

THE ROLE OF THE MOTHER-GODDESS CULT  
IN THE RELIGIOUS CONSCIOUSNESS  
OF BENGAL

By

SUSHIL KUMAR LAHIRI, M.A. LL.B.

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate  
Studies in Partial Fulfilment of the  
Requirements for the Degrees Master of Arts

McMaster University

September, 1968.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
PREFACE	1-11
Chapter I	
Introduction	1-7
Chapter II	
The Mother-Goddess cult in religious history	8-18
Chapter III	
The history of the cult in India	19-33
Chapter IV	
A historical review of the development of Tantrism	34-56
Chapter V	
Cult of the Mother-Goddess and religious revival as found in Ramakrishna, Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo	57-70
Chapter VI	
Mother-Goddess and socio-political resistance	71-78
Chapter VII	
The metaphysical significance of the Mother-Goddess cult	79-92
Selected Bibliography	1-111

## Preface

What distinguishes Bengal Hinduism from that of the rest of India is the greater emphasis it places on the Mother-Goddess concept and the distinct cult that has grown around it. In the religious history of India one finds how the Mother-Goddess cult has developed side by side with many other cults and how there has been a mutual give and take amongst the different forms of worship and the different cults. Yet it cannot be denied that the way this particular cult has grown and matured in Bengal is unique. From the 18th century onward a new religious milieu had been created by the songs and hymns of Ramprasad. Ramakrishna Paramahansa, the priest and mystic in the Kālī temple in Dakṣiṇeśwar near Calcutta founded the basis of new world-religion through his communion with the Goddess Kālī; his message was taken far and wide by his beloved disciple Swami Vivekananda. And in our own generation Sri Aurobindo gave a profound philosophical orientation to the concept of the Mother-Goddess and prophesied the coming of a new age, a new generation, the coming of the Superman. And finally the role this concept played in the 19th century social revivalism and renaissance, the upsurge of the patriotic feeling and the fight for independence, all these has been



discussed in this thesis.

A subject of this nature requires a much longer time than was actually given. Hence justice could not be done to it. However we would be satisfied if it could be an opening to the understanding of the vast scope of the concept of the Mother-Goddess.

I should like to express my sincere gratitude to Prof. Dr. J.G.Arapura for his guidance and timely encouragements in this present work.

Thanks are due to Dr. Paul Younger for his advice and fruitful discussions at various stages of this work.

Thanks are due to the Chairman of the Department of Religion for various facilities provided for studies.

To the McMaster University I owe indebtedness for the Award of the Graduate Teaching Fellowship.

And last but not least, my thanks go out to my friends and colleagues Don Schultz, his wife Juanita, Peter Hordern and Angella Fletcher, who inspite of their heavy assignments went most patiently through my thesis, making the necessary changes and corrections in the language.

May the Goddess Mahavidya be propitious to all.

Sarvamaṅgalye Śiva sarvārthasādhike

Śaranye tryambake Gauri Nārāyaṇi namoastu te.

September 1968

McMaster University, Hamilton.



## CHAPTER I

### Introduction

The Role of the Mother-Goddess Cult  
in the Religious Consciousness of  
Bengal.

This paper will attempt to show the origin, nature and conceptual development of the Mother cult. As the title indicates, the field of this study centres itself around Bengal. Since it is not always possible to confine the material to single space-time unit, it has become necessary to cover a wider field extending beyond Bengal and India into a time expanse that treats pre-history and history to the present century.

As one studies and analyses the socio-religious cults that are still extant while some others that are the distorted and mutilated versions of the original form, two characteristics invariably present themselves. One is the dominant strain of the cult and the other is the way in which it is being shaped and reshaped. It is cast and moulded by multifarious subordinate strains which came from diverse sources, giving the cult different characteristics in different ages, among different people, throughout different continents. The mother-goddess cult, which is the subject of this paper, is perhaps the best example of this tendency.

The cult of the mother-goddess is a very ancient phenomenon in man's spiritual experience. The great mother,

who is the central figure in this cult, has been explained and worshipped in forms and manners which are bewilderingly diverse in different parts of the world. This diversity in the cult of the mother-goddess is due to the different psychological and sociological make up of the different people. This, then, constitutes the subordinate strain mentioned above. The process of assimilation, absorption and growth continues through centuries until it becomes difficult to distinguish the essential from the contingent; the original from the borrowed, the basic from the superfluous.

In India one finds Umā, who is the Mountain Goddess, identified also as Girījā, as well as Pārvatī; one finds Satī the daughter of Dakṣa, again presenting herself as Daśanahāvidyā (the tenfold great knowledge). In fifty-one different places in India known as Pīṭhas, legend says there are fifty-one ruling deities where the mutilated body of the Goddess Satī had been thrown. Candī, who is the demon killer, is also Durgā, (the one who is difficult to obtain). She is again Abhayā, (the fearless one), who consols one in sorrow and distress. She also exists as Sarvamaṅgalā who brings all fortune and happiness. Kālī or Kālīkā is the prime deity in the mother cult and is identified with various other goddesses who are mentioned in the Puranas and the Tantras. Some other manifestations of the same goddess are Manasā, Śitalā, Ṣaṣṭhī,



Sarasvati, Lakṣmī, Jagaddhātṛ, Annapurnā and Vāsantī.

Despite this pluralistic manifestation of the deity, the notion about the goddess is rather monistic ~~and this is rather monistic~~ and this is supported by scripture. In Devī-Mahātmyam one finds the Goddess Candi speaking about Herself in the following manner:

"She is eternal having the universe as Her form. All these worlds are Her manifestation. Even so She is incarnating in manifold ways. Hear it from me."<sup>1</sup>

This monistic concept is the usual concept of the philosopher and the mystic but the historian's concept is quite different. Hence where a mystic discovers a single and unitarian principle behing all the diversity and multiplicity of the world, the historian's analytic mind finds there diverse and sundry streams that feed into this one wider principle. The approach in this paper then would be partly that of the historian and partly that of the philosopher with a view on the one hand to examine the main sources of the mother-goddess cult and to attempt an explanation of these from a higher plane of unity.

---

1. Nityaiva sā jaganmurtistayā saryamidam tatam  
Tathāpi tat samutpattirbahudhā śruyatām mama  
Devānām kāryasidhyātahamāvirbhavatisayadā  
Utpanneti tadāloke sa nityāpyabhidhyate. Devī-Māhātmyam, 1-47.

Although mother worship is found in other parts of India, it is nowhere found with such an all pervading influence as in Bengal. One reason for this phenomenon could be that from ancient time Bengal had been ruled according to a matriarchal form of society. This was probably the Characteristic of the pre-Vedic society of India also, although the extent of Aryan influence in Bengal may not have been very great. There are however, other reasons for this phenomenon. In the history of the religious consciousness of man certain social factors acquire deeper values than others, which in the course of time, become sacred.

The fire worship amongst the Aryans may be taken as an example. It is hard to determine whether fire was venerated because the Aryans came from a cold country or because building and maintaining a fire was so difficult that a certain sanctity grew around fire. It became sacred and holy and subtle mystical significances were read into fire which was finally deified. For some particular reason in the non-Vedic society of India, the mother held a central position. This might be because the relationship in marriage was not very strictly held, so that a child's paternity was difficult to discern; this would cause the children naturally to associate and to elevate the mother. The other reason could be that the

non-Aryan society was mainly agrarian and the agricultural operations were carried on by the women. Sowing, reaping and harvesting gave them importance within the social structure which later gained a sacred value and gave rise to the cult of the mother worship. This monopoly of women in agriculture was found not only in India but was a common feature in ancient society. As Briffault puts it in his book;

"The sole form of wealth and power to produce, and the advantage in such power is in favour of the women, for in primitive society women are the chief producers. This power is associated with agriculture which appertains to women, for the productiveness of the hunter can never go beyond hand to mouth."<sup>1</sup>

These are, however, all non-religious causes assigned to religious phenomenon. But purely religious causes behind the mother worship cult are not difficult to adduce.

In the dominant trend of Indian metaphysical thinking the Ultimate reality is the cause of all causes. In other words, It is the prime cause who is Svayambhu (causa sui) and Svaprakāśa or Svayamprakāśa (Self revealing). It has also been imagined as the Eternal man, and at the same time spoken of as the Eternal woman (Tvam Strī Tvam Puruṣa). Likewise this reality, which is again spoken of as Deva, comes from the root Div meaning 'to shine'. Hence the supreme

---

1. Briffault, Mother, New York, 1963, p. 96.



light, which in its transcendent aspect is one, becomes two for the sake of creation. This is a process of autofission by which both the father principle and the mother principle emanate from the First principle. It would not be out of place to discuss briefly the Vedic notion of creation, which would help us to understand more clearly the concept of Devi or the female deity.<sup>1</sup>

Creation in Indian thinking has been understood at two levels, the psychological and physiological, the mental and the material. The first is the *Mānasī sṛṣṭi* and the second is the *Maithuna sṛṣṭi*. Each creation involves the participation of two parents. On the Physical plane the pita and the mata is represented by *Dyāvā-Prthivī*. This is the *maithuna sṛṣṭi* in which the bisexual union is an essential principle. On the mental plane of creation, the two parents are *Svayambhu* and *Virāj*, the *Mahā Deva* and the *Mahī Mātā* who in Her great womb receives the seed of creation from the opposite principle. As the *Gītā* says:

"In the vastness of my Nature I place the seed of things to come; and from this union comes the birth of all beings."<sup>2</sup>

She has been imagined as the primeval darkness or

---

1. cf. V.S.Agrawal's annotated edition of *Devī Māhātmyam*, p. 3-4.

2. *Bhagavat Gita* 14:3.

or night in the R̥g Veda. While in the Rātri Sukta she has been mentioned as the creative Mother who exposes Herself every day in the form of the conscious world. She is the substratum of creation, the eternal womb and the source of all manifestation.<sup>1</sup> In R̥g Veda Rātri (night) has been conceived as the Mother and Samudra (the ocean), Her eternal womb.<sup>2</sup> From Her womb is produced the Sambatsara, which is the span of time or Kālā which again means darkness.<sup>3</sup> And kālā is the essence of Kālī, the dark Mother or the Sapphire Goddess, who becomes the principle deity in Tantra.

Thus after having traced the history of the Mother cult we shall try to show its impact on the religious, cultural and socio-political pattern of Bengal.

---

1. R̥g Veda, 10: 127; 1-8.

2. Ibid, 10: 125-7.

3. Ibid, 10: 190.

## CHAPTER II

### The Mother-Goddess cult in Religious History



## CHAPTER TWO

It is more or less an accepted fact that the history of India begins with the Indus Valley Civilization, which is considered to be pre-Aryan and is fixed at around 2500-1500 B.C.<sup>1</sup> The site of this civilization is Sind and Punjab extending towards Beluchistan. Much excavation has been done in and around the Indus Valley at Harappa, Mohenjodaro and Chanhudaro. This excavation has turned up a number of terracotta female figurines which indicate the prevalence of some kind of goddess cult which is generally known as Harappa culture. The figures are nude except for a short skirt round their loins secured by a girdle. What leads to the conjecture of their being worshipped is that a few of the statuettes were found smoked stained. This feature might be due to the fact that lamps and incense were in use for the worship.<sup>2</sup> In support of this theory Mackay refers to figurines of similar types found in Syria and the Eastern Mediterranean. The figurines are mostly painted red to enhance their life-giving property, which is done even today with a paste of vermilion and oil. This vermilion is a necessary article (Upācāra) in

---

1. Stuart Piggott, Prehistoric India, ch. V, p. 146.

2. Mackay, E.J., Further Excavation at Mohenjodaro, Delhi, 1937, p. 260.

Hindu worship and its use was current in pre-historic times in ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Malta.<sup>1</sup>

Male figures were also excavated in these sites. One of them from Mohenjodaro is of particular interest, and is contained in a well known cured seal. It is depicted as a three faced male figure in a sitting position so that it resembles the yogic posture. It has its heels conjoined, hands out-stretched and bangled. On the chest is a triangular necklace, resembling the figurines from Kulli and Zhob in Beluchistan. A pair of horns projects from the head with a tall head dress between them. At the end of the waist band there is a projection which might be the phallus. The figure has three faces, one in front, and the other two in profile with four animals on the sides. An elephant and a tiger are on the right. A rhinoceros and a buffalo are on the left. There are also two deer carved in the dias upon which the figure sets. Such a figure with all its symbolism depicts the Hindu God Siva in His Pasupati aspect, i.e. the Lord of the animals. Siva is also the prince of Yoga.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to these seals and figures conical stone pieces, stone rings, and circular pieces of stone with deep indentations were discovered. In the light of the Siva figure

---

1. Burnton and Caton Thomson, The Badarian Civilization. 1928, p. 29.

2. The Cultural Heritage of India, Voll. I, p. 122.



from Mohenjodaro, Marshall interpreted these conical stone pieces as fertility charms and the stone rings as their female counterpart (the vulva). However not all of the stones discovered in the Indus Valley were used for the purpose of worship nor were the symbols of gods or goddesses. Some of these stones might have been used for constructional purposes. But that some of them had worship value can not be totally ruled out, particularly on the ground of archaeological findings from excavations made in certain parts of north India. Such findings have taken places at Taxila, Kosam (Kosambi), which is situated near modern Allahabad, Rajghat and Patna. Apart from certain very minor differences among these findings there is a great deal of similarity. All of these pieces are of soft stone or sand stone, circular in shape with a hole or an indentation in their centres. Engraved on them are nude female figurines with a herbal design. A finding like this in a village called Hathial near Taxila has been described by Marshall in the following manner:

"It is of polished sand stone,  $3\frac{1}{2}$ " in diameter, adorned on the upper surface with concentric band of cross and cable patterns and with four nude female figures alternating with honey suckle designs engraved in relief round the central hole."<sup>1</sup>

Of particular interest in this connection is the discovery of a rectangular terracotta seal in Harappa, upon

---

1. Annual Report of the Archaeological Survey of India, 1927-28, p. 66.



which is engraved an upturned nude female figurine with legs stretched apart and a tree projecting out of the vulva. And like the hands of the Siva figure found in the Mohenjodaro excavation, her arms are also stretched far and wide. With this could be compared another finding. It is that of a female figurine of a much later date during the Gupta dynasty which had been discovered during an excavation in a village near Allahabad. The hands and legs of the figurine are similarly stretched wide apart, but instead of the tree issuing forth from the vulva, a lotus is depicted with its stalk issuing forth from her shoulder.<sup>1</sup> In spite of this minor difference the inner significance is clear. Both of them represent the fertility cult and stand as goddesses of fertility. How this fertility cult flourished in Bengal will be treated later at some length, but for the present a reference should be made from the Devī Māhātmyam (Glorification of the Mother-Goddess) where the goddess speaks about herself in the following words:

"At that time, O gods, I shall support the whole world with life sustaining vegetables, born out of my own body, until the rains set in again. Then I shall be famed on earth as Sakambhari."<sup>2</sup>

From this standpoint, the female figurines point to

---

1. J.W.Banerjee. Pancopāṣṇā (Bengali), Calcutta, 1960, p. 220.

2. Ātohamakhilam lokanātmadehasamudbhavaih  
Bharisyāmi surāḥ śākairāvṛstreh praxidhāraḥ  
Śakambharīti vikhyāti tadā yasyamyaham bhuvi.

Devī Māhātmyam, 11:45.

some form of Mother worship. Therefore the claims made about the Indus Valley figurines would not be unjustified.

It should therefore be admitted that the root of the Mother worship in both figure and symbol has its beginnings in pre-historic India from the culture of Mohenjodaro, Harappa, and Chanhudaro.

The ancient cult of the Mother worship, however, is not the property of the religious history of India alone but of many other nations, Hence James says:

"Behind this phallic cult lay the mystery of birth and the predominance of the female statuettes over male figures in the earliest levels of all cultures in which they occur in the Ancient East, from the Indus Valley to the Mediterranean, suggests that attention at first was concentrated on the feminine and maternal aspect of the process of generation, whether or not its divine personification (when it occurred) was a virgin or mother-goddess or goddesses."<sup>1</sup>

Moreover the mother goddess in most cases was the earth goddess (chthonic deity) who was associated not merely with the mystery of birth but the continuity of the human race, and the fertility of land and animal in all its forms and phases. But with the growth of husbandry and domestication of animals, importance of the male became more prominent together with the discovery of the important role he plays in procreation. But his position for all practical purpose remained more or less secondary. The mother goddess was provided with a male partner and his role was as a begetter

---

1. E.O.James, The Cult of the Mother-Goddess, London, 1959, p. 36.



with a relationship to the goddess as a son or a servant.

In the Tigris Euphrates Valley the earth goddess was the generative power ruling over the vyvle of nature and periodically restoring life after the blight of winter and the drought of summer. Therefore, she is known by many names. For instance in the Sumerian myth the Mother of the land was Ninsikil la the pure lady, who was approached the water god of wisdom Enki, who is comparable to Varuna of the Vedic myth. Ninsikil la gave birth to a number of deities and therefore is known as the one who gave birth, the mother of the land, and Dam-gal-nunna. In her generative capacity like that of the fertile soil she is known as Nin-hur-saga, the lady of the mountain.<sup>1</sup> (This reminds one of Gīrījā, 'mountain born' of the Paurāṇic myth of India.)

In the Mesopotamian myth we find Inanna the queen of heaven rejecting the advances of the divine shepherd Dumuzi. She marries the divine farmer Enkidu, who is the faithful son of the water that came forth from the earth. This marriage was celebrated at the spring festival every year to awaken the vital forces in nature. Here the ritual requires the union of the goddess of fertility with the god who incarnated the creative powers of spring, that the union might awaken the dormant earth and the process of fecundity in this season.

---

1. cf. Kramer's Sumerian Mythology, Philadelphia, 1949, p. 59.



Dumuzi is again considered very much dependent on his spouse, as the end of spring and harvest was considered to be his death. Here he descends into the land of darkness and death out of which no mortal can ever come. But Inanna determining to save her spouse descends into the nether region, for spring and harvest is brought about by their union. Therefore, their joint return restores the blight that had fallen on the earth during their absence, and the fertility myth is thus continued.<sup>1</sup>

Also in Mesopotamia mother earth is the inexhaustible source of new life and is the personification of nature in all its expressions. She is the goddess who was the incarnation of the reproductive forces in this nature as well as the mother of the gods. She was further responsible for the growth of vegetation and the propagation of animals.

Likewise in Egypt we find even the heaven being regarded as a woman. She is deified as the goddess Nut, in whom the sun enters daily in his westward course, and sets only to be reborn again the next morning. He enters into her by impregnating her and she greets his rising and setting as that of the Bull of Heaven.<sup>2</sup> The sky, like the queen mother, is described as the cow who bore the rising sun as the calf born to her every morning.<sup>3</sup>

---

1. Speiser's Ancient Near Eastern Text, p. 107 ff.

2. Lewis Spence, The Myths of Ancient Egypt, p. 172.

3. A. Scharff, Aegyptische Sonnen Lieder, Berlin, p. 39.

The most well known and important female goddess of the Nile Valley however was Isis who is the personification of motherhood and the embodiment of wifely love and fidelity. In her various capacities as the indigenous goddess of the Nile Valley, she was equated with almost all of the Egyptian goddesses and was the goddess of many names as well as the Great mother of western Asia, Greece and Rome.<sup>1</sup>

In the Palestinian land of the Old Testament the cult of the mother goddess was not so well defined as that in Egypt but nevertheless traces of mother worship are found. In almost every important excavation an abundant number of female figurines and amulets have been found but the figurines are not identified with the same certainty as the findings of Egypt.<sup>2</sup> The principal goddess whose names recur most frequently in the literary sources are those of Anat, Asherah, Astarte and Ashtaroah and they have much in common with one another. The Baal Anat myth which is found in the Ras Shamra text is not very different from the Mesopotamian myth. As Baal is the giver of life and nourishment who exercises complete authority over the life-giving rain and is, therefore, known as the rider of the cloud. But his adversary "Mot" somehow caused him to descend into the nether world where he

---

1. E.O.James, The Cult of the Mother-Goddess, London, 1959, p. 62.

2. Ibid, p. 67.

was murdered by him. This brought about the worst drought, and all vegetation languished. To remedy the situation his sister consort "Anat" descended into the nether world with the sun goddess Shapesh. Having found "Mot" in the nether world she demanded her brother-spouse only to learn that Baal had been killed. In a great fury she tore his flesh with a sharp weapon, winnowed him in a sieve, ground him in a mill, and scattered his flesh over the fields to be devoured by the birds.<sup>1</sup> The story weaves itself around the perennial theme of the struggle between life and death, fertility and sterility, and the eventual victory of life over death. Anat is the sister consort of Baal and the Aqht text describes her as the goddess of war and slaughter, wallowing in blood. This reminds one of Kālī in the Indian tradition, as it will be shown later. In Egypt, one finds that Anat is fused with Astarte, the Semitic Ashtaroah and goddess of war. In the new kingdom of Egypt when the Semitic influence became dominant, especially in Memphis, she becomes the composite deity Anat, the mistress of the sky, and Lady of the gods, the daughter of Ptah and of Re, the mistress of the universe.<sup>2</sup>

In the rock sanctuary about two miles from the village Boghazkoy, one of the oldest Hittite settlements,

---

1. Budge, The Gods of Egypt, Voll. I, 1904, p. 322 ff.

2. Mercer, Religion of Ancient Egypt, Voll. III, N.Y. 1935, p. 198.



there are bas reliefs of two converging processions of gods and goddesses. The weathering of the rocks makes it extremely difficult to identify the gods with the exception of the goddess who has been explained in the hieroglyphic script as Hepatu. Here she has been described as standing on a lioness or panther and clad in a full sleeved robe with pleated skirt. She has her hair braided, and wears a tiara on her head. In her left hand she holds a long staff, and her right hand is stretched forward to greet the male figure approaching her. This is very much reminiscent of the Durgā figure standing on the lion with a spear in one of her ten hands while another is a gesture signifying boon and courage (Varābhaya)<sup>1</sup>

In Iran the nude female figurines holding their often adorned breasts have survived from pre-historic times. On a bas relief found in the village Sur-i-pul, which was the ancient highway from Baghdad to Tehran, is depicted king Annubanimi of Lulluby with the goddess Ninni in her tall head dress. She is leading two captives on a cord while stretching her hand to the king. At Susa the fertility goddess was seen worshipped under the name of Kiririsha and was represented in her usual posture of holding her own breasts and squatting in the posture of child birth.<sup>2</sup>

---

1. Annals of Archaeology and Anthology, Liverpool, 1940, p. 10, 22ff.

2. R. Girshman, Iraq, 1954, Plate viii.

In the Avesta she is known as Anahita, the goddess of fertility and water, and in the Yashts she is personified as the mystical life-giving river in the shape of a maid. She is fair of body, most strong, very tall, well formed, high girded, seemingly pure and nobly born of a glorious race.<sup>1</sup> She is further represented as the goddess of water who has been let down from heaven so that she could fructify the earth. Likewise she brings forth an increase in generative productivity, easy labour to women, and an abundance of milk. In the Achaemenian cuneiform she appears with Mithra the victorious young god who liberates life by the sacrifice of the primeval Bull.<sup>2</sup>

Thus it can be seen that to serve the needs of mankind the beneficence of heaven must be made accessible to man, providing a bounteous harvest, defeating the forces of evil, and giving immortality to man. For this purpose the sky god and the earth goddess (the Dyāvā-Prthivī of the Vedic tradition) should be conceptually brought together, and it should be understood that the two sets of divinities associated with the sky and the earth played a very important role in the religious consciousness of the ancient people.

---

1. Yasht, V. In the Sacred Books of the East, Oxford.

2. Weissbach Bang, Die altpersischen Keilinschriften, 1893, p. 44, 46.

### CHAPTER III

The history of the cult in India

DATA PART  
RASA  
ARGUMENT



### CHAPTER THREE

In the last chapter an attempt was made to show how the mother-goddess cult which developed in the Indus Valley is related to a similar cult found in western Asia and the Mediterranean world. This chapter now will deal mainly with the continuity of the same tradition in the Vedic culture and its interfusion with it.

In the Veda, references are made concerning the fertility aspect of the mother-goddess, but she never receives that importance and prominence within the Vedic tradition which she came to have in Hinduism at a later date. Ofcourse this is not to say that she was unimportant or secondary. She always retained a distinctive position for herself inspite of the fact that mention of her was almost always in conjunction with a male deity.<sup>1</sup> She was also worshipped as the giver of life, the giver of food, and the great mother on whose breast we suck the milk of life. This extensive universe has been proclaimed as our mother in the Rg Veda where the R̥ṣi sings:

"Thou immovable Dyāvā-Pṛthivī, who has no feet to walk around, hold the moving creatures within them as do the parents to their children...."<sup>2</sup>

- 
1. The Dyāvā Pṛthivī (the sky father and mother earth) is one example of this.
  2. Rg Veda, 1:185-2 (Unless otherwise mentioned all the English renderings of Indian references are mine)

Again:

"Thou Dyava-Prthivi who art like our parents, all that I have proclaimed about thee are true. Be thou our guardians with the other gods...."<sup>1</sup>

Further:

"Oh thou mortal from whom the life force is departed go to the mother earth who is wide and extensive, she is all pervading and beautiful. Thou oh mother earth, keep this corpse within thee, give him no pain, satisfy him with good things, as a mother wraps her baby in her own garment so wrap thou this dead within thee."<sup>2</sup>

In the Vedic tradition the number of female deities is unquestionably fewer than the male deities but they have a definite position there. This fact becomes all the more evident both by a knowledge of the way the goddesses were acclaimed in the Vedas, and through the study of female deities like Adīti, Uṣā, Saraswati, Pr̥thivī, Rātrī, Purandhī, Idā and Dhīṣṇā.

Adīti has been depicted not only as the mother of the gods but the mother of the universe. She is also the mother of Uṣā who is the goddess of the morning or dawn.<sup>3</sup>

Saraswati, the goddess of learning was originally the name of a river on the bank of which a group of Vedic Ṛsis developed certain aspects of the Vedic culture.<sup>4</sup>

---

1. Rg Veda, 1:185-11.

2. Ibid, 10:18-10,11

3. Satapatha Brahmana, III Voll. p.60, 150, 378.

4. Ibid, p. 73.



Prithivī is the mother earth who has been worshipped in conjunction with the sky father and hence the combined form of Dyāvā Pṛthivī. In the Ṛg Veda Ṛṣi Dirghatamas proclaims the sky as the father and the terra firma as the mother.<sup>1</sup> The vast sky illuminated by a myriad of stars and hypnotic moon became the goddess of night in his poetic imagination. Ṛṣi Kushik describes her form and beauty in the Ṛg Veda.<sup>2</sup>

Idā is the goddess of nutrition, and since milk and a substance much like butter (Gṛta) were being offered to the gods for their nutritious value, Idā turned into an important synonym for the word 'cow' (as those offerings are obtained from cows.)<sup>3</sup> She has been praised and worshipped along with the goddess Saraswati and Māhī (Bhārati).

In the worship and singing of the Vedic seers the mother earth becomes the personification of love, affection and forgiveness. The earth with all her variety bewildered them. They perceived the changing seasons with their corresponding verdures and the multiplicity of birds and animals. They saw the various shapes of mountains, hills and valleys. It was a picture on one side both beautiful and grand while on the other side it was mysterious and confounding. They had the feeling of awe before this "Mysterium tremendum" which gave rise to a

---

1. Ratri vyakhyadayati pururatra devya <sup>ksabhih</sup>  
 .....  
 Rātri stomaṁ na jigyuṣe. Ṛg Veda, 10:8-127.

2. Satapatha Brahmana, Voll. V, p. 81.



certain humble religious feeling in them. From the depth of this religious insignificance the earth turned into a great mother and the Vedic seers bowed their head before Her.

Here one finds a duality in the notion of the universe. On the one hand there is the father sky and on the other the mother earth, out of their union creation has originated. As the Rg Veda says:

"The void between the sky and the earth is like the womb where the father infuses his seed."<sup>1</sup>

This dichotomy between the father sky and the mother earth, which in all probability developed into the concept of Siva and Sakti in the later Tantric literature.

Another Rg Vedic hymn which is relevant in this connection is the Devi Sukta composed by Vak, the daughter of Rsi Ambhrini. She says:

"I travel with the Rudras and the Vasus, with the Adityas and all gods. I wonder I hold aloft both Varuna and Mitra, Indra and Agni, and the pair of Asvins.

I cherish and sustain high-swelling Soma, and Tvashtar. I support Pushan, and Bhaga. I load with wealth the zealous sacrificer who pours the juice and offers his oblation.

I am the queen, the gatherer-up of treasures, most thoughtful, first of those who merit worship. Thus Gods have established me in many places with many homes to enter and abide in.

Through me alone all eat the food that fees them--- each man who sees, breathes, hears the word outspoken.

---

1. Rg Veda, 1: 164-33.

They know it not, but yet they dwell beside me. Hear, one and all the truth as I declare it.

I verily, myself announce and utter the word that Gods and men alike shall welcome.

I make the man I love exceedingly mighty, make him a sage, a R̥ṣi, and a Brahman.

I bend the bow for Rudra that his arrow may strike and slay the hater of devotion.

I rouse and order battle for the people, and I have penetrated earth and heaven.

On the world's summit I bring forth the Father: my home is in the waters, in the ocean.

Thence I extend o'er all existing creatures, and touch even yonder heaven with my forehead.

I breath a strong breath like the wind and tempest, the while I hold together all existence.

Beyond this wide earth and beyond the heavens I have become so mighty in my grandeur.<sup>1</sup>

An analysis of these lines would show how the Vedic seers had discovered an all powerful female force or principle behind the phenomenal reality and how, as time passed, this female principle evolved herself into many deities with many names and forms. Therefore the mention of the female deities either in the form of a force or that of the mother earth is found scattered throughout the R̥g Veda.

In the Atharva Veda a more mature and developed concept of the mother-goddess is found. The Pr̥thivi sukta relates that:

---

1. R̥g Veda, 10:125. 1-8.

"Truth, greatness, universal order (ṛta), strength, consecration, creative fervour (tapas), spiritual exaltation (Brahman), the sacrifice, support the earth. May this earth the mistress of that which was and shall be, prepare for us a broad domain."<sup>1</sup>

"The earth which the Asvins have measured,.....She the mother, shall pour forth milk for me the son!"<sup>2</sup>

".....The earth is the mother, and I the son of the earth; Parjanya is the father; he, too, shall save us!"<sup>3</sup>

"O mother earth, Kindly set me down upon a well founded place! with (father) heaven cooperating, O thou wise one, do thou place me into happiness and prosperity."<sup>4</sup>

The attitude of the Indian poets, philosophers, and authors considering the earth as 'mother' has continued in literature even to this day. In the epic Rāmāyana, Vālmīkī portrays Sita as the daughter of mother earth. When she emerged from the earth, at the point of the plough, her body was smeared with dust which was compared to the golden polens of the lotus. At the end of the end of the Rāmāyana, when banished Sita with the heaviness of her sorrow cried out to the mother earth to give her shelter and rest, the earth cleaved open and Sita entered into her womb. Here the purpose is not to find out the historic truth of this episode, as the purpose lies with the author, Ṛṣi Vālmīkī, who emphasises the point that the earth is

---

1. Atharva Veda, 12:1

2. Ibid, 12:10

3. Ibid, 12:12

4. Ibid, 12:63



not merely 'terra firma' but is 'mother earth'.

Just as there have been found many references to female deities in the Vedic period, so in the post Vedic period are found many new Mātṛkāś or female deities. For instance, the deities around which the mother worship in Bengal developed viz. Ambikā, Umā, Durgā, Kālī and so on, are all later creations and are included within the Hindu pantheon. Although their origin is difficult to trace a short study of them might prove beneficial.

The first reference to Ambika is found in the Vajasanayee Samhita of the Yajur Veda where she is the sister of Rudra.<sup>1</sup> But in the Taittiriyo Āraṇyaka she stands in a changed relation with Rudra where he is her husband. So it is seen that as the period changed so did the relationship.

Umā is first referred to in the Kena Upanishad. Here she is known as Himavat or the daughter of Himavat, the snow covered one.<sup>2</sup> This might be the source for the legend by which she is known as the daughter of mount Himalaya. In this Upanishad she has never been referred to as the wife of Rudra but has been described as 'Knowledge par excellence, Supreme knowledge.' She is also Brahma Vidya, more potent and more powerful than all other Vedic gods.

1. Esa te Rudra bhagat saha svasra Ambikaya.

Vajasanayee Samhita, 3:57.

2. Kena Upanishad, 3:12.

To support the above notion the context in which Umā is found in the Kena Upanishad should be mentioned. A simple understanding of this context is as follows:

In the fight between the gods and the demons, Brahmā was victorious on behalf of the gods. But the gods did not understand the power of Brahmā and thought the battle was won by them. This left them very proud and haughty. As a result Brahmā saw the need for him to make the gods realize their dependency on his power. He appeared before them as a human being and as such the gods did not recognize Him. So they sent Agni to find out who he was. Agni came before Him and gave his credential of power by boasting that he could cause any thing to be consumed by his power. Brahmā produced a thin straw and asked agni to burn it, Agni tried his utmost but failed and so went to relate his failure to the gods. Then they sent Vyāyu, who boasted that his power of wind could cause anything to be blown away from sight. Again a thin straw was placed in front of the inquisiter but his attempts were no more successful than his predecessors. Finally Indra himself came before Brahmā. But Brahma disappeared and caused a beautiful maiden to stand in His place. She then disclosed the power of Brahmā to Indra. This beautiful maiden was named Umā.<sup>1</sup>

---

1. Kena Upanishad, 3: 1-12.



This is the sole instance where the goddess has been referred to as Umā, and in no other Āranyakas or Upanishads do we find any reference to her until the age of the Epics, Rāmāyana and Mahābhārata. In the Rāmāyana, Mount Himalaya and his wife Mena (daughter of Menu), had two daughters, Gaṅgā and Umā. In the myth, Gaṅgā came down to earth to save human beings from death and destruction, and Umā did penance and received Ugra i.e. Śiva as her husband.<sup>1</sup>

The description of her in the Mahabharata is quite different. Here she is presented as the wife of Śiva or Mahadeva. Śiva was seated on a high mountain peak, deep in concentration, and clad in a tiger skin, with a snake about his neck representing the sacred thread. Umā similarly clad and surrounded with her companions appeared before him, carrying a pitcher filled with water from the many holy places. Here an elaborate description of their meeting is given. Umā asked many soteriological questions of Śiva and he answered them one by one. But at other places one finds Śiva in the process of asking and Umā answering.<sup>2</sup> This conversation constitutes the Āgamas and the Nigamas of the later Tantric literature.

The history of Durgā is a very interesting one. The name itself signifies the one who is difficult to obtain. In the Taittiriya Aranyaka the name of the Devī Durgā or Durgī is found

---

1. Rāmāyana, ch. 36, p. 77. Tr. by H.P. Shastri. London, 1962.

2. Mahābhārata, Anusasani Parva, ch. 140-147.



with a few other names of lesser significance. The verse reads as follows:

"Kātyāyanīya vidmahe  
Kanyākumārī dhīmahi  
Tanano Durgīh pracodayāt.<sup>1</sup>

Notice that three different names of the deity are found in which she is worshipped; viz. Kātyāyanī, Kanyākumārī, and Durgī.

Kanyākumārī means a virgin daughter and is again the name of an ancient and well known pilgrimage in South India. An Unknown Greek writer writes about it in the following manner:

"There is another place called Comari and a harbour, hither come those men who wish to consecrate themselves for the rest of their lives, and bathe and dwell in celibacy: and the women also do the same, for it is told that a goddess once dwelt here and bathed."<sup>2</sup>

The goddess who has been mentioned above seems in all probability to be the Kanyākumārī of Taittiriya Āranyaka. This idea of the goddess as a virgin is deeply rooted in Indian faith, as Durgā is often referred to as the virgin. Virgin worship (Kumari puja) as it is known technically, is likewise an important ritual in the Tāntric form of worship, and is still to be found in the Tāntric centres (like the district of Assam in north-eastern India).<sup>3</sup>

- 
1. Let my mind rests on Kātyāyanī  
Let my thought concentrates on Kanyākumārī  
Let us be exalted by Durgī. Taittiriya Āranyaka, 10:1.
  2. Periplus of the Erythraean Sea. W.H.Schoff's Edition, Sec. 58, p. 46.
  3. For further information see Agehananda Bharati's Tāntric Tradition, p. 160. Note 95.

As regards the origin of the name Kātyāyanī it could very well be the fact that she was the ruling deity of the Kātya clan of Brahmana and therefore came to be known as Kātyāyanī.<sup>1</sup> But the names and forms around which the later Tantric or mother worship developed are mainly Durgā and Kālī.

To further the discussion on the possible origin of Durgā another verse from the Taittiriya Āranyaka can be cited as follows:

"Being of the complexion of the fire, the daughter of the effulgent sun, who is being worshipped as the dispenser of our deed, unto her the goddess Durgā I seek refuge, obeisance unto thee oh thou beautiful one who is our saviour."<sup>2</sup>

In the concept of Durgā there lies a development into Kālī (Karālī) as is indicated by Mundaka upanishad where these two names have been mentioned as the two tongues of the seven tongued sacred fire.

"Kālī Karālīca Mangjavāca Sulohitā  
Yaca Sudhumravarna  
Sphulingini Viswaruci ca devī  
Lalāyamanāh it saptajihvāh"<sup>3</sup>

These seven names or tongues of fire could be compared with the seven later deities of the same names. Kālī is the fiercer form of Durgā and human sacrifice was associated with her worship. Apart from these seven names a few other names of the deity are found in the later Vedic literatures like Bhadrakālī, Śrī, Bhavānī and so forth.

- 
1. S.B.Dasgupta, Bharater sakti sadhana o sakta sahitya (Bengali) 2nd edition, p. 41.
  2. Taittiriya Āranyaka, 10:2.
  3. Mundaka Upanishad, 1:2;4.



Śrī as goddess was however not very important in the Tāntric form of worship but her gradual development as the goddess of wealth, fame and riches is interesting in this connection.

In the Tāntric worship she is however, referred to by some other names like Lakṣmī, or Mahālakṣmī, but the Ṛg Veda makes no mention of her. The Satapatha Brahmana relates that Prajāpati created the world and was relaxing, out emerged Śrī from his body. The other gods were jealous of her beauty and were about to slay her, but Prajāpati stopped them by proclaiming that women can not be killed. Then, through his direction, Śrī shared all her beauty and wealth amongst the gods. But later she worshipped the other gods with sacrifice and received back her riches.<sup>1</sup>

From the foregoing discussion it becomes clear that though mother worship in the Vedic or immediate post-Vedic era was not established very strongly, yet its materials were being slowly collected. The sparse information on the mother-goddess cult that is available in the epics make it all the more evident that in the completed form of the mother worship many other elements came and enriched it apart from the few mentioned above.

Rāmāyana in its original form says hardly anything about the cult of the mother worship. In its Bengali version,

---

1. Satapatha Brahmana, 11:4;1.



however, (by Krittivasa Ojha) there is a description of Durgā. Here Rāma, the hero in the epic, worships the goddess in the spring in order to win a battle with Rāvana. But it is difficult to discern where Krittivasa found this episode. All the scattered references of the deity in the Rāmāyana and Mahābhārata hardly indicate any clue to the history or origin of mother worship.

Reference could be made at this point to two prayers: one to Durgā and the other one known as Ārya stotra at the end of the Mahabharata, where an elaborate description of the deity is given. It becomes clear from the study and comparison of these prayers that by the time Mahābhārata came to its present completed form so the deity, too, had reached a more complete and mature form.

Apart from this development a most important point must be made. She has been depicted in these prayers not only as mother, daughter, sister, and the ruling deity of the Kusika and the Kātyas,<sup>1</sup> but she is also the deity who is worshipped by the low caste non-Aryans, whom she is to have rescued from many dangers and difficulties. Likewise in the third chapter of Hari Vansa known as Visnu Parva,<sup>2</sup> a most elaborate description of the deity is given which is known as Āryastava. Here one finds over

---

1. A particular branch of Brahmins of North India, cf. J.N.Banerjee's Pancopāsonā, (Bengali) p. 228.

2. This is included in the appendix of the Mahābhārata.

and above her Vedic characteristics many other non-Vedic characteristics are imparted to her. For instance, she is worshipped in mountain caves, river banks and in forests by the non-Aryan tribes, the Savaras, Barbaras and Pulindas. She lives high on the Vindyas mountain surrounded by roosters, goats, lions and tigers. Peacock feathers are her only decoration. She is otherwise known as Aparnā which indicates one who is without any apparel or, in other words, she is nude. Her other names like Savari, Parnasavari, Nagnasavari shows that she is the deity of the non-Aryans, and Savari means, "the one who is being worshipped by the Savaras."<sup>1</sup> Parna Savari literally means the Savari who is clad in Parna (leaf) and Nagnasavari means the same deity who is nude. Further reference to this deity is found in the Barāṇa Purāṇa where she is known as Kirāṭinī, the ruling deity of the Kiratas.<sup>2</sup> The other characteristics in which the deity appears is in the role of a Saviour. She rescues her people from war, fire, drowning, wilderness, thieves, and enemies.<sup>3</sup> Also she is known as Tārā in Mahayana Buddhism.<sup>4</sup>

---

1. A tribal community belonging to the Austric family. See The Cultural Heritage of India, Voll. I, p. 78.

2. A branch of the Mongoloid race living in the southern slopes of the Himalayas and Eastern India. See The Cultural Heritage of India, Voll. I, p. 87.  
Baraha Purana, 28:34.

3. cf. Mahabharata, Viratparva, ch. 6:20-22.

4. cf. The Cultural Heritage of India, Voll. I, p. 536.



All these points are meant to show that even though the cult of the mother worship can be traced into the Vedas, the later mother worship in its developed form is heavily overladen with non-Aryan elements.

In the Devi Mahatmyam (Glorification of the Mother), which is an important post-Vedic scripture, another aspect of the deity has been emphasised; for she is represented as a demon killer, and the scene has been beautifully depicted. When the harassed gods could fight the demon Mahiṣāsura no longer, they prayed to Viṣṇu and Mahādeva (Śiva) to relieve them of their suffering. The great and the lesser gods with their infinite wrath were angry and a strange light emerged from their anger which concentrated itself, taking the shape of a divine damsel to whom all the gods came forward and gave their weapons. Then a great fight ensued between the demon and the 'Devi' in which the demon was finally defeated and killed. Poetically the goddess proclaimed her role in the following words:

"Thus whenever trouble shall arise on account of Danavas, I shall become incarnate and destroy the enemies."<sup>1</sup>

- 
1. Itham yadā yadā bādha dānavoṭthā bhaviṣyati  
Tadātadāvatiryaḥam karisayāmi arisaṁksayaḥ.

Devi Māhātmyam, 11:51.



#### CHAPTER IV

A historical review of the  
development of Tantrism

## CHAPTER FOUR

So far we have seen that the different elements, Vedic and non-Vedic, lay the foundation for the mother-goddess cult. We have seen also that this mother worship was prevalent not only in India but in all the Mediterranean countries. The difference is that nowhere has the continuity of the mother worship been maintained as it is to be found in India even to day.

At this point one might question the antiquity of the mother worship in India on the ground that although the religious sects like the vaishnavaites and the Śaivites are mentioned in the pre-Christian literature, the Śāktas or the mother worshippers, as they came to be known in the latter day literatures, are not so mentioned. The answer to this could be that the mother worshippers as a distinct religious sect could not gain entry within the predominantly Aryan society, whose religious literature is the only one that has come down to us. However, that the mother worshippers as a distinct religious sect were gradually gaining momentum can be proved from such observations as that of the unknown Greek author of *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*.<sup>1</sup> Thus the point is that mother worship as a distinct event is certainly a slightly later phenomenon, for it took time for the female deities to establish their independence.

---

1. Periplus of the Erythraean Sea. W.H.Schoff's Edition.

Sec. 58, p. 46.



In this connection some of the archaeological finds are of interest. A stone plaque, discovered in a village named Gangdhar in central India belonging to the period of the Gupta dynasty (A.D. 423-24,) records that during the reign of Kumar Gupta I, one of the ministers, named Mayurākṣa, built two shrines or temples for the worship of Viṣṇu and the mother-goddess, in spite of the fact that he was a Bhāgavat or Vaiṣṇavite (Bhāgavatas Śrīman Mayurākṣaka). Such evidence shows that mother worship as an independent form of worship was gradually becoming prominent. During the 5th and the 6th centuries there is also evidence that two southern kingdoms were devoted mother worshippers, the Kadambakul and the Calukyas. In many of their plaques the Kadamba kings were mentioned as the devotee as Svāmī Mahāsenā and the mothers, the female deities. (Svāmī Mahāsenā mātṛiṅganānu-dhyātman Hārītiputrānām). In certain other plaques the Calukya kings record their gratitude for being saved by the grace of Svāmī Mahāsenā or Kārtikeya and the divine Mother. "The seven mothers of mankind." (Saptamātṛkā) appear as special object of worship, and tutelary deities of the early Kadambas and the Calukyas.<sup>1</sup>

The first positive reference to the form and liturgy of worship is found in a book named Vṛhat Sambita by Varāhamihir,

1. Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum, Vol. III, p. 48.



written around sixth century A.D.<sup>1</sup> In the chapter dealing with the installation of the deity he says Mandalakramavids are the fit persons who could install the female deities. But he did not say anything more about the Mandalakramavids. Utpala in his commentary on the Vṛhat Samhitā says that Mandalakramavids are those who are well versed in the details of the worship of the Mātrikās or the female deities. However, he says nothing more about the mandalakrama, which is a Tantric form of worship; and the Śāktas alone knew all the ritualistic details of this form of worship.<sup>2</sup>

In later years Śākta worship became the most popular form of worship in Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. But before discussing this, along with the Durgā, Candi and Kālī worship in Bengal, let us discuss in this connection the Tantric ritualism and worship, which is so closely associated with the Śākta worship. According to V.S.Apte the word Tantra means,

"The regular order of ceremonies and rites, system, frame-work, ritual."<sup>3</sup>

In this definition there is nothing to show that the Tantric rites and rituals are in any sense associated with or

---

1. Edited by Sudhakar Dvivedi. 59th chapter.

2. cf. J. Banerjee's Pancopāsonā (Bengali) 1st edition, p. 253-4.

3. V.S.Apte, Sanskrit-English Dictionary.

included in the Vedic rites and rituals. In fact the Tāntric form of worship would seem to be independent from the Vedic form of worship. In the course of the religious history of India many local gods worked their way up to the upper strata of the Vedic society, and new forms of worship and rituals were composed for them. Dr. S.B.Dasgupta says:

"From the 13th century onward when the Vedic religion in the upper strata of the society was badly disrupted due to foreign invasion and interference, the non-Vedic or non-Aryan faiths which were kept suppressed and confined within the lower segment found an opportunity to come forward and make themselves prominent and the deities worshipped by them were gradually assimilated within the frame work of the Vedic pantheon."<sup>1</sup>

Therefore, though we find that eventually all sects of Hinduism try to find their origin in the Veda, yet not all of them were Vedic; and their worship and rituals were undeniably non-Vedic.

The historical development of Tāntrism could be traced here. The Gangdhar plaque mentioned above gives us probably the earliest record of Tāntric worship. This form of worship, as the plaque says, was extreme and fearsome. The shrine which Mayuraksa built for the female deities was always packed with the witches who used to raise a great din in mirth and merriment so that a storm seemed to arise from the performance of the ritual in the shrine a storm which in its turn created

---

1. S.B.Dasgupta, Bhrāter Śakti Sādhana O Śakta Sāhitya, 2nd edition, p. 170 (Bengali)



great waves in the sea. In the early middle ages there were a number of such Tāntric shrines in the different parts of India. In Jabalpur near the river Narmada the ruins of the rock temple dedicated to the sixty-four female deities known as Causat Yogini are still standing. The Causat Yogini temples in Khajuraho, Hirapur, Ranipur and Jharial also bear witness to the Tāntric form of mother worship in these parts of India. They show in particular the frightening aspects of Tāntric worship. Interesting in this connection is the Vaital Deul temple in Bhuvaneswar. The principal deity is the goddess Cāmunda, all skinny and bony, emaciated, seated on a human corpse; on both sides of her are engraved on the wall many other female deities along with Ganesha, Vīrabhadra etc., most of whom are minor deities and many of whom are not known. Along with this pantheon there is engraved on the wall the likeness of a man with a beard and matted hair seated in deep contemplation on a human corpse. On one side of him there is a decapitated human body, and on the other side a jackal is chewing a human head. In another temple located about three or four miles away from Bhuvaneswar, the present capital of Orissa state, in a place known as Hirapur there is another temple dedicated to the female deities. This temple is also known as the temple of the Causat or sixty-four Yoginis, and engraved on a wall is a running human figure



closely followed by a jackal with human bones between its jaws. The bearded figure is emaciated, his eyes are deep sunk, his hair is matted, and he carries an unsheathed sword in his hand. On the outer wall of the temple are engraved nine female deities standing on the severed heads of nine young damsels. The nine deities are known as Navakātyāyanīs by the local people. Such engravings clearly reveal the fearsome nature of the Tāntric form of mother worship in the early middle ages.

Passing now to some other aspects of Tāntric worship, the important thing to be noted is the selection of the Guru (the preceptor), under whose strict guidance, supervision and direction alone can the devotee proceed in his spiritual discipline. The disciple will first be initiated in the Tāntric order by the preceptor, who will give him a Bīja mantra to concentrate upon. The guru must be a person with a high moral standard, and if he slips from his high moral height the disciple has always the option to change his preceptor; but a preceptor is a necessity, for without him any form of worship is fruitless.<sup>1</sup> The Bīja mantra which the preceptor gives to the disciple seems to be meaningless but nevertheless has to be kept a closely guarded secret. A few of these mantras could be mentioned here. The following have been

---

1. Swami Nigamananda Saraswati, Jñāni Guru Bā Jñāna O Sādhana Paddhati, 10th edition, p. 34-39. (Bengali)

given by Akshay Dutta:- Tārā Bīja : Hring String Hum Phat.  
 Durgā Bīja: Om Hrim Dum Durgāyai Namah. Mahālakṣmī Bīja: Om  
 Air Hrim Srim Klim Hemsau Jagatprasutai Namah. Vāgisvarī Bīja:  
 Vada Vada Vāgvādinī Svahā, etc. These mantras are of three  
 genders, those which end with hum phat are masculine, those  
 which end with svahā are feminine, and those ending with  
 namah are neuter. Those who are initiated into Tāntric  
 worship are broadly divided into two sects, the Paśvācārī  
 and the Vīrācārī. There are seven consecutive orders of  
 ascending excellence. These orders are known as Ācāras,  
 and their individual titles are: Vedācāra, Śaivācāra, Dakṣiṇ-  
 ācāra, Vamacāra, Siddhāntācāra and finally Kaulācāra. Kaulācāra  
 is the highest order. The lowest order, viz. Vedācāra, has  
 nothing to do with the Vedic rituals. Nitya Tantra describes  
 the Vedācārī Tāntric as the one who wakes up at dawn with the  
 name of the Guru, utters and reflects upon the name of Ānanda  
 Nāth, concentrates Him in the centre of his brain known as  
 the Sahasrārā, and worships Him with the aid of the five elements  
 of worship, viz. Matsya, Mamsa, Madya, Mudra, and Maithuna; and  
 finally he reflects upon the Bīja mantra given to him by his  
 Guru and reflects upon the Paramāśaktī, the highest or  
 ultimate power conceived in its feminine aspect. Similarly the  
 different orders each have different practices. Nitya Tantra



describes the Kulācārī as one who is bound by neither any space nor time in his worship, neither is there a specific time of worship for him, determined by any stellar arrangement. He will move around the world in different costumes. He no longer discriminates between clay and the sandal paste, and is indifferent towards his son and enemy. The home and the cremation ground, gold or grass are all the same to him.<sup>1</sup>

The seven orders of ascending excellence are again divided into two main groups, the Dakṣiṇācāra and the Vāmācāra. However this division is not always very strict and there is always the possibility of overlapping. For instance Lakṣmidhara, a well known commentator on the Tāntric text Saundaryalaharī, has divided the orders into three groups, the Samayācārā, Mīśrācāra and the Kaulācāra. The Samayācārīs are Dakṣiṇācārīs, the Kaulācārīs are Vāmācārīs and the Mīśrācārīs practice both the Dakṣiṇa and the Vāma ācāras or methods.

The Dakṣiṇācārī forms of worship consist in a highly regulated and restrained way of life. a total submission of the self to the deity and a constant concentration on her nature as given in the Tāntric śāstras. In this worship no kind of intoxicant can be used and no women are allowed to

---

1. Nitya Tantra, ch. 3.



participate in the worship. The Vāmācārī form of worship, on the other hand, is more activist in nature, and the worshipper is here known as Kaula or Avadhuta. Niruttara Tantra in the first chapter says that all forms of worship must be performed in the dead of the night and during the day the Kaula should be Vedācārī.

Kaulas or Avadhutas are again of two kinds, the Vyākta or one who is manifest Kaula and the other is Avyākta or Pracchanna, one who is hidden. The way of life and the methods of worship followed by the Avyākta Kaula are almost similar to that of the Dakṣiṇācārī tāntric. The Vyākta Avadhuta must on the other hand always be happy, dressed in a red garment, with marks of vermillion on the forehead, with rosary of red beads round the neck, with marks of red sandal wood paste on the body, and he must be a person of very strong and powerful mien.

Similar subdivision also characterises Tāntric ritual. The ritual is considered to have external and internal aspects. Food and drink and flower and incense are used in the external form of worship, and in internal form of worship the conscious self is the flower, the vital breath is the incense, the inner strength and power of the worshipper is the lamp. The purpose of the worship is to arouse the cosmic power. The power is imagined in the form of a serpent that lies dormant in the lowest plexus of the body and the worshipper

attempts to raise it through all the six different plexuses to the highest centre of the brain known as *Sahasrār*, in a process known as the piercing of the six plexuses (*Satacakraveda*).<sup>1</sup>

The principal deities around whom Tāntrism grew are *Candī* and *Kālī*. The concept of the goddess *Candī* has been developed mainly in the thirteenth chapter of the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* entitled *Devī Māhātmyam* (The glorification of the great Mother), and popularly known as *Śrī Śrī Candī*. This is one of the major books of the present day Śāktas or the Mother worshippers. Although in this work the goddess is mainly referred to as *Candī*, she is worshipped under other names as well. The most important of these names is *Ambikā*. In some places she is also called *Durgā*,<sup>2</sup> and, in others, because of her golden complexion, she is referred to as *Gaurī*.<sup>3</sup> But significantly in the *Devī Māhātmyam* she is never referred to as *Umā*, neither is she depicted here as the daughter of the mountain.

In the *Devī Māhātmyam* the goddess is extolled for three great acts: for helping the Lord Viṣṇu destroy the demon *Madhukaitava*, for killing the demon *Mahiṣāsura* and for destroying the demons *Bumbha* and *Nisumbha* and minor

---

1. cf. *Sivasamhitā*, *Satacakravijnana*, p. 115.

2. *Devī Māhātmyam*, IV-10, 16; V-10, 66; XI-29; XI-24, 46.

3. *Ibid.*, IV-10; V-8; XI-9.



demons like Canda, Munda, Raktabīja etc.<sup>1</sup> In the first two instances she has no relation with the mount Himālaya; only in the third instance a very minor reference to Himālaya is made.<sup>2</sup> Here it should be noted that Himalaya is only her abode and is not called the daughter of the mountain.<sup>3</sup>

One of the noteworthy aspects of the description of Candi in the Devī Māhātmyam is that her relation with Viṣṇu is stronger than her relation with Śiva, she is never represented as the power or energy of Śiva (Śiva Śaktī). In her first reference she is the Yoganidra of Viṣṇu, the trance of the creator or his sleep, in which he withdraws himself from the state of consciousness and enters the region of trances that is identical with dissolution or even chaos.<sup>4</sup> She is the trance of Viṣṇu and so long as Viṣṇu is in a trance he is incapable of any activity. He has no will, wish, motive, desire, intention, 'no discriminating knowledge', (Viveka Jñāna). Hence Brahma had to awake the Devī before Viṣṇu could be stirred into action. She is, therefore, in one sense more powerful than Viṣṇu. As it can be found in the Devī Māhātmyam:

"She is supreme eternal knowledge being the cause of Mokṣa. She is the supreme power over all the gods is also the cause of bondage of the world."<sup>5</sup>

---

1. Devī Māhātmyam, ch. 5.

2. Ibid, 2:29.

3. Ibid, 5:37.

4. Ibid, 1:41.

5. Ibid, 1:44.



Again:

"By you even the creator of the world, the preserver of the world, is put to sleep she is here capable of praising you adequately?"<sup>1</sup>

Thus Śiva is not associated with her in any manner. Her Mahiṣa Mardini form is found in the ancient palm leaf paintings and carvings on the walls of rock temples,<sup>2</sup> while a statue in this form has been discovered in Udaya Giri, a place in central India, dating back to the 4th century A.D. during the reign of Chandra Gupta II. In all these descriptions and paintings and statues the references to Śiva or Mahādeva are extremely few; and even when references to him are made, he is depicted as one amongst the many gods. In the third chapter, in which she is engaged in a battle with Sumbha and Nisumbha, she is eulogized by the gods as the force or power and energy of Viṣṇu and not that of Śiva. She is also Kālarātri, Mahārātri, Mohorātri ca Dāruṇā; she is Śrī, Hṛī, Buddhirupinī; she is lajjā, pustī, tustī, śanti, kṣanti. She is constituted of the condensed forces of all the gods and is decked with all the weapons and ornaments given to her by the gods.<sup>3</sup>

However, she is more popularly known as the destroyer of the demon Mahiṣāśura (Mahiṣāśura Mardini), and in the autumn festival in Bengal she is worshipped in this form.

---

1. Devī Māhātmyam, 1:64.

2. Compare the plates given by V.S. Agrawal in his annotated edition of Devī Māhātmyam or the Glorification of the Mother.

3. Devī Māhātmyam, ch. 2.

This endeavour to find out the relation of the goddess is important, because in the present Śākta movement the Śakti is intrinsically related to Śiva. But so far in our discussion we find that Śakti is more related to Viṣṇu than to Śiva.

Śākta faith has grown around three major points. In the first place Śiva is the first principle, the ultimate reality, and the goddess is his wife. In the second place there is a relation of equidependence, where Śiva and Śakti by themselves are nothing and only in a combined form do they become meaningful. And in the third place the goddess or the Śakti is supreme, she is independent, she is the all pervading ultimate principle and there is no one higher than she. This third point is the one emphasised in the whole of Devī Māhātmyam. Compare for instance:

"At one time She Herself is the supreme destroyer (Mahākālī); at another She the unborn, becomes this creation; and at another time, She Herself the eternal being."<sup>1</sup>

After the death of Nisumbha when Sumbha said:

"O Durga, you are puffed up with the pride of strength, do not be haughty, you are exceedingly proud but fighting with the strength of others."<sup>2</sup>

At this the goddess answered:

"I am all alone in the world here, what other is there besides me, O you wild one, see that these goddesses are my own powers entering into myself."

Then all those Matrikas, Brahmani and others became absorbed in the body of the goddess. There upon Ambika alone remained."<sup>3</sup>

- 
1. Devī Māhātmyam, 12:35.
  2. Ibid 10:2.
  3. Ibid 10:3,4.



In all these verses the emphasis is on the uniqueness of the goddess. Even though at the beginning she has been referred to as Viṣṇu Māyā or the power of Viṣṇu, yet without Śaktī, Viṣṇu remains completely inactive. For unless Brahmā invoked the Śaktī, Viṣṇu himself was unable to fight the demons. Later, in Devī Bhāgavat, Candī is also said to be the mother of all the gods as well as of Brahmā, she is the *Iśvari*.<sup>1</sup>

Thus although the later Śākta worship mainly developed around Śiva, earlier the deity was more associated with Viṣṇu than with Śiva, and in the final analysis she was dependent upon no one. She was the supreme spiritual principle.

The actual origin of the story of Candī is obscure. The Puranic scholars have always had the tendency to explain her battle with the demons as man's inner strife between his base self, represented by the gods, and the constant conflict within man between these two conflicting forces. Śrī Satyadeva has dwelt on this point in his book *Sādhana Samar* (The Battle in the Realm of Spirit), while Vasudev Saran Agrawal in his annotated translation of *Devī Māhātmyam* says:

"The Asura deserves beating whether he is on the plane of mind or life or matter, and the divine power must justify itself in the overall rout of the Asura. The victory of the goddess is universal vindication of the divine principle against the forces of Darkness and disorder."<sup>2</sup>

---

1. *Devī Bhāgavat*, 1/15/34.

2. *Devī Māhātmyam or The Glorification of the Mother*, p.7.

Historically, the story appears to have originated either after or in different circles to the Mahābhārata Epic. In the different parts of the Mahābhārata we find an account of the destruction of the demon Mahiṣāśura and Tārakāśura by Kārtikeya Skanda. The main theme of these stories is that the gods, having been defeated and vanquished from heaven by the demon Tārakāśura, had a secret meeting with Indra and asked him to provide them with a celestial field-marshal. Indra in turn requested Śiva to plant his seed in the womb of Pārvatī, and from this union came Kumār Kārtikeya, who finally defeated the demon Tārakāśura and killed him.<sup>1</sup>

Now if the Candī theme was current around the Mahābhārata period what necessity would the gods have had to ask for a leader, since the Devī herself had assured the gods saying:

"Thus whenever trouble shall arise on account of Dānavas, I shall become incarnate and destroy the enemies."<sup>2</sup>

That the gods did make such a request would seem to suggest that the theme of Candī was not current during the age of Mahābhārata.

When did the story first originate is now difficult to guess. The fact that, in later day local literatures, this Candī story is a very popular theme and has been treated variously by many authors, does not give us any clue to its origin.

---

1. On this theme poet Kalidas composed his immortal poem Kumara Sambhavam.

Devī Māhātmyam, 11:51.



In the final analysis all that can be said with certainty is that there are two currents in the Mother worship in Bengal. On the one hand there is the current of Umā-Pārvatī and on the other hand that of Candī. However, it is difficult to find a common source for these.

From this, we now pass on to the history of Kālī or Kālīkā. As was shown above, the cult of the mother-goddess gradually took a definite shape with the development of the worship of Umā, Pārvatī, Durgā and Candī. Later the "great" goddess Kālī or Kālīkā was added to this pantheon and the subsequent development of mother worship centred around her. To find how this later deity usurped all the powers from the other deities and became one of the principal deities in later Śākta faith is both interesting and important.

Indian thinkers often tend to trace the origin of all the deities, male or female, to the Veda, and many do the same with Kālī. Sometime the concept of Kālī is thought to have evolved from the Rātrī Devī, the goddess of night praised in the Rātrī Sukta of the Ṛg Veda.<sup>1</sup> At other times, she has been related to the dark and fearsome goddess Nirṛti referred to in Satapatha Brāhmaṇa and Aitareya Brāhmaṇa.<sup>2</sup> In Satapatha Brāhmaṇa Nirṛti is Krishna and Ghora, i.e. dark and terrible.<sup>3</sup>

---

1. Ṛg Veda, X, 127.

2. Cf. the appendix II by Brojolal Mukhopadhyaya at the end of Woodroff's Sakti and Śākta.

3. Satapatha Brāhmaṇa, 2/1/7 and 2/1/11.

In Aitereya Brāhmaṇa she is pictured with a snare in her hand, and an elaborate song is offered to the deity to be relieved from the snare.<sup>1</sup> However, the strange fact is that no further reference to Nirṛty is found in the post Brahmanic literature.

The first explicit reference to Kālī is in a sloka in the Mundaka Upanishad that gives the names of the seven tongues of the Sacred Fire.\* Kālī is said to be one of these tongues.<sup>2</sup> The same reference is found again in the Mahābhārata.<sup>3</sup>

Another passage in the Mahābhārata in the Sauptic Parva has been traditionally associated with Kālī. The passage describes how, after the death of Droṇācārya, the first captain of the Army of the Kuru, his son Asvathāmā entered the camp of the Pandavas at the dead of night, and the terror stricken Pandava army saw the Devī. She is described as fearsome and terrible, with bloodshot eyes, her body smeared with blood and holding a noose in her hand. She is death personified. However, at this time she does not yet appear to have attained the status of a tutelary deity. Later, in post Kālīdāsa literature, there are other references to a deity who is fearsome and blood curdling and who is worshipped in the lower segment of the society. In Bhavabhūti's well known

---

1. Aitereya Brāhmaṇa, 4/17.

2. Mundaka Upanishad, 1/2/4.

3. Mahābhārata, Adī Parva, 232/7.

\* Philosophically the seven tongues represent the five sense organs, the intellect and the mind.



play *Mālatīmādhavam* (Circa 7th century A.D.), a deity called *Karalā* appears. Like *Kālī*, she is fearsome, terrible and dark, is worshipped with human sacrifice, and has her abode in the cremation ground near a forest.<sup>1</sup>

In a still later period, this deity is assimilated with the goddess *Cāmundā* mentioned in *Devī Māhātmyam*, and the earliest account of her origin- i.e. the earliest account which refers explicitly to her- is given in the same work. When all the gods appear before the goddess *Candī*, *Kausiki* had emanated from the latter's physical sheath (*Kosa*), and she became dark as the rain cloud and came to be known as *Kālīkā*.<sup>2</sup>

In later chapters of the *Devī Māhātmyam* another description of the origin of *Kālī* is given. According to this, *Candī* burst into a fit of terrible anger and her countenance became as dark as ink when she saw the demons approaching her. Then:

"From her broad forehead of curved eye-brows suddenly sprang forth *Kālī* of terrible countenance, armed with a sword and a noose."<sup>3</sup>

A most devastating account of *Kālī*'s fight with the demons follows. After she had killed and destroyed all the assembled demons, she brought before the goddess *Candī* the chopped off heads of the arch-demons *Canda* and *Munda* and,

- 
1. *Bhavabhūti's Mālatīmādhavam*, V act.
  2. *Devī Māhātmyam*, 5:10.
  3. *Ibid*, 7:5.

holding them by their hair tufts, addressed her saying :

"Here I bring unto you gifts of Canda and Munda as two animals in this sacrifice of battle."<sup>1</sup>

Candī replied:

"Because you have waited upon me catching hold of Canda and Munda, you will become famous in this world by the name Cāmunda."<sup>2</sup>

So Kālī and Cāmunda according to this source, popularly known as Candī, are one and the same deity.

One of the significant aspects of this work is that Kālī is nowhere associated with Śiva, as she was in later literature. In later Purāṇas, subpurāṇas and tantras, Kālī is always found in association with Śiva, who is imagined as laying flat on his back while Kālī stands with one foot on his chest. Whatever significance the devotee might discover in this picture, it may be pointed out that three distinct ideas helped build this image of the goddess Kālī. The first is the Sāṃkhyan concept of Nirguṇa Puruṣa, or aqualified Puruṣa and triguṇātmika Prakritī, the gross substance with triple qualities. The second is the concept of the obverse sex posture of Tantra (Viparita ratāturā) and the third is the concept of the gradual ascendancy of the dynamic principle (in the form of the female principle) over the principle of stasis (in the form of the male principle)

---

1. Devī Māhātmyam, 7:23.

2. Ibid, 7:25.



A number of other interpretations are also found in the tantras. For instance, in the Mahanirvana Tantra the goddess devours Śiva, who is the cosmic time (Mahā Kāla), hence she is the devourer of time or Kāla and is the supreme goddess known as Kālī. The text reads:

"Thou the supreme yogini dost, moved by his mere desire, create, protect, and withdraw this world with all that moves and is motionless therein. Mahākāla, the dissolver of the universe is Thy form. At the dissolution of things, it is Kāla who will devour all, and by reason of this, he is called Mahākāla Himself, it is thou who art the supreme primordial Kālīkā.

Because thou devourest Kāla, thou art Kālī. Because thou art the origin of, and devourest, all things, thou art called the Ādya Kālī."<sup>1</sup>

Another passage describing Kālī's nature appears later in the same book. This passage, which is in the form of a dialogue between Śiva and Kālī, is worth quoting at length. Kālī wishes to know about her own nature and asks Śiva:

"How can Mahakali be endowed of form, she who is the great cause, the primordial power, the great light, more subtle than the subtlest element? It is only that which is the effect of Prakriti which has form? She is above the most high. It behoves thee, oh Deva, to completely remove this doubt of mine."

Śiva replies:

"Beloved: I have already said that to meet the need of the worshippers the image of the Devi is formed according to her quality and actions. As white, yellow and other colours all disappear in black in the same way, O Sailaja: all beings enter Kali.

Therefore it is, that by those who have attained the knowledge of the means of final liberation, the attributeless, formless and beneficent Kalasakti is endowed with the colour of Blackness.

---

1. Mahanirvana Tantra, ch. 4: 29-32.



As the eternal and changeless and beneficent one in the form of Kala is nectar itself, therefore the sign of the moon is placed on her forehead.

As she surveys the entire universe, which is the product of time, with her three eyes--the Moon, Sun, and Fire---therefore she is endowed with three eyes.

As (at the final dissolution) she devours all existence, as she chews all things existing with the fierce teeth, therefore a mass of blood, is said to be the apparel of the Queen of the Devas.

As time after time she protects all beings from danger O Siva, as she directs them in the paths of duty, Her hands are lifted up to dispell fear and grant blessings.

As she encompasses the worlds, which are the product of Raja guna, she is spoken of O Gentle one: as the Devi who is seated on a red lotus. The Devi who as consciousness itself witnesseth all things is gazing at Kala elated with the wines of ignorance and playing with the universe.

It is for the benefit of such worshippers as are of little understanding that the different forms are imagined according to the attributes (of the Divinity)."<sup>1</sup>

Finally, there is in the Kālī Tantra a strangely compelling description of Kālī. She is pictured as frightening in appearance with four hands and a cruel face. Black as cloud, she is adorned with a necklace of human heads and a waist band of human hands. From these heads and hands, blood oozes over her body. In her two left hands she holds a freshly severed head and a sword and she has her two right hands in positions symbolising respectively fearlessness (Abhayā) and the bestowal of gifts (Varadā). From her ears two corpses of babies hang like earrings, blood trickles from the corners of her mouth, and her teeth protrude. Her three

---

1. Mahānirvana Tantra, ch 13: 4-13.



eyes are as bright as the orb of the morning sun, and her long hair hangs down to her waist, on the right side. Her breasts are large, firm and high, and she sits naked on the bosom of Mahādeva (Śiva) who is lying in his back as if he were dead, and with whom she takes the initiative in sexual dalliance. On all sides she is surrounded by howling and fearful she-jackals, and she lives in the cremation ground.<sup>1</sup>

Before closing this chapter, a few of the important figures associated with the development of Tantrism ought to be mentioned. Krishnananda Aganavagish is undoubtedly the most important. About the sixteenth century -- there is some controversy about this date.<sup>2</sup> -- he collected and edited the Tantrasara, which describes the worship of Kālī together with the worship of other deities like Tārā, Śoṛoṣī, Bhuvaneśvarī, Chhinnamastā and Vagālā.

Apart from Krishnananda three other names which are worth mentioning in this connection are Brahmananda, Purnananda and Kashinath. Brahmananda was the guru of Purnanada, who lived in all probability in the first half or the middle of 16th century; and in his work Śāktānanda Taraṅginī, he dealt in details of Śākta forms of worship in Bengal. His disciple

---

1. Kālī Tantra, 1:27.

2. cf. Prof. C.H.Chakravarty's article 'Sakta worship and Sakta saints,' in the Cultural Heritage of India, 4th Vol.

Purnananda also produced a book on the same subject and his work likewise is regarded as authoritative. Finally there is Kashinath, who wrote Kālīsaparyāya Vidhi in 1763. He is an important figure because he is the first to mention an association between Kali worship and the light festival known as Dīpālī. Further references to early Kālī worship in Bengal may be found in the works of Govindenanda, Srinath Acarya Curemani, Vrihaspati, Roymukut and Kashinath Tarkalankara.

The 19th century and onward saw the great Tāntric revival in Bengal, and the names that are associated with this are Ramakrishna, Vivekananda and Aurobindo. Their thoughts and interpretation of Tāntric mysticism will be dealt with in a later chapter.



## CHAPTER V

Cult of the Mother-Goddess and religious  
revival as found in Ramakrishna, Vivekananda  
and Sri Aurobindo

## CHAPTER FIVE

A world-embracing spiritual meaning was attached to the mother cult through its revelation in our present era, and this was no doubt due to Ramakrishna Paramahansa and his disciple Vivekananda. However, the ground had been prepared for such a revival by the poet and mystic, Ramprasad, who was born a hundred years prior to Ramakrishna. Through his warm devotional songs, he changed the atmosphere of Bengal, and became so popular that the village poets and bards imitated him by composing songs and poems in his own fashion. This was a special type of song known as Kirtana. Thus the stage was set for Ramakrishna who appeared in the mid nineteenth century.

A later development of the mother cult in Bengal gave rise to two distinct aspects. One aspect rose from the long chain of mother worshippers which extended from Ramprasad through the innumerable village poets, bards and singer to Ramakrishna. The other aspect developed from Vivekananda and the other preachers of the Ramakrishna Mission who are to this day engaged in preaching the message of Vedanta, all the world over.

This development of mother worship into Vedanta might appear on the surface to be rather unrelated, but a deeper investigation reveals the fact that there is a relationship



rising through a natural development. For the Śāktas and the followers of Vedānta develop and blend their thought into one common notion of the "Ultimate". This is known from the fact that mother worship is not the worship of an idol made of stone, wood, or metal but is the worship of a world-engrossing force or energy. This force has been imagined in the form of the universal mother which corresponds to the ultimate of the Vedānta. The Śāktas tend to see this transcendental yet indwelling principle as the mother, for they have a psychological need of the love and affection that the mother gives.<sup>1</sup> But the Vedāntins from an intellectual stand point, driven by a logical necessity, always understand the Ultimate reality as a non-dual principle (Advaita). There is nothing antagonistic here, for one is the position of a worshipper while the other is the position of the philosopher. Hence it is the approach which differs not the subject matter. The worshipper seeks the object of his devotion and thus permits Ramakrishna to maintain a duality in his worship against the foreboding of pure abstraction. God is one, he used to say, only the approaches towards Him are different. As all the rivers go to the ocean, likewise all religions lead to the same God, barring, however, Buddhism, where there is no place for God.

---

1. cf. Ramakrishna Kathamrta, IV Voll, p. 50. (Bengali)



Religions are not God, but rather are the different paths to Him, so that one can have a religion that is best suited to his station, that fulfills his emotional needs and has an ultimate quest or concern towards God.

Likewise, for Ramakrishna, no difference exists between Brahman and Kālī. Kālī is the dynamic aspect of a static Brahman; and, therefore, one may worship Him in any form he pleases. Thus, the concrete and abstract form of worship depends solely upon the spiritual level of the person. From the lower emotional level the devotee seeks something concrete upon which he can cling, upon which he can focus his attention. But such is not the case when the devotee attains a higher level. Yet at times he may seek a taste of the divine experience from concrete worship. A good example of this is Ramakrishna's citation of the little girls playing with their dolls and arranging their forthcoming marriages. After marriage they have relation with their husbands and care no longer for their dolls. Yet at times they bring out the old dolls, but the seriousness with which they used to play with the dolls no longer excites them and is for ever lost.<sup>1</sup> Therefore it is concluded that worshipping with a visible object is necessary only so long as God is not directly intuited. Once He is intuited there is no

---

1. Ramakrishna Kathamrta, II Voll. p, 105. (Bengali)



necessity of an external object. But still the mind is not satisfied very long with pure abstraction, since it seeks some concrete reality; and so idols are necessary. Thus, the mind, like a bird soaring high in the blue, gets tired and comes down to perch on the limb of a tree. These two levels of the mind Ramakrishna used to explain from the standpoint of Tantra.

Tantra speaks of the six nerve plexuses in the body and the seventh one in the brain. It claims that the mind is in the lowest level known as Mulādhāra, when the individual is engrossed in the process of living.\* The fourth centre is the heart, in which the mind concentrates itself, bringing about the realization of a great light. This is the first comprehension of the divine effulgence. And once the devotee gets a taste of this divine beauty he is little concerned for this world. The fifth centre lies in the throat, and when the mind is established there all ignorance vanishes; at that stage he thinks nothing other than God.

Still when the mind reaches the sixth stage the devotee seems to have a distinct realization of God and a certain union with the divine, but this is not yet a complete union. It is like the June bug who attempts to jump into the lantern light but is unable to do so because the glass chimney guards the flame.

---

\* It is necessary to bypass the second and third levels, since their importance will later be noted.

When the mind reaches the seventh stage, the devotee looses all his consciousness for the world and is merged with the ultimate reality. But in this stage it is not possible to live for a long time, since that would lead to death. So the devotee has to descend to lower levels so that there is not a direct realization of God, but a looking at Him from a distance. So Ramakrishna would say, Kālī is dark, and in effect as dark as the sea water, but when one takes the sea water in his hands the colour disappears.<sup>1</sup>

In the seventh stage likewise when the devotee is merged in the Ultimate Reality no consciousness of God's form and feature is possible, since perception is possible only with a little distance and duality.<sup>2</sup> This distance is what the devotee seeks to attain in order that he might see the beauty of God. In devotion, as Ramakrishna would say, there are two approaches: one, that of the hero and the other, that of the son. His approach is that of the the son, and that is why he prefers some duality. It is for a little jest, a little joy that the devotee seeks to maintain this duality, without which no experience is possible. But in Vivekananda we find the approach is different. He is always concerned with the Ultimate, which is immanent in the world of our experience, and so God becomes for him the entire reality. It is a reality not denied

---

1. cf. Ramakrishna Kathamrta, I Voll, p. 71-72. (Bengali)

2. Ibid, III Voll, p. 100.



by him but rather all the more asserted, and this is his practical Vedanta where nothing is denied but is posited with the same amount of reality with which the Ultimate is being posited.

In fact the Ultimate Reality of Vedanta has been conceived by the Śāktas as the world mother. She is the female force, controlling and guiding, as well as destroying the reality. But this force or energy is beyond all human conception and discussion. She also is associated with Śiva.

The Brahman in Vedanta and Śiva in Tantra are conceptually very close to each other. Śiva is the principle of stasis and Śaktī is the principle of expressed energy. Śiva and Śaktī are thus intrinsically related. Śaktī is, therefore, the released energy of Śiva. In its unreleased state it is one with Śiva, identical, yet different. Ramakrishna used to say,

Brahman and His power, one leads necessarily to the other, like fire and the flame or the sun and its rays one can not be understood without the other."<sup>1</sup>

From this intrinsic identity of the Śiva and the Śaktī the cosmos emerges by stages: first, the subtle, and second, the gross form of it.

"Tantras apparently lay emphasis upon the dynamic principle, Śaktī, which is intrinsically connected with Śiva. Śaktī is the moving principle and Śiva is calm."<sup>2</sup>

Thus to Vivekananda, Tantra passes into Vedanta through its natural dynamics.

1. Quoted by Jahnavi, Kumar Chakravorty in his book Śākta padāvalī O Śaktī sādhanā, p.114. (Bengali).

2. Ibid,

This Tāntric spiritualism finds a most subtle and profound significance in the spiritual experience of Aurobindo. In his Integral Yoga he has given a deeper interpretation to the Tantric form of worship without caring much for the external ritualistic details of it. The basic position of Tantra is the Kāyā Sādhana or the trans-substantiation of the body through occult spiritual practice. This change is effectual through an identification or balancing of the two poles of salvation and bondage, spirit and matter; and this trans-substantiation of the physical self (in order to make it the right instrument for the use of the Mother) is the major tone in the entire spiritual experience of Aurobindo. In the Tantra we find the awakening of the cosmic power (Kundalinī Śaktī) dormant in the lowest centre of the body and then to raise it to the highest nerve centre of the brain (known as Sahasrār) where it drinks the divine Soma that oozes from there. Aurobindo has given this imagery a spiritual interpretation. The divine Soma is the infinite, all-pervading divine joy, which is to be found or rather received in our individual life in order that we ourselves may become divine and glorious beings. This divine joy is the basis of all existence, which, pouring itself into the jar of the mentalised living matter, transmutes and transforms it into a divine substance.



The usual approach in the Upanishad to the Ultimate Reality is *neti, neti*. It is an all engrossing negation beyond which nothing could be felt and nothing could be known. The Reality is beyond anything that can be conceived by the mind. The reality is the *Ekamevadvitīyam*, one without a second, and It cannot be known or understood in reference to anything, since there is nothing beyond It. But this negative approach does not satisfy Sri Aurobindo. To him the spiritual life is an integrated whole which is positive. In an endeavour to establish the supreme reality there is a tendency to deny the world or universe. Thus the *sadhana* has always been one sided, piecemeal, and fragmentary. But to complete the spiritual pursuit, account must be taken of another Upanishadic saying, i.e. "*Sarvam Khalu idam Brahman*," (All this is Brahman.) This '*neti*' and '*iti*', the negative and positive, together constitute an integrated spiritual whole. This is what constitutes the salvation and bondage, matter and spirit of Tantra. Aurobindo expresses this twofold movement in his book:

"The passionate aspiration of man upward to the Divine has not been sufficiently related to the descending movement of the Divine leaning downward to embrace eternally its manifestation. Its meaning in matter has not been so well understood as its truth in the spirit."<sup>1</sup>

---

1. Sri Aurobindo, Life Divine, p. 30.

In the course of a spiritual realization all that matters is the attempt to ascend indefinitely. But that movement is a one way progress. Another aspect of movement would be to descend from the upper spiritual strata, saturating the lower life to the last atom with joy and splendour of a higher life. The ultimate truth is to be realized both in the level of spirit and matter, the abstract and the concrete, and not only in the abstract, so that the realization becomes true and complete.

The fullness of life cannot be attained by denying life, but by allowing the life to be filled with the divine.

"Life in its self-unfolding must also rise to even new provinces of its own being. But if in passing from one domain to another we renounce what has already been given us from eagerness for our new attainment, if in reaching the mental life we cast away or belittle our physical life which is our basis, or if we reflect the mental and physical in our attraction to the spiritual, we do not fulfil God integrally, not satisfy the condition of His self manifestation. We do not become perfect, but only shift the field of our imperfection or at most attain a limited altitude, however high we may climb, even though it be to the Non-Being itself, we climb ill if we forget our base. Not to abandon the lower to itself, but to transfigure it in the light of the higher to which we have attained, is true divinity of nature."<sup>1</sup>

One thing Aurobindo emphasised repeatedly is that the greatest error is to consider the divine life as a process of being born in a higher plane. To him this passage towards the higher, from food to life, from life to mind, from mind again to soul, etc., is just one aspect of the spiritual

---

1. Sri Aurobindo, Life Divine, p. 45.



achievement. It becomes complete only with the reverse movement from spirit to matter, from the subtle to the gross, so that it plunges and saturates the total self with a bliss, joy, and ecstasy of the higher self. This is what he calls the evolution and involution in the spiritual life. Also, through this process the psycho-physical organism is transmuted and trans-substantiated, and this is what Aurobindo means by Kāyā Sādhana of Tantra. It is realizing the highest spiritual principle in and through this physical body. It is surcharging, as it were, each and every corpuscle of the body with the divine, and thereby changing our gross material body into a glowing spiritual existence.

But how is the transmutation possible? To this Aurobindo answers that the possibility of the higher form of existence is intrinsically associated with the lower. From another aspect, it is the lower form of existence from which emerges the higher; from matter emerges life, from life mind, etc. But every preceeding stage is enveloped with a sheeth of Māyā. The higher principle reveals itself then in the lower, and this lower principle gives way and thus slowly transform itself so that the total mundane self is transmuted into a divine self.

In order that this transmutation may take place preparation of mind and body is necessary. This in Tantra is

known as Ādhārasuddhi, cleansing the container. For unless the container is properly prepared it would not stand the power of the divine wine. It would break into pieces. Likewise, if divine energy is poured into an unprepared body, it would not bear the strain of it and thus fall asunder. Aurobindo says:

"If the psychic mutation has not taken place, if there has been a premature pulling down of the higher forces, their contact may be too strong for the flowed and impure material or Nature and its immediate fate may be that of the unbaked jar of the Veda which could not hold the divine Soma wine, or the descending influence may withdraw or be split up because the nature can not contain or keep it."<sup>1</sup>

So long as the total psychic mutation does not take place, life is in the lower level of nature. But as soon as the transformation is complete, life transcends all the laws of nature and becomes an instrument in the hand of the Divine, whom Aurobindo calls the Supreme World-Mother. She guides us, moves us, controls us and, in a sense, rules supreme over the total self. And thus the discovery is made that the individual existence is none other than the manifest expression of the World-Mother. As Aurobindo puts it:

"He would feel the presence of the Divine in every centre of his consciousness, in every vibration of his life force, in every cell of his body. In all the working of the supreme World-Mother, the super nature; he would see his natural being as the becoming and manifestation of the power of the World-Mother."<sup>2</sup>

This is the point at which Aurobindo could be equated

---

1. Sri Aurobindo, Life Divine, p. 1089.

2. Ibid, p. 1156.



with Ramakrishna. To him also, she is the World-Mother (Jagajjanani) and pervades every thing so that the devotee should offer himself unreservedly to the will of the World-Mother. Then she might enter into him, guide and control him from within, changing his entire personality.

Further, man's spiritual aspiration is reinforced from two ends. From his own side, he has that inner urge to be united with the World-Mother, who on the other side responds by pouring the Divine Soma, so that celestial bliss and joy thus bring about a total change in man. Also the Divine mother is forever ready to lift up her children if they let her. Therefore, the duty of the sādḥaka is to lay himself bare to the mother so that she may come in and work within him, unperturbed.

This twofold activities of the Divine energy is true not only for man but for the whole of nature as well, which is quite in accord with the thought of Aurobindo. For in the world of nature and its law of evolution there is always an urge in the lower order of things to develop themselves into a higher order. This process continues infinitely. It is the Divine mother residing as an urge in the lower order which helps it to grow into the higher. But this urge of the lower nature itself is not sufficient to bring the lower into the higher.



There is also necessary that which is known as the pull of the mother. This inner urge together with the outer pull constitute the central principle of evolution and the thought of Aurobindo.

The will of the mother is, therefore, working through the entire cosmic order. In the life of the individual there ought to be a complete and unconditional surrender to the will of the mother. The greater the surrender the stronger is the hold of the mother, and consequently the higher the divinization of the self. Aurobindo says:

"This is the thing you have to remember. Your psychic being is capable of giving itself to the Mother and living and growing in the Truth; but your lower vital being has been full of attachments and samskaras and an impure movement of desire and your external physical mind was not able to shake off its ignorant ideas and habits and open to the Truth. That was the reason why you were unable to progress, because you were keeping up an element and movements which could not be allowed to remain; for they were the exact opposite of what has to be established in a divine life. The Mother can only free you from these things, if you really want it, not only in your psychic being, but in your physical mind and all your vital nature. The sign will be that you no longer cherish or insist on your personal notions, attachments or desires, and that whatever the distance and wherever you may be, you will feel your self open and the power and presence of the Mother with you and working in you and will be contented, quiet, confident, wanting nothing else, awaiting always the Mother's will."<sup>1</sup>

After discussing at great length the role of the mother and her work in the growth of the cosmic order, there still remains a further question: who is the world mother? Aurobindo says:

---

1. Sri Aurobindo, Life Divine, p. 498.



"There is one divine Force which acts in the universe and in the individual and is also beyond the individual and the universe. The mother stands for all these, but she is working here in the body to bring down something not yet expressed in this material world so as to transform life here---working here for that purpose. She is that in the body but in her whole consciousness she is also identified with all the other aspects of the Divine."<sup>1</sup>

She has been conceived in three forms. First, she is the transcendental spiritual principle. Secondly, she is immanent in the world, and thirdly she takes a concrete individual form, that she may come closer to man. She comes to him in darkness so that darkness may be illuminated. She enters into error and falsehood so that they may become truth. She enters into the sorrow and sufferings of man in order that she might transform them into joy and happiness. She enters into death that she might immortalize it. Finally, it is to be noted that the Tāntric movement is being interpreted in a modern light by Aurobindo. He gives it a universal fervour so that man of all caste, creed, and walks of life may come forward and offer themselves to the feet of the mother so that she in return might change their lower status into a higher, nobler, and more spiritual existence.

---

1. Sri. Aurobindo, Life Divine, p. 434.

CHAPTER VI

Mother-Goddess and socio-political resistance



## CHAPTER SIX

The 19th century saw a great patriotic movement that started in Bengal and spread all through the country. The freedom movement that started during that era was so closely associated with mother-worship that this thesis will remain incomplete without a brief mention of it.

The conception by the Vedic seers of the earth as a great mother gives a new political insight to the national leaders, and through songs and poems, novels and dramas a new social ethos was created. Foreign rule was considered to be the greatest ignominy and shame for mother India. It was at the same time supposed to be the foremost duty of the common people of India to free the mother from this shame and establish her in her former glory.

The first national song composed during this century by Iswar Gupta begins:

"Mother India  
Why art thou fallen  
In such depth of misery?

Why carry thou this futile burden  
When fools are all thy children  
And ignorant as they are?"<sup>1</sup>

But it was Bankim Chandra Chatterjee who in the first national song brought out the truth that political aspiration

---

1. Janani bharatbhumi ar kano thako tumi  
Dharmarup bhusahin hoye.  
Tomar santan jata sakaley jnanahata  
Kano michhe mara bhar baye.

Quoted by Dr. S.B.DasGupta in his Bharater Sakti Sadhana O Sakta Sahitya.

is nothing contradictory to faith and religion. Our land is our Mother with whom we identify ourselves as her children; how can she be happy with us, he asked, how can we please her with our worship so long as she is enchained by a foreign power? Through his songs he emphatically pointed out to the people that unless the mother breaks free from her slavish abasement and revives her former glory, no amount of formal worship will avail anything.

This way of understanding and interpreting the cosmic power as the world-mother who resides in the national soul has been extended further and incorporated in the patriotic feeling of the 19th century populace. It became one of the most powerful motive forces behind the struggle for independence. In the first national song composed by Bankim Chatterjee, he addressed the country not only as mother, but conceived her in the image of Devi Durgā. This way of looking at the country as a mother, as mother land, and not just as a piece of earth has, as it has been shown, a long history. From the Vedic age or even earlier, from the history of the Indus Valley civilization and the civilization that grew around the Mediterranean world, the notion of a Great Mother has always been conceived as responsible for creation and dissolution. She is the creator and destroyer of all things. And therefore this notion of the mother earth comes almost as a national heritage; it becomes a part of the national character, which has been nourished in



the mind for milleniam and has finally become a natural phenomenon.

On analyzing the first national song, Bande Mataram, one can see how this religious belief in the 19th century was intrinsically incorporated with the political aspiration. The song contains three distinct ideas. First, the fertility aspect of the mother earth is being referred to, i.e. "Hail our mother land, in whose breezy air we live and feed in abundance."<sup>1</sup> Second, the mother is being worshipped by her seven hundred thousand children.<sup>2</sup> Third, the mother earth has been conceived in the form of Mother Durgā.<sup>3</sup>

In the first part, therefore, it is the chthonic aspect of mother India which was represented. Centering around this aspect of the mother land grew the concept of nation and nationality. Prior to this there was the usual love and affection and emotion for the country as one's birth place, but no sense of political unity was there. It was through and through a 19th century development, and Bankim Chatterjee's song is responsible to a great extent in building up this feeling of oneness. What is interesting in this song is the third part, in which India is no longer only the mother but

---

1. Bande mātarām, sujalam suphalam saṣya syamalam mātarām.

2. Saptakotikanthya kalakalanīnāda karāle.

3. Tvam hi Durgā dasapraharapadhārini.

See Bankim Chatterjee's song Bande Mātaram.

is also the Goddess Durgā. The spontaneity with which he passed from the concept of the mother-earth to the concept of the Goddess Durgā show the natural identification of the two concepts in the national mind. So the thought of this land as not only a piece of earth, but as the mother is a deep-rooted faith in the Indian mind.

In the writings of Sri Aurobindo we find him to say:

"Mother India is not a piece of earth, she is a power, a Godhead, for all nations have such a Devi supporting their separate existence and keeping it in being."<sup>1</sup>

Therefore the fight for freedom was the fight to liberate the mother. One finds Sri Aurobindo praying to the mother, saying:

"Mother Durga; giver of force and love and knowledge, terrible art thou in thy own self of might, Mother beautiful and fierce. In the battle of life, in India's battle, we are warriors commissioned by thee, Mother give to our heart and mind a titan's strength, a titan's energy, to our soul and intelligence a god's character and knowledge."<sup>2</sup>

Not only in Bankim Chatterjee and Sri Aurobindo, but also in the 19th century and onward in all forms of literature we find the tendency on the part of the poets, philosophers, novelists, dramatists and social thinkers to identify this new-found socio-political feeling with religious conviction and thereby to consider the country as mother India.

Dvijendralal Roy, the well known Bengali dramatist of the early 20th century, in a song in one of his plays "Rana Pratap",

---

1. Quoted by S.B.DasGupta in Bharater Sakti sadhana O sakta sahitya. p. 312.

2. Ibid, p. 313.



wrote:

"Let's fight the battle and offer our lives  
Hail mother India; Hail mother Kālī."<sup>1</sup>

Again we find that mother India is related to mother Kālī. In another of his poems offered to mother India he wrote:

"Mother what peace and happiness is in thy bosom!  
What intrepidity is in thy voice!  
There is food in thy hand and freedom in thy feet.  
What gladness and yet what anxiety  
Thou hast, oh mother, for thy children!

Thou maintainest the world,  
Thou bringest salvation to the world,  
Thou art the mother of this world,  
Oh thou mother India.

How we are blessed by the touch of thy lotus feet,  
And we sing hail! mother, the great conjuror,  
The World-Mother, mother India."<sup>2</sup>

Every line in it is a fine blend of the religious and patriotic feeling of the early twentieth century. In all the literature produced at this time, when the freedom movement was at its highest, the country was given a wonderful sanctity by identifying it with the mother concept. Another thing which is interesting to note in these songs is that Goddess Kālī, among other goddesses, was associated more with the country than were any other female deities. This is mainly because of her fierce look and her fighting mood, from which the freedom fighters used to draw their inspiration. At the same time,

---

1. Quoted by S.B.DasGupta in his Bharater Sakti sadhana O sakta sahitya, p. 313.

2. Ibid, p. 313.

since she has been depicted in legends as a demon killer, her children were also supposed to fight the foreign rulers, who were considered to be demons. In one of his songs, Asvini Dutta, another national leader, wrote:

"Mother dost thou not love to dwell  
In the place where the deads are burnt?  
Hast thou found a better place  
That we are deserted by thee?"<sup>1</sup>

A village singer, Mukunda Das, Gives a very emotional expression to this feeling;

"Awake, awake oh mother Shyāmā (A synonym for Kālī)  
If thou dost not awake,  
No one will be awakened.  
If thou dost not begin thy dance  
No one's heart will be stirred.  
How I beckoned everybody,  
No one cared to respond.  
How I searched in many hearts,  
But none is grieved for thee.  
People love to call thee merciful,  
But I do not find any mercy in thee.  
If thou hadst concern for us, oh mother,  
Could this misery befall on us?  
I am not disturbed by death, oh mother,  
But bless me so that I may see  
An India independent and free."<sup>2</sup>

Thus the thought of the mother earth in the Pṛthivī Sukta found in the Ṛg Veda in course of time took a concrete shape and finally was blended into the socio-political ideologies of India.

---

1. S.B.DasGupta, op. cit., p. 314.

2. loc. cit.



In the patriotic songs of Tagore also one can find this same strain of thought. Though for Tagore this was rather unusual, because in his mental development the influence that played the major part was Upanishadic and not Tantric. He had a positive distaste for Tantric tradition, its form of worship, ritual, animal sacrifice; and in more than one of his works he gave vent to his feeling. But even Tagore was not quite free from the tendency to consider India as mother land. In many of his songs he directly addressed the country as Mother. In those songs one finds that there was a deep conviction in his mind that the relation obtaining between the earth and us is that between a mother and her son. In one of his songs he says:

"Thou givest us all that thou hast,  
Food and wealth, the water of thy rivers,  
Thy knowledge and wisdom,  
But what do we give unto thee?"<sup>1</sup>

In other places he writes:

"Sing unto the mother,  
Sing ye one and for all.  
Let the world listen to that celestial song.  
\*\*\*\*\*  
When twenty million voices  
Will sing praises unto the mother,  
Oh how the world will stare in wonder.  
  
When twenty million children  
Will stand around the mother,  
Oh what a brilliant aura that will make."<sup>2</sup>

---

1. S.B.DasGupta, op. cit., p. 316.

2. loc. cit.

This reminds one clearly of the first national song by Bankim Chatterjee. In some other of his poems this concept of the mother takes a definite form. In his poem, Sonar Mandir he describes the mother in the following manner:

"Thou hast sword in  
Thy right hand,  
Thy left hand takes our fear away.  
  
There is love and compassion  
In thy two eyes,  
And the third is burning bright."<sup>1</sup>

This is undoubtedly a direct reference to the Goddess Durgā. Thus even Tagore was not immune from mother worship influence.

Many other excerpts could be cited where references are made to the mother, but what is important is to see that the mother-goddess cult flows as a perennial undercurrent all through the history of India, moulding every facet of Indian life and thereby forming a distinct national character.

---

1. S.B.DasGupta, op. cit., p. 318.



CHAPTER VII

The metaphysical significance of  
the Mother-Goddess cult

## CHAPTER SEVEN

This chapter will deal at some length with the metaphysical implication of the mother worship that has already been discussed in the previous chapters. Here an attempt will be made to analyse it in greater detail and to show its gradual development.

The origin of the mother worship has been traced from the time of the Indus Valley civilization up to the end of the Ṛg Veda. However, it is not possible to say anything definite about the nature of the pre-Ṛg Vedic mother worship in India, mainly because no extant literature on the mother-goddess cult has been discovered and all our knowledge concerning the faith and belief of the pre-Aryan people of India is gathered from figures and figurines, paintings on the potteries and potsherds, and seals, etc.<sup>1</sup>

The first positive mention about the mother, or more correctly the female deities, is found in the Ṛg Veda. But their positions were rather secondary. They were worshipped always in conjunction with the male deities and never alone. In the previous discussion was seen how the female deities were gradually coming forward in the course of history and making their importance felt. With the rise of the Śākta movement

---

1. Compare in this connection the figures and the plates given by Stuart Piggott in his book, Prehistoric India to 1000 B.C.



in the different parts of India and in Bengal particularly, the Vedic deities receded back into the twilight and their places were taken over by the female deities. They became all powerful and the degree of importance of the male deities was shifted to the female deities. The germ of this tendency, with the analysis of the Indus Valley culture in mind, seems to be there, but was only temporarily arrested with the influx of Aryans in the history of India. In course of time, as the Aryans were more and more assimilated with the local people and their culture, the imported Aryan culture underwent a thorough metamorphosis making possible what can be called the triumph of the female deities over the male gods:

The all-pervading force or energy about which the Vedic Seers sang, which to them was the primeval Purusha, became the Ādi Mātā to the Śāktas. She is the Brahmanayī Mā. What was the Brahman to the Vedic people is now the Brahmanayī Mā to the Śāktas. This change in attitude towards the male gods may be attributed to the dominating influence of the Śāṅkhya philosophy, where Purusha, the male principle, is static consciousness and Prakṛtī, the female principle, is the blind dynamics of life, the moving force. It is the Prakṛtī within which the flux of life takes place at the mere proximity of the Purusha when the harmony of the guṇas, the primordial existential principles, viz. Sattva, Rajas and Tamas, are lost.

The Śiva Śakti concept is construed in Tāntrism mainly in the Sāṅkhyan pattern where Śiva the male principle is Sava (corpse) without its counterpart the Śakti, the force, the energy. A parallel could be shown here with the Vedānta as well. The Brahman of Vedānta is the Śiva in the Śākta Tantra, who is the pure consciousness, eternally free and hence inactive; for what action could the infinite and the eternal ever indulge in, Who has no limitation and hence no need? But He assumes an attitude of playfulness and allows Himself to be subdued by His own power, the Māyā, and thus becomes Iswara, the personal God, the creator. But is creation real, is this subordination of Brahman by His own power the Māyā real, or is Māyā itself anything real? Vedānta's answer is a veritable no.\* They are all unreal. At this point the Śāktas differ from the Vedāntins. Brahman in the Śākta Tantra is the Śiva who is real; Māyā, the power of Brahman (which is referred to as Śakti) is real. In fact it is only by being activated by the Śakti that Śiva becomes the active creator of the universe. The eternal principle is therefore the composite principle of Śakti and the Śaktimān, the force and the repository of force: One is meaningless without the other. As a body without its vital force is but a corpse, so is a disembodied force or energy an incomprehensible abstraction.

---

\* This is a contrast with the Śāṅkara Vedānta, but Rāmānuja's interpretation of Brahman comes closer to Śākta Tantra.



The Ultimate Reality is therefore comprehended by the Śāktas in a composite fashion. And here lies the vital difference between the Śākta Tantra and Vedānta. To the Śāktas, therefore, Siva is real and so is Śakti; in the language of Vedānta one can say that Brahman is real and so is Māyā; Sṛsti or creation is real and the pleasure and pain of the jiva as well as his entire gamut of experience is real. The jiva's endeavour for an eternal and immortal life is also real. In its existential approach the Śāktas hold that this earthly existence furnishes the basis of immortality as well as the solution to the enigmas of life. It is not a denial of this life but a bold acceptance of it in order to transmute it into the higher level of immortality.

Hence to the Śāktas the basis of spiritual life is this body. To them whatever is there in the cosmos is here in this body, and so their spiritual endeavour or Sādhana is known as Kāyā Sādhana, the trans-substantiation of the psycho-physical organism into the higher plane of spiritual existence. It is an endeavour to unite the lower with the higher, the base material existence with the higher spiritual existence. Its aim is to saturate the whole of our existence with the all-engrossing spiritual power or energy, the energy which the Śāktas consider to be the female force. This to them is the Great Mother. In the legend which recounts her birth as the daughter of Mount

Himalaya, Himalaya asked Her who she was. Her answer to this query was very revealing. She said:

"Oh thou the king of the mountains, before the creation of this world of sensibilities it was me who existed as the all-pervading spiritual principle and as this self revealing spirit I am the supreme Brahman."<sup>1</sup>

In Devi Mahatmyam one finds the same strain of thought.<sup>2</sup>

This eternal, all-pervading spiritual principle constitutes the Mother concept of the Śāktas. She is the primeval (Ādya), non-dual (Advaita), undecaying (Akṣara), ancient one (Purāṇī). She is the existence, consciousness and bliss, the Paramesvarī Brahmaneyī. She is the supreme Brahman. She is omnipotent and above all the gods. (Sarvasakti svarupā sarvadevamay tanu), She is the supreme wisdom.

"The great sakti, the great mother, the goddess, who in spite of her countless names (Durgā, Kālī, Candī etc.) is only one, the one highest queen (Paramesvarī)"<sup>3</sup>

The whole of reality evolves out of this supreme principle. Mind and matter, the stasis and the dynamics, the sound and the stillness, the light and the darkness, all things that are, are evolutes from this supreme principle. Mahesvara or Śiva extols the goddess by saying:

"From the massive to the minutest atoms whatever is there all arise out of thee and are dependent on thee."<sup>4</sup>

---

1. Devibhagavat, ch. 7.

2. cf. Devi Mahatmyam, ch. 10.

3. A History of Indian Literature, Vol. 1, Winternitz.

4. Mahanirvana Tantra, ch. 4.



This cosmic energy according to Śākta philosophy is transcendent as well as immanent, it is formless as well as formed, it is static as well as dynamic. In its static form the Śakti is known as Śiva. But Śiva is not absolutely static like that of the Brahman of Vedānta or Puruṣa in Sāṅkhya, but a subtle perpetual action continues within it. Just as heat cannot be dissociated from fire, as light cannot be taken away from the moon, so is Śakti in the heart of Śiva.

The Śakti prior to Her emergence as this world of colour, light, sound etc., is hidden within Śiva, seemingly inactive and identical with Śiva. This is the principle of non-duality according to Śākta Tantra. But the nature of the Śakti in this non-duality is unknown. It is Apratirkeya, beyond all human conception and discussion.

From this hidden Śakti, reality evolves first in the subtle form and then in a grosser form. But in Her state of union with Śiva there is no creation, and Śiva and Śakti are in eternal bliss, joy, calm and tranquillity. Then a subtle movement takes place in Śakti and from the movement emanates a subtle sound. This sound is Nāda, which through its inner vibration generates a ray of light. Further again Nāda condenses itself into a concentric point known as Vindu. Nāda and Vindu, the expansion and the contraction, are the two moments of creation according to Śākta Tantra. The Vindu



again is known as Hansa, Han is Śiva and Sa is Śakti in a state of union, throbbing in the excitement of creation.

Vindu breaks itself into three grosser forms of Nāda, Vindu and Vīja (the primal seed). Nāda is the principle of motion in the nature of Śakti, Vindu is the principle of stasis in the nature of Śiva, Vīja has both the moments of statics and dynamics in it. In fact the transcendental Vindu (Parā Vindu) through its proximity with Time divides itself into the grosser forms of Vindu, Nāda and Vīja; and Time (Kāla) itself is only another aspect of the Parama Śiva. When Vindu explodes, this gives rise to a subtle sound which is known as Śabda Brahman, the first stage in the level of grosser creation. Śabda Brahman resides in the lower plexus of the human body in the form of a serpent power known as Kundalinī. Kundalinī again is nothing other than the cosmic energy in its concentrated form. It is dormant at the base of the body.<sup>1</sup> In this stage its respiration constitutes the life force of living beings, and the droning sound that emits from such activity is supposed to be the ground of poetry and music.<sup>2</sup> Kundalinī is therefore the Brahmaney. She is the great conjurer, deluding man in this pain of existence as well as being the cause of liberation and salvation.

---

1. Sāradātilakam, 1/11:14.

2. Sivasamhitā, 5:83.



The devotee through Yogic practice would awake this serpent power and raise it gradually to the highest centre of the nerve plexus known as Sahaśrār, the seat of Parama Śiva where she drinks the divine soma. This is the summum bonum of Tantra.<sup>1</sup>

The Tantric notion of Salvation needs some more elaboration. This notion principally agrees with the Sāṅkhyan notion of liberation. Sāṅkhya speaks about three ultimate sources of miseries. There are miseries caused either by the physical body or the external nature, or there may be the torments of the soul.<sup>2</sup> Man is trying repeatedly to get rid of these sufferings. He feels the need of the strength of a Titan with which he could win over these adversaries. The germ of this strength he finally discovers in himself. The power is in him, all he has to do is to awaken it. With this awakened power he becomes the master of himself, and conquering all the adverse forces that worked on him previously he enters into the realm of eternity. And this is liberation. But to establish oneself or to attain liberation one has to proceed step by step.

The entire Tāntric mode of worship is an endeavour to awaken the force which is within him, so that man can become

---

1. Satacakranirupanam, 53.

2. Sāṅkhya pravaçana sutra, 1:1.

superman. His whole physical frame will be charged and vitalised with this spiritual force. And so the first step is concentration, collecting the mind from the diverse external objects by which it is distracted. The devotee fixes his mind on the divine mother. This human body is the repository of great force. God is within man, but man has no consciousness of Him. He tries to find God outside, so he goes to the temple, takes a dip in the holy rivers thinking that this would make him clean and holy. But nothing helps very much. As Jung says:

"Too few people have experienced the divine image as the innermost possession of their own soul. Christ only meets them from without, never from within the soul."<sup>1</sup>

To the Tantric it is the inner change that is most important. Because to him the outer is the expression of the inner experience and consciousness. Tantric worship makes one aware of that power which is within. This realization automatically brings about the desired transformation in man, elevating him to a higher level of existence. As Jung puts it:

"So long as religion is only faith and outward form, and the religious function is not experienced in our own soul, nothing of any importance has happened. It has yet to be understood that the mysterium magnum is first and foremost rooted in the human psyche."<sup>2</sup>

Tantrism says that the proper understanding of the body is to see it as the locus and substratum of the spirit.

---

1. The basic writings of C.J.Jung, p. 442.

2. Ibid, p. 443.



The Tāntrics deal with a mystical anatomy. They hold that there are three vital nerves in our body, the Iḍā, Pingalā, and Susumnā. Iḍā is at the left of the spinal column and is compared to the moon. Pingalā is situated of the right of the spinal column and is compared to the sun. In the centre is situated Susumnā which is the most important of the three, travelling through the spinal column from the coccyx through the cervical region to the cerebrum. The pelvic region from which these three nerves originate is known as the Brahma dvāra (the door of the Brahman). The Tāntric system believes that the mystical power in our body travels through these nerves, like a divine light. These three nerves are again compared to the three holy rivers, viz: Iḍā to Ganges, Pingalā to Yamunā and Susumnā to Sarasvatī. The point where all the three meet in the cerebrum is called the Trivenī by the Tāntrics.<sup>1</sup>

Tantric physiology next speaks about ten different types of breath which pervade the whole body. They are Prāṇa, Apāṇa, Samāna, Udāna, Vyāna, Nāga, Kurma, Kṛkara, Devadatta, and Dhananjaya. These different breaths serve different purposes in the body. Prāṇa and Apāṇa are the most important. Prāṇa travels from the nostril to the navel and Apāṇa acts in the sacral region of the body. Their cooperation perpetuates life, whereas death results from their conflict.<sup>2</sup>

---

1. Sivasamhita, 5/74.

2. Ibid, Sec. 3.

Further the system deals with the six nerve plexuses in the body, which are situated within the spinal column along the Susumnā nerve. These plexuses are imagined to be in the form of a lotus and they are the power centres of the body. The lotuses are thought to be open having many petals and each of them having a presiding deity. During worship the devotee must concentrate on one of these lotuses. The nerve plexuses are known as follows: Svādhīsthāna, Manipura, Anāhata, Visuddha and Ājñā from the lower to the higher respectively. There is one more lotus situated in an inverted form in the brain known as Sahasrār, having one thousand petals.

The lotus in the pelvic region is known as the Ādhāra Padma. It is red and has four petals. Each petal is called by an alphabetical letter such as: va, śa, ṣa, za. These alphabetical names are known as mātṛika varṇa. The pelvic region is known as Muḷādhāra, which is supposed to be the plane of the earth, and the ruling deity of this lotus is Dākīnī. The Susumnā orifice is known as Brahma Dvara, as has been mentioned earlier. This orifice is guarded by Kundalinī, the cosmic power, where she lies in a dormant state. The first thing that the devotee is supposed to do is to awake this cosmic power.

Slightly above the coccyx around the region of the reproductive organ is situated the second lotus known as



Svādhīsthāna. Its colour is red and has six petals with six alphabetical names, viz.: ba, bha, ma, ya, ra, la. It is the realm of Varuna, and the ruling deity is Rākinī.

Around the navel region is situated the third lotus which is Manipura, which has a deep azure colour. The letters adorning its ten petals are da, dha, na, ta, tha, ḍa, ḍha, ṇa, pa, pha. Manipura is the realm of light and the ruling deity here is Lākinī.

Around the area of the heart is situated the fourth lotus. The letters for its twelve petals are ka, kha, ga, gha, ṅa, cha, chha, ja, jha, ṇa, ta, tha. This is the realm of the vital breath and is the place where the individual spirit (Jīvātma) resides. Here the ruling deity is Kākinī.

Around the region of the throat is situated the Viśudhyākshya lotus. It is smokey in colour. The sixteen letters on its petals are a, ā, i, ī, u, ū, ṛ, ṛṛ, li, lli, e, ai, o, ou, an, ah. This is the realm of the ether and the ruling deity here is Śākinī.

Between the eyebrows is situated the fifth lotus, which is known as Ājñā cakra. This lotus has only two petals, ha and kṣa being the letters on it. Its ruling deity is Hākinī. Ājñā cakra is otherwise known as the place of the Praṇava. This is the place where the devotee fixes his attention. It is further

known as Dhyānadhana (the locus of concentration).

On the brain is situated the thousand petaled lotus, facing down-ward. This is the final stage and is known as the place of Śiva (Śiva pura). Here the awakened Kundalinī unites with Śiva and drinks the nectar of immortality. when thus the awakened Kundalinī, the Paramā Śakti, is united with the Parā Śiva, the individual attains to liberation.<sup>1</sup>

To the tāntric, therefore, this body is the vessel of the divine. God is not external. He resides in the temple of the body. But the mortal Jīva has no awareness of this. He is deluded by the three gunas of Sattva, Rajas and Tamas. The devotee through sādhana gradually liberates himself from the delusion of the Gunas. There are three stages in this development. The Paśubhāva, the Vīrabhāva and the Divyabhāva. In the first stage his animal nature is transformed and he transcends his tāmasik nature. In the second level he wakes up to a higher consciousness through Vīrabhāva, and conquers rajas. In the third stage through Divyabhāva, the devotee attains the super-conscious level. His whole being is transformed into a divine existence. Through this spiritual discipline man becomes purer until his whole material existence is divinized. He feels the divinity in himself.



But this entire spiritual practice centres around the body. Unlike many other religious systems of the world, the Tāntric emphasize very much the need and importance of the physical body. This can be seen in the Antaryāga or the inner worship of the Tāntric. To them whatever is there in the outer reality is in the body, and there is therefore no need to collect the paraphernalia for worship. Worship is the awakening of the Kundalinī, the cosmic power, and the raising of it to the brain, where the union of the Śiva and Śakti takes place. The physical individual becomes supraphysical. And as Aurobindo says, God comes down so that man may become God. This is the finale of Tāntric Sādhana, where man in his integral being body, mind and spirit reaches its divine perfection.

Thus the cult of the mother-goddess that originated in the Indus Valley Civilization gradually, through change and modification through millenia, developed into a grand, integrated psychological, physical and spiritual system, offering a scheme of salvation completely different from anything one finds anywhere else. Unlike Vedanta of Śankara, or the Rāmānuja type, or the Buddhist Nirvāna, the Tāntric sādhana is the process of divinization of man and helps him to overcome all the limitation that the flesh is heir to.

### Selected Bibliography

1. Aitereya Brahmana, Sanskrit Sansthan, Khwaja Kutub, Berailly. 1965.
2. Atharva Veda, Sanskrit Sansthan, Khwaja Kutub, Berailly. 1965.
3. Annual Report of the Archaeological Survey of India, Govt. of India Press, Delhi. 1927-28.
4. Annals of Archaeology and Anthology, Liverpool, 1940.
5. A History of Indian Literature, Voll. I. Winternitz. Calcutta University, 1959.
6. Aegyptische Sonnenlieder, A. Schärff. Berlin. 1922.
7. Bharater Sakti Sadhana O Sakta Sahitya, S.B.Dasgupta, Calcutta, 1372 (Bengal Era).
8. Die altpersischen Keilinschriften, Weissbach Bang. J. Ricker'sche Buchhandlung, 1878.
9. Devi Mahatmyam, Motilal Banarsidas, Kashi, 1963.
10. Devi Bhagavat, Sanskrit Pustak Bhandar, Calcutta, 1959.
11. Iraq, R.Girshman, Paris, 1954.
12. Jnani Gura ba Jnan O Sadhana Paddhati, Swami Nigamanada Saraswati. Saraswat Math, Assam. 1370 (Bengal Era).
13. Kali Tantra. 12, Simla Street, Calcutta. 1334 (Bengal Era).
14. Kena Upanishad. Gita Press, Gorakhpure, 2019 (Sambat Era)
15. Life Divine, Sri Aurobindo. Pondicheri Asram. 1960.
16. Malatimadhavam, Bhavabhuti. Oriental Publishing Co. Bombay, 1908.
17. Mahanirvana Tantra, 12, Simla Street, Calcutta. 1334 (Bengal Era)
18. Mother, R.Briffault, New York, 1963.
19. Mundaka Upanishad. Gita Press, Gorakhpure, 2019 (Sambat Era)



20. Mahabharata, Basumati Sahitya Mandir, Calcutta. 1959.
21. Nitya Tantra, 12, Simla Street, Calcutta. 1334 (Bengal Era)
22. Panconasana, J. Banerjee, Firma K.L.Mukhopadhyaya, Calcutta. 1960.
23. Pre-historic India, Stuart Piggott. London, 1962.
24. Ramayana, Basumati Sahitya Mandir, Calcutta. 1950.
25. Religion of Ancient Egypt, S.A.B. Mercer, London. 1949.
26. Ramakrishna Kathamrita, Udbodhon Publishers, Calcutta. 1948.
27. Rg Veda, Sanskrit Sansthan, Khwaja Kutub, Berailly, 1965.
28. Sumerian Mythology, Kramer, New York. Harper Torch Book. 1961.
29. Sankhya Pravacana Sutra, J.G.Chatterjee & Co. Calcutta. 1887.
30. Satacakranirupanam, Basumati Sahitya Mandir, Calcutta, 1359 (B.E.)
31. Sivasamhita, As above.
32. Saradatilakam, As above.
33. Saktapadavali O Sakti Sadhana, J.K.Chakravorty, D.M.Library, Calcutta. 1370 (Bengal Era)
34. Sakti and Sakta, J.Woodroff, Ganesh & Co. Madras. 1956.
35. The Basic Writings of C.J.Jung, Edited by V.S.Delaszlo, Modern Library, New York. 1959.
36. The Cult of the Mother-Goddess, E.O.James, London, 1959.
37. The Cultural Heritage of India, Ramakrishna Mission Asram, Calcutta, 1958.
38. The Ebadarian Civilizations, Brunton and Caton Thomson, London, 1928.
39. Tantric Tradition, Agehananda Bharati. Rider & Co. London. 1965.
40. Taittiriya Aranyaka, Sanskrit Pustak Bhandar, Calcutta. 1949.

41. Vajrasenayee Samhita, Sanskrit Pustak Bhandar, Calcutta. 1949.
42. Vrihat Samhita, Bombay Sanskrit & Prakrit Series, 1919.
43. Yast, (Vandidad) Sacred Books of the East. Oxford, Voll. 5. 1880.
44. Further Excavation at Mohenjo-daro, E.J.Mackay. Govt. of India Press, Delhi. 1937.
45. The Myths of Ancient Egypt, Lewis Spence, London, 1922.