



Arise! Awake!
And stop not till the Goal is reached.

Prabuddha Bharata

Or Awakened India

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The Divine Message

A HYMN TO THE DIVINE MOTHER

का त्वं शुभे शिवकरे सुखदुःखहस्ते
आघूर्णितं भवजलं प्रबलोमिभङ्गः ।
शान्तिं विधातुमिह किं बहुधा विभङ्गाम्
मातः प्रयत्नपरमासि सदैव विश्वे ॥

O Thou most beautiful! Whose holy hands
Hold pleasure and hold pain! Doer of good!
Who art Thou? The water of existence
By Thee is whirled and tossed in mighty
waves.

Is it, O Mother, to restore again
This universe's broken harmony
That Thou, without cessation, art at work?

को वा धर्मः किमकृतं कः कपाललेखः
किंवादृष्टं फलमिहास्ति हि यां विना भोः ।
इच्छापाशैर्नियमिता नियमाः स्वतन्त्रैः
यस्या नेत्री भवतु सा शरणं ममाद्या ॥

Is it inherent nature? Something uncreate?
Or Destiny? Some unforeseen result?—
Who lacking nothing, is accountable,
Whose chain of will, untrammelled, grasps
the laws,
May She, the Primal Guide, my shelter be!

मित्रे शत्रौ त्वविषमं तव पद्मनेत्रम्
स्वस्थे दुःस्थे त्ववितथं तव हस्तपातः ।
मृत्युच्छाया तव दया त्वमृतञ्च मातः
मा मां मुञ्चन्तु परमे शुभदृष्ट्यस्ते ॥

To friend and foe Thy lotus-eyes are even;
Ever Thine animating touch brings fruit
To fortunate and unfortunate alike;
The shade of death and immortality—
Both these, O Mother, are Thy grace
Supreme!
Mother Supreme! Oh, may Thy gracious face
Never be turned away from me, Thy child!

या मामाजन्म विनयत्यतिदुःखमार्गैः
आसंसिद्धेः स्वकलितैर्ललितैर्विलासैः
या मे बुद्धिं सुविदधे सततं धरण्याम्
साम्बा सर्वा मम गतिः सफलेऽफले वा ॥

She who, since birth, has ever led me on
Through paths of trouble to perfection's goal,
Mother-wise, in Her own sweet playful ways,
She, who has always through my life inspired
My understanding, She, my Mother, She,
The All, is my resort, whether my work
O'erflow with full fruition or with none.

अम्बास्तोत्रम् by Swami Vivekananda.

ABOUT THIS ISSUE

□ MOTHER, IMMANENT AND TRANSCENDENTAL is this month's EDITORIAL. At the end of September begins the worship festival of Śrī Śrī Durgā Puja. Mother Durgā will come from Her ancient Himalayan abode at Mt. Kailas in mid-month. Her arrival permeates and purifies the whole atmosphere in the land of *Bhārata*, where She is received with honour and love. May She bestow spiritual Peace and Prosperity on all.

□ Rev. Anthony Elenjittam is a liberal thinker and prolific writer. He reminds Indians in his article, INDIA, LOSE NOT THY SOUL, of their rich and lofty heritage, and cautions that it may be lost in the new-fashioned consumerism mentality which is eroding moral values in advanced countries. The author directs a welfare society for destitute children at Bandra in Bombay, and leads meditation centres outside India.

□ Rev. Swami Gitanandaji, senior Swami of the Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math, writes with much feeling on THE MOTHERHOOD OF GOD AS MANIFESTED IN THE HOLY MOTHER. His article reveals to the devotees of Sri Sarada Devi, her spiritual power and loving divine nature which she often kept hidden behind her outward appearance of innocence and simplicity.

□ Prof. S. Srinivasachar, of Mysore, with an eye to history and archaeology, looks into the annals of antiquity to bring to light the evolution of WORSHIP OF THE MOTHER GODDESS. His scholarly essay gives an idea of the existence of the Mother Goddess in one form or another throughout Indian history. The author was for some years an archaeologist and also Editor and Chief Editor of Government of India Publications. He teaches at the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Moral and Spiritual Education in Mysore.

□ THE SECRET TEACHINGS OF CHRIST is a brilliantly written article unearthing the treasure contained in the early Gnostic Gospels. The author casts illumination on hitherto little known facts of early Christian history and the original teachings of Christ. Pravrajika Brahma-prana is a nun of the Sarada Convent, Vedanta Society of Southern California, at Santa Barbara, U.S.A.

“One no more hears nowadays of rigid austerities as of old...Vedānta cannot be understood except through austerities.

—Swami Turiyananda

Mother—Immanent And Transcendental

One makes fascinating discoveries on going through the different researches and views propounded by the scholars on the worship of the Mother-Goddess—be they anthropological, psychological or of anthroposophy. Typically, the historians base their research on the most complete archaeological and iconographical clues available, and together, after considering early historical references, draw up their hypotheses. Thus fortified they set forth an approximate historical chronology and state that the Mother-Goddess was dominant in the particular culture.

In almost all ancient cultures, modern history tells, the Mother-deity was in vogue in one form or another. Writing about the early period of India's culture, Prof. A. L. Basham says:

Mother goddesses were worshipped at all times in India, but between the days of the Harappa culture and the Gupta period the cults of goddesses attracted little attention from the learned and influential, and only emerged from obscurity to a position of real importance in the Middle Ages, when feminine divinities, theoretically connected with the gods as their spouses, were once more worshipped by the upper classes. The goddess was the sakti, the strength or potency of her male counterpart. It was thought that the god was inactive and transcendent, while his female element was active and immanent...¹

Anthropologists have a different postulate on the origin and prevalence of the Mother-goddess. When early man was still in his very primitive phase, it dawned, faintly in the beginning, that he was bound in indissoluble unity with the rest of nature. Early

man perhaps became objectively aware that he was utterly dependent on the fruits and plants and animals which sustained him. In the Paleolithic Age, man worshipped those as deities of Nature. Gradually, he ascribed more powers and intelligence to them, projected from his own self-awareness, and they became totems—animal spirits, but their powers supernatural.

In the second, or neolithic stage, early man gradually mastered the arts of tilling the ground, pottery and weaving. His image of himself was also growing. He began to give his gods human forms, or half-animal-half-human, and to manufacture clay images of them and worship them. In many of the prehistoric civilizations, idols of gods were made of clay. The Harappa culture of the Indus Valley was no exception. After the discovery of metal, clay idols were replaced by metal ones. Each community had in later times its own sacred animals and plants. The early Greeks, Persians, Egyptians, Babylonians, Indians, Chinese and others invoked the protection and creative powers of the animistic gods and erected temples for them. Domestication of animals and growing competence to survive in a hostile environment, along with the advance of tool-making technology, enhanced the self-image of the ancient peoples. This led to more powerful, but still anthropomorphic conceptions of the gods. Among the polytheistic cultures, naturally, those anthropomorphic deities became divided into male and female. Anthropologists put forward that the worship of God as Mother or Father was greatly influenced by the structure of the ancient social organization, whether it was matriarchal or patriarchal. In the matriarchy the greatest authority was with the mother, so in the early religious thought, the Deity was also a Mother, and in family and society She

1. A. L. Basham, *The Wonder That Was India* (London; Fontana Books, 1975) page 313.

was worshipped as the Supreme Being. In the patriarchal society, on the other hand, the highest Being was conceived to be a Father, and enormous were his power and influence. In the major religions of the world today, thus one finds some are mother-centered and others father-centered. The Semitic religions are father-centered.

During the early formative years of Christianity, i.e. in the first and second centuries A. D., the worship of God as Divine Mother was prominent. The discovery in 1945 of fifty-two texts at Nag Hammadi, in upper Egypt, called Gnostic Gospels, which belonged to the different sects of Gnostics, provided ample testimony to this fact. Gnostics believed in the worship of a Mother-Goddess. The Gnostic religion and philosophy which exerted considerable influence during the first and second centuries in Alexandria, and Syria. Many pundits believe they were influenced by Indian thought. The Indian mind is quite at home either looking upon God as Mother or as Father or even without attributing any form whatsoever to the Absolute.

Digging deep into the human psyche, modern psychologists uncover emotions and motives that play a rich part in the worship of God. The great psychoanalyst Eric Fromm says:

'Mother's love' is unconditional, it is all protective, all enveloping; because it is unconditional; it can also not be controlled or acquired. Its presence gives the loved person a sense of bliss; its absence produces a sense of lostness and utter despair. Since mother loves her children because they are her children, and not because they are 'good', obedient or fulfil her wishes and commands, mother's love is based on equality. All men are equal, because they all are children of a mother, because they all are children of Mother Earth.²

Writing on the father-aspect of love of God, Fromm observes:

2. Eric Fromm, *The Art of Loving* (New York: Bantam Books, 1972) page 55.

In this phase the mother is dethroned from her supreme position, and the father becomes the Supreme Being, in religion as well as in society. The nature of fatherly love is that he makes demands, establishes principles and laws, and his love for the son depends on the obedience of the latter to these demands. He likes best the son who is most like him, who is most obedient and who is best fitted to become his successor, as the inheritor of his possessions. ...Whether we think of the Indian, Egyptian, or Greek cultures, we are in the middle of a patriarchal world, with its male gods, over whom one chief god reigns, or where all gods have been eliminated with the exception of the One, *the God*.³

But the mother's love is so strong, inspite of the supremacy of masculine monotheism, it cannot be effaced either from religion or from society. It surely carves some niche for itself and enters in some form, either perceptibly or otherwise. Buttressing this point Fromm concludes:

In the Jewish religion, the mother aspects of God are reintroduced especially in the various currents of mysticism. In the Catholic religion, Mother is symbolized by the church, and by the Virgin. Even in Protestantism, the figure of Mother has not been entirely eradicated, although she remains hidden.⁴

Writing on the Western mind, Richard Taruvas remarks that the crisis of modern man is essentially a masculine crisis and this has been brought about by the Judaeo-Christian denial of the Great Mother Goddess.⁵

It is also interesting to study the development of Indian thought. The *R̥g Veda* is the earliest poetry of the blossoming mind set on its evolutionary course. It is a great hymnology to the personified forces of Nature, in which man first attempted to discover supernatural elements. This was

3. *Ibid.*, page 55.

4. *Ibid.*, page 55.

5. *Cross Currents, Quarterly*, Issue No. 3 (New York; 1990) page 279.

the objective phase of his religious consciousness, centring on external phenomena. The process of transference of his interest from forces of Nature without, to a monotheistic God took several thousands of years. When man's focus was shifted from the objective universe to the subjective *self*, he found the same God who is transcendent, is also immanent. This subjective phase of developing spiritual consciousness found its consummation in the realization that one's Self is God, and God the Self, expressed in the later *Upaniṣads*, (*Aham-brahma-asmi*). In the Upaniṣadic literature there are no hymns to gods and goddesses, but only the teaching, or description of steps to reach the Divine Reality behind Nature. Prayers and hymns of the early Vedic literature were replaced by the praises of the inmost Soul or Self; the attitude of helplessness by mighty strength, and opaque belief by luminous vision and realization of Truth. The personal consciousness trapped in body and mind freed itself and became *transpersonal*—to express it in the terms of modern thought of psychologists like Abraham Maslow, Charles Tart, Ken Wilber, Stanislav Groff and others. It is pure, limitless consciousness, the ground of the manifested universe.

The quest for Spirit begins in the objective world and culminates with the revelation that the same Spirit that is without is also within, in the depths of one's own heart. To stop the futile search of mind seeking Divinity in the objects of the world, the *Kena Upaniṣad* warns—"Reality is not what people here adore (*Nedam yad idam upasate*). When mind learns that the Divine is Absolute Subjectivity or Pure Consciousness, it abandons its quest. Then, even the slightest egoism or egoistic reliance on one's own self-efforts is vain, says the same *Upaniṣad*. Without Divine Grace, the realization of Ultimate Reality is not possible. Through a beautiful allegory the *Upaniṣad* drives

home this idea: It is the presence of *Umā*, the Most Comely, (daughter of Himāvat), Wisdom Personified, which dispels the last vestige of ignorance from the mighty god Indra. It was through the Mother's Grace that he was enlightened, not due to his own power. It is therefore said in the *Devī Saptasatī*:

Verily She, the Bhagavatī, Mahāmāya forcibly drawing the mind of even the wise, throws them into delusion. She creates this entire universe, both moving and unmoving. It is She who, when propitious, becomes a boon-giver to human beings for their final liberation. She is the Supreme Knowledge, the cause of final liberation, and is eternal; She is the cause of the bondage of transmigration and is the sovereign over all gods.⁶

Perusing history, anthropology and philosophy superficially, it appears that God undergoes changes—being in the imagination of man—and in consonance, His role in the Cosmic Scheme. However, God does not change; what has changed is man's concept of God. With spiritual growth, or expansion of knowledge, the concept expands till its inadequacy and incompleteness is felt. Then the mature soul lets go all conceptualizing, denudes itself of all thoughts and imaginings of God, and waits—like fallow land awaiting the blessing of the rain. The deepest mysteries of life cannot be solved by the mere ratiocinations of intellect. Reasoning is based on previous experiences of objective knowledge. Pure subjectivity involves the 'intuitive leap', when the bubbling intellect becomes silent, steady like the flame of a candle in a windless place, as described in the *Gītā*. (Ch. VI. 19).

Waiting for this breakthrough is the 'dark night of the soul'. In such a strange indefinable condition of the soul, bereft of all hope, *Umā*, the Gracious Mother, appears

6. *Sri Durgā Saptasatī*, Trans. Swami Jagadishvarananda (Madras, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, 1953) Chapter I Verses 55-58,

and in a flash there is a flood of Light and Bliss. When Grace descends the tiny ego bursts; the thralldom of suffocating individuality is dissolved.

Religion in its infancy begins with externals. With the help of outside symbols and images, the mind is gradually trained to focus on itself. In the lives of the mystics and saints of all major religions this unfolding has been recorded. "Religion is the conquest of nature both internal and external"—that is the very comprehensive definition given by Swami Vivekananda. After gaining considerable victory over his external nature, man turns inward his attention to get mastery over his unbridled impulses and unrestrained desires. The primal gods—their jealousy, greed, impulsive behaviour and vengeful nature described in different mythologies, were but creations and reflections of primitive man's own mind. The primitive tribal life gradually gave way to higher forms of social organization whence ethical and moral values were awakened. The gods also shed their repulsive characteristics and appeared in benign, merciful and all-loving roles. Even our twentieth-century views of God may not be the last word. Until human evolution ceases, human mind and consciousness may be expected to go on developing. None can hedge in the Infinite. The Absolute reveals more and more through the personal limited consciousness. In whom the revelation is greater, him the world calls a saint. For him the riddle of existence is forever solved. He knows the relative as the expression of the Absolute.

Each soul is evolving, grasping a higher conception of reality. Spiritual realization or religious awakening is the inborn birthright of every man. Though at the lower stages it appears in crude or bizarre forms, it is a temporary phase on a long march. Till man reaches the Infinite, he cannot rest. An inner consciousness urges him onward,

higher and higher. He may stumble and stagger at times, but he must eventually overcome the separation between himself and his final home of Oneness—that is the eternal Abode of the Divine Mother. A tired child goes back to its Mother after fruitless wanderings in the wilderness of the world. Freedom is the very heartbeat of man. Mistaking the sense of freedom he feels to be something external, he goes on searching for it in earth and heaven, in temples and churches, and after completing the circle, comes back to discover that blessedness is in his own heart—says Swami Vivekananda. All religions with their symbology, mythology and philosophy have only one goal—that is to set man free from all limitations.

In one word, they are all struggling towards freedom. Man feels consciously or unconsciously, that he is bound; he is not what he wants to be. It was taught to him at the very moment he began to look around. That very instant he learnt that he was bound, and he also found that there was something in him which wanted to fly beyond, where the body could not follow, but which was as yet chained down by this limitation.⁷

Man may believe in or repudiate the existence of God or the Supreme Spirit as the matrix of all manifestations, but he cannot deny his own existence. Even a microscopic insect is seen to be aware, though momentarily, of its existence. It struggles to avoid dangers which would bring an end to its life. Every being is aware of life's continuity and loves its life. What is that thing which makes one aware, not only of his existence, but of the surrounding world? What is that which gives the sense of 'I am'? It is consciousness. Consciousness is the prius of all. "This is the first fact of consciousness—'I am'."⁸ said Swamiji.

7. *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989) Vol. II, page 103.

8. *Ibid.*, Vol. II, page 32.

Consciousness animates brain and body and gets enmeshed, in course of time in activities. The individual brain is the product of particular culture and tradition, being formed through heredity and learning. Consciousness functions through all the sensory instruments of mind, brain and body, and yet it is independent of them. Being non-material its nature is awareness, so it cannot be destroyed, whereas the brain and body are manufactured out of matter and can be destroyed. The pure consciousness—the 'I am', by wrong habit, comes to identify itself with every thought and assumes 'I am this'; 'I am that'. Throwing further light, Swami Vivekananda pointed out:

In one sense Brahman is known to every human being; he knows 'I am'; but man does not know himself as he is.⁹

Stressing this Absolute Subjectivity, or non-dual awareness, Swamiji said:

Say 'Soham', 'Soham' (*I am That; I am That*) whatever comes. Tell yourself even in eating, walking, suffering; tell the mind incessantly that *we* never existed, that there is only 'I'. Flash—the dream will break.¹⁰

This pure subjectivity, without any trace of objectivity, is cosmic consciousness which is beyond existence and non-existence. That is, it is beyond description. Being subjective, awareness cannot be known as an object is known. Through Its help everything is known, but It Itself remains unknown. It is like sunlight. With its help one sees everything—*except* the sunlight. This 'I', without any adjectives, is the contentless consciousness.

Sri Ramakrishna, in his own unique way, simplified this abstract truth epigrammatically:

9. *Ibid.*, Vol. VII, page 34.

10. *Ibid.*, Vol. VII, page 92.

Sankaracarya had a certain disciple who served him long without receiving any teaching. One day, hearing footsteps behind him he asked, "Who is there?" and was answered by this disciple, "It is I." Then, said the Master, "If this 'I' is so dear to thee, either stretch it to the infinite or renounce it altogether."¹¹

Till the end of the nineteenth century, science (which was scientific materialism) did not believe in the independent existence of consciousness. To the scientists, consciousness was derived from matter, was an epiphenomenon of brain activity. Thomas Huxley contended that consciousness was related to the mechanisms of the body simply as a by-product of its working without any power of modifying that working. Thinking, feeling, willing, scientists of the past believed, were functions of the brain. After the destruction of the brain, nothing survived. The pioneering investigations of Sir Charles Sherrington in the field of nerves and brain, opened a new vista. He showed that these physiological phenomena were all explainable by bio-chemistry and physics, but mind and intelligence could not be explained. Sir John Eccles, Wilder Penfield, Roger Sperry, Adolf Portman and other modern neuroscientists have conclusively proven that consciousness controls the brain and survives after the destruction of it. Roger Sperry, neuro-scientist highlighting the limitations of science observes:

Consciousness, free-will, and values [have been] three long standing thorns in the hide of science. Materialistic science could not cope with any of them, even in principle. It's not just that they're difficult. They're in direct conflict with the basic models. Science has had to renounce them—to deny their existence or to say that they're beyond the domain of science. For most of us, of course, all three are among the most important things in life. When science proceeds to deny their importance, even their existence, or to say that they're

11. *Tales and Parables of Sri Ramakrishna*, (Madras, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, 1974) page 250.

beyond its domain, one has to wonder about science.¹²

Adolf Portman agrees: "No amount of research along physical...or chemical lines ever gives us a full picture of psychological, spiritual or intellectual processes."¹³

Sir John Eccles, Nobel Prize winner in 1963, believes that consciousness is a non-material something that does exist apart from the biological self. The disintegration that affects the body and brain does not affect consciousness. In his book *The Wonder of Being Human*, he states that the very top of the brain is called the Supplementary Motor Area (SMA) which is the precise location where interaction between matter and spirit takes place.

Rupert Sheldrake, a plant physiologist, whose book, *A New Science of Life*, created a furore a few years ago in scientific circles, expresses the view:

The universe as a whole could have a cause and a purpose only if it were itself created by a conscious agent which transcended it. Unlike the universe, this transcendent consciousness would not be developing towards a goal; it would be its own goal. It would not be striving towards a final form; it would be complete in itself. If this transcendent conscious being were the source of the universe and of everything within it, all created things would in some sense participate in its nature. The more or less limited 'wholeness' of organisms at all levels of complexity could then be seen as a reflection of the Transcendent unity on which they depended, and from which they were ultimately derived.¹⁴

Another eminent physicist, David Bohm, in his book, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*, stresses his conviction that matter,

life and consciousness all are projections of a common ground.¹⁵

Are there any distinctions between spirit and matter, animate and inanimate, or sentient and insentient objects in the universe? Like Vedānta, modern science too, comes up with a negative answer—that there is no sharp demarcation between them. "Biological life is embedded in a living universe. In other words, we are not different in kind from the sand beneath our feet and the clouds over our head. Matter is not inert. It is alive and active," Nobel Prize winner Ilya Prigogine remarks in his book, *Order Out of Chaos*. Again, "...this intelligence extends all the way down to the quantum level of matter. Some physicists think subatomic particles are conscious," writes Michael Talbot.¹⁶

Princeton physicist Freeman Dyson says: "In other words, mind is already inherent in every electron, and the process of human consciousness differ in degree not in kind."¹⁷ Human consciousness is one unbroken stream, one sees at its apex or source, a timeless dimension, and at its bottom or down-stream, the manifest physical side. In his letter to Sister Nivedita, Swami Vivekananda summed up the wisdom of Vedānta when he wrote: "There is but One, seen by the ignorant as matter, by the wise as God. And the history of civilization is the progressive reading of spirit into matter."¹⁸

Divine Mother is both noumenon and phenomenon. She, as Universal Consciousness, manifests and permeates the entire creation of the visible and the invisible. The *Devī Saptasatī* says: "By you this universe is borne; by you this world is created. By

12. Augros, R. M. & Stanciu, G. N., *The New Story of Science* (New York: Bantam, 1986) page 164.

13. *Ibid.*, page 34.

14. Rupert Sheldrake, *A New Science of Life* (London: Paladin Grafton, 1987) page 210.

15. David Bohm, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*, (London: Ark Paperbacks, 1988) page 212.

16. Michael Talbot, *Beyond the Quantum* (New York: Bantam Books, 1988) page 180.

17. *Ibid.*, page 180.

18. *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. VIII, page 429.

you it is protected, O Devī. (Ch. I. 75) It again declares: "She in the form of consciousness pervades the entire world. चित्तिरूपेण या कृत्स्नमेतद् व्याप्य स्थिता जगत् (V.78). Again it proclaims: "The Devī abides in all beings as consciousness." या देवी सर्वभूतेषु चेतनेत्यभिधीयते । (Ch. V. 17) She also abides in all beings in the form of intelligence: या देवी सर्वभूतेषु बुद्धिरूपेण संस्थिता । (Ch. V. 20) *Lalita Sahasranāma*, another famous devotional scripture, gives a magnificent description of the Mother Divine who is the essence of all gods. She is immanent and transcendent: चित्तिः—She is consciousness (362); चिदेक रसरूपिणी—She is of the nature of pure consciousness (364); क्षेत्र स्वरूपा—She is the body of all beings (341); क्षेत्रेशि—She is the ruler of all bodies. (342); क्षेत्र क्षेत्रज्ञ पालिनि—She protects both soul and body (343); ध्यान-ध्यातृ ध्येयरूपा—She is meditation, the meditator and the object of meditation (254); अचिन्त्य रूपा—She transcends all thought (554); सर्वाधारा—She on whom everything rests (659); द्वैतवर्जिता—She is without any duality. (668); सच्चिदानन्द रूपिणि—She is existence, knowledge, bliss absolute. (700); मुक्तिदायि—She is the giver of salvation. (736).

It is said in the *Suta Samhitā*:

संविदेव पराशक्तिः Pure consciousness is the Supreme Śakti. (1.5);

स्वानुभूत्या स्वयं साक्षात् स्वात्मभूतां महेश्वरीम् ।
पूजयेदादरेणैव पूजा सा पुरुषार्थदा ॥

One must experience directly the Maheśvarī as the Self; worship Her with adoration; such worship fulfils. (*Suta Samhitā*, 1.5.3.)

The Universal Mother has different forms and She sports in different ways. And She is also formless. Sri Ramakrishna realized both these aspects. His child-like playfulness and indulgence in fun and frolic with the Mother-Goddess are a perennial source of joy and inspiration to one and all. The Master said:

I put the palm of my hand near Her nostrils [the temple image of Goddess Kali] and felt that Mother was actually breathing. I observed very closely, but I could never see the shadow of the Mother's Divine person on the temple wall in the light of the lamp at night. I heard from my room the jingling sounds of the Mother's anklets, as She went upstairs like a merry little girl. I came out to verify and found that She, with Her hair dishevelled, was actually standing on the verandah of the first floor of the temple and was now viewing Calcutta, and next the Ganga.¹⁹

Swami Vivekananda and others who knew the real nature of Sri Sarada Devi, worshipped her as the living Durgā:

There were moments when, under the influence of higher moods or by way of confiding some secret to a devoted disciple, she would speak of her higher nature and of her divinity. In such moments she would compare herself to Laksmī, the divine consort of Nārāyana, speak of herself as the Mother of all beings, or admit her capacity to confer liberation on anyone.²⁰

Once a monastic disciple told her: "Mother, after having seen you, people will no more respect the various Goddesses." Her significant reply was: "Why not? They are all my parts."²¹

Swamiji had an extraordinary experience at Kṣīr Bhavānī in Kashmir. Seeing the dilapidated condition of the Mother's Temple, the desecration wrought by the invaders, he felt distressed. He thought,

"How could the people have permitted such sacrilege without offering strenuous resistance! If I were here then, I would never have allowed such things. I would have laid down my life to protect the Mother." It was then that he heard the Mother speaking: "What, even if unbelievers

19. Swami Saradananda, *The Great Master*, (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, 1982) page 166.

20. Swami Tapasyananda, *The Holy Mother* ((Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, 1969) page 160.

21. *Ibid.*, page 156.

should enter my temples, and defile My images! What is that to you? Do you protect Me? Or do I protect you?"²²

After hearing the Divine Voice, Swamiji ceased making any more plans for the future, and instead surrendered himself totally to the Will of the All-Knowing, and Ever-Knowing, and Ever-Conscious Divine Mother.

A few days before the Durgā Pūjā, Swami Brahmananda was sitting in the Belur Math, facing the Gaṅgā. He saw Mother Durgā come over the river from the direction of Dakshineswar and stop near the Bīlva tree in the Math premises. At the same time, Swami Vivekananda was coming from Calcutta by boat and asked Brahmananda to make arrangements for the worship of Mother Durgā in an image. When Swamiji heard what Brahmananda had seen, he was filled with joy and preparations for the first Durgā Puja were quickly started. The Holy Mother also came to the Math to attend the impressive four-day celebration.

At Madurai, in South India, there is a famous temple of the Divine Mother known as Minākṣī. Swami Brahmananda, during his sojourn in the South visited it. As he stood before the divine image he exclaimed, "Mother! Mother", and lost external consciousness. When he regained his normal awareness, he told the others that he had the vision of the luminous form of the Mother. In Kanyā Kumārī, at the temple of the Mother Goddess, he spent several days. Whenever he entered this temple he lost himself in ecstasy. In that ecstatic mood he would talk to the Mother endearingly.

Many wonderful things happened in the life of the saint Rāmprasād of Bengal, who passed away in 1803. Even the mere hearing of the relation between this great devotee

with the Mother of the Universe exhilarates the heart of the devotees and instils faith in them. One day Rāmprasād was repairing a hedge near his home. His daughter Jagadīswarī was helping him by returning the cord from the other side of the hedge. After some time Jagadīswarī had to leave the place for some reason. When she returned, she found that the work had almost all been completed during her absence. In surprise she asked her father who had been returning the cord. Intrigued by his daughter's query, Rāmprasād said, "Why, my child, you have been doing this work all the time." But Jagadīswarī emphatically said, "No, Father, I was not here for a long time." The truth flashed in Rāmprasād's mind that it was the Divine Mother Herself in the form of his daughter who was all the time helping him. It was then that he conceived the words for his famous song: मा भक्ते तनया रूपेते बान्धिया गेलेन बेडा—Mother appeared in the form of daughter and tied the hedge. On another occasion, Mother Annapūrnā, in the form of an exceptionally beautiful young woman came from Kāsi to the home of Rāmprasād to hear his soul-stirring songs.

The *Mahā-Canḍī* (Devī-Saptasatī) and the *Lālitasahasranāma* both say that the Divine Mother is *sukhārādhyā*, easily worshipped. Only simple yearning of heart is required.

Laying stress on the worship of Mother, Swami Vivekananda said, "At the present time God should be worshipped as Mother, the Infinite Energy. ...The new cycle must see the masses living Vedānta and this will have to come through women."²³

Before concluding his book, *Shakti and Shākta*, Sir John Woodroffe wrote that the Indian doctrine of Śakti (the Primal Energy worshipped in the form of Mother) would not only revivify India, but also give other religions a metaphysical foundation. ...For

²². *The Life of Swami Vivekananda by his Eastern and Western Disciples* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1979) page 382.

²³. *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. VII, page 95.

him who sees the Mother in all things, all scientific research is wonder and worship. The seeker looks upon not mere mechanical movements of so-called 'dead' matter but the wondrous play of Her whose form all matter is. As She thus reveals Herself She induces in him a passionate exhaltation and that sense of security which is only gained as approach is made to the Central Heart of things."²⁴

We are reminded of the touching prayer of Śrī Śaṅkarācārya to the Universal Mother—

²⁴. Sir John Woodroffe, *Shakti and Shākta* (London: Luzac & Co., 1918) page 102.

Alas, I do not know either Thy *mantra*
or *yantra*,
Nor songs of praise to Thee, nor how
to welcome Thee,
Or meditate upon Thee; neither do I
know words of Praise,
Nor Thy *mudrā*, nor how to lay before
Thee my grief—
But this much I know, O Mother, that
to take refuge in Thee
Is to destroy all my miseries.
This only I beg of Thee—
That my life may pass with the utterance
of these Names:
Mṛdanī, Rudranī, Śiva, Śiva, Bhavanī.²⁵

²⁵. *Hymn to the Divine Mother Craving forgiveness.*

India, Lose Not Thy Soul

ANTHONY ELENJIMITTAM

We stand on the threshold of the third millennium after Christ with great hopes, and also with great trepidation. Mahatma Gandhi taught us (speaking to his followers): "We should hope for the best, and, at the same time, prepare ourselves for the worst." If we do not allow this erosion of human and ethical values to continue, and we return to the perennial values of the *Sanātana Dharma*—to those imponderable spiritual values which sustain the universe, and our entire human family, making the best and positive use of the enormous technological progress of our Space and Electronic Age, then alone we can survive to cross the ocean of *samsāra* (worldliness, suffering and misery)

and reach the yonder shores of Peace unper-
turbable, Conscious Immortality and Life
Eternal. Otherwise the deluge will be on us.

Europe, America and other technologically advanced countries of the West, after passing through their youth of prodigal affluence, having enjoyed to saturation the deserts of the materialistic life, are hungry for the bread of life, desirous to search and discover the hidden sanctuary of Divinity. This Divinity is another name for Unconditioned Peace, Bliss and Fullness. It is derived from the realization of that Supreme Being, Universal Logos, Mind, and Consciousness—unlimited by the names and forms which constitute this illusory, evanescent, pain-

engendering phenomenal world, revealed to us physically through our five senses active in the waking state, and that subtler psychic universe unfolded to us through our mind and consciousness.

What a spate of literature—books and articles that inundate the western world for the purpose of feeding the public! It comprises all sorts of books, including also publications and journals on the scriptures, philosophies and wisdom from the Hindu-Buddhist world. Mahatma Gandhi stated that he began to read the *Bhagavad Gītā* and learn more about Indian philosophy and spiritual culture only while living in England as a student. This is my own experience, and indeed the experience of all those Indians studying, working or touring in the western countries.

The fifty volumes of Max Mueller's *Sacred Books of the East* are now available both in their original English or in translations in almost every country of the West. So are the speeches of Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo, Swami Ramtirtha, Professor Radhakrishnan, Surendranath Das Gupta, Swami Abhedananda, the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, Ramana Maharshi of Tiruvannamalai, Swami Sivananda of Rishikesh, Anandamai-Ma and so many others of modern and ancient India and Asia. They all have found a welcome entrance in the West. Laotze's *Tao-te-King*, Zen Buddhism, and the Advaita Vedānta of Sri Śaṅkara are all household names today among students, savants and even the common people in various cities of Europe, America and Russia.

In many western universities and schools, both intellectuals and students take to Indian philosophy, Zen meditation and the wide range of Hindu and Buddhist culture studies. In contrast it is a sad commentary that we, in our land of the Himalayas and the Gaṅgā, are neglecting the inestimable riches enshri-

ned in the Vedic lore, in the Upaniṣadic wisdom, in Patanjali's Yoga, and the great and priceless culture of our own land, the common patrimony of all children born of the love and bosom of Mother India.

If we were educated deeply in this perennial philosophy and eternal religion of Man the Universal, beyond the limitations of names and forms, there would have been no need for that political vivisection of our country in 1947 which brought about Pakistan in the west and Bangladesh in the east. That same communal cancer is today calling for further fragmentation of the country, basing its malign hopes on the linguistic, communal and cultural differences of the uneducated people. We have forgotten that we are all members of the universal family of God, and that we are all sent out here on this earth for a trial, to cleanse our hearts of all dross and blemish, and thus rediscover the lost paradise latent in all of us through *Jñāna*, *Gnosis* and holy understanding.

Mother India holds in her hands the magic wand of that self-knowledge, that ancient perennial psychology and methodology for self-realization. While the religion and philosophy of ancient Greece, from the days of Homer, Hesiod, Plato, Pindar, Socrates and others have been reduced today to dry history—and while the ancient philosophy of *Tao* in China, and of *Shinto* in Japan have got dimmed by the advent of modern science and technology, India's ancient culture is still living, and she has kept on producing an unbroken succession of seers and sages. These realized great souls have upheld the perennial culture and heritage and kept alight the spiritual blaze. From the dawn of the Indus valley civilization, through the Indo-Āryan and Vedic periods, the incarnations like Sri Rama, Sri Krishna, and sages like Vālmiki, Vasiṣṭha, Veda-vyāsa, Viśvāmitra, Yājñavalkya, Nārada and others flou-

rished and sounded the eternal notes from the wisdom of the *Sanātana Dharma*. And in our own day, Sri Ramakrishna of Dakshineswar, Swami Vivekananda of the world family, Rammohun Roy, Ramana Maharshi, Sadhu Vaswani of Poona, Swami Sivananda and Ramatirtha, and a good many others have kept the flame bright in their lives and teachings. Mahatma Gandhi brought those ideals into the practical arena of political battles and economic and social problems of the day. And Rabindranath sang his melodious lyrics which gloried in *Bhāratīya Sanskr̥ti*, India's culture.

Shall modern India barter away or jettison her eternal spiritual heritage, trying to rival the military giants, or by imitating the consumeristic life of the opulent nations, who are engaged in the dance of Death, attuning themselves to the allurements and enticements of *kāminī-kāñcana*, the sensual life and glittering gold, the two deities that hold sway over our worldliness and constitute the essence of *samsāra*? This is the moot question. It should not be forgotten that the law of *Karma*—that is cause and effect—operative in the ethical moral and spiritual order of the universe, strikes us with mathematical precision. The worldly man caught in the materialistic life of the senses is whirled round on the giant wheel of birth and death. His earthly existence is an imprisonment of mind and body, and he must pass through its inevitable sorrows and sufferings.

While beneath the different colours of skin, on which are based the modern anathemas—racial apartheid, religious ostracism, excommunication and other expressions of man's intolerance of his brothers, the blood running in the veins of all races is always red. The smile of a black African or of the blue-eyed and blond-haired teutonic or of the anglo-saxon, is always white. The cows of different colours all yield the same milk of whiteness. Similarly, it is the law of

Causality or *Karma* in the ethical and moral plane that sustains and nourishes the universe and all its beings. In the evolutionary process we may make progress from life to life if we learn and live by such inexorable laws, as this one, of Mother Nature, imprinted on her by the Oversoul—the Supreme *Puruṣa*. *Dharma* is the life lived in harmony, and in tune with the cosmic laws of evolution. Like the sun which sheds its life-giving rays on all alike, the Laws are impersonal, but wrong actions produce their commensurate painful effects. Good actions produce their good effects. Where there is a legislative assembly, there is also the penal code and the executive, that meets out the rewards both to the law-breakers and to the law-abiding.

The sword of Damocles is raised above us, caught up as we are inextricably in the labyrinth of cold and hot wars, not only between superpowers, but also among smaller countries, religious groups and economic blocks. The vision of Mikhail Gorbachev in launching *Perestroika*, that bold innovation for removing the causes of wars and conflicts by upholding human values and inner freedom first, and everything else afterward, was a step forward, and was indeed a substantial contribution towards peace and progress for the wider human family. There was a kind of liquidation of seventy-three year old Russian communism, which at one stroke dissolved the Warsaw-Pact alliance. The logical next step in the sequence would be the abolition of the Nato organization also, the defence alliance and military might of the thirteen European nations under the protecting umbrella of the United States.

Now what the human family needs—this *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* or family of God, is a Vedāntic idea of universalism which can restore to humanity in a commonwealth of nations, a vision of its inherent Divinity, the vision of the *Ātman* or one human Soul.

What hides beneath the proliferation of multiplicity in the world is pure Spirit, the omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent *Sat-chit-ānanda*. Says Śaṅkarācārya:

*Asti bhāti priyam nāma rupa
cetyamśapañcakam
Tayorādyatrayam brahmarupam
jagatrupam tayodvayam*

*Existence, Knowledge, Goodness, name
and form; these five;
Of these five, the first three constitute the
Divine, while
the latter two constitute the universe of
phenomena.*

Study, thought, reflection, meditation and introspection are essential for us to visualize the real universe in which we live, move and have our being. But by living at the sense-level of desires, attachments, passions and lusts, we run about to and fro like hares caught in a hunter's net, life after life, birth after birth, in the same ritornello, without being able to understand the scenes behind the veil of cosmic illusion (*māyā*).

Nuclear physicists like Nobel Laureates Einstein and Heisenberg, and others like Schrodinger and Carlo Rubia, have written that the physical universe is not what it seems to us to be, but is a kind of sensory and mental fabrication. The Noumenon or Reality is beyond the grasp of our scientists and technologists who swim only on the

surface waves of the ocean of Existence. A good many scientists, especially nuclear physicists of our century, proclaim that they are led to a philosophical position like those of the ancient Vedāntists, Buddhists, Taoists and Yogis of Asia. Heretofore Science discarded those views of the world, but today's deeper probing into the heart of matter has confirmed experimentally that the reality of the material universe goes much deeper than our five senses grasp. The book of Fritjof Capra, entitled *The Tao of Physics* was an important work.

Now our task is to utilize modern means of mass media for educating the people of all nations about the deeper Divine Reality behind the universe of names and forms—the God of the Christians, *Sat-chit-ānanda* of the Vedantists, and the state of Enlightenment or *Nirvāṇa* of the Buddhists. By following the ethical and moral precepts of one or more or all of the great religions, modern man may recover his lost serenity, self-knowledge and bliss. If there is not a revival of sincere adherence and practice of religion, our posterity may not survive to see the shape of things in the third millennium. The practice of religion means the curbing of the senses, mental purification, the practice of unselfish love for fellow beings and the liberation of hearts from the contagion of lusts and passions. Though it is an old story, may it be awakened anew in the hearts of modern man.

“The outside world is the projection of your own mind. As you give to the world, so you receive back from it. It is like looking at a mirror. The reflection in the mirror shows exactly what faces you make at it...It is not the snake of the forest that does any harm, but the snake in the mind that really kills a man.”

—Nag Mahashay

Motherhood Of God As Manifested In The Holy Mother

SWAMI GITANANDA

Sri Sarada Devi was Sri Ramakrishna's final word as to the ideal of Indian womanhood, and she is now being literally worshipped by innumerable devotees, not only of India but of the whole world. Her life was like a book of revelation that gives a wonderful inspiration, even now, to those who come in its contact. We cannot look—however imperfectly—upon a great man without gaining something from him. He is a fountain of living light which it is good and pleasant to be near. So the devotees and admirers of the Holy Mother often try to talk of her pure and simple life, think of her wisdom and calmness, and meditate on her Motherhood of God for the good of their secular and spiritual lives.

Sarada Devi was an embodiment of the *Parāśakti* or Supreme Power of God. What is this *Parāśakti*? Ācārya Sri Śaṅkara has given expression to the real nature of *Parāśakti* in his hymn *Ānanda-Laharī*:

तनीयांसं पांसुं तव चरणपङ्केरुहभवं
विरिञ्चिः सञ्चिन्वन् विरचयति लोकानविकलम् ।
वहत्येनं शौरिः कथमपि सहस्रेण शिरसाम्
हरः संक्षुद्येनं भजति भसितोद्भूलन विधिम् ॥

O Mother! Brahmā, the Creator, took a speck of the dust from Thy Feet and created the universe! Afterward, Lord Viṣṇu is holding it with much difficulty on His thousand heads. At the time of dissolution, Śiva reduces the universe to dust and besmears his body with that dust as Vibhuti!

The *Parāśakti*, the Supreme Power as Divine Mother is thus beyond comprehension by the human mind. It is only when the

infinite power of God is described in human terms that we can have an inkling of it. Swami Vivekananda expressed the Indian attitude towards God as 'Mother' to the Western people by saying:

Instead of "Our Father in Heaven", we say "Mother" all the time; that idea and that word are ever associated in the Hindu mind with infinite Love, the Mother's love—the Mother's love being the nearest approach to God's love in this mortal world of ours. "Mother, O Mother, be merciful; I am wicked! Many children have been wicked, but there never was a wicked Mother"—so says the great saint Ramprasad.

In Indian thinking every woman stands as a human symbol of the Supreme Creative Energy, All-Powerful, and the All-Compassionate Mother of the Universe. Says Vivekananda:

Now, the ideal woman in India is the mother, the mother first, the mother last. The word woman calls up to the mind of the Hindu "motherhood"; and God is called Mother. ...To the ordinary man in India, the whole force of womanhood is concentrated in motherhood.

For the good of the world, that Supreme Power has taken the form of Sri Sarada Devi to inspire men everywhere to dwell always in the higher values of life.

Once the Holy Mother said to one of her disciples, "Sri Ramakrishna used to look upon everyone as the manifestation of the Divine Mother. To preach the Motherhood of God, he has kept me here." In the *Caṇḍī* it is written: *Yā devī sarvabhūteṣu mātrrūpena samsthitā...* "We bow down to that Divine Power, Who is residing in all beings as Mother." In her later life the Holy Mother was conscious of her divinity and tried to lead anyone who came to her

towards spiritual emancipation. She did this by her motherly affection.

Now the question may be asked, "Why was it necessary for the world to have one endowed with the qualities of Motherhood of God?" In previous incarnations, the Mother-aspect of God was not fully expressed, and unless the Lord incarnated as Mother, there would have remained a gap in the spiritual world. The Holy Mother came to fulfill that need of the world. Now, what do we understand about motherhood? We may agree with Sister Nivedita when she said:

[It is]...a yearning love that can never refuse us; a benediction that forever abides with us; a presence from which we cannot grow away; a heart in which we are always safe; sweetness unfathomed, bond unbreakable, holiness without a shadow—all these indeed, and more, is motherhood.

Purity, humility, devotion, selfless love and all that go to adorn spiritual life, have been fully manifested in the life of Holy Mother. How an unlettered village girl in her rural surroundings could unfold such lofty ideals in life is an enigma to many. So we would now try to follow the course of unfoldment of her divine motherhood by some incidents of her life.

Before the advent of Sri Sarada Devi, her parents had strange presentiments that indicated to them a divine personality would be born. The little girl Sarada had indeed something extraordinary in her mental make-up. She was the very soul of sweetness and of an extremely good nature. In childhood she would always act as a peace-maker whenever any of her playmates quarreled. From her young age also, she had wonderful calmness and concentration of mind. Even the elders would sometimes be surprised to find Sarada absorbed in meditation when she was seated before the family deity, particularly Sri Jagadamba Devi, the Divine Mother. As a mere child she was always

helpful to her mother and cared for her younger brothers. She helped in all kinds of household duties which at times became exceedingly strenuous, as for instance when she would cut grass growing in the pond for the cows. But she said later, "As a girl I saw another girl of my age accompanied me, helped me in my work and frolicked with me; but she disappeared at the approach of other people. This continued till I was ten or eleven years old." A similar thing used to happen when Sarada was staying at Kamarpukur. She felt shy in her father-in-law's household and was afraid to go out to bathe in the Haldarpukur (lake) alone. As she stood perplexed in the door, she saw eight young girls approaching to accompany her to the lake. Thus reassured she started out. Four of the girls walked in front of her, and four behind. They all went to the Haldarpukur, had their dip and returned in the same manner. This procedure was followed for the whole time she was in Kamarpukur. Often she thought, "Who are those girls who come every day at the time of bath?" But she never asked them who they were. This shows that some unforeseen power was helping Sarada in her difficulties. It is up to anyone to guess the identity of those eight girls. There was at one time a famine around Sarada's native village, Jayrambati. She was twelve then. Fortunately, her father had still some store of grain from the previous year. He liberally provided for the famished people who came to his house by setting up an outdoor kitchen and preparing *kitchuri*, a preparation of rice, mixed vegetables and pulses. Ever solicitous of the afflicted people, Sarada would always be near to serve them the hot food, even standing by to fan it with her small hands to make it palatable. Such maternal solicitude she showed for others throughout her life. It was certainly this divine quality that caused people to respond to her love.

When Sarada Devi was fourteen years old, Sri Ramakrishna, who had been staying at Dakshineswar, came to Kamarpukur to recover his health. In him Sarada saw a God-intoxicated great soul, full of compassion and love for all beings. Divinity was fully manifest in him. He saw nothing but God within and around. Even at that young age Sarada could rightly perceive his spiritual state. During this time Sarada learned from Sri Ramakrishna the intricacies of spiritual practices and she used to feel his divine presence radiating purity and peace. She always felt that her heart was filled to the brim with bliss.

After that, Sri Ramakrishna returned to Dakshineswar and seven long years passed. The distressing rumour reached Jayrambati that Sri Ramakrishna had become mad at Dakshineswar. Somehow Sarada was able to accompany her father to Dakshineswar to see him. There she found that Sri Ramakrishna's "madness" was all due to great longing and zeal for the vision of the Divine Mother, Kali. The gossip, she was relieved to know, was totally untrue. Just the same as when she saw him before, she found that far from being out of his mind, he was full of love and compassion for others and fully aware of the world around him. Instead of forgetting Sarada, he seemed even more than before, to be concerned about her spiritual progress and wellbeing. The Master saw to her comfort after her long and tedious journey, and gave her during the months that followed much instruction and guidance about everything—ranging from worldly affairs and domestic duties to spiritual illumination. One day the Master told her, "Just as the beautiful moon in the night sky is equally lovable to all, so God is the same to everyone. If you invoke Him, you too will see Him." Thus the Master was shaping the Holy Mother for her future role as spiritual guide to many people wending their way to Ultimate Truth.

One day, Sri Ramakrishna had asked the Holy Mother, "Have you come to drag me down to the worldly level?" Immediately she replied, "No, why should I drag you to worldly ways? I have come to help you in your chosen path." But we know that Sri Ramakrishna had then completed all his sādhanas and had attained the highest spiritual realization. So what was it that the Holy Mother wanted to help? Evidently it was not Sri Ramakrishna's own spiritual progress. Therefore, it must be that the Holy Mother, by that time had a pre-vision of the Master's spiritual mission in the world, and she, being his counterpart, was also committed to help its fulfillment.

On another occasion, while one day massaging the feet of Sri Ramakrishna, the Holy Mother asked, "How do you regard me?" The Master replied, "The same Mother that is in the Kali temple gave birth to this body, and now resides at the Nahabat, and she again is now massaging my feet. Truly do I see you as a veritable form of the Blissful Mother!" This shows that Sri Ramakrishna and the Holy Mother each knew the other's real Nature and respective mission for the redemption of the world.

Sri Ramakrishna wanted that the Holy Mother should take up the thread of his unfinished task after him. So he awakened the Divine in the Holy Mother by worshipping her as the embodiment of Sōḍaśī-Devī, the Divine Virgin. Thus Sri Ramakrishna, by his selfless love, purity and devotion to God, taught the Holy Mother and endowed her with the heavenly qualities to guide mankind towards the Goal Supreme.

Gradually at first, the ideal of the Motherhood of God began to express itself more and more in the Holy Mother's life. Sri Ramakrishna was very circumspect and mindful of the spiritual welfare of his young disciples. Nothing escaped his notice. One day he noticed that Baburam (later Swami

Premananda) was consuming a good quantity of unleaven bread (*chapāti*) at his evening meals. Actually he was taking five or six pieces from the Holy Mother. Sri Ramakrishna went to the Mother and asked her to limit the number of chapatis to *four*, as the young disciple was expected to rise very early in the morning for his meditation and spiritual practice. The Master suggested that the Mother was "spoiling the spiritual life" of his boys. To Holy Mother, however, this was too much intrusion into the domain of motherhood. She spoke up firmly to the Master: "Why do you get upset because Baburam has eaten two extra chapatis? You don't have to worry; I shall look to their future." The Master became silent. He felt delighted that the Holy Mother was consciously entering into her future role as spiritual ministrator to the growing band of young disciples.

There was another incident that revealed the depth of Holy Mother's maternal feeling too. It showed her highest sense of selflessness and willingness to sacrifice for the welfare of those who came to her. One day as was her habit, she was carrying Sri Ramakrishna's food to his room when a woman said to her, "Mother, please let me carry the plate." Holy Mother agreed and the woman took the plate to the Master's room, placed it before him and went away. But the Master could not touch the food and said to Sarada, "What have you done? Why did you allow her to touch the plate? Don't you know that her character is bad? Now, how am I to eat?" The Mother replied, "I know all about it, but do please take the food today." But the Master would not touch it until he got a promise from the Holy Mother that henceforward, she would bring his food herself. Then the Holy Mother rose with all her courage and motherly dignity and said, "I cannot make such a promise; I shall certainly try to bring your food myself, but if anyone begs me, calling

me 'Mother', then I shall not be able to refuse." Hearing that, the Master seemed pleased and he began to eat. Sri Ramakrishna understood that the Divine Mother Herself was enthroned in Sarada Devi and was guiding events according to Her will. Sarada Devi was surely a fit recipient for the Mother's Grace. As for himself, Sri Ramakrishna was assured that she was a worthy disciple and heir to his mission.

Once Yogin-Ma asked the Holy Mother, "You are so docile, so obedient to Sri Ramakrishna, but how is it that sometimes you are wilful and go against his advice?" The Holy Mother simply said, "I shall not be able to turn away anybody if he addresses me as Mother." So we now know the weak point of the Holy Mother. Therefore it is up to the devotees to take advantage of this weak point of the Holy Mother and attain the highest good by just supplication and addressing her as Mother!

After Sri Ramakrishna, the Holy Mother gave spiritual advice and the holy mantra to many a seeker of God. She was Guru, she was *Iṣṭa*, Chosen Ideal, and she was Mother. In our country the Guru is placed on a very high pedestal—on an equal with Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Maheśvara, so one is always eager to serve one's own Guru. But who could imagine the Guru serving the disciples? In the life of Holy Mother we see that she would serve others in every way possible. We see in her *Life* that she often removed the food plates of her disciples of all castes. When someone objected that it would bring misfortune to the disciples, the Mother said, "Pooh! When Mother serves her child, what misfortune can come to the child? I am their Mother." Once a child of one of the devotees soiled the floor and the Holy Mother cleaned the place herself. When the mother of the baby objected, the Holy Mother simply said, "Am I not the mother of that baby also?"

In the life of the Holy Mother, motherhood was more prominently expressed than her role of Guru and *Iṣṭa*. Swami Premānanda said about the Mother:

Who has understood the Holy Mother? Who can understand her? You have heard about *Sītā*, *Sāvitrī*, *Viṣṇupriyā* and *Rādhārāṇī*. The Holy Mother occupies a far higher place. Not even the slightest trace of divine powers was noticeable in her. Sri Ramakrishna, however, had the *divya*-powers. Many were the occasions when we witnessed his trances and ecstasies. But in the Holy Mother even the *divya*-powers were concealed. What a supreme power that! Victory unto the *Śaktirūpā-Mā*, the all-powerful Mother! Victory unto the Mother!

The Motherhood of God was clearly manifested in the life of Sarada Devi. To her, everyone was a beloved child, and she tried to help all, irrespective of caste, creed and colour. Yet there was no outward show, no noise. All was mother's sweet affection, calmness and silence. Sarat Maharaj, who was one of her most beloved children could hardly ever see her face. When Sarat Maharaj used to go to her for *pranāms*, she kept her face veiled. Sometimes after coming to his room he would utter to himself, "She is so veiled—as if I am her father-in-law." The mother-love of the Holy Mother was so pure, so gentle, that it required no outward expression, all hearts could feel it. Like the gentle dew that falls unseen and unheard, this motherhood of Sri Sarada blossomed the beautiful flowers in the hearts of the devotees.

Seeing Sri Ramakrishna's total renunciation of worldly things, his unselfish love for all beings and his spiritual ecstasies, it was to some extent easy to discern his greatness. But in the case of Holy Mother all these heavenly qualities were kept completely hidden. Hardly any could have a glimpse

of her real greatness. Naturally, from time to time, among those who stayed very near to her, someone had a doubt about her spiritual accomplishments. Yogin-Ma once had such a doubt in her mind. She said within herself: "I have seen the Master as a man of extreme renunciation; but I find the Mother so worldly-minded!" Yogin-Ma was occupied with her meditation and *Japam* on the bank of the Gangā a few days after this, when all on a sudden she had a vision of the Master. The Master told Yogin-Ma: "Look! See what is floating down the Gangā." Yogin-Ma saw that the body of a new born babe was being carried away by the current of the River. The Master said, "Can the Gangā be ever polluted by that? Know Sri Sarada Devi to be as pure as that."

From the very beginning Sri Ramakrishna knew the greatness of the Holy Mother and expressed his feelings about her in his own inimitable way—"She is like a cat covered with ashes. She is *Sārada Saraswatī*—the Goddess of Learning; She has come to give knowledge! She is my *Śakti*."

Surprisingly enough, the Holy Mother also knew of her divine identity, though very rarely did she make it known to others. Once the village woman who used to cook in the Jayrambati Āśrama came to the Holy Mother one winter evening at about nine o'clock. She felt disgust that she had touched a dog while on the road, and said she would now have to take a bath. The Mother said, "Oh, don't bathe so late in the day, simply wash your hands and feet and change your cloth." But the woman was not satisfied. The Mother again suggested a remedy: "Then sip a little water of the Gangā." But this also did not satisfy her, because she felt that simply taking the Gangā water would not be sufficiently purifying. At last the Mother said, "Then touch me." This satisfied the woman, at least for the time being,

and saved her from the trouble of taking a bath in the cold night. In the *Upaniṣads*, it is said that Brahman purifies even those great purifying agents like the water of the Gangā, *Kusa* grass, and others. Is it for nothing that Sri Ramakrishna often referred to Sri Sarada Devi as Brahmamayī (Śakti of Supreme Brahman) ?

Apart from her spiritual ministrations and meeting numerous people with their varied problems, the Holy Mother had to manage her unmanageable relatives with whom she stayed. Radhu, the niece of the Holy Mother, was a problem-child. Radhu's mother was mentally unbalanced and the worldly-minded brothers of the Mother were frequently quarreling among themselves. All these things created much confusion and trouble in the household, and the Holy Mother had to find solutions to please everyone. Besides her family members, numerous people from all over the country came to the Holy Mother with their problems and supplications. All got solace and peace from the Mother, even from time to time, those with strange ideas and behaviour. One Padmabinode as a young man had visited Sri Ramakrishna and got his blessings. Later in life he had joined a theatre and become addicted to alcohol. Still he retained some devotion for the devotees and the Mother. While returning to his home from the theatre late at night he used to pass the Holy Mother's house, sometimes reeling. One night he decided to call on the Mother from the road with a devotional song:

*Waken, Mother! Throw open your door.
I cannot find my way through the dark ;
My heart is afraid...*

Great was his satisfaction when he saw

the shutters of the Mother's window were opening. He began to roll on the ground taking its dust on his head saying, "Mother, so you have awakened. Have you heard your son's prayer ? Since you are up, please accept my salutation. He felt blessed and went his way happily. Once there came an English lady, whose daughter was seriously ill, hoping to get blessings from the Mother. Actresses from the city theatre came and Holy Mother received them with love and sympathy. A poor woman came from the village and told the Mother that her only earning son had passed away and began to cry. Seeing her sorrow the Mother also began to cry, as if her own son had died. After sometime the poor woman took leave of the Mother fully consoled, feeling peace in her heart.

Holy Mother showed love and sympathy to all, helped everybody according to their need and bestowed spiritual peace like a loving mother. It was possible because she possessed a divine nature and manifested the Motherhood of God.

Sometimes when travelling in the mountainous up-country, one becomes downcast in incessant rain and fog, and dismal days follow upon one another ; but just as when the grey clouds are rent by the glorious sun and blue sky, revealing the sublime picture of snow-covered peaks—just so, one's spirit is lifted up to hear the Mother's words of self-revelation: "I am not merely the wife of your Guru, not even your mother for lip's sake ; I am really your own mother." Another time she said, "Always remember that you have a mother." May we ever remember, and may that Mother bestow peace and happiness to all Her children throughout the world.

Worship Of The Mother-Goddess

S. SRINIVASACHAR

In a historical sense the worship of the Mother-Goddess is not a peculiar Indian phenomenon. We find it prevalent among most primitive tribes as well as among the most civilized ancient communities. What is peculiarly Indian is that it is still a living cult in popular Hinduism and is prevalent in one form or another practically throughout India. The religious belief enthroning the female principle as the ultimate power or as an inalienable aspect of the 'male principle' (or God) is found in widely separated cultures like those of ancient Egypt, Sumer and India. Whether it arose as a result of culture contact, or independently in each case, will always remain a subject of controversy. It is likely that the earliest beginning of the mother-cult was in the most ancient agricultural communities which saw in the Sun, Water and the Earth the origin of their food and the essence of their being. The earth as the receiver of sunlight, and rain (both of which descend from the heavens), became an eternal symbol of fertility. It took root in the primitive mind because it was a visible phenomenon and provided simple proof of the existence of forces in nature over which man had little control but of which he was the greatest beneficiary. Primitive people viewed these forces with awe, and the earth's yielding of food was likened by them to the maternal instinct noticed in all living creatures providing food and nurture to their young. The earth gave birth to life in all its multifarious forms and also received it back when its tenure ended. The benevolent aspect of mother earth as the womb of creation was emphasized by Manu thus: *Iyam bhūmirhi bhūtānām śāsṃvati yonirucyate*¹ 'This earth is the eternal womb from which all creatures are produced.'

In the mind of primitive man the concept of the Sky and the Earth uniting to produce and nurture life is a common factor with far-reaching religious significance. While the Heaven with its sun and rain acted as the fertilizing agent, the earth bore the fruit and on that account was deemed the more dominant partner in creation and growth. Early Vedic literature refers to the Heaven-Father as *Dyaus-Pitṛ* (Cf. the ancient Greek *Zeus Pater* and the Roman *Jupiter*) and to Mother-Earth as *Dyāvā-Pṛthivī*. There is an interesting hymn of the *R̥g Veda* in which a bridegroom addresses the girl whom he is about to marry thus: 'I am Dyaus and thou art Pṛthivī. Come, therefore, and let us enter into wedlock.' (*Dyaurāham Pṛthivī tvam tāvehi vivāhāvai.*)

In the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, the teacher admonishes his departing pupils to place reverence for the mother above the father, teacher and guest. By implication the most worshipful status is accorded to the female principle in its manifestation as Mother. In the *Zend Avestā*, the word *Dyaos* (Cf. *Vedic Dyaus*) is used in the sense of 'heavenly orb'. In ancient Babylon, *Tiawath* or *Tiamtu*, the 'Mother of the Gods' or the 'Mother of All' was equated with 'abysmal waters' in which creation took place. *Nina* and *Ishtar* of ancient Egypt ruled over springs, mountains and was not different from the goddess of Rain. The similarity of Pārvatī, the daughter of the mountain-King, Lakṣmī, the daughter of the primeval ocean, Sītā, the daughter of furrowed Mother-Earth, or the river Gaṅgā as the inalienable companion of Rudra-Śiva, to these non-Indian concepts is interesting and cannot be missed. Most rivers in India to this day are revered by the common folk as manifestations of the Divine Mother or as the Mother *herself*. The widespread occurrence of the mother goddess does not

1. *Manu Smṛti*, IX. 37.

always indicate a cultural dissemination from one source, but only suggests that most ancient peoples associated the life-giving elements with their concept of a mother to whom prayers were addressed and sacrifices made.

When we talk of the cult of the mother goddess as prevalent among the tribal and common folk in India we must bear in mind the historical fact that Vedic thought left many of the ancient (and possibly pre-Vedic) centuries. The early monotheistic strain of thought which provided for the later immanence of one supreme principle—namely, Brahman (so characteristic of the *Upaniṣads*), had no room for the polytheism of later days with its host of gods and goddesses. On the other hand, by about six hundred B.C. the early Vedic gods like Indra, Mitra, Varuṇa, Aryaman, Pūṣan, the Aświns and others had come to be recognized as manifestations of the one supreme God, namely Brahman, from Whom everything emanates and into Whom all finally merges. The Harappan or Indus Valley culture (*circa* 1800-1500 B.C.) provides unmistakable proof of the worship of the mother goddess in pre-Vedic times. Excavations have also provided evidence of other related cults like serpent worship, plant and tree worship and possibly also a male god as the protector of all beings. The contemporary cultures of Egypt and Mesopotamia also had their own myths, legends and rituals woven round the belief in a mother goddess. The similarities of some of these myths with those of India, including the great epic stories and the *Purāṇas* cannot be dismissed as purely coincidental. Some, at least of these similarities suggest spread of culture from India.

In India the prehistoric mother cult persisted among the common folk, acquiring in the process of time the character of theism against the background of Vedāntic philosophy, whether of dualist or non-dualist character. It is the purpose of this brief

article to trace, as far as possible the philosophical and sacerdotal changes that the cult has undergone in India over the centuries, which enabled it to entrench itself in the religious ethos of the Hindus. These changes, as we shall see, were undoubtedly due to the close interaction between the pre-Vedic cults and the post-Vedic theism with its principal manifestations as Śaivism, Vaiṣṇavism and Śaktism. The emergence of *Purāṇic* literature in the post-Buddhist period—approximately the second-third century A.D. signifies a synthesis of early Āryan and the indigenous cultures. The proliferation of highly imaginative myths embellished through ornate poetry and enriched with philosophical and moral doctrines answered the religious cravings of the common folk. On this account the Mother-cult admits of no single definition, either as an iconographic or philosophic concept. The Devī has often come to be worshipped as the Supreme Deity—even above Rudra-Śiva, and equally often, as the consort of the one Supreme God, be He Śiva or Viṣṇu. Also she is worshipped as the great benevolent Mother, the giver of plenty, and even as the promulgator of evil and its destroyer.² More often she is the active spouse of the male deity, Śiva, of whom she is an integral part. She exercises compassion for the devout worshipper and is the mediator between him and God. This in general is the status of the Devī, whether she be Pārvatī, Lakṣmī, Saraswatī, Durgā, Kālī or other. The wide variety of iconographic forms to which prayers are addressed has sprung from a plethora of myths and legends to which her origin and her activities are traced. The methods of her worship have also come to acquire scriptural authority through what is known as the *Tantra* and the *Āgama* literature, into which hymns and rituals drawn

2. e.g. Sitalā Devi, goddess of smallpox, has also her benign protective aspect.

from the *Vedas* came to be incorporated. Thus the worship of God as Divine Mother has come down to the present as respectably and potent as any other form of worship of God.

The numerous names by which the Devī is addressed in the *Atharva Veda* (considered to be the last of the four Vedic compilations) make interesting reading. The various names do not necessarily refer to the same Deity, but denote her different aspects or functions which came to be described in the myths. The names of some of the feminine deities occurring in the *Atharva Veda* are also to be found in the *R̥g Veda*—like Uṣas, Aditī, Pṛthivī, Dyāva-Pṛthivī, Āpah and others. But the *Atharva Veda* has added to the list many more with different epithets and attributes which the Śakti cult of later days absorbed as attributes of the ONE MOTHER-GODDESS.³ Most of these are not treated as independent deities. Some of them were the consorts of minor male deities. Besides these, the more prominent of the names of the one Great Devī are: Bhagavatī, Umā, Māhī, Rātrī, Bhāratī, Idā, Vāk, Sarasvatī, Āditī and Diti. These names occur in the *R̥g Veda Samhitā*. It would be difficult to appreciate the significance of these innumerable names without reference to the special attributes denoted by them. For example, Devī and Bhagavatī mean 'goddess', Subhāgā, 'good-luck', Anvadyā (who deserves praise), Surūpamkāranī (bestower of good and comely form), Śivā or Śive (giver of auspiciousness), Sarasvatī (bestower of lear-

ning and wisdom), Śakti (the giver of energy or strength), Mātā (bestower of motherhood), Pāyasvatī (giver of plentiful milk), Oorjasvatī (giver of energy—same as Śakti), Ajarā (bestower of youth), Viśvarūpā (one with multiple forms), Sumanā (who possesses a good heart), Sumaṅgalī (who is auspicious in quality and appearance), Āyusmatī (bestower of longevity), Tapyamānā (one who performs tapas), Duhitā Prajāpateh (daughter of Prajāpati), Samvidānā (the great knower), Āśwavatī (giver of horses), Gomatī (giver of milch cows), Vīravatī (mother of heroic sons), Kṛshna (the beautiful dark one), Indrajanañī (the mother of Indra), and many more like Ambā, Amṛtā, Divyā, Harinī, Hiranmayī, Sahadevī, Nārāyañī, etc. To these may be added the most commonly used names like Umā, Maheśvarī, Gaurī, Caṇḍī, Kalyāñī, Kaumārī, Kātyāyanī, Vaiṣṇavī, Aparṇā, Pārvatī, Durgā, Mahākālī, Eswarī, Cāmuṇḍā, Lalitā, Mahiṣāsūramardini, Lokamātā, Haimavatī, Indirā, Mā, Ramā, Śrī, Maṅgalā Devatā, Bhargavī, Lokajanañī, Padmalaye, Sītā, Mīnakṣī, Dākṣāyini, etc. From this long list of epithets and names (which are here not exhausted) both Śaivite and Vaiṣṇavite cults of later years have drawn freely to glorify the Devī who is the special object of their worship. Bewildering as this list might appear, many more came to be added either as attributes or as alternative names by different worshippers of the mother deity in accordance with local traditions or legends. Thus we have in the South (particularly in Tamil Nadu) the Mother-Goddess known as Paraśaktī; in Maharashtra, Bhavāñī; in Karnataka, Cāmuṇḍī or Mārī; and in Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan, Sītālā Devī; in Bengal, Durgā, Kālī and Mahā-Kālī, to mention but a few. In practice, however, all of them are treated as equivalent appellations for the same Mother-Devī, namely Pārvatī, the consort of Śiva. Once the concept of a single Great Devī came to be widely accepted, the

3. Here are the names found in the *Atharva Veda*: Akuti, Anumate, Jaomi, Granī, Nirti, Prsni, Rohini, Saci Kṛtya, Nrvasi, Apsarasah Saptamatarah, Saptasvasarah, Destri, Sinivali, Indrani, Devapatnyah or Devajamayah, Vasa, Raga, Apodevi, Sraddha, Sita, Osadhīh, Pisaci, Asuri, Vatapatni, Yamini, Brahmajaya, Laksadevi, Ekastaka, Varunani, Vaisvadevi, Vaisvanari, Vasupatni, Laksmi, Raksasi, Ghrtaci, Vedamata, and Virsakapi.

tendency to accommodate all the names or epithets in a single prayer also took root. The result was that for the Devī as formerly for all the great Gods, worship was offered through the chanting of Sahasranama Stotras (hymns composed of the Deity's one thousand names). Thus there are extant the *Lalitā Sahasranāmam*, *Viṣṇu Sahasranāmam*, *Durgā Saptasati*, *Śiva Stuti*, *Devī Suprabhātam* and others.

Far more interesting is the process of assimilation of these different Mother-Goddesses in highly imaginative myths and *Purāṇas* which grew to explain in story-fashion the circumstances under which She acquired all those epithets and nomenclatures. Philosophies and theologies also gradually expanded. Some of these are undoubtedly of *Vedic* origin, as for example the stories of Uśas, Aditi, Pṛthivī, etc. but many others are positively of the Purāṇic age, dating mostly from the third to eighth centuries A.D. During this time the popular cults came to be incorporated in the Hindu pantheon. Before we survey the rich iconographic tradition it will be interesting to see how the more prominent of the mother goddesses came to be accepted as the Mahā-Devī, or as Her incarnations.

The explanation lies in the history of Hindu theism. The steady flow of philosophic ideas arising from free speculations of the *Upāniṣads* which entered popular cults started from about the fourth century B.C. Interpretations of Upaniṣadic philosophy seemed to provide rational justification for the Personal God or Goddess who would listen to prayers and respond to ritual worship. Even Buddhism and Jainism, which professedly are non-Vedic in outlook could not escape this popular urge to worship a Personal God with ritual. Though these two religions did not provide for a God as creator, their founders came to represent that personal element and the theistic system that the lay-worshipper has always craved

for. Historically, it is conceded even by the great grammarian Pāṇini, (circa 4th century B.C.) that Vāsudeva must be regarded as the Supreme God who deserves worship. A couple of centuries later, both Vāsudeva and Saṅkarṣaṇa were worshipped as inseparable divinities, and Vāsudeva in particular emerged as the most worshipful God. (the *Ghosundi* and *Besnagar* inscriptions) Heliodorus, the Greek ambassador from Takshasila to King Bhagabhadra (Malva) who set up the Garuda column in a Viṣṇu temple at Besnagar in the second century B.C., calls himself 'a Bhāgavata'.

The emergence of the Bhāgavata cult a few centuries before the Christian era is of relevance here because the growth of theism and the proliferation of cults based on theism in later centuries is closely linked to the elaboration of ancient myths (including those in the Vedic literature) and the emergence of new ones covering a wide range of gods and goddesses whose adoration had become strongly entrenched in the religious traditions of the people. Possibly, the Bhāgavata cult of the fifth century B.C. appeared as a reform movement⁴. It was based on theistic principles and came to be known as *Ekāntika Dharma*, or religion of single-minded devotion to *one God*. According to Sri Bhandarkar:

In its background stood the *Bhagavad Gita*, a discourse professed to have been preached by Vāsudeva-Krishna. It soon assumed a sectarian form and was called the Pancharātra or Bhāgavata religion. It was professed by a tribe of Kṣatriyas of the name *Sātvata* and was noticed by Megasthenes about the end of the fourth century before Christ, as the religion of such a specific people.⁵

This Bhāgavata school of theism gathered in the course of centuries widespread popu-

4. *Selected Works of R. G. Bhandarkar*, Vol. IV, Ed. Narayan Bapuji Utgikar (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1929) p. 142.

5. *Ibid.*

larity with the accretion of many myths and legends surrounding Krishna and the other incarnations of Viṣṇu or Nārāyaṇa. As a parallel development new philosophical doctrines, starting from the monism or Advaita of Śaṅkarāchārya and culminating in the philosophy of Rāmānuja (*Viśiṣṭādvaita* or qualified monism) and the dualism of Madhvāchārya, furnished doctrinal foundations to the Bhāgavata movement.

Meanwhile, another school of theism centering round Rudra (a Vedic god symbolizing the destructive phenomena of nature) together with his Rudriyas (personalized attributes) was transformed into Rudra-Śiva, the auspicious and benevolent god who could be propitiated through worship. As Rudra, the terrible god, whose home was in the mountain and the cemetery, and who lorded over the animal kingdom, was transformed into Maheśvar-Siva, and both the aspects—creative as well as destructive—became his primary attributes. By the ninth century A.D. the adoration of Śiva as the Supreme Deity had benefited from the doctrines of Sri Śaṅkara, and several Śaiva sects with a literature of their own called the *Āgamas* and the *Purānas*, had arisen. The Vaiṣṇavite and Śaivite schools of theism were parallel developments and each branched out into several sects, often distinguished by doctrinal differences. The *Kāpālikas*, *Kālamukhas* and *Pāśupatas* were the more important of the Śaivite sects before the birth of Kashmir Śaivism in the ninth century. The aberrations of these earlier sects involving animal sacrifice, use of wine and worship of the Śakti called Kapālakunḍalā or Cāṇḍikā (a bloodthirsty deity) became discredited later. The Kashmir school of Śaivism was refreshingly more sober, probably influenced by Buddhism and Śaṅkara's philosophy. In the South, the *Lingāyat* movement of which Basava was the greatest exponent (12th century) gave to Śaivism a humane philosophy based on *Bhakti* and rejection of

caste and superstitious practices in the name of religion. In its inception it was a reformatory movement and broke away from the Brahmanic system.

Worship of Śakti or Mother-Goddess.

The foregoing brief account of Hindu theism is only intended to preface the growth of Śaktism along with Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism. Perhaps Max Mueller's description of these cults (in spite of their common philosophy) as 'henotheism' is more appropriate. Basically, the Śakti cult is an offshoot of Śaivism which is based on the worship of Rudra-Śiva, of whom Pārvatī or Umā is a vital, inseparable part. She is also known by different other names with variations in her iconographic presentation. The worship of this female principle in one form or another, under one name or another, prevailed among the ordinary people, not excluding some who believed in the sanctity or authority of the *Vedas*. There was no doubt an aboriginal element in the worship of Rudra, but under the peculiar conditions that prevailed in the post-Buddhist and *post-Upaniṣadic* periods, the cults associated with this deity came to be absorbed in a loose socio-religious framework together with the tribes who paid allegiance to them. The medium of this absorption was a variety of myths. Some of these might have been prevalent among the people but several others were of later growth, finding expression in the *Purānic* literature of the Gupta and the post-Gupta era. This potent force or Śakti was personalized and worshipped as the Supreme Deity. Once, it was common to offer animal sacrifices to this deity in the course of worship as She was believed to possess immense power to do harm. Referring to the benign as well as the malefic aspects of Śaktism, Sri R. G. Bhandarkar makes the interesting observation:

Since the lustful nature of man is very strong, that goddess under the name of Tripurāsundarī

(the Beauty of the three celestial cities) or Lalitā (meaning sportively graceful) became the Creator of the world, and was also worshipped with debasing and sensual rites; and thus came in [sic] the school of the Śāktas who looked forward to an identity with Tripurāsundari as the goal of their existence.⁶

Closely connected with Rudra-Śiva and Śakti, other cults like those of Ganapati-Vināyaka and Skanda found widespread acceptance among Śaivites. Highly imaginative myths grew up eventually to establish their relationship to Śiva and Pārvatī as their children. This is a different story.

As myths proliferated with the growth of Tāntric practices, the status of Devī worship also grew basically around the concept of Rudra and Śakti. In the *Atharva Veda*, this female principle is called *Tejomayī*. She was believed to inhere in all beings—animals, gods and men alike—in the form of *tejas* or energy. The *Atharva Veda* also takes over the *R̥g Vedic* female deities like Aditi, Uśas, Dyāvā-Pṛthivī, etc. and treating them as synonymous with Aditi (wife of Sage Kāśyapa), accords her the dual status of being wife of the One supreme God, as well as 'Mother of all gods'. Since she came to personify primeval energy, she is conceived both in her benevolent as well as malefic aspects under different names. In her malefic aspect the Devī invariably appears as the consort of Rudra (being himself considered in the *R̥g Veda* as a malefic deity) with names like Rātri, Paisāci, Kritya, Nirti, etc.—names which appear in the *Atharva Veda*.⁷

Of immediate relevance to our current theme is the fact that the concept of the female deity as prevalent in the villages and tribal communities (both in North and South India) emphasized the malefic aspect. It did not take long for the non-Vedic cults of the

mother-goddess to coalesce with the *Vedic* deity through myths. The *Tantra* and *Āgama* scriptures (probably of the 4th-5th centuries A.D.) came to provide theological as well as iconographic norms for the ritual worship of the goddess. This is one of the most interesting aspects of the religio-cultural development of ancient India. Though it was coeval with the Vedantic systems, at the level of the masses, belief in a mother-goddess was practically unaffected by the latter. In time the Devī in her many forms became associated with one or the other of the schools of Vedānta and, together with the rich imagery that the *Purāṇas* provided, came to acquire greater credibility and acceptability. As Prof. Wolf said in his *Outline of Modern Knowledge*:

Indeed to the student of the history of human thought one of the most surprising things is the presence throughout the ages of the same stock of fundamental ideas, which are often modified and redefined in many ways but are never abandoned entirely.⁸

While the *Upaniṣadic* concept of Brahman makes no mention of the sex of the Supreme Deity, the philosophy underlying the *Tantras* emphasizes the Motherhood of God, and certain prescribed forms of worship of this personal deity were calculated to promote one's material and spiritual well-being. They prescribe also yogic *sādhana*s designed to bestow on the worshipper certain occult powers which will take the devotee on to a spiritual plane. So, the Tantric literature that later came into being has fully utilized not only the *Upaniṣadic* philosophy, but also Jaimini's *Mīmāṃsā* with its emphasis on rites and rituals and Patanjali's *Yoga-darśana*, which treats on *sādhana*s for acquiring yogic powers. It is thus that the Yoginī cult came into wide prominence in Central India during the ninth to twelfth centuries.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 223.

7. Pushpendra Kumar (XI) "Historical and Critical Studies in the Atharva Veda", Suryakant Bāli Ed. (New Delhi: Nag Publishers, 1976) p. 153.

8. A. Wolf, *Outline of Modern Knowledge*, p. 4.

In the *Tantras* which extol the role of the Mother as vital in the creation of life, the *Puruṣa* or Śiva is only the inactive principle. The union of active and inactive principles is fundamental to theology.

The relationship between the Devī cult and *Tantra* is very close. The Devī is worshipped both as the originator and the protector of life. But She is also the destroyer of life when evil seeps into it. As goddess Kālī, She stands on the breast of Mahākāla, Śiva Himself, showing that She transcends time. As Durgā or Cāmuṇḍeśvarī, She becomes the fierce slayer of Mahiṣāsura, the great black buffalo-demon under whose tyranny good people—even the gods could not live. As Karu-Marī, Death Herself, She appears in the dual role of Causer of pestilence as well as Redeemer and Protectress. As Gaurī, Kumārī, and Umā she is worshipped as an innocent unmarried maiden totally devoted to the Absolute, Lord Śiva. As Ādyā Śakti, Parā-Śakti, or Mahā-Māyā, the Mother becomes all-powerful and all-pervading, encompassing even Śiva. It is this concept of the Divine Mother as Mahā-Kālī that Sri Ramakrishna contemplated, experiencing the ineffable joy of encounter with Her as a manifestation of *Tejas* or brilliance.

The *Tantric* literature in South India, surrounding Śakti or Devī goes back to the Sangam period (2nd century A.D.), during the reigns of the Chera, Pandya and Chola kings of the Tamil region. In his doctoral thesis entitled 'Tantric Cult of South India', Dr. Nagaswami observes:

Sangam works refer to various aspects of Śakti, particularly in her Durga and Kali manifestations. Subrahmanya is extolled in *Tirumurgarrupadai* as the son of Haimavatī (*mulaimangal mahan*). He is also called the son of goddess Durgā, the giver of victory, and son of the goddess Kālī.⁹

9. Dr. R. Nagaswami, *Tantric Cult of South India* (New Delhi: Agam Kala Prakashan, 1982) p. 4.

As Durgā (or Korravai) she is the giver of victory and as the ancient goddess Kālī (or Palaiyol) she is the presiding deity over the forest. The *Silappadhikāram*, a great Tamil epic of the Sangam period, is replete with references to the Śākta cult and pictures the peculiar customs among the hill and forest tribes pertaining to the adoration of Śakti. In her iconographic representation she is portrayed with the third eye in her forehead, a serpent as her breast-band and with Śiva as part of her body. Like Śiva, also, the Devī sports a blue throat, indicative of the poison she swallowed to save mankind when it emerged from the churning of the milk-ocean. It is evident that by the fifth century A.D. Durgā with all the attributes given to Śiva, in addition to her own, appears in the Sangam literature. There are few villages in Tamil Nadu or Karnataka without a *Gramā* or *Nagara Devatā*, a presiding female deity. In one of the verses in *Silappadhikāram*, the Madurapati Devatā (Durgā) is said to combine in herself the valour of Mahā-Lakṣmī, Mahā-Sarasvatī and Mahā-Durgā.¹⁰ This accords with the concept delineated in the *Devī-Mahātmyam* of the *Markandeya Purāṇa* where Durgā, Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī appear as facets of one Deity. The *Nagara-devatā* (town patroness-Devī) came to be worshipped universally in the South as she was believed to be Protectress from all evils and pestilence, not only of men but of crops, cattle and villages. The *Silappadhikāram* elevates the status of the Devī above all, even including Lord Śiva. She receives adoration as the Highest Reality, even from Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva. Her Knowledge is pure Jñāna; She is the embodiment of the *Vedas*, the accompanying philosophy being akin to the doctrine of *Advaita*. All ritual treatises like the *Āgamas* have two main sections, the *Kriyapāda* is the ritualistic and the *Jñānapāda*, the philosophic part. Both

10. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

hold that by various sacrificial rites one attains supreme *Jñāna* which is the ultimate bliss and goal of human beings.¹¹

The worship of Pārvatī in her aspects as Durgā and Kālī received great encouragement under the Pallavās, Pandyās and Cholās. In the post-Cholā period it received further encouragement under the Vijayanagar Kings, and later the Nayaks of Madura. Some of the finest iconographic representations of the Devī belong to the Pallavā and Cholā periods. While under the Pallavās, Śaivism, Vaiṣṇavism and Śaktism received almost equal patronage, the more favoured deities among the common people continued to be Śiva and Durgā during the Cholā period. Śaivism received special royal patronage and this is exemplified in the innumerable sculptures and temples of this period. By the fifth century we see the Devī cult fully incorporated into the Brahmanical religion in South India, and the worship of the Mother Goddess came to conform to norms prescribed by the *Tantra-Āgamas* or Vedāntic doctrines and was accompanied by hymns drawn from the Vedic lore. The deity might appear under different names like Umā, Durgā, Lakṣmī, Saraswatī, Tripurasundarī, Bhadrakālī, Icchā-Śakti, Parā-Śakti, Jñāna-Śakti, Ādi-Śakti and Kriyā-Śakti, or as Brahmanī, Vaiṣṇavī, Rudrānī, or Niśumbinī (to mention only a few), with slight differences in iconographic presentation, but the reference is to the same Mother-Goddess who is both the consort of Śiva and embodiment of his vital or heroic spirit—the *rājasika* element within him. One of the most common forms in which the Devī is worshipped in temples is as Mahiṣāsuramardini (the slayer of the buffalo-demon Mahiṣa) She is also called Durga-Mātā, Cāmundeswarī, or Caṇḍikā and is pictured as a young beautiful woman with eight, ten or twenty arms, each wielding a weapon. She

rides on a lion and is supported in her fight by several *Gaṇās*, Her female supporters.

The Śrī Chakra

Considered the most sacred symbol (*Yantra*) of the Śakti cult and worshipped in many a household, is the Śrī Chakra for which a whole chapter is devoted in the fourth *Tantra*. Here, Śrī represents Śakti and the *Chakra* is a diagram drawn with a stipulated number of overlapping triangles with a centre called the *Bindu* on which the devotee is expected to contemplate. This diagram is enclosed in a series of three concentric circles, the running space between them being relieved by lotus petals. The *Śrī Chakras* are generally engraved on a metallic plate of copper, silver or gold, and are used as objects of worship. The *Śrī Chakra* consists of nine interlacing triangles of varying size forming in all forty-three triangles. In each triangular subdivision a code letter called the *Bijākṣara* (holy mantra) is engraved, each of which is endowed with an esoteric meaning. In most Śiva temples in South India, and more particularly in the Devī temples, the *Śrī Chakra* is kept for special worship. A devotee who seeks to worship the *Śrī Chakra* must be initiated into it by a qualified person who knows the significance of all the *Bijākṣaras*. Though the *Śrī Chakra* is usually engraved on a plane surface, it can also be in a pyramidal form where the various triangles are stacked one over the other in different planes, the top-most containing the small Bindu circle. If the *Śrī Chakra* is associated with the eight *Mātrikā* deities, the Meru (pyramidal top) represents the Kailāsa or abode of Śiva ; and if associated with *Vāsinī* deities, it represents the *Bhu* or Earth.¹²

11. *Tantrism in Tamil Classical Literature*, p. 11

12. T. A. Gopinatha Rao, *Elements of Hindu Iconography*, Vol. I, Part II, Delhi: Jawahar Nagar, Motilal Banarsidas, Bungalow Rd. p. 330.

There are several other *yantras* with slight differences in design which are worshipped in place of an icon, or are worn as talismans.

In most of the Śiva temples of the medieval period we see a sculptured panel of seven goddesses called *Saptamātrikā*, either as a part of the monument or in a separate shrine. This cult is a part of the *Devī* worship and is derived from a myth in which the powerful demon *Andhakāsura* had to be killed by Śiva by invoking the help of Śakti, called *Yogeśvarī*, who issued forth from the flame in his mouth. *Yogeśvarī* was assisted by the female counterparts of other gods like *Brahmā* (*Brāhmī*), *Maheśwara* (*Māheśvarī*), *Kumāra* (*Kaumārī*), *Viṣṇu* (*Vaiṣṇavī*), *Varāha* (*Vārāhī*), *Indra* (*Indrānī*) and *Yāma* (*Cāmuṇḍā*).

Vaiṣṇavism and the Śakti Cult

As we observed earlier, *Vaiṣṇavī*, *Nārāyanī*, etc. are other forms of *Devī* or Śakti, representing the vital energy emanating from *Viṣṇu*. But the *Vaiṣṇavite* theology of *Rāmaṇuja* does not provide for or justify the worship of *Lakṣmī*, *Viṣṇu*'s consort, as a separate deity equal to, or on occasion superior to her consort. In fact, Śaktism as a cult has no place in the philosophy of *Rāmaṇuja* or the theology of the Śrī *Vaiṣṇavas*. According to *Rāmaṇuja*, there is one and only one Supreme Being, (*Puruṣottama*, *Paramātma*) and that is *Viṣṇu* or *Nārāyana* or *Brahman*, to whom alone all worship is due. The entire sentient and non-sentient world (*Cidacitviṣiṣṭa*) which constitutes the cosmos, is His body. God's will is everything—creation, preservation and destruction. The *Ātman* or individual soul which shares many qualities with Him except two, has for its ultimate spiritual goal union with God, but not complete merger or identity. This union or *Sāyujya* comes to the devotee only as a result of His Mercy or compassion for the pure and devout. *Sri S. N. Das Gupta* says:

But there exists in *Nārāyana* the deity *Lakṣmī* who is like the essence of Him or the body of Him and who has voluntarily reconciled her will absolutely with that of *Nārāyana*. Though in such a conception *Lakṣmī* is dependent on *Nārāyana*, yet for the devotees *Nārāyana* and *Lakṣmī* go together, and for them the mercy of God is to be attributed to both *Lakṣmī* and *Nārāyana* taken together.¹³

Between Śrī (*Lakṣmī*) and *Hari* (*Nārāyana*) there is no duality and as such, the devotee has no need to worship *Lakṣmī* apart from *Nārāyana*. While she is part and parcel of *Nārāyana*, she embodies the principle of mercy or compassion so close to the heart of her consort that when a devotee approaches God in all humility after completely subduing his ego, *Lakṣmī*—the Merciful, intercedes on the devotee's behalf and pleads with her consort to grant him salvation. At this stage of self-surrender, the devotee invokes *Nārāyana* not as an individual deity, but as the Supreme *Hari* who embodies *Lakṣmī* as well. This is the psychology of *Prapatti* (self-surrender) which *Rāmaṇuja*'s great commentator, *Vedanta Desika*, has propounded in his *Rahasya Traya Sāra*. This *Prapatti*, surrender to the protection of God, is open to all regardless of sex or caste, and is unconnected with any place or time—all times and places being appropriate and holy. When the devotee is accepted by God through *Prapatti*, all his sins are immediately pardoned except the sin of *kraurya* (cruelty). This is the essence of *Bhakti* in *Rāmaṇuja*'s philosophy. Since even this divine grace comes to the devotee at the will of the Lord, *Lakṣmī* who is the embodiment of all the best qualities of a mother (*Jaganmātā*) will be helpful in pleading the case of the devotee.

We see therefore that in the theology of *Rāmaṇuja* there is no sanction for the worship of the *Devī* or Mother-Goddess, even

13. *S. N. Dasgupta, A History of Indian Philosophy, Vol. III (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass,) p. 375.*

as Lakṣmī. She can be worshipped only as a part of Nārāyaṇa. Since His love for Lakṣmī supercedes His love of anything else, He will listen to her pleadings on behalf of the devotee. So the followers of Rāmānuja worship the supreme deity only as Śrī Hari or Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa. They consider the worship of the Devī in all Her so-called malefic roles as amounting to worship of *kṣudra* (the mean or vile) which is a distraction from the true path of *Bhakti*. By worshipping any of the devīs the devotee gets, if he gets at all, very transient and perishable benefits. They have no independent existence apart from God, who is Nārāyaṇa, and are embodiments of *rājasic* and *tāmasic* qualities. The real devotee who is a *sāttvic* should therefore not fritter away his devotion on these minor (and often non-existent) deities. The real Devī or Mahā-Śakti always dwells in God, and being the embodiment of Mercy, She will not demand wine or sacrifice or ritualistic penances. Any worship which takes recourse to these amounts to *Kāmya-Karma*, worship motivated by gross materialistic desires. A pure life, uncontaminated by wild passions of any kind and leading to the total subjugation of the ego and surrender to God is the essence of Ramanuja's philosophy and the theology of the Śrī Vaiṣṇavas.

There is therefore a basic doctrinal diffe-

rence between the *Bhakti-Prapatti-Mārga* of Rāmānuja and the Devī Bhāgavatam which extols the supremacy of the female element. This difference is best brought out in the following stanzas in the *Devī-Stuti*:

Commonly it is said that Brahman creates
the universe,
Yet the learned in the Veda and Purana
Speak of His birth as from the navel-lotus
of Murari.

Although it is said He creates, yet
He is himself dependent therein.
Even Murari, in the blossom of his
navel-lotus

Brahma was born—
Therefore, Ananta, with his thousand
hoods

His support,
How can He who is Himself supported
Be called a leader in the creation of the
world?

Even the water of the ocean cannot exist
without a container, and therefore,
I take refuge with Her, the Mother of all
beings,
Who exists in all things in the form of
power (Śakti-rūpā).¹⁴

14. D. N. Bose and H. Haldar, *Tantras: Their Philosophy and Occult Secrets* (Calcutta: Dharendra Nath Bose Pubs., 1956) p. 84.

Sri Ramakrishna: "Is Kali, my divine mother, of a black complexion? She appears black because she is viewed from a distance, but when intimately known She is no longer so. The sky appears blue at a distance; but look at it close by and you will find that it has no colour. The water of the ocean looks blue at a distance, but when you go near and take it in your hand, you will find that it is colourless."

The Secret Teachings of Christ

PRAVRAJIKA BRAHMAPRANA

One day in December, 1945, Muhammed Ali of the al-Samman clan saddled his camel and went to the Jabal al-Tarif, a mountain near the town of Nag Hammadi, to collect fertilizer. The mountain was riddled with painted caves that had been used for burial thousands of years ago and had since been robbed and abandoned. As Muhammed was digging, he came across a red, clay pot about three feet high. What could it contain? Gold? Riches? Quickly he shattered the pot, and to his surprise he found treasure of another sort. Gold flakes of parchment wafted up and disintegrated in the air! Inside the pot were thirteen, leather-bound, papyrus manuscripts.

But Muhammed was careless of what he had discovered. Returning home he heaped the parchment near the oven—handy fuel for his mother, who later fed some of the writings into the fire. If only she knew how priceless her kindling was! Muhammed had discovered the Gnostic Gospels, which include the Secret Teachings of Christ. They were the Coptic translations of the more ancient Greek editions, the lost originals.

From December, 1945, onward, these texts were some of the most sought after manuscripts in the world. Three weeks later, after Muhammed murdered a man and cut out his heart to avenge his father's death in a blood feud, he handed over the documents to a priest to safeguard them from the authorities. The priest, however, lent one of the books to a local history teacher, who immediately sent it to Cairo for appraisal.

It was not long before the collection appeared on the Black Market, attracting the attention of Egyptian government officials, who confiscated most of the thirteen books and donated them to the Coptic Museum in

Cairo. A large part of the thirteenth volume was smuggled out of Egypt and sold into the hands of the Jung Foundation in Zurich.

Altogether fifty-two texts were discovered at Nag Hammadi, in upper Egypt. The papyrus dates back to about 350-400 AD, but scholars agree that most of the Greek originals must have been written no later than 150 AD. To quote the orthodox Bishop of Lyons, writing as early as 180 AD, "(The Christian heretics) boast they possess more gospels than there really are." Some of these gospels include "The Gospel of Truth," "The Gospel of Thomas," "The Apocryphon (or Secret Book) of John," "The Dialogue of the Savior," "The Gospel of Philip," and "The Sophia of Jesus Christ." From the titles alone, is it any wonder that these gospels were for thirty years the source of political squabbles and academic rivalries, not to speak of centuries of suppression? Finally an international team of scholars was chosen to edit, translate, and publish what is now known as *The Nag Hammadi Library*. In 1977, the first English edition came off the press.

Why are the Gnostic Gospels important? Rather, let us ask, "Why were they banned and hidden so long?" With the discovery at Nag Hammadi, the doors of history were flung open, and alternative forms of early Christianity came tumbling over the threshold like skeletons stuffed in a closet. Christianity's controversial past was made public, and its formative years before the Church assumed a radical turn. Either we discount these texts as worthless heresy of dissident principles and practices, or study them as the key to a diverse, but broader Christianity.

If we go back to the source of Christianity,

the period from the Christ Incarnation to 200 AD., when Christianity was supposedly in its purest, simplest form, we go back to a time altogether different from the one portrayed in the "Acts of the Apostles." According to Acts, all the followers of Christ lived in communities, shared property and money, worshipped together, honored the same teachings of Christ, and submitted to Apostolic authority.¹ The discovery at Nag Hammadi shatters this legend. In the known world, during the early Christian era, many distinct religious communities sprang up and numerous gospels circulated.

The origins of Gnosticism are uncertain and still debated among scholars. Gnostic communities, although in the minority, probably predated Christianity, drawing upon various religious traditions and synthesizing them into distinctive beliefs and practices. One possible source of Gnostic beliefs is Indian religious thought. We know for a fact that from 80-200 AD., trade passed freely between the Greco-Roman world and the Far East, and one notable item of exchange was religious thought. In 225 AD., Hippolytus, an orthodox Christian, wrote:

There is...among the Indians a heresy...They say that God is light, not like the light one sees, nor like the sun nor fire, but to them God is knowledge (gnosis) through which the secret mysteries of nature are perceived by the wise.²

With the Christ Incarnation, Gnosticism became Christianized, in fact, radically Christian. Over against this Gnostic community, there also emerged an orthodox Christianity. What had started as a protest movement with Christ and his small circle

of followers flowered into an organization, and as the religious body grew, its original ideals became tempered by the stamp of bureaucracy. Its outlook shifted; the intimate teacher-student relationship diffused into a hierarchy of bishops, priests, and deacons, and Christ's teachings were reworked into Church doctrines. Alongside this emerging orthodoxy, Gnosticism existed as a witness to mystical elements of the early Christian faith. To quote James Robinson in his introduction to *The Nag Hammadi Library*:

Christian Gnosticism emerged as a reaffirmation, though in somewhat different terms, of the original stance of transcendence central to the very beginnings of Christianity. Such Gnostic Christians surely considered themselves the faithful continuation...of that original stance which made Christians Christian.³

The Greek word "gnosis" means knowledge. It is not rational knowledge, but the deeper knowledge that comes with spiritual insight. Those who cannot claim this realization are agnostic, literally "not-knowing." Self knowledge is knowledge of God, and the highest level of knowledge is that which reveals the Self and God as one.

The Gnostic believes that ignorance, not sin, is the fundamental religious problem and accepts the idea of enlightenment rather than repentance. Jesus did not come to save us from our sins, but to lead the way to spiritual attainment, which is the Father. To quote "The Gospel of Truth":

Such is the way of those who have cast ignorance aside from them like sleep, not esteeming it as anything...but they leave (it) behind like a dream in the night.⁴

1. King James Version, THE HOLY BIBLE. New York: Thomas Nelson, Publishers, 1972. ref. "The Acts of the Apostles": 2:44-45, 4:34.

2. Elaine Pagels, THE Gnostic GOSPELS. (Winner of the National Book Critics Circle Award) New York: Vintage Books, A Division of Random House, 1981, p. xxi.

3. James M. Robinson, ed., THE NAG HAMMADI LIBRARY (hereafter cited as NHL). New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1977, p. 4.

4. George McRae, trans., "Gospel of Truth" 29:32-30:34; NHL p. 43.

Another important principle of Gnosticism is that Jesus is ultimately not different from the rest of humanity. Both he and man come from the same divine source. His role is to lead man on the interior path to enlightenment. Once illumined, the disciple becomes one with his spiritual guide. In "The Gospel of Thomas," Jesus said:

He who will drink from my mouth will become as I am: I myself shall become he, and the things that are hidden will be revealed to him.⁵

To impress this point, Jesus encouraged his disciples to become greater than he. In "The Apocryphon of James" we read:

Become better than I; make yourselves like the son of the Holy Spirit.⁶

From these basic tenets of Gnosticism—the divinity of man, his fundamental spiritual obstacle of ignorance, and the goal of self-realization—we see an unmistakable similarity of thought between the East and the West. Perhaps Gnosticism was influenced by the East, or perhaps these principles arose independently in both places. In any case, to quote Dr. Pagels:

What we call Eastern and Western religions, and tend to regard as separate streams, were not clearly differentiated 2,000 years ago.⁷

The Gnostic clung to what he understood as the mystical teachings of Christ, teachings that closely resembled Upaniṣadic truths. It was precisely his points of contact, however, with early Christianity that made the Gnostic co-follower of Christ a more subtle and dangerous rival than the Indian, Greek or Roman pagan.

The early orthodox Christian was martyred for his faith. It was this same tenacity to

preserve his faith that later made him suppress what he feared to be his enemy. The victim became the predator. The heretic became the heresy-hunter. This syndrome hoisted the Church edifice and inspired a bitter crusade against Gnosticism.

When we lay before us the Gnostic Gospels, we begin to piece together a fascinating political effort to annihilate an important aspect of Christianity and to destroy the seeds of a mystical tradition. With the Emperor Constantine's conversion in the fourth century, the wave reached its zenith: Christianity became the official, approved religion and Gnosticism became a criminal offence.

It was probably at this time in upper Egypt, that a monk from the monastery of Saint Pachomius placed the forbidden scriptures in an earthen jar and spirited them away to the nearby Jabal al-Tarif, where they remained hidden for sixteen hundred years. During early Christianity, the concept of God the Mother swept through the Church underground like a massive quake, rocking the foundations of the Church and creating in its wake wave after wave of successive tremors. How afflicted the early Church fathers must have been as they ruminated on the disasters of this heresy!

In the Gnostic religion the Divine Mother is a central belief. God is not Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; the Holy Trinity is Father, Mother and Son. The Apostle John, grief-stricken after the crucifixion, was blessed with a vision of the Trinity. In "The Apocryphon of John" he writes:

(T)he (heavens were opened and the whole) creation (which is) under heaven shone and (the world) trembled. (And I was afraid, and I) saw in the light...a likeness with multiple forms...and the likeness had three forms.

The vision spoke:

John, Jo(h)n, why do you doubt, and why are you afraid?...I am the one who (is with you)

5. Elaine Pagels, p. xx; ref. "Gospel of Truth" 108; NHL p. 129.

6. Frederik Wisse, trans., "The Apocryphon of John" 7:19-22; NHL p. 32.

7. Elaine Pagels, p. xxi.

always. I (am the Father); I am the Mother; I am the Son.⁸

Not only is the Mother immanent like the Holy Spirit, She is also transcendent. God is the Primal Source—the Eternal Male-Female Principle. The “Ineffable” and the “Depth” are Gnostic metaphors that describe the Father; Mother is “Grace,” “Silence,” the “Primal Womb,” and the “Mother of the All.” This masculo-feminine duo is a dyad—two independent principles that are united and act as one. This relationship of two complementary, mutually dependent powers is akin to the Yin-Yang of Taoism and the Purusha-Prakriti of Indian Samkhya philosophy. In one Gnostic text, the male Principle is described as the “Mind of the Universe which (maintains) all things;” whereas the Female Power is “the Intelligence which produces all things.”⁹

This brings us to a third characteristic of God the Mother. She is Wisdom or Sophia. In the *Gnostic Gospels*, Elaine Pagels presents this aspect of Knowledge or Conception as a play on words. She suggests that Wisdom is the Female Power which “conceived” creation. To quote Pagels:

According to one teacher, the double meaning of the term conception—physical and intellectual—suggests this possibility: “The image of thought (ennoia) is feminine, since...it is the power of conception.”¹⁰

In other words, Wisdom or Sophia is another name of the Mother as the creative power.

What was the Church’s reaction to the Motherhood of God? By 200 AD., feminine imagery disappeared from orthodox Christian tradition.¹¹

8. Ibid; p. 61. ref. “The Apocryphon of John” 1:30-2:15; NHL, p. 99.

9. Ibid; p. 60.

10. Ibid; p. 64.

11. Ibid; p. 68.

God the Mother was an anathema; its social repercussions were scandalous and far-reaching. Apparently in many of the Gnostic communities, women were emancipated and treated as equals; in the synagogues and orthodox Christian churches they were not. Tertullian, one orthodox Christian, writes:

These heretical women—how audacious they are! They have no modesty; they are bold enough to teach, to engage in argument, to enact exorcisms, to undertake cures, and, it may be, even to baptize!¹²

Which came first—the Church’s reaction to women or to God the Mother? Women’s subordination was critical in the formative years of the Church; its roots go very deep in Judaic tradition. But today that early social and religious bias has become hardened into Church canon. In 1977, the Pope stated that a woman could not become a priest “because our Lord was a man”. Curiously, by restricting the religious rights of more than half the world’s population, the Bishop of Rome also limited God. Though Mary is venerated as the mother of God, she is not worshipped as God the Mother.

There is evidence that the earliest Christian movement regarded women as equal to men. Jesus himself accepted women disciples and paid a profound tribute to Mother Mary. While on the cross, he commanded his beloved disciple John: “Behold, thy Mother!” Even after Christ’s death, women were honored as prophets, teachers, and evangelists and attended church meetings along with men. Furthermore, as part of the early Christian rite of initiation, the mentor would recite: “...there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.”¹³

The Apostle Paul accepted this belief, but he also adhered to the Jewish outlook of

12. Ibid; p. 71-72.

13. Ibid; p. 73. ref. Galatians 3:28.

man's authority over women. Pauline Christianity became the Church line. Though by 200 AD., Roman law had made great strides in emancipating women socially and politically, this freedom was primarily the privilege of the upper class. There women could enter educational institutions, business, athletic events, social life and war. However, in the Church, the deep-seated prejudice against women prevailed. In "I Corinthians," Paul states:

Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience...for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.¹⁴

Again, in the first letter of Paul to Timothy:

Let the women learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.¹⁵

These commands are more like sharp rebukes than reasoned church code. They seem to be reactions to something deep and disturbing occurring among some early Christians. In the Gnostic "Gospel of Mary," we perhaps find Paul's provocation. According to this gospel, after the crucifixion, the apostles asked Mary Magdalene to assuage their grief and fear by sharing what Christ had revealed to her. Mary consented and began to relate her visions, whereupon Peter interrupted:

Did he really speak privately with a woman (and) not openly to us? Are we to turn about and all listen to her? Did he prefer her to us?

Mary replied:

My brother Peter, what do you think? Do you think that I thought this up myself in my heart, or that I am lying about the Savior?

14. I Corinthians. 14:34-35.

15. I Timothy. 2:11-12.

Here Levi interceded:

Peter, you have always been hot-tempered. Now I see you contending against the women like the adversaries. But if the Savior made her worthy, who are you, indeed, to reject her? Surely the Lord knew her very well. That is why he loved her more than us.¹⁶

In "Pistis Sophia," we find yet another argument between Peter and Mary. Peter complained that while talking, Jesus directed his attention to Mary rather than to the apostles. This argument provoked Jesus and he scolded Peter. Later Mary confided to Jesus, "Peter makes me hesitate; I am afraid of him, because he hates the female race."¹⁷ Jesus comforted her by saying that whoever the Holy Spirit guided to speak was divinely inspired, whether man or woman.

Is this be the same Peter of the canonical gospels? Is it possible that such rivalry existed between the male apostles and female disciples of Christ? Passages from *The Nag Hammadi Library* seem to point in this direction. In "The Gospel of Phillip" we read:

...the companion of the (Savior is) Mary Magdalene. (But Christ loved) her more than (all) the disciples...The rest of (the disciples were offended) by it...They said to him, "Why do you love her more than all of us?" The Savior answered and said to them, "Why do I not love you as (I love) her?"¹⁸

Who was dearer to Christ? If, indeed, Mary was the most beloved, how debilitating it would be not only to Peter but to the entire apostolic line. As the Church grew it became imperative that beliefs were standardized, based on a single authority—Peter and the Apostles. What was the criterion of that authority? Christ's whole-souled

16. George McRae and R. Wilson, trans., "Gospel of Mary" 17:18-18:6 NHL p. 473.

17. Elaine Pagels, p. 78.

18. W. Isenberg, trans., "Gospel of Philip" 63:32-64:1. ref. p. 138; NHL p. 138.

love for them, as evidenced by Christ's appearances to them after His resurrection. This brings us to our second point of controversy, Christ's resurrection.

According to the orthodox, Jesus of Nazareth, "crucified, dead and buried," was raised on "the third day." This phenomenon of Christ's bodily resurrection is a promise to every believer that he too shall experience the resurrection of the flesh.

To the Gnostic, however, Christ's resurrection did not occur in the material sense. It was Christ the Spirit that transcended the body and arose. To those who truly see, Christ dwells on the spiritual level for all to experience through ecstasy or dream. This realization is far greater than the gross perception of the senses. To quote "The Gospel of Philip":

Those who say they will die first and then rise are in error. (They must) receive the resurrection while they live.¹⁹

The resurrection controversy was paramount. After all, there were eleven apostles who witnessed the bodily resurrection, a climactic event symbolizing the birth of Christianity and legitimizing the apostles' exclusive role of Church leadership. It was Christ, appearing in the flesh after death, that empowered Peter, as his living representative, to feed his lambs and sheep—to nourish his apostles and other followers with spiritual food and thus build his Church. The apostles accepted Peter as their leader because of the sign they all recognized—Christ bodily appearing to them after the crucifixion. To reject this historical event would imperil the line of apostolic succession.²⁰

19. Ibid; 73:1-5; NHL p. 144.

20. Elaine Pagels, p. 9.

"...orthodox churches that trace their origin to Peter developed the tradition—sustained to this day among Catholic and some Protestant churches—that Peter had been the first witness

But to the Gnostic, anyone who has the vision of Christ can claim authority equal to the apostles', as Christ's presence was not the sole property of a select group of male disciples, who happened to live at a particular time in history, but it is the privilege of any sincere seeker.²¹ Mary Magdalene was such a soul, praised in "The Dialogue of the Saviour" as the "woman who knew the All."²² In fact, it is through Mary that we receive the Gnostic understanding of spiritual vision. While in ecstasy, she asked the Lord:

How does he who sees the vision see it (through) the soul (or) through the spirit?

Christ answered:

He does not see through the soul nor through the spirit, but the mind which (is) between the two—that is what sees the vision.²³

The Gnostics accepted Mary's testimony to be as valid as the apostles'. To experience Christ firsthand was to receive gnosis and to go beyond Church hierarchy.

The orthodox Irenaeus protested this dangerous attitude:

They consider themselves "mature" so that no one can be compared with them in the greatness of the resurrection, and hence the rightful leader of the church."

21. Ibid; p. 10, 11.

"But from the second century, orthodox churches developed the view that only certain resurrection appearances actually conferred authority on those who received them."

In spite of the fact that Apostle Paul received the vision that transformed his life and influenced orthodox Christianity, Pagels maintains that any vision (1.) not occurring to one of the twelve disciples, (2.) occurring *after* the resurrection had (3.) only the manifestation of *traces* of Christ's presence, according to the church.

22. H. Attridge, trans., "Dialogue of the Savior" 139:13; NHL p. 235.

23. Elaine Pagels, p. 13. ref. "Gospel of Mary" 10:17-23; NHL p. 472.

of their gnosis, not even if you mention Peter or Paul or any of the other apostles...They imagine that they themselves have discovered more than the apostles, and that the apostles preached the gospel still under the influence of Jewish opinions, but they themselves are wiser and more intelligent than the apostles.²⁴

Just as the Motherhood of God and spiritual resurrection were issues that challenged the Church's authority, so also was the third major controversy—the ultimate nature of God. The familiar Church creed “I believe in one God, Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and earth” was composed in response to Gnostic heresy. Orthodox Christianity was monotheistic, rejecting all gods for the sake of one God, the Creator. Gnosticism, on the other hand, forms of God—Lord, King, Creator and Judge—as lower manifestations of that Reality. To the Valentinian Gnostic, although these images or names of God were vivid representations of intermediate spiritual realities, they were necessarily inadequate expressions of the true Source of all things, the Eternal Principle beyond words. To quote “The Gospel of Phillip”:

(Names are) very deceptive for they divert our thoughts from what is accurate to what is inaccurate, but perceives what is inaccurate. So also with “the Father,” and “the Son,” and “the Holy Spirit,” and “life,” and “light,” and “resurrection,” and “the Church,” and all the rest...²⁵

This line of thought shocked the Church leaders. The Gnostic who dared to broaden ethical monotheism into a kind of spiritual monism was, at the same time, widening the spiritual channels of the Church so as to diminish their power. In the Valentinian initiation rite, the Gnostic went so far as to verbally disavow his allegiance to the Creator and Father. Such an act demonstrated a high state of gnosis, as the orthodox Chris-

tian God was only an image of the true God, who is transcendent and “the depth” of all being. To quote Pagels:

Whoever has come to know that source simultaneously comes to know himself and discovers his spiritual origin; he has come to know his true Father and Mother.²⁶

The political implications of this ceremony were acute. By declaring his independence from the Creator's authority and judgment, the initiate was, thus, divesting the bishop of his clerical power. Irenaeus explained:

They maintain that they have attained to a height beyond every power, and that therefore they are free in every respect to act as they please, having no one to fear in anything. For they claim that...they cannot be apprehended, or even perceived, by the judge.²⁷

To the orthodox, there is one God and His rule is administered by one bishop. Officers of the Church—bishops, priests and deacons—preside in the place of God. Whoever refuses to obey them is guilty of insubordination to God Himself!²⁸

But the Gnostic did not accept the bishop as God's representative. Though he was qualified to preside over the uninitiated Christians, every initiate had the capacity to directly commune with God. The function of a Church intermediary was superfluous. Furthermore, the bishops were often regarded as “waterless canals,” spiritually unfit to administer counsel and perform sacred ritual.²⁹ Gnostic groups met without the sanction of the bishop; in fact, they showed no distinction between Church and laity.

26. Elaine Pagels, p. 44.

27. Ibid; p. 46.

28. Ibid; p. 40-41.

This dogma was formulated by Ignatius of Antioch in the second century, according to Dr. Birger Pearson, member of the NHL team of translators.

29. ref. Roger Bullard, trans. “Apocalypse of Peter”; NHL p. 339-345.

24. Ibid; p. 25.

25. “Gospel of Phillip” 53:23-32; NHL p. 132-133.

In order to reduce individual rivalries and develop dependence on the will of the Lord, the community drew lots to perform the priest's duties. In this function, women were given equal rights.

The Gnostic's final offence against the Church was over Christ's Passion. "Jesus suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried." The orthodox interpretation of this historical fact is that by sacrificing his life, Christ saved the lives of others. He absolved mankind from sin and guilt. The body suffered, the body died, and the body rose again.

But to the Gnostic, Christ's Passion had a different meaning. Jesus the man suffered, but Christ the Spirit transcended all suffering. The crucifixion proved that Christ's nature was not matter, but spirit. The Son of Man had a human body that suffered and died; but the Son of God was the spiritual being that transcended suffering and death. In the "Apocalypse of Peter," we read:

The Savior said to me: "He whom you saw being glad and laughing above the cross is the living Jesus. But he into whose hand and feet you are driving the nails is his fleshly part, which is the substitute."³⁰

Furthermore, the crucifixion was not merely a solitary act of self-sacrifice; it is an occasion for all to sacrifice the body idea for the sake of discovering the Self within. In *The Nag Hammadi Library*, the Saviour said:

I became very small, so that through my humility I might take you up to the great height, whence you had fallen.³¹

One famous Gnostic text, "The Acts of John," quoted by Elaine Pagels, goes so far as to say that Jesus was not a human being at all; instead he was a spiritual being who

adapted himself to human perception.^{32*} Several accounts in the text illustrate this concept. Here is how Christ's inscrutable nature struck James and John on one particular occasion. To James, Jesus appeared as a child, standing on the shore. But John, who was with James, retorted:

You are not seeing straight, brother James. Do you not see the man standing there who is handsome, fair, and cheerful looking?³³

They went ashore to confirm what they had seen, but were only further confused. The apparition appeared to James as a young man with a stubble of beard. To John he was bald-headed with a full grown beard. To quote John:

I tried to see him as he was...But he sometimes appeared to me as a small man with no good looks, and then again as looking up to heaven.³⁴

John then gives even more remarkable testimony of Christ's spiritual nature:

Sometimes when I meant to touch him I encountered a material, solid body; but at other times again when I felt him, his substance was immaterial and incorporeal...as if it did not exist at all.³⁵

Furthermore, John noticed that Christ never left any footprints, nor did he ever blink. Christ was a God-man, endowed with a spiritual body.

* This extraordinary belief rejecting the historical Jesus finds an interesting parallel in Swami Vivekananda's experience. As he was returning to India, his steamer approached the Isle of Crete. That night Swamiji had a dream. A bearded sage appeared to him and said that excavations on Crete would verify the fact that Jesus the man never lived.

³². Elaine Pagels, p. 87.

His Eastern and Western Disciples, *The Life of Swami Vivekananda* Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1974, p. 448.

³³. Elaine Pagels, p. 87-88.

³⁴. Ibid; p. 88.

³⁵. Ibid; p. 88.

³⁰. Ibid; 81:15-25; NHL p. 344.

³¹. John Turner, trans., "The Interpretation of Knowledge" 10:27-30; NHL p. 430.

To the Vedantist, special characteristics such as these will not sound unfamiliar. They belong to a Being called the Divine Incarnation. When Sri Ramakrishna practised the austerity of the Madhura Bhava, for six years he did not sleep, nor did his eyes blink. The devotional moods of his inner life besieged his body so that at times his joints almost dislocated from their sockets; at other times his senses ceased functioning, and he lay motionless in samadhi. There is a well known incident of Mathur Babu watching the Master pace back and forth on his veranda. As Sri Ramakrishna approached, he appeared as the Divine Mother; when he turned about he was Lord Shiva Himself. Whether the account is one hundred years old or two thousand years old, the evidence restates the same profound fact—the nature of the God-man is a spiritual phenomenon.

Testimony such as "The Acts of John" was ill-received by the Church. In 447 AD., Pope Leo the Great condemned them as "a hot-bed of manifold perversity," which "should not only be forbidden, but entirely destroyed and burned with fire."³⁶ Three hundred years later, the second Nicean Council reaffirmed this edict. Why was such a strong stand taken against, of all things, Christ's spiritual nature?

Church leaders felt that the Gnostic interpretation of Christ's Passion slighted Christian martyrdom. It was the crucifixion—Christ's bodily suffering and death—that had inspired thousands of Christians, who believed whole-heartedly that martyrdom at the hands of the Romans glorified Christ. At the time of the great purge, the key to paradise was literally one's own blood. No other belief was so nobly placed before the eyes of the martyr. How else could one explain the fearlessness of those who were

led to their slaughter? Numerous are the accounts:

First then those of the sect were arrested who confessed; next on their disclosures, vast numbers were convicted, for hatred of the human race. And ridicule accompanied their end: they were covered with wild beasts' skins and torn to death by dogs; or they were fastened on crosses, and, when daylight failed, were burned to serve as torches by night. Nero had offered his gardens for the spectacle...³⁷

Reports of uncommonly courageous martyrs inspired future martyrs. Carried by its own momentum, martyrdom unleashed a tidal wave of religious propaganda throughout the Empire. Self-sacrifice of this magnitude was a miracle. What hidden power did Christianity impart to those who so willingly and fearlessly sacrificed their lives? Accounts of martyrdom, carried to the far corners of the land, consolidated Christian groups into one Church and stirred the imagination and admiration of many pagans who converted. Martyrdom became curiously advantageous to the Christian cause.

But willing martyrdom offended the Gnostic, who accused the religious enthusiast of giving up his life without knowing who Christ was. Martyrs were blood witnesses, inferior to the real witnesses who experience Christ firsthand through spiritual vision. The historical Jesus suffered, but the Christ revealed through God-vision was beyond bodily suffering. In "The Acts of John," Christ assembled his disciples around him in a circle as he, in the middle, danced and chanted a mystical chant, foretelling the coming Passion. This occurred in Gethsemane, the night before. Was this joyous, ecstatic dance the sign of a suffering Saviour? Then in the forbidden "Acts of John," the blessed Lord appeared to John. During the hour of the crucifixion, Christ said, "I have suffered none of the things which they

36. Ibid; p. 90.

37. Ibid; p. 91.

will say of me.”³⁸ This was the Christ of the Gnostics—blissful and everfree.

Though Gnosticism was branded as heresy—its scriptures burned or buried and its followers diminished to a small sect of Iraqi peasants known as Mandaeans—the search for spiritual Truth and Self-knowledge is imperishable. Is it any wonder that the Gnostic Gospels were finally discovered in an age of tolerance? As Vedantists, when we read *The Nag Hammadi Library*, we may recognize many Gnostic beliefs as an echo of Upaniṣadic teachings proclaimed at least a thousand years before Christ in another land. “Truth is one, sages call it by various names”—so says the *Rg Veda*, the oldest living scripture in the world.

The Gnostic Gospels are important beyond the radical nature of their contents. Though revelation is an important ingredient, they encouraged aspirants to depend upon one’s own experience, not on the testimony of others. One’s spiritual life should be centred on the light within, and not in the Church—not even in Jesus Christ. A good disciple purifies his mind; the pure mind then becomes the teacher. To quote “The Teachings of Silvanus” in *The Nag Hammadi Library*:

...Bring in your guide and your teacher. The mind is the guide, but reason is the teacher. Live according to your mind...Light the lamp within you.³⁹

Furthermore, all are qualified to manifest this divinity by removing the veil of ignorance. “The Gospel of Thomas” quotes Jesus as having said:

When you make the two one, and when you make the inside like the outside and the outside like the inside, and the above like the below, and when you make the male and the female one and

the same...then you will enter (the kingdom of heaven)⁴⁰

But the Son of God is an example of one who has transcended the world and entered the Kingdom. He is a symbol of the Father or Absolute, and, in this respect, he is important to the Gnostic as well as the Vedantist. All Divine Incarnations are images of God. Their testimony gives us firsthand data of the unknown, and their lives manifest the divinity within. From them we see only the tip of the iceberg, but from that glimpse we can gather how vast the hidden glacier is. Again, quoting “The Gospel of Thomas,” Jesus said to his disciples:

“Compare me to someone and tell me whom I am like”...Thomas said to him, “Master my mouth is wholly incapable of saying whom you are like.”⁴¹

This incident reminds us of the Kalpataru Day, when Sri Ramakrishna asked Girish Ghosh this same question. Girish knelt at the Master’s feet, with face upturned and hands clasped together: “What more can I say of Him whose greatness Vyāsa and Vālmiki could not find words to express?”

All scriptures of the world and teachings of the Great Masters are part of the human experience and are the wellspring from which enlightenment comes. We must be willing to examine with an open mind all such discoveries as the Nag Hammadi papers. And as we examine any authentic scripture—whether Christian, Hindu, Buddhist or Gnostic—what Truth they might reveal can only deepen our understanding of the One who dwells within.

This involves risk—the risk that some of our cherished beliefs will be challenged. But from the crucible of that challenge, an enduring faith is formed.

38. Ibid; p. 89-90.

39. Ibid; p. 153. ref. Malcolm Peel and Jan Zandee, trans., “Teachings of Silvanus” 85:24-106:14; NHL p. 347-356.

40. Thomas Lambdin, trans., “The Gospel of Thomas” 37:25-38; NHL p. 121.

41. Ibid; 13; NHL p. 119.



या देवी सर्वभूतेषु शक्तिरूपेण संस्थिता
नमस्तस्यै नमस्तस्यै नमस्तस्यै नमो नमः

The Seven Mothers



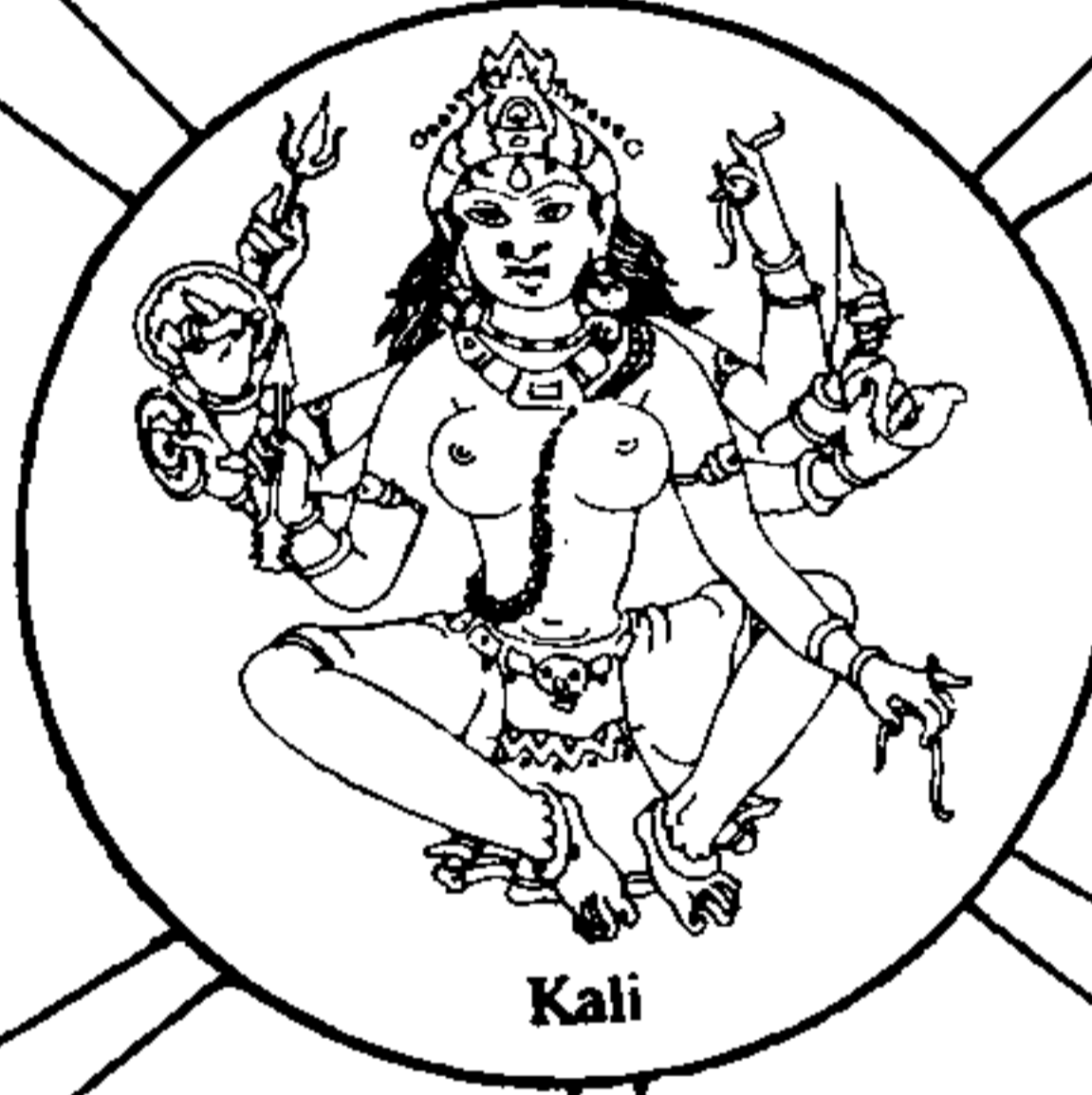
Brahmi



Mahesvari



Indrani



Kali



Kaumari



Varahi



Narayani

या देवी सर्वभूतेषु मातृरूपेण संस्थिता
नमस्तस्यै नमस्तस्यै नमस्तस्यै नमो नमः