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MOVING DEVI

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

How is "Moving Devi" linked to "Can the Subaltern Speak?" you ask. You also ask me to consider the authority of autobiography. Indeed, the link between the two essays is a life-link.

In "Can the Subaltern Speak?" I tried to engage precolonial Indic material for the first time. It meant pushing away my allegiance to "French theory." To keep working with Derrida, I had to endorse him, to make sure he survived my new engagement with that new material, which I saw not as identity but as making use of the extra-curricular "knowledge" I had because of the accident of birth. I knew nothing of the Indic material in a disciplinary mode. I proceeded with my serviceable Sanskrit and little else. I located the "subaltern" in the middle class, in which I was myself "responsible." The essay itself was a resolute suppression of the autobiographical, in more ways than I can yet reveal.

By contrast, in "Moving Devi," some seventeen years later, the Western stuff is digested, for better or for worse. It does not oppress; it is not a thing to quarrel with. I am also at ease with the Indic material, not a little because of the calm guidance and encouragement of my late friend, Bimal Krishna Matilal, whose name I will take again in the essay proper. I am no longer beset by the need to occlude the traces of the irreducibly autobiographical in cultural speculation of this sort. It will be harder to take sides now. There are many subalterns in the pages of this essay; their speech is still unheard, but not a one of them resembles me.

In 1998, I was asked to write an essay for the catalog accompanying an exhibition on the great goddess (Devi) at the Arthur M. Sackler

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Gallery in Washington, D.C. "Moving Devi" was the response. A shorter version was published in the catalog. This unwieldy hybrid essay is as much about the authority of autobiography in the problem of reading as was "Can the Subaltern Speak?" although the earlier essay was not yet ready to betray this. My understanding of the autobiographical subject is a position without identity. How that computes in the writing is for you to judge.

I have just been reading a lot of writing samples for a postcolonial position. It seems that many younger scholars now refer to metropolitan migrant writers as "subaltern." Yet Gandhi and Nehru were not "subalterns" for the Subaltern Studies collective. (It goes without saying that the historians themselves did not claim subalternity.) The term "subaltern" has lost its power to indicate people from the very bottom layer of society, excluded even from the logic of the class structure. This may indeed be one of the reasons why I take the museum visitor from the model minority—sometimes myself—as a constituted subject that forgets the other in its haste to claim otherness, only with reference to the metropolitan majority.

Here, now, is the essay proper.

Every critical conviction persuades me that if I were representative of anything, I would not know that I was. Yet, surely, I must at least represent the passage, in migration, from *ethnos* to *ethnikos*—from being home to being a resident alien—as I write on the great goddess as she steps into a great U.S. museum[1] I will allow "myself" to occupy this stereotype as I think about her. Surely, it is because of this stereotype that I was asked to be part of the catalog.

I have moved from a Hindu majority in the center of Hinduism to a Hindu minority in a new imperialist metropolis where Hinduism was, until day before yesterday, in the museum. Yesterday, when the active polytheist imagination accessed the mind-set of the visitor in the museum, a colloidal solution, shaken up between here and there, was surely the result. I want to ruminate upon this transference from careless participant to uneasy observer. I speak of Devi, from somewhere upon this transference circuit, although not as an expert among experts.

I have no disciplinary access to knowledge upon this topic. I must write of/from the frailer base of "making sense." I am an

educated "native informant," the peculiar subject of metropolitan multiculturalism. I must destabilize the constitution of the Devi as yesterday's object of investigation. I must not say what standard textbooks say: "The Great Goddess, or Maha-Devi as she is known in India, burst onto the Hindu religious stage in the middle of the first millennium of the Christian era."[2] That is yesterday's talk. I am in the history of the (globalizing) present. I must let foolish common sense interrupt the power of knowledge and declare: There is no great goddess.[3] When activated, each goddess is the great goddess. That is the secret of polytheism.

Intellectual Hinduism—to speak of it thus in the singular is to assume too much—seeks to emphasize its monotheist, monist, juridico-legal singular version. A certain line of Hindu thought has striven to see the polytheist moment as a more or less divine and playful allegory of the philosophico-theological. With Buddhism, that moment seems to become altogether extra-orbitant, until Mahayana Buddhism brings it back in.[4]

For some of us, the more interesting aspect of this impulse is its replication in varieties of the dominant—orthodox Brahminism, Puranic syncretism, or, finally, semitized reform Hinduisms reactive to the British. If today's metropolitan immigration is linked to this chain of displacements, the effort of the "Hindu-majority-model-minority" is to reconstellate this something called Hinduism as "a living heritage as ancient as it is modern."[5]

These displacements signify great waves of cultural politics. Does "being in a culture" bring with it a special way of feeling in thinking? Twenty-five years ago, the British critic Raymond Williams thought that the way to observe culture where it is in the making is through "structures of feeling."[6] And more recently Derrida has reread Marx's thought within his own (and Marx's) Abrahamic cultural fix of messianicity—the possibility of welcome structuring the human as human.[7] Can we make some such claim for a "Hindu" way of viewing, thinking of it "culturally" rather than from within a system of belief? Common sense tells us that any such claim is necessarily behind the time of its possibility. Surrendering ourselves to that inescapable necessity—that we cannot break through into the vanishing present—let us venture a guess as to what an everyday polytheist structure of feeling might be.[8]

I am drawing now upon my conversations with the late Professor Matilal, who was one of the greatest international authorities on Hindu religious and philosophical culture. Discussing the *Mahābhārata* with him, I suggested that the active polytheist imagination negotiates with the unanticipatable yet perennial possibility of the metamorphosis of the transcendental as supernatural in the natural. To my way of thinking, this seemed to be the secret of the *dvaita* structure of feeling: the unanticipatable emergence of the supernatural in the natural—the tenacious dog on the mountain path is suddenly King Dharma for Yudhisthira in the last Book of the *Mahābhārata*—rather unlike any sustained notion of incarnation. Perhaps this is why the Sanskrit word for "incarnation" (*avatār*)—has nothing to do with "putting on flesh." It means rather "a come-down [being]." Everything around us is, after all, "come-down" if we assume an "up-there."

It is not too fanciful to say that a possible *dvaita* "structure of feeling," if there are such structures, would be the future anteriority of every being as potentially, unanticipatably *avatār* in the general sense. It is within this general uneven, unanticipatable possibility of *avatarana* or descent—this cathexis by the ulterior, as it were, that the "lesser" god or goddess, when fixed in devotion, is as "great" as the greatest: *ein jeder Engel ist schrecklich*. How did Rilke know? Is "culture" perhaps semipermeable to the imagination?[9]

In Mahasweta Devi's lovely story "Statue," a passage about Manosha, a late Puranic almost-human snake-goddess, catches my drift. Manosha, although a minor goddess, is everything for her particular protégés: "The brass Manosha, with her wide-open indifferent brass pop-eyes, has been hearing the prayers of devotees for two hundred years. She hears it still."[10] For the families Manosha had devastated previous to this passage, she was the presiding goddess of the household, and, when in action, she was the great goddess, the goddess of everything. The dark consequences of a *dvaita avatarana*—where the moment is sustained into stabilized worship of an unfortunate young female person—are represented in Satyajit Ray's 1960 film *Devi*.

When I first read about the Greek pantheon and its division of labor in college, I had a problem. Was not each god or goddess the god or goddess of everything when cathected in devotion or worship?

I was convinced that the commentators had gotten it wrong, for they did not know polytheism in cultural practice. The difference between "Greece" and "India" seemed only knowledge, unsustained by the responsibility of experience. The authority of autobiography (as well as knowledge) must remain forever problematic because that binary opposition does not hold at the limit either way.

Our word is *dvaita* (two-ness, with the secondary meaning of doubt—in this case about the stability or constancy of the apparent), not *poly*theist. Since *each* other being is the only other being, there are always only two, not many. For the *dvaitin* or twoness-minded, radical alterity is in an impossible invagination in every instance of the other.

Invagination. When you think anything can be contaminated by the supernatural, by alterity, "[i]t is precisely [by] a principle of contamination, a law of impurity, a parasitical economy." Parasitically to the merely "real," alongside its ecology, runs this unanticipatable possibility of alteration. "A participation without belonging—a taking part in without being a part of ... the boundary of the set comes to form, by invagination, an internal pocket larger than the whole."[11] The supernatural in the pocket of the natural, *dvaitavāda* in action, a structure of feeling folded in, again and again, to alterity.

In usual cultural explanations, classical and modern, the austere transcendentalization of radical alterity in Indic monism is made to coexist with these invaginated representations of the quick change into alterity by way of an argument from allegory. I am suggesting that the relationship is ironic rather than allegorical, if by irony is understood "the permanent parabasis of an allegory (of the *advaita*) ... the systematic undoing, in other words, of the abstract."[12] The *dvaita* episteme or mind-set, the "structure of feeling" that shelters the invaginated radical other as perhaps already descended in what surrounds us, interrupts *advaita*. And an *advaita* or nondual impulse establishes itself imperfectly when a cathected god or goddess occupies the entire godspace.

Dvaita and *advaita*, especially the latter, are here being used as common nouns. With or without the "allegorical" explanation, they (especially *advaita*) have been perceived as proper names of doctrinal ensembles that are, at best, in a binary relationship, offering historical possibilities of openness and/or closure in response to their negotiations with the profane, at all social levels. Indeed, a more

dialectical vocabulary of forms of appearance (*Erscheinungsformen*) of essential structural relationships (*Verhältnisse*), would probably fit the case better. However that complex binary is perceived, the idea being advanced here is that perhaps the *dvaita* and the *advaita* are also lowercase names of a sleight of mind, a cultural mind trick where the outlines bleed into each other in the mode of a permanent possibility of a parabasis in the future anterior. The *dvaita* will have pierced the *advaita* already, perhaps, and vice versa, asymmetrically. It is in this structure of feeling that devi(s), and deva(s) too, of course, have their being.

Thus in the structure of feeling-thinking, the attempt is not only at the transcendentalization of the figure of radical alterity, which is all that is evident if we examine comparable movements among peoples of the Book. The polytheist moment (not the same as the *dvaita/advaita* [non]relationship) is not often invoked there, except as an originary violent female prehistory before binaries can be launched. Freud is of course the most monumental example, but other instances can be found.[13] Our suggestion has been that, in an effort to stabilize the future anterior, "Hindu" polytheist cultural practice attempts to *presentize* the uneven but permanent parabasis of the natural by the supernatural, thus making phenomenality resonate with its transcendent double, where the double (*dvi*) stands for an indefiniteness that is not merely the opposite of one as many. That originary indefiniteness is celebrated in the fact that the one itself is *a-dvaita*—nondual—rather than singular.

Let us now examine an extreme and eloquent case, where the *advaita* is the abstract God of Islam:

> Let the lips utter nonstop
> *La ilaha illella* [the Islamic credo: There is no greater God than God]
> The Lord's prophet sent this law.
>
> But keep form and name as one
> In spirit, and say it over thus.
> If you call without form-sign
> How will you know your Lord?

This is Lalan Shah Fakir (1774–1890), chief among Bengali Sufi (a misnomer, again) lyricists. The hazy margins of South Asian Islam

will yield other examples. What is important on the track of the Devi is the possibility that, when the *dvaita* interrupts the abstract, the feminine enters.[14] If Lalan can interrupt his abstract and imageless Lord with the *dvaita* urge to *rupa* (manifestation, "form" in my translation), he is a step away from suggesting, in another song, that Khadija—Muhammad's eldest wife—*is* Allah: *je khodeja shei to khoda*, that one cannot determine the coordinates of Prophet and Lady separately; *ke ba nobi ke ba bibi*, that it is a marriage of transaction between the same and the same, othered. Not formless (*nirakar*) but one-formed: *ekkarete moharana*.

As Muhammad's chief wife, Khadija is here the chief goddess, as it were. She is chief player in the play of *advaita/dvaita* in Lalan's hymn. But this is tightly structured poetic countertheology. The *dvaita* impulse is at work to mark out (or in) the borders of Islam. The fourteen wives of the Prophet are suddenly the fourteen worlds of Indic mythology, without any attempt at establishing allegoric continuity. Lalan is no blasphemer. Three of the wives were before the *kalema;* before, that is, the Islamic revelation. And therefore it is of the eleven within Islam that Lalan the Islamic *dvaitin* sings: *egaro jon dasya bhabe Lalan koi kore upashona*, Lalan says that the eleven worship in the servant's way.

Lalan writes this scene of woman within the way of *bhakti* or devotion, widely recognized as a historical challenge from within to the caste-fixed inflexibility of high Hinduism.[15] *Bhakti*, creating affective links between the subject and the invaginated radical alterity of the *dvaitin* mind-set, inscribes and assigns the subject's position within a taxonomy of phenomenal affect: the word literally invokes this taxonomic division. When Lalan iconizes the eleven wives of Muhammad as worshiping him in the servant's way, he is not guilty of *naturalistic* sexism. He is speaking rather of the various assigned subject-positions within the text of *bhakti*, themselves undoubtedly related to the highly detailed taxonomy of the *rasas* (names of implied affective responses to texts) available within the general Indic aesthetic.[16] *Dasya* or servantness is one of the affective roles cultivable within the script of *bhakti*. It is not a natural attitude to be developed as a virtue, and it is not gendered.

Bhakti is thus a parabasis or interruptive irony of rule-bound high Hinduism as well as of the *advaita* mind-set.

Permanent parabasis. It seems to me more and more that this may be a name for the most effective and plural way of dealing, from below, with the repeated mortal experience of nonpassage to the other side.[17] The plurality in this plural way is fragile and irreducibly uneven—dependent upon an "institution" that can be as amorphous as "culture" (gendering plus religion? I risk a definition of culture's bottom line) of which we can speak only by begging the question. The variously and much negotiated *dvaita/advaita* sleight of mind may be the experience of one such nonpassage.

When *bhakti* lived in the crannies of culture where it could give the lie to caste and scripture, it did so—and does; and it opened doors for women's agency. There were woman practitioners and teachers. It must, however, be admitted that these women were exceptional. Mirabai, the fifteenth/sixteenth-century aristocrat, leaves home to be *Krishnabhakta* (it seems interesting that *bhakta*—the adjectival noun from *bhakti*—[division in] devotion—admits no feminine), in the *dāsya* (servant) or *madhura/gārhasthya* (wife) mode. The maternal mode is also possible.[18] But within the Orissa-Bengal *bhakti* tradition of Sri Chaitanya (1486–1533), out of a hundred and ninety-one devotees listed in one reference book, only seventeen are women, and five of them are members of Chaitanya's direct family. Of a hundred poets, only one is female.[19] The most striking characteristic of this group is the near-institutionalization of sexual indeterminacy. But the chief appearance of this phenomenon was men affecting the feminine. The most superior *bhava* was the *sakhi bhāva* toward Krishna—to be Krishna's girlfriend [that is what *sakhi* is, I mean no disrespect]. Many of the male *bhakta*s were also called by female names. This identity-crossing and troping of the sexual self did not touch gendering. The object—Krishna—remained male. When Madhavi Dasi, the only named female poet, mourns Chaitanya's death, she laments from within untroped female gendering: "whoever sees that golden face floats in waves of love / Madhavi is now deprived by the fault of her own karma."[20] Affecting Radha, Krishna's chief girlfriend in *Rādhābhāva*, remains similarly drag-troped.

Speaking of epistemo-affective specificity ("structure of feeling" in thinking as a presupposition), I have been denying the great goddess

exclusive "greatness" in the experience of the culture. But if "culture" may be the name of an amorphous/polymorphous "institution" that holds us (*dhr*, "to hold, gives *dharma*"), it—again that question begging—is also disclosed in institutions of a more systematic and formal structuring: festivals are among them. And no person from Bengal—as is the present writer—can deny that, in terms of goddess festivals, Durga and Kali mark the year much more flamboyantly than any other divine figure.

But that feeling of half-belief or suspended belief, which the metropolitan middle class in India (mostly the origin of the immigrant museum-goer who was my implied reader for the catalog essay) may attach to the festivals of Durga or Kali, is not what travels to the metropolitan museum in the United States. This is not due only to the willed epistemic emphasis of Eurocentric economic migration.[21] It is also because, with its roots in German comparative religion, the colonial museumization of Indian culture is an altogether more specialized affair. Its starting point may be loosely assigned to a positive evaluation of what Friedrich Hegel had called, negatively, a *verstandlose Gestaltungsgabe* (a mindless gift for morphogenesis) in his *Lectures on the Aesthetic*.[22]

If one steps upon that established scholarly terrain, the blithe assertion of "Durga and Kali, of course," begins to get muddled, for we step into the enclosed garden of art history, not to mention the history of religion. But Durga and Kali, Durgapuja and Kalipuja, remain distinguishable for the educated native informant from Eastern India. Too much learning would here make present certainties indeterminate.

There are hyphenated and/or expatriate South Asian art historians of South Asian art, of course. How does their learning complicate the certainties of cultural competence? I cannot know. No doubt such experts negotiate the culture/discipline divide by way of some variation of the unevenly pluralist parabasis of which we have already spoken, complicated by the fact that their authority sometimes takes on extra weight by that very negotiation, a move from story to fabula, as it were.[23] "Religious" denomination and gender complicate the issue further.

Let me quote a learned passage, written for British academic validation, by a located female South Asian Asianist, born a Seventh-Day

Adventist in Calcutta, by political conviction a communist. A labyrinth opens there . . .

> *TA* [the Taittiriya Aranyaka] x:18 tells us of an unnamed wife of Rudra; *TA* x:I of Durgā Devi Vairācani (Virōcana's daughter); *TA* x:I: 7 of Durgi, Katy·āyani and Kanyākumāri; *KU* [Kena Upanisad] III: 12 of Umā Haimavati. *TA* x:18 has a parallel Dravidian text which makes Rudra Umāpati (Uma's husband). *MU* [Mundaka Upanisad] 1:2:4 mentions Kāli and Karāli among the seven tongues of fire. The *SGS* [Sānkhāyana Grhya Sutra] II:15:14 and also *Manu* III:89 mention Bhadrakāli. These texts, as is shown from their vagueness, are inconclusive even if taken in their totality; the epic-Puranic Durga did not develop from any one of them, but from all of them and also from many other elements.[24]

Why have I gone into all this and not started comfortably with feminist reminiscences moving inexorably toward a foregone "post-colonial" conclusion? I think because I have a strong sense of straddling a transitional historical moment, and political correctness would arrest it. All historical moments, whatever they may be, seem and are transitional. Historians judge between transitions. I will account for the specific transition I surmise. It is that soon the generations of U.S.-born Indian-Americans, descendants of the first big wave of Indian immigrants after Lyndon Johnson relaxed the quota system in 1965, will have changed performative into performance. The possibility of performance (citation) inhabits the performative. Yet the two are not the same. In this case, it involves a willing exchange of civil society. I have no moral position on it, but write this for the record.

Hedged in by this framing, then, I give witness to the great goddesses, Durga and Kali. You will work out my negotiations. "'I' is only a convenient term for somebody who has no real being. Lies will flow from my lips, but there may perhaps be some truth mixed up with them; it is for you to seek out this truth and to decide whether any part of it is worth keeping. If not, you will of course throw the whole of it into the wastepaper basket and forget all about it."[25]

In this mode of lying truth (fiction in the underived robust sense as the authority of autobiography), Durga and Kali will remain different. For Durga I will choose the story of the dismemberment of Sati. For Kali, an illustrated translation of a hymn by Ramproshad. I

will give an account of the "little mothers" of Bengal, of *vāmāchāra* and the *Chandimangal*, and close with a hesitant dedication. To begin my fiction, I caution again.

It is difficult to deny that something like a history leaves its mark on "us"; but this mark, in a time of migration, seems a dynamic. Thus, even if there is a structure of feeling that can, vaguely, be called "Hindu," it would not be identical with the "Indian" structure of feeling, whatever that might be. If we insisted, we would be inhabiting *Hindutva*, the slogan of Hindu nationalism on the subcontinent. In the United States would this be something like a dominant residual? I think more and more that a critical vocabulary for describing culture is only good for the person who puts it together.

If ever I had a *dvaita* sense of my city, it came from the story of Durga. A bit of her body had fallen upon Calcutta, and made it a place of pilgrimage. I knew that the Durga who had been dismembered should be called "Sati." I knew that the ten-armed, familial, annual autumn image celebrated in the high holy days could not be called "Sati." This plural naming of alterity—some minimal identity presupposed somewhere, just to hang the names on, is taken for granted by the *dvaita* mind-set. Being "in a culture" is to precomprehend, presuppose, even suppose. The question of belief comes up in crisis, but even then perhaps in performance rather than in a strictly cognitive assent.

Here is the story, told by Sukumari Bhattacharji, the source of the learned passage above, now for children:

> One day, while Sati was sitting outside her house, she saw a number of gods and goddesses passing by.... "Where are all of you going?" They answered, "Don't you know of Daksha's magnificent sacrifice?" ... [Sati] could not believe that they had been deliberately overlooked.... Sati asked her husband if he could explain her father's abnormal conduct. Shiva was sure he could.... Daksha intensely disliked Shiva and his unconventional way of life.... So, Sati ran to her father, ignoring the banter and sneers directed at Shiva, and said to Daksha, "What kind of sacrifice is this, father, where the supreme god Shiva has not been invited?" The status-conscious Daksha ... replied sarcastically, "... You have married beneath your social status, my child. I cannot insult these assembled dignitaries by asking that lunatic loafer to be here!" ... Unable to bear the insults uttered against her dearly beloved husband she fell down in a swoon and died.... [Shiva] was mad with fury and ...

> rushed to Daksha's sacrifice.... Shiva tore Daksha's head from his neck and threw it away. The sacrifice itself assumed the shape of a deer [lovely *dvaita* touch!] and fled. Shiva, with his Pinaka bow in hand, chased and shot it.... Shiva now came to where his beloved Sati lay dead and an uncontrollable fit of madness seized him.... [P]icking up Sati's body, he walked, jumped, danced, and traversed long distances for many days on end, oblivious that the mortal remains of Sati were dropping off, bit by bit, over many places. All these places, including those where parts of her jewellery fell, later became places of pilgrimage.[26]

In most Puranic accounts Sati's death is more theologized than in the intuitive popular story. In the *Kālikāpurāna* she meditates a moment upon the undivided pre-semic possibility of utterances—*sphōta* not *mantra*—splits the top-center of her skull, and gives up her life.[27] In the *Devibhāgavata* she burns herself through the fire of her concentration (*yogāgni*) in order to satisfy the ethics of good womanhood (*satidharma*) because her father had engaged in unseemly sexual behavior under the influence of a magic garland indirectly conferred upon him by another one of her fictive manifestations![28] In one the dismemberment is motivated by the other gods' caution rather than the husband's frenzy. In another the gods enter the corpse, cut it up from the inside, and make the pieces fall in specific places.[29]

Classical iconic representation makes no effort to grasp the drift of a story. Indeed, the stories are not starting places. They are pluralized presentifications of the *dvaita* episteme at odds with the theological impulse. The mode of existence of the icon as meaningful, from the point of view not of the scholar but of the culturally competent observer (a vast and many-tiered sprawling space of agency always "after" culture but also its condition of possibility) is something like an unrealized genre painting. The culturally competent (in this sense) may provide some generic narrative dynamic to move the devi and her companions along the stream of "history." It is in that assumption that a few generalizations will here be advanced.

I have cited Freud as dismisser of polytheism, defining it as prehistory and the intolerable rule of powerful women. If we take Freud as everybody's father (or anti-father), we are working with the axiomatics of imperialism: Europe gives the model of every knowledge. On the other hand, if we relax Freud's chronologic to a logic,

we will see Freud's brothers, or at least male cousins, in these Puranas. There can be no doubt that the general cast of the "authorship" of the Puranas is male.[30] Women speak in them but the frame-narrator is generally masculine. There can also be no doubt, I think, that there is a degree of relative autonomy to the great social text of sexual difference that overflows cultural frontiers, without losing specificity. It is therefore not surprising that, in the pores of these authorized versions of Sati's dismemberment, there are efforts at controlling the feminine as female. Relative autonomy is relative; it is not a postulation of universal deep structures of human sexual dynamics. It is in the sector of the relativity of the relatively autonomous that we look for cultural specificity.

These considerations made, we see in the Puranic texts that the female empowers, but males act. At the end of the chapter previous to the dismemberment story in the *Devibhāgavata*, there is a vertiginous spiraling of such empowering and acting that comes to a halt when the two male gods of the Puranic trinity think they act on their own and thus are cut off from empowerment through their hubris. The third calls his sons, they pray to the female fictive power, and the entire spiral starts again, with this supernatural division of gendered labor intact.

Within this division, in the high Puranic texts, male gods are allowed elaborate courtship privileges. Brahma is represented as publicly (although transgressively) spilling his semen on earth, lusting after Sati. But the devi celebrated in the Puranic account is the pleasureless mother. Sati punishes herself for pleasuring others.

At the beginning of this essay I suggested that the unanticipatable and irregular presentification of the slippage into *avatarana* (or descent from a transcendental semiotic) is the work of the *dvaita* episteme. The denaturalization of the goddess that has been tracked in the last few paragraphs can be seen as a counterpull: to stabilize the *dvaita* episteme by reversing the *avatarana* into reminders of *ārōhana* or ascent. Thus the *Devibhāgavata* loosens the connection between death, mourning, dismemberment, descent of body parts, inscription of geography: "the pilgrimages created by Sati's body parts have indeed been spoken of, but also those that are famous on earth for other reasons."[31]

This loosening of connection between Sati's body parts and natural space comes at the end of a torrential list of pilgrimages that began with the following declaration: "Wherever the cut limbs of Sati

fell, in those very spots Shiva established himself, assuming various forms." The loosening of connection is accomplished through a double-barreled list of one hundred and eight items, place-name in the locative case with the accompanying body part mentioned only in the initial one: "Vishālākshi [the large-eyed one] at Vārānasi lives on Gauri's face" (55) (Gauri is another name of the devi). The subsequent references are not necessarily to a body part. And soon the "poetic function" takes over, making the repeated couplings seem dictated by sheer euphony.[32] The pairs start looking like ordinary epithet-subject couples rather than located body-part couples as the formality of the verse gathers momentum and various rhetorical moves are made. Now the subject is enclitic upon and contained in the epithet. Now the so-called subjects are themselves epithets, dependent upon the location of the so-called epithets as condition, respectively qualifying and modifying an absent subject, by now fragmented, by force of rhetoric, at least a hundred and eight times. Intact manifestations, belonging to other narratives, are sometimes introduced to dilute the force of the dismemberment story. Consider these two pairs among many: "sex-loving at the door of the Ganga" [*gangādvāre ratipriyā*] (68) is clearly a riff on the woman's body as geography, but not of the Sati's body-part story. The subject is an epithet entailed by the overtly metaphorical locative: the river mouth as vagina. And "Radha in Vrindaban forest" [*Rādhā vrindābané bané*] (69) refers to a completely different story, thus negating the narrative and generative force of the dismemberment. The final names are not connected with the dismemberment story at all: "Among good women she is Arundhati, among charming women she is Tilottamā. In the mind she is named Brahmakalā and among all embodied [beings] she is Shakti" (83). From names to attributes. There is no Devi here. As we saw in the opening verse, it is Shiva who is sited in the *pitha*s.

This would be the bits of narrative and anti-narrative within which the images are set. Such Puranic references are archaic rather than functionally residual in metropolitan hybridization. For the specialists they find their place in the academic subdivision of labor, unevenly divided among continents.[33]

Among the four broad kinds of Indian scriptures, Purana (ancient) is a temporizing claim to antiquity whereas Veda is known, even known by heart, Smriti is remembered, and Sruti heard as

revealed. The double-structured pull of the *dvaita* is felt within the Puranas. Some are more a tabulation of the thing-ness of the signifier, others more inclined toward the mind-ness of the signified. The tension is generally coded as less and more brahminical respectively—what Raymond Williams would perhaps describe as the dominant incessantly appropriating the emergent.

This is the kind of difference that is usually noted between the *Devibhāgavatapurana* and the *Mārkandeyapurāna*. The former is more airy, the latter more earthy. We have just noticed how the body-part/real-space referential narrateme was unevenly sublated into a locative condition-dependent logical structure of potentially reference-undermining naming in the *Devibhāgavata*'s account of Sati's dismemberment. (This is the kind of sentence that irritates conservative Indianist scholars muscle-bound by their discipline as well as racist Left conservatives of whatever color. In the meantime, the dominant passes everything off as transcendent high culture.)[34]

The list in the fifth chapter of the *Devimāhātmya* section of the *Mārkandeyapurāna*—read by Birendrakrishna Bhadra on All-India Radio in the fifties—is well-known to most culturalist Hindus. It comes closest to the always deferred possibility of a sublation of the Devi into her attributes. But the list is here directed toward a Devi who is located in all that is, and the reciter/reader performs his respects by enunciating that directedness. To the goddess who, in all that is, is well-established as consciousness, respectful greetings, goes the first line. A marvelous series of parallel lines follows: respectful greetings are given to her as she is well-established as intelligence, sleep, hunger, shadow, power, thirst, patience, birth, modesty, tranquillity, faith, beauty, grace, activity, memory, compassion, contentment, mother, and the best of all, error.[35]

Yet this powerful song of praise is narratively framed as Visnu's *Māyā*. I propose to translate *Māyā* as "fiction," an English word philosophically unconnected with prose. Like all translations, this translation too "is a movement ... that transports [the] language beyond its own limits."[36] But *Māyā* in the limited sense or translation of "illusion" has given trouble to readers and believers through the centuries. *Māyā* as "fiction" would carry the paradox of the range of power of this antonym to "truth."

However the great goddess is made to occupy the place of power,

it is always as fiction, not as "truth." It is not a question of the multiplicity of manifestation; gods and goddesses share it; it is a *dvaita* world. It is not even a question of doing—both do. But she does through fiction and they—the singularity of the Puranic male *isvara* is nowhere near as grand as the singularity of the morphogenetic multinominated Devi—through method. If *Māyā* is understood as fiction, this is how the empowerment-activity dyad, mentioned above, would be regrasped. There is never an exception to this in all the male-female binaries strewn through the Puranic corpus: *prakrti/purusa* (comparable to *physis/nomos*, matter/consciousness, *hylè/morphè*) and *prajnā/upāya* (wisdom/method) are only two of the best known.

The name of that fiction or *Māyā* is the apparent magic of fertility—animate and inanimate. This is seen as unitary, even before the human-image propriation of the supernatural. Therefore, for the Hindu, whatever that may be, it is different to be identified with different male gods—a Shaiva is different from a Vaishnava, a Brahmavādi was loosely an *advaitin* until the nineteenth-century reformist Brahmos took the slot. But if you are a Shākta, Durga and Kali must be acknowledged as the same. The acknowledgment of this always unitary female power (at the time of first writing, the Indian film star Hema Malini was pushing her dance drama on Durga by cluing on to a culturally conservative feminism as "the strength and power of the woman" on the New York TV channel Eye on Asia) is yet another way of attempting to control what Freud would call "the uncanny."[37] Such acknowledgment cannot be translated into normative social attitudes toward female human beings. And indeed, women cannot feel fertility as the uncanny in quite the same way. For reverence for fiction (*Māyā*) as female to be unleashed, the *dvaita* trick must happen, and the female subject exit sociality.

More of this later. For the moment, let us note that the name of the version of the great goddess who animates the section of the *Mārkandeyapurāna* that is called *Devimāhātmya* is Chandi—the "irate." Indeed, by displacement, this section of the text is also called *Chandi*. In the mode of glorification, each of the "little mother" goddesses of Bengal is also a chandi. *Ein jeder Engel ist schrecklich.*

To encounter specifically female focalization in the *dvaita* presentification of the goddess in her biotic sphere, we will have to leave the

great goddess and turn to these "little mothers" of Eastern India, surrounded by their specific flora and fauna.[38] The high pantheon is dominantly male focalized.

When cathected in ritual, each small goddess is the great goddess. The cycle of her praise and worship is much shorter than the annual festival cycle of the great ones: daily, weekly, or by the phases of the moon. She relates not only to the house (there are male deities who bless and curse a particular foundation) but to the household as it is run by women, often by women in subordinate positions, such as a daughter-in-law or a virgin daughter. Even widows worship these little mothers, although for them the male greater gods come into social focus again.

There is no doubt that the addition of "chandi" to their names respects what I have already remarked: each goddess, when cathected in worship, is the great goddess. But, with specific reference to the minor goddess Sitala (this remark would, *mutatis mutandis*, apply unevenly to all the minor goddesses of Bengal), a commentator adds: "This Chandi is not Durga, rather she is the hunting deity of the hill-tribes of Chhotanagpur of Bihar. Purulia, as it was formerly under Bihar, hence, the Chandi of Bihar of the aboriginal groups spreads her impact in Purulia district."[39] Yet *candi*, even as a common noun, as presumably here, is a Sanskrit word. It is not possible to separate the Aboriginal and the Indo-European on the occasion of the goddess. They share a heartbeat: "that which, from moment to moment, *from one moment to the other*, having come again from an other of the other to whom it is also delivered up (and this can be me), this heart receives, it will *perhaps* receive in a rhythmic pulsation what is called blood, and the latter receive the force to arrive."[40] Except in stratified social practice, where "Indo-European" and "Aboriginal" have been forcibly kept separate for millennia. And perhaps in the museum.

Most of the regional accounts of the historical emergence of these minor goddesses are also accounts of resistance and flexibility: resistance to the increasingly caste-bound ritualism of high Hinduism. Scholarship tells us, of course, that even these great gods and goddesses owed a good deal to the aboriginal cultures already in place on the subcontinent when the Indo-European speakers began to settle, and that "Hindu" history is a history of the imperfect obliteration of traces. But the emergence of the gendered secondary pantheon as

resistance is part of a cultural self-representation that is not necessarily scholarly. I am not "responsible" in Hindi as I am in Bengali, my mother tongue, or in English, the object of my reasoned love and a general instrument of power. I am therefore better acquainted with a portion of the considerable writings in Bengali and on Bengal about the coming into being of these gods and goddesses of field, stream, forest, hill, and household. Not as a specialist but as a "Bengali," whatever that might be.

These goddesses, who came to be worshiped in the house without a priest and in Bengali rather than Sanskrit, are seen, in a certain kind of Bengali writing, as aligned to the aboriginal descent of the Bengali, to a resistance to the great tradition, as a sign of ecumenism. The vision of Bengali identity captured in this temporizing points to a gender-liberated, egalitarian, and humane people, domesticating Buddhism as high Buddhism moves to East Asia, coming to terms with Islam as Bengali Islam opens its doors to the oppressed outcastes, acknowledging the body as the iconic representation of the universe. The account consolidates the *dvaita* structure of feeling (if there be such a thing) by bringing it within a calculus of representation and practice, by removing from it the element of chanciness, by constituting it as the evidence of an "identity," not of Indian culture so much as of Bengali humanism. It is a tempting exercise, especially when garnished by such open-ended statements as this from the first extant text in Bengali, composed between the eighth and twelfth centuries: *jetoi boli tetavi tal/ guru bo se sisa kal* [the more said the more error/guru says the student deaf].[41]

Let us now leave the labyrinthine "truths" of this temporization of identity, and look at a text in the history of the present, aligning it with the ones we have already assembled in these pages.

If one believes that the synchronic is at least a methodological possibility, a pamphlet entitled *Meyeder Brotokatha* is also part of "our" present.[42] The book was bought at a fair for the aboriginal Sabars in Rajnowagarh in West Bengal, organized by the local Sabar welfare committee. Rajnowagarh is a relatively remote place. Most of the Sabars, except for a handful of adults and schoolchildren, are illiterate. The few "regular" Indians present at that activist-organized fair were from the urban middle class. Rural Hindus and Muslims do not mingle with the Aboriginals by choice, for pleasure. In other

words, the itinerant bookseller on a rusty bicycle, from whose horde a celebrated activist bought me a bunch of books, had no real buyer at that particular fair. But it is conceivable that at the more usual rural fairs, organized around festival days or around the weekly or bi-weekly market day, men buy these books for their wives and daughters, so that they may learn the religious authority behind their ritual practices. In the last decade, I have touched the normality of this grassroots readership, and try always (with no guarantees, of course) to compute their distance from the New Immigrant spectator of the devi icons in the museum, of Hema Malini at Lincoln Center, in order not to speak nonsense in the name of global feminism or hybridity.

Forty-six household rituals are listed in the book—*broto*-s (from Sanskrit *vrata*, meaning "restraining practice"), not *puja*-s. Women's rituals without a priest. I quote the opening lines of the poem accompanying one of them to give the reader a sense of the performance in it. I had read them before, in a novel by Bibhutibhusan Bandyopadhyaya, that Satyajit Ray translated into film in his *Apu* trilogy.

> Pond of good works, Garland of flowers
> Who worships in the morning?
> I am Sati Lilabati
> Lucky girl with seven brothers

and so on.

The text, as it was used in Bandyopadhyaya's novel (as opposed to the pamphlet bought at the fair), was not "real" but cited in a fictional frame to signify "village girl." But if and when a "village girl" utters this within an appropriate performance, she is also citing fiction—in our English colloquial sense, of course, but also because the performance is in the frame of the *Māyā* of the world. She acts two parts in the script—the questioner and the answerer-performer, specifically named: I am Sati Lilabati. "Sati" is a word in the language meaning, presumably, a paragon of the specifically womanly virtues; and the expert will give me a list of Lilabatis—a common enough moniker.

What matters to us is that there is something moving in the self-bestowal of that grand theatrical appellation—Sati Lilabati—upon a young girl, even as her good fortune is carefully designated as the

possession of seven brothers. O my Antigone! Behind these *broto*-s are quite often stories of women saving their men. There is indeed a degree of (or at least the representation of) agency on this register, validated by traditional gendering, securing domestic loyalty.

The ostensible goal is a good husband. There is something like a relationship between this and the personal columns of newspapers, seeking partners. Chance and choice are at play here. The personal column relies on a theory of the subject of decision, only apparently ungendered. The *broto* relies on propitiating the animal world as much as anything else. The ritual begins with offerings made to snakes and frogs. The connection between such gestures and fertility remains enigmatic.

There is a *broto* listed here, for example, involving the goddess Earth. The chant commemorates the *dvaita* moment, within that "structure of feeling," not just the dead metaphor in "mother earth." The Earth is a devi: "Come Mother Earth, sit on a lotus leaf." The chant goes on to praise her husband, the king of the universe, in the hope of marrying a king.

These performative pieces, without need of officiating priest, organize woman's time theatrically. The connection with the ostensible purpose—good husband or good fortune—is thin, less focused than the personal column or lottery tickets. And these temporizing stagings of the woman's being in and of the *oikos* do not produce an affective relationship with the great goddess as such. As the great goddess of the male imaginary recedes further and further into distanced and fixed visibility (as in Lacan's reading of *Antigone*), the invaginated *dvaita* episteme uses its part-containing-the-whole resources to create a space of theater for the women who sustain rural society.[43]

This sort of little mother ritual is the staging of the woman's day. By contrast, the great goddess festival is a grand exceptional event. And indeed, at those festivals, the womenfolk are the preparers of food and the ingredients for ritual detail, not the human protagonist.

In *Meyeder Brotokatha*, the pamphlet of little mother rituals, there *are* narratives that invoke the high pantheon. They are perfunctory tales, using the *dvaita* principle of quick shifts from human to other-than-human at random, to end inevitably in an injunction to perform the specific *broto*, with no noticeable logical buildup. The ritual seems

the remains of some other text, whose meaning is errant here. Was that textuality an indeterminate weave of aboriginality and the para-Vedic Puranas? I like best the eccentric scholar who writes, "Bengalis, like Indians in general, had their origin in Negrito or Negro-Bantoo race," and points out repeatedly that it is only in southwestern Bengal that the "little mother" Sitala—goddess of smallpox—is worshiped fully in the aboriginal way, and points at the sliding scale of ritual and imaging that she is offered.[44]

No "Indian" culture here. No great goddess as such. No serious ethnography either—just a traffic in regional identity in the name of women, in the household.

When the story of the dismemberment of Sati turns up in this pamphlet, it does not continue on to the establishment of *pitha*s or places of pilgrimage. There is no account here of the limning of a sacred geography upon a place we now call South Asia. The region does not exist here, only the courtyard and the field. There is a hiatus between the end of the Sati's death story and the injunction for the particular *broto* to which it is unaccountably attached.

As the new immigrant woman crosses the threshold of the museum, she reads the images in the museum as cultural evidence or investment, even as proof of a feminist culture. "Interest in the feminine dimension of transcendence as revealed in mythologies, theologies, and cults of goddess figures throughout the world has been keen in recent years both among those concerned with 'Women Studies' and among religion scholars generally."[45] I want now to leave the rural theater and to flesh out this viewer's look by referring to my own childhood. Autobiography is at best an example, no authority.

"Indian" cultural evidence is in the children's story. Professor Bhattacharji has distilled Bengali popular tradition there. The *Sahitya Samsad Dictionary* of the Bengali language lists the seventy-seven places consecrated by Sati's body simply as part of the definition of the word *pith* [Sanskrit *pitha*] or "seat."

As it provides the modern place-names beside the ancient, there is no hesitation in the dictionary. There can be no doubt from this lexicography that the naming was yet another way of consolidating settlement in a new land. If one follows through, one sometimes comes up with a geographical information system that uses a woman's

body to bring under one map self-contained aboriginal settlements. I feel my lack of expertise rather strongly here. But consider the place where Sati's upper lip came to rest: "Bhairavaparvata (Avantidesa near Ujjain). The country of Avanti, much of which was rich land, had been colonized or conquered by the Aryan tribes who came down the Indus valley and turned East from the Gulf of Cutch."[46] Behind the fictive authority of autobiography and the ecstatic celebration of the yearly Durga *puja* in Calcutta, there is the shadow of the first colonial conquest of India, by "my own kind":

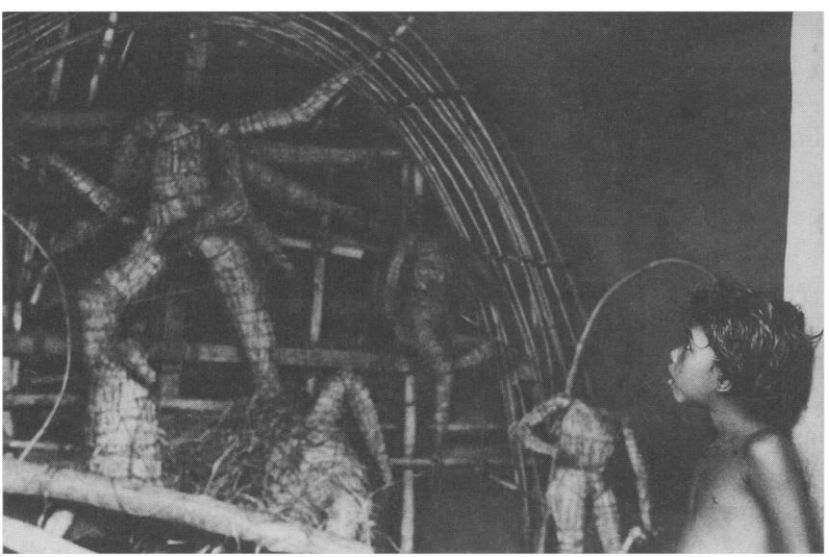
> [A]ll over the world there was the cult of a holy family—composed of "mother and son" at first, but later (when the man's contribution in the procreative process was recognized) of father, mother and son. In India this family consisted of Siva, Parvati and Kartikeya. Later the family grew to include Ganesa, Laksmi and Sarasvati, who constitute the group now worshipped in India in the autumn.[47]

What did this mean in my childhood and adolescence? New clothes for every day of the five-day festival, drinking mescalin-paste milk in the bosom of the family on the fifth night, visiting and comparing innumerable images all over town, complaining about and loving film soundtracks and amateur theater blaring over loudspeakers, and going the rounds of visiting extended family and friends, abruptly cut off when I left India in 1961. It is possible to connect to simulacra—citations within a general metropolitan civil performative—here in the United States, but I am not given to the expatriate staging of national origin for a culturalism that removes the nation-state of origin from independent transnational consideration. Lest I seem to suggest that the originary place is without simulation, I will relate Durga *puja* ("Devi Puja" in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh)—the sanctioned worship of the great goddess—through a photograph by Kalo Baran Laha that engages a rather different theater (figure 1).

Mr. Laha is a hotel owner in the country town of Purulia in West Bengal. He photographs, with a group of friends, for his own pleasure, establishing a record of life in the region, mostly of Aboriginals. This photograph, of a boy looking up obliquely at the clay and wattle frame of the image of Durga and her family, worshiped annually, is a little off Mr. Laha's usual beat.

A small-town boy or a rural boy, one cannot know. The photographer seems to have caught his subject unawares. The boy gazes at the image. The eyes in the absent, spectral head return his gaze. The knowledge of the return of the image every year directs the boy's gaze; a cultural habit that also knows that the image will be destroyed, plunged in the river with great pomp and circumstance at the end of the five days. It is the *dvaita* habit institutionalized—to see in the obviously transient and ephemeral the possibility of alterity—that conjures up the goddess's absent yet gazing, living, head for the boy. It bears repetition: it is not just that the image is not yet ready; it is that even when fully assembled and gorgeous, it will carry its imminent death. The day of triumph—*bijoya*—is also the day of the renouncing of the simulacrum—*protima bisharjon*—of floating—*bhashan*—all words in grass-roots vocabulary. And yet the gazes lock. In fact, if the image had been fully formed, the picture would have signified differently, for the goddess's fixed and stylized gaze (which I, like the boy, can imagine) would be angled at the other corner of the photographic space. The boy's expression does not lend itself to quick characterological analysis; in my reading, there can be none. The *dvaitin* gaze is not phenomenal.

If we read the photo through Sigmund Freud's essay on "Fetishism," we would expect a fascinated gaze, and we would



expect a doubled anxiety of castration and decapitation.[48] But that is another "culture," and I hope I have demonstrated that I do not mean that word in some silly multiculturalist way. If our boy had looked between this humble unfinished great goddess's legs, as Freud's boy in "Fetishism" would, he would "see" the absent gaze from the not yet assembled human head of the defeated buffalo, in a representation of the *dvaita* moment caught in the icon. Is this why polytheism (not a good word, but we will let it pass) is scary, because of such powerful females, improbably limbed? What does it "mean" that this representation, of this boy at least (we must beware of making a singular representation exemplary, although Freud sometimes forgets this lesson), will not prove the case for subject-constitution on an error about genitals? To pose the question is to make Freud "real," an occupational hazard of psychoanalytic cultural criticism.[49]

I will not open my usual Kleinian argument here, since that will divert this line of thought too far.[50] I will simply repeat that the *dvaitin* gaze is not phenomenal, that in every act of Hindu worship or presentification alterity must be instituted in the material—*prānpratisthā* —and then let go at the end, and that the relative permanence of built space—which organizes so much Hindu nationalist violence in India today—is irrelevant. The nonpassage between (above? below? beyond? beside? Can there be a relational word here? The *dvaita* gaze forever trembles on that brink.) the boy's actively *dvaita* gaze and the metropolitan museum will have remained negotiated without his "cultural" (not necessarily deliberate) participation; that gaze, locked perhaps in the spectral gaze of the great goddess, will have fallen short of the exhibition.

My take on Kali is different.

The Bengali *bhakta* visionary Ramakrishna (1836–1886) often experimented with cross-gendered *bhāva*s or affective essences. As a *bhakta*, however, he was turned chiefly toward Kali.

Because of my family's involvement with Ramakrishna, his wife, his disciples, and the movement in his name, over four generations, as well as because of the sect orientation of my father's ancestors, I was born and raised in the verbality of the praise of Kali.

The genealogy of the great goddess renders the distinction between Aboriginal and Aryan indeterminate. But Kali seems to have preserved some special aura of aboriginality. It is difficult to clothe

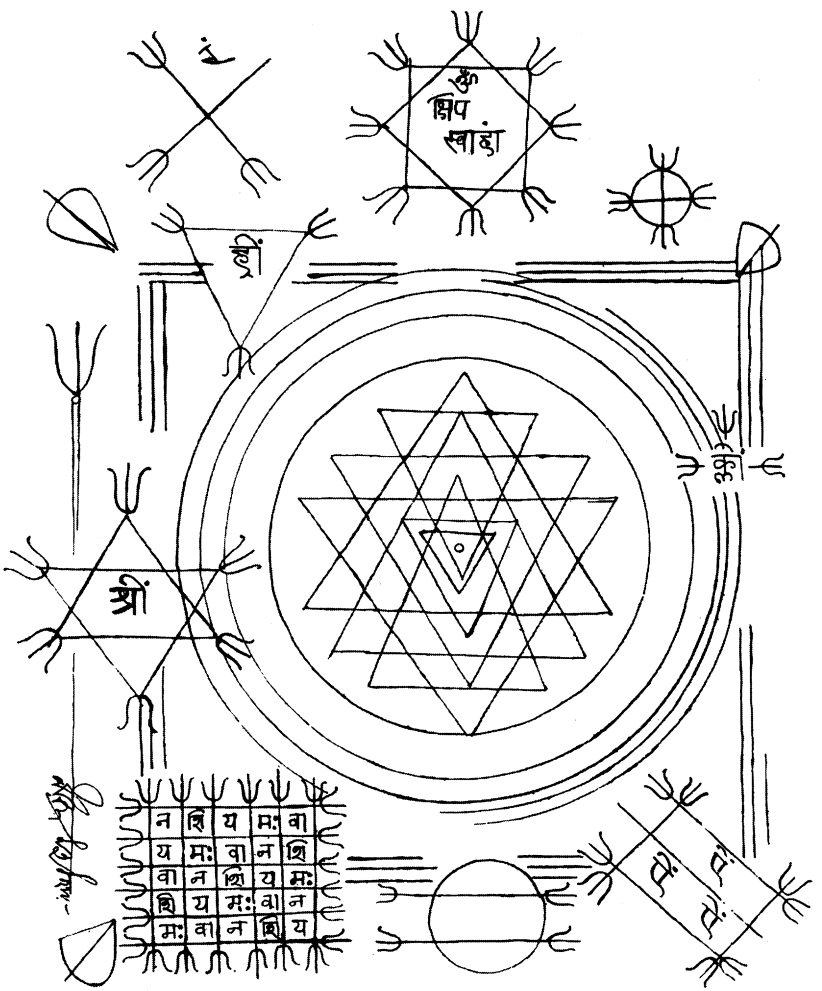
that joyous, leaping, naked black body altogether. If the buffalo-killing (*mahisāsuramardini*) golden Durga is not the object of worship of the aboriginal Indian, Kali has remained so. At least in the aboriginal group known to me, the Kharia Sabars of Manbhum, nonfigurative design is a major part of decorative art. It is perhaps no surprise that Kali has lent herself to the greatest abstraction in the nonfigurative mystical diagrams or *yantra*s of *tantric* practice. I lack the scholarship to say this with confidence. In this section, I will consider one such *yantra* as represented by the twentieth-century artist Nirode Mazumdar and his coupling of it with a verbal text from the celebrated eighteenth-century religious poet Ramproshad (figure 2). The text is, among other things, a humanization of the goddess that has something like a relationship with the *dvaita* episteme in the *bhakti* mode. (I hasten to add that Durga, too, is domesticated in Bengal. Her autumn festival is often coded as the married daughter visiting her parents' home and there is a wealth of songs welcoming her as such a daughter.)

In this hybridized representation of Kali by an Indian artist expatriate in France well before the era when today's hybridist episteme had started to emerge—the exotic artist in Paris was an earlier stereotype—truth-in-painting discloses itself even as it misfires on its intention: to couple text and image.[51] The "truth" disclosed is that such a coupling would work only for the glance that would see "India" as a stable symbol of the promise of mystical liberation—the Herman Hesse mode—with tantalizing residues of an earlier, more Madame Blavatsky mode, which would hint at the esoteric-as-such. For the middle-class Bengali of *Shakta* (the sect loyal to *Shakti*—power in the feminine—generally understood as Kali) provenance, as perhaps Nirode Mazumdar was, the eighteenth-century verbal text looks forward to the dynamic of Bengali colonial modernity, constituting a female object of the *dvaita* gaze who could straddle the culture of the rural landowners (itself on the cusp of the feudal-residual—thus reaching out toward the culture of the tenants—and the colonial-dominant), as well as that of the devotional culture of the emerging urban colonial middle class, stratified along location-specific lines. The visual text, by contrast, looks back toward the archaic.

Mazumdar's line drawing is a *yantra*—an instrument. *Yantras* are used to start inspiration in *tantra* practices. The line between the

erotic *bhavas* in *bhakti* and *tantra* is shifting and unclear. When, however, a *yantra* is used to focus ritual, there is a clear distinction from the affect-centered practice of *bhakti*. A *yantra* is a calculus, a diagrammatic representation of the goddess and the god, male and female together, to help access the human body as itself a diagrammatic representation of the universe, not as a container of affects.

Tantra is the "reverse" method of appropriating the *dvaita* structure of feeling. Instead of emphasizing ascent or *arohana* by bracketing the *dvaita* event into "allegory" in a restricted sense, *tantra*



attempts to arrest or capture by going *through* the descended flesh. Perhaps *tantra* longs to turn invagination inside out by literalizing it.

To engage the affects would be, strictly speaking, contrary to the *tantra* endeavor. Theoretically, the body that *tantra* wants to engage is a representation of the universe, not the text and instrument of affects. "The universe" is most often understood as a sexually differentiated force field.[52] The body engages in sex and comes to jouissance and has the skill to experience it (*mahāsukham*) as *advaita* transcendence. This skill is *tantra*.[53]

Nirode Mazumdar seems to have drawn a partial version of the most celebrated *yantra*—the *Shrichakra*: "There are nine *yoni*s or female organs, five of which have their apex pointing downwards, and these represent Shakti. The remaining four with apex pointing upwards represent Shiva. The *vindú* is situated in the smallest triangle pointing downwards."[54] In one corner is a hexagram expressing respect for Shiva.

With this *yantra* the artist has coupled the following two lines, by Ramproshad Sen (1718/20–1775/81): "Look at all this. It's the bitch's tricks. / Right out in the open she fools us. / She sets against your qualities / No qualities / And she breaks the lumps with the lumps."

If you knew the significance of the *yantra*, it is conceivable that these lines could be an admiring monstrative description of it. But Mazumdar, like the museum, is reconstellating. The "felicitous" text accompanying a *yantra* would tell the aspirant how to use it. This is why Naren Bhattacharya writes, somewhat querulously: "The term tantric art is evidently a misnomer."[55] You do not celebrate a baseball game for its choreography. Why not? we ask. That would be reconstellation.

Ramproshad Sen, the eighteenth-century poet, is also reconstellating. Working first as a clerk for a new colonial-style urban merchant, and patronized subsequently by a semifeudal landowner/"king," he can be read as living a nostalgic regression into a social discursivity that was soon to become residual. He writes when the active modes of *bhakti* and *tantra* have already receded from the mainstream. His poems are informed with the *desire* to taste the divine madness of the true *bhakta*. All his songs outline this desire within an enactment of the *bhaktibhāva*s.[56] He is no mendicant minstrel and

certainly not a practicing tantric, although he uses the metaphorology of both. His lines are playful, tuned into the affect of sweetness (*mādhurya*) or filiality (*vātsalya*). The "bad language" signifies the familiarity of affection. For this poet-persona a *yantra* would be somewhere between a curiosity and an artifact to be revered. Certainly in his own famous line: "I *yantra* you *yantri*," the use of the word is Bengali colloquial: "I the instrument, you the player." It would make no specifically *tantric* sense to call the aspirant the *yantra*. All his *tantric* imagery is filled with the accuracy of descriptive, not potentially performative, passion.

If Ramproshad had written practicing *tantric* texts, they would have been *vāmāchāri* (focused on sinister- or woman-practice), since he invariably used the coupling of Shiva and Shakti as his vehicle. Let us therefore look, not at a learned discussion of the *tantric* heritage, but at a text of grassroots *vāmāchāri tantra*, written in Bengali, on sale at that rural fair in West Bengal.

Here is the beginning of the text, accompanying a *yantra* altogether less complex than the one we are looking at:

> Penance must be continued for seven days. No food or drink. Only milk. Drinking that milk you must think that I am sucking immortal nectar from the Devi's large firm breasts. You must prepare a *yantra* according to the figure above, with white sandalwood paste. Then worship the *yantra* with karabiflower and vermillion. Get to a hilltop on the ninth night of the waxing moon and constantly recite the *mahabija mantra*. Devi will appear toward the end of the night. Devi strips and undresses the aspirant. To make the aspirant engage in erotic play she kisses, licks and embraces the aspirant constantly. She gives him great wealth. The pure body of the Devi is the aspirant's heaven. The aspirant enjoys this unearthly body for a long time.[57]

The book is full of such injunctions, often very graphic, about how to deal with the different erogenous zones of the female body. The passionless didactic tone is about as far from Ramproshad's funky affective use of *tantric* imagery as can be. It is interesting that, in the opening chapter ("Devi Bagala's Manifestation"), the oneness of the great goddess is asserted: "In addition, it is this Devi who is also worshipped as Kali, Tara, Shodashi, Tripura, Bhairavi,

Rama, Bagala, Matangi, Tripurasundari, Kamakshi, Jambhini, Mohini, Chhinnamasta, and Guhyakali" (10).

Who uses these pamphlets? Are there practicing *tantric*s in the rural areas or among the floating urban subproletariat? Here again, we are looking at a long delegitimized sector of what culturally defines "India." What word would Raymond Williams use for this?

I cannot think that *tantra* ever allowed for women's sexual agency. Although in the supernatural the devi is dominant, in the *yantra*-inspired activities the actual women representing her are the affectless receivers of foreplay. In the act itself, the goal is to arrest male ejaculation, so that orgasmic pleasure can lead to a transcendental rather than merely organic fulfillment. An actual event of this type, described by an ecstatic participant from the orthodox Bengali middle class, is rather horrible in the implications of what actually happened to the passive young woman involved.[58] If the evidence of this book is to be believed, the woman-advisers within the system feel no hesitation in acting as procuresses.[59]

Better, I think, to be the agent of the theater of the domestic in "little mother" rituals than to be the victim or organizer of this curious reverse figuration of the transcendent upon the woman's body. And better to join the chain link of reconstellated desire for a cultural "lost object": Ramproshad Sen, Nirode Mazumdar, and the negotiable figure of the new-immigrant model-minority lady-viewer. A politics is involved in how we will represent that desire, how try to make the images misspeak, and who gets to represent; by the structures of social empowerment, guaranteed by sexual difference, which is the lowest level of institutionalization that we can reach: the multicultural relative autonomy of gendering. Perhaps the chain link should include the *tantra*-impulse itself, appropriating, for a specific practice, the general word for technē as weaving the base thread (*tantu*), resisting the strict theological dominant with the flesh.[60] We are all like the little boy in Laha's photo, looking up at an angle at the absent head of a not-yet-there Devi, making eye contact with what is not yet there. When *vāmāchāra* in *tantra* needed to set a practical course, suspending affect to go through the flesh to transcendence became learning to withhold male ejaculation on the bodies of doped or brainwashed girls or sex workers.[61] We must keep on attempting

to reconstellate, but we must not forget this fact and its corollary: the relative autonomy of gendering, everywhere.

Mazumdar makes a lovely experiment. Yet, whatever the continuities or discontinuities of his visual-verbal couplings, a simulacrum ("citation without literal referent"), at best, of the condition-effect effect, there is no necessarily female component in the focalization of their two parts.

I did not engage in "little mother" practices in childhood and adolescence, although, here and there, women in my extended family performed them with the required regularity and did not seem odd. If "I" am representative of the shift from *ethnos* to *ethnikos*, am I then deprived of the possibility of occupying designated womanspace in the praise of goddesses? Am I confined, at best, to the cultural reconstellations of the radical sector of the expatriate middle class, such as the experiments of Nirode Mazumdar? Before I ask this question again, let us look at the class-mobile rhythms (disclosed and effaced by the imperialisms that have nurtured our viewer) in *Chandimangal*, by Mukunda Chakrabarti, a Bengali poet of the middle of the sixteenth century.[62] I am observing what Williams would call the "preemergent."[63]

This is the best of a series of *mangalkavya*s or rhymed romances of earthly good fortune, celebrating these minor goddesses. *Chandimangal* celebrates our major goddess—*Chandi*—as if she were a minor one.

Only two of the fourteen sections of the long poem are located in the world of the gods. There is an account of the ill-fated festival of Daksha, but no continuation into dismemberment. The fixing of the sacred geography of the subcontinent is not important here either. This poet steers by a real map. This poem, like others of this genre, is also an account of sea trade. Indeed, much of the economic evidence in Tapan Raychaudhuri's still influential *Bengal under Akbar and Jahangir* is taken from this poem.[64]

Twenty years ago, in "Rani of Sirmur," I was looking at young Robert Ross settling the map of a corner of Northwestern India.[65] India is a large multicultural place. I am savvy to Bengali. Here is the cartographic imagination in the Northeast, 250 years before Ross. Even those who have no sense of India's map will resonate to the words, I think:

Kolingo Telongo Ango Bango Karnat
Mahendra Magadh Maharashtra Gujarat
Barendra Bandar Bindha Pingal Safar
Utkal Dravid Rarha Bijayanagar
Mathura Dwarika Kali Kanchipur Jaya
Prayag Kauravkshetra Godabari Gaya.
Trihatta Kangur Konch Harenga Srihatta
Manika Phatika Lanka Pralamba Nakutta
. . . . . .
Silahatta Mahahatta Hastina Nagari
Aro Safar kato balibare nari. (Section 417)[66]

Barter—what Marx would call the relative value-form—is the medium of this trade. An extraordinary passage of exchange valuation or *badol* occurs, for example, in Day Six, section 338 of the poem, a list repeated and embellished.[67] I quote just one line of the extensive list to show that the terms of trade are perhaps a bit unfair: "Chinir badole dana-korpur altar bodole nathi / Sakallath pamari kombol pabo badol koriya pati" [Grain camphor for sugar, fever-nut for foot-coloring / We'll get wool blankets in exchange for rush mats]. The history of monetarization in South Asia is complex and not yet fully researched. Looking at the formal conduct of the poem, however, marked by the insistence and uniformity of these price indices, the reader can almost feel the value-form straining toward some version of the general equivalent—the money-form—in sea trade. By one opinion, the composition of *Chandimangal* may overlap with the arrival of the East India Company in India, although for another half century it is the Portuguese who will be more important in Bengal. One of the gradual and necessary achievements of the East India Company was to standardize the many silver currencies in 1833. A uniform paper currency was established by the Negotiable Instruments Act of 1881. Thus with the straining of the value-form in *Kabikankonchandi* we are on the way, however remotely, to globalization—which is the establishment of a uniform electronic exchange system globally.[68]

K. N. Chaudhuri proposes a noncontinental "Asia" constituted by unifying trade activities upon the Indian Ocean rim.[69] In my school days, the Sri Lanka trade on the Bay of Bengal rim was incanted to establish in our volatile hearts a pan-Bengali culture

stretching from Lanka to Indonesia: "Our son Bijoysingha, conquering Lanka, left a signal of his valor in the name 'Singhal.'"[70] Kabikankon Mukunda Chakrabarti's Chandi is also the patron goddess of trade.

She is conceived as a competitive woman: where will I get the best quality worship? is the question that motivates the entire romance.

If relative value trembles on the brink of the general equivalent in the details of the representation of trade, the *dvaita* form of appearance of the actant trembles here on the brink of what Roland Barthes would call the "character-person."[71]

The recognizably European form of the picaro is not available here. A new style of comparative studies would, however, catch this travelling Devi by the representation of her dynamic use of the shape changing already available in the narrative impulse of the Purānas—as opposed to the rhapsodic or legiferant impulses of Sruti and Smriti, and not merely record the fact that in domestic Bengal of the period, the stranglehold of Smriti was upheld at every turn.[72]

In order to compete for the best quality human allegiance, this Devi literally manufactures curses so that the inhabitants of the supernatural world can descend (*avatarana* in the general sense) and play in the real world. The *dvaita* has become fully instrumental. We can perceive the realization of that remote structure—the Devi as competitive loyalty buyer in the context of trade—as the corporate POI of gender sidles into the museum, looking around her to make the right moves.[73] Every rupture is also a repetition.

I am following the method of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.[74] "Myth is already enlightenment; and enlightenment reverts to mythology." With a difference. The idea of a cultural consciousness—even a political unconscious—as the driving force of history is for me a robust fiction, an allegory of reading, a politically dangerous methodological presupposition that must be used with tact.

If this suits her fancy, our POI might save the residual as it emerges into the emergent from the depredations of the dominant. For Kabikankon's Devi is split between two conjunctures. In the first phase of her descent, she is the forest. In one reading, the episode of Kalketu the hunter can be a source of information about revenu structures in Gujurat. In another, however, it is precisely to the forest

tribals of Panch-Parganya that Mukundaram refers. For at least one commentator, Sukumar Sen, this takes us back to the forest-poems of the Rigveda.[75] My allegiance, typically, is to the Aboriginals (Sabar, their admittedly Sanskritized name, means precisely "hunter") for whom I have been working as literacy teacher for the last ten years; they live in this very area.

In this age of biopiracy and the export of hunger, the viewer can perhaps cross identity a bit—go from U.S. POI to a gendered citizen of the world—and realize in herself the Devi of the hunters and gatherers, the Devi who wished to establish peace in the animal kingdom.[76]

This gives a partial answer to the question of our access to womanspace. The secure *oikos* of the *broto*-bound woman has been delegitimized by the green revolution and its consequences. Our way in is unavoidably with the dominant—our ally is the elite of the forest as picara—looking for the better bid. (I do not think of it as necessarily a way forward. But that is another argument.)

Perhaps there is also an "aesthetic" answer to the question of our access to this particular womanspace.

I have described above the peculiar positioning of the disciplinary historian of South Asian art who also happens to be South Asian. To be an expatriate feminist literary Europeanist who happens to understand the easier Sanskrit of the ritual practices is also a peculiar designation. In the last thirty-nine years I have been present at two or three great goddess rituals among expatriates; sanitized yet not without a certain poignancy in the framed observance of a deliberately distanced, unacknowledged *dvaita* mind-set. On these upwardly mobile, model-minority, subcultural occasions, the general nostalgic gender structure is preserved. Women who might otherwise hold corporate posts (not invariably, of course, and it was different until the mid-seventies) dress in costume and make elaborate preparations of food and flower; some men join, under their guidance, in the more masculine chores of fetching and carrying, the male priest (priest-for-a-day, in this simulation) intones, the congregation repeats, the words are lost, the feast is the best, saved for last.

My stereotype of "myself," knowing the minimum Sanskrit required for comprehension of the service, combined with an altogether fierce training in "the willing suspension of disbelief" over

forty-two years in departments of English literature as a non-native speaker, as student and teacher, moving through culturally fractured, changing classrooms, is separated from the festive gender division described above.[77] I "read" the text of the service and address myself as reader to the image as figure, and animate the ritual as an act of "poetic faith" (Coleridge) in the broadest possible way. If anyone notices, which is unlikely, the most generous explanation would be: bluestocking, and I choose the colonial word advisedly.

I should like to think that "suspension" in that description of poetic faith means both "*hanging on* and *hanging between, dependent* and *independent*, an 'assumption' both assumed and suspended."[78] And this quivering subject-fix, without its protective gender-skin, can perhaps be donated to the formation of one hyphenated (as in -American) agent among many, as subcultural practices become an increasingly inflexible class-differentiated special semiotic, to be performed (or not) like a dance routine, under special circumstances.

I think it is best, in view of such a hope, to put the historical distance of a great museum between the icons and the multicultural beholder. If multicultural mulch begins to affect museal practice, it will have happened in the middle voice, neither active nor passive—an expressive instrument we have lost in modern grammars. It will have happened—varieties of the future anterior is the closest we can get to that voice in modern Indian languages—only when the new museal discursive formation—internalized—becomes part of the migrant episteme, as it no doubt will, with much *Sturm und Drang*, as Hinduism becomes one of the minor religions of the United States.

On my wall hangs M. F. Hussein's "Laxmi," which I acquired at the Sotheby's auction in January 1996, where the NRI (the nonresident Indian, an important category within the problematic I am discussing) entered the auction room to invest in contemporary Indian art. That lovely image of the dismembered Maha-Laxmi reminds me daily that I have not made the epistemic shift to the great goddess in hyphenated America. It is the museums, great and small, that will have led us in.

Paradoxically, it is in this "aesthetic" challenge that I turn once again to the *broto*-bound rural women. The repetitive theatricality of the priestless *broto*-rituals was not necessarily connected, for these women, with a directed goal other than their performance. This can

be put two ways: on the Indic register we can say that a *naimittic karma* (purposeful act) became formalized in daily practice as a *nitya karma* (routine act); on the European register, although both sides will object to this transgressive and scandalous reconstellation, we can call these repeated rituals a *Zweckmäßigkeit ohne Zweck*—an aimless purposiveness or, in the conventional translation, "a purposiveness without purpose."[79]

Coleridge was wrong, of course. The habit of art appreciation is a cultural *reflex* translated differently in different subjects, not a *willing* (or unwilling) suspension of disbelief.[80] It seems to me more and more, as I go further and further into the rural past and present of my corner of South Asia, that the everyday *dvaita* habit of mind is just such an unacknowledged cultural reflex. The *broto*-bound women can be imagined as bound to this reflex as well. They are not asked to *face* the great goddess in festival. Their theater is the restricted sylvan enclosures in and around their home. We cannot, therefore, substantively share their space, even as it shrinks into the archaic. But I can at least acknowledge the possibility that I am concatenated with them upon a chain of displacements when I animate "ritual" as "poetry"; if not like them, as the theater that makes the everyday.

Unless one grants the possibility of such aesthetic judgment, one cannot account for the critical edge of the widows' talk, precisely at Vrindaban, the fabled loving ground of Krishna and Radha, where these modern widows are paid in food and a pittance to pass their days in singing *bhakti*-ful adoration of Krishna, in the *dāsya-bhāva* (assigned by Lalan to the eleven post-Islamic wives of Muhammad) as also in *sakhi-bhāva*, girl-talk with Radha, the chief girlfriend.

Pankaj Butalia's documentary *Moksha* is here my text. It is too easy to have a politically correct interpretation of these widows, although the denunciation of the predatory male establishment of moneylenders and petty religion-mongers is altogether apt. Except for one case of absolute depression where the subjecting script of *bhakti* has failed, the women are in the theater. These women, who would seem decrepit to the merely sophisticated eye, speak with grace, confidence, and authority, not as victims.[81] Their views on marriage, as expressed to these alien questioners, are poignant and innocent. They have come to Vrindaban for freedom, such as it is. The quality of their performance of improvisatory *pālākirtan* (an

antiphonal and choral narrative song of praise in the Eastern *bhakti* tradition) is often excellent, the songs in *dāsya-* and *sakhi-bhāva* full of longing and humor. As old-age homes for a female parent, or orphanage for widowed female relatives, these dormitories are harsh indeed. But they are transformed into a space of choice and performance by the gift for theater of these near-destitute widows, ready to inhabit the *bhakti* scripts that are thrust upon them. There is everything to denounce in a socioeconomic sex-gender system that will permit this. But the women cannot be seen as victims, and the theater of *bhakti* cannot be seen as orthodoxy pure and simple. The contrast between the sentimental voiceover of the documentary and the dry power of the women is itself an interpretable text. Butalia has done well to begin and end with a song where the cracked tuneful strong voice of the female *kirtaniya* sings as god: "these cowgirls have tied me down, brother . . ."

Again, subaltern women in theater. Again, no great goddess to offer an improbable role for women. The invaginated *dvaita* habit is nowhere near a "naturally" feminist narrative of identification with great goddesses. No room for She-god essentialization here. Adoration legitimizes hostility by reversal. The many representations of the great goddess look stunning on the wall. Real women are distanced from her. She is no role model unless, by the cruelty of the *dvaita*, one of us is thrust into that space. I shiver with the icy detachment of words meant and spoken by one who had been so thrust.

I am thinking of Saradamani Devi (1853–1920), the wife of Ramakrishna, whom I mentioned earlier—an ecumenical visionary (he reminds me of William Blake), playing with gaiety as position without identity, who addressed himself chiefly, though not exclusively, to Kali in the *bhakti* mode.

Sarada Devi was a village girl who could read some but not write. She was married at five, joined her husband at eighteen, and then was drawn into celibacy and the circuit of a tremendous assembly of male colonial subjects who gave her reverence and worshipped her often avataric husband. In her own life's detail, in the everyday detail of her marriage, she needed self-consciously to call upon the resources of the *dvaita* episteme in the most concentrated way. We have bits and pieces of her exquisite utterances as testimony.

This remarkable woman outlived her husband by thirty-four

years. In the course of time, his twelve young male disciples established her as the advisory head of an organization that became a monastic order devoted to social work. She performed her role with tact and wisdom, always remaining in the background. Here was a *broto*-bound girl transmogrified into an *avatārin*. Her husband had worshiped her ritually, officiating as his own priest.[82]

It is one of her ice-cold sayings that haunt me, a questioning of the right to possessing the other and of self-determined identity at once: "[action] befitting the situation, [consequences] befitting the person, [gifts] befitting the recipient. No one is anyone's, dear, no one is anyone's."[83] Paradoxically, this admonition without an imperative describes without moralism the passing of the *dvaita* habit of seeing—into the museum. Perhaps it is the female as honorary male who can say this best.

Vivekananda, Ramakrishna's chief disciple, wrote a Sanskrit hymn to her. The addressers, in the plural, are grammatically in the masculine gender. My female cousin and I, when we sang the hymn together in Calcutta in the fifties, quietly changed the gender of the collective singers to feminine, perhaps simply because we were two women incanting. Last year in New Delhi, the female religious order founded in her name sang the hymn on her birthday. They had not disturbed Vivekananda's grammar. The collectivity of nuns spoke in male gendering. Sarada Devi had become a Devi—a goddess, the *dvaita* gaze frozen in the artifice of a forever present, standing in for eternity.

For me, whatever she was, remains afflicted by mortality. She could not have known what an art gallery was. Is it appropriate to dedicate these pages to her? You will judge.

Notes

1. I have discussed the relationship between *ethnos* and *ethnikos* in "Acting Bits/Identity Talk," in *Geography and Identity: Living and Exploring Geopolitics of Identity*, ed. Dennis Crow (Washington: Maisonnneuve, 1996), 41–72.

2. C. Mackenzie Brown, *The Triumph of the Goddess: The Canonical Models and Theological Visions of "Devi-Bhāgavata Purāna"* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), ix. It is still appropriate to make such statements in a disciplinary textbook. For a somewhat more scholarly register, see Thomas B.

Coburn, *Devi-Māhātmya: The Crystallization of the Goddess Tradition* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1984). No academic could be against disciplinarization. We are interested in what is left out when the discipline consolidates. These remains cannot become disciplinary authority as "experience." They can only interrupt knowledge to indicate its vulnerability and to signal pathways for the imagination, as dangerous as they are challenging. An inventory without traces.

3. In 1999 I read "[w]hat thus turns out to be interrupted,... in the first moment of hospitality is nothing less than the figure ... of truth as revelation" (Jacques Derrida, *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, tran. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas [Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999], 52–53). Is there something like a relationship between the interruption of the production of disciplinary knowledge by "cultural responsibility"—to each goddess as guest, if you like—and that more austere, messianic insistence? Can the ethical subtend such quotidian common sense?

4. This story is repeated in all histories of Hinduism, often between the lines. For a sober and learned account see Sukumari Bhattacharji, *The Indian Theogony: A Comparative Study of Indian Mythology from the Vedas to the Puranas*, American ed. (London: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

5. Biju Matthew et. al., "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam: The Internet Hindu," *Diasporas* (forthcoming).

6. Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 128–35.

7. The argument about Marx is in Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994), 95–176. In making this move, Derrida draws upon Kierkegaardian-Levinasian thought, which is best explained in Derrida, *Adieu*, 70–78. In what follows in my text, the reader is asked to keep in mind that the two-ness of the Peoples of the Book is not the two-ness of the *dvaita*, although there is something like a relationship between them, perhaps. Derrida's work here relates, willy-nilly, to Jewish particularism and its vicissitudes, Levinas and Heidegger if you like, and as such can take on board the figure of "a structure of feeling" not necessarily connected to an intending subject although, as Levinas at least would argue, it is indistinguishable from intentionality as such: "hospitality opens as intentionality" (Derrida, *Adieu*, 48).

8. This is how I think Derrida and Williams together. Some think this is inappropriate because Williams thinks only in terms of an intending subject. I think "structure of feeling" can be thought of as a tiny narrateme without violence to Williams's system of thinking. It is of course (im)possible to think anything without the trace of an intending subject. That argument would take us too far afield. Insofar, however, as "structure of feeling" is thought as a structure, it need not entail the *philosophical* presupposition of an intending subject, although the contamination of the philosophical by the trace of the empirical cannot be too strenuously disavowed. It seems to me, therefore, altogether possible

to use Williams's bold methodological suggestion in a deconstructive way. I speak of feeling in thinking as a way of knowing. *Pouvoir-savoir*—the ability to know—is delivered by means of that structure, perhaps.

9. This is the first line of Rainer Maria Rilke's *Duino Elegies* (1923). It means "every angel is terrible." Literally, "each one angel is terrible."

10. Mahasweta Devi, "Statue," in *Old Women*, trans. Spivak (Calcutta: Seagull, 1999).

11. Derrida, "The Law of Genre," *Glyph* 7 (1980): 206.

12. Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 301. I have altered two words. I invite the reader to ponder the changes.

13. Sigmund Freud, "Moses and Monotheism," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*, trans. James Strachey et al. (New York: Norton, 1961–), 23: 83, 93.

14. This is not necessarily "feminist." It can even be a limit to feminism within permissible narratives. Indeed, this is the problem with Levinas's apparent privileging of the feminine. The best treatment of the question of woman in Levinas is Luce Irigaray, "Questions to Emmanuel Levinas: On the Divinity of Love," in *Re-Reading Levinas*, ed. Robert Bernasconi and Simon Critchley (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 109–18. The general insight about permissible narratives is part of Melanie Klein's legacy, not necessarily connected to feminism.

15. The task here is to transfer Gauri Viswanathan's extraordinary argument about "the resistances of converts to the erasure of their subjectivity" (*Outside the Fold: Conversion, Modernity, and Belief* [Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998], 17), *mutatis mutandis*, to a precolonial setting.

16. For the sheer multiplicity of the *rasa*s, see Venkatarama Raghavan, *The Number of Rasa-s* (Madras: Adyar Library, 1975).

17. In "From Haverstock Hill Flat to U.S. Classroom, What's Left of Theory?," for instance, I have suggested this as a description of actually existing counterglobalist struggles in the southern hemisphere (forthcoming in *What's Left of Theory?*, ed. Judith Butler and Kendall Thomas [New York: Columbia University Press]).

18. Parita Mukta, *Upholding the Common Life: The Community of Mirabai* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994) is indispensable for an understanding of women's *bhakti* in India today.

19. Achintya Kumar Deb, *The Bhakti Movement in Orissa: A Comprehensive History* (Calcutta: Kalyani Devi, 1984), 122–200.

20. Ibid., 199. "Gora" (golden) is also a sobriquet of Chaitanya. Fault of karma could also mean just simply "fault." Edward C. Dimock, *The Place of the Hidden Moon: Erotic Mysticism in the Vaisnava-Sahajiya Cult of Bengal* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2d ed., 1989) is deservedly the text most consulted internationally. I have mostly consulted "Hindu" scholarship for the problem of negotiating the *dvaita* structure of feeling-thinking for uneven scholarly recoding,

always negotiating with that unreliable autobiographical element, that "structure of feeling" that spells responsibility.

21. I say "emphasis" rather than "shift" because most of the members of the museum-going group have also participated in an academic-institutional acculturation since childhood; this comes to the fore in the United States.

22. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Arts*, trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 1: 340.

23. For the distinction between "story" and "fabula," see Mieke Bal, *Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, trans. Christine van Boheemen (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), 5.

24. Bhattacharji, *Indian Theogony*, 158.

25. Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (New York: Harcourt, 1929), 4–5.

26. Bhattacharji, *Legends of Devi* (Calcutta: Orient Longmans, 1996), 46–47.

27. *Kālikāpurāna*, 17.16, in *The Kālikāpurāna*, ed. B. N. Shastri (Delhi: Nag Publishers, 1991), 1: 179.

28. *Devibhāgavatapurana*, 7.30.37, in *Devibhāgavatam*, ed. Panchanan Tarkaratna (Calcutta: Nabobharat, 1981), 696.

29. Ibid., 7.30.45–46, 696; *Kālikāpurāna*, 18.41–43, 194.

30. There is a large body of female-authored collective oral tradition and some written work that remains peripheral to the authoritative voice of these Puranas. Navaneeta Dev Sen has written two ethereal texts around this fact for the reader of Bengali. See *Sita Theke Shuru* (Calcutta: Ananda Publishers, 1996), 13–78; and *Bama-Bodhini* (Calcutta: Deb Sahitya Kutir, 1997).

31. *Devibhāgavatapurāna*, 7.30.85, 698.

32. For "poetic function," see Roman Jakobson, "Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics," in *Style in Language*, ed. Thomas A. Sebeok (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1960), 358.

33. For "archaic," see Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 122.

34. For a stateside account of this "passing off," see "Vasudhaiva," op. cit.

35. The list is available in Thomas B. Coburn's good translation, *Encountering the Goddess: a Translation of the "Devi-Māhātmya" and a Study of Its Interpretation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 53–54.

36. Alexander Garcia Düttmann, "On Translatability," *qui parle* 8, no. 1 (fall/winter 1994): 36.

37. Freud, "The Uncanny," *Standard Edition*, 17: 244–45.

38. On "focalization," see Bal, *Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, 100–114; and Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (New York: Routledge, 1983), 71–85.

39. Subroto Kumar Mukhopadhyay, *Cult of Goddess Sitalā in Bengal* (Calcutta: KLM, 1994), 50.

40. Derrida, *Politics*, 69; translation modified. It is not a good idea to describe a phenomenon as an unmediated example of deconstructive discourse. But this old settler colony—India—requires from me a bolder and more "mistaken" descriptive gesture than the more visibly violent examples of Australia or South Africa.

41. Shambhunath Gangopadhyay, *Madhyayuger Dharmabhāvana o Bāngla Sāhitya* (Calcutta: Sanskrita Pustak, 1994), 27; translation mine. I have tried to keep to the sense of *tal* in "error" as mistake and wandering. I have also tried to keep to the polysemous relationship between teacher and student—whether the teacher can only speak to students who are deaf, whether when the teacher says this the student is deaf, and the like.

42. Prankrishna Pal and Bijoykumar Pal, eds., *Meyeder Brotokatha* (Calcutta: Annapurna Library, n.d.).

43. Jacques Lacan, "The Splendor of Antigone," in *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Dennis Potter (New York: Norton, 1992), 243–83.

44. Sanat Kumar Mitra, *Folk Life and Lore in Bengal* (Calcutta: G. A. E. Publisher, 1981), 9.

45. Brown, *Triumph of the Goddess*, ix.

46. I have put together two popular reference sources here. One is of course the dictionary. The other is Bimla Churn Law, *Historical Geography of Ancient India* (Delhi: Ess Ess Publications, 1976).

47. Bhattacharji, *Indian Theogony*, 159.

48. Freud, *Standard Edition*, 21: 152–57.

49. Both the earlier Sudhir Kakar and the earlier V. S. Naipaul, coming from quite different politics but applying a "real" Freudian standard, had concluded that Indian men do not pass Narcissus (Sudhir Kakar, *The Inner World: A Psycho-Analytic Study of Childhood and Society in India* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1981], especially 154–211; and V. S. Naipaul, *India: A Wounded Civilization* [New York: Vintage Books, 1978]). They changed their minds through varieties of cultural conservatism from which approaches such as mine are to be distinguished.

50. Lacan's geometrics of the gaze precomprehend the Oedipus and cannot be significantly helpful here.

51. Nirode Mazumdar, *Song for Kali*, trans. Spivak (Calcutta: Seagull, 2000), 31.

52. N. N. Bhattacharya, *History of the Tantric Religion* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1982), 283.

53. Not all *tantra* is *vaāmāchāri* or sex-practicing *tantra*. See Swami Lokeswarananda, ed. *Studies on the Tantras* (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 1989). Nirode Mazumdar's use of the *yantra* points toward *vamachar*.

54. Ibid., 333.

55. Ibid., 370.

56. In *Devoted to the Goddess: The Life and Work of Ramprasad* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), Malcolm McLean confuses the limning of desire and the use of metaphorology with the author's practice. It is like calling someone a psychoanalyst because she or he uses psychoanalytic imagery with conviction. In my estimation, Ramproshad's use of the available topos of the rhetorical question is somewhat overemphasized by McLean as genuine characterological astonishment at the contradictory "personality" of Kali.

57. Surendramohan Bhattacharya, *Brihat Adi o Asal Bagalamukhi Tantram* (Calcutta: Benimadhab Seal's Library, n.d.), 81.

58. B. Bhattacharya, *The World of Tantra* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1988), 357–70.

59. Parita Mukta gives a fine account of these practices in *Upholding the Common Life*, 41–42.

60. The possibility of this resistance is already inscribed in the socius. The opening lines of the second chapter of *Manusmriti* (the laws of Manu) are one famous engagement of it: "[now] understand intrinsically [*nibādhata*] the constant [*nitya*] sustaining principles or code [*dharma*], assent to which is [already] a knowing-tendency of the heart [*hridayena abhi-anu-jnāta*]. Although it is not commendable to be predicated by desire alone [*kāmātma*], there is no such thing as being desireless. To accede to (knowledgeability or) the *veda*s and to act (knowledgeably, or) according to the *veda*s [I put the alternative there because Manusmriti invariably inserts that heart-tendency clause] is desirable [*kāmya*]" (Panchanan Tarkaratna, ed., *Manusamhitā* [Calcutta: Samskrita Pustaka Bhandar, 1993], 19; translation mine). Commentators have worried about the heart-tendency clause that would seemingly make the distinction between the proper name *Veda* (the ancient texts of knowledge) and the simple verb form "know(s)" as in the *Brāhmanas ya evam veda*, "who knows thus" (Monier Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary* [Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1993], 963), or *vedāhametat*, "I know this." Perhaps *Manusmriti* attempts what all lawgivers do: to equate desire with law. The commentators close this off. Kullukabhatta (fl. mid–fourteenth century), arguably the best-known commentator on the laws, glosses the invagination of desire (access to vedas contained in human desire) by breaking it into a binary opposition: *srutisca dvibidha—vaidiki tāntriki ca* (*Manu*, op. cit., 19). Heard or orally transmitted wisdom (the most sacred kind) are of two kinds (as in dispositions)—*vedic* and *tāntric*. Since *sruti* could literally also take the meaning of hearing or rumor, there is the possibility that Kulluka, using Sanskrit as an active language, is also making a distinction between sacred knowledge *(veḍa)* and profane oral dissemination *(tantra)*. It is only by reversing this already available distinction and then displacing it that *tantra* in the narrow sense discloses the possibility of resistance and begins to efface it by institutionalizing it, at one go. And the instrument of effacement is the relative autonomy of the baseline institution: gendering. The devi is caught in it. Michel Foucault lays out the possibility of describing this sort of thing in *History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), 1: 94–97. There is no guarantee, of course, that that is how it "really happens."

61. Jacques Derrida represents comparable (though not identical) masculine contortion effects on his own part, in order to accede to his dying mother, in "Circumfessions," in *Jacques Derrida*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993). In the more "vedic" mode, it is also Derrida who warns us that, if we set a practical course on intractable "new philosophies," we risk falling into the opposite of the new. Yet one cannot quite ignore the call to

sapere aude [dare to know]. This seesaw is, I believe, the dynamic of Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*, trans. George Collins (New York: Verso, 1997), 75–77.

62. Mukundaram Chakrabarti, *Chandimangal*, ed. Sukumar Sen (Calcutta: Sahitya Akademi, 1986).

63. Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 127.

64. Tapan Raychaudhuri, *Bengal under Akbar and Jahangir* (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1969).

65. Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 227.

66. Chakrabarti, *Chandimangal*, 237.

67. Ibid., 195–96. For a fuller list, see Somnath Mukhopadhyay, *Candi in Art and Iconography* (Delhi: Agam Kala, 1984), 102–4.

68. See Sanjay Subrahmanyam, ed., *Money and the Market in India 1100–1700* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994), for a sense of the turbulence of the scene.

69. K. N. Chaudhuri, *Asia before Europe: Economy and Civilisation of the Indian Ocean from the Rise of Islam to 1750* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

70. Satyendranath Datta, "Amra," in *Kabbo-Sanchayan* (Calcutta: M. C. Sarkar & Sons, n.d.), 32.

71. Roland Barthes, "The Structural Analysis of Narrative," in *Image/-Music/Text*, ed. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill & Wang, 1977), 104.

72. Or indeed the parabolic impulse of the ten principal Upanisads, an altogether separate stream in the service of the *advaita* as such. Romila Thapar has connected this to the movement in India from lineage to state.

73. POI (Person of Indian Origin) is a category devised by the new Budget of the Government of India for granting visa privileges.

74. Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (New York: Continuum, 1988), xvi.

75. See Sen, introduction to *Chandimangal*, 20–24.

76. Idem. For the immediately contemporary situation vis-à-vis the global "rural," see George Monbiot, "The African Gene," *The Guardian* (London), 4 June 1998, 22; and Bob Herbert, "At What Cost?," *New York Times*, 7 June 1998.

77. The phrase "willing suspension of disbelief" is from one of the great texts of English literary criticism that generations of disciplinary students of English are invited to internalize (Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* [New York: Dutton, 1960]), 168–69.

78. Derrida, "This Strange Institution Called Literature," in *Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge (New York: Routledge, 1992), 49.

79. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. J. H. Bernard (New York: Collier, 1951), 55.

80. Wordsworth does speak of producing good cultural *habits* in *Lyrical Ballads and Other Poems*, ed. James Butler and Karen Green (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 745.

81. One of the women interviewed is not conventionally "decrepit." I hope to comment on her extraordinary remarks about her chosen life in a more appropriate context.

82. Jeffrey J. Kripal has read this act and indeed Ramakrishna's life as a *bhakta*, as *tāntric* practice. For the former, see Kripal, *Kālī's Child: the Mystical and the Erotic in the Life and Teachings of Ramakrishna* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 133–36.

83. I have not been able to grasp the simple poetry of the Bengali, where the abstract nouns are implied rather than stated.