



OXFORD JOURNALS
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

Hindu Female Deities as a Resource for the Contemporary Rediscovery of the Goddess

Author(s): Rita M. Gross

Source: *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 46, No. 3 (Sep., 1978), pp. 269-291

Published by: Oxford University Press

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1463798>

Accessed: 08/10/2009 17:41

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=oup>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Oxford University Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

Hindu Female Deities as a Resource for the Contemporary Rediscovery of the Goddess

Rita M. Gross

ABSTRACT

This article begins with a short discussion of the strangeness of theistic symbol systems that allow only male anthropomorphisms about their personal deity. The introduction also alludes to the fact that such a situation has severe negative repercussions, both psychological and social, for women. The body of the article is divided into two parts. In the first part, I discuss the meaning of the Goddess generally, demonstrating why this stranger to current theological discussions is returning. Three questions are dealt with under the subtitle "Why the Goddess?" First, what was the meaning of the Goddess, especially for women, in religions that had a strong Goddess tradition? Second, why should we re-image the Goddess today instead of moving to a completely nonmythic, nonanthropomorphic set of symbols? Third, what resources do we have for re-imagining the Goddess? The second part of the article deals with one of the resources for re-imagining the Goddess, Hindu female deities. In it, I discuss six basic images of the Hindu Goddesses that I think would significantly enrich our religious vocabulary if they and the Goddess were adopted. The first image deals with the Goddess as an aspect of a deity that is androgynous and bisexual. Goddess-imagery does not mean the loss of the image of a male God, but rather completion of presently truncated anthropomorphic imagery. The Goddess is, secondly, imaged as both strong and beautiful at once. She encourages confidence because of Her strength without losing Her female character and beauty. Thirdly, the Goddess, by means of a strong symbolism of the coincidence of opposites, participates in and valorizes the round of birth and death. Fourthly, the Goddess, who is Mother, revalorizes the metaphor of divine motherhood, without limiting women solely to the mother-role. She can do that because She is also—Her fifth basic image—patron of many life-pursuits—arts, learning, culture, liberation. Finally, the Goddess and the androgynous, bisexual deity restore sexuality as a viable theological metaphor and thus aid us in becoming reconciled to and appreciating our embodied condition.

Rita M. Gross (Ph. D., University of Chicago) teaches comparative religions at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. She is the editor of *Beyond Androcentrism: New Essays on Women and Religion* (Scholars Press, 1977) and has published in *Anima*, *Davka*, *Parabola*, and *JAAR*, among others. A grant from the American Institute of Indian Studies for travel in India aided greatly in gathering the iconographical materials on which much of this article is based.

For some time now, the lack of feminine symbolism in the theistic and, therefore, anthropomorphic symbol systems of Western religions has seemed somewhat bizarre to me. These religions stress, I think correctly, the personal dimension of their symbols of the Ultimate. The overriding characteristic of a theistic symbol system is that the Ultimate is conceived of and related to as if it were a personal being in relationship with other persons. But this personal god is also always symbolized and addressed as a male person in the three religions of the Western tradition, and these male forms of symbolization and address are adamantly insisted upon. To insist that the Ultimate is properly symbolized in personal terms, but then to insist further that the only proper personal symbols are male symbols, seems somewhat strange and illogical.

The only possible conclusion is that women are considered nonpersons by the adherents of the symbol system, which indeed seems to be implicit in many of the positions taken by defenders of such a symbol system on other issues. For example, many of the arguments against the ordination of women to the priesthood and ministry turn on the maleness of deity. I shall skip over the relatively superficial “Jesus-was-male” (Hewitt / Hyatt: 62) and “God-is-male” (Hewitt / Hyatt: 59) / 1 / forms of the argument to cite a more pernicious statement of the implications of a symbol system in which the personal deity is limited to being a male person.

The priest stands in the stead of Christ. It is his office to beget from humanity children of God for heaven (1 Cor. 4, 15). To beget life is, in humanity, the business of the male. Christ brought new life to humanity. For this reason he appeared among us as a male, because his work was man’s work. “Just as the Father has life in himself, so he also gave to the Son to have life in himself” (John 5, 26). Thus the mystery postpones itself into the lap of divinity. That is the most characteristic quality of God: that he does not receive his life but has it in himself. And the eternal word, which proceeds eternally from him, has, as its essential image, likewise life in itself. Therefore the first in the Godhead is not called Mother but Father. For any mother merely protects and hands on received life. And the eternal essential image is Son and not Daughter, for the Father has also given to him “to have life in himself.” God is without doubt exalted above all sexuality. But if we ask who among humans reflects in at least some respect that most characteristic quality in God—that is, to hand on nonreceived life—then it is the male and the father of the earth, while woman and mother reflects more that kind affection and care for life at hand, as is also proper to God (Is. 49, 15: Mt. 23, 37). (Van der Meer: 144)

The obviously false biology contained in this statement underscores how desperate, but also how convinced of the nonhumanity of women, are the adherents of such a symbol system.

The bizarreness of this position is significantly enhanced when one realizes that while anthropomorphic symbol systems are quite common in world religions, only the symbol system of Western monotheism has ever

attempted or valued the expulsion of feminine symbolisms. This is a relatively astounding fact. Though we become habituated to it, the use of exclusively male personal symbolisms is exceedingly rare; indeed, it is confined to the three Western monotheistic religions. Most of the world's known symbol systems that have utilized anthropomorphic symbolism have also utilized bisexual symbolism in which the divine has both feminine and masculine components. Furthermore, it is undeniable that the male symbolism of deity has been a major contributor to the exclusion of women from positions of respect or authority in Western society and religion /2/.

These facts must raise some obvious questions, must be the impetus for significant recasting of the religious vocabulary. This essay will explore a compelling solution to the problem of a deity imaged in solely masculine terms: the second coming of the Goddess.

I. General Considerations: Why the Goddess?

To some the Goddess is so obvious that She needs little introduction or justification. To others, She is a rather disturbing stranger. Given that She is not a theological commonplace among academic students of religion, I will begin my discussion of the meaning of the Goddess, not with some specific suggestion for the outlines of Her thea-ology /3/, but with more general considerations, especially with justifications for Her presence in the theological milieu after such a long absence. Three issues must be resolved before we can focus on the meaning of the Goddess in our time and on Her current re-imagining. First, I shall sketch what seems to have been the meaning of the Goddess, especially for women, in past religions with a strong Goddess tradition. Second, I shall explain why re-imagining the Goddess is important for contemporary religious people, despite strong arguments to the contrary. Third, I shall discuss briefly the sources that are available to us in re-imagining the Goddess.

My explanations of the meaning of the Goddess will begin by considering in very general terms what the Goddess has meant in those religious situations where She has been significant. I may as well state ahead of time that my conclusions are not always those that would gladden the heart of a contemporary feminist. The use of feminine symbolism does not seem to guarantee anything about the role and status of *women*, though it does seem to correlate with a positive evaluation of whatever is deemed *feminine* in a given religious symbol system. This is an important distinction, for many people either automatically expect a Goddess to correlate with high status and autonomy for women or else fail to see that feminine qualities can be revered even if women lack autonomy.

To present the negative conclusions first, I see no evidence that the past and current Goddesses promote equality as we think of it today—equal opportunity for all regardless of sex differences. Nor do I see any evidence for the theory that Goddesses indicated political and social power for women. Rather, it seems that male physical strength and the demands of female

biology fostered male political and social dominance even in traditional societies that had a keen sense of the reality of the Goddess.

However, on the positive side, clearly the Goddess does indicate a tremendous respect for the feminine side of humanity and experience—whatever that may mean. This dimension of the meaning of the Goddess is, I believe, the most powerful aspect of Her presence. The longing for the Goddess that many of us experience is simply the expression of a need for respect for ourselves *as we are*—female. We may not really know what being female means or entails, but we do know that for several thousand years femaleness has been denigrated and denied in the imagery of the Western theological tradition and that males have arrogated to themselves everything positive that they saw in femaleness (Adler). The sheer form of the Goddess, with Her feminine pronouns, Her breasts, womb and vagina, denies all that. She confirms us in looking—at the divine level—like us. We are indeed in the image of God—something that more patriarchal symbols systems have at times been reluctant to concede (Ruether, 1974: 156) /4/.

Furthermore, in Goddess religions, this respect and awe for the feminine are not confined to women. In fact, if anything, the Goddess seems to be as much a creation of men's projections and a recipient of male devotions as anything else, at least in those situations close enough for historical research. She does not necessarily imply any real access on the part of women to the symbol-making process, the "naming of reality" (Daly:6-7). She only implies a positive evaluation of "feminine " traits and tasks on the part of those creating the symbols. The sole exception may be the prehistoric goddesses, who may well have been more directly a product of women's imagination, but that is difficult to prove /5/. However, even if She is a product of men's imaginations, it seems that the Goddess also echoes women's mythic projections. She seems to reflect a general consensus, not just a male assessment, about what is truly primordial and deserves to be material for religious imagery.

The neophyte or casual observer surveying the scene outlined above frequently concludes that the Goddess is really quite irrelevant to modern women. In fact, I think this is a more common starting point than attraction to the Goddess, which brings me to my second task, that of countering the arguments against the Goddess as a relevant factor in contemporary (feminist) theology.

First of all, people often react that, even though the Goddess is present in Her various forms, She is still somehow "less" than the male deities. Pomeroy's interpretation of the five major Greek goddesses is not atypical.

The goddesses of Olympia appear in myth never to have more than narrowly restricted functions, despite the major importance of their cults to Greek cities. On the other hand, gods enjoyed a wider range of activities.

The goddesses are archetypal images of human females, as envisioned by males. The distribution of desirable characteristics among a number of females rather than their concentration in one

being is appropriate to a patriarchal society.

A fully realized female tends to engender anxiety in the insecure male. Unable to cope with a multiplicity of powers united in one female, men from antiquity to the present have envisioned women in "either-or" roles. As a corollary of this anxiety, virginal females are considered helpful, while sexually mature women like Hera are destructive and evil. The fact that modern women are frustrated by being forced to choose between being an Athena—an intellectual, asexual career woman—being an Aphrodite—a frivolous sex object—or a respectable wife-mother like Hera shows that the Greek goddesses continue to be archetypes of female existence. If the characteristics of the major goddesses were combined, a whole being with unlimited potential for development—a female equivalent of Zeus or Apollo—would emerge. (Pomeroy, 8–9)

In my own area of current research—Hindu theism—it would be difficult for a non-specialist not specifically interested in the Goddess not to conclude that the Hindu Goddess is also secondary to the Great Gods, given the scholarly books readily available. All of them assume a Hindu model of deity that sees Viṣṇu and Śiva as primary, with Devī, the Great Goddess, as a somewhat shadowy third. She gets the last chapter in the book, and usually it is quite short.

Thus it is argued that the Goddess will only mirror and legitimate a second-class status for women. "As on high—so below." However, this argument ignores patriarchy and patriarchal scholarship. As I have demonstrated elsewhere (Gross, 1977: 3–17), the patriarchal lens has radically skewed and filtered most of the scholarship done on Greek, Hindu, or any other religious situations. In the case of Hinduism, though the corrective scholarship is still largely undone, the need for it is being recognized, and some beginnings have been made (Brown: xiii-xvii; Kinsley: 84). Furthermore, besides patriarchal scholarship there is patriarchy. The argument that the Goddess is somehow "less" than the god and therefore, of little help to contemporary women, is made about cultures that were or are patriarchal in spite of the Goddess. It is not surprising that in such cultures there is some male dominance even among the gods. The Goddess in the nonpatriarchal society, whether past or future, would not be a second-class deity.

The second argument that goddesses are of little use to women focuses on the role and status of women. It is argued that the women in Goddess-worshipping cultures weren't "equal." They were excluded from power in religion and society; they didn't really have power over their own lives; and they were often confined to roles that seemed monotonous and boring to modern women. As Ruether writes regarding the primary Western quasi-Goddess, the Virgin Mary, it seems that despite

. . . these liberating possibilities of Mariology, feminists also realize that it is churches with a high Mariology which are most negative to women. It is the Protestant churches without Mariology which ordain

women. Mariology operates socially as a right-wing rallying cry among Catholics. It is used as a way of condemning the liberal personal and political mores of the "modern world." Mariology, as it is used by the clergy, seems antithetical to the liberation of women. Whose side is Mary on? (Ruether, 1975: 37)

This is a very tricky question and very difficult to handle. I have found in my research that the question of women's status vis-à-vis men is not the most useful tool with which to approach noncontemporary and non-Judeo-Christian religious situations. However, if we are going to tackle this question at all, it is crucial to compare comparable situations. Traditional societies, which are extremely role-bound, in which sex roles are functional and necessary, cannot be compared with a modern society in which sex roles have become obsolete. Equality, in the modern sense of not being subject to the limits of both male and female sex roles, is a very recent possibility. Thus it is not fair to compare say, Hindu society with American society, and conclude that American women are freer without a Goddess than Hindu women are with a Goddess. But traditional societies can be compared with each other and one of the most dramatic such examples is observed in traditional Islamic and Hindu society side by side in India. It seems that even though power and equality are lacking in both cases, the Goddess imparts to women a certain sense of dignity, self-worth, personal assertiveness, and simple visibility. It might even be argued that the few elite women who have attained highest political office in Asian countries at a time when no American woman, no matter how rich or famous she might be, no matter whose daughter she might be, could possibly attain such high office, are riding the hems of the saris of the Goddess, so to speak.

The third major hesitation about the Goddess, which seems to be expressed every time the Goddess is discussed, is that somehow She would limit women to the feminine, that She would reinforce female roles and stereotypes, and thus, be a confining rather than a liberating force. This is a very important question, but one that I think is relatively easily dealt with. In symbol systems that include a strong Goddess, She always is much more than a Mother-Goddess. Though birthing and nurturing are important symbols in these religions—as it seems they should be in any symbol system—the feminine deities are by no means confined to stereotypically feminine roles or character traits—not even the feminine roles and character traits deemed proper for women in the society that worships the Goddess. Instead the Goddess is involved in and patronizes the broad range of culturally valued traits and activities from warfare and hunting to nurturance and housekeeping, without regard to whether women or men are responsible for them. It does not seem to be the imagination that has limited women, but sex roles themselves, and those limiting sex roles seem finally to have become dysfunctional. Therefore, a Goddess who is imaged in so many diverse ways would become a liberating force.

However, this question contains another hidden question that is much more interesting. Does the validating presence of the Goddess effect a

complacency on the part of women? Are women who have a securely transcendent counterpart more likely to remain content with role-defined options than women who have no such supernatural counterpart? Perhaps we needed the hiatus of patriarchy to reveal completely the Goddess's lack of connection with any specific roles for women. Perhaps Her second coming is more powerful after the tremendous void of Her absence. Perhaps the Goddess as a completely nonsexist but totally empowering symbol is possible only in postpatriarchal symbol systems. Perhaps the tremendous experience of nonbeing and primordial outsider status, most powerfully articulated by Mary Daly (3-17) and Carol Christ (1976: 11-17), is part of the power and compellingness of the second coming of the Goddess.

That possibility aside, however, all the misgivings about the Goddess reveal a common source—that the past is authoritative and determinative. Because something has been the case, it will be the case. That reaction seems to be basically counter to the trend of feminist thinking, which is much more concerned with present and future experience than with the authorities of the immediate 3,000 year past. This comment is not meant to discount traditional sources, for, as I have already said and will say again, to me it seems foolish to rely only on contemporary experience to the exclusion of tradition and the past. On the other hand, the Goddess's past is not a limit either. Whether or not She fulfilled a feminist's dreams in her past manifestations is no indication of Her relevance for contemporary women. She may not have, but that is irrelevant. She may have, but that is also irrelevant.

Does the Goddess mean anything to us now? That is the only important question. Why bother with the Goddess at all? Why not become completely abstract in our thought patterns, going completely beyond God the Father as well as beyond God the Mother? Beyond God the Son as well as beyond God the Daughter? In my experience, to most people confronted with the issue, this seems to be the obvious solution, at least at first (Daly: 10).

Indeed there are strong justifications for such a solution. Were I speaking in philosophic rather than mystic language I would also opt for such a solution, given the efficiency and accuracy of impersonal modes of speech versus metaphors based on the experience of ego and personality. However, even the most thoroughgoing nonpersonal symbol systems seem to allow the existence of mythic modes of thought as expressions of skillful means, so to speak, thereby stressing the usefulness of personal anthropomorphic and gynomorphic images, even if they are evaluated as devices of the imagination at another level of understanding. It seems that it is neither possible nor desirable to do without mythic, symbol thinking, without modes of expression that turn on metaphor and imagery. If anything, our language is already too myth-starved, and further abstraction would exacerbate that problem. Thus the choice to re-image the Goddess rather than to discard all anthropomorphic imagery is in part due to a prior choice concerning the recognition of the eternal relevance of the mythic mode of thinking.

However, in addition, it seems to me that the Goddess offers us several advantages which cannot be obtained in any other way including a further

abstraction of language. First of all, She offers the most powerful corrective to the sexism current in theology and ritual. It seems very clear to me, and I have argued elsewhere at length (Gross, 1976: 6-9), that the ultimate symbol of women's degradation in the Western religio-cultural heritage is the inability to say "God-She." Thus it also seems clear that saying "God-She" is among the most powerful techniques for overcoming that sexism. In fact, it seems that often the move to abstract God the Father out of existence rather than to re-image the Goddess is taken precisely because, while people do recognize the inadequacy of solely masculine god-language, they simply cannot deal with the overwhelming powerful and positive evaluation of the feminine that the Goddess evokes. Therefore, they neuterize the language and imagery. Nevertheless, there is an overwhelming need to revalorize, as graphically as possible, simply being female as well as "feminine" experiences and traits, such as birthing and nurturing. Such experiences are too primordial and basic to be left out of the symbol system, to be devalued, suppressed and denied. However it should also be pointed out that it is taken for granted that women are not limited to "the feminine" nor "the feminine" to women. Rather we are dealing with experiences and traits that generally have been symbolized by and associated with females. But they are not relevant only to women nor are they the totality of women's possibilities and experiences. Nor as I have said, would the Goddess appear only as a nurturant birthgiver even though She revalorizes those symbols dramatically and graphically. She is much more universal and powerful than we imagine at present.

There is another reason, of less importance to me though possibly of more importance to others, for re-imagining the Goddess rather than going beyond God the Father. Simply put, this change requires *less* of a shift in the core symbolism of the Judeo-Christian tradition than does the move to an abstract, neuter and impersonal Ground of Being or Verb of Verbs (Daly: 10) that is never tainted with anthropomorphic symbolism. It is generally recognized that the theistic metaphors of a personal God have their limitations, but it is also generally recognized they are necessary for a certain stage of religious development and a certain kind of religious expression. In the Judeo-Christian tradition the use of such images has been central and crucial. It seems to me that these religions, as well as Islam, have invested much in them and are more dependent on them than are any of the other existing religions. Unfortunately, that entire theistic investment has been made in terms of the symbolism of male persons.

Therefore, these religions now face a dilemma. To give up theistic images of God as a person would require radical and thoroughgoing shifts in the core symbolism of Judaism and Christianity. However, the continued use of exclusively male language and imagery is intolerable. There are only two ways of transcending exclusively male imagery: either God can become neuter and nonpersonal, essentially nontheistic; or God can become bisexual and androgynous—female as well as male. The latter option is less disruptive and infinitely more powerful and attractive.

If we decide that re-imagining the Goddess is a necessary and worthwhile enterprise, we still face a very difficult problem. What are our sources for imagery of the Goddess? It is one thing to long for the Goddess and another to find Her. The problem of resources for re-imagining the Goddess, my third preliminary consideration, is of considerable importance. At least three sources suggest themselves. The one that feminist theologians most often turn to as the final arbiter is our own experience (Christ, 1977: 204), which seems to me to be the only final arbiter that can be trusted. Yet I see experience not so much as the sole creative source for imagery of the Goddess but rather as the final arbiter of the value of specific Goddess imagery, no matter what its source. In fact, I think it is rather dangerous to rely solely on our own experience to create the imagery appropriate for feminist theology. We may well simply not have the experience to conjure up some of the most fruitful and compelling dimensions of the imagery of the Goddess, though we easily recognize their validity or reject them as unhelpful once we come into contact with them in other contexts.

Those who utilize extant imagery of the Goddess usually begin by mining the hidden tradition of Western female God-language (Patai) and looking to the pre-Biblical goddesses of the Western world, who seem to have survived in some form to the present day (McFarland: Budapest: Valiente). These sources are much richer than is generally suspected at first. However, they too are problematic. They present a tiny inroad in a largely patriarchal tradition, or in the case of the ancient Goddess, they are very far removed from us.

It seems to me that there is a third important resource that has been largely unnoticed by feminist theologians, namely, the living religions with strong Goddess imagery, of which Hinduism is one of the most promising and fruitful. However, this resource is also not without its problems, for if the ancient Goddesses are temporally distant from us, the contemporary Goddesses are culturally distant from us. I am not suggesting that everyone read a half-dozen books on the Hindu deities and then attempt to utilize the imagery of the Hindu Goddesses in feminist theology. It is much more complex than that, and the Hindu materials are readily susceptible to misinterpretation, both positive and negative. In fact, in many ways, I consider this aspect of my paper to be its most controversial suggestion—not from the viewpoint of Western theology's reluctance to use non-Western sources, which I consider only provincialism—but from the viewpoint of a historian of religions demanding adequate understanding and fair representations of the Hindu materials. My task is a truly double-edged one. On the one hand, my primary intended audience is feminist theology, not Indology. I intend to *utilize* my conclusions about Hindu materials as a resource for re-imagining the Goddess, not to demonstrate their validity to other scholars of Hinduism. Nor am I attempting a complete description of the Goddesses, either in terms of their historical development or in terms of their contemporary manifestations, since I am looking for useful resources. Furthermore, since I find the most useful resources to be Hindu iconography, I am relying very heavily on that facet of Hinduism, to the relative exclusion of

textual materials. On the other hand, I am not interested in misrepresenting the Hindu materials for the cause of feminist theology. I am comfortable utilizing only sound conclusions about the symbolism connected with the Hindu Goddess as suggestions for re-imagining the Goddess (Gross, 1975). I am suggesting that some real scholarly competence with these materials is a prerequisite, but I am also suggesting that if approached critically and carefully, and if intelligent selection and borrowing are utilized, the Hindu Goddesses are the greatest stimulant to our imagination and to our speculation about the meaning of the Goddess that I have encountered.

II. Hindu Female Deities as a Resource for the Contemporary Rediscovery of the Goddess: Six Basic Images

We begin with a discussion of fundamental bisexuality of the deity in Hinduism. This aspect of Hindu theism is not so much noted by scholars of Hinduism as it should be. Yet this bisexuality is the foundation of modern Hindu theistic images, with independent status and activity of both female and male deities springing from this foundation. The lack of scholarly emphasis on this fundamental bisexuality can easily be explained. First, the bisexuality is a relatively recent phenomenon. Everyone knows that the Vedic pantheon was largely male and that everyone who writes about Hinduism makes a few comments about the resurgence of the Goddess some time after the beginning of the Christian era. One gets the impression that many commentators simply don't know what to make of this resurgence and do not assess its true significance or scope at all adequately, being content to treat the evermore significant female sides of Viṣṇu and Śiva as a shadowy composite third, the Great Goddess. Furthermore, the evidence for a foundation image of bisexuality is much more obvious in the iconographic materials than in the texts—and scholars of Hinduism have tended to leave iconography to art historians and content themselves with texts.

There are several significant icons connected with the image of divine bisexuality. First there is the icon of deity-as-couple, and the closely related phenomenon of female counterparts corresponding to every male manifestation of deity, from the most insignificant to the Trimūrti itself.

The image of the divine couple is so common in Hinduism that little needs to be said about it. This image pervades both the Shaivite and Vaishnavite traditions, though it is somewhat more noticeable in Shaivite tradition. However, the Vaishnavite tradition has also been significantly touched by the metaphor of the divine couple, though the Vaishnavite images tend to be more patriarchally male dominant than the Shaivite couple, with a diminutive Lakṣmī who rubs Viṣṇu's feet in proper wifely submission. However, that tendency is not universal in Vaishnavite imagery, as the icons in the central shrine of the Lakṣmī-Narayan temple in New Dehli show. The two members of the divine couple stand side-by-side. Lakṣmī only slightly shorter than Viṣṇu. The tradition of deity-as-couple also occurs in the

materials regarding Viṣṇu's avatars. It is sometimes said that Viṣṇu always incarnated as a couple. In any case, the later Kṛṣṇa materials present striking examples of the divine couple. The history of the Krishnaite materials also presents a strong example of the re-feminization of Hindu traditions, for Kṛṣṇa begins his career as a male hero who gradually becomes the archetypal lover. The image of Kṛṣṇa as lover, of course, represents something of a resurgence of feminine symbolism, but even more instructive is the gradual ascendance of Rādhā from the nameless human lover to Kṛṣṇa's divine counterpart (Brown: 119-98).

Closely related to the image of the divine couple is the fact that in classical and modern Hinduism, every manifestation of divinity, from insignificant spirits to the Great Gods themselves, has a female as well as a male manifestation. We may begin with Nāgas, serpentine beings, of folklore and popular mythology who become Nāginīs and Nāgas, their tails sensuously intertwined beneath their male and female heads and torsos. More interesting is the fact that the remnants of the old Vedic male gods received female counterparts, Indranī and Varunanī for example (Bussagli/Sivaramamurti: 207; Zimmer, 1955: Plate 243) relatively late in the development of the Vedic tradition. These female counterparts of major male gods were not important during the height of the Vedic period, when the male deities were prominent. Therefore it seems that their appearance in late Vedic tradition and in iconography can only be due to the new power of the image of divine bisexuality. However, it is not just minor or older deities that are portrayed in female guise. Abstractions of divinity, like Bhuvanēsvarī and Maheśvarī, appear in female form (Bussagli/Sivaramamurti: 191, 197). One also finds icons of Goddesses with all the major attributes of Viṣṇu and Śiva as well as Bhairavī (Mookerjee, 1971: Plate 93), the female form of Bhairava, a manifestation of the destructive side of Śiva. The entire Trimūrti also takes on female form on occasion (Maury: 43). In conclusion, it perhaps would be worth noting that the re-feminization of the tradition was so strong that it significantly affected not only all anthropomorphic figures within Hinduism, but also Buddhism and Jainism, despite their nontheistic teachings.

Two other icons demonstrate even more graphically the bisexual character of deity. The līṅga-yoni icon is, if anything, even more widespread than the image of the couple, often being the central icon in Shaivite temples and found in many other places as well. Though it is generally called a "Shivalīṅga" and there is much stress on its phallic component, both on the part of scholars of Hinduism and Hindus, everyone knows that the līṅga, or phallic component usually rests in the base of the yoni, or stylized vagina, and that one rarely finds an icon of līṅga without a yoni. The fact that the yoni tends to be overlooked in discussions of the līṅga-yoni icon is typical of the way androgynous images often are discussed as if they were purely androcentric images.

The second image I wish to discuss as an even more obvious demonstration of divine bisexuality than the couple-image is subject to some of the same problems. Generally called the Śiva Ardhanārī icon or "Śiva as

half-women” icon, it is an icon of a single being who is quite obviously male on one side of his body and quite obviously female on the other side of her body, down to the minutest details. The image itself is obviously much more bisexual than its title. This icon is not as common as others I have discussed, but it is by no means rare either, occurring quite early at Elephanta (Zimmer, 1955: Plates 256, 258) and Mahabalipuram, in the later style of South Indian bronze casting, a copy of which sits on my coffee table (Bussagli/Sivaramamurti: 254) and in the style common to late North Indian painting (Zimmer, 1946: Plate 70). An especially interesting occurrence of this icon is a Nepali carving of Viṣṇu as a hermaphrodite (Waldschmidt: Plate 20)—interesting because the hermaphrodite icon is almost always associated with Shaivite tradition. The occurrence of this icon in Vaishnavite tradition, even rarely, is significant and demonstrates once more the attractive power of the image of bisexuality.

This bisexuality of the deity strikes me as indicative of a basic sanity—a fundamental healthy and whole way to approach the need for personal imagery. It is quite reassuring to study and contemplate it and I suggest it as a foundation for any attempt to re-image the Goddess, taking care, of course, that the imagery is not used to express or perpetuate any sexism in either direction. However, while I think it is crucial to stress the androgynous foundation of sane theistic imagery, I am obviously more interested in the independent status and activity of the Goddess springing from this foundation. The independent manifestations of the Hindu Goddess offer five very significant suggestions for the re-imagining of the Goddess.

First, perhaps the most noticeable feature, as well as one of the most significant for us, is their obvious strength and capability, their transcendence and dynamic creativity. This quality is somewhat difficult to convey apart from the icons but it is omnipresent in the representations of the Goddess. However, it is most obvious in the stories and icons of Durgā Mahiṣāsura Mardini, Durgā, the slayer of the Buffalo Demon, a very widespread icon of the Goddess. The classic text itself (Zimmer, 1946: 189–97) reveals patriarchal overlay, attributing the origin of Durgā to the male gods, who recombine their energies to create the Goddess. A modern calendar picture, reversing this story and showing the three great male deities of current Hinduism springing from a ray of light emanating from the Goddess’s palm probably reflects a more primordial perception. In any case, even in the text, Durgā is called upon to accomplish that which none of the male deities can accomplish—the destruction of a very powerful embodiment of evil. Without a moment’s hesitation, with consummate grace, calmness, and beauty at all times, Durgā mounts her lion and easily defeats the Buffalo Demon in physical combat. She is often portrayed in the midst of the battle, capable and strong, calm, and exceedingly beautiful at once. This icon is exceedingly widespread and popular from relatively early times (the classic Mahabalipuram relief [Zimmer 1955: Plates 284, 285] is from the 7th century) to the present. In many of the icons the Buffalo Demon recedes in importance and all the stress is on Durgā herself, masterfully standing on his head, as in a relief in use today

in numerous South Indian temples. This emphasis on Durgā as deity has given rise to a very widespread and popular icon of Durgā riding her lion or tiger, displaying her attributes and dispensing boons with no reference whatsoever to the Buffalo Demon. It seems she has gathered more and more significance and universality to herself. It is important to note that these icons portray her carrying the emblems of *both* major Hindu theistic traditions, the Shaivite (trident, sword, etc.) and the Vaishnavite (solar disk, lotus, club, etc.). This is certainly a powerful indication of universality. It is important to note that except for a composite creation of Hari-Hara, a figure that is half Śiva and half Viṣṇu, this is the only icon that *combines* the attributes of both major streams of theistic imagery. And Durgā is certainly infinitely more popular and well known than Hari-Hara.

I am always especially struck by the combination of strength and beauty, since we are used to seeing these two qualities as mutually exclusive, especially in women. This element of the Goddess is the perfect counter to the objection that God must be male, since God must be strong, and capable of engendering trust and confidence—an argument which I often hear from the naïve, who expect that a Goddess would directly embody the qualities currently expected of females and therefore expect a Goddess somehow to be passive, ineffectual, and weak. Since I think theistic imagery must contain images of strength and capability that produce trust and confidence, and since these are qualities not usually associated with females in our current repertoire of images, I find it highly instructive to contemplate this element of the Hindu Goddesses. The other element of this icon that is of most significance for us is seen in the modern portraits of Durgā carrying the emblems of both major traditions. I cannot but be struck by the fact that it is a female image of the deity that demonstrates this kind of universality. One would expect such universal significance and completeness to occur with the second coming of the Goddess.

The second major characteristic of the Goddess that I wish to discuss is a characteristic She shares with the male Hindu deities, a characteristic that seems to me to be exceedingly important in theistic imagery but one which also seems to be very weak in current Western religious imagery. All Hindu deities, female as well as male, demonstrate a symbolism of the coincidence of opposites, perhaps most brilliantly demonstrated and commented on by Danielou (5, 190-92). At its most basic level the coincidence of opposites is a coincidence of creation and destruction, of “good” and “bad” looked at from the point of view of ego’s needs and self-interest. This dimension of the Hindu symbol system and the symbolism of the destructive Goddesses and Gods is quite susceptible to misinterpretation, to the painfully wrong conclusion that the Goddess is demonic because She promotes death as well as birth. However, many commentators have begun to decipher this kind of symbolism, noting its realism and wisdom. Both poles are an inevitable part of experience; it is shortsighted to look only to increase, continuity, and well-being. Rather this symbolism looks beyond the gratification of immediate needs to the necessity of death for life in a closed ecosystem. Not only is this

kind of symbolism necessary, but it seems fundamental that in a theistic symbol system, the deities should incarnate and embody this symbolism. If both poles are necessary and inevitable, then both must characterize the gods.

In the Hindu context, the destructive side of the coincidence is more than just something we recognize as inevitable and life-giving in the long run. The destructive manifestations of deity, both male and female, with their swords and severed heads dancing in the cremation ground, demonstrate cutting away finite attachments, thus demonstrating the way to the ultimate goal—liberation. The process of cutting away all resting places, all finite attachments, though difficult and painful, is inevitably necessary for release in most Indian views. Therefore the deities most closely connected with death and destruction, Kālī and Śiva, are also intimately connected with revelation and release. This dimension, this function of the destructive side of coincidence of opposites symbolism has been much less noted, though Danielou has buried some intimations of it in his discussions of Śiva (188-90), and Kinsley sees the same functions of this symbolism in connection with Kālī (141-59), doing a masterful job of drawing forth its implications.

At this point I shall begin to rest my case that both levels of coincidence of opposites symbolism are valuable and that since the Hindu Goddesses manifest both kinds of coincidence of opposites symbolism they have much to teach us. Let me say only that this is perhaps the area in which we need outside help the most in re-imaging the Goddess, since it seems extremely unlikely that anything in our present resources prompt us to develop this symbolism. Perhaps we should also remember that the ancient European and Middle Eastern Goddesses seem to have this same ambiguity. Therefore we seem to be tapping into an extremely primordial tradition and one towards which we need to be passively receptive.

It remains only to discuss the specific manifestations of coincidence of opposites symbolism in the Hindu Goddesses. To do so at the deepest level would require a discussion of all the Goddesses, the “beneficent” Goddesses, Durgā, Pārvatī, Lakṣmī, Sarasvatī, etc., as well as the “destructive” Goddesses, particularly Kālī. In this context I want mainly to discuss the destructive side of the pole, dealing in a general way with the broadest coincidence of opposites by pointing out a somewhat uncommon (Rawson, 1973a: Plates 87, 104; Zimmer, 1946: Plate 57) scene combining the mild, young, beautiful Durgā with Kālī at her worst—naked, black, fierce, sword in hand—both of them awaiting a huge multitude.

I want to focus on the second figure in the scene, who is sometimes portrayed in a totally mild manner. Usually her portrayals are more subtle (for example, see Neumann: Plate 182). One hardly notices the skull of her headdress, but it is there and the noose she holds is ominous. Nevertheless, her hands form the comforting mudrās “granting peace” and “granting a boon” and she sits in the relaxed teaching pose—a subtle but significant sign. What is she trying to teach us? It becomes more obvious in her most familiar portraits (Rawson, 1973b: Plate 15). She is black; her eyes are fierce and terrible, her tongue reaches well past her chin, eager to lick up the blood of her victims, and

she carries a severed head and a curved knife in two of her four arms. Neophytes usually overlook the peace-giving and gift-giving *mudrās* of the other two hands, the beautiful hair and the halo. That balance is crucial. It must not be overlooked.

In modern iconography it is common to portray this dark fierce Kālī dancing on the prone body of Śiva. Though there is little textual evidence about this particular icon of Kālī the icon itself can be found in relatively early times, for example on the walls of the temples of Belur and Halebid dating from the twelfth or thirteenth centuries, and over a wide geographic area within India. In one very surprising painting, the whole imagery is transferred to Viṣṇu and Lakṣmī (Rawson, 1968: Plate 8), which comes as quite a shock to anyone used to Vaishnavite symbols. Transferring this icon to the Vaishnavite context, even if rarely, demonstrates dramatically the power and attractiveness it attains. In contemporary India the Kālī-Śiva version is surprisingly popular. In some paintings Śiva watches Kālī in rapt fascination, his head propped up by his hand and arm. This behavior contrasts significantly with the text (Kinsley: 108) about this incident, which narrates how Kālī danced madly out of control on the battlefield until Śiva threw himself among the corpses. When Kālī danced on him, Brahmā pointed out that it was inappropriate for her to tread upon her husband and Kālī, rebuked, stopped dancing. The difference between the text, which subtly snubs Kālī, and the icon, which catches her at the moment of her exultant dance upon a cooperative, fascinated, nonreproachful Śiva, indicates how important the tradition of visual Hinduism is. In other modern paintings, Kālī's dance occurs in a cremation ground and the divine couple is surrounded by funeral pyres, cracked bones, skeletons, and jackals, and Kālī is irresistibly beautiful. The balance is clear and perfect, down to the frequent boon-giving and peace-giving *mudrās*.

It may seem that I am overworking this facet of Goddess symbolism, but I do want to describe briefly another fascinating, much less common and well-known portrayal of a Goddess that contains much of the same symbolism. Chinnamastā, the sixth of the ten Mahāvīdyās or forms of the energy of the Goddess (Danielou, 268-88; Rawson, 1973a; 132-33), sits or stands on the lotus throne, holding her self-severed head in her hands (Rawson, 1973a: Plate 86; 1968: Plate 110; Mookerjee, 1971: Plate 47; 1972, Plate 64). Three streams of blood, representing the three *guṇas* or basic strands in the phenomenal world, nourish her head and two female figures flanking her. Rawson says that each of the three females should be in intercourse, but I have only seen paintings with the entire lotus throne above or on a copulating couple, with the female in the superior position, of course. The coincidence of life and death, the bloody presence of the Mother of the World, could hardly be more obvious.

The third set of resources for re-imagining the Goddess that are found in connection with the Hindu Goddesses, the image of God as Mother, is one of the most difficult to deal with, both from the point of view of assessing how the image is utilized in the Hindu context and from the point of view of

determining how this imagery should be used in revalorized Goddess symbolism.

The problem we face in revalorizing God the Mother is double-edged. On the one hand, it is crucial to revalorize images of birthing, nurturing, and mothering. They have been banished and denigrated for far too long already. On the other hand, this revalorization must be done without excessive glorification and without giving credence to the notion that because divine motherhood is so significant, human motherhood itself is a sufficient role for women. This is a particularly difficult situation for us, since the transcendent significance of birthing and mothering has been denied at the same time as women have been trapped in and confined to mothering, caretaking roles, solely responsible for the care of young children. A more pervasive deadend is hard to imagine, and I am afraid that the only significant Western female deity, the Virgin Mary, at times helps to foster that confinement, since she usually functions in relation with and in dependence upon the divine child. However ambiguous the Hindu images of God as Mother may be in some ways, they clearly present one idea that is extremely helpful for us. The Motherhood of God, while real and strongly expressed, is basically metaphorical. Though there are a few icons of the Goddess giving birth (Rawson, 1973: 99; Mookerjee, 1972: Plate 74), the Mother and dependent child icon is conspicuous in its absence. Nevertheless, references to the life-giving creative motherhood of God are omnipresent. Participating in the Goddess's creative potential, female religious leaders frequently have the title "mother" appended to their names despite the absence of physical children. Thus it seems obvious that Motherhood in this case means something more subtle than the role of cosmic housewife and diaper-changer. It seems instead that any act carried out by a female that produces positive results of some sort merits the title "mother." This really should not be so hard to grasp, since we use language that way all the time in reference to God the Father, whom no one expects to be a cosmic universal inseminator (at least not anymore). Why then should God the Mother be an infinitely fertile, perpetual birth-giver and caretaker of young children? I doubt the Goddess ever was *only* that, even when fertility (as opposed to creativity) was an important part of her symbolism. That kind of literal motherhood does not now constitute the motherhood of the Hindu God-Mother and it certainly would not be the kind of Motherhood that is revalorized by the second coming of the Goddess.

We can get some further important clues for revalorizing the mothering aspects of the Goddess by noting that, not only do creative things done by females justify the title "mother," but also, any kind of creativity or bestowing of life seems to evoke a symbolism of motherhood. This correlation explains the common practice of calling the rivers "mothers," a custom which is most noticed in the case of Mata Gaṅgā, but is common for other rivers as well. The same habit of thought is expressed in the very common and widespread notion that the male pole of the male-female dichotomy represents passivity and potentiality, while the female pole represents activity and actuality. Called Māyā-Śakti, this version of the Goddess is responsible for the manifest,

manifold world of our experience, while her passive consort represents only the potential for existence. This notion is extremely widespread, especially in later and/or Tantric versions of Hinduism. Visually, it is most vividly expressed by a development on the familiar motif of Kālī dancing on Śiva. Everything is familiar except that Kālī dances on two figures of Śiva, one above the other (Zimmer, 1946: 197–216). The bottom Śiva is a śava, a corpse, the word-play that gave rise to the icon, while the upper Śiva-figure shows signs of life and attention. He is in contact with the feet of Kālī, which is paradigmatic of the relationship between the Absolute and the Manifest, the male and the female. There is a world only because of Kālī. Without her, everything would slip back into primordial potential voidness. It must be pointed out, in fairness, that this symbolism is more ambiguous in the Hindu context than it would be in a Western context, since Māyā is sometimes regarded as demonic in philosophic Hinduism, and Śakti as Prakṛti or Materiality is negatively assessed in some Hindu philosophies. Nevertheless, there is real ambiguity about this point, for the philosophical traditions that denigrate Māyā-Śakti—as philosophical ideas, not as personifications or images—have probably been overemphasized in Western perceptions of Hinduism. The icons and many less well-known traditions do not present a negative portrayal of Kālī as Māyā-Śakti. In any case, the image could function positively for us whatever its connotations in its original context, and I think it has much to offer.

The Hindu methods of dealing with the Motherhood of God offer a final suggestion. It seems that there is a keen perception of the awesomeness of female sexuality and the female sex organs, particularly the yoni, but sometimes the breasts. They are venerated in and of themselves, as awesome and creative. Sometimes this veneration is represented abstractly, as the painting which portrays the most common Hindu creation scene—Viṣṇu on the cosmic serpent, with Brahmā sitting on a lotus that grows from Viṣṇu's navel and creating the world while Lakṣmī rubs Viṣṇu's feet—all occurring within a yoni (Rawson, 1973b: 101). However, the veneration does not remain so abstract. The actual yoni of the Goddess is venerated (Mookerjee, 1972: Plate 83) and the Goddess presents her yoni, in a highly exhibitionistic pose, (Maury: Plate 23: Fig. 133, 134). In some cases the devotees' veneration, in the touching of the Goddess's yoni, has worn an indentation in the carvings. In other cases, icons of abstract (Rawson, 1973b: Plate 7) or graphic (Rawson, 1973a: Plate 40) yonis are utilized for veneration. The breasts are emphasized and venerated less often, but one finds icons of the Goddess drawing attention to her breasts by holding them (Rawson, 1967: 225) or by holding one breast while pointing to her yoni with the other hand (Bussagli/Sivaramamurti: Plate 110).

I have repeatedly been met with stunned, slightly uncomfortable silence when presenting and discussing these icons. The correspondence between feminine and divine imagery, to say nothing of the explicit veneration of female sexuality and its creative potential, seems to unnerve people.

Therefore, I suggest it. It is the visual corollary of the verbal God-She and teaches us the same lesson. It's okay to be female.

The fourth lesson that might be learned from the symbolism of the Hindu Goddesses is relatively straightforward and simple, though of great significance. The Goddesses are involved with the broad range of culturally valued goals and activities. Their connection with motherhood and female sexuality does not confine them or exhaust their significance and activities. In this case, it is the general principle rather than any specific examples that is most instructive, though it is easy to demonstrate the general principle in the Hindu context by pointing out that Lakṣmī distributes wealth and good fortune, while Sarasvatī promotes learning and cultured, artful living. Subtler clues in her icons demonstrate the general point more thoroughly. Sarasvatī assumes the cross-legged meditation pose and teaching mudrās without sacrificing any of her explicitly female form (Goetz: 172), just as Durgā is strong and capable without compromising her femaleness. The combination portrayed by Sarasvatī has the same stereotype-breaking power as Durgā's power and is therefore important. In addition, Pārvatī presents herself in the posture of a teacher (Zimmer, 1955: Plate 419) and Kālī destroys finite attachments (Zimmer, 1946: Plate 68), feeding on those attachments, symbolized as the entrails of a victim on whom she dances. Nor should this universal range of activities be surprising; it is consonant with Goddess symbolism in other religions. However, it is important to point out this universal range of activities again and again, since femaleness is often interpreted as a limiting condition.

However, the Goddess will not necessarily involve Herself with the same activities in Her second coming as She does in past or current Goddess religions. She may, but She may also manifest solutions for totally new problems. For example, metaphors of rulership and hierarchy have always been crucial in Western religious imagery, but I doubt that those images are of central concern today. Therefore, while the Goddess involves Herself in the broad range of our culture's values and goals, I don't look for Her to manifest Herself as a female lord or ruler. (Note the absence of a true counterpart for "Lord." "Lady" simply is not the counterpart at the level of connotations.) Instead I expect Her to be involved in more equalitarian, mutually sparing and giving manifestations, to which feminine imagery should have much to contribute.

My last set of comments and suggestions centers around the reintroduction of sexuality as a significant religious metaphor. If deity is bisexual, explicit sexual symbolism becomes unavoidable. It is important to note that it is only the explicitness that is new, since God the Father has always been an implicitly sexual symbol, as the notion of his begetting the Son, as well as his supposed male initiative, quoted earlier in this paper, demonstrate. So it is actually only female sexuality and the male-female sexual relationship that are unfamiliar images, and they have much to offer.

Sexual metaphors are present in all the images of the Goddess and divine bisexuality that I have already discussed. The motherhood of God involves

veneration of female sexuality and the many versions of the divine couple already discussed are laden with implicit sexuality. All that remains is to point it out explicitly. Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa metaphors are laden with implicit sexuality as the lovers' eyes meet (Archer: Plate 36), and with explicit sexuality as they make love in paradisiacal settings (Rawson, 1968: Plates 9, 13). The yoni and the līṅga abstractly embrace each other. Kālī dances on a longing, impressively erect, Śiva (Rawson, 1973a: Plate 88), not only with her feet, but also with her yoni (Rawson, 1973a: Plates 110, 111; 1968: Plate 111), as all the imagery accompanying the icon of Kālī dancing on Śiva or Śiva-Śava are transferred to icons of Kālī sitting on the erect penis of Śiva or Śiva-Śava, still with her sword and severed head, her mudrās of peace-giving and gift-giving, in the midst of the cremation ground.

There is no need to document further the pervasive sexuality in Hindu images of the Goddess and deity in general since it is so commonplace. Indeed the explicit and pervasive sexuality of Hindu images is often confusing and alienating, or else titillating, to outsiders. Yet it seems bizarre that theistic, personal imagery of the Absolute, could have so neglected or defused a basic dimension of personal experience, especially in a religious context that pays so much attention to the other basic bodily experience of eating. Furthermore, the loss of this imagery is especially problematic for an image system that turns on personal relationships both for imaging intra-divine relating and the divine-human relationship. To invest so heavily in relational metaphors and then to limit the metaphors to *one* of the four parent-child relationships while completely excluding and denying the most basic human relationship as well as the other three parent-child relationships seems a bit strange, to say the least.

This final suggestion about the meaning of the Goddess—the reintroduction of sexuality as a significant religious metaphor—seems to me to be commonplace and obvious by now, especially since it too, like the coincidence of opposites and emphasis on life-giving properties of female sexuality, is stressed in the symbolism of the ancient Goddesses. However, I consistently find that this set of images is among the most perplexing and surprising of all the images involved in re-imaging the Goddess. The reluctance or relief with which people respond to the notion of sexuality as a religious metaphor reveals much about a lingering uncomfortableness about our embodied condition that would best be abandoned. Therefore, the reintroduction of the Goddess which demands the reintroduction of the sexual metaphors, represents a basically sane and healthy turn of events. In fact, what this will do to get past a lingering body-spirit dichotomy and consequent body-hatred is incalculable. The resultant coincidence of sexuality and spirituality has much to offer.

In the end some sort of vision of the Goddess does begin to emerge—fuzzy and indistinct, waiting for more revisionings drawing upon other resources. But She is a lot clearer and more distinct than when I wrote my first essay on female god-language three (only three!) years ago, and ended unable to get beyond articulating why God-She was a theologically sound and

sociologically necessary idea, totally unable to see any imagery of the Goddess. As I look at Her now, what seems most significant is not Her similarity to, or difference from, the images of male deities, though there are plenty of each, but Her sheer presence *as female*. By being there as female, She validates me as I am. Her limitlessness is exemplary for me. It is good to be in the image of the Goddess. That is the most important of Her many meanings.

NOTES

/1/ The most widely quoted recent statement of this thesis is George Rutland's statement:

A priest is a "God-Symbol" whether he likes it or not. In the imagery of both the Old and New Testaments God is represented in masculine imagery. The Father begets the Son. This is essential to the *givingness* of the Christian Faith, and to tamper with this imagery is to change that Faith into something else.

Of course, this does not mean God is a male. The biblical language is the language of analogy. It is imperfect. Nevertheless, it has meaning. The male image about God pertains to the divine initiative in creation. Initiative is, in itself, a male rather than a female attribute. (Hewitt/Hyatt: 59)

/2/ The recent Roman Catholic decision against the ordination of women as priests turns on the maleness of Jesus. This is only the most recent example of the use, for the past 2,000–3,000 years, of the symbolism of a male deity to exclude and denigrate women. The ways in which this symbolism functions to exclude and denigrate women is most obvious when one engages in role reversal phantasies. Then what is normally done to women becomes intolerable and unbearable, simply because it is being done to men instead. The most effective published role reversal phantasy that I know of was written by Nelle Morton and is published in Hageman (29–31).

/3/ The term was coined by Naomi Goldenberg.

/4/ She cites Augustine's view that the male alone is fully in the image of God, while women are in the image of God only with the male but not in and of themselves: ". . . when she is referred to separately in her quality as a helpmate, which regards the woman alone, then she is not in the image of God, but as regards the man alone, he is in the image of God as fully and completely as when the woman too is joined with him in one" (Ruether, 1974: 156).

/5/ This is an extremely difficult and touchy point in current discussions. It is clear that conventional scholarship, collapsing women and the feminine, has been content to investigate Goddesses without considering whether Goddesses reflect males' or females' perspectives on the world or some female-male consensus. Recently, some scholars have wondered what the Goddess meant to women and have tried to prove that Her theologians and priestesses were women and that She dictated high political and social standing for women. The most convincing presentation of that argument to date is Merlin Stone's book *When God Was a Woman*. A somewhat more fanciful but widely read version of a similar hypothesis is found in Elizabeth Gould Davis, *The First Sex*. Much as I hope Stone and Davis are correct, I prefer to adopt a more conservative hypothesis, namely, that we *cannot prove* that Goddesses, either ancient or Indian, are a product of women's religious imagination; and then to demonstrate that, *nevertheless*, the Goddesses often present imagery that is significant for contemporary women seeking wholeness and self-respect.

WORKS CONSULTED

- Adler, Rachel
1977 "A Mother in Israel: Aspects of the Mother Role in Jewish Myth," *Beyond Androcentrism: New Essays on Women and Religion*. Ed. by Rita M. Gross. Missoula, MT: Scholars Press.
- Archer, W. A.
1977 *The Loves of Krishna in Indian Painting and Poetry*. London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd.
- Brown, C. M.
1974 *God as Mother: A Feminine Theology in India*. Hartford, VT: Claude Stark and Company.
- Budapest, Zsuzsana E.
1976 *The Feminist Book of Lights and Shadows*. Venice, CA: Luna Publications.
- Bussagli, Mario and Sivaramamurti,CALEMBUS
n.d. *5,000 Years of the Art of India*. New York: Henry N. Abrams, Inc.
- Christ, Carol P.
1976 "The Liberation of Women and the Liberation of God," in *The Jewish Woman*, ed. by Elizabeth Koltun. New York: Schocken Books.

- 1977 "The New Feminist Theology: A Review of the Literature." *Religious Studies Review*, III, (October): 203-12.
- Daly, Mary
1974 "Theology After the Demise of God the Father: A Call for the Castration of Sexist Religion," *Women and Religion*, Revised Edition. Ed. by Judith Plaskow and Joan Arnold. Missoula, MT: Scholars Press.
- Danielou, Alain
1964 *Hindu Polytheism*. (Bollingen Series, LXXII.) New York: Bollingen Foundation.
- Goetz, Hermann
1959 *India: Five Thousand Years of Indian Art*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company.
- Gross, Rita M.
1975 "Issues and Non-Issues in the Study of Women in World Religions." *Anima*, II (Fall): 34-39.
1976 "Female God-Language." *Davka*, (Winter): 6-9.
1977 "Androcentrism and Androgyny in the Methodology of History of Religions," *Beyond Androcentrism: New Essays on Women and Religion*. Ed. by Rita M. Gross. Missoula, MT: Scholars Press.
- Hageman, Alice
1974 *No More Silence: Sexist Religion and Women in the Church*. New York: Association Press.
- Hewitt, Emily C. and Suzanne R. Hyatt
1973 *Women Priests: Yes or No?* New York: The Seabury Press.
- Kinsley, David R.
1975 *The Sword and the Flute: Kālī and Kṛṣṇa, The Terrible and the Sublime in Hindu Mythology*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Maury, Curt
1969 *Folk Origins of Indian Art*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- McFarland, Morgan
1975 "Witchcraft: the Art of Remembering." *Quest* I (Spring): 41-48.
- Mookerjee, Ajit
1971 *Tantra Asana: A Way to Self-Realization*. Basil, Switzerland: Ravi Kumar.
1972 *Tantra Art: Its Philosophy and Physics*. Basil, Switzerland: Ravi Kumar.
- Neumann, Erich
1955 *The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype*. (Bollingen Series, XLVII.) New York: Bollingen Foundation.
- Patai, Raphael
1968 *The Hebrew Goddess*. New York: KTAV.

Pomeroy, Sarah B.

- 1975 *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity*. New York: Schocken Books.

Rawson, Philip

- 1967 *The Art of Southeast Asia: Cambodia, Thailand, Laos, Burma, Java, Bali*. New York: Frederick A. Praeger.
- 1968 *Erotic Art of the East*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson.
- 1973a *The Art of Tantra*. Greenwich, CT: New York Graphic Society, Ltd.
- 1973b *Tantra: The Indian Cult of Ecstasy*. New York: Bounty Books.

Reuther, Rosemary

- 1974 "Misogynism and Virginal Feminism in the Fathers of the Church," *Religion and Sexism*. Ed. by Rosemary Ruether. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- 1975 "Mistress of Heaven: the Meaning of Mariology," in *New Woman: New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation*. New York: Seabury Press.

Valiente, Doreen

- 1973 *An ABC of Witchcraft: Past and Present*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Van der Meer, Haye

- 1973 *Women Priests in the Catholic Church?* Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

Waldschmidt, Ernst and Rose Leonare

- 1970 *Nepal: Art Treasures from the Himalayas*. Trans. by David Wilson. New York: Universe Books.

Zimmer, Heinrich

- 1962 *Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization*. New York: Harper Torchbooks.
- 1955 *The Art of Indian Asia*. 2 vols. (Bollingen Series, XXXIX.) New York: Bollingen Foundation.