Tara is dear to the Tibetan people in a special way. She is in a historical or legendary sense their queen and mother.²⁷

Historically, the cult of Tara in Tibetan Buddhism dates to the eighth century, that is, to around the time when Buddhism was introduced to Tibet from India. Until the time of Atisa* (eleventh century), however, the worship of Tara does not seem to have been very widespread in Tibet. Atisa is traditionally associated with bringing the cult of Tara to Tibet, and biographical accounts emphasize his many visions of Tara and his special devotion to her. Atisa is credited with having translated a series of Sanskrit texts concerning Tara into Tibetan. The texts were soon circulated as a coherent cycle and came to be known by the name *Cheating Death*.²⁸ Another text that was to become very popular in Tibet was also brought there in the eleventh century. The master Darmadra brought to Tibet and translated the text *Homages to the Twentyone Taras**, which to this day is well known to most Tibetans.²⁹

Despite Tara's many forms and functions it seems clear wherein lies her extraordinary power and appeal. She is approached primarily as a savior, as a being who specializes in spectacular, dramatic appearances when her devotees call on her in dire circumstances. Like Durga*,³⁰ Tara is often said to rescue her devotees from such desperate predicaments as being lost in an impenetrable forest, foundering in a storm at sea, being under threat of imminent execution, or being trapped and bound in prison.³¹ The many folk stories about Tara show her typically appearing at the request of her devotees to dramatically rescue them from the jaws

of certain death. 32 Tara's compassion for suffering beings, then, is revealed primarily in her role as the cheater of death. In this sense her chief blessing to her devotees is a long life, and other stories emphasize that regular worship of Tara brings about longevity.³³ In Tibetan monastic traditions, when novices are initiated into the ceremonies in honor of Tara, the rituals are referred to as an "initiation into life."³⁴ Unlike goddesses who are associated with life as embodiments of fertility, Tara is approached primarily as the one who protects, preserves, and saves life. She is not a fertility goddess (although she does give her blessing in this form from time to time)³⁵ but a greatly compassionate being who cannot tolerate the suffering of her devotees.

Tara's devotees approach her with great love and devotion. Tibetan Tantric Buddhism is in many respects a heroic, fierce religion involving arduous spiritual exercises. Her worship introduces into it a theme of great tenderness. An example of this devotional tenderness is the poem the *Cry of Suffering to Tara* by the lama Lozang tenpe jets'en:

From my heart I bow to the Holy Lady, essence of
compassion,

.....
until I gain the terrace of enlightenment
I pray you grasp me with the iron hook of your
compassion.

From the depths of my inmost heart and bones I
pray to you

.....
think of me a little, show me your smiling face,
loving one! grant me the nectar of your voice.

.....
O holy Tara! you know
everything that I have done,
my happiness and suffering, my good and evil:
then think lovingly of me, my only mother!³⁶

Tara's charm and approachability are evident in her appearance and personality. Although she is often depicted in regal attire, she is usually said to be a girl of sixteen or younger. She is playful, energetic, and possesses a sense of humor. A modern story about her appearance to a young Tibetan couple whom she rescued from starvation describes her as follows:

Presently a bright light fell upon his eyes and, starting up in alarm, he beheld Tara seated negligently on the table, swinging her legs like a child with more energy than she knew what to do with. However, even as he lept up to prostrate himself, her body began to glow with light. The window behind her was dissolved in these rays and, in its place, he saw the peak of a lofty hill covered with lush green grass wherein glittered innumerable points of light as though it were bestrewn with gems. Beyond and stretching to the horizon was an expanse of deep blue water capped by magnificent white waves which, breaking on the shore below, emitted rainbowcolored clouds of spray. These clouds, rising to the hilltop, filled the air with millions upon millions of glittering particles like multicoloured jewels. Meanwhile, the table had become a moon disc resting on a huge and manypetalled lotus, whereon Tara sat, still negligently and with the air of a young girl having fun, but now clad in shining silks and golden ornaments like the daughter of the Emperor of the Sky. She was smiling at him with a mixture of archness and contempt. 37

Although Taras* primary appeal seems to be as the cheater of death, the prolonger of life, and although she is primarily popular as a charming, playful young girl, she does have a variety of forms, some of which are fierce, even terrifying. The *Homages to the Twentyone Taras**, probably her most popular hymn of praise, contains several verses that invoke Tara* in fierce forms.

Homage, Lady who annihilates the heroes of Mara*,
TURE, the terrible lady,
slaying all enemies
by frowning the brows of her lotus face.

.....
Homage, Lady who strikes the earth with her hand,
who pounds upon it with her feet,
shattering the seven underworlds
with the sound of hum* made by her frowning brows.

.....
Homage, Lady who strikes with the feet of TURE,
whose seed is the form of the syllable hum*,
shaking Mount Meru, Mandara*, Kailasa*,
and all the triple world.38

Image not available

Tara *. Eleventh century A.D. Pratapaditya Pal, Nepal, Where the Gods are Young (New York: Asia Society, 1975), fig. 37, p. 55. Reprinted by permission of William H. Wolff.

A particularly fierce form of Tara * is Tara Kurukulla*.39 She is described as follows:

Homage and praise to her
 who stands in the dancing pose
 haughty with furious rage,
 who has a diadem of five skulls,
 who bears a tiger's skin.
 I pay homage to the red one,
 bearing her fangs, whose body is frightful,
 who is adorned with the five signs of ferocity,
 whose necklace is half a hundred human heads,
 who is the conqueress of Mara*.40

Tara Kurukulla's* special power lies in her ability to subjugate and destroy evil spirits or one's personal enemies.41 The rituals in which Kurukulla is invoked involve the goddess's coming to reside in the practitioner himself. The rituals thus require a strong and accomplished adept, for Kurukulla is a potent force. The adept dresses in red garments and visualizes himself taking on the form of the goddess. Then he recites her mantra ten thousand times. Then he makes certain offerings to her and asks her to subjugate the person or demon who is the object of the rituals.

When these preliminaries are complete, when he has firmly grasped the vivid appearance and ego of the goddess, the visualization is ready to be performed. Light radiates forth from a hrih* in the practitioner's heart and places the person to be subjugated, naked and with unbound hair, upon a wind mandala* arisen from yam*: that is, the seed of wind transforms into the round shape symbolic of the air element, and this wind propels forward the person to be subjugated; he is bound around the neck by a noose radiated from the practitioner's Kurukulla's lotus flower, drawn forward by an iron hook stuck into his heart, summoned by the strength of the mantra, and laid down helpless upon his back before the practitioner's feet. If the person to be subjugated is male, the text adds, Kurukulla's iron hook is stuck into his heart; if female it is stuck into her vagina.42

Other fierce forms of Tara include Mahamaya-vijayavahini* Tara,43 Bhimadevi*, who is also called the blue shewolf,44 and Mahaci-

natarā * (also known as Ugratara*) is described in both Buddhist and Hindu sources. She is described in the Buddhist work *Sadhanamala**.

The worshiper should conceive himself as (Mahacina-Tara*) who stands in the Pratyaldha* attitude, and is aweinspiring with a garland of heads hanging from the neck. She is short and has a protruding belly, and her looks are terrible. Her complexion is like that of the blue lotus, and she is threeeyed, onefaced, celestial and laughs horribly. She is in an intensely pleasant mood, stands on a corpse, is decked in ornaments of snakes, has red and round eyes, wears the garments of tigerskin round her loins, is in youthful bloom, is endowed with the five auspicious symbols, and has a protruding tongue. She is most terrible, appears fierce, with bare canine fangs, carries the sword and the Kartri in the two right hands and the Utpala and Kapala* in the two left. Her Jatamukuta* of one coil is brown and fiery and bears the image of Aksobhya* within it.⁴⁵

An almost identical description of Mahacinatarā is given in the *Tantrasara** of Krsnananda* Agamavagisa*, a seventeenthcentury compilation of *dhyana-mantras** written in Bengal. Even though it is a Hindu work, the *Tantrasara* description includes the reference to an image of Aksobhya adorning her crown.⁴⁶

Several other Hindu Tantric texts describe Tara* as fierce, and the goddess's appearance in these texts differs only in a few particulars from Kali's*. Such works as the *Tararahasyavrttika**, the *Rudrayamala**, and the *Tara-tantra** describe Tara as "short of stature, bedecked with ornaments of serpents of various colour, bearing garlands composed of fifty human heads, severed afresh from bodies, and bleeding freely. The *devi* stands with one foot on a dead body . . . in the funeral ground."⁴⁷ Completing Taras* fierce description in the *Tara-tantra*, in which barely any resemblance to the benign Tara of Tibet remains, is her delight in receiving both the blood of sacrificial animals and the blood of her devotees. The devotees' blood, which is to be taken from specified parts of the body such as the forehead, hands, breast, head, or area between the eyebrows, is said to be far more pleasing to the goddess than the blood of an animal victim (5.15). Throughout the text Tara is to be worshiped in the context of lefthanded Tantric rites, in which wine, meat, and illicit sex play an important role.

Tara's association with Kali* in the devotional works of Ramprasad* Sen also makes it clear that the Tara known in Hindu Bengal was a fierce

goddess quite different from the gentle, youthful, playful forms of Tara * so popular in Tibet. I have a contemporary lithograph of the Mahavidyas* that shows Kali* and Tara adjacent to each other and almost identical in appearance. Both are dark, nearly naked, have protruding tongues, hold bloodied cleavers in the upper left hand, have a garland of severed heads (the heads of Kali's* garland are freshly cut, while the heads of Taras* garland are skulls), have disheveled hair, and stand or dance on an identical prone male body (or corpse). Tara's inclusion in the list of Mahavidyas thus does not seem to derive from her essential popularity in Tibetan Buddhism as a gentle, compassionate deity who cheats death. The Hindu Mahavidya* Tara is modeled on Tara's fierce forms such as Kurukulla* and Mahacinatara*.

The Hindu Mahavidya Tara's association with ceremonies that terrify, disable, stultify, and enchant people⁴⁸ immediately brings to mind Tara Kurukulla's* employment in rituals of subjugation in Tibetan Buddhism. Although the ritual context of worship of the Hindu Mahavidyas is not clear, it may well be that these fierce goddesses are utilized in rituals similar to the ones featuring the fierce Tara Kurukulla in Tibet. One of the underlying assumptions of the Tara Kurukulla rituals of subjugation seems to be that if one wishes to exert power over another person, or if one wishes to protect oneself from supernatural beings, the most effective kind of deity one can employ is fierce and terrifying. Such beings as Tara Kurukulla, it seems, dramatically express the aggressive emotions that must accompany rituals of subjugation and also reassure the person seeking protection from equally fierce, hostile demons.

In any case, the effect of the appearance of the Mahavidyas on the great god Siva* is impressive. He is terrified and immediately agrees to what Sati* wishes. He is subjugated by these goddesses in the same way that Tara Kurukulla subjugates enemies when properly invoked.

Chinnamasta*

Chinnamasta, like Tara, is also popular in Tantric and Tibetan Buddhism. In Buddhism she is known as Vajrayogini*. The Buddhist Tantric text, the *Sadhanamala**, describes her as follows:

Vajrayogini . . . carries in her left hand her own head severed by herself with her own Kartri held in her right hand. Her left hand is raised upwards while the right is placed below. She is nude, and her right leg is stretched while the left is bent down. He (the worshipper) should also meditate on the streams of

blood issuing from the severed body as falling into the mouth of the severed head and into the mouths of the two Yoginis * on either side of her.

He (the worshipper) should also conceive the two Yoginis to the left and right . . . , both of whom carry the Kartri in their left and right hands respectively Their left and right legs respectively are stretched forward, while the other legs are bent, and they have disheveled hair. On all sides, between the two Yoginis and in the firmament there is the awful cremation ground.⁴⁹

The Hindu deity Chinnamasta* is similarly depicted. In most Hindu renditions three jets of blood spurt from the cut stump of her neck. One jet streams into the goddess's own mouth, while the other two flow into the mouths of the two flanking *yoginis**. The goddess usually holds her own head on a platter, as if about to make an offering of it. Beneath the goddess the god Kama*, personifying sexual desire, and his wife, Rati, are engaged in sexual intercourse, she usually on top. They are stretched out on a lotus, and the backdrop is often a cremation ground.⁵⁰

Chinnamasta is probably the most dramatic, stunning representation in the Hindu pantheon of the truth that life, sex, and death are part of an interdependent, unified system. The stark contrasts and reversals of what one would normally expect to see in this iconographic scenario—the gruesome decapitation, the copulating couple, the cremation ground, all arranged in a quite delicate, harmonious pattern—jolt the viewer into an awareness of the truth that life feeds on death, is nourished by death, necessitates death, and that the ultimate destiny of sex is to perpetuate more life, which in turn will decay and die in order to feed more life. As arranged in most renditions, the lotus and the copulating couple appear to provide a powerful life force for the goddess, who is standing on the back of the copulating woman. The couple, vigorously participating in the ultimate act of affirming life, convey a strong, insistent, vital urge to the goddess. They pump her with energy, as it were. And at the top, like an overflowing fountain, her blood spurts from her severed neck, the life force leaving her, but streaming into the mouths of her devotees (and into her own mouth) to nourish and sustain them.⁵¹ The cycle is starkly portrayed: life (the lovemaking couple), death (the decapitated goddess), and nourishment (the flanking *yoginis* drinking her blood).

The images of most fierce goddesses, such as Kali*, show the goddess severing the heads of others and demanding their blood as nourishment. The practice of sacrificing one's head to a goddess, usually

Image not available

Chinnamasta *. Contemporary. First published in L'Art du Mithila
(Paris: Les Presses de la Connaissance/Editions sous le Vent, 1985).
Reprinted by permission of Editions sous le Vent.

Durga * or Kali*,⁵² is also often attested in Indian literature and art. The message (or at least one of the messages) is that the goddess, representing the vital forces of the cosmos, needs regular nourishment; sacrificing oneself to her is a way of acknowledging that one is obliged to give life back to her because one has received life from her. These images convey the truth that the goddess is ever hungry and demands blood in order to remain satisfied.

The Chinnamasta* image reverses these images but ultimately teaches the same truth. Chinnamasta is shown not taking or receiving the heads or blood of others but taking her own head and drinking her own blood. She is shown being nourished or sustained not by death (or sacrifice) but by the copulating couple beneath her. She is shown not being fed by her devotees but feeding them with her blood. Chinnamasta, however, does not teach different truths from those conveyed by Kali and Durga*. She simply represents the alternate phase of an everrecurring sequence. The cosmic process, the rhythms of creation and destruction, the universal economy, is a harmonious alternation of giving and taking, of life and death. Kali's* need for blood, or conversely the everfecund, everbountiful giving of goddesses such as Annapurna* or Sataksi*, represents only one aspect of the process of giving and taking. Chinnamasta, in her shocking way, presents both aspects together and in such a way that the viewer can grasp the interconnectedness of the different stages in the process. Chinnamasta takes life and vigor from the copulating couple, then gives it away lavishly by cutting off her own head to feed her devotees. Such is the way of things in a world where life must be sustained by organic matter, where metabolism is maintained only by ingesting the corpses of other beings.

The image of Chinnamasta, like the formula of the ten Mahavidyas* itself, does not seem to be very old. The *Sadhanamala**, containing a description of the headless Vajrayogini*, probably dates to not much later than the twelfth century, and mention of the Hindu ten Mahavidyas is even more recent than that.⁵³ It has been suggested, however, that Chinnamasta may have earlier prototypes in India.⁵⁴ Several examples have been discovered in India of nude goddesses squatting or with their thighs spread to display their sexual organs. These figures, some very ancient, often have their arms raised above their bodies and are headless or faceless. Their headless condition is not the result of subsequent damage but an intentional part of the image. The combination of nudity and headlessness, it has been suggested, suffices to indicate that the Chinnamasta figure may have some roots in this more ancient figure.⁵⁵

These early nude figures, however, are particularly onesided in what they convey. The arresting iconographic feature of these images is their sexual organs, which are openly displayed. If the headlessness of the figures suggests death, it lacks the force of the Chinnamasta * icon. More likely, the headlessness of the nude figures simply focuses attention on their physiology. Although the Chinnamasta image includes an emphasis on sexual vigor, life, and nourishment, the central theme is the shocking selfdecapitation.

Other nude goddess figures have been suggested as possible prototypes of Chinnamasta. One of these is the fierce, disheveled goddess Kotavi*. Kotavi is usually associated with battlefields and is sometimes included among lists of the Matrkas*.⁵⁶ She sometimes is an opponent of Visnu*, and in the *Visnu-purana** (5.3233) and *Bhagavata-purana** (10.63.20) she is described as naked, disheveled, and of such an awful appearance that Visnu has to turn his head away from her lest he become incensed by her. In this myth she tries to protect the demon Banasura*, who is her son in the *Bhagavata-purana* account. Although descriptions of Kotavi emphasize her nudity and her wild appearance, she seems very different in character from Chinnamasta. Her typical haunt is the battlefield, not the cremation ground (although both are places of death), and she seems to be a fierce demoness whose primary role is to terrify or distract enemies during battle. Her character is usually malevolent, while Chinnamasta* character, although fierce perhaps, is not said to be malevolent.

A South Indian hunting goddess called Korravai* is similar in name and character to Kotavi. She is fierce, bloodthirsty, and wild. Again, it has been suggested that she may be another expression of the type of goddess that inspired Chinnamasta.⁵⁷ J. N. Tiwari sums up her nature.

... Korravai was perhaps the earliest and the most widely worshipped goddess of the ancient Dravidian people. She was essentially a goddess of the seminomadic hunting tribes of South India who invoked her for success in cattleraid and appeased her with bloody sacrifices. As presented in the Tamil heroic poems, there is no marked element of fertility in the character of Korravai, who remains primarily a goddess of war and victory.⁵⁸

The Chinnamasta image is striking primarily because her selfdecapitation rivets the viewer's attention. She is not a warrior goddess, and unlike Korravai she does not receive blood sacrifices; rather, she gives her own blood to her devotees. Although Tiwari is to be commended for drawing our attention to the nude, squatting goddesses and

to the naked, fierce goddesses Kotavi * and Korravai*, for each of whom he gives a thorough description from many and differing sources, none of the figures seems to be overwhelmingly similar to Chinnamasta*. There are many goddesses and demonesses in the Hindu tradition who haunt battlefields, are nude, are fierce and bloodthirsty in nature, or have a clear association with fertility. Chinnamasta, however, seems to be the only goddess who decapitates herself in order to nourish her devotees.

Although Chinnamasta is easily recognized by most Hindus and although her image, along with the other Mahavidyas*, is fairly common in goddess temples, she is not popularly worshiped by most Hindus. She is almost always associated with heroic, Tantric religious practice. The only temple dedicated to Chinnamasta that I have been able to locate is in the courtyard of a large Durga* temple in Ramnagar* across the Ganges River from Banaras. The priests at the Durga temple told me that the temple had been established by a Tantric *sadhu** and that the people who worshiped the image were primarily Tantrics in pursuit of *siddhis* or supernatural powers.

12

Goddesses and Sacred Geography

Earth As a Goddess/India As a Goddess

An important aspect of the reverence for the divine feminine in the Hindu tradition is an awe for the sacrality of the land itself and for the Indian subcontinent as a whole. The most ancient expression of this in the Hindu tradition is found in the *Rg-veda* * and its several hymns that praise the goddess Prthivi*. It is clear that the hymns to Prthivi are grounded in reverence for the awesome stability of the earth itself and the apparently inexhaustible fecundity possessed by the earth.¹ When Prthivi is described, characterized, or otherwise praised, the earth itself is usually the object of the hymn. Prthivi is the earth in a literal sense as much as she is a goddess with anthropomorphic characteristics.

An underlying implication of perceiving the earth as a great and powerful goddess is that the world as a whole, the cosmos itself, is to be understood as a great, living being, a cosmic organism. This idea is expressed in the central creation myth of the *Brahmanas**, which feature the deity Prajapati*. The world was created, according to this scenario, when Prajapati undertook great austerities and subsequently released his immense stored-up energy.² This great vigor became the underlying substance of the world, pervading it with life and energy. The aim of Vedic sacrificial ritual in the context of this myth is to reconstitute, replenish, rebuild, or reinvigorate Prajapati by gathering his dispersed energy. By gathering, nurturing, and feeding Agni (who is identified with Prajapati's* released power), the participants in these rites understand that they are renewing Prajapati. Vedic rituals therefore become part of an ongoing cycle in which Prajapati creatively releases his ascetic power³ into the world and is then continually renourished in the sacrificial cult.⁴

The idea of the earth as a personified goddess and the idea that the cosmos as a whole is a living being persist and are central in later Hindu

mythology. Prthivi* continues to be mentioned in medieval mythological texts, and reverence for Bhudevi* (whose name literally means "the goddess who is the earth") becomes an important aspect of Vaisnavite* mythology and iconography. When Bhudevi complains that she is being oppressed by a certain demon, Visnu*, attentive to the welfare of the earth, assumes the appropriate form and rescues the earth from her predicament.⁵ Iconographically it is common to see Visnu flanked by Sri-Laksmi* on one side and Bhudevi on the other.⁶ Bhudevis* primary role in medieval mythology, however, does not seem to be as the underlying, stable, broad ground that supports all creatures or as the source of inexhaustible fertility. These aspects of the earth, expressed in early hymns to Prthivi, are found in other goddesses, such as Sakambhari*, Laksmi*, and the Mahadevi*.⁷ Bhudevi's primary role is that of an injured supplicant who is being oppressed by wicked rulers.⁸

Texts extolling the Mahadevi contain many examples of her identification with the world or the cosmos. The Mahadevi is often identified with *prakrti**, primordial matter or nature (see chapter 9 above).⁹ The stuff of creation, the basic matter of the world, is affirmed to be a divine being. In the *Devi-mahatmya** the world is said to be filled by her (11.5); she is said to constitute every created thing (11.6). In the *Devi-bhagavata-purana** she is said to be present everywhere in the universe, from Brahma* to each blade of grass (1.9.3132). The Devi* herself proclaims to Visnu that everything that is seen is she (1.15.52). At the time of the dissolution the Devi is said to withdraw the world into her womb and then to exist as the seed of the universe until the next creation, when she grows and blossoms forth (3.3.5455). She is said to appear in the form of the universe. As a spider weaves its web, the Devi creates the universe out of her own body (3.4.41; 4.19.10). In the *Lalita-sahasranama** she is called she whose form is all (Sarvamayi*, 203), she whose body is matter (Ksetrasvarupa*, 341), she who is the world (Jadatmika*, 419), she whose womb contains the universe (Visvagarbha*, 637), and she whose form is all existing things (Bhumarupa*, 666). She is also called Mahi* (718) and Dhara* (955), two common names for the earth.

The identification of the Devi with matter, the earth, or the cosmos is often expressed by identifying parts of the world with parts of her body. The *Devi-bhagavata-purana* calls the earth the Devis* loins (5.8.72). The same text speaks of the oceans as her bowels, the mountains as her bones, the rivers as her veins, and the trees as her body hair. The sun and moon are her eyes, and the nether worlds are said to be her hips, legs, and feet (7.33.2141).¹⁰ Somadeva's *Yasastilaka** describes the goddess Aparajita* as having the stars for pearls in her hair, the sun and moon for eyes, the heavenly rivers as her girdle, and Mount Meru as her

Image not available

The goddess Earth. Nineteenth century A.D. National Museum, Bangkok. Mario Bussagli and Calembus Sivaramamurti, 5000 Years of the Art of India (New York: Harry Abrams, 1981), fig. 211, p. 185. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

body. 11 In a Gupta inscription Kumaragupta* is said to rule over the whole earth, whose "marriage-string is the verge of the four oceans; whose large breasts are (the mountains) Sumeru and Kailasa*; [and] whose laughter is the full-blown flowers showered forth from the borders of the woods."12

The image of the earth, or at least of India, as a great goddess in the Gupta inscription is part of a Gupta ideology that was inspired to a great extent by Vaisnava* mythology and theology. The Gupta rulers saw themselves as divine instruments of Visnu*, the cosmic king. Like Visnu they understood themselves as protecting the earth and cosmic stability in general. The boar *avatara** of Visnu, who rescues the earth by diving into the primordial waters where she has been taken by a demon and raising her up on his tusk,13 was particularly popular among the Guptas and probably represented a mythological model that expressed their understanding of their political role.14

The fundamental conviction that the earth itself, or the Indian subcontinent itself, is a goddess, indeed, that she is one's mother, pervades the modern cult of Bharat* Mata* (Mother India), in which all Indians are called sons or children of India and are expected to protect their mother without regard for personal hardship and sacrifice. One of the earliest and probably still the most popular literary expressions of this theme is Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's novel *Anandamath**, written in the late nineteenth century when the Indian independence movement was beginning to become powerful. The novel is set in Bengal in the late eighteenth century during a great famine. The action centers around a conflict between a band of militant Hindu ascetics and the Muslim rulers of Bengal (and eventually their British allies). The ascetics have renounced wealth, prestige, and even their families to devote themselves to the service and freedom of their motherland, Bengal. They are worshipers of Visnu's* man-lion *avatara*, a particularly ferocious aspect of the divine, while at the same time being devoted to the mother, who is worshiped in concrete form in images of Durga* and Kali*.15 In the context of the novel it is clear that it is not Durga herself, or Kali herself, who is the object of reverence on the part of the ascetics (and the author). Kali's* image is interpreted as the present condition of the mother; that is, the mother, under the domination of foreigners, has become naked, poor, and disheveled. Mahendra, the hero of the work, is told as he gazes on her image that the severed arms that adorn her waist as a girdle are the arms of devotees who will have to be sacrificed before the mother can be freed from her foreign yoke.16 For purposes of the novel, Kali's appearancenaked, disheveled, and in disarraybecomes a symbol of the present condition of the motherland: a place of sickness, death, poverty, and exploitation.

The band of ascetics are known as the children, and their battle cry is "hail to the mother" (*bande mataram* *). All of the children have vowed to serve the mother and have sworn not to return to their families until she is saved.¹⁷ When the hero, Mahendra, asks who this mother is, he receives this explicit answer from one of the leaders of the children: " 'We own no other mother,' retorted Bhavananda*; 'they say, 'the mother and the land of birth are higher than heaven.' We think the land of birth to be no other than our mother herself. We have no mother, no father, no brother, no wife, no child, no hearth or home, we have only got the mother.' "¹⁸

elaborates his answer to Mahendra's question by singing a hymn in praise of the mother, which is clearly a hymn of praise to the motherland. This hymn became known as the "Bande Mataram*" and was very popular during the independence movement in India.

Hail thee mother! To thee I bow!
 Who with sweetest water o'erflows
 With dainty fruits is rich and endowed
 And cooling whom the south wind blows;
 Who's green with crops as on her grow;
 To such a mother down I bow!

With silver moon beams smile her nights
 And trees that in her bloom abound
 Adorn her; and her face doth beam
 With sweetest smiles, sweet's her sound!
 Joy and bliss she doth bestow;
 To such a mother down I bow.

Resounding with triumphal shouts
 from seventy million voices bold
 With devotion served by twice
 As many hands that ably hold
 The sharp and shining rapier bold,
 Thou a weakling we are told!

Proud in strength and prowess thou art,
 Redeemer of thy children thou;
 Chastiser of aggressive foes;
 Mother, to thee thy child I bow.

Thou are knowledge, thou my faith,
 Thou my heart and thou my mind.
 Nay more, thou art the vital air
 That moves my body from behind.

Of my hands thou art the strength,
 At my heart devotion thou,
 In each temple and each shrine,
 To thy image it is we bow.

Durga bold who wields her arms
 With half a score of hands,
 The science-goddess, Vani too,
 And Lakshmi who on lotus stands,
 What are they but, mother, thou,
 To thee in all these forms I bow!

To thee! Fortune-giver, that art
 To fault unknown, beyond compare,
 Who dost with sweetest waters flow
 And on thy children in thy care
 Dainty fruits dost rich bestow,
 To thee, mother, to thee I bow!

To thee I bow, that art so green
 And so rich bedecked; with smile
 Thy face doth glow; thou dost sustain
 And hold us still unknown to guile!
 Hail thee mother! To thee I bow! 19

Independent India still cultivates this theme of the motherland as a goddess. The Indian national anthem, composed by Rabindranath Tagore and first sung in 1911 at the Indian National Congress in Calcutta, is in the same vein as Chatterjee's "Bande Mataram*."

Thou art the ruler of the minds of all people,
 Dispenser of India's destiny.
 Thy name rouses the hearts of Punjab, Sind, Gujarat
 and Maratha,
 Of Dravida and Orissa and Bengal.
 It echoes in the hills of Vindhya and Himalayas,
 mingles in the music of Jamuna and Ganges
 and is chanted by the waves of the Indian Sea.
 They pray for thy blessings and sing thy praise.
 The saving of all people waits in thy hand,
 Thou dispenser of India's destiny.
 Victory, victory, victory to thee. 20

Concrete expressions of this reverence for India as a feminine deity are not difficult to find in modern India. In Banaras, the spiritual capital

of Hinduism, there is a temple dedicated to Bharat * Mata*. Inside the temple, in the place where there would ordinarily be an anthropomorphic image of the goddess, there is a large, colored relief map of the Indian subcontinent. It is to this large map that pilgrims show reverence.²¹ Insofar as the nation-state represents, is identified with, or is associated with the land itself, it is due reverence. For the land itself is a sacred, nourishing, redemptive presence to those who are born from it and are nourished by it.

The Sakta* Pithas*

The myth and cult of the Sakta *pithas** is another vivid expression of the Hindu intuition that the Indian subcontinent itself is a goddess. India is covered with sacred places associated with prominent geographical features of the country. Mountains, hills, rivers, caves, and other sites having some geographical or natural peculiarity are often affirmed to possess sacred power or to be places where one may make contact with the divine. These sites are usually called *tirthas**, a term that means a place where one fords a river. The term is significant in regard to sacred places in two senses: (1) it indicates that rivers themselves are often the site of sacred power, and (2) such places are sites where one may cross over from the realm of the profane to the sacred, from the human to the divine, from this world to another world.²² In many cases these sites are associated with deities who are well known in the Hindu tradition and who have an elaborate mythology and cult independent of the sacred site in question. In other cases it seems that the object of sacrality, that which lends the site power, is the place itself and not so much the deity who is associated with the place.²³

While it is difficult to establish historically how a given site has become popular as a sacred place, it seems clear that in many cases an awe or reverence for the geographical place itself was crucial in distinguishing it.²⁴ Arduous pilgrimages to remote sites where the central religious rite is to bathe in the waters of a pool or river, enter a cave, or have a view of some geographical feature indicate that the great attraction of many sacred places is tied to the geography of the place. Although temples are often found in such places, the environment rather than the temple itself is usually the object of the pilgrim. The temple simply serves to mark, specify, or objectify the sacrality of the local geography. The temple does not enhance the sacrality of the place so much as the place enhances the sacrality of the temple.

Underlying the extraordinary number of sacred sites associated with

geographical places in India seems to be the intuition that the land, the earth, or the Indian subcontinent itself is an immense source or repository of sacred power. Looking at a map of the Indian subcontinent on which only the most famous sacred places are marked, we see that India bubbles with sacrality in every region. 25 To a great extent these many *tirthas**, which are associated with Hindu mythology and epic history, have given India its sense of cultural and historical unity. India has rarely been under central rule. For the most part she has been ruled by several competing kingdoms. The sacrality of the land itself, rather than a unified political tradition, has cultivated among most Hindus the strong sense of Mother India.

The whole of India's sacred geography, with its many *tirthas* those inherent in its natural landscape and those sanctified by the deeds of gods and the footsteps of heroes is a living geography. As such it has been central for the shaping of an Indian sense of regional and national unity. The recognition of India as sacred landscape, woven together north and south, east and west, by the paths of pilgrims, has created a powerful sense of India as *Bharat** *Mata** Mother India. 26

Many sacred sites are specifically associated with, identified with, or presided over by a goddess. The pervasiveness of sites sacred to goddesses is suggested by the number of towns and villages that have names associated with different goddesses.

. . . in this vast country, holy resorts of the goddess are innumerable and the popularity of her cult is proved even in the place-names of India. Referring to the Panjab region Prof. Niharranjan Ray observed: "Very few people pause to consider this social phenomenon, or to consider the significance of such toponyms in these regions as, for instance, Ambala which is derived from Amba, one of the many names of Durga*, Chandigarh which is named after Candi*, . . . Kalka which is a vulgarisation of Kalika*, Simla which is Syamala devi* in its anglicised version. A careful and close look at the postal directories of the Punjab, Hariyana and Himachal would yield a long list of such toponyms from which one may draw one's own conclusion. Besides, throughout these regions one still finds a countless number of small, lowly shrines with all but shapeless or crude forms placed on their altars, which worshippers, lowly village folks, describe as Manasa*, Candi, Kali*, Nayna*, Durga, etc." 27

Many of these sites associated with goddesses are called *pithas* *, "seats." Why the term *pitha** is used for those sites in preference to the more traditional and common term *tirtha** is not entirely clear. *Pitha** is preferred, perhaps because it tends to emphasize the rootedness of the goddesses associated with these places. Many of the goddesses are preeminently tied to the locales in which they are worshiped. They are perceived to be not so much transcendent, heavenly beings as beings whose power is firmly grounded in the earth itself. It may be, too, that the term *pitha* is appropriate to those aspects of Devi* theology which emphasize her association with the earth itself and her motherly nature, which casts her in the role of an ever-present, nurturing presence. Perhaps the point of the term is to emphasize that the Devi is to be understood as firmly located in this world, both in the sense of being identified with it and in the sense of being oriented toward such worldly concerns of her devotees as fertility, well-being, and long life.²⁸ While the term *tirtha* has connotations of crossing from this world to another world, the term *pitha* connotes a fixed point, and by extension the fixedness of the goddesses worshiped at these sites.

Sometime in the medieval period an attempt was made to affirm the basic unity of all *pithas* sacred to goddesses.²⁹ The assumption behind this attempt was that the Mahadevi* underlies all the particular manifestations of goddesses residing at the many *pithas*. Mythologically this idea was expressed by adding an episode to the myth of Satis* selfdestruction at Daksas* sacrifice. In the expanded version of the myth Siva* arrives at Daksa's sacrifice having received the news that Sati* has killed herself. He picks up her body and, racked with grief, begins to wander the cosmos. He is so distraught by Sati's death and so grieved by the presence of her corpse that he completely ignores his divine responsibilities. His sobbing and grief threaten the stability of the world. Visnu* is called upon to remedy the situation. He enters Sati's body by yoga or else slices pieces of her body off bit by bit, but in one way or another he disposes of her body a bit at a time.³⁰ When Siva discovers that Sati's body is gone, he recovers his divine composure and stops grieving. Where the parts of Sati's body fell, sacred places called *pithas* were then established. The number of *pithas* varies from 4 to 110 in the different accounts of the tale.³¹

In most accounts of this myth and in most lists of the *pithas*, Sati's yoni is said to have fallen and been enshrined at Kamagiri* in the region of Kamarupa* in Assam, where the goddess is worshiped as Kamakhya*. Although goddess worship is undoubtedly ancient in this part of India³² and although Kamarupa is mentioned in the Allahabad pillar inscription of Samudragupta (middle of the fourth century), the present temple of

Kamakhya * near Gauhati does not date beyond the sixteenth century. In the seventeenth century the Ahom kings of Assam encouraged the worship of Kamakhya on a grand scale, and her centrality in the *pitha** mythology probably originates around this time. In the Kamakhya temple at Kamagiri*, the central image of the goddess is a yoni carved in stone and smeared with red paste symbolizing blood.³³ Rituals are done at the temple each month to signify the Devi's* menstruation. This famous center of goddess worship, in short, reveres and enshrines a sacred place that is affirmed to be the creative orifice of a goddess whose larger body is the earth itself or at least the local mountain and region.

According to this myth, then, the Indian subcontinent has been sacralized by the remains of Sati*. India is in effect her burial ground.³⁴ The subcontinent is sown with the pieces of Sati's* body, which make the land especially sacred.³⁵ The myth also stresses that the numerous and varied *pithas** and goddesses worshiped at them are part of a larger, unified whole. Each *pitha* represents a part of Sati's body or one of her ornaments;³⁶ taken together, the *pithas* found throughout India constitute or point toward a transcendent (or, perhaps better, a universally immanent) goddess whose being encompasses, underlies, and unifies the Indian subcontinent as a whole. In short, the Indian subcontinent *is* the goddess Sati.

Although the myth speaks of the dismemberment of Sati's corpse, the emphasis at the *pithas* is not on the worship of Sati's relics but on the worship of living goddesses, who are all understood as manifestations of the living Mahadevi*. The point is not so much that India is the reliquary of the Devi's corpse as it is that India is the Devi's living body. The myth provides a vantage point from which the many local and regional goddess cults throughout India may be understood as part of a larger, unified vision in which each act of devotion to a local goddess becomes an act of reverence to the divinity of India as a whole.

The Ganges and the Sacrality of Rivers

Geographical sacrality in the Hindu tradition is also dramatically expressed in the reverence shown to almost every river of the Indian subcontinent. This reverence extends all the way back to the *Rg-veda**, where the idea is expressed that earthly rivers have their origin in heaven. In the *Rg-veda* the Sarasvati* River is praised as a mighty goddess who blesses her devotees with health, long life, and poetic inspiration.³⁷ The earthly Sarasvati River is said to be only a partial manifestation of the goddess Sarasvati, for she is said to exist in heaven as well

as on earth. The earthly river is an extension or continuation of divine waters that flow from heaven to earth. In Rg-vedic * cosmology the creation of the world or the process of making the world habitable is associated with the freeing of the heavenly waters by Indra. Indra's enemy Vrtra* is said to have withheld these waters, thus inhibiting creation. When Indra defeats Vrtra the waters rush onto the earth like mother cows eager to suckle their young (10.9). The rivers of the earth are therefore seen as being necessary to creation and as having a heavenly origin. They are brought to earth by the heroic act of a god who defeats a demon who has hoarded the waters and kept them from fertilizing and nourishing the earth in the form of rivers.³⁸

Reverence for rivers in the Hindu tradition is nowhere more intense than in the case of the Ganges. Like the Sarasvati* River in the Vedic tradition, the Ganges is said to have its origin in heaven. Many myths concerning the descent of the Ganges to earth emphasize this point. The oldest and probably best known concerns the restoration of the sixty thousand sons of King Sagara. According to this myth, Sagara's sons were dull-witted and impetuous, and while searching the world for their father's sacrificial horse they insulted and disturbed the tranquillity of the great sage Kapila. In anger, Kapila burned them all to ashes with the fire that he had generated as the result of his great austerities. Sagara's descendants, despite their piety and ascetic efforts, were unable to restore their incinerated forefathers until the saintly and mighty Bhagiratha*, the great-great-great-grandson of Sagara, undertook the task. Giving his kingdom over to a trusted minister, Bhagiratha went to the Himalayas to do heroic austerities. After he had physically mortified himself for centuries, the Ganges appeared in bodily form and granted his wish: she would descend to the earth, provided that someone could be found to break her mighty fall, which otherwise would destroy the earth itself. Siva* was persuaded to receive the Ganges on his head, and so the great heavenly river descended to earth, her mighty fall softened by Siva's* massive tangle of hair. In his hair she became divided into many streams, each of which flowed to a different region of earth and sanctified that area. Her principal artery emerged from Siva's hair and came to India, and under Bhagiratha's* guidance it cut a channel to where the ashes of Sagara's sons were piled. Moistened by her waters, the souls of the sixty thousand sons were purified and freed to undertake their journey to the land of their fathers, where they could be duly honored by their descendants.³⁹

Other accounts of the Ganges' descent feature Visnu* and sometimes Krsna*. After assuming his dwarf *avatara** to trick the demon Bali, Visnu strides across the cosmos to appropriate it for the gods. On his third stride his foot strikes the vault of heaven and breaks it. The Ganges

River pours through the hole and eventually finds its way to earth. Falling on Mount Meru, the cosmic axis, the Ganges divides into four parts, and as it flows onto the four world continents it purifies the world in every direction. 40 In some versions of the myth the god Brahma*, who is said to hold the heavenly Ganges in his water pot, pours the Ganges on Visnu's* foot when it stretches into the heavenly sphere.41 In still other versions of the myth Visnu* becomes liquified when he hears a particularly sublime song sung in his praise, and in this form he enters Brahmas* water pot, which contains the Ganges, and thus sacralizes her.42

In one way or another, these myths about the Ganges' coming to earth stress the river's heavenly origin, her essentially divine nature, and her association with the great male deities Brahma, Visnu, and Siva*. Spilling out of heaven from Visnu's foot, containing Visnu's liquified essence according to some myths, and falling onto Siva's* head, where she meanders through his tangled locks, the mighty Ganges appears in this world after having been made more sacred by direct contact with Visnu and Siva. The river then spreads the divine potency of these gods into the world when she flows onto the earthly plane. She gives their sacred presences to the earth in liquid form.43 The myths make clear that the earthly Ganges is only a limited part of the cosmic river that flows in heaven and descends to other regions and worlds as well as this one. As mighty as the Ganges appears here, the earthly river is only a limited aspect of a reality that transcends this world. The Ganges, these myths insists, points beyond itself to a transcendent, cosmic dimension that locates the source of the river in a divine sphere.

Another important theme in the reverence for rivers in Hinduism is the purifying quality of rivers and of running water in general. The purity-conscious Hindu social system, in which pollution is inevitably accumulated in the course of a normal day, prescribes a ritual bath as the simplest way to rid oneself of impurities. This act consists of little more than pouring a handful of cold water over one's head and letting it run down one's body. Moving, flowing, or falling water is believed to have great cleansing power; a mere sprinkling of water over one's head or a dip in a stream is sufficient to remove most kinds of daily pollution accumulated through normal human intercourse with those in a state less pure than one's own.44 Like fire, the other great natural purifying element in Hinduism,45 water is affirmed to contain intrinsic powers of purification, particularly when in motion.

The most awesome manifestations of moving water in the Hindu context are the great rivers of the Indian subcontinent. Ever moving, ever the same, apparently inexhaustible, such rivers as the Jumna, Cauvery, Narmada, Brahmaputra, and Ganges are revered in particular for their great purifying powers. The myths concerning the heavenly origin

Image not available

The goddess Ganga *. Sena, twelfth century A.D., Bengal. C. Sivaramamurti, Ganga (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1976), fig. 29, p. 62.

of such rivers as the Ganges make the point that the mighty rivers of India are in essence uncontaminated by the impurities of the world, that they arise and for the most part flow in celestial realms before falling to earth. Once descended to earth, however, these same rivers literally wash away the accumulated impurities of the realms they traverse. As a handful of water sprinkled over a person's head cleanses that person, so the river cleanses the entire world when she falls on Mount Meru. The Ganges, Jumna, Cauvery, and countless other rivers and streams are understood to perform a continuous, gracious process of purifying the earth and her inhabitants.

The physical evidence of this continuous process of purification is the clarity of a river's swiftly flowing source compared to its broad, sluggish, murky mouth before it enters the sea. A river may take on an increasingly impure appearance the farther it travels from its source. Rivers like the Ganges are nevertheless held to be equally purifying from source to mouth. While the source of the Ganges and the place where it breaks out of the mountains onto the plains are important pilgrimage sites, the lower Ganges also has many places of great sanctity. Banaras itself, perhaps the most sacred site in all of India, is far downstream on the Ganges. Though great removers of pollution, the rivers remain uncontaminated by what they remove, staying ever pure, ever potent, ever gracious to all those who come to them for purification.

Although all rivers are revered as removers of pollution, the Ganges is preeminent among India's rivers as a purifying power. Hymns extolling the Ganges repeatedly emphasize the miraculously purifying powers of her waters. The *Agni-purana* * says that the river makes those regions she flows through into sacred ground, that bathing in her waters is an experience similar to being in heaven, that those afflicted with blindness and other ailments become like gods after bathing in her waters, that the Ganges has made pure thousands of impure people who have seen, touched, or drunk her waters.⁴⁶ To die while being immersed in the Ganges results in *moksa**, final spiritual liberation. Being brushed by a breeze containing even a drop of Ganges water erases all sins accumulated over lifetimes.⁴⁷ In the *Brhaddharma-purana** a sinful king is said to have been spared an untimely death because he lived for a while with a merchant who used to bathe in the Ganges.⁴⁸ The *Mahabhagavata-purana** tells the story of a robber who, though sent to hell after death, was subsequently sent to Siva's* heaven because his flesh was eaten by a jackal who had drunk Ganges water (74).

In the Gupta and early medieval periods it was common for the personified images of the Ganges and Jumna to flank the doorways of temples.⁴⁹ The Ganges' role as threshold figure in these periods probably had

to do with both her (and the Jumna's) purificatory powers. The Ganges' heavenly origin and descent to the earth made her an intermediary between the earthly and heavenly realms. She is a continuous, liquid link between the two worlds. Her location at the thresholds of temples was appropriate in that she connected and formed a transition between the worlds of men and gods. Her position at the doorways of temples probably also indicated her role as remover of pollution. Before entering the sacred realm of the gods, which a temple represents, devotees should cleanse themselves of worldly impurities. Crossing the threshold of a temple flanked by images of the goddesses Ganga * and Yamuna*, devotees probably were symbolically cleansed in the purificatory waters of these rivers.

The Ganges' location as a threshold figure in medieval temples also suggests the threshold function of the physical Ganges River (and other rivers). The most common name for a sacred place in Hinduism is *tirtha**, which means a place for crossing over from one place to another, especially a place for crossing a river, a fording place. As applied to sacred places the term signifies a place at which one may cross from one plane of reality to another, in particular, a place where one can cross from the earthly plane to the divine plane, or from the limited human sphere to the unconditioned divine sphere. As a sacred place, as a *tirtha*, the Ganges is prototypical. Her waters are affirmed to originate in heaven and to flow in a continuous stream into the earthly sphere. The Ganges is often called she who flows in the three worlds (Triloka-patha-gamini*).⁵⁰ She is a liquid *axis mundi*, a pathway connecting all spheres of reality, a presence at which or in which one may cross over to another sphere of the cosmos, ascend to heavenly worlds, or transcend human limitations. As Diana Eck has so nicely put it: "It is because the Ganga descended in her *avatarana** that she is a place of ascent as a *tirtha*."⁵¹ Flowing out into the world, the Ganges moves according to rhythms and currents that originate in heaven. Her waters have had physical contact with the great gods Visnu* and Siva*. She is a sacred bridge to those realms from which she has come.

The Ganges' role as a mediator between this world and the divine worlds, as a place at which or in which crossings may be made, is clear in the context of death rituals.⁵² A strong and widespread Hindu belief is that to die in the Ganges, or to have a few drops of Ganges water poured on one's lips just prior to death, is to gain immediate liberation.⁵³ Although any part of the Ganges is believed to have this redemptive power, the cult of seeking to die in contact with the Ganges is most active in Banaras, where special hostels for the dying accommodate the thousands of pious Hindus who make a final pilgrimage from all over

India to die on the banks of the Ganges there. 54 The Ganges is understood to be a particularly accessible bridge from one mode of being to the other, a sure crossing point in the difficult transition from life to death or from bondage to liberation.

Another strong and widespread belief in India is that having their ashes or bones thrown into the Ganges guarantees the dead a safe journey to the realm of the ancestors. Against this background the story of the redemption of Sagara's sons makes sense. Cursed to eternal banishment from the realm of the ancestors, the souls of Sagara's sons can only reach the goal of the dead by means of contact with the Ganges, which provides them a special route to heaven. In this role the Ganges is known especially by the epithet *Svarga-sopana-sarani** (she who is a flowing staircase to heaven).⁵⁵ Pious Hindus make a pilgrimage to various points on the banks of the Ganges to cast the ashes of their ancestors and kin onto the waters of the Ganges so that they, like the sons of Sagara, will be ensured a successful transition to the realm of the dead. Just as the mighty waters of the Ganges are envisioned in Hindu cosmology as continuously descending from heaven to earth, so a continuous procession of souls is ascending the Ganges to transcendent realms.⁵⁶

The Ganges as the surest access between the worlds of the living and the dead is also seen in *sraddha** and *tarpana** rituals, which are performed in honor of ancestors. These rites frequently stipulate Ganges water as desirable. The intention of these rites is to nourish the ancestors, the *pitrs**, in the heavenly sphere. The use of Ganges water may be understood both as nourishing the ancestors directly and as representing the means by which the other offerings to the ancestors will reach the desired realm. The use of Ganges water guarantees the efficacy of the rites by making the Ganges present as a *tirtha**, a crossing point from the world of the living to the world of the dead.

A particularly strong motif in reverence to the Ganges is her presence to her devotees as a mother. *Ganga* Ma**, "Mother Ganges," is probably the river's most popular epithet. Like a mother or as a mother the Ganges is here in the world to comfort her children. She is tangible, approachable, and all-accepting. All who approach her for comfort and blessing are enveloped by her yielding, redemptive waters. She is the distilled essence of compassion in liquid form. No one is denied her blessing. *Jagganatha**, the author of the *Ganga* Lahari**, probably the most famous hymn in praise of the Ganges, was outcast by his fellow Hindus for having a love affair with a Muslim woman. He says that he was even shunned by untouchables and madmen. He declares that he was so despicable, so polluted, that none of the *tirthas** was able to cleanse

him. 57 The Ganges alone was willing to accept him and cleanse him, and he in gratitude praises her as a loving mother:

I come to you as a child to his mother.
 I come as an orphan to you, moist with love.
 I come without refuge to you, giver of sacred rest.
 I come a fallen man to you, uplifter of all.
 I come undone by disease to you, the perfect physician.
 I come, my heart dry with thirst, to you, ocean of
 sweet wine.
 Do with me whatever you will.⁵⁸

The Ganges' maternal aspect is seen especially in her nourishing qualities. Her waters are sometimes likened to milk or *amrta**, the drink of immortality.⁵⁹ "The concept of the river in India is that of a sustaining mother. The stream of the river carries *payas*. The word *payas* stands for both water and milk. Appropriately this has been used in relation to the river as the stream that sustains the people, her children, with water, as a mother sustains her babies with her milk."⁶⁰ Her waters are life-giving, nourishing to all those who bathe in or drink them.⁶¹ Her waters have miraculous vivifying powers. The ashes of Sagara's sons, and the ashes of the dead in general, are enlivened, invigorated, or otherwise made strong enough by the touch of her waters to make the journey to heaven.

As a mother, the Ganges nourishes the land through which it flows, making it fertile. Historically, the land along the banks of the Ganges has been intensely cultivated. It is particularly fertile because of the sediment periodically deposited by the flood waters of the river and because of irrigation. Images of the Ganges often show her carrying a plate of food and a *puṇakumbha**, an overflowing pot.⁶² Mother Ganges is depicted as a being overflowing with food and life-giving waters, as one who continually nourishes all she comes in contact with. As giver of food and as water that makes fields rich with crops, the Ganges bestows her blessings concretely in this world. She makes the earth abundant with crops and thereby sustains and enriches life. As the bestower of worldly blessings the Ganges is particularly approached to ensure healthy crops and to promote fertility in women. "Today in Bihar, at the start of the plowing season, before the seeds are sown, farmers put Ganga water in a pot and set it in a special place in the field to ensure good harvest. Among those who live along the river, a newly married woman unfolds her sari to Ganga and prays for children and the long life of her husband."⁶³

The waters of the Ganges are also often used to restore the health of

sick people. 64 The miraculous restorative powers of the Ganges is the subject of many stories. In one of the Buddhist *Jataka* tales we read of a parrot who lived in a fig tree. The tree's fruit sustained the bird and also provided him shelter. Over the years the parrot became exceedingly devoted to the tree, which had acted as his benefactor throughout his life. Hearing of the devotion of the parrot, the king of the area wished to test the bird's fidelity and magically dried up the tree. But the bird remained. Impressed with the bird's loyalty the king granted the parrot a wish. The bird asked that the tree be restored. Thereupon the king "took up the water from the Ganges in his hand and dashed it against the fig-tree stump. Straightaway the tree rose up rich in branch and stem, with honey-sweet fruit, and stood a charming sight, like the bare Jewel-Mountain."65

The Ganges' relationship with Siva* suggests a structure similar to the rhythmic interdependence of opposites in Siva's* relationship with Parvati*.66 The Ganges, like Parvati, her co-wife, represents the cool, nourishing, fertile dimension of reality that calms, contains, or offsets the fierce, hot, destructive powers of Siva. The most dramatic expression of this relationship is found in the myth concerning the birth of Karttikeya*. When Siva spills his semen it is so powerfully hot that it cannot be contained even by Agni himself. After passing through a series of containers, none of which is able to contain it for long, the semen falls into the Ganges and is cooled there. Within the cooling womb of Mother Ganges the semen takes on embryonic form, and the war god Karttikeya is duly born.67

The practice in many Siva temples of pouring Ganges water on Siva's linga* also suggests the cooling, calming effect of the Ganges. Siva's fiery, hot, hard character is complemented and made accessible by the soft, cooling effect the Ganges has on him. The pouring of Ganges water on the linga, which goes on continuously from dawn till dusk in some temples,68 is also reminiscent of the Ganges' descent from heaven onto Siva's head. Siva's consent to accept the mighty weight of the Ganges to break her fall to earth effectively involves him in worldly matters, drawing him away from isolated meditation. The Ganges' meandering course through Siva's locks and through the regions of the earth physically connects the aloof god's presence with the earth. By tangibly connecting Siva with the earth the Ganges extends his presence into the world. In a quite physical and literal way the Ganges acts as Siva's *sakti**, permitting his redemptive presence to spread to the world and his devotees, who yearn for his grace. By means of the Ganges Siva's otherwise dangerous, destructive, fierce presence is transmitted into an approachable reality accessible to all.69

Behind the many myths that exalt the Ganges as a great goddess

and associate her with Siva *, Visnu*, Brahma*, and other deities lies an enduring reverence for the river itself. Behind the lofty hymns of praise that affirm the Ganges' miraculous powers to effect renewed health, fertility, a safe journey to the land of the ancestors, and spiritual liberation, there is a fundamental affection for the physical river that meanders across the North Indian plains. The extent to which it is the physical Ganges River itself that is adored by Hindus is evident in the persistent habit of pilgrims to see, touch, be sprinkled with, and bathe in the river's waters. It is not anthropomorphic images of the Ganges that attract reverence and worship, although such images are common enough. It is the river itself that is worshiped. Devotees honor other deities by draping a garland around the neck of the image. They worship the Ganges by stringing the garland of flowers across the river itself. Similarly, while it is auspicious to circumambulate the image of a deity, some adventurous devotees circumambulate the Ganges by traveling up one bank and down the other along her entire course.⁷⁰ In Diana Eck's phrase, the Ganges is an "organic symbol," not a narrative symbol. In the case of the Ganges, and in the case of the Hindu reverence for the sacrality of the land, the organic *is* the sacred.

For the Ganges* significance as a symbol is not exhaustively narrative. First, she is a river that flows with waters of life in a vibrant universe. Narrative myths come and go in history. They may shape the cosmos and convey meaning for many generations, and then they may gradually lose their hold upon the imagination and may finally be forgotten. But the river remains, even when the stories are no longer repeated. The river flows on, bringing life and conveying the living tradition, even to those of this age for whom everything else is demythologized.⁷¹

Reverence for and worship of the Ganges is yet another vivid affirmation that the geography of India itself is somehow redemptive, that simply being in contact with this place, dwelling upon it, imbues people with salvific strength.

13

Village Goddesses

India today is primarily a village culture. The majority of Hindus live in villages of under a hundred thousand people, and there is little doubt that this has always been the case in the Indian subcontinent. In the context of village life one of the most (if not the most) significant and powerful divine presence is the *gramadevata* *, a deity who is especially identified with the village and toward whom the villagers often have a special affection. It is not uncommon, in fact, for there to be several *gramadevatas** in a village, each of whom may have a specialized function.¹ These village deities, more numerous than Indian villages themselves, are naturally diverse in character. Their names alone suggest diverse characteristics and functions.² Some of these deities have a regional reputation, or at least the name of a certain *gramadevata* will be well known or popular throughout an entire region. The goddesses Mariyamman* in South India and Manasa* in North India are examples of this regional popularity. Other village deities may be known only to one small village. The goddess Periyapalayattamman*, whose name means simply "the mother (or mistress) of the village Periyapalayam*," is relatively unknown outside that village near Madras in South India.³ Often the village deity will share the names or epithets of deities from the Sanskrit pantheon and will be identified with these deities in the minds of villagers. But this does not necessarily mean that the village deity will bear many similarities to the "great" god in question. It may indicate little more than a conscious attempt to relate the village deity to a wider religious universe or to make the local deity recognizable to curious outsiders. In most cases where such an identification exists the *gramadevata* differs markedly from the "great" deity with whom it shares a name.⁴

Despite the number and variety of *gramadevatas*, several typical characteristics of these local deities have been noted. First, they usually are female. Speaking of South India, Henry Whitehead says that "*village*

deities, with very few exceptions, *are female* All over Southern India . . . the village deities are almost exclusively female. In the Tamil country, it is true, most of them have male attendants, who are supposed to guard the shrines and carry out the commands of the goddesses; but their place is distinctly subordinate and almost servile." 5

Second, these deities are usually not represented by anthropomorphic images. They are usually represented by uncarved stones, trees, or small shrines that do not contain an anthropomorphic image. Sometimes no shrine is present at all except during special festivals, when temporary structures will be built to house or represent the deity.⁶

Third, these deities, goddesses for the most part, capture the primary interest of the villagers and tend to be worshiped with more intensity than the great gods of the Hindu pantheon. Although the great gods are acknowledged to be in charge of distant, cosmic rhythms, they are only of limited interest to most villagers, many of whom traditionally were not allowed within the precincts of the temples of these deities in the first place. The village goddess, in contrast, engages the villagers directly by being associated with their local, existential concerns.⁷ She is perceived to be *their* deity and to be concerned especially with *their* well-being and that of their village.

Finally, these village deities are often directly associated with disease, sudden death, and catastrophe. When the village is threatened by disaster, particularly epidemics, the local goddess is usually said to be manifesting herself. She erupts onto the village scene along with disasters that threaten the stability, and even the survival, of the village. Furthermore, her role vis-à-vis such epidemics or disasters is ambivalent. She is perceived both as inflicting these diseases and as protecting the village from them.

The Local Rootedness of the Village Goddesses

One of the most persistent themes found in the myth, cult, and worship of village goddesses is their being rooted in specific, local villages. The village is the special place of the deity. She is the mother or mistress of the village, as suggested by a name popular in the South, Amman, meaning "mother, mistress, or lady."⁸ Although it is common to speak of the goddess of such-and-such a village, it is probably more accurate to think of the village as belonging to the goddess. Theologically the village goddess predates the village. She created it. As its center and source she is often associated with a "navel stone" located somewhere in the

village. 9 Sometimes she is represented only by a head placed directly on the ground. This may suggest that her body is the village itself, that she is rooted in the soil of the village. 10 The village and the villagers might be understood as living within or upon the body of the village goddess.

The close identity of the goddess with her village is also seen in her role as guardian of the village's boundaries. Her shrines or symbols are often erected at the boundaries of the village, where she acts to protect it from invasions of evil spirits and outsiders in general. Another expression of the intimate identity of the goddess with her village is her symbolic marriage to representatives of the village during her ceremonies. 11 Although the goddess is sometimes said to have a husband or a male consort or guardian, her real associate in a marriage-like arrangement is the village itself rather than a male deity. The two, the goddess and the village, are tied to each other, dependent on each other; in short, they are married to each other and nourish each other.

Another indication of the identity of village and goddess is the participation of almost all members of a village in the goddess's festivals. In the case of the high or great gods, worship is often restricted to certain castes, usually the higher ones, or such deities may be particularly worshiped by *sampradayas** or movements that have restricted membership. The village goddess, however, is approached by the natural grouping of the local village itself and all those who constitute it. She is the goddess of the whole village, the physical place as well as the social and economic organism. Nearly all castes are represented at her festivals and to some extent mix freely. Her worship is a community effort, although particular castes may play more important ritual roles than others. 12 The extent of the all-inclusive nature of local-goddess worship in villages is indicated by the participation of Brahmans and Muslims in these festivals. 13 The point is that the local goddess is not so much a Hindu deity or a deity specially related to a caste or occupation, or even to a specific phenomenon such as disease, although all of these things might be the case to some extent. The point is that from the villagers' point of view the goddess is specifically their deity, their lady, as it were, who has their particular needs at heart.

The local rootedness of village goddesses, their special and narrow association with particular villages, is also suggested in the tendency during festivals in their honor to exclude outsiders. The exclusion of outsiders seems to be associated with the idea that they might benefit from the power of the goddess, which is intended for the local village. Her power is believed to be for her village, not for outsiders. Sometimes, too, the symbol or image of a disease or epidemic will be escorted to the border of a village and symbolically passed on to another village. 14 The

village and its immediate surroundings thus represent for the villager a more or less complete cosmos within which life in all its fullness and complexity can be lived out in an orderly and fruitful way. The central divine power impinging on or underlying this cosmos is the village goddess, and the extent to which order and fertility dominate the village cosmos is bound up with the relationship between the goddess and the villagers. Village life is her business and their business, and the role of outsiders is sometimes seen to be irrelevant or disruptive.

The basic relationship between the village goddess and her village seems quite straightforward. In return for the worship of the villagers the goddess ensures good crops, timely rain, fertility, and protection from demons, diseases, and untimely death. The arrangement is a local one with little or no room for outsiders. The power of the goddess does not extend beyond the village, so villagers leave her jurisdiction and protection when they venture beyond it. The relationship is localized and aims not so much at individual welfare as the welfare of the whole.

In fact, relations between village goddesses and their villages are more complicated. This is made clear by the association of these goddesses with disease and disruption, an identification that gives them an ambivalent character. For these goddesses are not usually peaceful, benign, and calm presences. Rather, they tend to be wild, rambunctious, independent, demanding, and destructive in their habits. This is evident in both their mythology and their ceremonies.

Mythological Themes

An important theme in myths concerning the origin of village goddesses is the injustice done to women by men. Two of the best-known myths concerning the origin of the popular goddess Mariyamman * in South India include this motif. In one version a young Brahman girl is courted by and eventually married to an untouchable who has disguised himself as a Brahman. On discovering the trick, the woman becomes furious and kills herself. She is transformed into a goddess and in her divine form punishes the untouchable by burning him to ashes or otherwise humiliating or humbling him.¹⁵ Another version of Mariyamman's* origin identifies her with an extremely pious, pure wife who is married to a devout holy man. She is so pure that she can perform miraculous tasks such as making jars out of loose sand and boiling water simply by placing a pot of water on her head. One day, however, she sees two *gandharvas* making love and feels envy for them. Thereupon she loses her

miraculous powers. Discovering this and suspecting sexual disloyalty, her husband commands their son to kill his mother. The son obeys his father and decapitates his mother. Eventually she is restored to life, but in the process her head and body get transposed with those of an untouchable woman. Mariyamman * is thus understood to have a Brahman head and an untouchable body, which is significant in terms of both her ambivalent nature and her role as a village goddess exemplifying the social status quo in which Brahmins are at the head of the social system.¹⁶

Myths concerning the origins of other village goddesses also include this motif of injustice done to women by males. Kannagi*, the heroine of the Tamil epic *Silappadhikaram**, is portrayed as faultlessly faithful to her husband despite his lecherous and unfaithful behavior. Ordinarily Kannagi's* faithfulness would guarantee the well-being and long life of her husband, for according to folk tradition a wife's faithfulness ensures her husband's welfare, whereas her unfaithfulness causes him harm. If a man's wife is faithful, he is virtually immune from harmsuch is the belief promulgated in both the folk and Sanskrit traditions. Kannagi's husband, however, is unjustly accused by the king of Madurai of having stolen an anklet and is executed. Kannagi proves her husband's innocence, tears off her breast, which becomes blistering hot, and burns the city of Madurai in her wrath. She subsequently becomes a goddess.¹⁷ Again we see the theme of a woman who has been treated unjustly by males expressing her outrage in an act of violent destruction and being transformed into a goddess.

Another set of myths relating the origin of village goddesses takes place entirely in the divine sphere but contains a similar theme. In the beginning is the great goddess Ammavaru. In her desire to create she produces three eggs, from which are born the three great gods: Brahma*, Visnu*, and Siva*. When she wants to marry these deities to promote the continuation of creation, they refuse, saying that it would be improper for a mother to have sex with her sons. But one or the other of the gods finally agrees to marry her if she will give him her middle eye, which is symbolic of her primordial power. She agrees, but having given up her power to the god she is destroyed by him. From her body are created the many *saktis** who become village goddesses.¹⁸

These myths, with their theme of village goddesses' having suffered injustices at the hands of men, help us to understand certain central characteristics of village goddesses: namely, the fiercely ambivalent nature of these goddesses, which manifests itself in sudden outbursts of rage, and the goddesses' relative independence from or superiority over

male consorts. Such goddesses' terrible retributive wrath continues to be expressed in festivals in which a male animal, often identified as a "husband," is sacrificed. These goddesses are angry deities and need appeasing. Furthermore, they rarely provide a traditional model for women in their relationships with males. The village goddesses are often not married at all, and if they are, they dominate their male consorts the reverse of what sexual roles should be according to Indian cultural models. 19 It could be said of these fiercely independent goddesses that they have "learned their lesson,"²⁰ that they have learned that they only receive injustice from males; consequently they are determined to remain independent from men in their transformed positions as goddesses. This theme of the goddesses' using and abusing males is suggested at certain points in local-goddess festivals. The goddesses still need males to invigorate them, but they ensure that the males will not dominate them or threaten their powers. At the end of the festival, in fact, it is not uncommon for the male to be symbolically destroyed, humiliated, or cast out of the village.

Another kind of mythical theme that emphasizes the village goddesses' independence appears in the stories concerning Kanniyakumari*. Kanniyakumari is prohibited from marrying Siva* for various reasons. Although she is described as distressed at being prevented from enjoying Siva as her husband, the myths underline Kanniyakumaris* perpetual virginity and her formidable power. Her great power seems to be directly related to her unmarried state and her celibacy. In the context of Tamil culture a woman's virginity, through which she withholds her sexual energy, is more or less equivalent to the building up of *tapas* in males when they retain their semen, which is magically transformed into powerful heat.²¹ Quite simply, Kanniyakumari is much more powerful as an unmarried maiden than she would be as a married woman. Although reluctantly unmarried, her independence from males gives her great power.

The great power possessed by goddesses and females who are independent of males is also a theme in many myths current in South India in which female deities are subjugated or tamed by gods. Probably the two best-known examples of this theme feature Minaksi*, the goddess enshrined in Madurai, and the fiercely wild goddess Kali*. In the mythology concerning Minaksi the goddess is born with three breasts. Her disconcerted parents are instructed to raise the child like a male. She is brought up like a boy and ascends her father's throne when he dies. She then undertakes a campaign to subdue the entire world. She and her armies are invincible in battle until she comes to Mount Kailasa and challenges Siva himself. Seeing Siva, minaksi*'s entire character is transformed. She

becomes shy, and "as soon as she caught sight of him, her third breast disappeared, and, overcome with modesty, innocence, and shyness, she began to scrape the ground shyly with her toe." 22 And so Siva* reduces the powerful battle queen to a shy maiden and eventually subservient wife.

Kali* is subdued in a dance contest. In her independent form she is described as powerful, destructive, bloodthirsty, and fearsome. When she disrupts the meditation of one of Siva's* devotees or otherwise attracts Siva's attention, he challenges her to a contest in which he tames her by defeating her in dance. Thereafter she is said to be his wife or to take on a benign form that becomes widely worshiped. In effect, she loses her power and becomes a weak, helpless female. "Kali acknowledged defeat; shyly . . . she worshiped the lord; she stood helplessly like a puppet, confused."23

It has been argued that goddesses in Hindu mythology are generally portrayed as dangerous, violent, and aggressive if they are unmarried and as docile, obedient, and calm if they are married.²⁴ This reinforces social norms by suggesting that it is necessary for women to marry and express their sexuality in "safe" ways and under male supervision and authority. In the human realm marriage is assumed not only to complete a woman but to tame her, channeling her dangerous sexual energy in acceptable ways. The god or the male is seen as a civilizing, calming, ordering presence. Alone, goddesses and women are perceived as powerful and dangerous.

The myths and cults of village goddesses, however, often cast males in disruptive roles and equate the village goddess with the civilized, orderly, and refined realm of the village. Outside the village is the jungle: wild, raw, and chaotic. The village goddess represents the order of the cultivated field and the security of hearth and home. She is preeminently the being who protects the village from attacks by wild, unstable, demonic spirits from the uncivilized outer world. Those demons, furthermore, are often said to be male, and Siva himself, the deity of the Sanskrit pantheon most commonly associated with village goddesses as a consort, is well known to live on the periphery of civilization, to associate with demons, and in general to have disruptive, antisocial habits. The pattern of associating a goddess with the village, order, and civilization, on the one hand, and her male consort or counterpart with the jungle, on the other hand, is quite common in the central provinces. "The chief deity of the central provinces is Dharni* Deota*, 'earth, the deity'; her husband and companion, Bhatarsi* Deota, is a god of the hunt, related to Siva, the archer, lord of the wild beasts and the jungle."25

While goddesses from the larger tradition are often assumed to be

dangerous and wild when unmarried or independent from male deities, a central theme in the village-goddess cults is the association of independent female deities with the stability and order of the village. The village goddesses usually avoid both the extreme of the docile, shy, obedient married female and the extreme of the wild, frenzied, dangerous Kali * who is a threat to civilized order. The combination of the village goddesses' power and fierceness with their protectiveness of the well-being, stability, and order of their villages is beneficial. As the protector of the village the goddess *must* be powerful in view of the dangerous forces that threaten it. No shy, retiring, docile female could successfully protect the village. Although the village goddess may be dangerous because of her great power, for the most part that strength is directed against threatening forces from outside.

Festivals

Although the village goddesses are typically characterized as protecting, ordering, and instituting village civilization, they also have a reputation for behaving in disruptive, violent, and dangerous ways, particularly during festivals held in their honor. This is particularly clear during festivals in honor of village goddesses during epidemics. Many village goddesses are specifically associated with diseases, and during epidemics they may play several apparently contradictory roles. They may defend the village from the disease, which may be identified with invading demons. They may be identified with the disease itself. Or they may be cast in the dual role of inflicter of the disease and protector from the disease. In whichever role, village goddesses during these festivals reveal an awesome, disruptive, violent aspect. Like the disease itself, the village goddess seems to erupt on the scene, to wake up from a state of quiescence to a state of frenzied activity. During an epidemic, or during her festival, which often coincides with an epidemic, the village goddess forces herself on the awareness of the villagers.²⁶

The goddess's presence is as immediate, as real, and as disruptive and threatening as the disease that attacks the village. In fact, the two usually are inextricably related. In the case of Sitala*, the North Indian goddess associated with smallpox, the disease is said to be her "grace." Except in times of smallpox epidemics, Sitala is quiet, withdrawn, perhaps beyond human ken.²⁷ Traditionally, village-goddess festivals were not undertaken regularly or routinely, although this seems to be the increasing pattern in some places today. Festivals were only held and the goddesses were only worshiped when some disaster, usually an epi-

demic, struck the village. Such disasters are taken to represent either the presence of demons in the village because the goddess's defenses have broken down or the anger of the awakened goddess, who is demanding worship by punishing her people for neglecting her for so long. 28 From either point of view, or from both points of view simultaneously, during the festival the village is overcome with the immediate presence of the goddess. At this time she makes herself unmistakably known, particularly in the fever of disease victims and in those she possesses.

The theme of the relationship of an epidemic or a disaster to the invasion of the village by hostile demons from outside echoes the mythic theme of the goddess's abuse by males. In the festival context the goddess confronts and overcomes the demons, and in this struggle she is helped by the villagers. While the villagers are struck down and overcome by the demons and suffer fever and sometimes death, the goddess too is said to become possessed, afflicted, or somehow invaded by the demons. Both she (in the form of her image) and the villagers afflicted by the epidemic are cooled with water and other substances, and in cooling one victim it is understood that the other is treated as well. It is as if the two are suffering the invasion of the village together. It is not necessarily a contradiction of this point of view to say that the goddess also causes the epidemic. She receives the main brunt of the onslaught, but she is unable, or unwilling, to contain it all and spreads it to the villagers, who help her deal with it. It is well known that the goddess in this situation is particularly partial to the victims of disease, perhaps because they help her bear the burden of the demonic attack.²⁹

Perhaps the central dramatic event of village-goddess festivals is a blood sacrifice. This sacrifice also may be understood from two points of view. The sacrifice may be seen as a gift from the villagers with which they hope to appease the goddess so that she will withdraw her anger, which expresses itself in the form of the heat of disease. Or the sacrifice may be understood as representing the defeat of the invading demon or demons, who are also associated with the goddess's consort/husband who had afflicted or abused her in the myths. In either case, it is clear that the goddess demands the blood of a victim, that she needs that blood, either to appease her wrath or to invigorate her in her contest with the demons.

The elaborate, ritualistic way in which the sacrificial victim is treated during the sacrifice suggests his humiliation by the goddess. This in turn suggests that the victim is the goddess's enemy and thus represents an invading demon or her offending husband/consort. Traditionally, a buffalo was offered to the goddess. After it was beheaded, its leg was thrust into its mouth, fat from its stomach was smeared over its

eyes, and a candle was lit on its head and then presented to the goddess. The humiliation of the victim is fairly clear here 30 and certainly suggests the defeat of an enemy, presumably the demon who caused the disaster or epidemic.

Although the themes of conflict, struggle, defeat, and death are obviously prominent in these goddess festivals, there is also the theme of the goddess's being awakened, aroused, and stimulated. Indeed, there is the suggestion that she may even have sexual intercourse with the demon or demons who invade her village.³¹ A likely implication is that the goddess periodically needs this encounter with a demon/husband/consort to invigorate and enliven her. The festival also has an invigorating, enlivening effect on the village and its occupants. To a great extent, the villagers identify themselves with the goddess in her encounter with the invading demons. Like her and with her, they are aroused, invaded, and assaulted by these "outside" forces that disrupt the calm and order of their world.

During the festival the village as a whole, or at least those who are participating most actively in the worship, appear to abandon the quiet, orderly habits of everyday life. There is a stirring up of everything, a mixing up of things.³² There is often a mixture of castes, demons are present in the village, blood is spilled in sacrificial offerings, people are awakened, aroused by both the epidemic and the festival it has occasioned. Reversal of roles often takes place, or at least social roles and rules are temporarily held in abeyance.³³ The village is awakened to the presence of sacred power, to the affirmation that a sacred power underlies and pervades the village. Morbidity is overcome, and the village organism is reactivated and reenlivened by the immediate presence of the goddess.³⁴

The village-goddess festival is often the time of undertaking heroic vows, which greatly heighten the aroused state of the village. Fire walking, carrying burning pots on one's head, and swinging while suspended on hooks through one's flesh are all common during these festivals and are associated with trance and possession. These ordeals invite the presence of the goddess by expressing the devotee's willingness to fully encounter the dangerous power of the goddess, who is aroused, hot, and fierce. While there is considerable risk involved in so encountering the goddess, it is understood that the ordeal is undertaken in gratitude for her blessing in the past or her mercy in the present and that she is particularly fond of those who so approach her and will usually see that no harm will come to them. In return for villagers' taking on a part of her excess fury or heat generated by contact with demons, the goddess

blesses her devotees by protecting them during their ordeal. 35 Together, as it were, the goddess and her devotees take on the dangerous but invigorating presence of the epidemic or disaster.

A striking illustration of the enlivening effects of the festival on the goddess and the village is the role played in many festivals in the South by a low-caste woman called a Matangi*. The Matangis* are unmarried and hold their office for life. During a festival for the village goddess the Matangi represents the goddess. Possessed by the goddess, she will dance wildly, use obscene language, drink intoxicants, spit on spectators, and push people around with her backside. She seems to take special delight in abusing members of the high castes.

As she rushes about spitting on those who under ordinary circumstances would almost choose death rather than to suffer such pollution from a Madiga [the low caste from which the woman comes], she breaks into wild, exulting songs, telling of the humiliation to which she is subjecting the proud caste people. She also abuses them all thoroughly, and . . . they appear to expect it and not to be satisfied without a full measure of her invective.³⁶

An inversion of the usual social codes and rules takes place here.³⁷ The Matangi personifies social topsy-turvy. Completely unrefined, bursting with raw energy and coarse humor, and intoxicated on country liquor, she is the goddess herself: ". . . willful, impetuous, violent, irrepressible, she exults in her own aliveness and the tumult she arouses."³⁸

As Victor Turner has argued, religious festivals often serve the important purpose of allowing a society, culture, or village to step out of the confines of normality so that other, often redemptive, possibilities may be glimpsed or briefly experienced or experimented with. Festivals provide a window to what Turner calls the liminal dimension of reality, the dimension that remains outside social norms and expectations but that is capable of enlivening and nourishing the realm of social order and normality.³⁹ Festivals provide a context for the breaking out of confining social roles, for the breaking up and mixing up of expected social relations. The Matangi dramatically acts out this liminal facet of the village-goddess festival and makes it clear that it is the goddess herself who incites and arouses her devotees to this invigorating frenzy. Having been aroused herself by the encounter with a demon/husband/consort, she in turn arouses the entire village, and together they are renewed and renourished.⁴⁰ Villagers say that in the topsy-turvy context of the festival, where reversals are dominant, the outrageous behavior of the

Matangi *, ordinarily highly polluting, is purifying. Instead of avoiding her spittle and insults, people go out of their way to be subjected to her abuse.⁴¹

Death, Disease, and Ambivalence

The close association of village, local, and regional goddesses with disease, epidemic, disaster, and sudden death deserves further comment. Because the village goddesses institute, nourish, and protect villages, it would make sense to interpret their myth, cult, and worship as primarily revolving around their periodic struggles with invading demons who bring sickness, death, and disruption to the villages. Yet given the over-whelming association of these goddesses with the diseases themselves, given the common identification of epidemics with the goddesses' "grace," it would make sense to interpret their worship as primarily the attempt to propitiate them so that they will withhold their wrath from their people. Unfortunately, neither point of view alone does justice to the facts, namely, that the goddesses are cast in two contrasting roles: (1) guardians of the village and (2) the cause and source of disease and sudden death that threaten the existence of the village. Richard Brubaker sums up the ambivalent nature of the village goddesses this way:

Thus the goddess is the one who manifests herself in epidemic disease, who guards against it and keeps it at bay, who inflicts it upon her people in wrath, who joins her people in fighting and conquering it, who suffers it herself; she it is who invites its appearance and then struggles against it; she enters people's bodies by means of it, but sometimes heals them by taking it upon herself; she uses it as a means to enhance her own worship; she is enflamed by its heat and needs to be cooled, and may be cooled by the fanning of disease-heated humans, while the latter may also be cooled by pouring water on her image; she is both the scourge and the mistress of disease demons, and perhaps even their mistress in both senses of the term; she mercilessly chastizes her people with the disease, but holds its victims especially dear; she delights in the disease, is aroused by it, goes mad with it; she kills with it and uses it to give new life.⁴²

The ultimate mystery and potency of these village/disease goddesses may well lie precisely in the fact that their ambivalent natures are not capable of being comprehended rationally. That the patron deity of a

village who is its founder and protector should also assault that village with devastating epidemics seems to suggest a depth of irrationality beyond logical analysis. Nonetheless, some scholars such as Victor Turner have argued that the ongoing well-being of a society and culture depends on its being able to participate periodically in chaos, disorder, and tumult. Religious ritual and festival are the traditional means by which this is done. 43 Another scholar puts the case in similar terms: "The festival rite utilizes the potency of disorder. It harnesses the disorder of the 'other mind,' possession, trance, dreams, ecstasy . . . ; if these powers are harnessed properly, the society recovers a special potency from chaos beyond the limits of order."⁴⁴

Speaking of shamanic initiation, another scholar applies this logic to the individual level:

Thus the shaman's initiatory experience is represented as an involuntary surrender to disorder, as he is thrust protesting into the chaos which the ordered and controlled life of society strives so hard to deny, or at least to keep at bay. No matter how valiantly he struggles, disorder eventually claims him and marks him with the brand of a transcendental encounter. At its worst, in peripheral cults, this is seen as a baneful intrusion of malign power. At its best, in central possession religions it represents a danger-laden exposure to the powers of the cosmos. In both cases the initial experience withdraws the victim from the secure world of society and of ordered existence, and exposes him directly to those forces which, though they may be held to uphold the social order, also ultimately threaten it.

. . . The shaman is not the slave, but the master of anomaly and chaos Out of the agony of affliction and the dark night of the soul comes literally the ecstasy of spiritual victory. In rising to the challenge of the powers which rule his life and by valiantly overcoming them in this crucial initiatory rite which reimposes order on chaos and despair, man reasserts his mastery of the universe and affirms his control of destiny and fate.⁴⁵

Village goddesses, in their association with disease, sudden death, and other realities that threaten the stability or even the existence of the village system, might be understood as instigating society's confrontation with the chaotic, demonic, disruptive dimensions of life, particularly in the context of festivals, when the village goddesses are fully aroused. From this confrontation a new, more vigorous, more durable order might be won. The very ambivalence of these goddesses heightens their effectiveness in this role. They, like the diseases so often associated with

Image not available

Manasa *, goddess of snakes. A painted pottery image.
Contemporary, Bengal. Sudhansu Kumar Ray, *The Ritual Art of
the Bratas of Bengal* (Calcutta: Firma K. L. Mukhoipadhyay,
1961), plate xiv.

them, are unpredictable in their moods. They erupt onto the scene suddenly, always powerfully and undeniably, and usually dangerously. Manasa *, the North Indian goddess associated with snakes,⁴⁶ strikes suddenly and usually fatally and in so doing violently introduces terrifying chaos into the lives of those who are affected. Suddenly, unmistakably, the fragility of existence is underlined, and the normality of ordered, civilized village life is called into question. Similarly, Sitala* and Mariyamman*, both of whom are associated with smallpox, remind people that their tightly ordered worlds may be reduced to chaos at any moment. To pay attention to such goddesses, however, is to make one's view of reality less fragile, less prone to being shattered by sudden death.⁴⁷

The Bengali goddess Sitalas* presence in the form of smallpox⁴⁸ is referred to as her "grace" or play. Edward Dimock suggests that this grace might be understood as her ability to permit people a wider vision of reality. Normal human consciousness tends to impose a diachronic scheme on events whereby a limited, controlled, sequential angle of vision dominates the individual's perception of reality. Sickness, death, disease, and suffering generally seem to come and go, according to this way of viewing things. There are good times, and there are bad times, and the bad times are for the most part forgotten or repressed. A synchronic view of reality, however, in which past, present, and future are collapsed, in which sequential time is seen to be a mere construct, superimposes the whole range of human events—blessings, tragedies, good times, and bad times—on one another so that they may be viewed simultaneously. In this view the bad times are always with us. Disease, death, and disaster are endemic in good times, and vice versa. The goddess Sitala, in her periodic visitations in which the bad times become epidemic, reminds people that only a synchronic vision of life comes close to reality.⁴⁹ "By hearing of suffering, by realising the extent of human frailty, one with the eyes to see may be spared the necessity of more particular pain. Sitala allows us cognition of our position in the universe . . . Her grace is that she allows us restitution in return for the understanding of her constant presence."⁵⁰ To worship Sitala, to pay attention to what she represents, is to provide oneself with a more realistic, less fragile view of life, which in turn makes the inevitable outbursts of disease or tragic occurrences less devastating.

Appendix

The Indus Valley Civilization

The historian of Hindu religion must resist two temptations when faced with interpreting the data of the Indus Valley civilization. The first temptation is to say very little. The second temptation, the one that most scholars have chosen, is to say too much. The proper approach to the materials, I think, is to try to interpret them in their own context and not to seek interpretive keys from other cultures, such as those of the ancient Near East or the subsequent Indian tradition, unless overwhelming parallels can be demonstrated.

In reflecting on the history of goddess worship in the Hindu tradition, one has to acknowledge that the impressive data available in the Indus Valley civilization and in neighboring Baluchistan cultures may bear on such a history. While it is speculation to call these cultures Hindu, the presence of such evidence of goddess worship in the Indian subcontinent at such an early period surely deserves some comment. It also deserves comment because other scholars, a bit uncritically, I think, have traced the source of goddess worship in the Hindu tradition to the Indus Valley civilization.

What is the evidence, and what are we to make of it? We have evidence of three peasant cultures, centered in villages west of the Indus Valley in Baluchistan, which probably predate the Indus Valley culture itself. Two of these cultures, the Zhob Valley and the Kulli cultures, dating back to the third millennium B.C.E., have yielded female figurines. The Kulli figurines, which are earlier than the Zhob, are only shown from the waist up. They are heavily adorned with jewelry, and their heads and faces are pinched and somewhat resemble a hen's head. The faces are not clearly depicted, and the figurines thus have a somewhat anonymous look to them. Unlike the Indus Valley figures, their hair is not elaborate, and their breasts are not accented or exaggerated. The female figurines from the Zhob Valley in northern Baluchistan are also

only shown from the waist up. They do not wear as much jewelry as the Kulli figures, but their hair is more elaborately depicted and arranged. The most dramatic feature of the Zhob figures is the face. The faces all have large eyes that are hollow or bulbous, slit mouths, and fairly prominent noses. The breasts of the Zhob figures, though more clearly emphasized than those of the Kulli figurines, are not exaggerated either. 1

Although there are similarities between these figures and the figurines from the Indus Valley civilization (for example, the emphasis on jewelry and the elaborate coiffures of the Zhob specimens), the peasant culture figures are distinctively different from the Indus Valley examples and should be discussed in their own right. While cultural contact between these cultures and the Indus Valley culture is quite likely, it cannot be shown to have been overwhelming, and the figurines of the peasant cultures may have meant something quite different from what the figurines in the city culture of the plains meant. Because of the dissimilarities in appearance, then, I will treat the Kulli and Zhob figurines independently from the remains of the greater culture of the plains.

Little, indeed, can be said about what these female figures might have represented. It is even something of a conjecture to suggest that they were images of goddesses. The flat bases might imply that the figures were meant to be set up, perhaps for worship. The nudity of the figures calls attention to their female physiology, but this physiology is not unduly accented. If these figures did represent goddesses, it is difficult to say what these goddesses might have been like and what functions they fulfilled or what truths they revealed on the basis of their sex. The elaborate jewelry might suggest that they were adored with gifts; it also might imply high rank or simply suggest the usual costume of the peasant women. It is impossible to say. The unusual faces, although striking, also present us with no clear indication of who these figures might have been. On the one hand, the anonymity might call our attention to the sex of the figures rather than to their "personalities." On the other hand, the faces might simply be the result of crude craftsmanship or artistic stylization. Most interpreters of the Zhob Valley figurines have said that the faces portray negative qualities. One of the heads somewhat resembles a skull. One scholar, for example, says the type of figurine found in the Zhob Valley "is clearly intended to inspire horror and can hardly fail to remind us of the terrible and loathly images of the malignant Kali of which these figurines may be taken to be an early prototype."2

While I agree that the faces perhaps have grotesque overtones, I am not sure that they were intended to inspire horror or any other negative emotion. Again, the large eyes and small mouths simply may have been

stylized and may have had no malign significance for the artists. In any case, I consider it unjustified to conclude that we have here a prototype of the Hindu goddess Kali *. None of the Zhob figurines has any particular similarities to images of Kali, and no association with burial or cremation has been established by scholars seeking to interpret these early figures. If these Zhob "goddesses" were clearly associated with funeral ceremonies or burial or cremation grounds, then perhaps one might postulate an association with the much later goddess Kali. But even then it would be a weak association insofar as Kali's* function and meaning are not nearly exhausted in terms of her role as mistress of the cremation ground.

I am forced to yield to the first temptation mentioned above and say next to nothing about what these figurines might imply in relation to the later Hindu tradition. All one can justifiably conclude is that there is evidence of goddess figurines in two peasant cultures in the hills of Baluchistan in the second or perhaps late third millennium B.C.E. Insofar as male figures are lacking, one might go further and suggest that if these figurines represent goddesses, their religion, whatever it might have been, was more open to the divine or the sacred as revealed through women than through men and that this might have had something to do with the fertility of the crops. Again, the figurines do not seem to accentuate or exaggerate feminine physiology or the biologically creative role of females.

In moving from the Zhob Valley and Kulli cultures to the Indus Valley civilization we move from the mountains to the plains, from highly localized peasant cultures situated in small villages to an extensive, highly organized culture that was centralized in two large cities. The data relevant to goddess worship are also more extensive and complex when we turn to the culture of the plains.

Hundreds of female figurines have been found in the Indus Valley civilization. The very number of figurines has prompted one scholar to proclaim that there must have been a female figurine in every household.³ The figurines themselves vary quite widely. Most are made quite crudely and are of terracotta. Others, notably the famous "dancing girl," are skillfully crafted and made of bronze.⁴ A few male figures have been found, but in comparison to the female figurines their numbers are fairly insignificant (although several of them are striking and among the most dramatic figures found).⁵ Some of the figures are virtually indistinguishable according to sex, whereas others appear to be androgynous, having breasts and what appear to be male genitals.⁶

Generally, the female figurines are not like the so-called Venus figurines that have been found in prehistoric Europe.⁷ Very few of the In-

dus Valley statues accentuate the breasts, hips, or genital areas. Although there are some examples of this type, 8 most of the Indus Valley figures are on the slim side, often small breasted or sharp breasted. Many of the figures are of almost boyish build.⁹ A few of the figurines have very narrow waists, sharp breasts, and flared hips reminiscent of the way in which female figures are often portrayed in later Hinduism.¹⁰ A striking characteristic of most of the figurines is the wellarticulated head. The coiffures of the figurines are usually highly elaborate.¹¹ Head ornaments, or even horns, might be shown instead of or in addition to hair. In most cases one's attention is drawn to the figure's head because of these characteristics.¹² This stands in sharp contrast to the Venus type of figure, in which the head is usually tiny and nondescript, the viewer's attention being struck by the breasts, rump, and thighs. A few of the Indus Valley images do seem to assume poses that expose the genitals,¹³ but this is not typical, and none of these figures is a particularly good example of the splayedthighs posture that clearly attracts attention to the female womb or genital area.¹⁴ Finally, none of the figurines can positively be said to be pregnant.

Another feature of most of the figurines is the crudeness with which they were made. The faces seem to have been stuck together in a hurry (the features often being represented by lumps of clay stuck onto the face). In contrast to this is the figures' elaborate decoration with jewelry. Rarely is a figure shown with much clothing, although many of the figures wear a giridle.¹⁵ Finally, a few of the figures seem to have horns.¹⁶

There are a few additional female figures on small clay seals, most of whom are more dramatically suggestive than the figurines themselves. One tableau shows what appears to be a nude figure, probably a woman, but it is not entirely clear, with her legs spread and a tree emerging from her womb. The reverse of the seal shows a female figure seated or kneeling with a male figure standing beside her with what looks like a sickle.¹⁷ Another seal shows a "goddess" emerging from or standing in a bush or tree with a kneeling figure beside it and an animal facing her.¹⁸ A third scene depicts a nude female figure with an animal head (or mask) and perhaps animal feet (hooves) who leans over a rearing animal, a horned tiger perhaps. Her hand is placed on (or perhaps stabs) his shoulder, and a tree stands to the side of the animalheaded female figure.¹⁹ A fourth scene shows a clothed figure, whose sex is difficult to determine, standing between two animals with which he or she seems to be holding hands.²⁰

To complete our survey of the data that seem most relevant to possible goddess worship or exaltation of the feminine in the Indus Valley culture, mention should be made of several small circular stone objects

or discs with holes in the center. Some commentators have concluded that in conjunction with other objects that have been interpreted as phalluses the circular, pierced discs are meant to represent the vagina and that what we have in the Indus Valley civilization is an example of a religion that emphasized the sacred power of human sexuality. These objects are held to be prototypes of the yoni and linga * of later Hinduism.²¹

The majority of scholars who have sought to interpret this data have concluded that goddesses of one sort or another were a central part of the religion of the Indus Valley civilization. The evidence does seem to point to this conclusion. The nature of the goddesses worshiped, however, and the truths these beings have revealed are much more difficult questions. Some scholars have concluded that the Indus Valley culture was dominated by a cult of the Great Mother similar to cults in Asia Minor and the Mediterranean.²² Some scholars have also hypothesized that the religion of the Indus Valley culture represents an early form of Saktism* or an early form of the kind of goddess worship we find in medieval Hinduism.²³ Both of these conclusions are tempting. To exegete the relatively mute evidence of the Indus Valley on the basis of materials from other cultures is attractive because the Indus script has not yet been deciphered and therefore we have no textual descriptions or myths concerning the figurines discovered there. To suggest that the Indus Valley figurines are prototypes of later Hindu goddesses is also tempting insofar as it helps explain what appears to be a drastic change in emphasis in the history of the Hindu tradition, a change, that is, from the Vedic tradition, which is dominated by male deities, to a mythology in which goddesses become far more common and dominant. It seems logical to suppose that the emphasis on the feminine in later Hinduism is a survival or persistence of an indigenous, non-Aryan* religiosity that has finally "surfaced" in the Hindu tradition.

What are the facts that enable us to resort to either of these solutions in interpreting the Indus Valley data? It is true that there was trade between the Indus Valley and the ancient Near East,²⁴ and it is also true that in both the Indus Valley and the ancient Near East we have roughly contemporary city cultures located on rivers. There is little evidence, however, that the Indus Valley civilization was culturally dependent on ancient Near Eastern cultures or vice versa. Specifically, in the cultures of the ancient Near East which were roughly contemporary with the Indus Valley culture there seem to be no clear examples of figurines or scenes that suggest similarities to the Indus Valley data. The only striking examples, which are extremely few, are found in historically later cultures of the ancient Near East. Quite simply, one is struck by the dis-

similarities in appearance between the feminine images of the Indus Valley and the feminine images in the ancient Near East. The evidence of cultural dependence is not overwhelming. This does not mean that the Indus Valley "goddess cults" might not have been very similar to those of the ancient Near East. The differences in appearance between the figurines in the two areas may be merely artistic and stylistic. If one does presume cultural dependence, however, one does so on the basis of no clear evidence to that effect.

Turning to the goddess cults in later Hinduism for possible interpretive direction, we are in a similar dilemma. There are similarities between the Indus Valley data and the Hindu goddess cults, but these similarities, it seems to me, are more superficial than essential or may suggest only superficial continuities rather than essential continuities. It seems typical of both Indus Valley iconography and medieval Hindu iconography to emphasize elaborate adornment when portraying goddesses. In both cases, too, there is a tendency to portray goddesses with elaborate coiffures or lavishly adorned hair. There are also a few examples of images in the Indus Valley which are reminiscent of the slimwaisted, largebreasted images of goddesses in later Hinduism. Beyond these similarities in appearance, which are not overwhelming, there is really nothing else to suggest continuity between the Indus Valley images and later Hindu goddess cults. Marshall's interpretation of circular stones with holes in the middle as protoyonis and of other oblong objects as proto-lingas * is highly speculative. To my knowledge, the two types of objects have not been found conjoined, which would suggest a linga* set in a yoni, the central image in most Siva* temples. The dramatic scenes depicted on seals mentioned above do not help us much either. None of the scenes reminds us in any striking way of later Hindu myths that feature goddesses, nor do they suggest central themes in later Hindu goddess cults.

Finally, other evidence not bearing directly on goddesses from the Indus Valley does not allow us to presume any essential continuity with later Hinduism. While some scholars have been impressed with the so-called proto-siva*²⁵ and the highly ordered and probably hierarchical social system of the Indus Valley culture as being similar to aspects of later Hinduism, these similarities are not sufficient to allow us to presume an essential continuity between a highly developed city civilization with a strong centralized authority and later Hinduism, which is clearly village centered, lacks a strong central authority, and has a literary tradition greatly influenced by Aryan* religion.²⁶ The evidence for continuity is not so overwhelming that we can read back into the Indus Valley religion elaborate metaphysical truths and complex mythologies that

emerge in later Hinduism a thousand years or more after the collapse of the Indus Valley civilization. Clearly, the proper procedure to follow in interpreting the Indus Valley culture is to isolate the evidence and seek to discern meanings on the basis of the evidence itself without reference to contemporary foreign cultures or to a complex religion that postdates the Indus Valley civilization by a millennium.

Data relevant to goddess worship in the Indus Valley civilization show that very few images clearly accentuate feminine physiology. The majority of images stand in sharp contrast to the Venus type of image, in which the breasts, hips, rump, and genital area are exaggerated. In the Indus Valley images the focus of attention is directed not to their bodies but to their heads, which are unusually well formed and accentuated by elaborate coiffures or headdresses. Many of the figurines thus give the impression of being top heavy. Insofar as this is the case, it seems likely that whatever truths these images sought to convey had less to do with feminine physiology than with feminine psychology. Unless we limit our commentary to a few figures (clearly in the minority) that approximate the Venus type, we are not justified in speaking of a religion or a vision of reality that exalted the productive, nourishing, creative roles of the feminine. While these aspects are suggested in some images, these emphases cannot be said to be dominant themes on the basis of the data alone, which in general appear to deemphasize those features of feminine physiology that emphasize fertility and nourishment. Among the hundreds of figurines and in the few scenes depicted on seals there are hardly any examples of pregnant women, figures giving birth, figures displaying their genital organs, or figures suckling children.

The most promising data for purposes of interpretation are the female figures portrayed on the seals. Several general ideas seem to be conveyed here. The seal depicting a tree issuing from the womb of a nude woman may emphasize the relation between vegetative life and some (probably) divine feminine being.²⁷ It seems, on the basis of this figure, that this ancient culture knew a goddess who was associated with or manifested herself through vegetation, or perhaps was identified with the sap and vigor of plants or perhaps life in general, insofar as the tree issuing from her womb might be a symbol of all life. The reverse of the seal, showing a kneeling or seated female figure with a male figure standing over her holding a sickle, might suggest both an association of this female being with the crops (the sickle being an agricultural tool) and a ritual sacrifice of some sort.²⁸ If a sacrifice, or a sacrificial victim, is depicted here, we might hypothesize that a blood offering was made to a goddess to reinvigorate her productive energy, thus ensuring abundant and continued crops. But no sacrifice at all may be implied. The

kneeling female figure may simply be receiving a blessing from or showing obeisance to a male deity associated with the harvest. In any case, the combination of these two very suggestive scenes on the same seal (implying some clear relation) does lead us to conclude that a female being or goddess was known who gave birth to vegetation and had some association with crops. Insofar as the Indus Valley civilization was economically grounded in agriculture, this is not at all surprising. What is surprising is that there is so little further evidence of such a goddess.

Another seal stresses the association of a female being with vegetation. This seal shows a naked female figure standing in or emerging from a bush. ²⁹ That this being is a goddess seems likely because a row of kneeling figures is pictured beneath her, apparently adoring or worshiping her. What is odd about this scene is that an animal faces her, and apparently not a domestic animal but a wild animal. That seal in conjunction with the third seal portraying a dramatic scene featuring a female figure leads us to hypothesize another type of goddess, or female being, who is not so much associated with the fertility of the crops as with wild animals and vegetative life in general. This third seal shows a masked or animalheaded naked female apparently slaying (or leaning on) a horned tiger.³⁰ A tree also appears on the right of the seal. While this scene may depict a goddess defeating a demon in combat, what is more clearly suggested is some type of mistress of animals, a being who rules over the various animal species and is responsible both for the wellbeing of those species and for making them available for the welfare of human beings in the hunt. This type of figure admittedly seems to have very little place in an agriculturally based culture in which the economy must have been only peripherally associated with hunting. Nevertheless, the frequency with which wild animals are shown in the Indus Valley data is remarkable and forces one to use caution before concluding that the religion of the Indus Valley culture revolved around agriculture, the fertility of the crops, and ritual blood sacrifices aimed at ensuring the continued vitality of the crops.

In conclusion, then, what can be said about the meaning and importance of goddess worship in the Indus Valley civilization? First, we can surmise simply on the basis of the great number of female images found that goddesses were known and probably widely worshiped or exalted in this culture. Second, primarily on the basis of three scenes depicted on seals, we can surmise that a goddess was known who was associated with vegetation and most likely with the fertility of the crops. Also on the basis of the three seals and the frequency with which wild animals were shown, we can conclude that a female being was also known who had some connection with animals, perhaps the fertility of animals. If

these two types of goddesses were in fact the same goddess, we might further conclude that a goddess was known who presided over all life, plant and animal, and was adored for her lifegiving and lifesustaining powers. Whether such a being was also associated with or dependent on a male consort, was the recipient of ritual sacrifice, was mistress of the dead, or was fierce or benign in nature are almost impossible questions to answer.

If the majority of figurines are in fact additional representations of this being, then we might say that she was generally benign in character, for hardly any of the figurines successfully convey frightening aspects. We might say further, if the majority of the figurines are related to the scenes depicted on the seals, that this being was extraordinarily popular, not simply goddess of the elite. It seems likely from the very number of the figurines found that almost every household had such a figure.

There is one drawback to relating the vast number of terracotta figures to the female beings shown on the seals, however, and that is that the figures shown on the seals are not dressed like the majority of figurines. The ones on the seals are nude and do not wear elaborate jewelry or have elaborate coiffures. Insofar as the seals must aim at economy of line, however, as they are quite small, these details may simply have been left out. It is also the case, though, that none of the terracotta figurines has an animal head or is masked like the figure "slaying" the horned tiger. In conclusion, it is not clear that the terracotta figurines were representations of the female figures on the seals, so any conclusions that depend on this association must be tentative.

Notes

Introduction

1. For example, Narendra Nath Bhattacharyya, *History of the Sakta * Religion* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1974), and *Indian Mother Goddess* (Calcutta: Indian Studies Past and Present, 1971); Sadanand K. Dikshit, *The Mother Goddess* (New Delhi: Published by the author, 1957); Pushpendra Kumar, *Sakti* Cult in Ancient India* (Banaras: Bhartiya Publishing House, 1974); Ernest Alexander Payne, *The Saktas** (Calcutta: YMCA Publishing House, 1933); and M. C. P. Srivastava, *Mother Goddess in Indian Art, Archaeology and Literature* (Delhi: Agam Kala Prakashan, 1979).

2. For example, Raghunath Airi, *Concept of Sarasvati* (in Vedic Literature)* (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1977); Upendra Nath Dhal, *Goddess Laksmi: Origin and Development* (New Delhi: Oriental Publishers, 1978); Mohammad Israil Khan, *Sarasvati in Sanskrit Literature* (Ghaziabad: Crescent Publishing House, 1978); Bandana Saraswati, "The History of the Worship of Sri* in North India to cir. A.D. 550" (Ph.D. diss., University of London, 1971); C. Sivaramamurti, *Ganga** (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1976); Jagdish Narain Tiwari, "Studies in Goddess Cults in Northern India, with Reference to the First Seven Centuries A.D." (Ph.D. diss., Australian National University, n.d.).

3. For example, Rita Gross, "Hindu Female Deities as a Resource for the Contemporary Rediscovery of the Goddess," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 46, no. 3 (September 1978): 269-292.

4. David Kinsley, *The Sword and the Flute Krsna* and Kali** (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1975).

5. See my chapter 9, "The Mahadevi*."

1

Goddesses in Vedic Literature

1. Sometimes the idea of *sruti** is narrowed to mean primarily the *Upanisads**. The idea of *sruti* often also includes the *Bhagavad-gita**, which is much later than most Vedic literature.

2. For example, Sukumari Bhattacharji, *The Indian Theogony* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), pp. 160161; Stella Kramrisch, "The Indian Great Goddess," *History of Religions* 14, no. 4 (May 1975): 235265.
3. For example, *Satapatha-brahmana* * 2.2.1.19; 3.2.3.6, 19; 4.5.1.2; *Aitareyabrahmana** 1.8.
4. For example, *Satapatha-brahmana* 14.2.1.12; *Aitareya-bramana* 6.7; *Kausitakibrahmana** 5.1; 10.6; 12.2, 8; 14.5.
5. *Satapatha-brahmana* 3.2.1.183.2.3.30.
6. Ibid. 5.5.5.12.
7. Ibid. 4.6.7.13.
8. Ibid. 4.6.9.16.
9. Ibid. 6.1.2.511.
10. Ibid. 10.5.3.412.
11. *Taittiriya-brahmana** 1.6.1.4.
12. *Atharva-veda* 5.7.9.
13. *Satapatha-brahmana* 5.2.3.3.
14. Ibid. 9.1.2.9.
15. *Rg-veda** 1.34.1; *Atharva-veda* 19.47.2.
16. *Atharva-veda* 19.48.6.
17. *Rg-veda* 5.5.6.
18. Ibid. 10.127.6.
19. *Atharva-veda* 19.48.3.
20. Ibid. 19.49.4
21. Kramrisch, "The Indian Great Goddess," pp. 236239.
22. See my chapter 4, "Sarasvati*."
23. J. Przyluski, "The Great Goddess of India and Iran," *Indian Historical Quarterly* 10 (1934): 405430; Kramrisch, "The Indian Great Goddess," pp. 235265.
24. In Vedic literature some gods are frequently identified or associated with each other. We have noted above, for example, that Prthivi* and Dyaus, Vac* and Sarasvati, and Prthivi and Aditi are often identified or associated with each other. These identifications, however, are selective and consistent and should not lead us to suppose that the authors of Vedic literature presupposed that all deities were manifestations of one great god or one great goddess. While a very strong and articulate monistic position arises in Upanisadic* literature, there are only hints of this position in earlier Vedic texts.
25. See my chapter 9, "The Mahadevi*."
26. In the *Brahmanas** Prthivi is identified with Aditi, and Sarasvati is sometimes identified with Vac.

2

Sri-Laksmi*

1. Throughout this chapter I have assumed that Sri* and Laksmi* are the same. It seems clear that in almost every case the names refer to the same goddess. For a discussion of the evidence suggesting their independent

identity, see

[< previous page](#)

page_222

[next page >](#)

Bandana Saraswati, "The History of the Worship of Sri * in North India to cir. A.D. 550" (Ph.D. diss., University of London, 1971), pp. 291296.

2. Jan Gonda, *Aspects of Early Visnuism**, 2d ed. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1969), p. 188.
3. Although a process of personification seems evident in the origin of the goddess Sri in Vedic literature, it may be that her origins lie in pre-Vedic Indo-European traditions in which goddesses of royal power are common. It has long been known that the authors of the *Vedas* are Indo-Aryans and therefore related to other Indo-European peoples. As regards the goddess Sri, it is significant to note that goddesses like her, goddesses associated with royal power and authority, are found in several Indo-European traditions. The Irish goddess Flaith or Flaith Erenn is a good example. See Alf Hiltebeitel, *The Ritual of Battle* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1976), p. 176.
4. *Satapatha-brahmana** 11.4.3.1 ff.
5. For the text and translation of this hymn, see Saraswati, "The Worship of Sri," pp. 2231.
6. Upendra Nath Dhal, *Goddess Laksmi: Origin and Development* (New Delhi: Oriental Publishers, 1978), p. 178; see also the worship of Sri later in this chapter.
7. F. D. K. Bosch, *The Golden Germ* ('s Gravenhage: Mouton, 1960), pp. 8182.
8. Curt Maury, *Folk Origins of Indian Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), p. 114. Maury interprets the lotus as a symbol of the female sexual organ, which also emphasizes the meaning of the lotus as the source of all life or a symbol of all life (pp. 110111).
9. Niranjan Ghosh, *Concept and Iconography of the Goddess of Abundance and Fortune in Three Religions of India* (Burdwan: University of Burdwan, 1979), p. 54; Bosch, *The Golden Germ*, p. 80; Ananda Coomaraswamy, *Yaksas*, 2 parts (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1971), pt. 2, pp. 5660.
10. For a discussion of these images, see Ghosh, *Concept and Iconography*, pp. 7587; Saraswati, "The Worship of Sri," pp. 159161; Kiran Thaplyal, "Gaja-Laksmi* on Seals," in D. C. Sircar, ed., *Foreigners in Ancient India and Laksmi* and Sarasvati* in Art and Literature* (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1970), pp. 112125.
11. Heinrich Zimmer, *The Art of Indian Asia*, 2 vols. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1955), 1:160161.
12. Jan Gonda, *Ancient Indian Kingship from the Religious Point of View* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1969), pp. 78.
13. J. C. Heesterman, *The Ancient Indian Royal Consecration* (The Hague: Mouton, 1957), pp. 114122.
14. Gonda, *Ancient Indian Kingship*, p. 37, notes that Laksmi* is equated with *abhisekha** in some texts and is said to dwell in the royal umbrella.
15. Saraswati, "The Worship of Sri," p. 187.
16. *Ibid.*, pp. 157159.
17. Dhal, *Goddess Laksmi*, pp. 6566; Saraswati, "The Worship of Sri," pp. 150153.

18. Dhal, *Goddess Laksmi*, pp. 6869.
19. Saraswati, "The Worship of Sri *," pp. 138147.
20. *Mahabharata** 12.124.4547.
21. *Vamana-purana** 49.1450; *Mahabharata* 12.216.16; *Devi-bhagavata-purana** 8.19.15. See Dhal, *Goddess Laksmi*, pp. 9495.
22. *Mahabharata* 12.221.14 ff.; Dhal, *Goddess Laksmi*, pp. 8889.
23. For Indra's association with the plough, see *Rg-veda** 2.21.1 and 6.20.1. For Indra as a phallic god of fertility, see Wendy O'Flaherty, *Asceticism and Eroticism in the Mythology of Siva** (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp. 8586.
24. Maury, *Folk Origins*, p. 105, thinks that Sri-Laksmi's* association with wealth is secondary and subsidiary to her association with vegetation and calls her association with wealth the result of a crass preoccupation with "mundane vanities." Sri-Laksmi's association with wealth, however, seems both ancient and consistent with her other qualities.
25. Dhal, *Goddess Laksmi*, pp. 9193.
26. Saraswati, "The Worship of Sri," pp. 173177.
27. See Ananda Coomaraswamy, *Yaksas*, 2 parts (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1971), pt. 1, pp. 32 ff., for the woman-and-tree motif.
28. See *ibid.*, pt. 2, pls. 34 and 35.
29. For example, *Mahabharata* 12.220.4446.
30. Banabhatta*, *Kadambari** (Bombay: Mathuranathsastri*, 1940), pp. 210 ff.; Saraswati, "The Worship of Sri," pp. 287288.
31. For the early history of Sris* association with Visnu*, see Saraswati, "The Worship of Sri," pp. 113121.
32. Dhal, *Goddess Laksmi*, pp. 7880.
33. The story of the churning of the ocean is found in the following texts: *Mahabharata* 5.102.12 ff.; *Ramayana** 4.58.13; *Visnu-purana** 1.9.105; *Padma-purana** 5.4.1 ff.; *Bhagavata-purana** 8.8.728; Saraswati, "The Worship of Sri," pp. 299 ff.
34. For a discussion of the water cosmology, see Coomaraswamy, *Yaksas*, pt. 2, pp. 1926.
35. Heinrich Zimmer, *The Art of Indian Asia*, 2 vols. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1955), 1:165166.
36. *Visnu-purana* 1.9 ff.; *Padma-purana* 1.5.4 ff.; Dhal, *Goddess Laksmi*, pp. 8485.
37. Gonda, *Aspects of Early Visnuism**, pp. 164167.
38. See Zimmer, *Art of Indian Asia*, vol. 2, pl. 111; Saraswati, "The Worship of Sri," pp. 234238.
39. For Sri-Laksmi* accompanying Visnu in his different *avatars**, see Saraswati, "The Worship of Sri," pp. 133, 267273; *Laksmi-tantra** 8.3150; K. S. Behera, "Laksmi* in Orissan Literature and Art," in Sircar, ed., *Foreigners in Ancient India*, pp. 9697.
40. Behera, *Laksmi* in Orissan Literature and Art*, p. 101.
41. Saraswati, "The Worship of Sri," p. 242.
42. *Brahma-vaivarta-purana** 3.23.19 ff.; Dhal, *Goddess Laksmi*, p. 117.

43. *Garuda-purana* * 5.37; Dhal, *Goddess Laksmi*, p. 118.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 118.
45. Saraswati, "The Worship of Sri*," p. 239.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 244.
47. D. C. Sircar, "ArdhanariNarayana*," in Sircar, ed., *Foreigners in Ancient India*, pp. 132141; Ghosh, *Concept and Iconography*, pp. 9296.
48. Saraswati, "The Worship of Sri," pp. 133135.
49. F. Otto Schrader, *Introduction to the Pancaratra* and the Ahirbudhnya Samhita** (Madras: Adyar Library, 1916), pp. 3435.
50. Translations are from the *Laksmi* Tantra, a Pancaratra Text*, trans. Sanjukta Gupta (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1972).
51. For example, *Laksmi-tantra** 45.1621.
52. Ghosh, *Concept and Iconography*, p. 28.
53. It is interesting to note that Sri does *not* play a significant role in this respect in the thought of Ramanuja*, the most famous philosopher of the Sri Vaisnava* movement; John Carman, *The Theology of Ramanuja** (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1974), pp. 238244.
54. Vasuda Narayanan, "The Goddess Sri: The Blossoming Lotus and Breast Jewel of Visnu*," in John Stratton Hawley and Donna Marie Wulff, eds., *The Divine Consort: Radha* and the Goddesses of India* (Berkeley, Calif.: Religious Studies Series, 1982), p. 225.
55. *Ibid.*, p. 226.
56. Vasudhanarayanan*, "*Karma and Krpa**. Human Bondage and Divine Grace: The Tenkalai* Sri Vaisnava Position" (DePaul University, n.d.), p. 4.
57. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
58. Narayanan, "The Goddess Sri," pp. 228230.
59. Maury, *Folk Origins*, pp. 101102.
60. Dhal, *Goddess Laksmi*, pp. 164184.
61. M. Srivastava, *Mother Goddess*, p. 189.
62. Dhal, *Goddess Laksmi*, p. 176.
63. Behera, *Laksmi in Orissan Literature and Art*, pp. 104105.
64. See my chapter 7, "Durga*."
65. Dhal, *Goddess Laksmi*, p. 179.
66. *Ibid.*, p. 178.
67. *Ibid.*, pp. 150156, 177178.
68. M. Srivastava, *Mother Goddess*, p. 190.
69. Dhal, *Goddess Laksmi*, pp. 166167.
70. Behera, *Laksmi in Orissan Literature and Art*, pp. 100102, speaking of the festival tradition at the

Jagannatha* temple in Puri.

3

Parvati*

1. *Vajasaneyi-samhita** 3.57.

2. *Taittiriya-brahmana** 1.6.10.45.

3. For example, *Siva-purana**, *Vayaviya-samhita** 2.2.4660.

[< previous page](#)

page_225

[next page >](#)

4. M. C. P. Srivastava, *Mother Goddess in Indian Art, Archaeology and Literature* (Delhi: Agam Kala Prakashan, 1979), p. 81.
5. The following account of the myth of Sati * primarily follows the *Siva-purana** account of the story.
6. For example, *Kalika-purana** 24.
7. See my chapter 12, "Goddesses and Sacred Geography."
8. Kamarupa* is one of the most famous centers of goddess worship in India today. At the goddess's temple in Kamarupa the sacred image is in the form of a yoni.
9. *Brhaddharma-purana** 2.610; *Kalika-purana* 1518; *Mahabhagavata-purana** 811.
10. Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *Asceticism and Eroticism in the Mythology of Siva** (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), *passim*.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 83; see particularly the Satarudriya* hymn, which has many names for Siva* that suggest his dangerous nature (*Taittiriya-samhita** 4.5.110), and the account of the Sulagava* ritual as described in the *asvalayanagrhyasutra** 4.8.140.
12. See my chapter 12, "Goddesses and Sacred Geography."
13. For a discussion of the relation between Sati and suttee, see Paul Courtright, "Sati and Suttee: Widow Immolation in Hinduism and Its Western Interpretations" (University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 1982).
14. A long list of goddesses called Matrkas* (mothers) is mentioned in the *Mahabharata** 9.45, and they are said to dwell in inaccessible places, including mountains. One of Durga's* popular epithets is Vindhyaivasini*, "she who dwells in the Vindhya Mountains."
15. For example, *Devi-bhagavata-purana** 7.29.2630; 3.4.137.
16. See my chapter 9, "The Mahadevi*."
17. The following account of Parvatis* mythology primarily follows the *Siva-purana**.
18. *Siva-purana*, Rudra-samhita* 3.4.26; 3.8.4548.
19. *Devi-bhagavata-purana* 7.31.5557; *Siva-purana*, Rudra-samhita 3.5.29.
20. *Siva-purana*, Rudra-samhita 3.5.31.
21. For example, *Vamana-purana** 2527; *Siva-purana*, Rudra-samhita 3.6.24.
22. *Siva-purana*, Rudra-samhita 3.8.811.
23. *Ibid.* 3.1719; the resuscitation of Kama*: 3:51.1017.
24. *Ibid.* 3.32.
25. The idea that heat is accumulated by doing austerities may have to do with the obvious phenomenon that heat is expended with vigorous exercise. One loses heat when acting in the world, one sweats when exerting oneself. Asceticism generally involves withdrawal from the world and the severe restricting of most normal bodily functions, particularly sex. By thus stopping or hindering the normal outflow or leakage of heat one accumulates great amounts of heat, which may then be used to burn away impurities, to threaten or harm an opponent, or to force the gods to grant a boon.

26. *Siva-purana* *, Rudra-samhita* 3.23.1934.
27. Ibid. 3.25.4551; 3.27.1038, where Siva* himself speaks to Parvati*.
28. Ibid. 3.43.565.
29. Ibid. 4.1.4446.
30. Ibid. 4.2.970.
31. Ibid. 4.1318.
32. T. A. Gopinatha Rao, *Elements of Hindu Iconography*, 2d ed., 2 vols. (New York: Paragon, 1968), vol. 2, pt. 1, pls. 23, 24, 26.
33. For example, *ibid.*, pl. 25.
34. Wendy O'Flaherty, *Hindu Myths* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1975), cover picture; see also O'Flaherty, *Asceticism and Eroticism*, pl. 10 facing p. 224.
35. O'Flaherty, *Asceticism and Eroticism*, p. 252.
36. For example, Edward J. Thompson and Arthur Marshman Spencer, trans., *Bengali Religious Lyrics, Sakta** (Calcutta: Association Press, 1923), no. 98, p. 98.
37. *Mahabharata** 13.140.
38. *Siva-purana*, Vayaviyasamhita* 25.148.
39. *Vamana-purana** 2930.
40. For example, *Linga-purana** 1.106; 1.72.6668.
41. Glenn Yocum, *Hymns to the Dancing Siva*: A Study of Manikkavacakars* "Tiruvacakam*"* (Columbia, Mo.: South Asia Books, 1982), p. 119.
42. *Mahabharata* 3.81.105110.
43. O'Flaherty, *Asceticism and Eroticism*, p. 158.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 157.
45. *Ibid.*
46. C. Sivaramamurti, *Nataraja in Art, Thought and Literature* (New Delhi: National Museum, 1974), p. 144.
47. *Ibid.*, p. 138.
48. Kumaraguruparar, *Minaksiammam* Pillaittamil**, translated from Tamil for me by K. Sivaraman, Department of Religious Studies, McMaster University.
49. Sivaramamurti, *Nataraja in Art*, p. 138.
50. For the madness of Siva, see David Kinsley, "Through the Looking Glass': Divine Madness in the Hindu Religious Tradition," *History of Religions* 13, no. 4 (May 1974): 274278; Glen Yocum, "Manikkavacakars* Image of Siva," *History of Religions* 16, no. 1 (August 1976): 2731; Glen Yocum, "The Goddess in a Tamil Saiva* Devotional Text, Manikkavacakar's *Tiruvacakam*," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 45, no. 1, supplement (March 1977): K, 372373.
51. *Siva-purana*, Rudra-samhita 3.12.2833.
52. Siva sometimes plays the role of subduing or taming a goddess. This goddess is usually the fierce, wild Kali* or a goddess who plays the role of a warrior, such as Minaksi*. Prior to her taming or her marriage to

Siva, the goddess in these stories is described as dangerous. See David Shulman, *Tamil Temple Myths* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1980), pp. 176-211. It has also been argued that outside of marriage, or prior to marriage, goddesses are generally fierce and dangerous, but they are tamed when married. The implication of this is

[< previous page](#)

page_227

[next page >](#)

that the male deity somehow tames the goddess to whom he becomes married. See Lawrence A. Babb, *The Divine Hierarchy: Popular Hinduism in Central India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975), pp. 217226. In the case of Parvati * and Siva*, though, it is Siva who needs taming, and he is tamed by Parvati; she is never described as dangerous or wild prior to her marriage to Siva.

53. O'Flaherty, *Asceticism and Eroticism*, p. 225.

54. Ibid., p. 220.

55. Ibid.

56. Ibid., p. 151.

57. Ibid., p. 257.

58. *Siva-purana**, *Vayaviyasamhita** 2.4.18, 2930.

59. *Linga-purana** 2.11.4.

60. *Siva-purana*, *Vayaviya-samhita* 2.4.38, 54, 75; *Linga-purana* 2.11.1932.

61. *Linga-purana* 2.11.5.

62. *Siva-purana*, *Vayaviya-samhita* 2.4.55.

63. *Linga-purana* 2.11.6.

64. *Siva-purana*, *Vayaviya-samhita* 2.4.42.

65. *Linga-purana* 2.11.28.

66. *Siva-purana*, *Vayaviya-samhita* 2.4.62.

67. *Linga-purana* 2.11.29.

68. Ibid. 2.11.4.

69. Ibid. 2.11.26.

70. Ibid. 2.11.4.

71. For example, Jitendra Nath Banerjea, *The Development of Hindu Iconography*, 2d ed. (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1956), pl. 38, no. 4.

72. *Siva-purana*, *Satarudra-samhita* 1.424; *Vayaviya-samhita* 1.15.133.

73. Siva is actually referred to as mother in some of the hymns of Manikkavacakar*; Yocum, *Hymns to the Dancing Siva*, pp. 126127.

74. For example, Philip Rawson, *The Art of Tantra* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973), fig. 30, p. 51; fig. 166, p. 200.

75. O'Flaherty, *Asceticism and Eroticism*, pp. 138.

76. *Siva-purana*, *Rudra-samhita** 3.27.1038.

77. Ibid. 3.22.2862.

78. Yocum, *Hymns to the Dancing Siva*, p. 120.

79. Ibid., p. 120.

80. Ibid., pp. 124125.

81. Ibid., p. 117.

82. Parvati plays a similar role in Manikkavacakars* poems; Yocum, *Hymns to the Dancing Siva*, p. 127.

83. Mariasusai Dhavamony, *Love of God according to SaivaSiddhanta** (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 186.

84. Ibid., pp. 188, 190.

85. For example, *Siva-purana*, Kailasasamhita* 29.

86. For example, *Mahanirvana-tantra**, which consists entirely of a dialogue between Siva as teacher and Parvati as student.

[< previous page](#)

page_228

[next page >](#)

4

Sarasvati *

1. See my chapter 1, "Goddesses in Vedic Literature."
2. See my chapter 12, "Goddesses and Sacred Geography."
3. See Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (Cleveland: World Publishing Co., 1963), chapter 5, "The Waters and Water Symbolism," pp. 188-215.
4. A. K. Chatterjee, "Some Aspects of Sarasvati," in D. C. Sircar, ed., *Foreigners in Ancient India and Lakshmi and Sarasvati in Art and Literature* (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1970), p. 150.
5. Raghunath Airo, *Concept of Sarasvati in Vedic Literature* (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1977), pp. 3 ff.
6. *Vamana-purana** 40.140; *Skandapurana** 6.46.28; M. C. P. Srivastava, *Mother Goddess in Indian Art, Archaeology and Literature* (Deli: Agam Kala Prakashan, 1979), p. 190.
7. *Matsya-purana** 3.3047.
8. *Brahma-vaivarta-purana** 2.1.1 ff.; *Devi-bhagavata-purana** 9.1.1 ff.
9. *Devi-bhagavata-purana* 9.1.3033.
10. Ibid. 9.1.34.
11. *Brahma-vaivarta-purana* 2.2.54 ff.; *Devi-bhagavata-purana* 9.1.34.
12. Anand Swarup Gupta, "Conception of Sarasvati in the Puranas*," *Purana** 4, no. 1 (1962): 71.
13. *Skanda-purana* 7.33.96; Gupta, "Conception of Sarasvati," p. 72.
14. Chatterjee, "Some Aspects of Sarasvati," p. 151.
15. See my chapter 4, note 6.
16. Gupta, "Conception of Sarasvati," p. 60.
17. See also *Skanda-purana* 6.46.28; Gupta, "Conception of Sarasvati," p. 60.
18. Gupta, "Conception of Sarasvati," pp. 76-77.
19. Ibid., p. 69.
20. Ibid. Sarasvati often acts as the arbiter in philosophical debates and "is also widely known as bestowing upon mortals the ability to solve philosophical problems," for example, in *Brahma-vaivarta-purana*, *Praktikhanda** 5.2127; Phyllis Granoff, "Scholars and Wonder-Workers: Some Remarks on the Role of the Supernatural in Philosophical Contests in Vedanta Hagiographies" (McMaster University, 1984), p. 22.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid., p. 76.
23. Ibid., p. 69.
24. *Agni-purana** 50.16; Mohammad Israil Khan, *Sarasvati in Sanskrit Literature* (Ghaziabad: Crescent Publishing House, 1978), pls. 3, 9, 11.
25. M. Srivastava, *Mother Goddess*, p. 133; Gupta, "Conception of Sarasvati," pp. 80-81.
26. Gupta, "Conception of Sarasvati," p. 80.

27. Ibid.

[< previous page](#)

page_229

[next page >](#)

28. Ibid., p. 81.
29. Ibid.
30. *Devi-bhagavata-purana* * 9.1.34.
31. Gupta, "Conception of Sarasvati*," pp. 7879, gives a few examples.
32. Kahn, *Sarasvati in Sanskrit Literature*, pls. 6, 7.
33. Gupta, *Conception of Sarasvati*, p. 87.
34. Ibid., pp. 8788.

5
Sita*

1. Edmour Babineau, "The Interaction of Love of God and Social Duty in the Ramcarit-manas*" (Ph.D. diss., McMaster University, 1975), pp. 4648; R. G. Bhandarkar, *Vaisnavism*, Saivism* and Minor Religious Systems* (Strassburg: K. J. Trübner, 1913), pp. 7576.
2. *Rg-veda** 4.57.67; *The Hymns of the Rg-veda**, trans. Ralph Griffith, 4th ed., 2 vols. (Banaras: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office, 1963), 1:461.
3. Cornelia Dimmitt, "Sita: Mother Goddess and *Sakti**," in John Stratton Hawley and Donna Marie Wulff, eds., *The Divine Consort: Radha* and the Goddesses of India* (Berkeley, Calif.: Berkeley Religious Studies Series, 1982), p. 211.
4. Ibid., p. 212.
5. Ibid.
6. *Satapatha-brahmana** 7.2.2.221.
7. Dimmitt, "Sita," p. 212.
8. Jan Gonda, *Ancient Indian Kingship from the Religious Point of View* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1969), pp. 68, 129.
9. For example, *Rg-veda* 1.22.
10. Gonda, *Ancient Indian Kingship*, p. 130; Phyllis Kaplan Herman, "Ideal Kingship and the Feminine Power: A Study of the Depiction of 'Ramrajya*' in the Valmikiramayana*" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1979), pp. 6575.
11. *Mahabharata** 5.102 ff.; *Ramayana** 4.58; *Visnu-purana** 1.9.105; *Padma-purana** 5.4.1 ff.; *Bhagavata-purana** 8.8.728.
12. Herman, "Ideal Kingship and the Feminine Power," p. 56.
13. *Visnu-purana** 4.5.28; Herman, "Ideal Kingship and the Feminine Power," p. 114.
14. Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (Cleveland: World Publishing Co., 1963), pp. 259260.
15. *Ramayana* 2.114.
16. Ibid. 3.63.
17. Ananda Coomaraswamy, "On the Loathly Bride," *Speculum: A Journal of Medieval Studies* 20, no. 4 (1945): 396.
18. *The Laws of Manu*, trans. G. Bühler (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1975), p. 196.
19. Ibid., p. 328.

20. *Ramayana* 5.22.

[< previous page](#)

page_230

[next page >](#)

21. *The Ramayana of Valmiki*, trans. Hari Prasad Shastri, 3 vols. (London: Shantisadan, 195762), 1:233.
22. *Ibid.*, 1:236237.
23. *Ibid.*, 1:238.
24. *Ibid.*, 2:373374.
25. *Ibid.*, 2:377.
26. *Ibid.*, 2:379.
27. *Ibid.*, 3:336.
28. *Ibid.*, 3:338.
29. *Ibid.*, 3:529.
30. *Ibid.*, 3:617.
31. M. N. Srinivas, *Marriage and Family in Mysore* (Bombay: New Book Co., 1942), p. 195.
32. Sudhir Kakar, *The Inner World: A Psycho-analytic Study of Childhood and Society in India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 62.
33. Akshaykumar Kayal, "Women in Folk-Sayings of West Bengal," in Sankar Sen Gupta, ed., *A Study of Women in Bengal* (Calcutta: Indian Publications, 1970), p. xxiii.
34. Kakar, *The Inner World*, p. 64.
35. Babineau, "Love of God and Social Duty," pp. 161238.
36. Tulsi * Das*, *Kavitavali**, trans. F. R. Allchin (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1964); p. 76.
37. *Vinayapatrika** 104.1; Tulsi Das, *The Petition to Ram*: Hindu Devotional Hymns of the Seventeenth Century (Vinaya-patrika)*, trans. Raymond Allchin (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1966), p. 155.
38. Tulsi Das, *The Ramayana of Tulsidas*, trans. A. C. Atkins, 2 vols. (New Delhi: Hindustan Times, n.d.), 1:1.
39. Norvin Hein, "The Ram* Lila*," in Milton Singer, ed., *Traditional India: Structure and Change* (Philadelphia: American Folklore Society, 1959), p. 87.
40. For example, *Vinaya-patrika* 53.4; 55.2, 58.1; 63.8; 77.1.
41. Introductory hymn to *Ramcarit-manas**; hymns introducing *Vinaya-patrika* 15 and 16 to Parvati*, Durga*, and Kalika*; 1720 to Ganga*; and 21 to Yamuna*.
42. *Vinaya-patrika* 4142.
43. Babineau, "Love of God and Social Duty," p. 287.

6

Radha*

1. See David Kinsley, *The Divine Player A Study of Krsna* Lila* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1979), pp. 112118.

2. For the early history of Radha*, see Jayadeva, *Love Song of the Dark Lord: Jayadeva's "Gitagovinda,"* ed. and trans. Barbara Miller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), pp. 2637; S. C. Mukherji, *A Study of Vaisnavism* in Ancient and Medieval Bengal* (Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1966), pp. 183195.

3. Jayadeva, *Love Song of the Dark Lord*, p. 29.
4. Ibid., p. 30.
5. Ibid., p. 34.
6. Ibid., p. 33.
7. Ibid., p. 35.
8. For the date and setting of the *Bhagavata-purana* *, see Thomas J. Hopkins, "The Social Teachings of the *Bhagavata-purana* *," and J. A. B. van Buitenen, "On the Archaism of the *Bhagavata Purana*," in Milton Singer, ed., *Krishna: Myths, Rites, and Attitudes* (Honolulu: East-West Center Press, 1966), pp. 322 and 2340.
9. Jayadeva, *Love Song of the Dark Lord*, p. 74.
10. Craig Jones, "Radha*: The Parodhanayika*" (M.A. thesis, McMaster University, 1980), pp. 1920.
11. Edward C. Dimock, Jr., and Denise Levertov, trans., *In Praise of Krishna: Songs from the Bengali* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1967), p. 51; excerpt from "I who body and soul," copyright ã 1965 by Modern Poetry Association from the book *In Praise of Krishna* by Edward C. Dimock and Denise Levertov; reprinted by permission of Doubleday & Company, Inc.
12. Vidyapati*, *Love Songs of Vidyapati**, trans. Deben Bhattacharya (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1963), p. 65.
13. Candidas*, *Love Songs of Candidas**, trans. Deben Bhattacharya (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1967), p. 135.
14. Ibid., p. 67.
15. Richard Barz, *The Bhakti Cult of Vallabhacarya** (Faridabad, Haryana: Thomson Press, 1976), p. 90.
16. S. K. De, *Early History of the Vaisnava Faith and Movement in Bengal* (Calcutta: Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1961), pp. 409410; Edward C. Dimock, *The Place of the Hidden Moon* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), pp. 17, 162, 211213.
17. Dimock, *The Place of the Hidden Moon*, pp. 208210.
18. Rupa* Gosvamin*, *Vidagdhamadhava** 2.17; Donna Marie Wulff, "A Sanskrit Portrait: Radha in the Plays of Rupa* Gosvami*," in John Stratton Hawley and Donna Marie Wulff, eds., *The Divine Consort: Radha* and the Goddesses of India* (Berkeley, Calif.: Berkeley Religious Studies Series, 1982), p. 29.
19. Wulff, "A Sanskrit Portrait," p. 31.
20. *Vidagdhamadhava* 5.18; Wulff, "A Sanskrit Portrait," p. 31.
21. Wulff, "A Sanskrit Portrait," pp. 3235.
22. Ibid., p. 36. For Radha's* adoration, see also John Stratton Hawley, *At Play with Krishna: Pilgrimage Dramas from Brindavan* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1981), pp. 168 ff. It should also be noted in reference to Radha's lofty status that in most North Indian Krsna* temples and shrines the central image is of Krsna and Radha.
23. Kinsley, *The Divine Player*, pp. 109110. The contemporary expression of this idea is seen in the invocation addressed to Radha and Krsna at the beginning of a religious drama in Brindavan: "Homage to Radha, Krishna's essence, and Krishna, the essence of Radha" (Hawley, *At Play with Krishna*, p. 168).
24. Jones, "Radha," pp. 4860.

25. The *Devi-bhagavata-purana* * contains several parallel passages in which Radha* figures prominently. See Cheever Mackenzie Brown, *God as Mother: A Feminine Theology in India* (Hartford, Vt.: Claude Stark, 1974), pp. 207215.

26. Prakrti-khanda 55.8687; Brown, *God as Mother*, p. 124.

27. Krsnajanmakhanda* 15.5960; Brown, *God as Mother*, p. 128.

28. Krsnajanma-khanda 6.202203; Brown, *God as Mother*, p. 138.

29. Krsnajanma-khanda 6.208212; Brown, *God as Mother*, pp. 130131.

30. Krsnajanma-khanda 67.1314; Brown, *God as Mother*, p. 132.

31. Krsnajanma-khanda 124.911; Brown, *God as Mother*, p. 198.

32. Prakrtikhanda* 23; Brown, *God as Mother*, pp. 168169.

33. Brown, *God as Mother*, p. 179.

34. Prakrti-khanda 15.1629.

35. Krsnajanma-khanda 130.4888.

36. J. N. Farquhar, *An Outline of the Religious Literature of India* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1967), p. 318.

7

Durga*

1. *Taittiriya-aranyaka** 10.1.7.

2. M. C. P. Srivastava, *Mother Goddess in Indian Art, Archaeology and Literature* (Delhi: Agam Kala Prakashan, 1979), pp. 111113; Jitendra Nath Banerjea, *The Development of Hindu Iconography*, 2d ed. (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1956), pp. 495500.

3. The most celebrated text describing Durga's* mythological exploits is the *Devi-mahatmya**, which constitutes chapters 8193 of the *Markandeyapurana**. The myth of Durga defeating Mahisa* is also found in the *Vamana-purana** 19.121.52; *Varaha-purana** 62.195.65; *Siva-purana** 5.46.163; *Devi-bhagavata-purana* 5.220; *Skandapurana**; and several *Upa-puranas**. The myth concerning Durga's slaying of Sumbha* and Nisumbha* is also found in the *Vamana-purana* 29.130.73; *Siva-purana* 5.47.148.50; *Skanda-purana* 7.3.24.122; and several *Upa-puranas*. The worship of Durga is enjoined and described in the *Kalika-purana** 61; *Mahabhagavata-purana** 4548; and *Devi-purana** 2123.

4. For example, the hymn to Arya* in *Harivamsa** 3.3; *Visnu-purana** 5.1.95; and *Mahabharata**, Virataparva* 6.

5. M. Srivastava, *Mother Goddess*, p. 110.

6. *Devi-mahatmya* 5.38; *Vamana-purana* 28.625.

7. Heinrich Zimmer, *Myths and Symbols of Indian Art and Civilization*, ed. Joseph Campbell (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), pl. 56.

8. See my chapter 8, "Kali*," and chapter 10, "The Matrkas*."

9. *Devi-mahatmya* 8.62.

10. The term *liminal* has been used by Victor Turner to designate boundary situations, characteristics, and so on. He notes that many rituals purposely seek to involve participants in such situations to allow them to step outside their normal social roles and restraints. See his *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1974), pp. 231270.

11. David Dean Shulman, *Tamil Temple Myths: Sacrifice and Divine Marriage in the South Indian Saiva Tradition* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1980), pp. 186187.
12. *Devi-mahatmya* * .5665; *Devi-bhagavata-purana** 5.220.
13. *Devi-bhagavata-purana* 5.11.1730.
14. For example, *Manu-dharma-sastra** 9.1417; 5.147149.
15. See Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1977).
16. Pearl Ostroff, "The Demon-slaying Devi*: A Study of Her Puranic* Myths" (M.A. thesis, McMaster University, 1978), pp. 5657.
17. David Kinsley, "The Portrait of the Goddess in the *Devi-mahatmya*," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 46, no. 4 (December 1978): 497498.
18. *Devi-mahatmya* 2.910.
19. David Kinsley, *The Divine Player A Study of Krsnalila** (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1979), pp. 155.
20. Balram Srivastava, *Iconography of Sakti*: A Study Based on Sritattvanidhi** (Delhi: Chaukhambha Orientalia, 1978), plate facing p. 67.
21. Pandurang V. Kane, *History of Dharmasastra**, 5 vols. (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Institute, 193062), 5:171; Pratapachandra* Ghosha, *Durga Puja: With Notes and Illustrations* (Calcutta: Hindoo Patriot Press, 1871), p. 39.
22. Abbé J. A. Dubois, *Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies*, trans. Henry K. Beauchamp, 3d ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1906), pp. 569570; see also Paul Thomas, *Hindu Religion, Customs and Manners* (Bombay: Taraporevala, n.d.), p. 147. I am indebted to Pearl Ostroff for showing the connection between Durga* and military themes in Hinduism.
23. Alexander Kinloch Forbes, *RasMala*: Hindu Annals of Western India* (New Delhi: Heritage Publishers, 1973), p. 614.
24. Kane, *History of Dharmasastra*, 5:190.
25. Ibid., p. 193.
26. Krishna Kanta Handiqui, *Yasastilaka* and Indian Culture* (Sholapur: Jaina Samskriti* Samrakshakasangha* , 1949), p. 398.
27. *Garuda-purana** 135.5; *Visnudharmottarapurana** 2.158; *Devi-purana** 21.22.
28. *Vakpatirajasgaudav**, trans. N. G. Suru (Ahmedabad: Prakrit Text Society, 1975), verses 285337.
29. For a discussion of the relationship between the *sami** tree and weapons in both the *Mahabharata** and the present day during Durga Puja*, see Madeleine Biardeau, "L'arbre *sami** et le buffle sacrificiel," in Madeleine Biardeau, ed., *Autour de la déesse hindoue* (Paris: Centre d'Études de l'Inde et de l'Asie du Sud, 1981).
30. *Worship of the Goddess according to the Kalika-purana**, trans. K. R. Van Kooij (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1972) 62.2427, 3032, 4143, 49; see also *Mahabhagavata-purana** 3648; *Brhaddharma-purana** 1.1822.
31. Narendra Nath Bhattacharyya, *History of the Sakta* Religion* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1964), pp. 133, 149.

32. Ákos Öster, *The Play of the Gods: Locality, Ideology, Structure, and Time in the Festivals of a Bengali Town* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 18.
33. P. K. Gode, "Hari Kavi's Contribution to the Problem of the Bhavani * Sword of Shivaji the Great," *New Indian Antiquary* 3 (194041): 8283.
34. Ibid., pp. 8485, 92.
35. Ibid., p. 98.
36. James Tod, *Annals and Antiquities of Rajast'han*, 2 vols. (New Delhi: M. N. Publishers, 1978), 1:465.
37. Ibid., p. 184.
38. Kane, *History of Dharmasastra**, 5:163; Ghosha, *Durga Puja*, pp. 4151.
39. Ghosha, *Durga Puja*, p. 41.
40. Ibid., p. 47.
41. Ibid., p. 49.
42. Ibid., p. 50.
43. Ibid., p. 22.
44. Ibid., pp. 14, 23.
45. Ibid., p. 23.
46. Kane, *History of Dharmasastra*, 5:156.
47. Ghosha, *Durga Puja*, p. 46.
48. Ibid., p. 14.
49. Ibid., pp. 76, lxvii.
50. See especially the Rudhiradhyaya* (chapter on blood) of the *Kalika-purana** 71.
51. *Devi-mahatmya** 13.8.
52. *Harivamsa** 3.3.
53. Joseph Campbell, *The Masks of God: Primitive Mythology* (New York: Viking Press, 1959), pp. 216224; Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (Cleveland: World Publishing Co., 1963), pp. 341347.
54. Kane, *History of Dharmasastra*, 5:177; *Brhaddharma-purana** 1.2122; *Kalika-purana** 61.
55. Ghosha, *Durga Puja*, p. 82; Abhay Charan Mukerji, *Hindu Feasts and Fasts* (Allahabad: Indian Press, 1916), pp. 156, 162; *Kalika-purana* 6163.
56. Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, pp. 314316, 332334.
57. Edward J. Thompson and Arthur Marshman Spencer, trans., *Bengali Religious Lyrics, Sakta** (Calcutta: Association Press, 1923), p. 98.
58. Laurence A. Babb, *The Divine Hierarchy: Popular Hinduism in Central India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975), pp. 216224, argues that a typical theme in Hindu mythology is the danger presented by unmarried goddesses and females and that unmarried goddesses are generally aggressive and dangerous in their actions. This danger might be presumed to arise from such goddesses' pent-up sexual energy.
59. This may reflect the male fear of sexual intercourse which sees in the loss of semen something spiritually

harmful. An important notion in Indian asceticism is that by retaining this semen a male may build up great spiritual vigor.

60. Shulman, *Tamil Temple Myths*, pp. 176191, 211223.

[< previous page](#)

page_235

[next page >](#)

8

Kali *

1. *Agni-purana** 133, 134, 136; *Garuda-purana** 38.
2. Sasibhusan* Dasgupta*, *Bharater* saktisadhana* o Saktasahitya** (Calcutta: Sahityasangsad*, 1367 B.S. [1961]), pp. 6667.
3. D. C. Sircar, *The Sakta Pithas** (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1973), p. 20.
4. *Bhavabhutis* Malatimadhava* with the Commentary of Jagaddhara*, ed. and trans. M. R. Kale (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1967), pp. 4448.
5. Krishna Kanta Handiqui, *Yasastilaka* and Indian Culture* (Sholapur: Jaina Samskriti* Samrakshakasangha* , 1949), p. 56.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
7. See my chapter 10, "The Matrkas*."
8. *Skandapurana** 5.82.121.
9. Summarized in *Principles of Tantra: The Tantratattva of Sriyuktasiva* Candra Vidyarnava* Bhattacharyamahodaya** , ed. Arthur Avalon (Madras: Ganesh, 1960), pp. 208213.
10. *Adbhutaramayana**, Saraladasas* Oriyan *Ramayana*, and the Bengali *Jaiminibharata* Ramayana*; Narendra Nath Bhattacharyya, *History of the Sakta Religion* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1974), p. 149.
11. C. Sivaramamurti, *Nataraja in Art, Thought and Literature* (New Delhi: National Museum, 1974), pp. 378379, 384; M. A. Dorai Rangaswamy, *The Religion and Philosophy of Tevaram**, 2 books (Madras: University of Madras, 1958), 1:442, 444445; R. K. Das, *Temples of Tamilnad* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1964), p. 195.
12. Some renditions of Siva's* dance, in which the entire Hindu pantheon is shown as spectators or musicians, do include Kali* standing passively by: for example, the painting at the sixteenth-century Siva* temple at Ettumanur (Sivaramamurti, *Nataraja in Art*, fig. 150, p. 282) and the scene from a seventeenth-century temple at Triprayar*, Kerala (*ibid.*, fig. 152, p. 284). In both scenes Kali rides a *preta* (ghost), and her appearance is unchanged.
13. That Siva should have to resort to his *tandava** dance to defeat Kali suggests the theme of Kali's* inciting Siva to destructive activity. Siva's *tandava* dance is typically performed at the end of the cosmic age and destroys the universe. Descriptions of it often dwell on its destructive aspects. The chaotic dancing of Siva, who wields a broken battle-ax, must be tempered by the soft glances of Parvati* (Sivaramamurti, *Nataraja in Art*, p. 138). Siva tends to get out of control in his *tandava* dance, and in the legend of the dance contest with Kali, it is she who provokes him to it.
14. *Bhavabhuti's Malatimadhava*, pp. 4448.
15. M., *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1942), p. 961.
16. The theme of Parvatis* acting as a restraining influence on Siva is mentioned by Glen Yocum, "The Goddess in a Tamil Saiva* Devotional Text, Manikkavacakars* *Tiruvacakam**," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 45, no. 1, supplement (March 1977): K, 372.
17. *Principles of Tantra: The Tantratattva of Sriyuktasiva* Candra Vidyarnava**

Bhattacharyamahodaya *, ed. Arthur Avalon (Madras: Ganesh, 1960), pp. 327328.

18. *Hymn to Kali** (*Karpuradi-stotra**), ed. and trans. Arthur Avalon (Madras: Ganesh, 1965), p. 34.

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid.

21. For example, *Mahanirvana-tantra** 5.140141; 6.6876; 10.102.

22. *Tantra of the Great Liberation (Mahanirvana-tantra* Tantra)*, trans. Arthur Avalon (Madras: Ganesh, 1972), pp. 4950.

23. For the *pancatattva** ritual see *Mahanirvana-tantra* 56; Agehananda Bharati, *The Tantric Tradition* (London: Rider, 1965), pp. 228278; Mircea Eliade, *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1958), pp. 254262; Heinrich Zimmer, *Philosophies of India* (Cleveland: World Publishing Co., 1956), pp. 572580.

24. *Hymn to Kali*, pp. 84, 86.

25. In at least one Tantric text Kali* is identified with Laksmi* and by implication Visnu* (*Laksmi-tantra** 8.13).

26. Throughout North India Kali is associated with Bengal, where she is most popular. Outside Bengal, for example, her temples will be established by Bengalis, Bengalis will often act as her temple priests, or the image of Kali in the temple will be said to have some connection with Bengal.

27. *Rama Prasada's Devotional Songs: The Cult of Shakti*, trans. Jadunath Sinha (Calcutta: Sinha Publishing House, 1966), no. 181, p. 97.

28. Edward J. Thompson and Arthur Marshman Spencer, trans., *Bengali Religious Lyrics, Sakta** (Calcutta: Association Press, 1923), p. 22.

29. For Annapurna*, Jagaddhatri*, and Sataksi*, see my chapter 9, "The Mahadevi*."

30. David Kinsley, *The Sword and the FluteKrsna* and Kali* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1975), pp. 133145.

31. *Rama Prasada's Devotional Songs*, no. 221, pp. 118119.

32. Thompson and Spencer, trans., *Bengali Religious Lyrics*, pp. 8586.

33. Ibid., p. 84.

34. *Rama Prasada's Devotional Songs*, p. 106.

35. In *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1970), Mary Douglas locates taboo in the idea of dirt out of place. In a sense Kali may be regarded as taboo, a dangerous being out of place in the civilized sphere.

36. Ibid., p. 193.

37. "The unusual, the paradoxical, the illogical, even the perverse, stimulate thought and pose problems, 'cleanse the Doors of Perception,' as Blake put it"; Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1974), p. 256.

38. The term *antistructure* is used here in the way Turner uses it, as a positive phenomenon that enables a culture to step outside itself in order to perceive itself more clearly. Antistructure is not necessarily chaotic or destructive.

39. The story is told in the *Adbhutaramayana**, the Oriyan *Ramayana* of

Saraladasa *, and the Bengali *Jaiminibharata Ramayana**; Narendra Nath Bhattacharyya, *History of the Sakta* Religion* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1974), p. 149.

40. *Linga-purana** 1.106.2028.

9

The Mahadevi*

1. Some scholars have assumed that an underlying goddess theology asserting the essential unity of all goddesses has existed in Hinduism since the Vedic period. See, for example, Stella Kramrisch, "The Indian Great Goddess," *History of Religions* 14, no. 4 (May 1975): 235-265; J. Przyluski, "The Great Goddess of India and Iran," *Indian Historical Quarterly* 10 (1934): 405-430; and Sadanand K. Dikshit, *The Mother Goddess* (New Delhi: Published by the author, 1957). There is little or no evidence for this position, however, and none is adduced by these authors.
2. Thomas B. Coburn, "Consort of None, *Sakti** of All: The Vision of the *Devi-mahatmya**," in John Stratton Hawley and Donna Marie Wulff, eds., *The Divine Consort: Radha* and the Goddesses of India* (Berkeley, Calif.: Berkeley Religious Studies Series, 1982), pp. 153 ff.
3. For example, the Pancaratra* school (Surendranath Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy*, 5 vols. [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968], 3:35); the philosophy of Yamunacarya* (latter part of the tenth century), the founder of the Visistadvaita* school (ibid., 3:155); Bengal Vaisnavism (S. K. De, *Early History of the Vaisnava Faith and Movement in Bengal* [Calcutta: Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1961], pp. 276 ff.); and Kashmir Saivism* (Sudhendukumar Das, *Sakti or Divine Power* [Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1934], p. 61).
4. For example, Kashmir Saivism; see S. Das, *Sakti*, p. 61.
5. For example, the *Devi-bhagavata-purana**, where she sits on a couch composed of the great male deities (7.29.7; 12.12.12), and the *Saundaryalahari**, where the same image is described (verse 94).
6. This point is dramatically made in the stories about Visnu's teaching the sage Narada about the nature of his *maya** when the sage experiences rebirth as a woman. Forgetfulness of one's past lives, total identification with one's present life, is exactly what *maya* is said to be in these tales. See Heinrich Zimmer, *Myths and Symbols of Indian Art and Civilization*, ed. Joseph Campbell (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), pp. 3035.
7. For example, the first episode of the *Devi-mahatmya*, where the Devi is equated with Visnu's sleep and the deluding power of the world (1.6869; 1.40).
8. For example, *Devi-bhagavata-purana* 7.33.2141.
9. For example, *ibid.* 1.8.40; 3.4.3839; 3.24.38.
10. *Ibid.* 3.3.3567; 12.1012.
11. For example, *Lalita-sahasranama** 281; *Saundaryalahari** 56; *Sitaupanisad** 34.

12. For example, *Devi-bhagavata-purana* * 3.5.4; 7.33.13; 12.8.77; *Saundaryalahari** 53.
13. For example, *Devi-bhagavata-purana* 7.29.2630.
14. *Devi-bhagavata-purana* 7.29.7.
15. Ibid. 5.7.5760.
16. The Dasamahavidyas* will be discussed in my chapter 11.
17. The Devis* manifestations are sometimes grouped according to the three *gunas**, for example, *Devi-purana** 50.517. In this case the Devi's auspicious forms are grouped under the *sattva* (and to some extent *rajas*) *guna**, and the terrible forms are grouped primarily under the *tamas guna*.
18. Arthur Avalon and Ellen Avalon, trans., *Hymns to the Goddess*, 3d ed. (Madras: Ganesh, 1964), pp. 146152.
19. Ibid., pp. 146, 149, 151.
20. Bhismaparva* 23; Avalon and Avalon, trans., *Hymns to the Goddess*, pp. 155156.
21. Virataparva* 6; Avalon and Avalon, trans., *Hymns to the Goddess*, p. 144.
22. *The Saundaryalahari* or Flood of Beauty*, ed. and trans. W. Norman Brown (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1958), p. 52, verse 13.
23. For example, *Saundaryalahari* 6. The Devi* is said in some texts to appear in the form of a great bee or in a form that is surrounded by bees. In this form she is called Bhramaridevi*. In Sanskrit erotic literature the bee symbolizes erotic desire, and the Devi's form as Bhramaridevi may convey this dimension of her character. *Devi-bhagavata-purana* 10.13; *Devi-mahatmya** 11.50.
24. *Devi-bhagavata-purana* 7.28; *Devi-mahatmya* 11.45.
25. *Devi-bhagavata-purana* 7.28.168.
26. Ibid. 7.28.3045.
27. Diana L. Eck, *Banaras, City of Light* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982), p. 161.
28. Ibid., pp. 163164.
29. Ibid., p. 164.
30. *Lalita-sahasranama** 935.
31. See my chapter 8, "Kali*."
32. For example, the *Saundaryalahari*.
33. David Kinsley, "Blood and Death Out of Place: Reflections on the Goddess Kali," in Hawley and Wulff, eds., *The Divine Consort*, pp. 145146.
34. *Linga-purana** 1.106, where Parvati* transforms herself into Kali.
35. *Devi-mahatmya* 7.5, where Durga* produces Kali in her rage.
36. *Vamana-purana** 30, where the seven Matrkas* (mothers) are born from different parts of the Devi's body.
37. For a discussion of the significance of the Devi splitting herself into many goddesses, see Pearl Ostroff, "The Demonslaying Devi: A Study of Her Puranic* Myths" (M.A. thesis, McMaster University, 1978), pp. 3347.
38. For example, *Devi-mahatmya* 8.62; *Matsya-purana** 179.890; *Garuda-purana** 241; *Devi-bhagavata-*

39. Narendra Nath Bhattacharyya, *Indian Mother Goddess* (Calcutta: Indian Studies Past and Present, 1971), pp. 5456.
40. U. N. Ghoshal, *Studies in Indian History and Culture* (Bombay: Orient Longmans, 1965), "The Rite of Headoffering to the Deity in Ancient Indian Literature and Art," pp. 333340.
41. N. Bhattacharyya, *Indian Mother Goddess*, p. 54.
42. T. V. Mahalingam, "The Cult of Sakti * in Tamiland," in D. C. Sircar, ed., *The Sakti* Cult and Tara** (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1967), p. 28.
43. *Bhavabhutis* Malatimadhava* with the Commentary of Jagaddhara*, ed. and trans. M. R. Kale (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1967), pp. 4448.
44. Ramendra Nath Nandi, *Religious Institutions and Cults in the Deccan* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1973), p. 143.
45. N. Bhattacharyya, *Indian Mother Goddess*, p. 54; for other examples of blood offerings to goddesses, see Philip Spratt, *Hindu Culture and Personality* (Bombay: Manaktalas, 1966), pp. 236, 238, 245, 282, 284.
46. J. P. Vogel, "The Headoffering to the Goddess in Pallava Sculpture," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies* (London) 6:539543.
47. Ghoshal, *Studies in Indian History and Culture*, p. 333.
48. Ibid.
49. Ibid., pp. 335336; Nandi, *Religious Institutions*, pp. 145146.
50. Vogel, "The Headoffering to the Goddess," pp. 539543.
51. Prince Ilango Adigal, *Shilappadikaram*, trans. Alain Danielou (New York: New Directions Book, 1965), canto 12, pp. 7685.
52. Nandi, *Religious Institutions*, p. 136.
53. Brenda Beck, "The Goddess and the Demon: A Local South Indian Festival and Its Wider Context" (University of British Columbia, 1979), passim; Henry Whitehead, *The Village Gods of South India*, 2d ed. (Delhi: Sumit Publications, 1976), passim.
54. Whitehead, *Village Gods of South India*, p. 18, his emphasis.
55. See, for example, the play *Sacrifice*, by Rabindranath Tagore, which is a sustained criticism of animal sacrifice.
56. Eck, *Banaras*, p. 52, traces blood offerings all the way back to Yaksa* worship, perhaps the oldest surviving stratum of Hindu religion. She also notes the increasing use of red powder instead of blood in the propitiation of Yaksa images in recent times.
57. Krishna Kanta Handiqui, *Yasastilaka* and Indian Culture* (Sholapur: Jaina Samskriti* samrakskakasangha*, 1949), p. 168.
58. *Bhavabhuti's Malatimadhava*, pp. 4448.
59. C. Sivaramamurti, *Nataraja in Art, Thought and Literature* (New Delhi: National Museum, 1974), p. 72.
60. The *Karpuradi-stotra** 1516 and Krsnananda* Agamavagisas* *brhattantrasara** (2 vols. [Calcutta: basumatisahityamand*, 1934], 1:374) give the *dhyanamantra** of Smasanakali* (Kali of the cremation grounds), in which the adept is advised to worship Kali at dead of night, naked, in the cremation grounds.
61. *Bhavabhuti's Malatimadhava*, pp. 4448.

62. Nandi, *Religious Institutions*, p. 135; see also Nalina Bhattasali, *Iconography of Buddhist and Brahmanical Sculptures in the Dacca Museum* (Dacca: Rai S. N. Bhadra Bahadur, 1929), pl. 71(b) facing p. 206.

63. See also the description of Dikkarvasini * in the *Kalika-purana** 83.6465.

64. Pushpendra Kumar, *Sakti* Cult in Ancient India* (Banaras: Bhartiya Publishing House, 1974), p. 265; see also the description of Bhimadevi*, who is described as holding a bowl of blood and flesh in her hands, in the *Visnudharmottarapurana** 3.73.40 ff.

65. Handiqui, *Yasastilaka**, p. 56.

66. R. C. Majumdar, ed., *History of Bengal*, 2 vols. (Dacca: Dacca University, 1943), 1:455, pl. 14; cited in Vibhuti Bhushan Mishra, *Religious Beliefs and Practices of North India during the Early Medieval Period* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1973), p. 25; see also Bhattasali, *Iconography of Buddhist and Brahmanical Sculptures*, pl. 72(a) facing p. 219.

67. Kanwar Lal, *Temples and Sculptures of Bhubaneswar* (Delhi: Arts and Letters, 1970), pl. 28.

68. Jitendra Nath Banerjea, *The Development of Hindu Iconography*, 2d ed. (Calcutta: University of Calcutta), p. 507, pl. 44, fig. 5; see also pl. 45, fig. 1, for an image of Dantura*.

69. Richard Brubaker, "The Uses of Decapitation" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion, New York, November 17, 1979), p. 4.

10

The Matrkas*

1. Jagdish Narain Tiwari, "Studies in Goddess Cults in Northern India, with Reference to the First Seven Centuries A.D." (Ph.D. diss., Australian National University, n.d.), pp. 215244.

2. *Mahabharata**, Vanaparva 217.

3. Ibid. 219.2223.

4. Ibid. 219.2045.

5. Jitendra Nath Banerjea, *The Development of Hindu Iconography*, 2d ed. (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1956), pp. 380381; see also Nalini Kanta Bhattasali, *Iconography of Buddhist and Brahmanical Sculptures in the Dacca Museum* (Dacca: Rai S. N. Bhadra Bahadur, 1929), pp. 6367.

6. *Mahabharata*, Vanaparva 219.27.

7. *Bhagavata-purana** 10.6.418.

8. T. A. Gopinatha Rao, *Elements of Hindu Iconography*, 2d ed., 2 vols. (New York: Paragon), vol. 1, pt. 2, p. 393.

9. For example, Brenda E. F. Beck, "The Goddess and the Demon: A Local South Indian Festival and Its Wider Context" (University of British Columbia, 1979), p. 25; Richard L. Brubaker, "The Ambivalent Mistress: A Study of South Indian Village Goddesses and Their Religious Meaning" (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1978), pp. 3031.

10. *Mahabharata*, Salyaparva* 45.

11. The non-Brahmanic, Saivite * associations of the Matrkas* are also seen in their association with Ganesa* and Virabhadra*, two other members of the Saivite "family," with whom the Matrkas are often pictured iconographically; Tiwari, "Goddess Cults in Northern India," pp. 194198.

12. See my chapter 13, "Village Goddesses."

13. Tiwari, "Goddess Cults in Northern India," p. 139.

14. Ibid., p. 140.

15. Ibid., p. 142.

16. Ibid., p. 143.

17. Ibid., pp. 144155.

18. Andhaka in this myth has the same ability to reduplicate himself that Raktabija* has in the *Devi-mahatmya** and *Vamana-purana** accounts of the Matrkas.

19. *Matsya-purana** 179.932.

20. The *Devi-bhagavata-purana** account of the Matrkas (5.28.1333) names ten goddesses and then says that the *saktis** of some gods also appeared to do battle.

21. Rao, *Elements of Hindu Iconography*, vol. 1, pt. 2, pp. 348349. This observation is made by Pearl Ostroff, "The Demonslaying Devi*: A Study of Her Puranic* Myths" (M.A. thesis, McMaster University, 1978), pp. 3738.

22. Tiwari, "Goddess Cults in Northern India," p. 180.

23. Ibid., p. 181.

24. Ibid.

25. Ibid.

26. Narendra Nath Bhattacharyya, *History of the Sakta* Religion* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1974), p. 102.

27. An exception to this is Camunda*, who is sometimes listed among the Matrkas. Camunda, who is very often identified with Kali* and is very much like her in appearance and habit, is an important goddess in her own right.

28. See my chapter 13, "Village Goddesses."

11

Tara*, Chinnamasta*, and the Mahavidyas*

1. See my chapter 9, "The Mahadevi*."

2. For example, *Vamana-purana* 30.39.

3. For example, *Devi-mahatmya* 11.3850.

4. D. C. Sircar, *The Sakta Pithas** (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1973), p. 48.

5. David Kinsley, "The Portrait of the Goddess in the *Devi-mahatmya*," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 46, no. 4 (December 1978): 498.

6. *Mahabhagavata-purana** 8.5052.

7. Ibid. 8.5771. The list of ten Mahavidyas is the same in the *Brhaddharma-purana**, except that the goddesses

are given in a different order (Madhyakhanda 6). Other lists of Mahavidyas, some containing more than ten goddesses, and including different goddesses from the ten given above, may be found in the

[< previous page](#)

page_242

[next page >](#)

Saradatilaka *, the *Malinivijaya**, the *mundamala**, and Krsnananda* *Agamavagisas* Tantrasara**; Chintaharan Chakravarti, *Tantras: Studies on Their Religion and Literature* (Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1963), pp. 8586.

8. Krsnananda Agamavagisa, *brhattantrasara**, 2 vols. (Calcutta: basumatisahityamand*, 1934), 1:310311.
9. Alain Danielou, *Hindu Polytheism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1964), p. 277; Pushpendra Kumar, *Sakti* Cult in Ancient India* (Banaras: Bhartiya Publishing House, 1974), p. 156; Philip Rawson, *The Art of Tantra* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973), p. 125.
10. Danielou, *Hindu Polytheism*, pp. 280281; Kumar, *Sakti Cult*, pp. 157158; Ajit Mookerjee, *Tantra Asana: A Way to SelfRealization* (New Delhi: Ravi Kumar, 1971), pl. 47, p. 77.
11. Kumar, *Sakti Cult*, p. 157; Rawson, *The Art of Tantra*, p. 126.
12. Danielou, *Hindu Polytheism*, p. 283; Kumar, *Sakti Cult*, p. 159; Rawson, *The Art of Tantra*, p. 130.
13. Kumar, *Sakti Cult*, pp. 158159; Rawson, *The Art of Tantra*, p. 130; Mookerjee, *Tantra Asana*, pl. 81, p. 118.
14. Danielou, *Hindu Polytheism*, pp. 284; Kumar, *Sakti Cult*, pp. 15960; Rawson, *The Art of Tantra*, p. 130.
15. Danielou, *Hindu Polytheism*, pp. 283284; Kumar, *Sakti Cult*, p. 159; Rawson, *The Art of Tantra*, p. 130.
16. Kumar, *Sakti Cult*, p. 156; Rawson, *The Art of Tantra*, pp. 125126.
17. Danielou, *Hindu Polytheism*, pp. 281282; Kumar, *Sakti Cult*, p. 157.
18. An exception to this is found in the *Devi-bhagavata-purana** 7.28.4668, where the Mahavidyas* arise from the Devis* body in order to help her defeat the demon Durgama.
19. *Brhaddharma-purana**, Madhyakhanda* 6.
20. *Mahabhagavata-purana** 8; *Brhaddharma-purana*, Madhyakhanda 6.
21. See my chapter 8, "Kali*."
22. Caitanya (14851531) is mentioned converting Buddhists in Bengal; A. K. Majumdar, *Caitanya, His Life and Doctrine: A Study of Vaisnavism** (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1969), p. 187.
23. Stephen Beyer, *The Cult of Tara*: Magic and Ritual in Tibet* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1973), p. 7.
24. John Blofeld, *Bodhisattva of Compassion: The Mystical Tradition of Kuan Yin* (Boulder, Colo.: Shambhala Publications, 1978), p. 53; Heinrich Zimmer. *Philosophies of India* (Cleveland: World Publishing Co., 1956), p. 534.
25. Beyer, *The Cult of Tara*, pp. 810.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 469, for references on the history of Tara*.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
30. See my chapter 7, "Durga*," and D. C. Bhattacharya, "An Unknown Form of Tara," in D. C. Sircar, ed., *The Sakti Cult and Tara* (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1967), pp. 138139.

31. For a depiction of the "eight terrors" from which Tara * is said to save, see Giuseppe Tucci, *Tibetan Painted Scrolls*, 2 vols. (Rome: Libreria dello Stato, 1949), *tanka* 44, pl. 78, discussed in vol. 2, pp. 403 ff.
32. For examples, see Beyer, *The Cult of Tara**, pp. 233240; Blofeld, *Bodhisattva of Compassion*, pp. 5571.
33. For example, Beyer, *The Cult of Tara*, pp. 386388.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 386.
35. Blofeld, *Bodhisattva of Compassion*, p. 59, where she blesses a young couple with a child after rescuing them from calamity.
36. Beyer, *The Cult of Tara*, pp. 6162.
37. Blofeld, *Bodhisattva of Compassion*, pp. 5758.
38. Beyer, *The Cult of Tara*, pp. 212213.
39. Beyer, *The Cult of Tara*, p. 302, shows quite clearly that Kurukulla* was originally an Indian tribal deity.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 303; see also Benoytosh Bhattacharyya, *The Indian Buddhist Iconography: Mainly Based on the Sadhanamala* and the Cognate Tantric* Texts of Rituals* (Calcutta: Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1968), pp. 147152.
41. Beyer, *The Cult of Tara*, p. 302.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 306.
43. B. Bhattacharyya, *Indian Buddhist Iconography*, pp. 134146.
44. Beyer, *The Cult of Tara*, p. 292.
45. B. Bhattacharyya, *Indian Buddhist Iconography*, p. 190; see also Nalini Kanta Bhattasali, *Iconography of Buddhist and Brahmanical Sculptures in the Dacca Museum* (Dacca: Rai S. N. Bhadra Bahadur, 1929), pl. 71(a) facing p. 206.
46. B. Bhattacharyya, *Indian Buddhist Iconography*, pp. 190191; Danielou, *Hindu Polytheism*, p. 277, cites a Hindu text that says that Tara should be worshiped according to the Buddhist way.
47. *Taratantram**, ed. A. K. Maitra (Ghoramara*, Rajshahi*: Pandit Purandara Kavyatirtha*, 1913), pp. 1819.
48. *Mahabhagavata-purana** 8; *Brhaddharma-purana**, *Madhyakhanda** 6; Chakravarti, *Tantras*, p. 88.
49. B. Bhattacharyya, *Indian Buddhist Iconography*, pp. 247248; see also Benoytosh Bhattacharyya, *An Introduction to Buddhist Esoterism* (Banaras: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office, 1964), pp. 159160.
50. For pictorial representations of Chinnamasta* see Ajit Mookerjee, *Tantra Art: Its Philosophy and Physics* (New Delhi: Ravi Kumar, 1966), pl. 65; A. Mookerjee and Madhu Khanna, *The Tantric Way: Art, Science, Ritual* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977), p. 84.
51. The only myth about Chinnamasta that I have been able to locate says that once upon a time her two devotees Jaya and Vijaya complained to her that they were hungry. After twice telling them to be patient, she responded to their third complaint by cutting off her head to feed them with her own blood. Sri Svami Maharaja Datiya*, *Sri Chinnamasta Nityarchana** (Prayag: Kalyan Mandir Prakasan*, 1978), p. 5.
52. See U. N. Ghoshal, *Studies in Indian History and Culture* (Bombay: Orient Longman, 1965), pp. 333340.

53. B. Bhattacharyya, *An Introduction to Buddhist Esoterism*, p. 159.
54. Jagdish Narain Tiwari, "Studies in Goddess Cults in Northern India, with Reference to the First Seven Centuries A.D." (Ph.D. diss., Australian National University, n.d.), pp. 312337.
55. Ibid., pp. 313315.
56. Ibid., p. 317.
57. Ibid., pp. 328333.
58. Ibid., p. 334.

12

Goddesses and Sacred Geography

1. See the section on Prthivi * in my chapter 1.
2. An even earlier example of this idea is found in *Rg-veda** 10.90, where the creation of the world is described as the result of the sacrifice of a giant being who is dismembered. The parts of the world are composed of the parts of his body.
3. Wendy O'Flaherty, *Asceticism and Eroticism in the Mythology of Siva** (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), passim, has shown that a similar idea underlies much of Saivite* mythology. Siva* alternates between two poles, the ascetic and the erotic, the former creating great reserves of energy that are released when Siva enters his erotic phase.
4. The idea pervades the entire section of the *Satapatha-brahmana**, which deals with the elaborate rituals involved in building the fire altar. The idea that the world is periodically evolved out of a cosmic being is also seen in the mythology of Visnu*, who inhales the world after it has worn down at the end of the Kali Yuga and then gives it rebirth when it emerges from a great lotus that grows from his navel. The origin of the world from a giant being is also seen in the opening passage of the *brhadaranyakaupanis**, where the world is said to have been created from a great sacrificial horse.
5. For example, *Bhagavata-purana** 10.1.1722, where Visnu decides to take the form of Krsna* because of the earth's complaint about Kamsa*.
6. For example, T.A. Gopinatha Rao, *Elements of Hindu Iconography*, 2d ed., 2 vols. (New York: Paragon, 1968), vol. 1, pt. 1, pls. 22, 23, 25, 26, 27.
7. See my chapters 2, "Sri-Laksmi*," and 9, "The Mahadevi*."
8. For example, *Devi-bhagavata-purana** 4.19.2324.
9. For example, *Devi-mahatmya** 1.59; 5.7; *Lalita-sahasranama** 397; *Saundaryalahari** 11; *Devi-bhagavata-purana**, passim.
10. Jainism contains a similar vision of the universe as a cosmic giant, whose lower limbs are identified with the nether worlds.
11. Vibhuti Bhushan Mishra, *Religious Beliefs and Practices of North India during the Early Medieval Period* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1973), p. 25.
12. John F. Fleet, *Inscriptions of the Early Gupta Kings and Their Successors* (Banaras: Indological Book House, 1970), p. 86.
13. For images of this, see Veronica Ions, *Indian Mythology* (London: Paul

Hamlyn, n.d.), p. 35; Jitendra Nath Banerjea, *The Development of Hindu Iconography*, 2d ed. (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1956), pl. 25.

14. Michael McKnight, "Kingship and Religion in the Gupta Age" (Ph.D. diss., McMaster University, 1976), p. 215.

15. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, *The Abbey of Bliss*, trans. Nares Chandra Sengupta (Calcutta: Padmini Mohan Neogi, n.d.), pp. 3941.

16. Ibid., p. 41.

17. Ibid., p. 99.

18. Ibid., p. 32.

19. Ibid., pp. 3233.

20. *India: A Reference Manual, 1980* (New Delhi: Publication Division, Ministry of Education and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1980), p. 16.

21. Diana L. Eck, *Banaras: City of Light* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982), pp. 3839.

22. Diana Eck, "India's *Tirthas* *: 'Crossings' in Sacred Geography," *History of Religions* 20, no. 4 (May 1981): 323344.

23. In some cases the twothe geographical place and the deityare hardly distinguishable. See below (pp. 187196) on the sacrality of rivers and the Ganges.

24. Eck, *Banaras*, p. 157, has shown that in myths concerning the origins of Banaras it was the beauty and holiness of the city that attracted Siva* to it in the first place. The sacrality of Banaras, then, does not stem primarily from the fact that it is Siva's* city, although Siva's residing there enhances its sacrality.

25. For example, Agehananda Bharati, "Pilgrimage Sites and Indian Civilization," in Joseph W. Elder, ed., *Chapters in Indian Civilization* (Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Co., 1970), p. 102; Surinder Mohan Bhardwaj, *Hindu Places of Pilgrimage in India* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1973), passim.

26. Eck, "India's *Tirthas*," p. 336.

27. Narendra Nath Bhattacharyya, *History of the Sakta* Religion* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1974), pp. 139140.

28. Diana Eck, paper on *pithas** delivered at the annual meeting of the New England Region, American Academy of Religion, Dartmouth, N.H., 1979.

29. D. C. Sircar, *The Sakta Pithas** (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1973), pp. 134.

30. This is reminiscent of the sacrifice of the giant in *Rg-veda** 10.90 from whose body the world was created.

31. *Matsya-purana** 13; *Devi-bhagavata-purana** 7.30; *Kalika-purana** 18; *Mahabhagavata-purana** 11; *Bhraddharma-purana**, *Madhyakhanda** 10.

32. Edward Gait, *A History of Assam* (Calcutta: Thacker Spink, 1963), pp. 1113.

33. N. Bhattacharyya, *History of the Sakta Religion*, p. 142.

34. In much the same way when the remains of the Buddha were enshrined in stupas they sacralized India and other countries to which Buddhism spread.

35. Although the myth tries to be universal in the sense of applying to all areas of India, it is most applicable to northern areas of India and to goddesses

worshiped at northern shrines. In most versions of the myth it is clear that southern geography is not well known, while the regions of Bengal, Assam, and the Northwest are often known in great detail. Bengal, Assam, and the Northwest were and still are centers of Tantric worship, and the cult of the *pithas* * may be related to Tantric masters and the sites at which they performed their *sadhana* *. Some texts instruct the Tantric adept to "place" the goddesses enshrined at the *pithas* into various parts of his body by means of the *nyasa* * ritual. In this way the adept identifies himself, piece by piece, with the goddess he worships. Sircar, *The Sakta* Pithas**, pp. 3,1517; N. Bhattacharyya, *History of the Sakta Religion*, pp. 119122.

36. Sircar, *The Sakta Pithas*, pp. 3541.

37. See my chapter 4, "Sarasvati*."

38. See especially *Rg-veda* * 7.49 for the divinity of waters and rivers; see also Pandurang Vaman Kane, *History of Dharmasastra**, 5 vols. (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Institute, 193062), 4:555556.

39. *Mahabharata* *, Vanaparva 104108; *Ramayana* * 1.3844; *Bhagavata-purana* * 9.89; *Brahma-vaivarta-purana* *, PrakrtiKhanda* 10; *Devi-bhagavata-purana* * 9.11.

40. *Kurma-purana* * 1.44; *Brahamavaivartapurana*, Krsnajanmakhanda* 34; *Bhagavata-purana* 5.17; *Devi-bhagavata-purana* 8.7; *Visnu-purana* * 2.2, 8.

41. *Mahabhagavata-purana* * 65; *Brhaddharma-purana* *, Madhyakhanda* 17.

42. *Brhaddharma-purana*, Madhyakhanda 14.

43. Conversely, the Ganges is understood as purifying the deities she comes in contact with; C. Sivaramamurti, *Ganga* * (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1976), p. 45.

44. For a detailed and clear exposition of how purity and pollution are understood and ritually dealt with, see Edward B. Harper, "Ritual Pollution as an Integrator of Caste and Religion," *Journal of Asian Studies* 23 (June1964) 151197.

45. The generation of *tapas* (heat or fire) as a result of ascetic practices is a good example of the purifying role of fire, as is the understanding of the cremation fire as a final purifying act.

46. *Agni-purana* * 110; see also *Padma-purana* * 5.60.1127 and Kane, *History of Dharmasastra**, 4:585.

47. Diana Eck, "Ganga*: The Goddess in Hindu Sacred Geography," in John Stratton Hawley and Donna Marie Wulff, eds., *The Divine Consort: Radha* and the Goddesses of India* (Berkeley, Calif.: Berkeley Religious Studies Series, 1982), p. 174.

48. *Brhaddharma-purana*, Madhyakhanda 26.

49. Jitendra Nath Banerjea, *The Development of Hindu Iconography*, 2d ed. (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1956), pp. 353354; Sivaramamurti, *Ganga*, figs. 2227; in Odette Viennot's *Les divinités fluviales Ganga et Yamuna** (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1964) nearly every plate depicts either Ganga or Yamuna* on a temple or at the doorway of a temple.

50. Eck, "Ganga," p. 176.

51. Ibid.

52. Ibid.
53. Sivaramamurti, *Ganga* *, p. 81.
54. Eck, *Banaras*, pp. 324344.
55. Eck, "Ganga*," p. 176.
56. Jonathan Parry, "Death and Cosmogony in Kashi*," *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 15 (1981): 337365.
57. Eck, "Ganga," p. 181.
58. Eck, *Banaras*, p. 218.
59. Eck, "India's *Tirthas**," p. 327.
60. Sivaramamurti, *Ganga*, p. 49.
61. Ibid., fig. 42.
62. Ibid., figs. 1921.
63. Steven G. Darian, *The Ganges in Myth and History* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1978), p. 37; see also his p. 61.
64. Ibid., p. 152.
65. *mahasukajataka**, no. 429; Darian, *The Ganges*, pp. 3637.
66. See my chapter 3, "Parvati*."
67. For a discussion of this theme in Saivite* mythology, see O'Flaherty, *Asceticism and Eroticism*, pp. 95110.
68. Darian, *The Ganges*, p. 111.
69. Eck, "Ganga," pp. 178179.
70. Ibid., pp. 166167.
71. Ibid., p. 182.

13

Village Goddesses

1. For example, S. C. Dube, *Indian Village* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), p. 96. Dube mentions four goddesses in a village of under 2,500; these goddesses are associated with different castes.
2. Henry Whitehead, *The Village Gods of South India*, 2d ed. (Delhi: Sumit Publications, 1976), p. 23.
3. Richard L. Brubaker, "The Ambivalent Mistress: A Study of South Indian Village Goddesses and Their Religious Meaning" (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1978), p. 61.
4. Siva* is often pictured as a harassed farmer in folk tales in Bengal, for example, and bears little resemblance to the Siva of the *Puranas**.
5. Whitehead, *Village Gods of South India*, pp. 1718.
6. Brubaker, "The Ambivalent Mistress," p. 69.
7. Ibid., p. 194.
8. Ibid., p. 57.

9. Ibid., pp. 297-298.

10. Ibid., p. 79.

11. Ibid., p. 298.

12. In South India a common distinction is made between right-division castes and left-division castes. The former are agriculturally based and tied to the

[< previous page](#)

page_248

[next page >](#)

land, whereas the latter are urban based and pursue artisanrelated skills in their traditional occupations. In festivals in honor of village goddesses, the rightdivision castes tend to play a more central role. For example, the *pujaris* *, ritual priests at the villagegoddess festivals, come from the rightdivision castes. This may be because the rightdivision castes are closer to the soil and have more at stake in terms of the wellbeing of the village. Traditionally the leftdivision castes have been more mobile and less tied to one specific locale. See Brenda E. F. Beck, *Peasant Society in Konku*: A Study of Right and Left Subcastes in South India* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1972), p. 118; and Brubaker, "The Ambivalent Mistress," pp. 182, 191.

13. Brubaker, "The Ambivalent Mistress," p. 172.

14. Ibid., p. 170.

15. Ibid., p. 92; Brenda E. F. Beck, "The Goddess and the Demon: A Local South Indian Festival and Its Wider Context" (University of British Columbia, 1979), p. 15.

16. Brubaker, "The Ambivalent Mistress," pp. 99101.

17. Ibid., p. 110.

18. Ibid., pp. 127134; Whitehead, *Village Gods of South India*, pp. 126137; Wilber Theodore Elmore, *Dravidian Gods in Modern Hinduism: A Study of the Local and Village Deities of Southern India* (Hamilton, N. Y.: Published by the author, 1915), pp. 8990.

19. For example, *Manu-dharma-sastra** 5.147149.

20. Brubaker, "The Ambivalent Mistress," pp. 140141.

21. David Dean Shulman, *Tamil Temple Myths: Sacrifice and Divine Marriage in the South Indian Saiva Tradition* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1980), pp. 147148.

22. Ibid., p. 202.

23. Ibid., p. 216; David Kinsley, *The Sword and the FluteKrsna* and Kali** (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1975), pp. 105106.

24. Lawrence A. Babb, *The Divine Hierarchy: Popular Hinduism in Central India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975), pp. 215237.

25. Heinrich Zimmer, "The Indian World Mother," in Joseph Campbell, ed., *The Mystic Vision* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1976), p. 76.

26. Brubaker, "The Ambivalent Mistress," p. 166.

27. Edward C. Dimock, Jr., "A Theology of the Repulsive: The Myth of the Goddess Sitala*," in John Stratton Hawley and Donna Marie Wulff, eds., *The Divine Consort: Radha* and the Goddesses of India* (Berkeley, Calif.: Berkeley Religious Studies Series, 1982), pp. 184186.

28. Brubaker, "The Ambivalent Mistress," p. 162.

29. Babb, *The Divine Hierarchy*, p. 227; Brubaker, "The Ambivalent Mistress," p. 319.

30. Brubaker, "The Ambivalent Mistress," p. 338.

31. Ibid., pp. 347352.

32. Ibid., p. 291.

33. Ibid.; Beck, "The Goddess and the Demon," p. 36.

34. Brubaker, "The Ambivalent Mistress," pp. 295296.
35. Ibid., pp. 277283.
36. Elmore, *Dravidian Gods*, p. 31; see also Edgar Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, 7 vols. (Madras: Madras Government Press, 1909), 4:295307, 316317.
37. Beck, "The Goddess and the Demon," p. 36.
38. Brubaker, "The Ambivalent Mistress," pp. 273274.
39. Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1974), pp. 231270.
40. Brubaker, "The Ambivalent Mistress," p. 291.
41. Ibid., p. 269.
42. Ibid., p. 382.
43. Victor Turner, *Process, Performance and Pilgrimage* (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Co., 1979), pp. 1159.
44. Richard Lannoy, *The Speaking Tree: A Study of Indian Culture and Society* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 201.
45. I. M. Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion: An Anthropological Study of Spirit Possession and Shamanism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1978), pp. 188189.
46. For Manasa * see Edward C. Dimock, Jr., "The Goddess of Snakes in Medieval Bengali Literature," *History of Religions* 1, no. 2 (Winter 1962): 307321; Edward C. Dimock, Jr., and A. K. Ramanujan, "The Goddess of Snakes in Medieval Bengali Literature, Part II," *History of Religions* 3, no. 2 (Winter 1964): 300322; and Pradyot Kumar Maity, *Historical Studies in the Cult of the Goddess Manasa** (Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1966).
47. Brubaker, "The Ambivalent Mistress," p. 384.
48. Sitala* is popular across North India and is worshiped particularly during the height of the dry season, when smallpox was most easily spread. Although smallpox has been eradicated, Sitala is still widely worshiped to help alleviate or prevent skin diseases and to help solve personal problems. One of the largest and busiest temples in Banaras is a Sitala temple. Most of her shrines, though, are small and primarily attract local residents during the dry season.
49. Dimock, "A Theology of the Repulsive," p. 187.
50. Ibid., p. 196.

Appendix

The Indus Valley Civilization

1. Sir John Marshall, ed., *Mohenjodaro and the Indus Civilization*, 3 vols. (London: Arthur Probsthan, 1931), vol. 1, pl. 12, Kulli figures, nos. 35, Zhob figures, nos. 610; Stuart Piggott, *Prehistoric India* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1950), fig. 16, p. 129.
2. Marshall, *Mohenjodaro*, 1:50; Piggott, *Prehistoric India*, p. 129, agrees that the figures are "terrifying."
3. Marshall, *Mohenjodaro*, 1:339.
4. Ibid., vol. 3, pl. 94, nos. 68.
5. Ibid., vol. 3, pl. 98.

6. E. J. H. MacKay, *Further Excavations at Mohenjodaro*, 2 vols. (Delhi: Government of India Press, 1938), vol. 1, pl. 72, nos. 810; pl. 73, no. 8; pl. 74, nos. 2324.
7. See, for example, André LeroiGourhan, *Treasures of Prehistoric Art* (New York: Harry Abrams Publishers, n.d.), pls. 53, 55; p. 520.
8. MacKay, *Excavations at Mohenjodaro*, vol. 1, pl. 75, nos. 9, 19; pl. 76, no. 10.
9. Ibid., pl. 72, nos. 89; pl. 73, nos. 911.
10. Ibid., pl. 75, no. 5; Marshall, *Mohenjodaro*, vol. 1, pl. 94, no. 14.
11. It is not always clear if hair is being depicted.
12. See MacKay, *Excavations at Mohenjodaro*, vol. 1, pl. 73, nos. 3, 4, 6; pl. 75, nearly every example.
13. Ibid., pl. 76, nos. 6, 14.
14. For example, Philip Rawson, *The Art of Tantra* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973), pls. 32, 33.
15. MacKay, *Excavations at Mohenjodaro*, vol. 1, pl. 75, nos. 10, 17.
16. Ibid., pl. 76, nos. 15.
17. Marshall, *Mohenjodaro*, vol. 1, pl. 12, no. 12.
18. Ibid., pl. 12, no. 18.
19. Ibid., pl. 13, no. 17.
20. MacKay, *Excavations at Mohenjodaro*, vol. 1, pl. 84, nos. 75, 86.
21. Marshall, *Mohenjodaro*, 1:5863. Examples of the objects are found in *ibid.*, pl. 13; vol. 3, pl. 156.
22. Narendra Nath Bhattacharyya, *History of the Sakta * Religion* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1974), p. 14; J. Przyluski, "The Great Goddess of India and Iran," *Indian Historical Quarterly* 10 (1934): 405430; Sadanand K. Dikshit, *The Mother Goddess* (New Delhi: Published by the author, 1957).
23. N. Bhattacharyya, *History of the Sakta Religion*, pp. 1315; Marshall, *Mohenjodaro*, 1:51, 5758.
24. N. Bhattacharyya, *History of the Sakta Religion*, pp. 1314; Marshall, *Mohenjodaro*, 1:7678; Piggott, *Prehistoric India*, pp. 211213.
25. Marshall, *Mohenjodaro*, vol. 1, pl. 12, no. 17.
26. For a balanced reappraisal of the religion of the Indus civilization, see Herbert P. Sullivan, "A Reexamination of the Religion of the Indus Civilization," *History of Religions* 4, no. 1 (Summer 1964): 115125.
27. Marshall, *Mohenjodaro*, vol. 1, pl. 12, no. 12.
28. Ibid., p. 64; Sullivan, "The Religion of the Indus Civilization," p. 117.
29. Marshall, *Mohenjodaro*, vol. 1, pl. 12, no. 18.
30. Ibid., pl. 13, no. 17.

Bibliography

Agni-purana *. Poona: Anandasrama* Sanskrit Series, 1957.

Agni Puranam *. Translated by Manmatha Nath Dutt Shastri. 2 vols. Banaras: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office, 1967.

Airi, Raghunath. *Concept of Sarasvati (in Vedic Literature)*. Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1977.

[*Aitareya-brahmana**]. *Rigveda Brahmanas**: *The Aitareya and Kausitaki brahmanas* of the Rigveda*. Translated by Arthur B. Keith. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1971.

[*Asvalayanagrhyasutra**]. *The Grihya-sutras**, *Rules of Vedic Domestic Ceremonies*. Translated by Hermann Oldenberg. 2 vols. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1967.

Atharva-veda. With the Commentary of Sayana*. Edited by Vishva Bandhu and others. 4 parts. Hoshiarpur: Visveshvaranand Indological Series, 196064.

[*Atharva-veda*]. *The Hymns of the Atharva-veda*. Translated by Ralph T. H. Griffith. 2 vols. Banaras: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office, 1968.

Avalon, Arthur, and Ellen Avalon, trans. *Hymns to the Goddess*. 3d ed. Madras: Ganesh, 1964.

Babb, Lawrence A. *The Divine Hierarchy: Popular Hinduism in Central India*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1975.

Babineau, Edmour. "The Interaction of Love of God and Social Duty in the Ramcarit-manas*." Ph.D. diss., McMaster University, 1975.

Banabhatta*. *Kadambari**. Bombay: Mathuranath Sastri*, 1940.

Banerjea, Jitendra Nath. *The Development of Hindu Iconography*. 2d ed. Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1956.

Barz, Richard. *The Bhakti Cult of Vallabhacarya**. Faridabad, Haryana: Thomson Press, 1976.

Beck, Brenda E. F. "The Goddess and the Demon: A Local South Indian Festival and Its Wider Context." University of British Columbia, 1979.

. *Peasant Society in Konku**: *A Study of Right and Left Subcastes in South India*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1972.

- Behera, K. S. "Laksmi * in Orissan Literature and Art." In D. C. Sircar, ed. *Foreigners in Ancient India and Laksmi* and Sarasvati* in Art and Literature*, pp. 91105. Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1970.
- Beyer, Stephen. *The Cult of Tara*: Magic and Ritual in Tibet*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1973.
- Bhagavata-purana**. Gorakhpur: Gita* Press, samvat* 2021.
- The Bhagavata-purana*. Translated and annotated by Ganesh Vasudeo Tagare. 4 vols. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1976.
- Bhandarker, R G. *Vaisnavism*, Saivism* and Minor Religious Systems*. Strassburg: K. J. Tr'bnner, 1913.
- Bharati, Agehananda. "Pilgrimage Sites and Indian Civilization." In Joseph W. Elder, ed. *Chapter in Indian Civilization*, pp. 83126. Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Co., 1970.
- . *The Tantric Tradition*. London: Rider, 1965.
- Bhardwaj, Surinder Mohan. *Hindu Places of Pilgrimage in India*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1973.
- Bhattacharji, Sukumari. *The Indian Theogony*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970.
- Bhattacharya, D. C. "An Unknown Form of Tara." In D. C. Sircar, ed., *The Sakti* Cult and Tara*, pp. 134142. Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1967.
- Bhattacharyya, Benoytosh. *The Indian Buddhist Iconography: Mainly Based on the Sadhanamala* and Cognate Tantric* Texts of Rituals*. Calcutta: Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1968.
- . *An Introduction to Buddhist Esoterism*. Banaras: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office, 1964.
- Bhattacharyya, Narendra Nath. *History of the Sakta* Religion*. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1974.
- . *Indian Mother Goddess*. Calcutta: Indian Studies Past and Present, 1971.
- Bhattachali, Nalini Kanta. *Iconography of Buddhist and Brahmanical Sculptures in the Dacca Museum*. Dacca: Rai S. N. Bhadra Bahadur, 1929.
- Bhavabhutis* Malatimadhava* with the Commentary of Jagaddhara*. Edited and translated by M. R. Kale. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1967.
- Biardeau, Madeleine. "L'arbre sami* et le buffle sacrificiel." In Madeleine Biardeau, ed. *Autour de la déesse hindoue. Purusartha: sciences sociales en Asie du Sud*. Collection no. 5. Paris: Centre d'Études de l'Inde et de l'Asie du Sud, 1981.
- Blofeld, John. *Bodhisattva of Compassion: The Mystical Tradition of Kuan Yin*. Boulder, Colo.: Shambhala Publications, 1978.
- Bosch, F. D. K. *The Golden Germ*. 's Gravenhage: Mouton, 1960.
- Brahma-vaivarta-purana**. Poona: Anandasrama* Sanskrit Series, 1935.
- Brahma-Vaivarta Puranam*. Translated by Rajendra Nath Sen. 2 parts. Allahabad: Sudhindra Nath Vasu, 1920, 1922.
- Brhaddharma-purana**. Banaras: Chaukhamba Amarabharati Prakashan, 1897.
- Brown, Cheever Mackenzie. *God as Mother: A Feminine Theology in India*. Hartford, Vt.: Claude Stark, 1974.

Brubaker, Richard L. "The Ambivalent Mistress: A Study of South Indian Village Goddesses and Their Religious Meaning." Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1978.

. "The Uses of Decapitation." Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion, New York, November 17, 1979.

Campbell, Joseph. *The Masks of God: Primitive Mythology*. New York: Viking Press, 1959.

[Candidas *.] *Love Songs of Chandidas**. Translated by Deben Bhattacharya. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1967.

Carman, John. *The Theology of Ramanuja**. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1974.

Chakravarti, Chintaharan. *Tantras: Studies on Their Religion and Literature*. Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1963.

Chatterjee, A. K. "Some Aspects of Sarasvati*." In D. C. Sircar, ed. *Foreigners in Ancient India and Laksmi* and Sarasvati* in Art and Literature*, pp. 148153. Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1970.

Chatterjee, Bankim Chandra. *The Abbey of Bliss*. Translated by Nares Chandra Sengupta. Calcutta: Padmini Mohan Neogi, n.d.

Coburn, Thomas B. "Consort of None, *Sakti** of All: The Vision of the *Devi-mahatmya**." In John Stratton Hawley and Donna Marie Wulff, eds. *The Divine Consort: Radha* and the Goddesses of India*, pp. 153165. Berkeley, Calif.: Berkeley Religious Studies Series, 1982.

Coomaraswamy, Ananda. "On the Loathly Bride." *Speculum: A Journal of Medieval Studies* 20, no. 4 (1945): 391404.

. *Yaksas*. 2 parts. Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1971.

Courtright, Paul. "Sati* and Suttee: Widow Immolation in Hinduism and Its Western Interpretations." University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 1982.

Danielou, Alain. *Hindu Polytheism*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1964.

Darian, Steven G. *The Ganges in Myth and History*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1978.

Das, R. K. *Temples of Tamilnad*. Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1964.

Das, Sudhendukumar. *Sakti or Divine Power*. Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1934.

Dasgupta*, Sasibhusan*. *Bharater* Sakti-sadhana* o Sakta Sahitya**. Calcutta: Sahitya Sangsad*, 1367 B.S. [1961].

Dasgupta, Surendranath. *A History of Indian Philosophy*. Vol. 3. 5 vols. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968.

Datiya*, Sri Svami Maharaja*. *Sri Chinnamasta**. Prayag: Kalyan Mandir Prakasan*, 1978.

De, S. K. *Early History of the Vaisnava Faith and Movement in Bengal*. Calcutta: Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1961.

*Devi-Bhagavata-purana**. Banaras: Pandita Pustakalaya*, 1969.

[*Devi-bhagavata-purana*]. *The Sri Mad Devi Bhagavatam*. Translated by Swami Vijnanananda. Allahabad: Sudhindra Nath Vasu, 192123.

[*Devi-mahatmya* *]. *The Glorification of the Great Goddess*. Edited and translated by Vasudeva S. Agrawala. Banaras: AllIndia Kashiraj Trust, 1963.

*Devi-purana**. Edited by Pushpendra Kumar Sharma. New Delhi: Kendriya Sanskrit Vidyapeeth, 1973.

Dhal, Upendra Nath. *Goddess Laksmi: Origin and Development*. New Delhi: Oriental Publishers, 1978.

Dhavamony, Mariasusai. *Love of God according to Saiva Siddhanta**. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971.

Dikshit, Sadanand K. *The Mother Goddess*. New Delhi: Published by the author, 1957.

Dimmitt, Cornelia. "Sita*: Mother Goddess and *Sakti**." In John Stratton Hawley and Donna Marie Wulff, eds. *The Divine Consort: Radha* and the Goddesses of India*, pp. 210223. Berkeley, Calif.: Berkeley Religious Studies Series, 1982.

Dimock, Edward C., Jr. "The Goddess of Snakes in Medieval Bengali Literature." *History of Religions* 1, no. 2 (Winter 1962): 307321.

. *The Place of the Hidden Moon*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966.

. "A Theology of the Repulsive: The Myth of the Goddess Sitala*." In John Stratton Hawley and Donna Marie Wulff, eds. *The Divine Consort: Radha and the Goddesses of India*, pp. 184203. Berkeley, Calif.: Berkeley Religious Studies Series, 1982.

Dimock, Edward C., Jr., and Denise Levetov, trans. *In Praise of Krishna: Songs from the Bengali*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1967.

Dimock, Edward C., Jr., and A. K. Ramanujan. "The Goddess of Snakes in Medieval Bengali Literature, Part II." *History of Religions* 3, no. 2 (Winter 1964): 300322.

Douglas, Mary. *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1970.

Dube, S. C. *Indian Village*. New York: Harper and Row, 1967.

Dubois, Abbé J. A. *Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies*. Translated by Henry K. Beauchamp. 3d ed. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1906.

Eck, Diana L. *Banaras, City of Light*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982.

. "Ganga*: The Goddess in Hindu Sacred Geography." In John Stratton Hawley and Donna Marie Wulff, eds., *The Divine Consort: Radha and the Goddesses of India*, pp. 166183. Berkeley, Calif.: Berkeley Religious Studies Series, 1982.

. "India's *Tirthas**: 'Crossings' in Sacred Geography." *History of Religions* 20, no. 4 (May 1981): 323344.

. Paper on *pithas** presented at the annual meeting of the New England Region, American Academy of Religion, Dartmouth, N.H., 1979.

Eliade, Mircea. *Patterns in Comparative Religion*. Cleveland: World Publishing Co., 1963.

. *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1958. Elmore, Wilber Theodore. *Dravidian Gods in Modern Hinduism: A Study of*

the Local and Village Deities of Southern India. Hamilton, N.Y.: Published by the author, 1915. Reprinted from *University Studies of the University of Nebraska* 15, no. 1 (1915).

Farquhar, J. N. *An Outline of the Religious Literature of India*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1967.

Fleet, John F. *Inscriptions of the Early Gupta Kings and Their Successors*. Banaras: Indological Book House, 1970.

Forbes, Alexander Kinloch. *Ras-Mala *: Hindu Annals of Western India*. New Delhi: Heritage Publishers, 1973.

Gait, Edward. *A History of Assam*. Calcutta: Thacker Spink, 1963.

*Garuda-purana**. Edited by Ramshankar Bhattacharya. Banaras: Kashi Sanskrit Series, 1964.

The Garuda-puranam. Translated by Manmatha Nath Dutt Sastri*. Banaras: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office, 1968.

Ghosh, Nirranjan. *Concept and Iconography of the Goddess of Abundance and Fortune in Three Religions of India*. Burdwan: University of Burdwan, 1979.

Ghosha, Pratapachandra*. *Durga Puja: With Notes and Illustrations*. Calcutta: Hindoo Patriot Press, 1871.

Ghoshal, U. N. *Studies in Indian History and Culture*. Bombay: Orient Longman, 1965.

Gode, P. K. "Hari Kavi's Contribution to the Problem of the Bhavani* Sword of Shivaji the Great." *New Indian Antiquary* 3 (1940/41).

Gonda, Jan. *Ancient Indian Kingship from the Religious Point of View*. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1969.

. *Aspects of Early Visnuism**. 2d ed. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1969.

Granoff, Phyllis. "Scholars and WonderWorkers: Some Remarks on the Role of the Supernatural in Philosophical Contests in Vedanta* Hagiographies." McMaster University, 1984.

Gross, Rita. "Hindu Female Deities as a Resource for the Contemporary Rediscovery of the Goddess." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 46, no. 3 (September 1978): 269-292.

Gupta, Anand Swarup. "Conception of Sarasvati* in the Puranas*," *Purana** 4, no. 1 (1962): 55-95.

Handiqui, Krishna Kanta. *Yasastilaka and Indian Culture*. Sholapur: Jaina Samskriti* Samrakshaka Sangha*, 1949.

*Harivamsa**. Edited by Ramachandra Shastri. Poona: Oriental Research Institute, 1936.

Harivamsha. Translated by Manmatha Nath Dutt. Calcutta: Elysium Press, 1897.

Harper, Edward B. "Ritual Pollution as an Integrator of Caste and Religion." *Journal of Asian Studies* 23 (June 1964): 151-197.

Hawley, John Stratton. *At Play with Krishna: Pilgrimage Dramas from Brindavan*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1981.

Hazra, R. C. *Studies in the Upa-puranas**. Vol. 2: *Sakta* and Nonsectarian Upa-puranas*. Calcutta: Calcutta Sanskrit College Research Series, 1963.

Heesterman, J. C. *The Ancient Indian Royal Consecration*. The Hague: Mouton, 1957.

Hein, Norvin. "The Ram * Lila*." In Milton Singer, ed. *Traditional India: Structure and Change*, pp. 7398. Philadelphia: American Folklore Society, 1959.

Herman, Phyllis Kaplan. "Ideal Kingship and the Feminine Power: A Study of the Depiction of 'Ramrajya*' in the Valmiki Ramayana*." Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1979.

Hiltebeitel, Alf. *The Ritual of Battle*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1976.

Hopkins, Thomas J. "The Social Teachings of the *Bhagavata-purana**." In Milton Singer, ed. *Krishna: Myths, Rites, and Attitudes*, pp. 322. Honolulu: EastWest Center Press, 1966.

Hymn to Kali (Karpuradi-stotra*)*. Edited and translated by Arthur Avalon. Madras: Ganesh, 1965.

The Hymns of the Rg-veda. Translated by Ralph T. H. Griffith. 4th ed. 2 vols. Banaras: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office, 1963.

India: A Reference Manual, 1980. New Delhi: Publication Division, Ministry of Education and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1980.

Ions, Veronica. *Indian Mythology*. London: Paul Hamlyn, n.d.

Jayadeva. *Love Song of the Dark Lord: Jayadeva's "Gitagovinda*"*. Edited and translated by Barbara Stoler Miller. New York: Columbia University Press, 1977.

Jones, Craig. "Radha*: The Parodha Nayika*." M.A. thesis, McMaster University, 1980.

Kakar, Sudhir. *The Inner World: A Psycho-analytic Study of Childhood and Society in India*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978.

*Kalika-purana**. Bombay: Venkatesvara* Press, 1891.

Kalika-purana. See *Worship of the Goddess according to the Kalika-purana*.

Kane, Pandurang Vaman. *History of Dharmasastra**. 5 vols. Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Insititute, 193062.

Karpuradi-stotra. See *Hymn to Kali*.

[*Kausitaki-brahmana**]. *Rigveda Brahmanas*: The Aitareya and Kausitaki Brahmanas of the Rigveda*. Translated by Arthur B. Keith. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1971.

Kayal, Akshaykumar. "Women in FolkSayings of West Bengal." In Sankar Sen Gupta, ed. *A Study of Women in Bengal*, pp. ixxxxii. Calcutta: Indian Publications, 1970.

Khan, Mohammad Israil. *Sarasvati in Sanskrit Literature*. Ghaziabad: Crescent Publishing House, 1978.

Kinsley, David. "Blood and Death Out of Place: Reflections on the Goddess Kali." In John Stratton Hawley and Donna Marie Wulff, eds., *The Divine Consort: Radha and the Goddesses of India*, pp. 144152. Berkeley, Calif.: Berkeley Religious Studies Series, 1982.

. *The Divine PlayerA Study of Krsna* Lila**. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1979.

- . "The Portrait of the Goddess in the *Devi-mahatmya* *." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 46, no. 4 (December 1978): 489506.
- . *The Sword and the FluteKrsna* and Kali**. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1975.
- . " 'Through the Looking Glass': Divine Madness in the Hindu Religious Tradition." *History of Religions* 13, no. 4 (May 1974): 270305.
- Kramrisch, Stella. "The Indian Great Goddess." *History of Religions* 14, no. 4 (May 1975): 235265.
- Krsnananda* Agamavagisa*. *Brhat Tantrasara**. 2 Vols. Calcutta: Basumati Sahitya Mandir*, 1934.
- Kumar, Pushpendra. *Sakti* Cult in Ancient India*. Banaras: Bhartiya Publishing House, 1974.
- Kurma-purana**. Edited by Anand Swarup Gupta. Translated by Ahibhushan Bhattacharya and others. Banaras: AllIndia Kashi Raj Trust, 1972.
- Laksmi* Tantra, a Pancaratra* Text*. Translated by Sanjukta Gupta. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1972.
- Lal, Kanwar. *Temples and Sculptures of Bhubaneswar*. Delhi: Arts and Letters, 1970.
- [*Lalita-sahasranama**]. *Sri Lalita Sahasranamam*. Translated by Chaganty Suryanarayanamurthy. Madras: Ganesh, 1962.
- Lalita sahasranaman with Bhaskararaya's* Commentary*. Translated by R. Ananthakrishna Sastry. Madras: Theosophical Publishing House, 1951.
- Lannoy, Richard. *The Speaking Tree: A Study of Indian Culture and Society*. London: Oxford University Press, 1971.
- The Laws of Manu*. Translated by G. Bühler. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1975.
- LeroiGourhan, André. *Treasures of Prehistoric Art*. New York: Harry N. Abrams Publishers, n.d.
- Lewis, I. M. *Ecstatic Religion: An Anthropological Study of Spirit Possession and Shamanism*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1978.
- Linga-purana**. Edited by J. V. Bhattacharya. Calcutta: J. V. Bhattacharya, 1885.
- The Linga-Purana**. Translated by a Board of Scholars. 2 parts. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1973.
- MacKay, E. J. H. *Further Excavations at Mohenjodaro*. 2 vols. Delhi: Government of India Press, 1938.
- Mahabhadgavata-purana**. Bombay: Manilal Itcharam Desai, 1913.
- Mahabharata**. Edited by Vishnu S. Sukthankar et al. Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1933.
- The Mahabharata*. Translated and edited by J. A. B. van Buitenen. Vol. 1: *The Book of the Beginning*. Vol. 2: *The Book of the Assembly Hall and the Book of the Forest*. Vol. 3: *The Book of Virata* and the Book of the Effort*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973, 1975, 1978. (Incomplete.)
- The Mahabharata of KrishnaDwaipayana*. Translated by K. M. Ganguly. 12 vols. Calcutta: Oriental Publishing Co., n.d.
- Mahalingam, T. V. "The Cult of Sakti in Tamilnad." In D. C. Sircar, ed. *The Sakti Cult and Tara**, pp. 1733. Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1967.

Mahanirvana-tantra *. See *Tantra of the Great Liberation*.

M. [Mahendranath Gupta]. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. Translated by Swami Nikhilananda. New York: RamakrishnaVivekananda Center, 1942.

Maity, Pradyot Kumar. *Historical Studies in the Cult of the Goddess Manasa* *. Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1966.

Majumdar, A. K. *Caitanya, His Life and Doctrine: A Study of Vaisnavism* *. Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1969.

Majumdar, R. C., ed. *History of Bengal*. 2 vols. Dacca: Dacca University, 1943.

Majumdar, R. C., H. C. Rachaudhuri, and Kalikinkar Datta. *An Advanced History of India*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1967.

Manu-dharma-sastra *. See *The Laws of Manu*.

Marshall, Sir John, ed. *Mohenjodaro and the Indus Civilization*. 3 vols. London: Arthur Probshtan, 1931.

Matsya-purana *. Bombay: Venkatesvara* Press, 1938.

Matsya-Puranam *. Translated by a Taluqdar of Oudh. Allahabad: Sudhindra Nath Vasu, 1916.

Maury, Curt. *Folk Origins of Indian Art*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1969.

McKnight, Michael. "Kingship and Religion in the Gupta Age." Ph.D. diss., McMaster University, 1976.

Mishra, Vibhuti Bhushan. *Religious Beliefs and Practices of North India during the Early Medieval Period*. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1973.

Mookerjee, Ajit. *Tantra Art: Its Philosophy and Physics*. New Delhi: Ravi Kumar, 1966.

. *Tantra Asana: A Way to SelfRealization*. New Delhi: Ravi Kumar, 1971.

Mookerjee, A., and Madhu Khanna. *The Tantric Way: Art, Science, Ritual*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1977.

Mukerji, Abhay Charan. *Hindu Feasts and Fasts*. Allahabad: Indian Press, 1916.

Mukherji, S. C. *A Study of Vaisnavism in Ancient and Medieval Bengal*. Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1966.

Nandi, Ramendra Nath. *Religious Institutions and Cults in the Decan*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1973.

Narayanan, Vasudha. "The Goddess Sri*: The Blossoming Lotus and Breast Jewel of Visnu*." In John Stratton Hawley and Donna Marie Wulff, eds., *The Divine Consort: Radha* and the Goddesses of India*, pp. 224-237. Berkeley, Calif.: Berkeley Religious Studies Series, 1982.

. "Karma and Krpa*. Human Bondage and Divine Grace: The Tenkalai* Sri Vaisnava* Position." DePaul University, n.d.

O'Flaherty, Wendy Doniger. *Asceticism and Eroticism in the Mythology of Siva* *. London: Oxford University Press, 1973.

. *Hindu Myths*. Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1975.

Öster, Ákos. *The Play of the Gods: Locality, Ideology, Structure, and Time in the Festivals of a Bengali Town*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980.

Ostroff, Pearl. "The Demonslaying Devi*: A Study of Her Puranic* Myths." M.A. thesis, McMaster University, 1978.

Padma-purana *. Edited by Khemaraj Srikrishnadas. Bombay: Venkatesvara Press, n.d.

Parry, Jonathan. "Death and Cosmogony in Kashi*." *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 15 (1981): 337365.

Payne, Ernest Alexander. *The Saktas**. Calcutta: YMCA Publishing House, 1933.

Piggott, Stuart. *Prehistoric India*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1950.

Prince Ilango Adigal. *Shilappadikaram*. Translated by Alain Danielou. New York: New Directions Book, 1965.

Principles of Tantra: The Tantratattva of sriyukta Siva Candra Vidyarnava* Bhattacharyamahodaya*. Edited by Arthur Avalon. Madras: Ganesh, 1960.

Przyluski, J. "The Great Goddess of India and Iran." *Indian Historical Quarterly* 10 (1934): 405430.

Rama Prasada's Devotional Songs: The Cult of Shakti. Translated by Jadunath Sinha. Calcutta: Sinha Publishing House, 1966.

*Ramayana**. Edited by J. M. Mehta and others. Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1960.

The Ramayana of Valmiki. Translated by Hari Prasad Shastri. 3 vols. London: Shantisadan, 195762.

Rangaswamy, M. A. Dorai. *The Religion and Philosophy of Tevaram**. 2 books. Madras: University of Madras, 1958.

Rao, T. A. Gopinatha. *Elements of Hindu Iconography*. 2d ed. 2 vols. New York: Paragon, 1968.

Rawson, Philip. *The Art of Tantra*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1973.

*Rg-veda**. With the commentary of Sayana*. Edited by N. S. Sontakke and C. G. Kashikar. 5 vols. Poona: Vaidika Samsodhana1 mandala*, 193351.

Rg-veda. See *Hymns of the Rg-veda*.

The Sakta Upanisads**. Translated by A. G. Krisna Warriar. Madras: Adyar Library and Research Center, 1967.

Saraswati, Bandana. "The History of the Worship of Sri* in North India to cir. A.D. 550." Ph.D. diss., University of London, 1971.

*Satapatha-brahmana**. Edited by Albrecht Weber. Banaras: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series, 1964.

The Satapatha-brahmana. Translated by Julius Eggeling. 5 vols. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1966.

The Saundaryalahari or Flood of Beauty*. Edited and translated by W. Norman Brown. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1958.

Schrader, F. Otto. *Introduction to the Pancaratra* and the Ahirbudhnya Samhita**. Madras: Adyar Library, 1916.

Shulman, David Dean. *Tamil Temple Myths: Sacrifice and Divine Marriage in the South Indian Saiva Tradition*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1980.

*Silappadhikaram**. See Prince Ilango Adigal.

Sircar, D. C. "Ardhanari-Narayana*." In D. C. Sircar, ed. *Foreigners in Ancient India and Laksmi* and Sarasvati* in Art and Literature*, pp. 132141. Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1970.

. *The Sakta* Pithas**. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1973.

*Sita-upani-sad**. See *The Sakta Upanisads**.

- The Siva-Purana* *. Translated by a Board of Scholars. 4 vols. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1970.
- Sivaramamurti, C. *Ganga* *. New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1976.
- . *Nataraja in Art, Thought and Literature*. New Delhi: National Museum, 1974.
- Skanda-purana* *. 5 vols. Calcutta: Mansukharaja Mora, 195962.
- Somadeva. *Yasastilaka* *. See Handiqui.
- Spratt, Philip. *Hindu Culture and Personality*. Bombay: Manaktalas, 1966.
- Srinivas, M. N. *Marriage and Family in Mysore*. Bombay: New Book Co., 1942.
- Srivastava, Balram. *Iconography of Sakti* *: A Study Based on *Sritattvanidhi* *. Delhi: Chaukhambha Orientalia, 1978.
- Srivastava, M. C. P. *Mother Goddess in Indian Art, Archaeology and Literature*. Delhi: Agam Kala Prakashan, 1979.
- Sullivan, Herbert P. "A Reexamination of the Religion of the Indus Civilization." *History of Religions* 4, no. 1 (Summer 1964): 115125.
- Taittiriya-aranyaka* *. 3d ed. 2 vols. Poona: Anandasrama* Sanskrit Series, 196769.
- Taittiriya-brahmana* *. 2 vols. Poona: Anandasrama Sanskrit Series, 1934, 1938.
- Tantra of the Great Liberation (Mahanirvana-tantra)* *. Translated by Arthur Avalon. New York: Dover Publications, 1972.
- Tantrasara* *. See Krsnananda* Agamavagisa*.
- Tara-tantram* *. Edited by A. K. Maitra. Ghoramara*, Rajshahi*: Pandit Purandara Kavyatirtha*, 1913.
- Thaplyal, Kiran. "Gaja-laksmi* on Seals." In D. C. Sircar, ed. *Foreigners in Ancient India and Laksmi* and Sarasvati* in Art and Literature*, pp. 112125. Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1970.
- Thomas, Paul. *Hindu Religion, Customs and Manners*. Bombay: Taraporevala, n.d.
- Thompson, Edward J., and Arthur Marshman Spencer, trans. *Bengali Religious Lyrics, Sakta* *. Calcutta: Association Press, 1923.
- Thurston, Edgar. *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*. 7 vols. Madras: Government Press, 1909.
- Tiwari, Jagdish Narain. "Studies in Goddess Cults in Northern India, with Reference to the First Seven Centuries A.D." Ph.D. diss., Australian National University, n.d.
- Tod, James. *Annals and Antiquities of Rajast'han*. 2 vols. New Delhi: M. N. Publishers, 1978.
- Tucci, Giuseppe. *Tibetan Painted Scrolls*. 2 vols. Rome: Libreria dello Stato, 1949.
- Tulsi* Das*. *Kavitavali* *. Translated by F. R. Allchin. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1964.
- . *The Petition to Ram* *: *Hindi Devotional Hymns of the Seventeenth Century (Vinaya-patrika)* *. Translated by F. R. Allchin. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1966.
- . *The Ramayana of Tulsidas. [Ramcarit-manas]* *. Translated by A. G. Atkins. 2 vols. New Delhi: Hindustan Times, n.d.
- Turner, Victor. *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1974.

- . *Process, Performance and Pilgrimage*. New Delhi: Concept Publishing Co., 1979.
- . *The Ritual Process: Structure and Antistructure*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1977.
- [*Upanisads* *]. *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads*. Translated by Robert Ernest Hume. London: Oxford University Press, 1931.
- Vajasaneyi-samhita**. Bombay: V. L. Shastri Panikhar, 1912.
- Vakpatirajas* Gaudavaho**. Edited and translated by N. G. Suru. Ahmedabad: Prakrit Text Society, 1975.
- Vamana-purana**. Edited by Anand Swarup Gupta. Translated into English by S. M. Mukhopadhyaya and others. Banaras: AllIndia Kashiraj Trust, 1968.
- van Buitenen, J.A.B. "On the Archaism of the *Bhagavata-purana**." In Milton Singer, ed. *Krishna: Myths, Rites, and Attitudes*, pp. 2340. Honolulu: EastWest Center Press, 1966.
- Varaha-purana**. Mathura: Gita* Press, n.d.
- Vidyapati*. *Love Songs of Vidyapati**. Translated by Deben Bhattacharya. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1963.
- Viennot, Odette. *Les divinités fluviales Ganga* et Yamuna**. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1964.
- Visnudharmottara-purana**. Bombay: Venkatesvara* Steam Press, 1938.
- Visnu-purana**. Gorakhpur: Gita Press, Samvat 2024.
- [*Visnu-purana*]. *The Vishnu Purana, a System of Hindu Mythology and Tradition*. Translated by H. H. Wilson. 3d ed. Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1961.
- Vogel, J. P. "The Headoffering to the Goddess in Pallava Sculpture." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies* (London) 6:539543.
- Whitehead, Henry. *The Village Gods of South India*. 2d ed. Delhi: Sumit Publications, 1976.
- Worship of the Goddess according to the Kalika-purana**. Translated by K. R. Van Kooij. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1972.
- Wulff, Donna Marie. "A Sanskrit Portrait: Radha* in the Plays of Rupa* Gosvami*." In John Stratton Hawley and Donna Marie Wulff, eds., *The Divine Consort: Radha* and the Goddesses of India*, pp. 2741. Berkeley, Calif.: Berkeley Religious Studies Series, 1982.
- Yocum, Glen. "The Goddess in a Tamil Saiva* Devotional Text, Manikkavacakars* *Tiruvacakam**." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 45, no. 1, supplement (March 1977): K, 369388.
- . *Hymns to the Dancing Siva*: A Study of Manikkavacakars* "Tiruvacakam."* Columbia, Mo.: South Asia Books, 1982.
- . "Manikkavacakar's Image of Siva." *History of Religions* 16, No. 1 (August 1976): 2041.
- Zimmer, Heinrich. *The Art of Indian Asia*. 2 vols. New York: Pantheon Books, 1955.
- . "The Indian World Mother." In Joseph Campbell, ed. *The Mystic Vision*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1976.
- . *Myths and Symbols of Indian Art and Civilization*. Edited by Joseph Campbell. New York: Harper and Row, 1962.
- . *Philosophies of India*. Cleveland: World Publishing Co., 1956.

Index

A

- Abhinavagupta, 82
- Abhisekha* * ritual, 22
- Adharma*, 42. *See also* Dharma
- Aditi, 910, 18, 152
- Adityas*, 9
- Adultery, 81, 82-83, 86, 88, 89, 90, 91-92
- Advaita Vedanta*, 4
- Afzalkhan, 110
- Agnayi*, 17
- Agni, 6, 14, 15, 74, 178, 195;
 and Prthivi*, 9;
 Siva* as, 47
- Agnicayana ritual, 66
- Agni-purana**, 117, 191
- Ahimsa**, 146
- Anom kings, 187
- Aindri*, 156, 159
- Aiyai, 145146
- Aksobhya*, 171
- Alaksmi*, 20, 34, 154
- Ambika*, 36
- Ambivalence, 198, 200, 201, 208-209
- Amitabha*, Dhyani* Buddha, 165, 166
- Amman, 198
- Ammavaru, 201
- Amoghasiddhi, Dhyani Buddha, 165
- Amrta**. *See* Nectar of immortality
- Amsa*, 9
- Anandamath**, 181-182

Ancestor rituals, 193

Andhaka, 158, 159

Androgyny, 29, 50, 57, 58, 92-93

Anekakotibrahmandajanani*, 133

Animals:

goddesses and, 219;

sacrificed, 15, 112, 113, 114, 146. *See also* Buffalo; Goat

Annakuta* festival, 143

Annapurna*, 126, 143, 175

Antistructure, 130

Aparajita*, 107

Aprameya*, 133

Aranyani*, 16

Ardhanarisvara*, 49, 50, 52, 53

Arjuna, 107-108, 139

*Arul**. *See* Grace

Arya*, 66, 152

Aryaman, 9

Aryans*, 55-56

*Aryastava**, 141

Asceticism/ascetic austerities, 71;

of Bappa, 110;

of Bhagiratha*, 188;

of demons, 96, 101;

v. dharma, 39;

heat generated by, 42, 43, 48;

v. householder, 46-48, 49, 52;

of Mahadevi*, 159;

of Parvati*, 42-43, 44, 53, 119;

of Prajapati*, 178;

of Sarasvati*, 63;

of Siva, 35, 38, 39, 40, 46, 48, 52, 53-54

*Asiva**, 152

Asparajita*, 179, 181

Assam, 38, 145, 186, 187

Asvins *, 7, 15

Atharva-veda, 9

Atisa*, 166

*Atman**, 93, 141

Austerities, *See* Asceticism/ascetic austerities

Avalokitesvara*, 165, 166

*Avataras**, 138. *See also* Visnu*, descends in forms

Ayana*, 86, 88

Ayodhya, 70, 71

B

Bagala*, 162

Bali, 23, 25, 33-34, 188

Baluchistan, 212, 214

Banabhatta*, 117, 155

Banaras, 143, 177, 183-184, 246 n. 24;

death rituals in, 192-193, 194;

as sacred, 191

Banares Hindu University, 64

Banasura*, 176

Bappa, 110

Bee, 239 n. 23

Bengal:

animal sacrifices in, 146;

Buddhism in, 165;

festivals in, 113, 115, 146;

goddesses in, 3;

Kali* in, 116, 120, 122, 125;

Krsna* in, 88-89, 90, 91;

as mother, 181;

Radha* in, 3;

Sakta* devotionalism in, 122, 125, 126;

Vaisnavism*, 3, 81, 89, 90, 91

Bhaga, 9

*Bhagavad-gita**, 102, 139

*Bhagavata-purana**, 83, 84, 117, 159, 176

Bhagiratha*, 188

Bhairava, 162

Bhairavi*, 162

Bharati*, 11, 15

Bharat* Mata* cult, 181, 184, 185

Bhasa*, 155

Bhatarsi* Deota*, 203

Bhatta Narayana*, 82

Bhavabhuti*, 117, 119-120, 145, 147

Bhavani*, 109, 110

Bhimadevi*, 170

Bhoga, 52

Bhudevi*, 17, 179

Bhukti, 58

Bhuvanesvari*, 162

Blood, 128-129, 148, 176

Blood sacrifices, 18, 112-113, 114, 116, 117, 145-146, 171, 173-175, 205-208, 218

Bloodthirstiness, 97, 99, 100, 112, 139-140, 144, 145, 146, 156, 158

Boar, 152, 181

Brahma*, 30, 156;

created, 133, 201;

and creation, 137;

and Durga*, 96, 100;

and Ganges River, 189, 196;

and Kali, 122;

as male and female halves, 57;

meditates, 57;

and Sarasvati*, 55, 57, 58, 59, 63;

and Siva*, 37

Brahman. See Reality, ultimate

Brahmanas*, 10, 11, 12, 13, 55, 57, 178

*Brahmani**, 156, 159

Brahmaputra River, 189

*Brahma-vaivarta-purana**, 58, 82, 92, 93, 94

*Brhaddharma-purana**, 109, 163, 164, 165, 191

Brhali*, 152

Brhaspati*, 6

*Brhatkathamanjari**, 145

Brubaker, Richard, 208

Bruner, Jerome, 78

Bubhanesvar*, 148

Buddha, 153, 155

Buddhisaktisvarupini*, 59

Buddhism, 56;

 Bengal, 165;

 goddesses in, 153, 172-173, 187;

 Tantric, 167, 172, 177;

 Tibetan, 165-166, 167, 171, 172, 177

Buffalo:

 demon (*see* Mahisa*);

 sacrificed, 112, 114, 146, 205-208

C

Caitanya, 88

Calcutta, 146

Camunda*, 117, 145, 146, 147, 148-149, 156, 159

Canda *,101, 118

Candalas*, 118

Candamari*, 117, 146-147, 148

Candi*, 117

*Candidas**, 86-88

Carmamunda*, 147-148

*Carudatta**, 155

Caste, 63, 248-249 n. 12

Catastrophe, 198, 204-205, 207, 208, 209, 211

Cauvery River, 189, 191

Chastity, 74, 76, 78

Chatterjee, Bankim Chandra, 181-183

Cheating Death, 166

Children, afflicted, 152, 153, 154-155, 160

Chinnamasta*, 172-177;

and blood, 173, 175, 176;

in Buddhism, 172-173;

and cremation ground, 173, 176;

described, 172-173, 175;

as Hindu deity, 173, 177;

and lotus, 173;

as Mahavidyas*, 165;

as Narasimha*, 161;

as nude and headless, 172, 175;

represents lifedeathsex cycle, 173, 175, 176;

selfdecapitation of, 162, 172, 173, 175, 176, 177;

as Vajrayogini*, 172-173, 175;

worshiped, 173, 177

Chola sculpture, 145

Churningoftheocean myth, 26-27, 67, 112, 154. *See also* Creation

Cow, 7, 10, 12, 16, 33

Creation:

Brahma in, 137;
*Brahmanas** on, 178;
 Danu* and, 16;
 Durga* and, 97, 102, 104-105;
 of gods, 133, 201;
 Krsna* in, 58, 93;
 Mahadevi* in, 133, 136-137, 141, 161;
 myths, 26-27, 67, 112, 154, 178;
 Pancaratra* School on, 30;
 Parvati* in, 49, 50;
 Prajapati* in, 178;
 primordial waters in, 16, 21, 26;
*Rg-veda** on, 188;
 rivers in, 188;
 Sarasvati* in, 58, 62;
 Siva* in, 37, 38, 49, 50;
 sound in, 11, 13, 18;
 Sri-Laksmi* in, 21, 26-27, 30, 68;
 Vac* in, 12;
 Visnu* in, 30, 67-68, 161

Cremation grounds, 53, 148;

Chinnamasta* in, 173, 176;
 Kali* in, 116, 117, 118, 124, 125, 126, 130, 147, 214
*Cry of Suffering to Tara**, 167

D

Daksa*, 9, 23, 36, 37, 53, 119;
 sacrifice by, 38, 162, 163, 186;
 v. Siva, 38, 39

Daksinakali*, 130

Damayanti*, 78

Dance:

Kali's*, 119-120, 130;
 of Matrkas*, 156;
 Siva's*, 47, 48, 53, 119, 120, 122, 203

Dantura*, 148

Danu*,16

Darmadra, 166

Daruka*, 118

Dasamahavidyas*, 119, 138

Dasara* festival, 106-107, 108, 110-111

*Dasavataracarita**, 82, 83

Dawn, 7, 8, 14

Death, 129, 131;

cheated, 167, 168, 172;

goddesses and, 13, 124, 125, 128, 146-148, 149, 167, 168, 172, 198, 206, 208;

rituals, 191, 192-193, 194;

and sexuality, 173

Delusion (*maya**), 100, 104-105, 135-136

Demons:

austerities by, 96, 101;

buffalo (*see Mahisa**);

Durga v., 95, 96-97, 98, 99, 100, 101-102, 104, 105, 106, 107, 110, 112, 114-115, 118, 138;

goddesses, 153-154, 159;

Kali v., 118, 119, 120, 124;

Mahadevi v., 138, 144, 156, 158, 159;

Parvati v., 96;

Siva and, 203;

in Sri-Laksmi, 23-25

and village goddesses, 205, 206, 208. *See also* Bali; Kaitabha; Madhu; Nisumbha*; Sumbha*

Destruction:

goddesses and, 13, 124, 125, 128, 146-148, 149;

by Siva, 47, 137

Devi*. *See* Mahadevi

*Devi-bhagavata-purana**, 58, 63, 82,

99, 109, 156;

on Mahadevi *, 133, 137, 138, 139, 179

*Devi-mahatmya**, 96, 132, 139;

on Durga*, 100, 101, 102, 104, 105, 106;

on Kali*, 118;

on Mahadevi, 145, 148, 179;

on Matrkas*, 156, 158

*Devi-purana**, 109

Devotion:

divinehuman, 82, 85, 89-90;

of goddesses, 4;

to Krsna*, 81-82, 84-85, 88-89, 90, 91, 92, 94;

of Parvati*, 35-36, 52-53, 54;

of Radha*, 81, 82, 85, 88-89, 90;

to Radha, 9091, 94;

by ritual suicide, 145-146;

of Sita*, 4, 79-80. *See also* Sakta* devotionalism

Dhara*, 179

Dharma (god), 23

Dharma, 28, 40, 63, 129;

and *adharmā*, 42;

v. asceticism, 39;

Durga and, 96, 101;

and *moksa**, 4, 52;

and *mukti*, 58;

Parvati and, 4, 46, 47

*Dharma-sastras**, 4, 29, 99, 115

Dharni* Deota*, 203

Dhisana*, 15

Dhumavati*, 162, 163

*Dhvanyalokalo-cana**, 82

Dimock, Edward, 211

Dipavali* (Divali*) festival, 33, 34, 116

Disease, and goddesses, 155, 160, 198, 200, 204, 205, 208, 209, 211

Diti, 152

Divine couples:

Krsna and Radha as, 91, 93;

Rama* and Sita as, 65, 78-79, 91;

Siva* and Parvati as, 52, 91;

Siva and Sati* as, 40;

sky and earth as, 25;

Visnu* and Laksmi* as, 91

Divine essence. See Sakti*

Douglas, Mary, 129

Dubois, Abbé J. A., 106

Durga (demon), 96

Durga, 3, 36, 95-115, 132, 166, 175;

blood sacrifices to, 112-113, 114;

as bloodthirsty, 97, 99, 100, 112;

and Brahma*, 96, 100;

character of, 97;

cosmic interventions by, 101-102;

creates goddesses, 97, 102;

and creation, 104-105;

as delusion, 100, 104-105;

v. demons, 95, 96-97, 98, 99, 100, 101-102, 104, 105, 106, 107, 110, 112, 114-115, 118, 138;

*Devi-bhagavata-purana** on, 99, 138, *Devi-mahatmya** on, 100, 101, 102, 104, 105, 106;

and earth, 105;

and fertility, 95, 111-112, 113, 114;

festival for (*see* Durga Puja*);

forms of, 95, 96, 101, 114, 118, 165;

guards dharma, 96, 101;

as hunger, 100;

hymns to, 107-108;

as independent, 97, 99, 115;

intercedes, 102-104;

and Kali, 97, 112, 118, 124, 125, 165;

*Kalika-purana** on, 108-109;
 as liminal, 97, 99-100, 101, 115;
 and lion, 95, 97, 106, 109;
*Mahabharata** on, 107;
 as Mahadevi, 138;
 and Matrkas*, 118;
 in medieval Hinduism, 96, 109;
 and military themes, 106-111;
 as mother, 95, 113, 114, 181;
 and mountains, 99, 107;
 names for, 99, 100, 104, 105, 107, 117;
 and nine crops, 111;
 as non-Aryan*, 96;
 origin of, 96-97, 101, 104;
 and Pandava* brothers, 107, 108;
 and *prakrti**, 104, 105;
 protects warriors, 107-109;
 and Rama, 107, 108, 109;
*Ramayana** on, 107, 108;
 and *sakti**, 97, 104, 105;
 as sexually dangerous, 114-115;
 as Siva's* wife, 95, 113, 114, 115;
 as sleep, 100;
 suitors of, 97-99;
 in Tamil, 114-115;
 in Vedic literature, 18, 95;
 and Visnu, 96, 97, 100-101, 102, 104;
 worshiped, 99, 100, 102, 106-115, 177

Durga Puja, 95;

animal sacrifices in, 112, 113, 114, 146;
 in Bengal, 113, 115;
 daughters return in, 113-114, 115;
 as harvest festival, 111, 112;
 military themes and, 106, 107, 109, 110-111;

ribald behavior in, 112, 113;

Sri-Laksmi* worshiped in, 33

Dussaha, 154

Duty, 31

[< previous page](#)

page_268

[next page >](#)

Dvaraka *, 83

Dwarf, 28, 188

Dyaus, 8, 9, 25

*Dyavaparthivi**, 8

E

Earth, 25, 105;

as goddess, 17, 178-184;

goddess rooted in, 186;

Mahadevi* as/and, 143, 149-150, 179-181, 186, 187;

as mother, 181;

Parvati* as, 50;

Prthivi* as, 8, 178, 179;

sacred power of, 185;

Sati* as, 40;

Sita* as, 68, 70;

sky and, 40, 50

Eck, Diana, 192, 196

Elephants, 21, 22, 34, 163

F

Fertility, 214, 218-219;

agricultural and human as interdependent, 113;

Durga* and, 95, 111-112, 113, 114;

and Ganges River, 194, 196;

of Indra, 25;

Kali* and, 146;

kings and, 22, 67-70;

lotus and, 21;

of Prthivi, 9;

of Sarasvati*, 10-11, 55, 56, 58;

of Sinivali*, 15;

of Sita, 65, 66, 67, 70;

of Sri-Laksmi*, 4, 20, 22, 23, 26, 28, 33, 58, 68;

and Yaksas*, 26

Festival:

Annakuta*, 143;

in Banaras, 143;

in Bengal, 113, 115, 146;

Dasara*, 106-107, 108, 110-111;

Dipavali*, 33, 34, 116;

Durga's* (*see* Durga Puja*);

function of, 207, 209;

harvest, 111, 112;

as liminal, 207;

for Mahadevi, 143;

in North India, 63-64;

as ritual disorder, 209;

Sarasvati's*, 63-64;

Sri-Laksmi's*, 33;

for village goddesses, 199, 202, 204-208, 209;

vows in, 206

Figurines, 212-215, 216, 217, 218, 219, 220

Fire:

cult, 55;

as purifying, 189

Forbes, Alexander, 106-107

Forest, 16, 41

G

Gaja-Laksmi*, 22, 34

Gandharvas, 60

Ganesa*, 34, 44, 45, 95, 114

Ganga*, 3, 56, 57, 79, 190, 192

*Ganga Lahari**, 193

Ganga Ma*, 193-194

Ganges River:

*Agni-purana** on, 191;

ancestor rituals on, 193;

Brahma* and, 189,196;
*Brhaddharma-purana** on, 191;
 and death rituals, 191, 192-193;
 descends from heaven, 188-189, 192, 195;
 and fertility, 194, 196;
 Gupta period on, 191-192;
 health restored by, 194-195, 196;
 hymn to, 194;
 and Karttikeya*, 195;
 and Krsna*, 188;
 as link between worlds, 192-193;
 as mother, 193-194;
 names for, 193;
 nourishes, 194;
 as Parvati's* cowife, 195;
 personified, 191-192;
 pilgrimages to, 191, 192-193, 194, 196;
 as sacred, 188-196;
 as *sakti**, 195;
 and Siva*, 188, 189, 192, 195-196;
 source of, 191;
 as threshold, 191-192;
 and Visnu*, 188-189, 192, 196

Garuda, 156

*Garuda-purana**, 117

Gaudavaho*, 107, 117

Gauri*, 46, 119, 145

Geography, 4;

sacred, 38, 40, 56, 178-196 (*see also* Ganges River); *Pithas**; *Tirthas**

Giriputri*, 41

Girirajaputri*, 41

Girisa*, 41

*Gitagovinda**, 82, 83, 85, 86

Goat, 146

God(s), 3, 5, 6;

cowherd, 81;

create goddesses, 96-97, 101, 104, 156;

divine play of, 105;

as dominant, 17;

and goddesses, 16-17, 23-26, 222 n. 24 (*see also* Divine couples);

intervention of, 102;

king of, 23;

and Mahadevi, 137-138;

and Matrkas*, 151, 156, 160;

mother of, 9, 66;

power of (sakti), 49, 156;

Sanskrit, 197

Goddess(es):

ambivalent, 208;

and animals, 219;

animal sacrifices to, 146;

battle/warrior, 18, 63, 176, 177 (*see also* Durga; Kali);

Bengal, 3;

in

Buddhism, 153, 172-173;
 on coins, 37;
 created, 96-97, 101, 102, 104, 156;
 as dangerous if unmarried, 115, 202, 203-204, 227-228 n. 52, 235 n. 58;
 demon, 153-154, 159;
 as dominant, 216;
 earth as, 17, 178-184;
 on figurines, 212-215, 216, 217, 218, 219-220;
 forest, 16;
 geographical, 3, 4
 (*see also* Ganga *);
 and gods, 16-17, 18, 222 n. 24 (*see also* Divine couples);
 "grace" of, 204, 208, 211;
 headless, 172, 173, 175, 176;
 hungry, 148;
 India, as, 178, 181-184;
 IndoEuropean, 223 n. 3;
 as Mahadevi* manifested, 4, 5, 18, 42, 138-139, 140;
 male attendants of, 198;
 masculine roles of, 4;
 minor, 14-17;
 as mother, 5, 7, (*see also* Matrkas*);
 natures of, 5;
 nude, 116, 125, 172, 175, 176;
 powers of, 63;
 and *prakrti**, 3;
 and prayer, 11;
 river, 55-57, 58;
 as role models, 63;
 and sacred sites, 185-186;
 sacrificial, 11, 15;
*sakti** personified by, 49, 63, 104, 122, 133, 156;

on seals, 215, 217, 218-219, 220;
 sex roles expressed by, 4;
 and snakes, 211;
 swords named for, 109-110;
 Tamil, 198;
 Tantric, 122;
 tensions expressed by, 4;
 unity of, 41, 132-133 (*see also* Mahadevi);
 in Vedic texts, 2, 6-18;
 village (*see* Village goddesses);
 worshiped, 145, 146, 153, 154, 212-220

*Gopis**, 83-85, 159

Grace, 54;

of goddesses, 204, 208, 211;

of Siva*, 36, 53, 54;

of Visnu*, 31, 32

Gramadevata*, 197

Granthakarini*, 60

*Guhyatiguhya-tantra**, 161

Gundadabbe*, 145

Gupta ideology, 181, 191-192

H

Halima*, 152

Hanuman, 72, 73, 79, 80

Haravijaya. 147

Hariscandra*, 139

Hariti*, 153

*Harivamsa**, 66, 83, 140

*Harsacarita**, 155

Heat:

of austerities, 42, 43, 48, 71;

of fidelity, 71

Hemacandra, 83

Hermaphroditism, 50

Himalaya, 97, 114, 119

Himalaya Mountains, 36, 37, 40, 99

Himavat, 36, 37, 42, 140

Hinduism;

on *ahimsa**, 146;

blood and death in, 128-129;

Brahmanic, 2, 146;

classical, 55, 56;

epic period in, 19, 36-37;

goddesses as dominant in, 216;

ideals of, 77;

later, 17-18, 23-29, 55, 57-64;

on *linga** and *yoni*, 216, 217;

marital roles in, 76-77;

medieval, 18, 27-28, 40, 96, 109, 156, 216;

*moksa** as goal in, 63;

popular, 2, 3, 79, 146;

postepic period in, 2, 155-156;

refinement of nature in, 63;

rivercrossing metaphor in, 56;

rivers as sacred in, 189;

sakti in, 133, 135;

speech in, 59;

woman's role in, 76-77

*Homages to the Twentyone Taras**, 166, 168

Hotra*, 11, 15

Householder, 35, 43, 46;

v. ascetic, 46-48, 49, 52

Hunger, 100, 146-148, 149

Hymns:

to Durga*, 107-108;

to Ganges River, 194;

to Kali*, 124, 125, 127-128;

to Mahadevi, 140, 141, 142;

to Prthivi*, 9, 178, 179;

to Sita*, 66;

to Sri-Laksmi*, 20, 21;

to Tara*, 166, 167, 168, 170. *See also* Mantra

I

Ida*, 11, 15

Ila*, 15

Immortality, 26;

nectar/milk of, 26-27, 67-68, 112, 154, 194

India:

as body of Devi*, 187;

as center of world, 56;

as goddess, 178, 181-184;

independence movement in, 181, 182;

Kali as, 181;

as mother,

[< previous page](#)

page_270

[next page >](#)

181, 182, 184, 185;

North, 34, 65, 78, 197, 204, 211

(*see also* Bengal);

as sacred, 178, 185;

as Sati's * burial ground, 187;

South, 146, 197, 198, 200, 202

(*see also* Tamil);

villages in, 197

Indra, 6, 9, 16, 17, 67, 109, 156;

brings rain, 25;

fertility of, 25;

and Karttikeya*, 152;

as king of gods, 23;

and Matrkas*, 151, 153;

and plow, 25;

and Prthivi*, 91;

and rivers, 188;

and Sarasvati*, 56;

and Sita*, 66;

and Sri-Laksmi*, 23, 25, 27;

and Vrtra*, 188

Indrani* (Saci*), 17, 18

Indus Valley, 212-220;

goddess figurines in, 214-215, 216, 217, 218-219, 220;

great mother cult in, 216;

religion in, 215-216;

Saktism* in, 216;

stone symbols in, 215-216, 217

J

Jagaddhatri*, 126, 143

Jaganmata*, 60

Jagatikanda*, 133

Jagganatha*, 193

Jainism, 56, 107, 245 n. 10

Jajpur, 148

Jakarta tales, 195

Janaka, 68

Jara*, 153-154

Jayadeva, 82, 83, 85

Jihvagravasini*, 59

Jnanasakti*, 59

Jumna*, 56

Jumna River, 84, 189, 191-192

Jyestha*, 154

K

*Kadambari**, 117, 155

Kadru*, 152

Kaitabha, 96, 100, 101, 102, 104, 109

Kaki*, 152

Kali*, 3, 18, 44, 46, 116-131, 202, 204;

in *Agni-purana**, 117;

appearance of, 116, 117, 118, 119, 122, 124-125, 126, 130, 181;

as battle goddess, 116-117, 118, 119, 120, 130, 131;

in Bengal, 116, 120, 122, 125;

in *Bhagavata-purana**, 117;

and blood, 128;

blood sacrifices to, 116, 117, 146, 173, 175;

and Brahma*, 122;

as Camunda*, 117, 156;

as Candi*, 117;

and cremation ground, 116, 117, 118, 124, 125, 126, 130, 147, 214;

as Daksinakali*, 130;

dances, 119-120, 130;

as dangerous;

as death, destruction, 124, 125, 128;

v. demons, 118, 119, 120, 124;

in *Devi-mahatmya**, 118;
 as dominant, 120;
 and Durga*, 97, 112, 118, 124, 125, 165;
 early representations of, 213, 214;
 and fertility, 146;
 festival for, 116;
 as forbidden, 124;
 as frightening, 116, 117, 124, 125, 165;
 in *Garuda-purana**, 117;
 hymn to, 124, 125, 127-128;
 as India, 181;
 as Krsna*, 161;
 as liminal, 117-118, 131;
 as Mahadevi* manifestation, 122-123;
 as Mahavidya*, 119, 122, 161, 162, 164, 165, 172;
 mantra of, 122, 124;
 as mistress of universe, 124, 125;
 as mother, 126, 127; 128, 181;
 as nude, 116, 125, 162, 163, 181;
 origin of, 118;
 as Parvati's* alter ego, 118-119, 120, 124, 126, 165;
 as reality, 122, 124, 128, 129-131;
 in Sakta* devotionism, 122, 125, 126;
 as *sakti**, 123;
 and/as Sati*, 119, 163, 165;
 as savior, 124, 125;
 and Sita, 119;
 and Siva, 116, 118, 119-120, 122, 123, 124, 126, 127, 130, 131, 203;
 in Tantrism, 122-123, 124, 125, 126-127, 147, 164;
 as Tara*, 165, 171-172;
 and thieves, 117;
 threatens cosmos, 116, 120, 122, 124;
 as Vindhyavasini*, 117;
 and Visnu*, 122;
 worshiped, 116, 117-118, 120, 122, 124, 125-126, 127, 128, 130-131, 147, 165

Kalidasa*, 37

Kalighat* temple, 146

*Kalika-purana**, 108-109, 145, 147,163

Kalpanasakti*, 59

[< previous page](#)

page_271

[next page >](#)

Kama *, 42, 47, 142, 143, 173
*Kamada-tantra**, 123
 Kamagiri*, 186, 187
 Kamakhya*, 145, 186, 187
 Kamakhya-tantra*, 122
 Kamala*, 162, 163. *See also* Sri-Laksmi*
 Kamarupa*, 38
 Kamsa*, 83, 84
 Kannagi*, 201
 Kanniyakumari*, 202
 Kapila, 188
 Kardama, 20
*Karpuradi-stotra**, 124, 125
 Karttikeya*, 36, 43, 44, 95, 114;
 birth of, 152;
 and Ganges River, 195;
 and Indra, 152;
 *Mahabharata** on, 152-153;
 Matrkas* and, 151, 152, 153, 155, 156
 Kaumari*, 156, 159
*Kausika-sutra**, 66
 Kausiki*, 119
 Kavijihvagravasini*, 59
*Kavitavali**, 78, 79
*Kena-upanisad**, 36
 Kesai Khati, 145
 King/kingship, 4, 68, 181;
 and fertility, 22, 67-70;
 of gods, 23
 Korravai*, 176, 177
 Kotavi*, 176, 177
 Krsna*, 96, 107, 139;

as androgynous, 58, 92-93;
 in Bengal, 88-89, 90, 91;
*Bhagavata-purana** on, 83, 84;
 and creation, 58, 93;
 devotion to, 81-82, 84-85, 88-89, 90, 91, 92, 94;
 and Ganges River, 188;
 and *gopis**, 83-85, 159;
 as incarnation of Visnu*, 83-84;
 as irresistible, 81, 82, 84, 85;
 Kali* as, 161;
 and Kamsa*, 83, 84;
 and Matrkas*, 154;
 and Radha*, 81-82, 83, 85, 89, 91, 92-94;
 and reality, 58, 92;
 and Rukmini*, 81;
*sakti** of, 58, 91, 92;
 and Sarasvati*, 58, 59;
 and Satyabhama*, 81;
 in Vraja, 82, 83, 84, 85;
 worshiped, 88-89, 90, 91

Krsnananda* Agamavagisa*, 171

Krttivasa*, 109

Ksemendra*, 82, 83, 145

Ksetrapati*, 66

Kubera, 25, 34

Kulli culture, 212, 213

Kumaragupta*, 181

Kumara* Kampana*, 110

*Kumari-tantra**, 145

*Kurma-purana**, 140

Kurukulla*, 170. *See also* Tara*

L

Laksmana*, 70, 74, 79

Laksmi*. *See* Sri-Laksmi

*Laksmi-tantra**, 30, 31

Lalita*, 90, 91

*Lalita-sahasranama**, 133;

on Mahadevi*, 137, 138, 140, 141, 142, 143, 179

Lanka*, 109

Liminality, 207;

of dead, 131;

of Durga*, 97, 99-100;

of infants, 131;

of Kali, 117-118, 131

Linga*

Siva's*, 38, 39, 49, 195, 217;

and yoni, 40, 49, 52, 216, 217

*Linga-purana**, 118, 154

Lion:

Durga rides, 95, 97, 106, 109;

Visnu* as man, 152, 159, 181

Lohitayani, 152

Lotus, 163, 173;

and elephant, 22;

and fertility, 21;

as pure, 21;

and Sarasvati*, 62;

seat, 21;

and Sri-Laksmi, 21, 22, 32

Love in separation (*viraha*), 81, 82-83, 85, 89, 93

Lozang tenpe jets'en, 167

M

Madhu, 96, 100, 101, 102, 104, 109

*Mahabhagavata-purana**, 163, 164, 165, 191

*Mahabharata**, 29, 36, 41, 67, 81, 107;

on Karttikeya*, 152-153;

on Mahadevi, 141;

on Matrkas*, 151, 153, 154, 155, 158, 160;

Sabha-parva* of, 153;

Salya-parva* of, 152;

Vanaparva of, 151, 153

Mahacinatara*, 170-171, 172

[< previous page](#)

page_272

[next page >](#)

Mahadevi *, 132-150;

- appearance of, 137, 139-140, 141-142;
- as auspicious, 139-150;
- austerities by, 159;
- as bee, 239 n. 23;
- as bloodthirsty, 139-140, 144, 145;
- brings rain, 143;
- as cosmic queen, 137-138, 161;
- and creation, 133, 136-137, 141, 161;
- as dangerous, 139-140, 144, 146-147;
- and death, 146-148, 149;
- and delusion, 135-136;
- v. demons, 138, 144, 156, 158, 159;
- as destruction, 146-148, 149;
- Devi-bhagavata-purana** on, 133, 137, 138, 139, 179;
- Devi-mahatmya** on, 145, 148, 179;
- as dominant, 135, 137-138, 164;
- as dreadful, 139-140, 144, 149;
- earth/ world and, 143, 149-150, 179-181, 186, 187;
- festival for, 143;
- as food, 141, 143-144, 149;
- forms of, 119, 138, 139-150, 159, 161;
- function of, 137-139, 140-141;
- gods are dependent on, 137-138;
- human sacrifice to, 145;
- and hunger, 146-148, 149;
- hymn to, 140, 141, 142;
- India as body of, 187;
- and Kama*, 142, 143;
- Lalita-sahasranama** on, 137, 138, 140, 141, 142, 143, 179;
- as liberation, 141;
- as mad, 140;

*Mahabharata** on, 141;

Mahavidyas* and, 161;

Matrkas* as form of, 158;

as mother, 133, 138, 139, 149, 186;

names of, 133, 135, 135, 138, 140, 141, 142, 143, 179;

negative aspects of, 135, 139-140;

other goddesses manifest as, 4, 5, 18, 42, 122-123, 136, 138-139, 140, 141, 143, 164;

and Parvati*, 139, 140;

as *prakrti**, 135-136, 142, 143, 179;

as protectress, 139, 140, 144, 145;

as reality, 132, 133, 135, 136-137, 141;

and *sakti**, 133, 135, 136, 142, 143;

*Saundaryalahari** on, 137, 141, 142;

as sexual desire, 142-143, 149;

and Siva*, 133, 142, 164;

and Visnu*, 133, 138, 139;

as warrior, 138, 139, 144;

and wisdom and learning, 141;

worshiped, 139, 140, 141, 145

Mahamatrkas*, 152. *See also* Matrkas*

Mahamaya*, 100, 104, 135

Mahamaya-vijayavahini* Tara*, 170

Mahamoha*, 100

Mahanavami*, 107

*Mahanirvana-tantra**, 123, 140

Mahasuri*, 100

Mahavani*, 59

Mahavidyas*, 161-165, 175;

Chinnamasta* as, 165;

described, 163;

as fearsome, 163, 164;

function of, 163-164;

as group, 164-165;

Kali* as, 119, 122, 161, 162, 164, 165, 172;

and Mahadevi*, 161;

named, 162;
 number of, 161;
 origin of, 162;
 and ritual, 164;
 as Sakta* version of Visnu's* forms, 161-162;
 and Sati*, 162, 163, 164;
 and Siva, 162, 163, 164, 172;
 in Tantrism, 164;
 worshiped, 161, 164. *See also* Tara*

Mahesvari*, 156, 159

Mahi*, 11, 15, 179

Mahisa*, 95, 96, 98, 99, 100, 101, 102, 105, 106, 110, 112, 114-115, 138

Malati*, 117

*Malatimadhava**, 117, 119-120, 145, 147

Malini*, 152

Manasa*, 197, 210, 211

*Manasara-silpa-sastra**, 147

Manavala Mamunikal*, 32

*Mandalas**, 21

Manikkavacakar*, 46, 53

*Manimekalai**, 145

Mantras, 6, 12, 107;

 Kali's*, 122, 124;

 power of, 59;

 Sri-Laksmi's*, 30;

 Taras*, 170

Manu, 57

*Manu-dharma-sastra**, 70-71

Mara*, 170

Mariyamman*, 146, 197, 200-201, 211

Marriage, 15, 199

Marshall, Sir John, 217

Matangi*, 162, 163, 207-208

Mathura*, 82, 83

Matrkas*, 3, 41, 151-160, 176, 177;

afflict children, 152, 153, 154-155,

[< previous page](#)

page_273

[next page >](#)

160;

Bhagavata-purana * on, 159;

as bloodthirsty, 156, 158;

dance, 156;

as dangerous, 151, 152, 153, 155, 159;

v. demons, 156, 158, 159;

described, 151-152, 153, 156;

*Devi-bhagavata-purana** on, 156;

*Devi-mahatmya** on, 156, 158;

and disease, 155, 160;

and Durga*, 118;

and gods, 151, 153, 156, 158, 160;

as group, 151, 158, 160;

as inauspicious, 151, 152, 153, 154, 159;

and Indra, 151, 153;

and Karttikeya*, 151, 152, 153, 155, 156;

Krsna* and, 154;

*Mahabharata** on, 151, 153, 154, 155, 158, 160;

and Mahadevi*, 156, 158, 159;

as malevolent, 155, 159;

*Matsya-purana** on, 158-159;

in medieval period, 156;

named, 156, 159;

*Natya-sastra** on, 155;

as nonAryan, 155;

number of, 151, 152, 153, 156, 158, 160;

origin of, 97, 156, 158;

in postepic period, 155-156;

as protective, 151, 153;

and Siva*, 155, 158-159;

as *siva** and *asiva**, 152;

speak several languages, 153, 155;

*Vamana-purana** on, 156, 158;

*Vamana-purana** on, 159;

in Vedic texts, 151;

as village goddesses, 155, 160;

as warriors, 156, 158, 159;

worshiped, 154, 155-156

*Matsya-purana**, 158-159

*Maya**. *See* Delusion

Mena*, 37, 42, 43, 114

Milk. *See* Nectar of immortality

Minaksi*, 202-203

Mitra, 6, 9

Mohini*, 67

*Moksa**, 101, 164, 191;

and dharma, 4, 52;

as goal, 63;

in Tantrism, 123;

and unity of opposites, 123

Mother, 5, 7;

Aditi as, 9, 10;

Bengal as, 181;

Durga as, 95, 113, 114, 181;

earth as, 181;

Ganges River as, 193-194;

of gods, 9, 10, 66;

India as, 181, 182, 184, 185;

Kali* as, 126, 127, 128, 181;

Mahadevi as, 133, 138, 139, 149, 186;

Prthivi* as, 8, 9;

Radha* as, 93;

Ratri* as, 14;

Sarasvati* as, 11;

Sita* as, 66, 78, 79;

Vac* as 12;

of world, 78, 79. *See also* Matrkas*

Mountains, 37, 41, 99, 107. *See also* Himalaya Mountains

Mount Kailasa, 43, 202

Mount Meru, 147, 179, 189, 191

*Mrcchakatika**, 155

Mukti, 58

Mulaprakrti*, 135

Munda*, 101, 118

Music, 11, 55, 60

N

Nanda, 83

Narada*, 109

Narasimha*, 159, 161

Narasimhi*, 156

Narmada River, 189

Nature. *See Prakrti**

Nataya-sastra, 155

Navaratra* festival. *See* Durga Puja*

Nectar of immortality, 26-27, 67-68, 112, 154, 194

Nigama-kalpataru, 122

*Nilamata-purana**, 21

Nirnayasindhu, 107

Nirrti*, 13

Nirupama*, 133

Niruttara-tantra, 122

*Nirvana-tantra**, 122

Nisumbha*, 96, 101, 102, 118, 119, 156, 158

O

Ocean. *See* Churningoftheocean myth

Order, 203, 204. *See also* Dharma; Rta*

Orissa, 33

P

Padma*. *See* Sri-Laksmi*

*Padma-purana**, 82

Palala*, 152

Pallava sculpture, 145

Pancaratra* schol, 29-31

*Pancatattva** ritual, 123-124

[< previous page](#)

page_274

[next page >](#)

Pandava * brothers, 107, 108

Panis*, 16

Paramesvari*, 133

Parendi*, 15

Parjanya, 9, 66

Parvati*, 3, 34, 35-54, 78, 79, 132;

alter ego of, 118-119, 120, 124, 126, 165;

as androgynous, 50;

austerities of, 42-43, 44, 53, 119;

child of, 41-42, 43, 44;

complexion of, 42, 44-46, 119;

as creation force, 49, 50;

dark side of, 46;

v. demons, 96;

devotion of, 35-36, 52-53, 54;

and dharma, 4, 46, 47;

as domesticator, 46, 47, 48, 120-122;

as Durga*, 95, 96, 114;

as earth, 50;

as forester, 41;

and Ganges River, 195;

as Gauri*, 46, 119;

as grace, 36, 53, 54;

as householder, 35, 43, 46, 49:

and Mahadevi*, 42, 139, 140;

as mediator, 53, 54;

and mountains, 37, 41;

myths, 38, 41-046;

nature of, 41;

not in Vedic texts, 18, 36;

and *prakṛti**, 49;

as preserver, 47, 48;

as reincarnation of Sati*, 35, 36-37, 42;
 as role model, 35;
 in Sakta* texts, 41;
 as *sakti**, 35-36, 49-50;
 and Siva*, 4, 35-36, 41-44, 46-50, 52, 53-54, 91, 116, 120-122, 195;
 as student, 54, 122;
 and Soma, 47;
 Sri-Laksmi* compared to, 35, 36;
 in Tamil Saivism, 53-54;
 worshiped, 53

*Pativrata**, 71, 76

Paurnamasi*, 90

Peasant culture, 212-214

Periyapalayattamman*, 197

Periyavaccan* Pillai, 32

*Picchila-tantra**, 122

Pilgrimages, 184, 191, 192-193, 194, 196

*Pithas**, 38, 40, 184-187

Poetry, 55, 60

Pollution, 189

Power. See *Sakti**, *Sri**

Prahlada*, 23-25

Prajapati*, 9, 12, 13, 20, 178

*Prakrti**, 58;

Durga and, 104, 105;

Mahadevi as, 135-136, 142, 143, 179;

Parvati and, 49;

Radha* and, 92;

as reality, 3;

Sarasvati* and, 62;

Sri-Laksmi as, 31

Pratibha*, 59

Primordial waters, 16, 21, 26. See also Churningoftheocean myth

Prthivi*, 10, 11, 126, 140;

and Dyaus, 8, 9, 25;

as earth, 8, 17, 178, 179;

fertility of, 9;

and gods, 9, 17;

hymns to, 9, 178, 179;

as mother, 8, 9

Prthu, 67

Puja*. *See* Durga Puja; Festival

Puramdhi*, 15

*Puranas**, 37, 83

Purification:

by fire, 189;

rites, 63, 129;

by river, 56, 57, 189-191, 192;

by Sarasvati, 11, 55, 56

Purity, 21, 62

*Purusa**, 49, 58, 92

Pusan, 15

Putana*, 152, 154, 159

R

Rabindranath Tagore, 183

Rada*, 4

Radha, 3, 18, 81-94;

adultery of, 81, 82-83, 86, 88, 89, 90, 91-92;

as androgynous, 92-93;

belongs to another, 89-92, 93;

Bengal Vaisnavas* on, 3, 89, 90, 91;

*Brahma-vaivarta-purana** on, 92, 93, 94;

in creation, 93;

devotion of, 81, 82, 85, 88-89, 90;

devotion to, 90-91, 94;

as emotional, 81, 82, 85-86;

as goddess, 91, 92, 93, 94;

jealousy of, 94;

and Krsna* 81-82, 83, 85, 89, 91, 92-94;

as mother, 93;

names for, 93;

poems to, 86-88;

and *prakrti*, 92;

as *sakti*, 91, 92

Radhavallabhins*, 94

Rain, 22, 58, 66, 143

Rajagrha*, 153

Rajasuya*, 22

Raka*, 15

[< previous page](#)

page_275

[next page >](#)

Raksasi *, 152

Raktabija*, 101, 118

Raktadantika*, 148

Rama*:

cult, 79, 80;

and Durga*, 107, 108, 109;

as ideal king, 68;

origin of, 68, 70, 74;

and Ravana*, 109, 119, 139;

and Sita*, 65, 67, 68, 70-78, 79, 91;

as supreme deity, 78, 80;

as virile, 68;

worshiped, 65, 78

Ramanuja*, 225 n. 53

*Ramayana** (Krttivasas*), 109

Ramayana (Valmiki*), 36, 66, 78;

on Durga, 107, 108;

on Hindu ideals, 77;

on Rama, 68;

on Sita, 65, 68, 70, 71-72, 76, 79, 80

*Ramcarit-manas**, 78, 79, 80

Ram* Lila*, 78, 79

Ramnagar*, 177

Ramprasad* Sen, 125, 126, 127-128, 165, 171-172

Rati, 42, 173

Ratnakara, 147

Ratri*, 14

Ravana*, 68, 70, 72, 73, 74, 76, 108;

slain, 109, 119, 139

Ray, Niharranjan, 185

Reality:

Kali* as, 122, 124, 128, 129-131;

Krsna* and, 58, 92;
 Mahadevi* as, 132, 133, 135, 136-137, 141;
*prakrti** as, 3;
*sakti** as, 135;
 in sound, 59;
 in Tantrism, 122;
 as transcendent female, 132, 133;
 ultimate, 58, 136-137, 141

Revati, 152

*Rg-veda**, 12, 67;

Aditi in, 9;
 appendix to, 20;
 on creation, 188;
 gods in, 6;
 as mantras, 6;
 minor goddesses in, 14-17;
 Nirrti* in, 13;
 Prthivi* in, 8, 9, 178, 179;
 Ratri in, 14;
 rivers in, 187-188;
 sacrifice in, 15;
 Samara* in, 16;
 Sarasvati* in, 10, 11, 56, 59;
 Sarasvati River in, 187-188;
 speech in, 11;
 Surya* in, 15;
 Usas* in, 67

Ritual:

*abhisekha**, 22;
 Agnicayana, 66;
 ancestor, 193;
 consecration, 22;
 death, 191, 192-193, 194;
 lifecycle, 63;
 and Mahavidyas*, 164;

*pancatattva**, 123-124;

purification, 63, 129;

sacrifice, 15, 66, 178;

on Sarasvati River, 57;

and Sati, 164;

of subjugation, 172;

suicide, 145-146;

Tantric, 123-124;

Tara* and, 172;

Vac* and, 12

River:

in creation, 188;

crossing, 56-57, 184, 185, 186, 192;

goddess (*see* Sarasvati);

Indra and, 188;

as purifying, 56, 57, 189-191;

in *Rg-veda*, 187-188;

as sacred, 56, 57, 184, 187-196. *See also* Ganges River; Sarasvati River

*Rsi**. *See* Sage

*Rta**, 78, 10

Rudra, 17

Rudrani*, 17, 36

*Rudra-yamala**, 171

Rukmini*, 81

Rupa* Gosvamin*, 90

S

Sabaras*, 99, 117

*Sabda-brahman**, 13

Sabdavasini*, 59

Saci*, 17, 18

Sacrifice, 18, 116, 117, 171, 173-175, 218;

animal, 15, 112, 113, 114, 146, 205-208;

Daksa's*, 38, 162, 163, 186;

at Durga Puja*, 146;

goddesses of, 11, 15;

human, 145;

humiliation in, 205-206;

to Mahadevi, 145;

in *Rg-veda*, 15;

ritual, 15, 66, 178;

Siva* and, 38, 39, 40;

Soma's, 15, 23;

in South India, 146

*Sadhaka**. See Tantrism

*Sadhana**, 123

*Sadhanamala**, 171, 175

Sagara, 188, 193, 194

Sage, 6, 11, 12, 152, 154, 188

Sailasuta*, 41

Saivism*, 36, 53-54

Sakambhari*, 105, 143, 179

Sakhibhavas*, 94

Sakta* theology, 18, 38, 41, 122, 125, 126, 161-162;

on *pithas**, 184-187

Sakti *, 13, 17, 18;
 of Ammavaru, 201;
 of bliss, 91;
 Durga* and, 97, 104, 105;
 as essence of divine, 133, 135;
 Ganges River as, 195;
 as god's power, 49, 156;
 Kali* as, 123;
 Krsna's*, 58, 91, 92;
 Mahadevi* as, 133, 135, 136, 142, 143;
 Parvati* as, 35-36, 49-50;
 personified in goddess, 49, 63, 104, 122, 133, 156;
 Radha* as, 91, 92;
 as reality, 135;
 Sarasvati* as, 58;
 Siva's*, 35-36, 49-50, 122;
 Sri-Laksmi* as, 30, 31;
 Visnu's*, 30, 31
 Saktirupini*, 60
 Samadhi*, 139
Sama-veda, 12
*Sami** tree, 108
 Samkhya* philosophy, 135
 Samskaras*, 63, 129
 Sarama*, 16, 152
 Saranyu*, 16
 Sarasvati, 3, 55-64, 95, 114;
 appearance of, 58, 60;
 as ascetic, 63;
 and Ásvinas, 56;
 birth of, 57-58;
 blessings of, 62;

as bountiful, 56;
 and Brahma*, 55, 57, 58, 59, 63;
*Brahmanas** on, 11, 55, 57;
 and Brahmans, 60;
 character of, 58, 60, 62, 63;
 as cosmic, 60;
 and creation, 58, 62;
 and culture/arts. 11, 17, 55, 57, 59, 60, 141;
*Devi-bhagavata-purana** on, 63;
 fertility of, 10-11, 55, 56, 58;
 festival of, 63-64;
 as healer, 56;
 and Indra, 56;
 and Krsna*, 58, 59;
 and Laksmi*, 58;
 in later Hinduism, 17-18, 55, 57-64;
 and lotus, 62;
 and Mahadevi, 141;
 as mother, 11;
 and music, 11, 55, 60;
 names for, 59, 60;
 and *prakrti** 62;
 as pure, 62;
 as purifying, 11, 55, 56;
 and rain, 58;
*Rg-veda** on, 10, 11, 56, 59;
 and religious rites, 60;
 as river goddess, 10, 11, 55-57, 58;
 and sacrificial goddesses, 15;
 as *sakti**, 58;
 and Sarasvati River, 55-57, 187-188;
*Satapatha-brahmana** on 56;
 and Soma, 58;
 as speech, 17-18, 55, 57, 59-60, 62;
 and swan, 62;

and thought/learning/knowledge/wisdom, 17, 55, 57, 58, 59-60, 62, 141;

and Vac*, 11, 55;

and Visnu*, 58, 59

Sarasvati River, 55-57, 187-188

Sarvadhara*, 133

Sarvaga*, 133

Sarvalokesi*, 133

Sarvasastravasini*, 60

Sarvavidyasvarupini*, 60

Sataksi*, 125, 143, 175

Satapatha-brahmana, 56

Sati*, 46;

body of forms *pithas*, 38, 40, 186-187;

as earth, 40;

as faithful, 40, 41;

and/as Kali*, 119, 163, 165;

as Kamakhya*, 186-187;

and Mahadevi*, 42, 140, 164;

as Mahavidya*, 162, 163, 164;

as mediator, 39-40;

myth of, 35, 37-41;

reincarnated, 35, 36-37, 42;

rituals and, 164;

and Siva*, 35, 37, 38-41, 163, 164, 172, 186;

suicide of, 35, 38, 39, 40-41, 163, 186;

and Visnu, 186;

worshiped, 186-187;

yonis of, 38, 39, 40, 186, 187. *See also* Parvati

Satyabhama*, 81

*Saundaryalahari**, 137, 141, 142

Savitr*, 15

Savitri*, 72, 78

Self (*atman**), 93, 141

Selfdecapitation, 145-146

Selfimmolation, 145, 146

Serpent, 27, 67, 147

Sesa*, 147

Sexuality:

and death, 173;

of Durga, 114-115;

of Mahadevi, 142-143, 149;

religion based on, 215-216;

of Siva, 37, 38, 39, 42, 43, 48-49, 52, 195

Shaman, 209

Sheep, 146

*Siddhahemasabdanusana**, 83

*Silappadhikaram**, 145, 201

Sinivali*, 15

[< previous page](#)

page_277

[next page >](#)

Sita *, 3, 65-80, 81, 109, 132;
 abducted, 70, 72-73, 74;
 and agriculture, 65-66;
 appearance of, 72-73;
 as Arya*, 66;
 birth, 68, 70;
 chastity of, 74, 76, 78;
 as devotee, 4, 79-80;
 as earth, 68, 70;
 exiled, 74, 76;
 and fertility, 65, 66, 67, 70;
 hymn to, 66;
 and Indra, 66;
 as intermediary, 79, 80;
 and Kali*, 119;
 as mother, 66, 76, 78, 79;
 as model wife, 65, 70-78, 79, 80;
 and Parjanya, 66;
 in popular Hinduism, 79;
 and rain, 66;
 and Rama*, 65, 67, 68, 70-79, 91;
*Ramayana** on, 65, 68, 70, 71-72, 76, 79, 80;
 tested, 73-74, 76;
 in Vedic texts, 18, 65;
 worshiped, 65, 79

Sitala*, 204, 211

Siva*, 30, 34, 96, 97, 109, 156, 246 n. 24;
 as Agni, 47;
 as Ardhanarisvara*, 49, 50, 52, 53;
 asceticism of, 35, 38, 39, 40, 46, 48, 52, 53-54;
 as Bhairava, 159;
 and Brahma*, 37;

children of, 41-42, 43, 44;
 created, 133, 201;
 and creation, 37, 38, 49, 50, 158;
 in cremation ground, 53;
 v. Daksa*, 38, 39;
 dance (*tandava**) of, 47, 48, 53, 119, 120, 122, 203;
 v. demons, 203;
 destroys cosmos, 47, 137;
 and Durga*, 95, 113, 114, 115;
 as forester, 41;
 and Ganges River, 188, 189, 192, 195-196;
 grace of, 36, 53, 54;
 and Kali, 116, 118, 119-120, 122, 123, 124, 126, 127, 130, 131, 203;
 v. Kama*, 47;
 linga* of, 38, 39, 49, 195, 217;
 as mad, 47, 48;
 and Mahadevi*, 133, 142, 164;
 and Mahavidyas*, 162, 163, 164, 172;
 and Matrkas*, 155, 158-159;
 and Minaksi*, 202-203;
 and mountains, 37, 40, 40, 41;
 nature of, 47;
 as nonBrahmanic, 155;
 as otherworldly, 46;
 and Parvati*, 4, 35-36, 41-44, 46-50, 52, 53-54, 116, 120, 122, 195;
 and *purusa**, 49;
 and sacrifice, 38, 39, 40;
*sakti** of, 35-36, 49, 50, 122;
 and Sati*, 35, 37, 38-41, 163, 164, 172, 186;
 sexuality of, 37, 38, 39, 42, 43, 48-49, 52, 195;
 sister of, 36;
 as sky, 50;
 student of, 54, 122;
 as *Tantras* source, 122;
 and village goddesses, 203;

and Visnu*, 186;

in world, 38-39;

yoga of, 46, 53, 54

Sivaduti*, 156

Sivaji*, 109-110

*Siva-purana**, 37, 50

*Skanda-purana**, 96

Sky, 8, 9, 22, 25, 40, 50

Sleep, 100

Smallpox, 204, 211

Smrtisakti*, 59

Sodasi*, 162, 163

Soma, 6, 11, 15, 23, 47, 58

Somadeva, 107, 117, 146-147, 148, 179

Songsten gampo, 166

Sound, 11;

absolute as, 13;

creation through, 11, 13, 18;

reality in, 59. *See also* Speech

Speech:

goddess of, 11, 12, 13, 55, 57, 59;

Sarasvati and, 17-18, 55, 57, 59-60, 62

*Sphota**, 13

Spirit:

endeavor for, 123;

pure, 49, 58, 92

*Sri**, 19-20

Sri-Laksmi*, 3, 18, 19-34, 66, 78, 79, 95, 114, 132, 138;

as androgynous, 29;

children of, 20;

compassion of, 32;

and cow, 33;

as cowife, 58;

and creation, 21, 26-27, 30, 68;

in demons, 23-25;
and Dharma, 23;
in Durga Puja*, 33;
and elephants, 21, 22, 34;
fertility of, 4, 20, 22, 23, 26, 28, 33, 58, 68;
as fickle, 26, 28;
and Ganesa*, 34;
and gods, 23-26;
and good fortune, 33-34, 68;
hymns to, 20, 21;
and Indra, 23, 25, 27;
as Kamala*, 163;
and Kubera, 25;
*Laksmi-tantra** on, 30, 31;
and lotus, 21, 22, 32;
as Mahadevi, 140;
mantra of,

30;
 as mediator, 31-32;
 as model wife, 19, 28-29, 34, nature of, 20-21, 26, 28, 31, 32;
 origin of, 20, 26;
 Pancaratra * school on, 29-31;
 Parvati* compared to, 35, 36;
 as perfection, 21;
 as *prakrti**, 31;
 as royal, 4, 19, 20, 23, 28, 68;
 as *sakti**, 30, 31;
 and Sarasvati*, 58;
 and social order, 29;
 and Soma, 23;
*Sri-sukta** on, 20;
 Sri* Vaisnava* school on, 29, 31-32, 54;
 in Vedic texts, 19, 20;
 and Visnu*, 19, 26, 27, 28-29, 30, 31-32, 34, 65, 91, 179;
 and wealth, 19, 25, 32, 33, 34, 58;
 worshiped, 20-21, 30, 32-34;
 and Yaksas*, 25-26

Srinivas, M. N., 77

Srisukta, 20

Sri Vaisnavism*, 36;

on duty, 31;

on Sri-Laksmi*, 29, 31-32;

on Visnu, 31

*Sruti**, 6

Subandhu, 165

Subjugation, rituals of, 172

Sudarsana*, 139

Sudraka*, 155

Suicide:

ritual, 145-146;

Sati's*, 35, 38, 39, 40-41, 163, 186

Sumbha*, 96, 101, 102, 118, 119, 156, 158

Surabhi, 152

Suratha, 139

Surya (sun), 6, 7, 15

Surya*, 15

Suttee, 35, 40-41. *See also* Sati*, suicide of

Svarga-sopana-sarani*, 193

Swan, 62

T

Tamasi*, 100

Tamil:

culture/epics, 145, 201, 202;

Durga* in, 114-115;

goddess, 198;

Savitr*, 53-54

*Tandava**. *See* Siva*, dance of

Tantras, 54, 122

*Tantrasara**, 171

Tantrism, 172, 177;

duality in, 124;

goddess in, 122;

hero (practitioner) of, 123, 124, 125, 126;

Hindu, 171;

Kali* in, 122-123, 124, 125, 126-127, 147, 164;

lefthanded, 122, 123, 171;

Mahavidyas* in, 164;

*mandalas** in, 21;

*moksa** in, 123;

reality in, 122;

ritual in, 123-124;

Tara* in, 165, 167, 170-171

Tapes. *See* Asceticism/ascetic austerities

- Tara, 162, 165-172;
- blood sacrifices to, 171;
 - as cheater of death, 167, 168, 172;
 - as compassion, 165-166, 167;
 - described, 167-168, 170, 171, 172;
 - forms of, 166, 168, 170-171;
 - function of, 166;
 - in Hinduism, 171-172;
 - hymns to, 166, 167, 168, 170;
 - Kali as, 165, 171-172;
 - as Mahavidya*, 172;
 - mantra of, 170;
 - origin of, 166;
 - powers of, 168, 170;
 - and rituals, 172;
 - Sadhanamala** on, 171;
 - as savior, 165-167;
 - in Tantrism, 165, 167, 170-171;
 - as Tara Kurukulla*, 170, 172;
 - in Tibetan Buddhism, 165-167, 171, 172;
 - Vasavadatta** on, 165;
 - worshiped, 166-167, 168, 170, 171
- Taraka*, 37, 41-42, 43
- Tara Kurukulla, 170, 172
- Tararahasyavrttika**, 171
- Tara-tantra**, 171
- Tibet, 165;
- Buddhism in, 165-167, 171, 172, 177
- Tirthas**, 184, 185, 186, 192, 193
- Tiwari, J. N., 176
- Tortoise, 27, 67
- Tripura Bhairavi*, 147, 163
- Tripurasundari*, 163
- Tulsi* Das*, 78, 79, 80
- Turner, Victor, 207, 209

Tvastr*, 6, 16

U

Uma* Haimavati*, 36

*Upanisads**, 136

*Upa-puranas**, 96

Usas*, 9, 17, 18;

as cow, 7;

as dawn, 7, 8, 14;

as light, 7;

and Ratri*, 14;

[< previous page](#)

page_279

[next page >](#)

in *Rg-veda* *, 67;

and *rta**, 78;

and wealth, 7

V

Vac*, 11-12, 13, 17-18, 55

Vagdevi*, 57, 59

Vagisa*, 59

Vaimitra*, 152

Vaisnavi*, 156, 159. *See also* Mahadevi*

Vaisnavism*, 179, 181;

on adultery, 89;

on *avataras**, 138;

Bengal, 3, 81, 89, 90, 91;

on divine intervention, 102;

*Puranas** in, 37, 83;

on Radha*, 3, 89, 90, 91

Vajasneyi-samhita, 66

Vajrayogini*, 172-173, 175

Vakpati*, 117

Vallabhacarins*, 81, 89

Valmiki*, 65, 66, 72, 78, 79, 80, 108

*Vamana-purana**, 58, 119, 156, 158

*Varaha-purana**, 159

Varahi*, 156, 157, 159

Varuna, 6, 8, 9, 10

Varunani*, 17

*Vasavadatta**, 165

Vasuki*, 27, 67

Vayu, 97

Vedagarbha*, 60

Vedanta*, 54

Vedanta Desika*, 31

Vedas (Vedic texts), 1;

Aryans* of, 55-56;

on Durga*, 18, 95;

on goddesses, 1, 2, 6-18;

lack one great goddess, 18;

on Matrkas*, 151;

on Sarasvati*, 11, 55, 56, 57;

on Sita*, 18, 65;

on Sri-Laksmi*, 19, 20;

as *sruti**, 6;

Vac* creates, 12.

See also *Brahmanas**;

*Rg-veda**

Vedic:

Aryans, 55, 56;

sacrificial ritual, 178

*Venisamhara**, 82

Vidyapati*, 86

Vilasavati*, 155-156

Village goddesses, 2, 3, 197-211;

as ambivalent, 198, 200, 201, 208-209;

and catastrophe, 198, 204-205, 207, 208, 209, 211;

as celibate, 202;

character of, 197-198, 201;

and death, 198, 206, 208;

and demons, 205, 206, 208;

and disease, 155, 198, 204, 205, 208, 209, 211;

as disruptive, 198, 200, 203, 204, 205, 206-208, 209, 211;

festivals for, 199, 202, 204-208, 209;

as guardians, 199, 203, 204, 208, 209;

as independent, 202, 203, 204;

and injustices to women, 200-202, 205;

male consorts of, 201-202;

Matrkas as, 155, 160;

in myths, 200-204;

in North India, 197, 204, 211;
 as order, 203, 204;
 origins of, 200-201;
 rooted in village, 198-200;
 and Siva*, 203;
 in South India, 197, 198, 200, 202;
 symbolic marriage of, 199;
 worshiped, 20-21, 198, 199, 200, 204-208

Vinata*, 152

Vindhya, 99

Vindhyaivasini*, 99, 107, 117

Virabhadra*, 38

Viraha. See Love in separation

Viraja*, 94

Virginity, 202

Visakha*, 90

Visnu*, 21, 25, 38, 78, 109, 154, 176;

as androgynous, 29;

and Bali, 188;

*Bhagavad-gita** on, 102;

and Bhudevi*, 179;

as boar, 152, 181;

and churningocean myth, 27;

as cosmic king, 181;

as cosmic serpent, 67;

and creation, 30, 67-68, 161;

creation/birth of, 93, 133, 201;

descends in forms (*avatars**) 26, 27, 28, 42, 67, 102, 138, 156, 159, 161-162, 179, 181, 188;

as divine king, 27-28;

and Durga, 96, 97, 100-101, 102, 104;

as dwarf, 28, 188;

and Ganges River, 188-189, 192, 196:

grace of, 31, 32;

and Kali*, 122;

as Krsna*, 83-84;

and Mahadevi*, 133, 138, 139;

maintains order, 28, 137, 161;

as manlion, 152, 159, 181;

[< previous page](#)

page_280

[next page >](#)

in medieval period, 27-28;
 and Prthivi *, 9, 17;
*sakti** of, 30, 31;
 and Sarasvati*, 58, 59;
 and Sati*, 186;
 and Siva*, 186;
 and Sri-Laksmi*, 19, 26, 27, 28-29, 30, 31-32, 34, 65, 91, 179;
 Sri* Vaisnavism* on, 31;
 as tortoise, 67;
 yoga of, 186

*Visnudharmottara-purana**, 159

*Visnu-purana**, 28, 29, 96, 176

Visvadharini*, 133

Visvadhika*, 133

Visvagarbha*, 133

Visvakarma*, 9

Visvakarman*, 6

Visvarupa*, 60

Visvarupa*, 16

Vivasvat, 16

Vraja, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 94

Vratas, 33

Vrtra*, 11, 16, 67, 109, 188

Vyapini*, 133

W

Whitehead, Henry, 197-198

Woman:

daughter-in-law role of, 77, 113-114;
 as faithful, 40, 41;
 injustice to, 65, 200-202, 205;
 as model wife and mother, 19, 28-29, 34, 65, 70-78, 79, 80;
 in religion, 12;

status/role of, 76-77, 99, 113, 114

Y

Yajurveda, 12

Yaksas*, 25-26, 34

Yaksis*, 16

Yama, 16, 97

Yami*, 16

Yamuna*, 192

*Yasatilaka**, 107, 117, 146-147, 148, 179

Yasoda*, 83, 91

Yasovarman*, 107

Yoga, 52, 135;

 Siva's*, 46, 53, 54;

 Visnu's*, 186

*Yogini-tantra**, 122

Yogisvari*, 159

Yoni, 49, 52, 216, 217;

 Sati's*, 38, 39, 40, 186, 187

Yudhisthira*, 107, 108

Z

Zhob Valley, 212-213, 214