

MOTHER GODDESS WORSHIP IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis attempts to correlate economic, social and religious factors in the development of Mother Goddess worship in India. The pre-Āryan Indus Valley Civilization had a well-developed agricultural economy, probably a matrilineal kinship system and was most likely centered around worship of the Mother Goddess. The conquering Āryan tribes had a pastoral economy, a patrilineal kinship system and worshipped predominantly male Sky Gods. Indian civilization illustrates a merger of these two opposing traditions. On the religious level, the Brāhmans have carried out the dual process of Sanskritization of the Mother Goddess: the Great Tradition has incorporated elements of fertility and Mother Goddess worship and Sanskritized these elements; and non-Āryan tribes have incorporated Sanskrit names and legends in their worship of local Mother Goddesses and have thereby 'legitimized' them on the folk level. The thesis argues that Mother Goddess worship has had a continuous historical development both in the Great and Little Traditions in India.

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INTRODUCTION

In the Kena Upaniṣad, dating from the seventh century B.C., a myth is told concerning the Vedic gods Agni, Vāyu and Indra, and their encounter with the local goddess Umā Haimavati. The gods are exultant because of a battle they have just won against the demons. They do not realize, however, that their victory is really due to the power of Brahman. When Brahman manifests Itself to them, they are unable to recognize It. At last they appeal to Umā to help them in this identification. "It is indeed Brahman," she says. "Through the victory of Brahman alone have you attained glory."¹

This myth is highly significant for several reasons. Brahman is portrayed as the unification of two religious traditions: the Āryan tradition, symbolized by the Vedic gods; and the non-Āryan tradition, symbolized by Umā. Since Umā is a goddess of non-Āryan origin (witness her local character, daughter of Mount Himālaya, and her sudden appearance in the Vedic literature), her presence in this hymn indicates that by roughly the seventh century B.C. the orthodox Brāhmaṇ tradition was recognizing non-Āryan beliefs. Thereby a

¹Kena Upaniṣad IV.1. Swami Nikhilananda, tr. and ed. The Upanisads. Harper Torchbooks. The Cloister Library (New York: Harper & Row Pub., 1964), p.101.

a "syncretistic juncture of the two antagonistic traditions had already been achieved".¹ This passage also shows that the belief in the supreme importance, necessity and efficacy of the sacrifice was breaking down, since the three gods, described here as less knowledgeable than Umā, were traditionally those most important in the Vedic sacrificial rites. Finally, this non-Āryan goddess proved herself superior to the highest representatives of the Vedic gods in her esoteric knowledge of the highest Truth. She was no initiate into traditional Vedic wisdom, yet she proved herself superior to such wisdom.

The emphasis in this thesis will be on the development of Mother Goddess worship in India as evidenced through religious myths, such as the one recounted above, as well as through religious practices, cults and artistic representations. From this analysis, I wish to draw conclusions regarding both the social and economic structures of ancient India and the concomitant religious developments. My analysis is based on the assumption that religion, a part of the larger ideological order of the society, is a metaphorical representation of underlying social and economic factors; religious changes therefore reflect economic and social changes. We will argue that the differentiation of society in India into a class of religious specialists, the Brāhmins, and religious laymen, the people, was and is the result of the development of the early Āryans from a tribal society to a peasant society. In this development the religious

¹Heinrich Zimmer, The Art of Indian Asia. Bollingen Series XXXIX (New York: Pantheon Books, 1964), p. 108.

tradition of the Āryans, a predominantly tribal religion emphasizing Sky Gods and reflecting a male-dominant kinship system, became merged with an autochthonous peasant religion, stressing worship of the Mother Goddess and reflecting a female-dominant kinship structure.

The autochthonous peasant religion in India has roots going back both to primitive hunting and gathering societies which worshipped the earth as Tellus Mater, and to early agricultural societies which tended to have more advanced Mother Goddess and fertility cults. The Indus Valley Civilization, a peasant society which flourished from c. 2500-1500 B.C., sanctioned the worship of the Mother Goddess. The religious emphases of this civilization have survived down to the present day amongst various indigenous tribes in India and have as well been synthesized into the Āryan religious structure. There is also evidence that certain non-Āryan tribes had matriarchal kinship systems. In such a social system, the original ancestor as well as the local patron deity tends to be female rather than male, hence the social structure and religious structure reinforce each other.

The more modern cultural tradition has developed mainly from the early Āryan tribal society in India from 1500 B.C. The Āryans in their religious tradition emphasized the sky rather than the soil, and their kinship system was patriarchal. However, from early times, especially with the settlement of the Ganges River Valley, a gradual shift in the Vedic literature and worship occurs: the strictly male-oriented religious tradition increasingly included Mother Goddess elements. This can be seen as a result of both the

gradual incorporation of indigenous tribes and their religious traditions (goddess-oriented) into the folds of Āryan society, and the shift in Āryan society towards a more advanced agricultural economy.

We shall trace this syncretism through the increasing importance of the Mother Goddess in the Ṛg Veda, Atharva Veda, Brāhmaṇas, Upaniṣads, Epics and finally the Purāṇas and Tantras. Slowly her functions and abilities became differentiated. Mythologies and artistic representations of these goddesses increased. From being a consort of a male deity she became a deity in her own right. Brāhmaṇs came to recognize the older traditional beliefs of the peasants, and through the process of Sanskritization, legitimized the Mother Goddess as a Hindu deity. As Śiva increased in importance in the Vedic pantheon, so did his consorts such as Umā, Durgā, Pārvatī and Kālī. These goddesses had roots in non-Āryan cults. Their inclusion in the Aryan pantheon represents their official legitimization in the Great Tradition. The process of Sanskritization in the Little Tradition is to be found in the worship of the Grāmadevatās or Village Mothers in rural India on the folk level. It is generally held that Grāmadevatā worship is essentially a non-Āryan tradition.¹ These goddesses have undergone a process of Sanskritization at the hands of the Brāhmaṇs whereby they have been assimilated into the Hindu pantheon.

¹Mircea Eliade, Yoga: Immortality and Freedom, trans. by W. R. Trask, Bollingen Series LVI (New York: Pantheon Books, Inc., 1958), p. 349.

It has been stated that in a peasant system, as distinguished from a tribal society, the state as a centralized institution arises and society itself becomes stratified.¹ Functional differentiation develops, and political, economic and religious concerns are increasingly handled by specialists. Religion in such a society serves to support the peasant ecosystem and social structure. In addition, it provides a framework for the larger ideological order, in which religious specialists relate the religious beliefs of the peasantry to the larger order.²

The religious traditions of the peasants and the specialists are often very different as they arise in different social and economic contexts and fulfill different needs. The religious specialists tend to innovate, while the peasant groups tend to retain traditional religious forms. Hence the interrelationship between the religious elite and the populace often takes the form of a syncretism of beliefs; an older tradition and a more modern tradition merge, each affecting the other.³

In India the Brāhmaṇs have been the religious specialists whose orthodox religious tradition has differed considerably from that of the peasants, especially the autochthonous non-Āryan peasant groups in rural India. The development of Hinduism reflects a

¹Marshall D. Sahlins, Tribesmen, Foundations of Modern Anthropology Series (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1968), p. 6.

²Eric R. Wolf, Peasants, Foundations of Modern Anthropology Series (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1966), pp. 100-103.

³Ibid., p. 103.

syncretism of beliefs of these two different traditions. The following study of the Mother Goddess in India will be conducted from this perspective. We will examine non-Āryan and Āryan social, economic and religious structures, with our main emphasis upon the presence and development of the Mother Goddess in the latter. The Mother Goddess and her process of Sanskritization in both Great and Little Traditions will be the focus from which the merging of these two traditions will be studied.

CHAPTER I

THE NON-ĀRYAN TRADITION IN INDIA

Introduction to Mother Goddess Worship in the Ancient World

Worship of the Mother Goddess can be traced back to the earliest stages of human society. Figurines of pregnant females with exaggerated sexual features have been found among remnants of hunting and gathering societies dating from the Upper Paleolithic period. These figurines have been interpreted as symbolic expressions of fertility cults and the worship of the Earth Goddess prevalent among these early human societies.¹

In the earliest phases of human society, which were characterized by an absence of agricultural knowledge and techniques, collective labour was necessary for the survival of the group. A surplus of people could always move away, but too few people meant death for the group. Production of the necessities of life was synonymous with the reproduction of the group.² Both production and reproduction were unstable, however, as agricultural methods were not yet known and the infant mortality rate was extremely high.

¹Ralph Linton, The Tree of Culture (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964), p. 140.

²George Thomson, Studies in Ancient Greek Society: The Prehistoric Aegean, Vol. I (London: Laurence & Wishart, 1961), p. 204.

The explanation of natural processes and the means of control over nature, prevalent in these societies, were largely supernaturalistic and anthropomorphic.¹

The division of labour amongst these early hunting and gathering societies usually dictated that the men were the hunters, while the women were left to gather vegetables, berries, fruit and seeds near the camp.² Hence women were from the beginning more directly associated with the soil than were men.

Many early hunting and gathering societies worshipped the earth as Tellus Mater. The lack of agricultural knowledge caused them to regard the production and produce of the soil as mysterious and sacred. While Mother Goddess worship can thus be traced to pre-agricultural societies, it was only with the development of agricultural techniques that more specialized divinities of agriculture and harvesting slowly took the place of the earlier divinities of the soil.

The discovery of agriculture marked a higher level of society. Both the clearing and keeping clear of a plot of land and the fighting off of wild animals and nomadic tribes required collective settlement. Again, safety lay in numbers.³ The crops were tended by women, and were blessed or cursed by goddesses of the soil, fertility and childbirth. Agriculture taught man the analogies

¹Elmer R. Service, The Hunters, Foundations of Modern Anthropology Series (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1966), p. 82.

²Ibid., p. 10.

³Thomson, op. cit., p. 204.

between woman and the field, between the sexual act and sowing, and illustrated the notion of life as rhythmic with death as a return to the origins of life, the womb.¹ These ideas can be seen in the early and later iconography and mythologies of Mother Goddess cults.

The earliest traces of Mother Goddess worship date from the Upper Paleolithic era. The Gravettian culture (so-named because of the distinguishing blade-tools or gravettes) migrated from Western Asia, the south Russian Plain and the Valley of the Don to eastern and central Europe in the beginning of the Upper Paleolithic era.² This culture introduced small female figurines of bone, ivory, stone and bas-relief, commonly called Venuses, as well as its agricultural tools to Europe. The bodily features of these Venuses tended to be exaggerated, while the often featureless head was ignored. In moving to central and western Europe, the bodies of the Mother Goddess became cruder and more conventionalized. Traces of red ochre appear on some of these figurines, such as the Willendorf of Venus, and the emphasis was very clearly on the sexual features. Red pigment was widely used in Paleolithic ritual as a life-giving agent, the substitute of blood.³

Numerous headless clay female statuettes have been discovered in northern Iraq near the ancient city of Ninevah in the Chalcolithic mound Tell Arpachiyah, which dates to before 4000 B.C.⁴ These are

¹Mircea Eliade, Patterns in Comparative Religion, trans. by Rosemary Sheed, Meridian Books (Cleveland: The World Publishing Co., 1970), p. 361.

²The following information is largely based upon E. O. James, The Cult of the Mother Goddess (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Pub., 1959), pp. 13-40.

³Thomson, op. cit., p. 210.

⁴James, op cit., p. 23.

very similar to the Venuses, with large breasts and hips and slender waists. The squatting position of many of these figurines indicates childbirth. As in the Paleolithic Venuses, the head was rarely depicted, the body shows a tendency towards conventionalization, and red pigment was often used. Even though these figurines are often inferior in technique and design, they do show a continuity with the Gravettian prototypes and provide a link with the Paleolithic and later Chalcolithic and Bronze Age statuettes in Anatolia, Crete and the Aegean in the west, and Persia, Baluchistan and the Indus Valley in the east.

In the Chalcolithic Age trade routes and common bonds of culture united the ancient world.¹ Female statuettes, often very similar in style to each other, have been discovered in a wide range of countries from the Indus Valley to the Aegean because of this cultural exchange. Whether they appear earlier or at somewhat later dates, or in smaller or larger numbers, these figurines indicate certain common religious developments and religious symbols based upon the parallel development of agricultural techniques. They are most often interpreted as representing the Great Mother or Nature Goddess, and were perhaps used as votive offerings or as cult images in household shrines dedicated to her.²

¹Sir John Marshall, Mohenjo-daro and the Indus Civilization, Vol. I (London: Arthur Prubsthain, 1931), p. 50.

²Loc. cit.

Non-Aryan India

Modern social theory proposes the thesis that matriarchal social conditions predominated in those groups which had advanced from a food gathering economy to an agricultural economy. The attainment of agriculture, a mode of production usually initiated by women,¹ was a decisive step in counteracting the earlier supremacy of the male. Agriculture involved the adoption of a sedentary life as opposed to the nomadic life of the hunting and gathering stages. As "the mode of descent is correlated with the mode of production",² we usually find that early agricultural societies were matrilineal in descent and matrilocal in residence. These cultures usually also worshipped predominantly female deities. There was thus a correlation between an agricultural mode of production, a 'matriarchal' social structure,³ and the worship of female deities. Some scholars hold that the worship of the Mother Goddess in non-Āryan India originated in such a matriarchal state of society similar to that in which Astarte was conceived in Syria, Cybele in Asia Minor and Isis in Egypt.⁴ Further evidence of this thesis may also be found in the fact that contemporary India contains numerous matriarchal tribes and castes whose mode of production is agricultural.

¹Thomson, op. cit., p. 42.

²Ibid., p. 41.

³Hereafter we shall use 'matriarchy' to denote matrilineal descent and/or matrilocal residence.

⁴Marshall, op. cit., p. 51.

Ehrenfels has compiled a list of more than one hundred matriarchal tribes and castes in India.¹ The Khasis, for example, were the most important representatives of the north-east group of Indian matriarchal groups. Each of the tribes belonging to the Khasis was divided into two to six principally endogamous sub-groups which were composed of exogamous clans or units. The basic social unit of the Khasi was called Mahari, 'Motherhood'.² All of the clansmen traced their descent to the same female ancestor, Ki Jawbei Tynrei, 'mother of the root'. A popular saying explained that "from the woman sprang the clan".³ Three generations of females constituted the most important members of each household unit in the sub-clan. The husbands matrilocally lived in the household of the wives or else, under the system of visiting marriage, in the household of the mothers. The mother was the only owner of property, and daughters were the inheritors of the mother's property. The religion of the Khasis was centered around a female deity who was believed to be the creative force of the universe. The various spirits and demons who were approached in times of need were also female.⁴

Amongst the Parayan, a depressed class of labourers and serfs

¹O. R. Ehrenfels, Mother-Right in India (London: Oxford University Press, 1941)

²Robert Briffault, The Mothers, abridged by G. R. Taylor (London: George Allen & Unwen Ltd., 1959), p. 68.

³Thomson, op. cit., p. 153.

⁴Ehrenfels, op. cit., pp. 36-37; P. R. T. Gurdon, The Khasis (London: David Nutt, 1907)

who were spread all over India, inheritance was traced partially through the female line. Three categories of divine mothers were worshipped by the Parayans: (1) The Ammas who were represented by seven stones on platforms under margosa trees and who were worshipped collectively; (2) the Grāmadevatās who were single, individualized mothers identical with the local Grāmadevatās of the village and who each had a statue in the Parayan's temples; and (3) Mariattal and Gangammal who were both goddesses of contagious diseases such as cholera and especially smallpox.¹

Amongst the Nayars of Kerala the matriarchal joint family system has almost completely died out. Yet this group can be seen as another very ancient matrilineal caste, with descent and property being traced through the mother.²

Matrilocal marriage was practiced until recently in certain autochthonous tribes in India where Hindu customs had not completely overlaid the original institutions. This was the case with the Gonds, the Santals and the Mundas.³ Polyandry has also been practiced by various non-Āryan tribes in India, such as the Khonds and the Santals. Amongst the Āryan Jats and Rajputs, the latter being the aristocratic class of the former, fraternal polyandry has been very widespread.⁴

Certain traces of earlier matriarchal conditions of society

¹Ehrenfels, op. cit., pp. 52-55.

²Ibid., pp. 60-61.

³Briffault, op. cit., p. 68.

⁴Ibid., pp. 136-137.

can be found in much of Hindu literature. Such traces are an indication of non-Āryan influences upon early Aryan society. For example, the marked initiative of Yamī towards her brother Yama (R.V. X. 10,3,7,11)¹ is a matriarchal trait, even though the position is revised in other instances. The idea of women initiating courtship is found in Sanskrit and Sanskritized poetry, and this complete reversal of the Vedic and Epic tradition would seem to have originated from some indigenous source.² In certain parts of India, for example among the Jats in Rampur, proposals of marriage had to come from the girl's side.³

There are frequent references to a plurality of husbands in the Vedic hymns. In the Vedic family brothers tended to live together even after the death of their father, and the eldest brother was the representative of the others. This arrangement is usually associated with polyandry. Certain references indicate that a man would have the right of access to his wife's sisters.⁴ Evidence of polyandry can be seen in the Mahābhārata, where the five Pandava brothers shared one wife. In speaking of this marriage, Yudhishtira said:

¹R. T. H. Griffith, The Hymns of the Rig Veda, Vol. II (Benares: E. J. Lazarus & Co., 1897), pp. 392-393.

²Agehananda Bharati, The Tantric Tradition (London: Rider & Co., 1965), p. 206.

³Oscar Lewis, Village Life in Northern India. Vintage Books (New York: Random House Inc., 1965), p. 159.

⁴Briffault, op. cit., pp. 138-139.

"Let us follow in the way that has been traced by the illustrious of former ages; this practice has been established, it is to be regarded as old and eternal."¹

The survival of the custom of marrying the daughter of the maternal uncle, called menarikam, in certain parts of South India, reflects a matriarchal social organization.² For when property was transmitted through the female, then a father would be pleased to marry his daughter to his sister's son, the heir to the family property. In the Mahābhārata we learn how amongst the Āraṭṭas the nephews rather than the sons inherited the property. This custom of marrying the daughter of the maternal uncle has also been referred to in Baudhāyan Dharamsūtra (I.I.19-26) and in the Tantrāvatika of Kumārila of the seventh century A.D.³

According to the Mahāvastu, the Śākyas used to marry their sisters.⁴ This is also an indication of matriarchal societies. In R.V. VI. 55.4,5 there are references to brother and sister unions.⁵ In the Dasarath Jātaka, Sītā is represented as the sister as well as the wife of Rāma. There are also many Buddhist stories of sister marriages.⁶

¹Quoted in Ibid., p. 138.

²N.N.Bhattacharya, "Śaktism and Mother-Right", in The Śakti Cult and Tārā, ed. by D.C. Sircar (Calcutta: Calcutta University Press, 1967), p. 66.

³P. V. Kane, History of Dharmasastra, Vol.II (Poona: 1941), pp.459-460.

⁴J. J. Jones, The Mahavastu, Vol.I (London: 1949), p. 296.

⁵Griffith, op. cit., p. 626.

⁶Bhattacharya, op. cit., pp. 66-67.

The autochthonous tribes of India are generally considered to be at an early stage of agricultural economy. Many of these tribes have shown traces of matriarchal social structures and worship of mother goddesses. These elements influenced the economic and religious development of Āryan society in India. We must now turn to the Indus Valley Civilization to find the origin of matriarchal and mother goddess influences both in non-Āryan India and in Āryan culture itself.

Mother Goddess Worship
in the Indus Valley Civilization

At the end of the fourth millenium B.C. the great tracts of alluvial land in the valleys of the Indus River and its tributaries were colonized by Neolithic-Chalcolithic groups of people. The earliest agricultural settlements that have been found are in north, central and southern Balūchistān.¹ The evidence of this early settlement of the Indus Valley is especially important in terms of the increased agricultural productivity made possible by the exploitation of the rich flood plains and hence the increased population and population expansion.

The area covered by the Indus Valley Civilization is somewhat less than half a million square miles. Most of the seventy sites which have so far been discovered are situated on the plains of the

¹B. and R. Allchin, The Birth of Indian Civilization (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1968), p. 101.

Indus and its tributaries, or else on the banks of the now dry Habra or Ghaggar River to the south of the Sutlej River.¹ The two major cities of the Indus Culture are Harappā on the left bank of the now dry Rāvī River and Mohenjo-daro on the right bank of the Indus, 250 miles from its mouth.

The Harappans had well-developed agricultural and irrigational methods which enabled them to exploit to the full the alluvial plains of the Indus. The agricultural surplus thus achieved could be used for commercial purposes. As a result, we are not surprised to find evidence of a well-developed system of trade and commerce extending beyond the borders of the empire and involving contacts with other civilizations.²

The cultural uniformity of the Indus Valley Civilization, both throughout the several centuries when it flourished and over the large area it covered, is perhaps its most striking feature. This is most clearly seen in the uniformity of town planning from one end of the empire to the other. This uniformity suggests that it was a single centralized state rather than being made up of independent communities, and that there was a continuity of government throughout its history.³ The discrepancy in the size of many of the houses would seem to indicate a class structure. Large dwellings are usually found at a distance from the granaries, while smaller dwellings

¹Ibid., p. 127.

²Ibid., p. 270.

³Stuart Piggott, Prehistoric India (London: Cassel and Co. Ltd., 1962), p. 152.

are located nearer the granaries. These smaller units might have been inhabited by the workers.¹

From the general knowledge we have of cultures at the level of development of the Indus Valley Civilization, it would seem that with the attainment of an economic surplus, both the population and social stratification increase in direct proportion to one another. The increases in population and surplus demand the development of an administrative apparatus for distributing the surplus and managing the technological structure of the society, such as the irrigation system, etc.² It is generally thought that priest-kings or a priestly oligarchy controlled the economy, civil government and religious life of the Harappan state. The dominance of this priestly class would have been based on their special expertise. Thus, as in Mesopotamia and Egypt, the culture was probably theocratic in nature.³

¹Ibid., p.171.

²Elman R. Service, Primitive Social Organization (New York: Random House, 1962).

Morton H. Fried, The Evolution of Political Society (New York: Random House, 1967). Fried lists certain initiating conditions of restricted access to basic resources, which in turn gives rise to the emergence of stratification and the State: population pressure; contraction or sharp natural alteration of basic resources; shifts in subsistence patterns arising from such factors as technological change or the impingement of a market system; development of managerial roles as an aspect of a social and ceremonial system, etc. (p. 196).

Gerhard Lenski, Power and Privilege (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1966). Lenski defines privilege as possession or control of a portion of the surplus produced by a society. From this it follows that privilege is largely a function of power.(p. 45).

³Allchin, op. cit., p. 137.

The Great Bath at Mohenjo-daro provides partial evidence for the presence of a theocracy in the Indus Valley Culture.¹ The Great Bath consists of a several-storied building surrounding an open courtyard which in turn contains a large rectangular tank 23 x 39 x 8 feet. A flight of steps to the bottom of the tank is located at each end. The Great Bath could not have been used solely for sanitary purposes, since most of the houses had bathrooms with running water. Rather, it must have been constructed to fulfill ritual functions of the culture.

A clue to these functions can be found in reference to ritual tanks in the early literature of the Aryans in India. Pushkara or 'lotus-ponds' were constructed throughout the early historic period to adjoin temples. These ponds were used for ritual baths and purification rites, but were also used to consecrate early Indian priests and kings. The steps of the Bath can be compared to the steps, ghat, of places of pilgrimage, and the actual word for place of pilgrimage, tirtha, implies that water had to be forded in order to arrive at the holy spot. Hence there are connections between the Great Bath and later holy tanks.

Another function of the pushkara mentioned in early sources links it with primitive fertility rites. The apsaras, water-deities, resided in the pushkaras. The apsaras were lovely water-nymphs skilled

¹The following set of ideas is based largely upon D. D. Kosambi, Ancient India, Pantheon Books (New York: Random House, Inc., 1965).

in song and dance who would consort with men and would inevitably be responsible for the downfall of heroes. Some ancient Indian dynasties claimed to have been descended from the brief union of an apsaras and a particular hero. Apsaras never entered into permanent relationships with humans. Kosambi postulates that the small rooms surrounding the Great Bath were used for ritual cohabitation between the male bathers and female attendants, comparable to apsaras, who were devotees of the Mother Goddess to whom the complex was dedicated. This would be analogous to the temples of Ishtar in Babylon and Sumer where girls would participate in similar rituals. Ishtar herself was eternal virgin and seductress. She was a Mother Goddess, but never a wife. The citadel mound can, in this case, be compared to the Mesopotamian ziggurat. The presence of such a Mother Goddess can further be confirmed by the small often grotesque terracotta figurines found in pre-Indus villages as well as in Harappan sites, who would seem to be representations of a goddess of birth as well as death. All of these facts contribute to the theory that the Great Bath was constructed for worship of the Mother Goddess and that its priests were her devotees.

To widen our perspective in an attempt to view the role of the priests of the Mother Goddess within the social and economic structure of the Indus Valley Civilization, Kosambi poses certain questions regarding the relatively static level of economic development of this culture. For example, why were more advanced foreign tools and agricultural innovations, such as canal irrigation and deep ploughing, not adopted? Such methods would have increased the crop yield

considerably. A possible answer is that the merchants themselves could not have profited from such innovations, as the land and the crop yields were directly owned and controlled by the priesthood. Theocracies have traditionally opposed innovation, and so change would not have been profitable for the merchant class. The merchants could accumulate their profits individually, but there is no evidence of one major palatial structure in any of the Indus cities, and hence the presence of a king who levied taxes upon the merchants is to be doubted.

The rural agriculturalists and the priesthood controlling the revenue of the land were worshippers of the Mother Goddess. The totem animals and humans depicted on the merchants' seals are, however, male. This leads to the conclusion that the traders developed their own secondary cults which excluded the Mother Goddess. In other words, the fact that the seals portray exclusively male animals and the rare human male figure, and the figurines are exclusively female, indicates that they were the objects of worship of two different classes of people living simultaneously in the Indus Valley. Kosambi postulates that the trader class who worshipped the seals were destroyed by the invaders at the end of the Harappā Civilization, while the rural population, the women and the lower classes and their cults, centered around the figurines, survived as wives and slaves of the invaders.¹ Hence while the urban culture of the Indus Civilization largely disappeared, the

¹D. D. Kosambi, Myth and Reality (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1962), p. 68.

rural elements involving worship of the Mother Goddess remained, and were slowly assimilated into the Āryan tradition.

There is actually a wide variety of evidence which discloses many of the religious emphases, both urban and rural, of this culture. From the evidence of seals, copper tablets, sculptures and pottery which have been discovered at Harappan sites, certain items emerge which probably had religious significance. One of the most frequent figures is that of a horned deity who is often surrounded by animals and seated in a lotus position. The animals, the plant-like growth between the deity's horns and the fact that he is ithyphallic all indicate that he was a fertility deity. Both the form and symbolism of the figure indicate that it is a prototype of Śiva in his aspect as Paśupati, Lord of Beasts and Prince of Yoga.¹

In Balūchistān certain phallic images have been discovered, most notably a large representation of a phallus carved in stone at the Mogul Ghundai mound close to the Zhob River, and a large vulva depicted at the nearby Periano Ghundai mound.² In the Indus Valley Civilization, limestone conical liṅgas, or representations of the male organ, have been found. Many of these are very realistically modelled.³ Stone rings called yoni, representing the vulva, have also been discovered.⁴

¹Piggot, op. cit., p. 204.

²James, op. cit., p. 32.

³Marshall, op. cit., Pl. xiii, 1, and xiv, 2 and 4.

⁴Ibid., Pl. xiii, 7.

Sometimes the līngas and yonis have been brought into conjunction to represent the union of the two organs, for example in those depictions of yonis bases of līnga. The ring encircling certain small conical baetyls has often been regarded as yonis.¹ These phallic images seem to have been involved in a fertility cult connected with the Mother Goddess. Many scholars claim that this is the prototype of the later Śiva-Śakti cult², as phallic worship is the most common form of venerating Śiva.

Numerous terracotta figurines have been found in pre-Harappan settlements in Balūchistān and Sind, as well as in Indus Valley sites. The most common subject depicted is *Bos indicus*, most often humped. There are a few models of other animals such as sheep, birds and goats.³ Human figures are less common in the lower levels, but in the late pre-Harappan periods there is an increasing number of distinctive female figurines, for example among the cities of the Kullī Culture of South Balūchistān. These show very little modelling of the body, which often ends in a flat base, and are very similar to many images found on the sites of the Minoan and Mycenaean cultures.⁴ The breasts, neck, and head are heavily ornamented. The head is also very loosely modelled, while the eyes are formed by deep stick incisions.⁵ The

¹James, op. cit., p. 36.

²B. P. Sinha, Evolution of Sakti Worship in India, Sircar, ed. op. cit., p. 47.

³Allchin, op. cit., pp. 302-303

⁴Marshall, op. cit., p. 49.

⁵Piggott, op. cit., pp. 109-111.

female figurines of the Zhob Culture have grim faces, often to the point of being a grinning skull. These would seem to be an embodiment of the Mother Goddess who is also guardian of the dead¹ and as such would be an early prototype of Kālī.

Numerous terracotta female figurines, often very similar to pre-Harappan models, occur on all levels of the Indus Valley Civilization. They frequently wear elaborate headdresses, and while many are naked, some are clothed in ornaments or appliqué dresses. They are sometimes depicted with children. Heads with horn-like appendages appear on male and female bodies. These tend to be associated with the horned figures portrayed on many seals, which are often interpreted as deities.²

Some of the Indus Valley figurines, such as the woman kneading dough or holding dishes, are probably toys having no religious significance. Others who are carrying children or who are pregnant may be ex-voto offerings for the purpose of procuring offspring.³ The majority of the figurines, however, have usually been interpreted as being tutelary divinities representing the Great Goddess of fertility and vegetation despite the fact that there is no emphasis of the generative organs as is common to most Mother Goddess cults.⁴

¹Ibid., p. 129.

²Allchin, op. cit. pp. 303-304.

³Marshall, op. cit., p. 49.

⁴Sir Mortimer Wheeler, The Indus Civilization (Cambridge: The University Press, 1953), p. 68.

The phallic images, liṅga and yoni, provide part of the evidence of fertility worship in the Indus Valley culture. These objects were most likely connected with the Mother Goddess cult, since her major attributes are those of fertility and fecundity.

The constant proximity of goddess and plant in archaic iconography and mythology indicate that all over the ancient world plants and trees symbolized "an inexhaustible source of cosmic fertility".¹ From its leaves, the tree depicted in the Harappan seals has most often been interpreted as being the pipal tree.² This tree is still worshipped widely all over India. It is known as the tree of knowledge, bodhi or bo-tree, and under its leaves the Buddha gained enlightenment. At Harappā and Mohenjo-daro two forms of tree worship are represented. Firstly, the tree is worshipped in its natural form; secondly the tree spirit is anthropomorphized.³

In India, sap-filled trees symbolize the constantly regenerative powers of fertility and divine motherhood.⁴ The Harappan figurines are often standing beside a *ficus religiosa* or else have a plant emerging from their womb.⁵ This would indicate an identification between the Goddess and fertility and vegetation. The representation of the Goddess with a plant growing from her womb is closely paralleled by a

¹Eliade, Patterns, op. cit., p. 280.

²Marshall, op. cit., p. 64.

³Ibid., p. 65.

⁴Eliade, op. cit., p. 281.

⁵Marshall, op. cit., Pl. xii, 12, p. 52.

terracotta relief from Bhita in the early Gupta period where the Goddess is in a similar position but with a lotus issuing from her neck rather than from her womb.¹ In certain Vedic and Puranic creation myths, the divinity manifests himself or herself, and often the universe, as issuing forth from a lotus floating upon water.² Further, the miraculous plant, soma, of the Indo-Iranians was the symbol for life, fertility and regeneration.³

Many of the Harappan terracotta figurines wear a fan-shaped headdress with pannier-like side projections. Mackay has interpreted the black stains on many of these headdresses as having been caused by smoke. From this he has postulated that these figures were used as small lamps in a Mother Goddess cult of whom they were a symbol.⁴ The fact that similar headdresses and pieces of jewelry occur on female figurines from Neolithic and Bronze Age civilizations in Syria and the Eastern Mediterranean would further support this hypothesis.⁵ Another link between these figures and goddess cults of other ancient cultures is that many have been painted with a red slip or wash. This was also done in Ancient Egypt, Malta and Mesopotamia to enhance the life-giving properties of the figurines.⁶

¹Ibid., p. 52.

²Eliade, op. cit., p. 281.

³Loc. cit.

⁴Ernest Mackay, ed., Further Excavations at Mohenjo-daro (Delhi: 1938), p. 260.

⁵James, op. cit., p. 33.

⁶Ibid., p. 34.

As household deities the figurines would have been worshipped at family altars.¹ This is very similar to the Grāmadevatās of contemporary Hinduism who are the guardians of the house and village, and preside over childbirth and daily needs. As such an image cult was unknown to the Āryans, it may be traced back to the Indus Civilization. A further similarity between the Harappan figurines and the Grāmadevatās is the fact that the Harappan goddess or goddesses did not seem to have had a male counterpart, and if she did, he is rarely brought into conjunction with the goddess in the iconography. The Grāmadevatās of rural India also do not have male counterparts.

The worship of the Mother Goddess or Grāmadevatās in rural India has had a long continuous past. It stretches back to the Indus Valley Civilization where the Mother Goddess was worshipped by the rural population and was the centre of the official religion of the theocracy. When the Āryans conquered the Indus Valley, certain elements of worship of the autochthonous peoples, namely the Mother Goddess, were absorbed into the Āryan tradition, or at least allowed to co-exist with the Āryan tradition. A two-fold process ensued between the Āryan and non-Āryan traditions. The Brāhmaṇs reached down and raised certain local goddesses to be included in the Sanskrit tradition, while the non-Āryan tribes reached up to the Sanskrit tradition and incorporated many of the names and myths of the goddesses of the Great Tradition into their local cults, and hence

¹Piggott, op. cit., p. 203.

effected a merger on the folk level of the Great and Little Traditions.
This dual process of Sanskritization was responsible for the continued
existence of the Mother Goddess from the Indus Valley Civilization onwards.

CHAPTER II

THE ĀRYAN TRADITION IN INDIA

Introduction to Tribal Society

Tribes are social formations that occupy a middle position in the evolution of culture. Although more advanced than simple hunting and gathering societies, they are nonetheless below the level of technological society characterized by urbanization. We intend to present some general anthropological information concerning the economic, social and religious structures of tribal societies. This information may serve as a background to the study of early Āryan tribal society in India. Further, since our thesis involves a close correlation between social, economic and religious structures in both pastoral and agricultural societies, represented in Āryan and non-Āryan society in India, an examination of such factors in tribal society in general and Āryan society in India in particular, is essential.

In early tribal economies, most production is carried out for the benefit of the producers or for the purpose of discharging kinship obligations, rather than for the purpose of exchange or private gain. "A corollary is that de facto control of the means of production is decentralized, local and familial in primitive society."¹ Producers

¹Wolf, op. cit., p. 3.

control the means of production, including their own labour, and also exchange their labour and the products of their labour for goods and services of other tribesmen.¹ In reference to these transactions in particular and to tribal economic relations in general, material utility tends to be deemphasized, while the social benefits of the transaction are emphasized much more strongly. Many tribes exhibit different types of reciprocal gift giving, which are instrumental exchanges which establish bonds of solidarity between people and social groups. "A transaction always has an instrumental co-efficient: it is socially negative or positive. . . . An exchange is inevitably a social strategy. Therefore, reciprocity, or some approximation to it, dominates tribal economics."²

Tribal social structure is usually based on kinship, which is basically a social relation of nonviolence and cooperation.³ Kinship also serves to maintain a level of economic cooperation as well as a level of social cooperation. On the interpersonal level, various kinds of 'classificatory kinship systems' influence the structure and interaction amongst the members of the tribe. The social similarity of the members is defined and reinforced in a common kinship classification. On the level of group organization, tribal descent groups are a further example of the cohesive functions of the kinship system.

¹Loc. cit.

²Sahlins, op. cit., p. 9.

³Ibid., pp. 10-12.

Intermarriage of descent groups illustrate how kinship can result in tribal alliances. Hence the smallest social units are usually households made up of cohesive kinship groups forming local lineages. Lineages form village communities, villages form regional confederacies which are the tribes themselves set in a wider inter-tribal sphere.¹ All of the social groupings can be reduced to different lines of kinship.

An interesting study of the correlations between marriage systems and economic systems among five hundred and fifty-two separate primitive groups and cultures from around the world indicates that tribal groups characterized by the above economic and social structures tend to be patriarchal and patrilineal. In a book entitled The Material Culture and Social Institutions of the Simpler Peoples, the authors "suggest that the matrilineal system on the whole slightly predominates among the Hunters and the patrilineal decidedly among Pastoralists, while the two are nearly balanced among Agricultural peoples. . ." ² The authors combine these data concerning rules of descent with data concerning rules of marital residence and conclude on the basis of the same sample of cultures "that the maternal principle predominates among the hunting peoples, the paternal in the pastoral stage, while

¹Ibid., pp. 15-16.

²L. T. Hobhouse, G. C. Wheeler, and M. Ginsberg, The Material Culture and Social Institutions of the Simpler Peoples (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1965), p. 151.

among agricultural peoples the two are nearly balanced."¹ A further authority on primitive culture concludes that "one gross correlation that has considerable empirical support . . . (is that) among stock-raising populations the status of woman is almost uniformly one of decided and absolute inferiority."² It has been said that "the cow is the enemy of matriliney, and the friend of patriliney".³

A number of studies also indicate that there are definite connections between economic systems and social structures on the one hand, and religious structures on the other hand. While different tribal groups have different sets of religious beliefs, it is usually the case that tribes at a very early level of agricultural development worship the sky and celestial powers which control the life-giving rain.⁴ If agricultural knowledge and techniques are not known, and hence irrigation not practiced, certainly in arid areas especially

¹The figures cited are as follows: (p. 153)

	Maternal	Paternal	Intermixed
Hunters	30	18	22
Pastoral	1	10	3
Agricultural	44	47	19

²Robert H. Lowie, Primitive Society (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 1947), p. 193.

³Jack Goody, "Kinship, II", International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, ed. by David L. Sills, 8 (New York: Crowell Collier and Macmillan Inc., 1968), p. 405.

David F. Aberle, "Matrilineal Descent in Cross-Cultural Perspective", Matrilineal Kinship, ed. by David M. Schneider and Kathleen Gough (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961), pp. 655-727.

⁴E. O. James, The Worship of the Sky God (London: University of London, 1963), p. 20.

it is logical that early tribal groups would worship a Sky-God responsible for weather in general and rain in particular. This is the case with many tribal groups from the Neolithic period. The Sky-God has tended to be detached from the world and its affairs, and yet in his connection with the atmosphere, air and wind he was regarded as omnipotent and omniscient.¹

The Āryans

The early Āryans in India are an example of pastoral tribal society. There are many different types of pastoralism. Research indicates that the Āryans were very similar to Mongol pastoralism, which as a specialized cultural type emerged out of the more generalized herding, hunting and farming culture of the Bronze Age of northern Asia.² The traditional pastoral village of the Mongols was made up of extended families each under a patriarch. Upon marriage residence was patrilocal. Kinship was and still is determined in the patriline. The men tended the herds and decided upon the important issues concerning the tribe. Traditionally all of the component families of a Mongol village "were related by descent and were grouped into patriclans that were in turn grouped into confederations and principalities; villages, clans, confederations each had a ruler or chief. Thus all individuals were related by consanguinity."³

¹Loc. cit.

²Lawrence Krader, "Pastoralism", International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, op. cit., II, p. 458.

³Loc. cit.

The early Āryans in India exhibited certain characteristics of tribal societies in general and of such pastoral groups as the Mongols in particular. As such, they differed on the levels of social, economic and religious structure both from the Indus Valley Civilization and from contemporary non-Āryan tribes whose roots extend back to the Indus Culture. These two social groups, Āryan and non-Āryan, theoretically represent antithetical poles: patriarchal versus matriarchal social structure, pastoral versus agricultural economy, and worship of male Sky Gods versus worship of female Earth Goddesses. There is much more actual evidence, mainly in the form of references in the hymns of the Ṛg Veda, enabling us to reconstruct early Āryan society than there is to reconstruct a similar model of Indus Valley society.

The Āryans were a cultural rather than a racial group, and their cultural identity was probably established by about 3000 B.C. in the southern Russian steppes.¹ It is generally held that the expansion of Indo-European languages was roughly coincidental with the domestication of the horse and the subsequent development of war chariots.² Evidence of a wild species of horse from the late Pleistocene era has been found in the southern Russian and Ukrainian steppes, and from there eastwards into Central Asia. Domestication of the horse took place in this area some time before 2000 B.C., and the adoption of the war

¹Charles Drekmeier, Kinship and Community in Early India (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962), p. 18.

²Allchin, op. cit., p. 144.

chariot and subsequent migration of the Āryan tribes occurred shortly after this date.¹ There is reference to this development in the Chagar Bazar tablets of Samsi-Adad (c. 1800 B.C.), and contemporary inscriptional reference to the entrance of Indo-European languages into Iran.²

Separate groups of Indo-Iranian speaking peoples from the area of Iran advanced into India through the Hindu Kush mountains in the second quarter of the second millennium B.C. The Vedic Āryans probably came in one of the later waves.³ In a treaty between the kingdom of Mitanni on the Upper Euphrates and the Hittite Empire, dated c. 1400 B.C., various deities are invoked as witness, such as Indra, Varuna and Mitra, all of whom were major gods of the Ṛg Veda, the earliest literary work of the Āryans in India.⁴ In the Cemetery H culture at Harappā, there occurs a fusion of Harappan characteristics with new traits of Iranian origin.

The main geographical area of the Ṛg Veda is the Punjab. The Indus, Sarasvatī and Drishadvatī Rivers and the five rivers which mark the Punjab (five waters) are all mentioned in the Ṛg Veda. The western horizons are the western tributaries of the Indus, while the

¹Loc. cit.

²Loc. cit.

³Ibid., p. 324.

⁴Paul Masson-Oursel, Helena de Willman-Grabowska, and Philippe Stern, Ancient India and Indian Civilization, trans. by M. R. Dobie (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd., 1934), p. 15.

eastern boundaries are the Jamunā, and at the end of the period, the Ganges Rivers.¹

In this area the Āryans encountered the Dāsas who were of darker complexion, were rich in cattle, inhabited walled towns, and whom the Aryans deprecatingly called worshippers of the phallus (śiśna deva, R.V. VII. 21.5.). Another group of people whom they encountered were the Panis who also were wealthy in cattle.

In the south Russian steppes the Āryans probably had been primitive agriculturalists as well as pastoralists. Many words dealing with cultivation, such as plough, yoke, wheel, etc., which are in use in Indo-European countries, all point to the same primitive roots from which these words have been derived.² The Āryans described in the Rg Veda utilized simple agricultural techniques, although irrigation was practiced. The early Āryans in India were, however, mainly a pastoral people who also raised a grain crop. Wealth was reckoned in cattle, which was also the means of exchange. The Āryan vocabulary has many words describing aspects of the herd.

The early Āryans lived in farmsteads and small villages. The word nagara, city, does not occur in the Rg Veda.³ The family pictured in the Rg Veda was patriarchal, patrilinear, consanguineous and usually monogamous. The basic element of the early Vedic social

¹Allchin, op. cit., p. 154.

²Romesh C. Dutt, Early Hindu Civilization (Calcutta: R. P. Mitra & Son, 1927), p. 29.

³R. C. Majumdar, An Advanced History of India (London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd., 1950), p. 33.

structure and the smallest political unit was the grāma, later to become 'village'. At first the grāma consisted of a group of related families and thus was a kinship grouping (sajāta). The tribe or jana was the highest level of political organization.¹

There are many references to three social divisions in the Rg Veda: that of the brahma, ksatra and viś, meaning priests, warriors and artisans or the common people. These divisions are functional groupings of the population, as referred to in R.V. I. 113.6 and R.V. VIII. 35.16-18, rather than castes, jāti, denoting occupational groupings. The social structure was still in its formative stages in the early Vedic period, and the four classes, varna, are not specifically mentioned until the late R.V. X. 90.

The early Āryans in India were a tribal society without a developed system of economic or social stratification characteristic of more advanced societies such as the Indus Valley Civilization. Economically the Āryans were mainly pastoralists with simple agricultural methods, and socially they were patriarchal and loosely organized into kinship groupings. The religious structure of the Aryans can be seen as illustrative of their economic and social structures. Their increasing contact with non-Āryan tribes and gradual assimilation of many non-Āryan elements into their culture was also to become reflected in their religious structure. The Mother Goddess, a seemingly inimical metaphorical representation of non-Āryan culture, can be found even in the early Vedic literature.

¹Drekmeier, op. cit., pp. 18-20.

Mother Goddess Worship
in the Early Āryan Religious Tradition

The religious literature of the early Āryans in India consists of the Ṛg Veda and the Brāhmanas. In both these works we can see that goddesses were definitely secondary in importance and function to the male gods such as Indra, Varuna and Rudra. Both the patriarchal social structure and pastoral level of economy of this period account for the discount of female deities and the absence of a major Mother Goddess.

The origins of the Sky-God tradition in its Āryan aspects is to be found in the confederacy of tribes in southern Russia and Turkestan which spread into Western Asia, Europe and eastwards into northern India in the second millenium B.C. Ancient texts tell us that the rulers of Mitanni in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries B.C. worshipped Indo-European sky-deities such as Indra, Mitra and Varuna, who were all major deities of the Ṛg Veda. Hence the worship of the Vedic sky gods was already established among the Āryan tribes during their migrations, before reaching India.

In the hymns of the Ṛg Veda the forces of nature were personified as deities. These deities also indicate, however, characteristics of the social and economic structures of early Āryan society in India. The Ṛg Vedic deities, like the semi-nomadic herdsmen themselves, did not have specific abodes or sanctuaries where they were to be worshipped. They ruled, rather, in the general sphere of nature itself, and could only be summoned to the sacrificial altar by the priest with the aid

of special formulae. The Vedic gods were not represented by any sacred images, such as stones or trees, and "the only indispensable prerequisites for the invocation and worship of the deities were the hymns and rites of the Veda".¹ The gods were representations of natural phenomena rather than guardians of morality.² The relationship between the early Āryans and their gods was one of reciprocity: if the correct sacrifices were performed and the correct words chanted, then the gods would grant favours.

One of the earliest gods in the Ṛg Veda was Dyaus, god of the light sky, who was common to many Āryan tribes. The names of many of the early deities of the Āryans reveal their organic connection with the sky,³ and hence of their roots in a pastoral society. Dyaus came to be replaced by Varuṇa, who retained all the attributes of the sky but embodied much more. He was guardian of Ṛta, cosmic order, and was omniscient, omnipresent and ethically the highest of the Vedic gods. Parjanya, god of hurricanes, was the son of Dyaus. He was replaced by Indra, most popular of the gods. Indra was the god of fertility, war and weather, and was as well a prototype of the ksatriya or warrior class. Rudra was a storm god, not quite as popular as Indra, and was the precursor of Śiva. Like the later Śiva, he had a dual nature: his arrows brought disease and disaster, yet he was also the guardian

¹Zimmer, op. cit., p. 37.

²Drekmeier, op. cit., p. 13.

³Eliade, op. cit., p. 66.

of those herbs which heal diseases.

Sūrya, Savitr̥ and Pūṣan were all associated with the sun. There are references to Viṣṇu, who in the Ṛg Veda was a minor deity having solar characteristics. Agni, god of the sacrificial fire and prototype of the brāhman class, was regarded as the intermediary between men and gods since he consumes the sacrifice and brings it to the gods. Soma, god of the intoxicating plant soma, was also an important deity.

The religious symbols - the deities - reflect the background of early Āryan society in which they arose. Indra and Agni, two of the most important gods in the Ṛg Veda, are social prototypes reflecting two major economic and functional groupings of the society. Indra represents the ksatriya or warrior class, and hence symbolizes the characteristics and values of the early Aryan warriors who rode into and wrested India from the autochthonous tribes already in the Indus region; the warrior par excellence was epitomized in this rowdy and brave god. Agni, god of the sacrificial fire, represents the brāhman or priestly class, and his increasing importance as necessary intermediary between men and the gods reflects the rise in social and economic importance of the brāhmans themselves, and of the changes involved in the economic and social structure of Aryan society as it developed from tribal pastoralism to a more stratified society.

Together with these Ṛg Vedic gods, a tendency towards conceptualizing one supreme being was developing in this period.¹ For example,

¹S. N. Dasgupta, Hindu Mysticism (New York: Frederick Ungar Pub. Co., 1967), p. 23.

in R.V. X. 114,5 we read of a deity who is One in nature, though he is called by many different names. R.V. X. 129 speaks of That One Thing that existed before all else. Hiranyagarbha in R.V. X. 121 is called Only Lord of all created beings. These hymns are all relatively late, and were to set the dominant train of thought for the Upaniṣads.

In the Ṛg Vedic period the major deities were gods, the prototypes of the patriarchal society. The goddesses were usually seen as either the wives, lovers or daughters of the gods. However, we also see that the consorts of the deities were often represented as the female principle that absorbs various functions of the god and that also represents the productive energies or generating fertility of the deity.¹ This conception was to develop in later periods to culminate in Śakti, Divine Mother, but in the Ṛg Veda it is prefigured by the above and also by the concept of divine energy which was believed to be inherent in animals, men and gods.

The word 'śakti' occurs nearly a dozen times in the Ṛg Veda. It is used in the context of the power of generation and fertility.² Śacī, consort of Indra, is actually mentioned more often than śakti. In R.V. I. 56.4 she is Devī, Goddess of Might, who waits upon Indra as the Sun attends the Dawn. This hymn is significant in marking the further process of unifying the different Śacīs into one consort of Indra. Towards the end of the Ṛg Vedic period Śacī is seen as nothing

¹Sinha, op. cit., p. 49.

²The idea of generation embodied in Śakti was to later acquire the meaning 'to give birth to the world of names and forms'.

but Indra's exploits of power deifies as his wife.¹

'Jñā', meaning women, occurs in the Ṛg Veda roughly eighteen times. "Though the traditional interpretation of the term Jñā varies, still it is maintained that Jñā belongs to the pre-historic stages of thought when male nature powers were beginning to be associated with female energies."² Whereas the Śacīs were the deified functions of the male divinity and were essentially part of his character, the Jñās were separate and distinct principles of female energy, which interacted with their male counterparts.³

The Devīsūkta, R.V. X. 125, is a hymn dedicated to Vāc, who was to become the single representation of the Jñās in the Brāhmaṇas. Vāc was the daughter of the seer Ambhr̥ṇa, and identified herself with the primal energy of life⁴, the sole principle of creative energy. She was the support of all major deities such as Indra, Varuṇa, Mitra, Agni and Soma. She bestowed both wealth and protection and spiritual knowledge, making her devotees Rshis. She was the Word, the magical quality of sacrificial utterances, and hence was worshipped especially by the Brāhmaṇas.

Dyaus, god of Heaven, was usually associated with Pṛthvī, the Earth. In R.V. VI. 51,5 they are called Father and Mother, and in

¹Sinha, op. cit., p. 50.

²G. Sastri, "The Cult of Sakti", in Sircar, op. cit., p. 12.

³Loc. cit.

⁴Ibid., p. 14.

R.V. I. 159,2 they are Universal Parents. Their names were often linked together in a dual compound dyāvāprthvī.¹ Dyaus and Prthvī were both more than personifications of physical principles. They were endowed with moral and spiritual attributes as well, and reflect different aspects of early Āryan society. For example, in R.V. I. 159,1 mighty Heaven and Earth are called the wise and the Strengtheners of Law; in R.V. IV. 56, 4-5 they are described as holy and pure; and in R.V. VI. 70,6 as omniscient. Heaven was a place of reward or bliss for those worthy people who have honoured the gods and upheld the society during their lifetime. Prthvī is praised alone in a very short hymn R.V. V. 84. In the funeral hymn R.V. X. 18, in verses 10 and 11 Prthvī is conceived of as taking back her dead sons even as she gave birth to them. R.V. X. 97 is a hymn to herbs called Mothers who were sacred as they had been born from Mother Earth. They brought life, wealth and success to men. Dyaus and Prthvī, however, were not major deities of the Rg Veda. They were generally conceived in rather vague terms, certainly far subordinate to a vital deity such as Indra.

Uṣas, Dawn, is one of the most frequently mentioned goddesses in the Rg Veda, having twenty-one complete hymns dedicated to her. She was conceived as the life and death of all things and as the preserver of men and of the world. In R.V. I. 48 she is the divine matron who guided and inspired men and granted life and wealth. She was often associated with the Sun God, Sūrya, as in R.V. VII. 75,5. In R.V. I. 113.19 she is

¹Sir James G. Frazer, The Worship of Nature (London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd., 1926), p. 23.

called Mother of Gods and Aditi's form of glory. In a hymn to Agni, R.V. IX. 2, verse 15 reads "And may we be born from the Dawn, the mother, as the seven priests, as the first worshippers among men".¹ Here we can see that Uṣas was a high Mother Goddess. She was dropped from the list of divinities after the Rg Vedic period. Perhaps the answer to why she lost her exalted position can be seen in such hymns as R.V. IV. 30,8-11; R.V. X. 73,6; R.V. X. 138,5 and R.V. II. 15,6, in all of which Indra strikes down Uṣas in a great battle. She is called the evil-plotting daughter of Heaven (IV. 30,8) and after Indra had shattered her car she fled far away (IV. 30,10-11). An explanation for this tale of conflict might be that of a clash of cults. She was a Mother Goddess of the pre-Āryan inhabitants of the Punjab who was crushed by the war god of the patriarchal Āryans. Her survival after this battle, and her being 'ancient of days' yet being born again and again (I. 92,10) all indicate the "progressive, comparatively peaceful assimilation of her surviving pre-Āryan worshippers who still regarded her as mother of the sun, wife of the sun, daughter of heaven".² Towards the end of the early Vedic period, however, Uṣas lost her prominence.

Aditi is the goddess in the Rg Veda who most clearly bears the characteristics of a Mother Goddess. In R.V. I. 89,10 she is described

¹Hermann Oldenberg, tr., Vedic Hymns, Vol. 46 of The Sacred Books of the East, ed. by F. Max Muller (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1964), p. 318.

²Kosambi, Myth and Reality, op. cit., p. 64.

as the sky, atmosphere, Mother, Father and Son, all Gods and men. She was the source of all that has been born and all that shall be born. Here again we can see traces of a pre-Āryan goddess cult. As the early Āryans were semi-pastoral and semi-agricultural, it was natural that they should recognize agricultural cults. The symbolism of Aditi contains many elements that are structurally local. She is associated with the earth and the river. This association with a physical abode is, as we have seen, a non-Āryan characteristic. The lap or womb of the goddess is referred to in R.V. IX. 71,5 and X. 26,1 in connection with ritual significance. This would be of special significance in an agricultural community.

Recognition of and adaptation to local forms of goddesses could occur not in spite of Brāhmanic ritualism, but rather because of this ritualism which, with the subsequent realization techniques, preserved the peculiar all-embracing figure of the goddess symbolism.¹

Despite her role as Universal Mother, Aditi was not assigned even a single hymn in the Rg Veda, and in the following period she decreased in importance.

Uṣas and Aditi both illustrate certain dynamics of the relationship between early Āryan and non-Āryan society, and hence of the relationship between two opposing religious traditions. The group of people who worshipped Uṣas were overcome by the Āryans. Their way of life in terms of social, economic and religious factors must have been so at odds with the Āryans that they had to be crushed. The tribe or tribes who worshipped

¹Kees W. Bolle, The Persistence of Religion (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1965), p. 27.

Aditi, however, must not have been so at variance with the early Āryans, as she was assimilated into the Vedic pantheon and sacrificial ritual by the Brāhman̄s, and hence her worshippers were also peacefully assimilated into the fold of Āryan society. There must have been a fine line at times between which non-Āryan tribes were acceptable or too 'heretical' to be assimilated, but at least in this specific case it is apparent that the social and economic institutions of the tribes worshipping Aditi were either adequately similar or flexible to the Āryan patterns so that they could be incorporated into the Āryan structure on all levels. The tribes worshipping Uṣas were either too dissimilar or inflexible for such a process to occur.

In the Atharva Veda we also find the idea of the earth as Mother giving forth and receiving back life unto herself. Pṛthvī seems to be the goddess held in highest esteem in the Atharva Veda. She embodied the powers of creation, sustenance and destruction. In A.V. XVII. 4,48, a funeral chant intones "Thou who art earth, I place thee in the earth". In A.V. XII. 1, a long hymn to the goddess Earth, we read in verse 12: "The earth is the mother, and I the son of the earth; Parjanya is the father". Eliade points out that this idea of returning to Mother Earth was completed by the later conception of man's reintegration into the entire cosmos.¹ We see this conception in Aitareya Brāhmaṇa II. 6,13 where the sacrificial victim was dedicated to various parts of the universe: "Make its eye go to the sun; let loose its breath to the wind,

¹Eliade, Patterns, op. cit., p. 252.

its life to the atmosphere, its ear to the quarters, its body to the earth."¹

The sacred marriage between earth and heaven was probably the divine epitome of the fertility of the soil and of human marriage. In A.V. XIV. 2,71 the bride and bridegroom were compared to earth and heaven. Again in A.V. XII. 1,12, Dyaus has been replaced by Parjanya, who was the personification of the rain cloud and in R.V. VII. 102,1 had been called the Son of Heaven. Parjanya in turn gave way to Indra in importance, but his mention in connection with Pṛthvī shows a certain sexual significance. The furrow of the field was often identified with the vulva, while the seed was compared to semen (Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa VII. 2. 2,5). In A.V. XIV. 2,14 we read: "This woman who has come as the living soil, sow seed in her, ye men." The rain of Parjanya can also be seen as seed sowing the earth and producing new life.

Plants were sacred, for the Earth Goddess was manifested in the vegetation she has produced. A.V. IV. 136,1 refers to plants as "Divinity born of the Earth Goddess". And again in the Yajur Veda IV. 2,6 herbs are called both mothers and goddesses.

In the Brāhmaṇas and Atharva Veda we find even more clearly than in the Ṛg Veda that all the various Jñās have been united in the one figure of Vāc. She was speech personified (A.V. V. 7,5) and was the vehicle of knowledge. She gave intelligence and power to those who followed her. In A.V. IX. 2,5; VIII. 10,24 and XI. 8,30 she is

¹A. B. Keith, tr., Rigveda Brahmanas, Vol. 25 of the Harvard Oriental Series (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1920), p. 139.

addressed as the Wish Cow and is identified with the Cosmos, Virāj, the female principle that appears in R.V. X. 90. In the Brāhmanas she further became the Śakti of Prajāpatī, Lord of Creation.¹ The Aitareya Āraṇyaka III. 1,6 speaks of the union of Prajāpatī and his wife producing a son. This union was here called, however, Aditi. "For Aditi is all whatever there is, father, mother, child and begetting." This is one of the rare later references to Aditi.

One of the most important aspects of Vāc is that of the 'Triple Hymn', Gāyatrī. "This name applies to a Vedic meter of twenty-four syllables and to a sacred verse in this meter considered to be the essence of the Veda and pictured as their Mother."² Gāyatrī was patroness of the Āryans, as they were the only ones allowed to speak her name.³ The idea of Vāc as Mantra-mother, giving birth to Ṛk, Sāman and Yajus will later culminate in Tantrism in the conception of Mātrkā Śakti, the Mantra-Mother of the Parā Vāc or Supreme Logos.⁴

Other evidence apart from references in the early Vedic literature would indeed be helpful in understanding more fully the dynamics of the assimilation of the Mother Goddess into the Āryan religious structure. No major works of art or architecture have been found dating from this

¹Sastri, op. cit., p. 13.

²Alain Danielou, Hindu Polytheism, Bollingen Series LXXIII, Pantheon Books (New York: Random House, Inc., 1964), p. 261.

³Loc. cit.

⁴Sastri. op. cit., p. 13.

period of the Vedas and Brāhmaṇas,¹ although there are many references to actual techniques in sculpture and architecture in the Vedas.² The Aryans settled in small scattered communities in the Punjab and built their houses with wood and bamboo mainly, and did not use brick until later on. Hence there are no architectural monuments from this period.

One of the very few monuments that can perhaps be dated as far back as the period of the Vedas and Brāhmaṇas, that is from the early centuries of the first millenium B.C., are certain huge mounds discovered at Lauriyā Nandangarh. These are dome-shaped, similar to the later Buddhist stupas, and were probably used to mark and commemorate burial sites of the local chiefs or kings. Wooden masts are embedded into the earthen domes, perhaps again, as in later Buddhist stupas, to represent the tree or axis of the universe or rather to support an umbrella, a royal emblem, above the mound.³

Two gold repousse figures have been discovered inside the mounds at Lauriyā Nandangarh which date back to the period of the Vedas and Brāhmaṇas. One of them portrays a naked female with exaggerated sexual features, which probably represents a fertility deity.⁴ Also, as Rowland points out, there is a high probability that this figure

¹There are no significant sculptural or architectural remains after the Indus Valley Civilization until the rise of the first Indian Empire under the Mauryas in the third century B.C.

²Benjamin Rowland, The Art and Architecture of India (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1959), p. 19.

³Ibid., pp. 21-22.

⁴Ibid., Pl. 6c.

is that of Pṛthvī, goddess of the earth.¹ As the funeral hymn R.V. X. 18,10-11 mentioned above indicates, the dead were buried and given back to Mother Earth. The outstretched arms of this figure, together with her marked maternal features, all suggest a Mother welcoming her children in an embrace.

Other terracotta female figurines have been found in pre-Mauryan sites, often very similar stylistically and iconographically to the figure from Lauriyā. A statuette from Mathurā has similarly exaggerated maternal organs and has the same frontality and flatness of figure²: a representative of the Mother Goddesses of the ancient world.

There are points of similarity between the figurines from the time of the Vedas and Brāhmanas or perhaps somewhat later, and the terracotta statuettes of the Indus Valley Civilization, such as the additive method of figure composition. The later figurines are more advanced, however, in the sense that they are definite human forms rather than symbolic abstract representations of human forms.³ This important development will be examined more fully in connection with later periods of Indian culture when the material evidence is more plentiful.

Artistic evidence of Mother Goddess worship from the early Vedic period is scant. This is to a large extent due to the Āryan's use of

¹Ibid., p. 22.

²Ibid., p. 23; Pl. 6b.

³Ibid., p. 23.

wood rather than brick as a basic building material. However, we can further say that at this early period, worship of the Mother Goddess was not completely 'acceptable' in the Āryan religious tradition. We have seen how the Mother Goddess does appear in early Vedic literature, occasionally in a very exalted position. Generally, however, the contact and merging of Āryan and non-Āryan structures was at an infant stage in this period of history. The Āryans tended to be rather wary of the customs and traditions of the non-Āryan tribes, and so while these traditions were recognized and occasionally included in the early Vedic literature and more rarely recognized in artistic representations, the Mother Goddess was essentially still a 'foreign' element not officially recognized in Āryan culture. Sanskritization of the Mother Goddess - her incorporation into the Āryan tradition - occurs much more dramatically and extensively in the period of the Ganges Civilization, as evidenced in the literature and art of that period.

In the early Vedic period until c. 800 B.C., traces of the Mother Goddess have been found in the literature and art of the Āryans. She was not worshipped as a major deity nor did she occupy a paramount position in the sacrificial rituals. And yet basic elements in the characters of Aditi, Pṛthvī, Uṣas, Vāc, etc., indicate that the purely pastoral tribalism of the early Āryans was changing and developing in new directions as they conquered, settled, and were influenced by autochthonous peoples in the Indus region. Agricultural techniques were becoming more complex and economic specialists began to emerge. Socially, the kinship system began to change as settled life advanced

and villages became the socio-political units. These changes must have been influenced to a certain extent by the non-Āryan tribes that were assimilated by the Āryans. The religious structure illustrates these developments, and shows how the Mother Goddess and her social and economic concomitants were gradually becoming assimilated. This assimilation was necessary for the evolution of Indian culture and Hinduism in general.

CHAPTER III

THE MERGING OF NON-ĀRYAN AND ĀRYAN TRADITIONS: SANSKRITIZATION OF THE MOTHER GODDESS

Introduction

The complexity of the Ganges Civilization, c. 800 B.C. onwards, can be explained by many different factors; however, one of the most important was certainly the rise of an economic surplus. Anthropological research has shown that different types of subsistence bases have different surplus potentials. Simple hunting and gathering cultures produce only enough surplus for chiefdoms, and accomplish this extremely rarely. A low level of surplus holds true also for cultures that are horticultural, or where mixed horticulture and extraction are co-dominant activities. Agriculture can support the development of a complex state. Pure pastoral systems do not usually rise above the level of chiefdoms.¹ The early Āryans had predominately a pastoral economy, but were also simple agriculturalists raising various grain crops. The development of their agricultural techniques was probably influenced by various non-Āryan agricultural tribes with whom they came into contact in their expansion eastwards to the Ganges.

¹Aberle, op. cit., p. 692. See also Table 17-7 on p. 687 correlating size of political unit, subsistence type and descent. This table is based upon a selected sample of five hundred and sixty-five societies drawn up by G. P. Murdoch in "World Ethnographic Sample", American Anthropologist, 59 (1957), 664-687.

It is this development of an agricultural economy which enabled them to produce an economic surplus and hence to progress to a higher level of societal and political organization. The merging of non-Āryan and Āryan traditions resulted in a highly advanced economic and political structure.

More specifically, on coming to the Ganges area, the Āryans rapidly changed from a semi-nomadic pastoral way of life and economy to a settled agricultural economy.¹ The plough was increasingly used in this period; it aided the settlers in progressively clearing the flat, often swampy forests of the Ganges and preparing the land for cultivation. Plough cultivation was an essential factor in the development of Indian culture, in that it made possible the emergence of an economic surplus and hence an expansion of the population.² Rice, in particular, played an important role in relation to population growth and expansion; the wide alluvial plains of the Ganges provided ideal area for the cultivation of rice. Moreover, commodity production developed rapidly in this period. Trade and industry flourished. Commerce was facilitated by standard units of weight and measure, and by coinage.

A merging of Āryan and non-Āryan cultures is also discernible in the social structure of the Ganges Civilization. In general terms,

¹Sir Mortimer Wheeler, Early India and Pakistan to Ashoka (London: Thames and Hudson, 1968), p. 123.

²Drekmeier, op. cit., p. 18.

it can be said that patrilineality predominates in those cultures which are characterized by animal husbandry, the use of the plough, irrigation agriculture, and wet-rice agriculture.¹ All of these characteristics hold true both for early Āryan economy and the later Ganges Civilization; the social structure of the Ganges Civilization was predominately patrilineal. Although this applies to the urban areas and the social and economic elites of ancient Indian society, other social patterns, such as matrilineality, continued to exist in the rural areas on the folk level.

From the ninth century B.C. onwards, the Ganges Civilization became increasingly complex. As the number and size of settlements increased, the old tribal groups of the Āryans disappeared to be replaced by territorial units. The rise of cities, which India had not seen since the Indus Valley Civilization, was a major event of this period, and illustrates the break-up of the old Āryan tribal society. The largely urban societies of the Ganges Valley had strong centralized governments and exerted an ever-increasing cultural and political dominance over the whole region. This was facilitated by "the growing dominance of Sanskrit as an interregional culture language, and of Brahmanical rites as an all-Indian ideal".²

The Brāhman̄s and their role in the merging of non-Āryan and Āryan social and religious patterns and ideals can be seen again within a wider theoretical background. An economic surplus aids in the

¹Aberle, op. cit., p. 667; Tables 17-4 and 17-7, pp. 677 and 687.

²Allchin, op. cit., p. 331.

development of cultural and social diversity. It permits the development of specialization within which different social and religious traditions can co-exist. More advanced civilizations and 'states' tend to have a large population that is ethnically diversified and that is divided in terms of labour into specialized occupations and unequally privileged classes. The more highly advanced the culture, the higher the level of stratification and specialization. As the attainment of an economic surplus gives rise to specialization, society becomes divided into numerous subgroups, all of which are controlled and governed by specialists. Political and economic specialists integrate the peasant politically and economically to the state and society as a whole.

Generally, the religion of peasants and the religion of specialists are responses to different needs due to different environments. The peasant lives within a narrow social and economic sphere; he is involved in fulfilling daily needs, and tends to depend on religious beliefs which have been handed down for generations. Due to his social and economic position, his religious horizons tend to be fairly limited. The religious specialist, however, lives in the framework of wider social and economic horizons, and hence tends to be more creative in developing ideological structures. Because of this, religious elites are innovators of the religious structure. There is frequently a time lag before peasants adopt religious concepts and rituals developed by specialists; their religious beliefs and customs remain traditional for a much longer period of time. Hence,

such a peasant society undergoes a process of syncretism where two religious structures based on two cultural levels, an older traditional and a more recent one, gradually merge together.¹

In this merger, although both traditions seem to share basic belief-systems and religious practices, there remain important differences between the two. The peasant continues to worship his traditional deities and forces; these, however, have different names as they have become further aspects of a major deity in the Great Tradition. The religious specialists recognize the new additions to the major deity, but continue to worship those aspects which have been traditional in their system. The deities of the peasants are usually very personal; they have human attributes and emotions. The deities of the religious specialists are more abstract and often embody philosophical or ethical principles. Even after a merger between the two traditions of peasants and specialists, when the particular gods or goddesses have become syncretized, these basic differences are still discernible in their characters. Similarly, on the level of religious action and ritual, the peasant worships his deities in a very concrete manner, often in a similar manner as he would treat a respected and loved older relative. The specialist, because he does not anthropomorphize his deities to the same extent, is involved in religious action which again is more abstract and which concentrates upon attaining the level of philosophical or ethical truth embodied

¹Wolf, op. cit., pp. 102-103.

in or symbolized by the deity. When the two traditions merge, the levels of religious action of the peasants and the specialists influence each other but the emphases remain different. Because of these differences on the level of religious belief and action, Great and Little Traditions often retain basic characteristics that they have inherited from the past, even though they have become merged on a more general cultural level as well as on the levels of social structure and economy.

In India, on the religious level, this process of merging is known as Sanskritization. The dynamics of the Sanskritization of the Mother Goddess have occurred both in the Great Tradition and the Little Tradition. The first process has been carried out by the brāhman class mainly, and has resulted in the inclusion of non-Āryan Mother Goddess figures and symbolism into the 'official' Āryan religion. The second process has occurred on the folk level and has resulted in local Mother Goddesses being 'Sanskritized'; that is, being given Sanskrit names and having mythologies and attributes from the Āryan religious structure grafted onto their characters. It is important to examine both these processes, the development of the Mother Goddess in the Āryan religious structure and the Sanskritizing of goddesses on the folk level, in order to fully understand the dynamic process of the Sanskritization of the Mother Goddess.

From the period of the Ganges Civilization onwards, the Brāhmins, as a highly specialized occupational class, set about incorporating various non-Āryan social norms and customs into the

wider context of Āryan society as a whole. The level of specialization enabled wide cultural diversity, and hence the patrilineal Āryan society was able to co-exist with matrilineal elements of non-Āryan tribes. Many non-Āryan myths, deities and sacred practices were incorporated by the Brāhman̄s into the official Āryan religion. Due to the process of incorporation or Sanskritization, the Āryan religion changed and expanded to embrace new elements. One of these was the worship of the Mother Goddess. From 1000 B.C. on she became increasingly Sanskritized. Hence, a merging on the religious level of non-Āryan and Āryan traditions was effected.

In this context religion can be seen as an integrating ideology. Local Mother Goddesses were Sanskritized; they were given Sanskrit names, were married to Aryan deities, and were given a place in the mythology and the official religious structure as a whole. Most of the Āryans themselves, including the Brāhman̄s, did not necessarily become followers of these female deities. They usually continued to worship male gods. However, amongst the rural population, the Mother Goddess could be worshipped as an official deity in the Āryan pantheon, paralleled by the tribe itself being an official caste or division of Āryan society. This was also the case in the Indus Culture, where the rural population, the urban lower classes and the priests had been the devotees of the Mother Goddess, while the merchants had worshipped male deities. In both the Indus and Ganges Civilizations, due to the level of economic surplus, social stratification and cultural diversity, two religious traditions - the one oriented towards male deities, the other towards female deities - were able to co-exist.

Sanskritization of the Mother Goddess
in the Āryan Religious Tradition

In Indian literature from the time of the Upaniṣads through the Epics and Purānas, the traditional Āryan gods who had been the major deities in the early Vedic literature decreased in importance. Their place was taken by Prajāpati, Lord of Beings, who came to be called Brahmā; Viṣṇu, who had been a lesser deity connected with the sacrifice and also having solar characteristics in the R̥g Veda; and Śiva, who developed from the Vedic god Rudra and in whom merged elements of a non-Āryan fertility deity. The development of Viṣṇu also reflects a merging of non-Āryan and Āryan religious structures. By the end of the second century B.C. Vāsudeva, a local god widely worshipped in western India, had become identified with the Vedic god Viṣṇu. Another god Nārāyaṇa, also merged into the figure of Viṣṇu, as did many other popular deities. By this time, Viṣṇu was as well closely connected with Kṛṣṇa, a hero of Āryan martial traditions which were combined to form the huge epic, the Mahābhārata.

During this period, i.e. the early centuries B.C. and A.D., a fertility deity whose roots extend back to the Indus Valley Civilization and who had continued to be worshipped on the folk level, rose in the Vedic pantheon. This god, Śiva, was identified with the Vedic Rudra, and tended to be worshipped in the form of a linga, or phallic emblem. Other popular deities, such as Gaṇeśa and Skanda, came to be associated with him. The rise of both Viṣṇu and Śiva was greatly influenced by religious emphases from the Dravidian South where non-

Āryan cults, although often Sanskritized, had continued to thrive and develop. Theistic schools arose which were characterized by extreme ecstasy and devotion to personal deities. This theistic attitude towards Viṣṇu and Śiva can be seen in many of the Purāṇas, especially those which were composed from the Gupta period, although much of their material is more ancient.

Śiva is an ambivalent figure. He is Mahākāla, the power of death and time which causes the destruction of all things. He is also the master ascetic who sits atop Mount Kailāsa in the Himalayas and whose continual meditations ensure the continuing existence of the world. He is Naṭarāja, Lord of the Dance, and Dakṣiṇāmūrti, Universal Teacher. The fact of his being mainly worshipped in the form of a liṅga indicates that he was originally a non-Āryan fertility deity; phallic emblems have been found from pre-Harappan sites, and in the Rg Veda we do have a deprecating reference to śisna-deva, worshippers of the phallus. Rudra, the Vedic mountain god, had been connected with plants and animals in the Rg Veda. The horned ithyphallic deity pictured in Harappan seals surrounded by animals, is probably the prototype of Śiva as the principle of fertility and reproduction in plants, animals and men. Paśupati, Lord of Beasts, is a favourite aspect of Śiva. As Śiva has these roots in non-Āryan religious traditions, it is appropriate that the rise of the Mother Goddess in the Āryan tradition was accomplished mainly in the form of the consort of Śiva. Both Śiva and Śakti reflect the dynamic process of the merging of Āryan and non-Āryan cultures, and the ongoing process of

Sanskritization of the Mother Goddess both in the orthodox tradition and on the folk level.

The Mother Goddess figures that appear in the literature of the period of the Ganges Civilization (i.e. from 1000B.C.) were much more highly developed and more important than the goddesses of the R̥g Veda such as Uṣas, Aditi or Vāc. Certainly the concept śakti can be discovered in the earlier literature. Yet it is only in this later period that definite traces of non-Āryan goddess worship influencing the religion of the Āryans and indeed receiving Brāhmanical sanction and support can be seen. From this point onwards, Śakti, mainly in her various aspects as a consort of Śiva, rose in prominence, as did her spouse, and began to attract more and more followers.

In the later Vedic literature we continue to find the conception of woman as earth and the soil itself as Mother Earth giving birth to all things. A ritual for the procreation of a son is described in Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad VI. 14,20-21, one of the earliest Upaniṣads, usually dated c. 900 B.C. Here the father identifies himself and his wife with the cosmic pair, Heaven and Earth. He calls upon various gods, such as Viṣṇu, Prajāpatī, Agni, Indra and Vāyu to aid in this act of creation, which hence assumes cosmic proportions.¹

Taittirīya Āraṇyaka X.1 (Nārāyana Upaniṣad), dated between the seventh and sixth centuries B.C., is addressed to Durgā Devī, who is Vairochanī, daughter of Agni. In X.I.7, among verses which are addressed

¹R. E. Hume, tr., The Thirteen Principal Upaniṣads (London: Oxford University Press, 1931), pp. 171-172; Eliade, op. cit., p. 411.

to Agni, she is called by the names of Kātyāyanī and Kanyākumāri, and is described as the 'flaming goddess'.¹ She is associated with Brahman, and is to be worshipped for material and spritual gain. Ambikā is also addressed in the Nārāyana Upaniṣad. She had been called the sister of Rudra in the Vājasaneyā Samhitā. In the Taittirīya Āraṇyaka X.18, however, Ambikā is described as the consort of Rudra.² As Rudra developed into Śiva and grew in importance, his spouse, whether as Ambikā, Durgā, Umā, etc., also increased in significance in Hindu literature and worship.

Umā was a daughter of Agni. Her important appearances in Kena Upaniṣad III, where she proved herself superior to the male Āryan deities, has already been described.³ Umā, originally a non-Āryan Mother Goddess, was increasingly Sanskritized during the Late Ancient Period (1000-200 B.C.), and her inclusion in the orthodox religious and philosophic tradition of the Āryans can be seen in the Kena Upaniṣad, usually dated in the seventh century B.C. Hence, the Brāhmins began to effect a merger of non-Aryan and Aryan myths and deities. Also, Umā actually proved herself superior to the traditional Āryan deities Agni, Vāyu and Indra in her knowledge of Brahman, the Highest Truth. The traditional Āryan doctrines and beliefs were no longer the only paths and answers to salvation. Here Umā, a non-Āryan figure, born and raised outside

¹Sastri, op. cit., p. 14.

²K. K. Dasgupta, "Iconography of Tara", in Sircar, op. cit., p. 116.

³See Supra, p. 1.

the Āryan fold, was the real knower of Brahman. She has been interpreted as the active principle of the Absolute, and as therefore being of the nature of Brahman herself.¹

Brahman and Śakti, the neutral and the female aspects of the divine life-force, the Āryan and the non-Āryan truths, thus were recognized as fundamentally one. And this identity of herself with Brahman is the ultimate secret of the goddess.²

The only actual reference to 'śakti' is in the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad I.3, a relatively late Upaniṣad, where "the self-power (ātma-śakti) of God is hidden in his own qualities (guṇa)."³ This can be seen as the culmination of the conception found in the Brāhmaṇas of Vāc giving birth to all things in union with Prajāpati. In the present context she is the supreme Śakti of God, his power of action in the world.

In Hindu myth and iconography, Kālī has been portrayed as a highly ambivalent figure. She is the Eternal Mother of the universe who cherishes and protects all beings. She is also, however, the Terrible Mother, destroying and devouring all life as the power of Time and Death. 'Kālā' means both 'black' and 'time'. Kālī first appears in Sautpiak Parva VII of the Mahābhārata, c. 200 B.C. She stands on the battlefield where the Pāṇḍava army lies slaughtered by the Kauravas. She is black and her mouth is bloody as she leads the

¹Nikhilananda, op. cit., p. 101 n.

²Zimmer, op. cit., p. 110.

³Hume, op. cit., p. 394.

dead soldiers away with her noose. Kālī is also mentioned in Virata Parva VI and Bhīṣma Parva XXIII as an epithet of Durgā.¹ In the Mahābhārata Kālī is the power of time, and Śiva as the Destroyer is identified with her. "You are the origin of the worlds and you are Time, their destroyer." (Mhb. 45. 313) Mahākāla, 'Great Time' or Eternity, is one of the names of Śiva, while the power of time, i.e. relative time, Kālī, measures the existence of life and destroys all things.² Hence time is seen as the sakti or power of Rudra-Śiva, the Destroyer. "I am Time (Death, Kālā) cause of destruction of the worlds."³ (Bhagavad Gita XI, 32). Kālī and Durgā were both associated with Śiva from the time of the Mahābhārata. In Bhīṣma Parva, Kālī is the wife of Kāpala, Śiva the skull-bearer, and mother of Skanda. As she is an epithet of Durgā, Durgā is thus also associated with Śiva.⁴ In the Vāmana Purāṇa, Kālī is an epithet of Pārvatī, wife of Śiva.⁵

In many Purāṇas, composed roughly from the second century B.C. to the eighth century A.D., the Goddess is portrayed as the sakti of Śiva: as his power in the world. Daniélou points to an interesting comparison of Śiva and Śakti in the theory of Language, where a basic

¹David Kinsey, "Freedom from Death in the Worship of Kali", (paper presented at the American Academy of Religion, Asian Religions Section, Atlanta, Georgia, October 28-31, 1971), pp. 2-3.

²"Time which digests the elements, Time which devours all beings." (Mhb. I. 1. 273)

³Franklin Edgerton, tr., The Bhagavad Gita, Harper Torchbooks, The Cloister Library (New York: Harper & Row, Pub., 1964), p. 58.

⁴Kinsey, op. cit., p. 3.

⁵Ibid., p. 5.

distinction is made between the word and its meaning. As Śiva is the ground of all knowledge, then he can be identified with the meaning of the word. The word itself is the instrument which enables one to grasp the meaning and hence can be identified with Śakti. The word, Śakti, is the form of energy which is the active principle of the word's meaning, Śiva. "Siva is the meaning, his consort the words." (Līṅga Purāṇa 3.11.47)¹

In many parts of India the Devī Bhāgavata Purāṇa, composed c. 400 A.D., is regarded as a highly sacred text; it is seen as a form of Devī, Mother of the universe, and as the driving force, ādiśakti, of her nature. Hence it is the centre of more ritual than any other Purāṇic text. One must take a preparatory bath before touching the book, and one can only begin a reading cycle at certain prescribed times.²

In the Devī Purāṇa, the Goddess slays various demons, who represent the powers of evil. She thus restores the world to the powers of good. She herself is the embodiment of good and is the life-force of all things. When the gods approach her and ask who she is, she replies: "I am the form of the Immensity; from me the world arises as Nature and Person (prakṛti-puruṣa)" (I.1.)³ Śiva,

¹Daniélou, op. cit., p. 200.

²William McCormack, "The Forms of Communication in Vīraśaiva Religion", in Traditional India: Structure and Change, ed. by Milton Singer, Bibliographical Series, Vol. X. (Philadelphia: The American Folklore Society, 1959), p. 124.

³Quoted in Daniélou, op. cit., p. 255.

Viṣṇu and Brahmā are presented as her sons, and she tells the world that all three are equally deserving of worship. The Devī Purāṇa, which Śiva narrates, promises to its readers salvation from samsāra. Devī can be worshipped in either her unqualified or qualified form. "Those bound by attachment should worship her qualified form, and those without attachment her unqualified form." (I.8.40)¹ Devotion to Her leads to fusion, aikya, with the Godhead, and to permanent nirvāna.

The culmination of the concept of Śakti can be seen in the Devīmāhātmya or the 'Chandī' of the Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa. This is a sectarian work which all Hindu sects do not recognize or worship. Yet it displays the complex and exalted position which Śakti had achieved in certain Hindu sects by the early centuries A.D. The Mother Goddess is known by many different names in the Devīmāhātmya, e.g. Durgā, Candī, Śrī, Annapūrṇā, etc., all of whom are different local goddesses fused into one supreme Mother Goddess. Alternatively, they may be seen as representing different attributes or aspects of Devī.²

The great soul of the Mother (Mahātmā), one without a second, by its own glory, becomes many souls, many little mothers, matrīkas and these emanations of the Mother, after finishing their appointed task, converge back into the great soul of the Mother.³

¹Ibid., p. 256.

²Sinha, op. cit., p. 54.

³S. Shankaranarayana, tr., Glory of the Divine Mother. Devīmāhātmyam. Dipti Publications, Sri Aurobindo Ashram (Madras: Ganesh & Co. Private Ltd., 1968), p. 6.

She is the ground of the universe, the force of Brahman called Brāhmāni (VIII, 15) She is the creator, preserver and destroyer of all things. She is both supreme knowledge, mahāvīdyā, and supreme illusion, mahāmāyā. She grants wisdom to her followers as well as inducing in them ignorance, avidyā, and delusion, moha.

This aspect of the Goddess as Māyā is an important conception found in many of the Purāṇas, and can be seen as one of her major representations. She generates delusion in the individual and causes him to forget his real nature as an eternal spirit. She causes him to have attachments to his body and worldly pleasures. However, it is the Great Goddess who also removes this veil of delusion, grants to him real knowledge and, through her grace, release from samsāra.¹

"When they attain the infinite state . . . they experience the oneness 'I am Brahman', and realize Her as the all-pervading One in all."²

The Devīmāhātmya recounts the story of Durgā Mahīśasura mardinī, Durgā who is the destroyer of the Buffalo Demon. There was once a long war between the gods, led by Indra, and the anti-gods, led by the genie Mahīśa, the Powerful, in which the latter were the victors. The homeless gods were directed by Śiva and Viṣṇu to concentrate their powers which issued from their mouths in bursts of fire. These flames

¹Jadunath Sinh, Rāma Prasāda's Devotional Songs: The Cult of Shakti (Calcutta: Sinha Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., 1966), p. 3.

²Śrī Śankara Bhagavatpāda, Śrī Lalitā Trīsati Bhāṣya, translated by C. S. Murthy (Madras: Ganesh & Co., Private Ltd.), p. 108.

united, and in the blaze emerged Durgā, Beyond Reach. Each god invested her with his special weapon. She conquered the army of the antigods and then battled with Mahiṣa. The genie assumed many forms in this battle, the final one being that of a water-buffalo, symbol of death. She stabbed the buffalo's throat, and cut off Mahiṣa's head when he tried to escape from the dead buffalo's body. She then restored heaven to the gods.¹

Here we can see the ascendancy of the female principle in the Vedic pantheon. As all the gods have invested her with their powers, she stands above them as all-powerful, Supreme Godhead, the embodiment of Cosmic Energy.

Bhagavati, though eternally manifesting herself again and again, carries out the protection of the world. . . This universe is deluded by her and it is she who gives birth to the universe. Entreated, she grants supreme knowledge and gratified, she confers prosperity.²

The identification of Durgā with vegetation reveals her non-Āryan origins. Again in the Devīmāhātmya we read: "O gods, then till the rains come, I shall fill and nourish the entire world with life-sustaining vegetables produced out of my own body."³ An important aspect of Durgā worship is the navapatrikā, or worship of nine plants, which clearly pictures Durgā as the personification of the spirit of vegetation. During this festival, the worshipper prays to each

¹Daniélou, op. cit., p. 288.

²Devīmāhātmya XII, 36-37, in Shankaranarayana, op. cit., p. 269.

³Devīmāhātmya XI, 48, in Ibid., p. 359.

of the spirits of the nine plants, and then concludes: "Om, O leave, O nine forms of Durgā, you are the darling of Mahādeva; accept all these offerings and protect me, O queen of heaven. Om, adoration to Durgā dwelling in nine plants."¹

Eliade describes an autumnal ceremony, the Śābarotsava, held to honour Durgā. This was practiced in the Middle Ages, but still survives in Bengal. During this festival, the worshippers covered themselves with mud, leaves and flowers just as the Śābaras, an autochthonous people of Southern India from whom the ceremony had derived its name, had done in the past. Kalikā Purāna LXI, 21-22 indicates that the Śābarotsava ceremony included licentious rituals and erotic mimicry. The Bṛhaddharma Purāna III, 6, 81-83 says that during this festival, names of generative organs were to be recited by initiates of the Śakti cult, as "Śakti delights in hearing obscene words."² The vegetative and fertility cults evidenced in this festival can be seen as traces of non-Āryan Mother Goddess cults. These cults were assimilated into the orthodox tradition by the goddess being Śakti and hence having become Sanskritized. The non-Āryan tribes continued their worship of the Mother Goddess, although her name and mythology had become merged with the orthodox tradition. In this

¹R. Chanda, The Indo-Aryan Races (Rajshahi: The Varendra Research Society, 1916), p. 132.

²Eliade, Yoga, op. cit., pp. 342-343.

particular case, the origins of Durgā in ancient fertility and Mother Goddess worship are very clear.

Similarly, there are many festivals dedicated to Kālī, especially in Bengal. For example, in the autumn during the night of the new moon, the lamp festival, dipali, is celebrated. Kālī is also worshipped in an annual public ceremony, bāroāri pūjā, held in countless villages all over Bengal.¹ The Kālī-Nautch festival is also held in honour of her. Non-Āryan customs are frequently noted in these festivals, many of which have been practiced since the period of the Purāṇas.²

Pārvatī is portrayed as a gentle goddess. Her father, as well as that of Umā, is the mountain, parvata, the snow-capped one, haimavat. Mount Himālaya is regarded as a symbol of ether; in the peaks of the mountain the energy of the earth combines with the ether. Pārvatī's mother is Menakā who symbolizes intellect, buddhi. "Born of Ether and Intellect, Pārvatī is the conscious substance of the universe."

The Kālīka Purāṇa I, 1-5,10 recounts how in her previous incarnation, Pārvatī had been born as Satī, daughter of the sage Dakṣa. She married Śiva and they lived in his mountain retreat practising various forms of tantric yoga as a meditative discipline.

¹Chanda, op. cit., p. 136.

²Eliade, Yoga, op. cit., p. 388.

Here we can see Śiva, as the Supreme Self, enchanted and enraptured with Satī as Māyā, world-illusion.¹ They lived together in delight for 3600 years. Dakṣa then decided to give a huge sacrifice, to which he did not invite Śiva, as he was contemptuous of Śiva's matted locks, ash-smearred body and ascetic way of life. Satī was overcome with grief by this slight to her husband. There are various endings to this story. The one that is most significant for later Tantrism is that Satī flung herself into her father's sacrificial fire and the ashes of her body, which fell all over India, became the sacred shrines, pīthas, of her cult.

The legend of Śiva and Satī indicates that the orthodox followers of the Vedic rites did not acknowledge the right of Śiva or of Satī to partake of the sacrificial food along with the other Vedic gods.² This indicates the non-Āryan character of Satī and the non-Āryan nature of Śiva himself, here pictured, as in the later Pāśupata conception, as stressing the merits of worship and devotion rather than of sacrifice. The theistic framework in which Śiva is here presented was at first regarded with suspicion and hostility by the Brāhmanas, and only in the period of the Upaniṣads did it become an accepted aspect of the Āryan religion. The devotional cult itself, pūjā, and mystical devotion, Bhakti, are usually regarded as religious characteristics of the autochthonous peoples of India that played a considerable

¹Heinrich Zimmer, The King and the Corpse. Bollingen Series XI (New York: Pantheon Books, 1948), p. 285.

²Chanda, op. cit., p. 126.

role in Hinduism, purifying it from magical excesses and ritualistic scholasticism".¹ Hence Śiva and Satī in this legend represent these autochthonous tendencies of religious experience, and the entire legend illustrates the confrontation of Āryan and non-Āryan traditions. Indeed, the earliest full recounting of the legend is found in the Mahābhārata during which period also the non-Āryan Mother Goddess Umā was first presented as a major deity in the Vedic pantheon.

Śakti came to occupy a paramount position in the Purāṇas. In some texts she is subordinate to male deities such as Viṣṇu and Śiva, while in others these deities are subordinate to her. The Purāṇas contain many phrases and images of Śakti which were to play important roles in Tantric rituals, and also images which received artistic interpretation in this and subsequent periods. The religious body of literature known as the Tantras appeared both in Hinduism and Buddhism and arose in the fourth century A.D. Their content is diversified; for the most part they concentrate on ritualistic procedures and forms of worship, and in them the Great Goddess occupies the supreme position. From the sixth century Tantrism became increasingly popular all over India in various levels of society. "In a comparatively short time, Indian philosophy, mysticism, ritual, ethic, iconography and even literature were influenced by Tantrism."² Tantrism came to comprise many divergent and heterogeneous elements of Indian society, embodying

¹Eliade, Yoga, op. cit., p. 348.

²Ibid., p. 200.

the most esoteric philosophical principles and the most basic non-Āryan religious beliefs and customs of the folk level. It was assimilated, to some degree or other, by all the sectarian schools of India.

In the Śaktā cosmology of Tantrism, unmanifest Prkr̥ti alone existed before all creation.¹ When she felt the desire to create, she assumed the form of the Great Mother and created Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva from her own body.² She remained, however, the unchanged source of all creation; she is without attributes, imperishable, Brahman Itself.³ As the origin of all things, she is the "giver of prosperity and well-being".⁴ This idea of the Mother Goddess as the divine source of food and well-being, characteristic of the earlier Neolithic Goddess cult, can be seen especially clearly in various hymns to Annapūrṇā, who is "ever giving rice".⁵ Mother Goddess worship arose before the development of agricultural techniques, i.e. in hunting and gathering societies. Tellus Mater miraculously provided man with food and life, and her gifts were sacred. Even when agricultural knowledge developed and specialized divinities of the harvest arose, the earth continued to be sacralized

¹ Arthur Avalon (Sir John Woodroffe), ed., Kulacūdāmani Nigama (Madras: Ganesh & Co. Private Ltd., 1956), p. 7.

² "Nirvāna Tantra" in Principles of Tantra, trans. and ed. by Arthur Avalon (Madras: Ganesh & Co. Private Ltd., 1960), pp. 327-328.

³ Arthur Avalon (Sir John Woodroffe), tr., Karpūrādīstotram, Vol. IX of Tantrik Texts, ed. by Arthur Avalon (Calcutta: Sanskrit Press Depository, 1922), p. 31.

⁴ Quoted in Bolle, op. cit., p. 45.

⁵ Loc. cit.

and conceived of as the divine source of life and the sustenance necessary for life. Hence Annapūrnā is a representation of the ancient Mother Goddess.

Sanskritization of the Mother Goddess
on the Folk Level

In contemporary India there are many instances of aspects of older peasant religions, such as the belief in the Mother Goddess, being affected and Sanskritized by the more recent cultural and religious tradition of the Āryan Brāhmins. In such a case the two traditions, Āryan and non-Āryan, Great Tradition and Little Tradition, merge. The product formed by this merger contains elements basic to both traditions. The external characteristics and attributes of the Mother Goddess have changed as she has been Sanskritized; her basic symbolism has remained unaltered, however, and she is still worshipped as giver of life and prosperity, as well as the giver of death.

In towns and villages all over India, there are shrines dedicated to the Divine Mother. This Great Mother is the prototype of the power, prakṛti, which developed into Śakti.¹ The village goddesses, Grāmadevatās, are distinguished by different names and attributes. For example, in Gujarat there used to be more than one hundred and forty Grāmadevatās, and in the Madras Presidency there were more than ten times as many.² However, these were all representatives

¹Marshall, op. cit., p. 51.

²Monier Williams, Religious Thought and Life in India (London: J. Murray, 1891), p. 225.

of the same power. They were usually worshipped as the sources of fertility, giver of life and all things, and as a protector from evil spirits. The Grāmadevatās were often represented by rudely carved images and sometimes like a tree or a stone, the stone being in the form of the female organ of generation (yoni). Their shrines were also often empty.¹ Among the names of the Great Goddess as manifested in the village goddesses, we find Ellammā, Māriyammaḥ, and Ambikā. The Dravidian root, 'amma', means 'mother'. Sītalā, "the Cool" has been one of the main Grāmadevatās. She is the goddess of smallpox, and is worshipped in order to both prevent and cure the disease. Māriyammai is her name in the Tamil country.²

Grāmadevatā worship is essentially a non-Āryan tradition.³ The assimilation and coalescence of this cult into the Āryan tradition has been especially effected on the lower levels of religion amongst the popular strata. The peasant divinities and religious ceremonies have survived, although their symbolism and mythologies have frequently been altered. The tutelary divinities, such as the Grāmadevatās, have been assimilated into Hinduism by becoming representatives of Śakti.

The Festival of Nine Durgās is a good example of the process that has gone on between the autochthonous tribes and Hinduism. The nine days on which the festival took place were sanctioned for the

¹Marshall, op. cit., p. 51.

²A. L. Basham, The Wonder That Was India (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1959), p. 316.

³Eliade, Yoga, op. cit., p. 349.

worship of Durgā, Kālī, Pārvatī, Śakti, and all other names of Devī as the consort of Śiva. During this festival in the village of Kishan Garhi in Uttar Pradesh, in about every tenth household, bas-relief idols made of mud were built representing a goddess called Naurthā. Every morning and every evening of the nine days the women and girls of the village worshipped these representations. The people of Kishan Garhi considered her to be an indigenous goddess; Marriott, however, considers Naurthā to be a dialectic variation of nava ratra, meaning "nine nights".

The festival of Nine Durgas in Kishan Garhi thus exemplifies the fertility and creativity of little communities within Indian civilization: by sheer linguistic confusion and loss of meaning in the contact between great and little traditions, a new minor goddess has been created. But no sooner has the parochial goddess Naurthā been born into the villages of Aligarh than she is reabsorbed by peasant conception as a new manifestation of the great Goddess principle.¹

In Gujarat, several castes were mātā or mother worshippers.² The deity of the caste as well as of almost every clan, gotra, lineage and family was a mātā. The people also worshipped mātās who performed specific functions, and there were patron mātās of every village, field and street. This cult of the Mother Goddess had two levels.

¹McKim Marriott, "Little Communities in an Indigenous Civilization", in McKim Marriott, Village India, The American Anthropological Association, Vol. 57, no. 3, part 2, memoir no. 83 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), p. 201.

²A. M. Shah and R. G. Shroff, "The Vahīvancā Bārots of Gujarat: A Caste of Genealogists and Mythographers", in op. cit., p. 43.

On the Sanskritic level, the various mātās were worshipped as different manifestations of Śakti who was regarded as the personification of the female principle in the creation of the universe. On the Folk Level, the same idea was expressed but in a different form. Here the mātās were regarded as manifestations of a single Mātā, Mother of all creation.

Amongst the Nāyars, a matrilineal caste of landholders and salaried workers, each taravād or lineage segment had a patron goddess or dharma devī ("goddess of moral law").¹ These goddesses were all thought of as a species of the generic goddess Bhagavadi or Bhadrakālī, who was the chief deity of the Nāyars. Her idol was kept in a small shrine near the oldest ancestral house or else in the courtyard of the village temple. This deity was a Sanskritized form of the local Goddess of smallpox and other diseases.² This element remained in her character, as she was believed to be the authoress of diseases and of all other types of misfortune. She was annually propitiated with offerings of cooked food. She was the source of fertility of the women of the lineage. Lineage members seem to have felt a collective responsibility towards the goddess for any ritual lapses or sins on the part of any individual member.³

In the 'conversion' to Hinduism of many tribes there are often certain elements that betray the ancient character of the new gods or

¹E. Kathleen Gough, "Cults of the Dead Amongst the Nāyars", in Ibid, pp. 240-243.

²Ehrenfels, op. cit., p. 66.

³E. Kathleen Gough, "Nāyar: Central Kerala", in Schneider and Gough, op. cit., p. 330.

cults. For example, upon conversion, certain tribes accepted Hindu divinities, mainly female, but did not use Brāhman̄s to perform their rituals.¹ Members of ancient low-caste tribes, such as the Pariahs, rather than Brāhman̄s, often play the leading roles in the ceremonies and rituals of the grāmadevatās.² Further, the sacred places of worship of the ancient Mother Goddess have often been validated by mythological episodes from Hindu literature. When Hindu temples were erected on sites that were formerly consecrated to non-Āryan cults, the sacredness of the site and of the tutelary divinity of the tribe remained more dominant than the new form this sacrality assumed.³

The Grāmadevatās have often been worshipped as the guardians of the products of the field that sustain the life of the entire village. These products of the field were regarded not only as wealth in the sense of capital, but also as bearers of the sacredness of the Great Goddess. The link between this sacrality of the products of the soil and women can be seen in various rites performed in rural India. Devotion to Mother Earth has continued to find ritual expression.

After each successive harvest when the soil is exhausted, some tribes have believed that the fertility of the earth must be renewed by the performance of fertility dances. Revitalization has sometimes involved the offering of human blood, as among the Khonds in Bengal

¹Eliade, Yoga, op. cit., p. 386.

²Marshall, op. cit., p. 51.

³Eliade, Yoga, op. cit., p. 386.

who used to offer Meriah to Tari Pennu, the Earth Mother, in order to obtain a fruitful harvest.¹

Many tribes celebrated the dasara festival in September and a feast after the Holi festival in March. Both of these festivals were dedicated to Devī, Mother Earth. A fast was also held in her honour, first before the sowing of the spring crops, and secondly before reaping them.²

The saradiya pūjā or the autumnal worship of Durgā involved the worship of pigs in village festivals. During the pūjā, or devotional cult, her sacrifice often consisted of twenty-one cocks.³ This is evidence of her non-Āryan character and origin. The sacrifice of cocks or duck-eggs spotted with vermillion has been compared to the sacrifice of drakes made in southern Bengal to a non-Āryan deity, Dakshina Rāya, who bears the form of a tiger.⁴

Non-Āryan customs are also found in the worship of Kālī. For example, during the popular Kālī-Nautch festival, masked dancers paraded the streets after having worshipped the goddess three days earlier at midnight under a banyan tree.

The worship of trees originated in a non-Āryan religious tradition, that is amongst autochthonous tribes of India. The cult

¹James, op. cit., p. 243.

²Ehrenfels, op. cit., p. 113.

³Eliade, Yoga, op. cit., p. 387.

⁴Mitra, "On the Worship of Dakshina Raya as a Rain-God", in JASB, XIII (1924-1928), pp. 198-203.

sites of the Grāmādevatās are most often located in the vicinity of trees, and trees often played an important part in their worship. On the folk level all over India, it has been customary before cutting down a tree to ask the pardon of the indwelling spirit. The non-Āryan Gond would not shake a tree or pick its fruit at night for fear of disturbing its sleeping spirit.¹ Tree worship is an important characteristic of Śaktism, and a Śaktā's first duty in the morning is to salute a Kula tree.² Some non-Āryan tribes anthropomorphized trees. Brides were married to a tree before being wed to their husbands amongst some tribes, and trees were also sometimes married to each other.³ In the Barods province in Bengal, the sacred tulasī plant, embodied in the Goddess Tulasī, was married annually to Viṣṇu.⁴ In other villages the sacred tulasī plant was annually wed to the śālagrāma stone.⁵ In these cases, the tree was personified and worshipped as a deity.

In all these examples we can see the continuing existence of the Mother Goddess on the folk level in India. The religious structure of the non-Āryan tribes was neither discouraged nor fundamentally changed by the Brāhman̄s. Rather it was brought into the wider context of Indian society and was synthesized with the religious tradition of the Āryans. In this merger, the Mother Goddess acquired new names, images and mythologies. As an archetype, however, she has remained constant.

¹Marshall, op. cit., p. 65.

²Loc. cit.

³Loc. cit.

⁴Ibid., p. 123.

⁵Ibid., p. 65.

Sanskritization of the Mother Goddess
in Indian Art

The process of Sanskritization of the Mother Goddess can be seen in Indian art from the period of the Mauryas (fourth century B.C.) onwards. Representations of various goddesses and fertility spirits, yaksīs, are found in increasing numbers throughout the major schools of Indian art and architecture. As these schools are mainly centered around the decoration of temples, their subject matter represents the major figures in the religion of the Brāhman̄s or Buddhists of the time. The artistic figures, as in the case of the Mother Goddess, often illustrate to what extent indigenous, non-Āryan elements and cults were incorporated into the Great Tradition.

The only architectural site that has yielded any evidence of a consecutive artistic development of the Mother Goddess from pre-Mauryan times is the Bhir mound at Taxila. This mound is usually dated from the fifth and fourth centuries B.C.¹ At this site ring-stones have been discovered which are quite small and which were perhaps used as ex-voto offerings.² The nude female figures, which are engraved inside these deities, are very similar to fertility goddess figurines found all over the ancient world. Plants are also carved inside these discs. In addition, ring-stones are regarded as yoni, representations of vulva, and hence are indicative of fertility worship or the practices of

¹Rowland, op. cit., p. 23.

²Marshall, op. cit., p. 62.

fertility cults. Similar ring-stones have been found at Saheth-Maheth in the United Provinces and Patna.¹ A carving from Taxila, depicting a male and female, has been cited as the earliest archaeological evidence of a god and his śakti together.² The interpretation of the male and female in this carving as god and goddess is, of course, conjecture. A few terracotta figurines have been discovered in pre-Mauryan sites.³ These would seem to fit into the context of a fertility cult, as their sexual features are very carefully portrayed and emphasized.

A few statues of yakṣas and yakṣīs have been found from the Mauryan and immediately pre-Mauryan period. These show signs of a traditional art in which the primary influences were derived from the Indus Valley culture.⁴ These figures are often larger than life-size, and are somewhat heavy and bull-necked. They give one an impression of solidity. The full abdomens of the statues are similar to those of Harappan figures.

The word 'yakṣa' occurs at several points in the R̥g and Atharva Veda, as well as in the Brāhmanas and Upaniṣads. It is used in the context of supernatural power or mysterious spirit. In the earlier texts there seems to be a dual attitude towards yakṣas and the female yakṣīs: they are referred to both with respect and with fear and

¹Sinha, op. cit., p. 52.

²Ibid., p. 53.

³Rowland, op. cit., p. 23.

⁴Edwardes, op. cit., p. 150.

dislike. Coomaraswamy holds that the latter attitude reflects the Āryan distrust of the indigenous deities, which can be seen in the R. V. V. 70,4 and R. V. IV. 3,13 while the veneration of yaksas and yaksīs is a local trait, as are the yaksas themselves.¹ In A. V. X. 7,38, the Creator of the universe is referred to as "a great Yakṣa in the midst of the universe, reclining in concentrated energy on the back of the waters, therein are set whatever gods there be, like the branches of a tree about a trunk."²

As we saw earlier, trees in the ancient world and in the Indus Valley civilization were a symbol of fertility and life. The link between yaksas/yaksīs and trees indicates that they were primarily vegetation spirits, symbolizing the fertility which gives forth life to men and all other beings. The yaksīs are primarily a fertility symbol in Indian mythology.³ Many Indian legends recount how women and yaksīs can bring trees to immediate flowering by embracing the trunk or touching it with their feet. This practice was probably descended from an ancient fertility rite and "may be interpreted as symbolical of the soul's union with the divinity, often typified in India by the metaphor of sexual union."⁴ Yaksas and yaksīs, as vegetative and fertility spirits, are also closely connected with water which is a symbol of fertility.

¹A. K. Coomaraswamy, Yaksas, Part II (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, Freer Gallery of Art, 1931), p. 1

²Quoted in Ibid., p. 2.

³Rowland, op. cit., p. 48.

⁴Loc. cit.

All of these various classes of yaksas and yaksīs were prayed to as vegetation spirits, and their devotees believed they granted wealth and fertility.¹ They are still extensively worshipped in rural India, but their popularity has declined a great deal from this early period, since great gods such as Visnu, Śiva and Śakti rose and took their place.²

What is equally important for the purposes of this thesis is that the yaksīs and yaksas, though worshipped in themselves less than in the past, have become prototypes of images of Lakṣmī, Pārvatī and other orthodox Hindu Mother Goddesses. Their original character, that of fertility symbol, has thus been retained, but has been Sanskritized. Hence they represent and illustrate concretely a merging of Āryan and non-Āryan religious traditions.

From the time of Aśoka, second century B.C., Buddhist burial mounds or stūpas increased rapidly. Through the centuries they became larger and more elaborate, and were decorated with carvings in which voluptuous yaksas and yaksīs often appeared prominently. This is the case at Bhārhut, dated from the second century B.C., Sāñchi, dated from the first century B.C., Gandhāra, dating from the first to seventh centuries A.D., Mathurā (first century A.D.) and Amarāvātī (early centuries A.D.).

¹Coomaraswamy, op. cit., p. 13.

²Edwardes, op. cit., p. 71.

During the Gupta Empire in northern India from the fourth to seventh centuries A.D., yaksīs continued to occupy a major position in the artistic schools. Many yaksīs are portrayed at the caves at Ajantā as well as at the temple of Viṣṇu at Deogarh, c. 600 A.D. In the cave temples at Ellurā, constructed from the fifth to eighth centuries A.D., yaksīs can be seen as prototypes of the orthodox Hindu Mother Goddesses portrayed here, especially Pārvatī. This is very clearly illustrated in the Kailāsanāth temple, dedicated to Śiva, and constructed on the orders of Kṛṣṇa I (757-783) of the Rāṣṭrakuta Dynasty. Here we see a sculpture depicting Śiva and his consort Pārvatī in their Mount Kailāsa home.¹ There is also a panel, carved in deep relief, of an embracing couple: "This union of male and female is a symbol of eternal consumption."² At Ellurā there is also a shrine dedicated to the three river goddesses, Gaṅgā, Yamunā, and Sarasvatī. In Pl. 21,2 in Yaksas we see Gaṅgā Devī supported by a makara, and in Pl. 22 we see Yamunā Devī supported by a tortoise, standing amongst lotuses underneath a partial makara accompanied by dwarf yaksas riding on makaras. Pl. 24 shows Śrī-Lakṣmī surrounded by the four-armed deities holding vessels, one of whom is Varuna. Underneath the seated figure of Lakṣmī is a lotus pond.³

¹Rowland, op. cit., Pl. 119.

²Ajit Mookerjee, The Arts of India (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Co., 1966), p. 81, Pl. 54.

³Coomaraswamy, op. cit., p. 77.

The cave temples at Bādāmi, c. 578, are adorned with figures of goddesses, as are the temples, at Aihole, constructed from the sixth to eighth centuries A.D. At Aihole there is as well a separate temple dedicated to Durgā decorated with many varied poses of the goddess, depicting various scenes from the rich mythology which had by now gathered around her person.

At Māmāllapuram on the sea-coast below Madras, seventeen cave temples carved under the patronage of the seventh century Pallava kings illustrate later developments of Dravidian architecture. The carved figures at Māmāllapuram are similar in many respects to the forms at Amarāvati, and have the same graceful movement and vitality embodied in them. We see the new canon of female beauty in the heart-shaped faces, the shape of the pipal leaf coming to replace the oval shape of earlier periods, and in the elongated slender arms and legs of the figures. Durgā is portrayed in one panel as Durgā Mahisaṣura mardini slaying the buffalo demon.¹ Another panel depicts Durgā standing on the severed head of Mahiṣa.² She is holding in her eight arms the weapons which the gods had invested her with. There is a dynamic quality in this figure which is specifically characteristic of Dravidian Hindu art.³ Her long slim figure stands calmly triumphant, yet we can feel the strength, energy and rage of the goddess, ready to spring forth anew at any moment.

¹Stella Kramrisch, The Art of India (London: Phaidon Press Ltd., 1954), Pl. 86.

²Rowland, op. cit., Pl. 116.

³Ibid., p. 172.

The latest important cave temples are those at Elephāntā, an island in the harbour of Bombay. They are usually dated from the eighth to ninth centuries and are very similar in style to Ellurā. Inside the main temple are twenty sculptures depicting legends of Śiva. The magnificent Śaivite Trinity presents Śiva Mahadeva as the central face with Aghora-Bhairava, Śiva the Destroyer on the left, and Umā, consort of Śiva on the right.¹ There are various panels depicting the marriage of Śiva and Pārvatī.² Pārvatī is slender and graceful, yet we can see traces of the earlier more voluptuous ideals embodied in her form.

The Kalāhāndi copper plate of Tuṣṭikara, dating from the fifth or sixth century A.D., portrays King Tuṣṭikara as a devotee of the goddess Stambheśvari. Stambheśvari is held to be the family deity of the Sulkīs, and she is represented in the form of a pillar, which signifies Śiva and Śakti.³ This goddess of the pillar is also referred to in the grants of the Bhañja and Tuṅgas of Orissa who ruled from the eighth to eleventh centuries A.D. At Sonepur there is a temple of Stambheśvari, and at Askā in Ganjam there is also a temple dedicated to her. The practice of paying homage to wooden pillars amongst hill tribes of the area is also interpreted as a form of

¹Ibid., Pl. 120(A).

²Ibid., Pl. 120(B).

³K. S. Behara, "The Evolution of Sakti Cult at Jajpur, Bhubaneswar and Puri", in The Sakti Cult and Tara, op. cit., p. 74..

worship of Stambhēśvari.¹ This goddess would seem to be a local tutelary deity who was Sanskritized in the fifth century A.D. and hence came to be identified with Śiva.

In South India, from the tenth century to the present day, lovely bronzes have been made by the method of casting known as cire-perdue or 'lost-wax' process. The finest examples of these bronzes are from the Chola Dynasty between the tenth and thirteenth centuries, and the most frequently portrayed figure is Śiva, usually as Natarāja, Lord of the Dance.²

Two bronzes of the Great Goddess, one of Pārvatī and the other of Kālī, illustrate very clearly her nature as worshipped in this and all subsequent periods of Indian history. The image of Pārvatī³ is tall and slender, depicting a quiet grace and serene character. One is struck by the dynamic tension of this graceful figure, the same feeling of dynamic vitality as embodied in the Sāñchi tree-goddesses.⁴ Her ample breasts and the outstretched hand signifying blessing upon her devotees all mark her as the Mother Goddess. As the gentle consort of Śiva she is the Energy that gives birth to the world.

The bronze of Kālī⁵ represents the alternate nature of Pārvatī or Śakti. She is the 'Black One', goddess of Destruction, Time and

¹Ibid., pp. 74-75.

²Rowland, op. cit., Pl. 128(A).

³Ibid., Pl. 127(B); a similar depiction of Pārvatī is reproduced in Sir Leigh Ashton, The Art of India and Pakistan (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1950), Pl. 53, p. 313.

⁴Rowland, op. cit., p. 186.

⁵Ibid., Pl. 127(A).

Death. We see her emaciated figure squatting on the burning ground. She holds the cymbals which mark the time of her dance of death. Her face is contorted into a horrible grimace, symbolic of her power of destruction.

These two figures, Pārvatī and Kālī, are two major aspects of the Mother Goddess. Both give one an impression of regal bearing, perhaps conveyed by the elongation of the torso in both figures. The kind Mother who gives birth to all life and the awful Goddess who destroys all life signify the totality involved in the symbol and figure of the Great Goddess.

The school of Orissā, centered around Bhubaneswar and Purī, flourished from roughly the eighth to thirteenth centuries A.D. The Liṅgarāja at Bhubaneswar was built in 1000 A.D.¹ and bears many carved female figures.² The latest temple was the Sūrya Deul or Temple of the Sun at Koṅāraka³ constructed in the thirteenth century, also known as the Black Pagoda. Here are represented many single females⁴ as well as numerous couples in embrace, called maithunas or auspicious pairs. These couples are depicted very frankly and erotically. There have been interpretations of these figures, such as their being advertisements for the temples' prostitutes, devadāsīs,

¹Kramrisch, op. cit., Pl. 103(B).

²Mookerjee, op. cit., Pl. 81, p. 106.

³Kramrisch, op. cit., Pl. 104(A).

⁴Mookerjee, op. cit., Pl. 83, p. 108.

or else as serving to contrast the fleeting world of the flesh as opposed to the eternal world of the spirit. We feel it is more likely that these figures symbolize the religious significance of sexual union within the context of Tantrism, particularly Vāmācāra Tantrism, which in turn evolved from earlier agricultural fertility rites. Here we see the duality of man and woman, representing Śiva and Śakti, merge together. Their union, portrayed here so vividly, represents the soul's liberation from and transcendence of duality, and his realizing of the One Reality which, in Tantrism, is the Great Goddess.¹ Tantrism represents the extreme extent to which the Mother Goddess had become Sanskritized in Medieval India. In Tantrism, Śiva and Śakti, male and female elements, have become completely merged. Śakti, however, represents the transcendence of this duality as she is the Sole principle. The period in which the temple of Koṅāraka was constructed was a time when Tantrism spread and flourished all over India, and perhaps this temple was a centre for local tantric cults.

Many sensuous females are depicted in the group of temples at Khajurāho in central India, dating from the tenth and eleventh centuries A.D. At Gujarāt, dating from the tenth to thirteenth centuries A.D., the yaksī prototype is found in the form of a river goddess, and plant and water symbolism, both denoting fertility worship, are also evident.

¹Stella Kramrisch, The Hindu Temple (Calcutta: University of Calcutta Press, 1946), pp. 346-347.

The various artistic schools which arose in India from pre-Mauryan times on to the medieval periods and later reflect the rising significance and varied aspects of the Mother Goddess in the Hindu and Buddhist traditions. Although the literature often provides clearer and more specific examples of the merging of Āryan and non-Āryan elements in the incorporation and Sanskritization of the Mother Goddess, her many and varied artistic representations further illustrate this process of syncretism. Both in the literature and the art of this period the process of Sanskritization of the Mother Goddess can be noted. Durgā and Umā, both local goddesses, attained high positions in the Hindu texts, and both were worshipped both by themselves and as consorts of Śiva. Kālī in particular emerged as a powerful figure and soon became the centre of a growing number of worshippers. Yakṣīs and goddesses are portrayed throughout the various artistic schools which have arisen in India. The portrayal and the particular attributes of the Mother Goddess changed with the centuries, but her symbolism and significance have remained constant.

Our examination of the Mother Goddess in Indian Art and architecture further reinforces our general description of the merging of Āryan and non-Āryan elements on the three levels of economy, social structure and religion. This process can be seen today in the relationship between the Great Tradition of Hinduism and the Little Tradition of the rural autochthonous tribes all over India. The Mother Goddess continues to be a Sanskritized as local tribes have been incorporated into Indian society as a whole.

Modern Indian religion and Indian society are syncretistic structures composed of non-Āryan and Āryan elements. The merger between the two cultures occurred after the settlement of the Ganges Valley by the Āryans from roughly 1000 B.C. onwards. In this merger, we see the fusion of two distinct cultures that differed not only in regard to religion, but also in regard to the economy and social structure. The pre-Āryan Indus civilization, on the one hand, was a civilization based on an agricultural economy and a matrilineal kinship system which had found its major religious expression in the worship of the Mother Goddess. The Āryan conquerors, on the other hand, were tribal groupings based on a pastoral economy and a patrilineal kinship system with a focus of the worship of male Sky Gods. The civilization that resulted from the Āryan conquest was a structure which combined elements of both the pre-Āryan and Āryan economies, social structures and religions. The Ganges River Valley Civilization exhibited a religious system which combined the worship of the Mother Goddess with the worship of the Sky Gods.

In the process of this merger, the underlying social and economic structures underwent profound changes. Economically, the merger resulted in the development of an entirely new structure: a state based upon an advanced agricultural system. This was not the result of the two traditions being added together, but rather the result of each influencing the other and a new system developing from this mutual interchange. Socially, the merger of non-Āryan and Āryan elements was accomplished by means of stratification. The

Āryans were the conquerors; the non-Āryans were the conquered. Stratification enabled both to co-exist, however, and matrilineal groups and tribes continued as castes of patrilineal Āryan society as a whole. Religiously, stratification and specialization also enabled the non-Āryan and Āryan religious traditions to co-exist. The Brāhman̄s slowly came to recognize many aspects of non-Āryan worship which became increasingly Sanskritized and were brought into the official Āryan religious structure. Such was and is the case with Mother Goddess worship.

CONCLUSION

Evidence of Mother Goddess worship can be traced back to early hunting and gathering societies of the Upper Paleolithic era. The fertility of the earth was worshipped as Tellus Mater, and as agricultural techniques were discovered and the economic basis of society was altered, Tellus Mater developed and became differentiated into many different goddesses of the soil, the harvest, childbirth, and generally of the principle of fertility. This development is evidenced by numerous female figurines found from the Aegean to the Indus Valley.

In our study of Mother Goddess worship in India, we have attempted to correlate three factors: the level of economic development, the social structure, and the religious tradition. Generally speaking, the social structure or mode of descent is often illustrative of the mode of production, and the religious tradition tends to support these two levels. As agriculture is a mode of production often initiated by women, many early agricultural societies tend to be matriarchal and to worship female deities. This has been the case with many non-Āryan tribes in India whose basis of economy is early agricultural, whose social structure is matriarchal, and who worship various levels of Mother Goddesses. There are as well numerous references to matriarchal tribes and customs in early Aryan literature.

The source of the Mother Goddess tradition in India is to be found in the Indus Valley Civilization. Although our knowledge of the social structure itself is relatively scant, we can say that this society had well-developed agricultural techniques which gave rise to an economic surplus and an increase in population; that the society was probably theocratic in nature; and that the controlling priesthood was dedicated to the worship of the Mother Goddess. The latter hypothesis is validated by two major pieces of evidence. Firstly, the citadel mounds and the Great Bath at Mohenjo-daro in particular were centres for Mother Goddess worship. This is proved both by comparison with Mesopotamian worship of Ishtar centred in similar temples, and by means of reference to pushkaras or lotus-ponds in early Āryan literature which were used for ritual purposes and which were the abode of fertility nymphs or apsaras. Secondly, the numerous terracotta female figurines as well as the phallic images and vegetative/fertility motifs indicate a well-developed fertility cultus centering around worship of the Mother Goddess. The fact that the merchants' seals portray exclusively male figures and animals indicates that the merchant class had developed their own secondary cults in distinction from the priests, the rural agriculturalists, the women and the labourers.

When the Āryans entered India they destroyed the merchant class and their cults whereas the women and labourers were assimilated into the Āryan social structure and the autochthonous tribes usually left to themselves. Hence Mother Goddess worship persisted. It continued both on the folk level and gradually developed in the official

Sanskrit tradition. Sanskritization itself has been a dual process: on the one hand, the non-Āryan tribes incorporated Sanskrit names and legends to their worship of the Mother Goddess and thereby 'legitimized' her; on the other hand, the Great Tradition incorporated elements of fertility and Mother Goddess worship and 'Sanskritized' these elements. Both processes have enabled the Mother Goddess to have a continuous existence in India, both in the Great and Little Traditions, since the Indus Valley Civilization.

Tribal societies, like the early Āryans, tend to be more advanced than simple hunting and gathering societies and less advanced than settled agricultural societies such as the Indus Valley Civilization. Reciprocity and the discharging of kinship obligations rather than surplus and profit are the main principles of tribal economics. Tribal social structure is based on kinship. Pastoral peoples have always tended to be strongly patriarchal, and have worshipped Sky-Gods and weather-gods rather than female fertility goddesses.

The Āryan tribes who invaded north-west India in the second millennium B.C. were inimical with both the Indus Valley culture and the more isolated autochthonous tribes. The Āryans had a pastoral economy, a patriarchal social structure, and worshipped male Sky Gods. The Ṛg Vedic gods were personifications of nature, mainly of the sky and weather, but are as well indicative of certain elements of the social and economic structures of the society in which they arose and developed. Indra was a prototype of the warrior or ksatriya

class who embodied the ideals of early Āryan society. Agni, god of the sacrificial fire, was a prototype of the priestly or brāhman class. Agni's growing importance as the necessary intermediary between men and the gods and hence as largely responsible for the continued existence of man in the cosmos reflects the rise in social and economic importance of the brāhman class. This in turn reflects the gradual development of the Āryans from a tribal and pastoral society to a more advanced socially stratified agricultural society.

In early Vedic literature, goddesses clearly occupy secondary positions to the male deities. We do find the idea, however, of the consort of a god representing the productive energy or generating fertility of the deity. Pṛthvī or Mother Earth was praised although not extensively. Vāc was worshipped as the magical quality of the sacrificial incantations. Uṣas, Dawn, was extolled in the earliest literature but decreased in importance. The legend recounting her defeat in battle by Indra indicates that the non-Āryan tribes who worshipped Uṣas must have been completely inimical to the Āryans socially, economically and religiously, and hence had to be destroyed. Aditi was a Mother Goddess figure adopted from non-Āryan tribes which were able to be assimilated peacefully into the fold of Āryan society. Aditi herself decreased in importance but the characteristics she embodied were retained in the Āryan pantheon by other goddesses. Final evidence of non-Āryan Mother Goddess worship in early Āryan society lies in the small female figurines found in pre-Mauryan sites, some perhaps dating back to the early centuries of the first millenium

B.C. These figurines are often similar in style and symbolism with both the early Mother Goddess figurines of the ancient world and the female terracotta figurines of the Indus Valley Civilization.

These traces of Mother Goddess worship in the literature and art from the early Vedic period indicate that Āryan society was slowly changing from a tribal pastoral society to a more stratified early agricultural society. This development was to a certain extent influenced by the assimilation of non-Āryan tribes and remnants of the Indus Valley Civilization, both having tendencies towards matriarchal social structure, agricultural economy and worship of the Mother Goddess. Hence in the development of the Great Tradition of Hinduism as well as the Little Tradition on the folk level, the Mother Goddess continued as a major religious and symbolic figure.

When the Āryans moved eastward to settle in the Ganges River Valley they rapidly shifted from a semi-nomadic pastoral way of life and economy to a settled agricultural village economy. Plough cultivation made possible the emergence of an economic surplus and hence an expansion of the population. The Brāhmins, who had become a highly specialized occupational class, were responsible for incorporating many non-Āryan social and economic customs into Āryan society as a whole. Because of the high level of specialization of the Ganges Valley Civilization, diverse cultural and religious elements were able to co-exist. The process of Sanskritization carried out mainly by the Brāhmins in the Great Tradition enabled many non-Āryan elements, especially worship of the Mother Goddess, to be assimilated

into the 'official' Āryan religion. On the other hand, the process was also carried out on the folk level where local Mother Goddesses were Sanskritized. In this latter process, the names of local goddesses were Sanskritized, and Āryan myths and attributes were added to the characters of rural goddesses.

The development of the Mother Goddess in the Āryan religious structure can be seen in the rise of Śakti as consort of Śiva. Śiva developed from the Vedic storm god Rudra and had as well non-Āryan fertility elements. As he increased in importance in the Āryan pantheon, so did Śakti in her many manifestations such as Ambika, Durgā, Umā, Pārvatī and Kālī. The culmination of the concept of Śakti is to be found in the Devīmāhātmya. Here the Vedic gods all invested their powers into the figure of Durgā who then defeated the Buffalo Demon. This represents the ascendancy of the female principle in the Vedic pantheon. The structure of Durgā reveals many elements of non-Āryan fertility and Mother Goddess worship, as does the structure of Kālī. Pārvatī and Umā are usually regarded as having originally been local goddesses of tribes residing around the Himalayas. In the religious and philosophical movement of Tantrism, arising in the fourth century A.D., the Mother Goddess occupied the supreme position as Absolute Truth. In Tantrism we can also see the ancient roots of the Mother Goddess. She was described as the origin of all things, the source of vegetation and fertility as well as the source of spiritual enlightenment.

Sanskritization of the Mother Goddess has also occurred on the folk level. Worship of the Grāmadevatās or Village Mothers has occurred all over rural India, and is essentially a non-Āryan tradition. These local goddesses and the religious ceremonies centred around them have been assimilated into Hinduism by the goddesses becoming representatives of Śakti. Again, vegetative and fertility elements have been widespread in her worship and symbolism.

The Sanskritization of the Mother Goddess in Indian art from the fourth century B.C. further indicates her development in the Āryan Hindu and Buddhist religions. Yaksīs, who were originally fertility spirits worshipped on the folk level, became prototypes of orthodox goddesses such as Lakṣmī and Pārvarī, and hence were Sanskritized. Tantric art represents the furthest degree of this process, as Śakti is here portrayed as the supreme principle above Śiva as well as above all other gods and men.

Indian culture from the period of the Ganges Civilization has resulted from the merging of Āryan and non-Āryan traditions on the level of economy, social structure and religion. The stratification of the state which was based on an advanced agricultural system enabled matrilineal and patrilineal groups as well as non-Āryan and Āryan religious traditions to co-exist, although each was influenced by the other. The Mother Goddess has been Sanskritized both in the orthodox religious structure and on the folk level. Her history and development

has thus been continuous. Śakti exists as she did in the Upper Paleolithic era; she illustrates the changed economic and social structures of society, yet she is still Mother Goddess, origin of life, prosperity and death.

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