

# IMAGES OF THE HINDU FIERCE MOTHER GODDESS AND EXPERIENCES OF MOTHER

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This article focuses on two interrelated areas, Hindu imagery of the fierce goddess and Hindu women. Three features of Hindu worship directed at the fierce goddess are not only unfamiliar to the western observer, but go contrary to the known tradition for the first is the proposition that the god is feminine, portrayed as a terrible-looking woman; the second, that the god is the destroyer of the creation; and the third that the ritual is effected through actual killings. One of my central concerns is with this set-up, specifically Hindu conceptions of the fierce goddess, exemplified in the figure of Kali and the blood sacrifices that characterize her mode of worship. In the literature, certain authors (Payne 1933, Nandy 1980, Kakar 1978 for example) though concerned with different issues, all appear to agree that for Hindus the fierce goddess is understood as a highly negative figure and the rites are made as placatory gestures. In the case of those authors (for example, Kakar and Nandy) who belong to the 'culture and personality' school,\* blood sacrifice is interpreted as having bearings on human relationships and is cited as evidence of the

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\* For the sake of convenience, I use the label "culture and personality school", for those authors who heed psychological issues and the cultural definitions and imperatives that affect people's lives.

castration complex. Although Hindu theorising undoubtedly distils an image of startling ferocity -- the skull-garland dripping blood around the goddess's body or a range of destructive armaments held in her hands -- and it associates the goddess with calamities like small-pox which strikes terror in the hearts of all, yet to translate these as entailing sheer negativity runs the risk, I think, of taking the image at face value or not adequately heeding the complex metaphysical schemes in which these ideas are situated. It is possible that the Hindu details are approached through western preoccupations and modes of conceptualizing. Of the general tradition in which blood sacrifice belongs, Chakravarti makes the observation that it is "much maligned and largely misunderstood" (1963: 49). It seems to me that his comment is particularly applicable to the goddess imagery and the blood rites.

My first objective is to chart what the fierce imagery signifies according to Hindu speculations, as I understand them. The imagery, in my view, has to a certain extent been misrepresented by the authors mentioned in that although they purport to heed the cultural constructs, they either treat them in a pre-interpreted way or introduce unwarranted slants through particular emphasis, selectivities or omissions. I shall argue that the imagery is essentially positive, not despite its ferocity, but because of it. In the final section, I turn to the second area of concern, Hindu women. While the culture and personality school's treatment of women's social and psychological relations entails a daring approach, engages in a highly worthwhile project often neglected in the anthropological literature, nonetheless, the kind of picture it presents carries certain slants, stresses and exclusions from the discussion and so downplays the cost to women, despite the school's sensitivity to women's cause. In attempting to bring this cost into high relief, I briefly examine some key notions about Hindu women and the social imperatives that impinge on their lives, focusing on wife, mother and daughter.

IMAGERY OF THE FIERCE GODDESS

In this part of the article I have one major objective. I want to indicate that, in Nepal at least, it would be unwise to say that the imagery of the bloody Goddess, whether referred to as Devi, Bhagvati, Durga or even Kali, is essentially negative for her worshippers. Such a rendition, in my mind, would miss the point of the imagery's undeniable ferocity.

The discussion focuses on the yearly rite of Durga Puja for it is on this occasion that the fierce goddess and her numerous forms, especially Kali, feature prominently. In Nepal, the only extant Hindu kingdom, Durga Puja,<sup>1</sup> (otherwise

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1. The exact age of the Durga Puja festival is hard to tell, though Devi worship has had a long tradition going as far back as the fifth century at least. Sirkar refers to a 5th century Indian sculpture of Devi as Mahismardini (slayer of the demon) (1973: 104-5) and Slusser locates the same kind of icon found in Nepal to the 6th century (1982: Vol. II, 309). Payne notes that the book of verses, known in the vernacular as "The Chandi" (otherwise as "the Devi Mahatmayam", or "Durga Sapta Sati"), and chanted during the 10 days of Dasai, was probably written in the 6th century (1933: 40). The palm leaf manuscript of the "Markandeya Purana" in which the verses figure which was translated by Pargiter had been preserved in Nepal.

As for the ritual procedure of Durga Puja, historians locate it much later. Many take reference from "The Kalika Purana" which details the requirements involved in blood sacrifice. This has been allocated to the 14th century (Payne 1933: 46). Sirkar cites the oldest reference to "the modern Bengali form of worship of Durga Mahismardini to the 16th century (1973: footnote 2,105) though he notes that Devi worship is an extremely old tradition occurring in various parts of the sub-continent several centuries earlier (ibid: 104-5). The Nepalese Durga Taleju cult is assigned to the 14th century by Slusser (1982: Vol. I, 318). Performances of the ritual appear to include the same range of important features, the installation of the pot and the planting of grains, and blood sacrifice or its surrogate (see Stevenson 1920: 329-334 for South India; Ghosha 1871 and Chakravarti 1963: 94-103 for Bengali; and Anderson 1971, Grey 1982; Kondos 1982 for Nepal).

known as Navaratra, Dasara, Dasai) is treated as a national festival and in Kathmandu literally thousands of animals, ranging from goats to duck eggs and including the vicarious pumpkin, are sacrificed in a spectacle that is probably unsurpassed by anything else in the world. The monumental displays are associated with the state's tutelary deity, the mother goddess called Durga Taleju. Less important than spectacle is the fact that here the tradition is vibrant and vital, whereas elsewhere on the sub-continent it has become somewhat attenuated but by no means defunct. In Nepal, households of most castes undertake the rituals of the ten day series at home in the special shrine room set up for the occasion while tribals at least visit the Durga Taleju temple opened to the public during this festival. In the discussion I rely on the outlines of the ideas and practices given by the Nepalese experts as well as the ordinary practitioners especially those of the twice-born Parbatya. These people, as to be expected given their positioning in the Hindu order, are extremely important in that it is they (more than others) who articulate the prevailing Hindu ideas and values, though this is not to say that their conceptions of the fierce Mother Goddess radically diverge from those of the other castes. In fact, in my experience most people had comparable notions about the deity. Nevertheless there were some variations in the ritual practices, for example in the case of the Buddhist Newars.

Inasmuch as the particular ideas and rites devoted to the goddess are situated within a general context that we call Hinduism, it is necessary to investigate these within that

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As an event Ghosha in 1871 notes that it "is universally observed" all over India (ibid: xii), and a century later Chakravarti notes that "The autumnal worship of Durga is the most popular event in the religious year of the Hindus especially in Bengal" (1963: 96).

context, wherever relevant. Otherwise treating the imagery in isolation, runs the risk of misrepresenting the Hindu conceptions about Durga or Kali or any other fierce form. Since Hindu conceptions are metaphysical in nature I shall examine the imagery as part of that general discourse about the invisible powers of the universe (that is, anthropomorphised as the deities); furthermore since the goddess features in rites geared to pragmatic ends, the imagery is considered in terms of the ritual procedure where the general notions of ritual technology are pertinent.

There is no doubt that the fierce goddess and her various forms is delineated in startingly horrific details but the point to remember is that these are forms of Mahakali according to Hindu metaphysical speculations about the nature and operation of the cosmos. The black figure with its characteristic ten set of limbs is undeniably terrible in appearance, yet this does not necessarily signify an essentially negative image for those involved. Her name, to cite one expert, refers to "time", death and the colour black. "A thing in time must end. There can be no time without change and to exist in time means being subject to the powers of destruction". In this way, the man indicated the interlocking of complex ideas expressed in the iconographic imagery, for Kali is the divine form of the cosmic destructive force. The idea of a cycle movements also appears in the Kali imagery with its ten heads, ten lolling tongues and ten arms, holding the destructive weaponry, insofar as ten constitute the units for the termination of one kind of cycle -- the cycle of human reproduction taking place in the womb.<sup>1</sup> It is also the time taken for seeds to grow into barley shoots

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1. As well as in the death rites where ten days are devoted to the son's creation of a surrogate body for the dead parent.

which are planted, watered and harvested during Dasai.<sup>1</sup> The event entails the inevitable and invariable stages of any cycle, "rise, growth and decay". The speculations about time, then, not only pay heed to demarcations, the measuring, but also simultaneously incorporate the idea of development and especially the breaking down event. In such events, the destructive power Kali is identified with the element fire, one of the five basic forms of materiality signalled in the visual representations by the red tongues and black body.

The Kali imagery which evokes notions of time and destructive potency is not necessarily understood negatively in opposition to some imputed positive form, but as the terminating force in the inevitable and invariable process of transformations, where two others also figure so as to comprise the three basic forces of existence. Existence, Hindu discourse stresses, shifts along a three-phased route, the creative thrust, followed by comparative stasis and then to dissolution. The three forces are defined as aspects of the one great power, primal energy, the goddess Shakti or Mulprakruti, the root force of the cosmos. This basic energy is identified as residing in the female principle which operates when "stirred by the male principle" (Siva or Purusa).<sup>2</sup> The

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1. Dasai, I should add, is extremely complex incorporating all major dimensions associated with the goddess as Sakti (see Kondos 1981, 1982).

2. Of Devi's powers, "The Chandi", says,

By you this universe is born, by you this world is created.  
By you it is protected, O Devi, and you always consume it as the end. O you, who are (always) of the form of the whole world, at the time of creation you are of the form of the creative force, at the time of sustenation you are of the form of the protective power, and at the time of the dissolution of the world you are of the form of the destructive power...I, 75-77.

You are the primordial cause of everything bringing into force the three qualities, (*sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas* of which all things are composed...I, 78 in Jagadisvarananda 1982: 17-18).

idea of recurrence is also an intrinsic component of Hindu conceptions of time in that it posits that after dissolution there is a lull when all is held in the absolute (the special fourth, Turya) and then the process starts again,<sup>1</sup> cycle following cycle. The notion of continuity through change as well as recurrence is affixed in the iconographic detail of the "moon" appearing behind the goddess' head in her form as Mahakali. "Death for us" a pundit said, "is not the end of life, but the beginning of another form of existence. We do not see them as opposites. While westerners tend to see things this way, we do not".

The pundit's statements stress that the binary mode of conceptualization is inapplicable in contexts where we might too readily presume oppositional relations, warning against the imposition of western format with its accompanying presupposition to Hindu ideas (creation/destruction) for Hindu thought delineates three basic powers underlying the three stages of existence that invariably occur for any entity which is subject to time's conditions (Kondos 1982). In such conceptions, the format is processual and the focus ontological. The visual details of the Kali imagery from the metaphysical angle parallel the various notions held as relevant in their metaphysical conception of time's workings. If time is viewed as entailing a movement of "rise, growth and decay" and always ends in destruction, tongues of flame evoke the point better than the mechanical swing of a clock's pendulum.

Even though the formidability of the fierce goddess imagery is undeniable I would argue that it is appropriate not only for the metaphysical idea of destructive force that it signifies, but also at the pragmatic level it is I think,

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1. The Absolute conceived as being outside time is therefore unconditioned and unvarying.

especially apt given the worshipper's concerns.

The important events in the Dasai series of the fierce goddess occur on the eighth and the ninth and especially the Night of Kali is regarded as the important occasion for blood sacrifice to this fierce goddess since: "it is", to cite one of the Nepalese pundits, "the time of *pralaya* (dissolution). It is the time when Kali is around and we try to catch her power". His comment indicates that the ritual is located in a time zone when the destructive cosmic force is said to be present and so situates the worship within metaphysical conceptions about the operation of the universe. This, like other formulations, accords with the general principle that there is always a "time when" which also carries its "time to..." as the list of the yearly ritual calendar indicates. If the ritualist's immediate objective entails the attempt to contact that particular cosmic force, then it goes without saying that the ritual procedure constitutes the means whereby the hook-up is to be achieved.

The particular ritual procedure, blood-sacrifice, (alongside a back-up of esoteric technology) is regarded by the practitioners as efficacious for the destruction of the enemy. As they say, the series culminates with the "day of victory--the tenth" (Vijayadasami). Blood sacrifice in this particular formulation is not viewed as appropriation of a deity, hostile to the worshippers but is employed as the means for ritually harnessing that force against obstructions. As a corollary, it also indicates that the fierce form is not construed as a malevolent but as a straightout protector, benefactor, helper of the worshipper. The conception of the Goddess as the remover of the worshipper's troubles is repeatedly made in "The Chandi", a text recited throughout the Dasai series. It is in sacred literature like this that the terms of the relationship between devotee and the goddess are clearly promulgated.



There seem to be several features involved in the protagonist relationship. Firstly, as for example in the Chandi, the Goddess is described as assuming different manifestations<sup>1</sup> at different world periods when called by the devotee.<sup>2</sup> Such a possibility is not viewed as limited to remote parts of the cosmos and past periods but is also taken as applying to the here and now where humans may be implicated. Some Nepalis maintain that they have seen Devi come to their house during Dasai. The second and obvious point is that description of the Goddess relates how she is the one who adopts the cause of the worshipper and fights the obstruction in question, thus depicting a partisan kind of relationship -- not "aggression" (cf. Nandy 1980: 27-8). To render the relationship between Devi and devotee as expressed in the blood sacrifices as one of malevolence, would entail a peremptory injection of ideas that are not exactly couched in the texts in this way nor introduced in people's commentary about this fierce form. Rather what tends to get stressed is the idea of haven and protection. For example, Durga, the term which gives the series its name, means "fort", "impregnable" and the goddess with her eight particular emanations constitute a line of defence around the city, where the temples are situated just

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1. "The Kalika Purana" makes the same point:

Just as it happened in olden time, in exactly the same way the Goddess, spontaneously takes action in each cosmic period with a view to annihilating the demons. In each cosmic period there will be a Rama and on the other side a demon Ravana; in the same way a fight will arise and a meeting of the gods will take place... and likewise the Goddess takes action Ch. 62, 38-41 in Van Kooij (tr.) 1972: 110).

2. For example, "in olden times...Mahamaya...was constantly praised by all the gods with a view to the annihilation of the demon Mahisa, through desire for the welfare of the living beings". "The Kalika Purana" (Ch. 62, 54-55 in Van Kooij (tr.) 1982: 111).

outside the eight city gates.<sup>1</sup> Just inside are the Goddess's houses which in the past stored the city's weaponry. The geographical defence is given a correspondence at the human level, a point to be taken up later. In addition the relationship between the fierce goddess and the worshippers is defined as invoking compassion on the goddess' part. A passage from "The Chandi" brings several points together.

When called to mind in a difficult pass, you remove fear from every person....which goddess but you O Dispeller of poverty, pain and fear, has an ever-sympathetic heart for helping everyone? (Ch. IV 7, in Jagadisvarananda (tr.) 1972: 49).

In this way the goddess is rendered as the exemplary protagonist and if she "dispels" obstacles then the pertinent capability is the destructive one; that seems to me to be self-evident.

Nonetheless, it might be said that, for example, in the description elaborated in the myths, there is always a range of startling effects that carry matters to excess. The profusion of alarming details is I think nothing more than an

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1. The opposing of Durga and Kali in terms of protector and destroyer (see Nandy 1980: 8-4) is, I think, unwarranted. Durga is the generic term which covers all the various goddesses worshipped during Dasai which also include Kali. As the pundit said "all the Devis are Durgas". He continued and said that the important point is that Durga is approachable from all directions -- "*sarba amnya*" and stressed that the ritualist can hone into this form according to the tradition of the family. Durga, like Kali and any of the other fierce forms, is given blood sacrifice. Though details in accoutrements vary the fierce forms all carry some kind of item associated with destruction. The important event of Durga Puja entails blood sacrifice to Kali on Kalaratri, the conjunction of the eighth and the ninth where the names Durga and Kali appear as synonymous (Ghosha 1871: 77-8) or as forms of each other. If there is a distinction it is that Kali is generated from Durga's anger, in one myth, in her fight against demons.

ordering arranged by an esoteric code of correspondences, where each detail is commensurate with the central notion being stressed. In all battles the goddess is described as of terrific appearance, wildly angry and uttering boisterous shrill sounds and undertaking bloody exploits. These points seem to constitute a set playing around one central notion inasmuch as it includes the appropriate appearance, emotion, utterance and action all of which directly connect with the destructive capability. Similarly, the myths, though developing a story line, also identify and construct a system of relevances around one idea.<sup>1</sup>

Many of the startling myths about Kali's bloody exploits also seem to link back to esoteric notions about the ritual procedure. Such myths however are often taken by, for example, the culture and personality school as evidence of psychological disturbances and fear of mother. In a myth cited by Kakai, Siva when angered by an army of demons he was fighting projected a horrific form of Kali from his third eye, instructed her how to fight one of the demons, Sukra, who could not be killed. The form of Kali he issued forth had a womb of teeth and eyes. Following orders, she embraced Sukra, laughing shrilly and "vanished" with him. Meanwhile Siva tackled the leader, Jalandhara (Kakar 1978: 92).

The myth, according to Kakar, constitutes an instance of fear of the "feminine genitalia" rendered "concrete", and "magnified in horrific imagery". He translates it as evidence of a child's "helplessness in the face of the dreadful mother"

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1. From the anthropomorphic angle dissolution (*pralaya*) is described in one myth as the destruction of Dakṣa's sacrifice where Dakṣa stands as the father of progeny, that is, the world (see Kramrish 1981: 323-4). At this terminating phase of the cycle, the fierce destructive force (in some versions emanations of Siva, in others of Mahakali) throw Dakṣa's head in the fire and so the cycle ends.

(Kakar 1978: 92). It would seem that the culture and personality school, although purporting to heed cultural symbols automatically casts them as psychological manifestations of some disorder, in that the indigenous meanings at least in this case are left unexamined, where only some points, out of the range of details, are selected, and the general context is ignored. The myth belongs to a text on Tantric ritual procedures, "The Kalika Purana", and, as is the practice with Tantra, is written in code, where the precise meanings are "wilfully scrambled" thus avoiding disclosure of secret ritual technology. The myth apparently refers to aspects of yogic *Sadhana*, where an adept through certain processes experiences an upward movement through his body, and with expertise it goes as far as the top part of the head, said to constitute a realization of the absolute state. In this the force identified as Devi is seen as crucial. "Kali" is the element, fire, whose properties are illumination as well as destruction signified in the myth by the "eyes" and the "teeth". "Sukra" literally means semen and refers to that component of the body which is to be redirected in the yogic endeavour through the linkage to the female force Sakti Kundalini, the "fiery serpent". Jalandhara (net), the "demon" tackled by Siva refers to a net of arteries that are also involved in *Sadhana*. Laughter mentioned in the myth possibly relates to the appropriate mantra or the sound that is caused by the vibrations entailed in rerouting the Kundalini upwards. This kind of sound invariably features with the fierce deities of both sexes. The detail about Kali's vanishing with Sukra, could refer to this upward movement, or more simply that the fire and the "fuel" (Kali + Sukra) finally fade out. Since I am not privy to the secrets I cannot translate beyond this nor would I. Even so the few points noted indicate that the myth refers to a ritual procedure which is highly systematised, albeit presented in code. None of which is mentioned by Kakar. Secondly, the interpretation is somewhat selective in that it

isolates Kali's activities only, and ignores Siva's involvement in producing Kali and fighting the other enemy (the "net"). Thirdly, while the teeth get stressed as an instance of "vagina dentata" (ibid: 92) the myth's reference to the "eyes" are omitted and the symbol of fire and light is overlooked. For the adept, Kali is a means in the moksa endeavour. Yet in Kakar's rendition of the imagery for the adept she stands as the evil and castrating mother, a "chamber full of poison, causing death in the sexual act" (ibid: 92). With this kind of rendition the myth is preinterpreted according to the premises of that school.

Often in such accounts with a concentrated focus on the extraordinary, any unambiguously positive message tends to get overlooked. Take Chamunda whose skeletal face characterises the terrific form of Kali. Against this detail plus the skulls and swords one notices that the most formidable of forms displays the "fear not" and "boon giving gestures". While the juxtaposition of seemingly positive and negative could be taken to signify an ambivalent deity, for practitioners it condenses a range of not incompatible ideas. As one stated, "Kali collapses a whole metaphysics at one point". Even Kali's tongue, so prominent in the anthropological literature, always has a *svastika* inscribed, yet reference to that detail is usually omitted. The *svastika* is a graphic representation of time's progression in that when spun it becomes a wheel. Since it also signifies individual well-being, its location at the centre of the fire-tongue also seems to promulgate the idea that Kali is the provider of boons and is not to be feared.

Let me make my position clear. I am not suggesting that fear may not be involved, a point to be considered in a little more detail later. But I am suggesting that in both texts and people's commentary, Kali is formulated as a complex metaphysical notion, one of the major forces that make the existence of

things work whether this relates to the cosmic processes or that of the human digestive system. The untrammelled fierceness signifies the destructive capability. For the ritualist, the fierce power constitutes the means for obliterating obstructions that he or she encounters and in such cases the goddess then is construed as ally, not the aggressor of the devotee. From the relational point of view, Kali is not rendered as a malevolent figure but the most formidable of protagonists. From the ontological point of view, the profusion of vividly terrific images, systematised within a scheme of corresponding relevances, may be understood as aspects of the core notion, destructive power, the necessary capability for the task involved, combatting the enemy. This would hold whether the person approaches the goddess from a more antropomorphised angle or a metaphysical one, but even with the first, the metaphysical dimension would also be present since it constitutes the general framework of Hindu theorising. In Hindu doctrine the fierce imagery is not necessarily and invariably projected negatively but rather signifies the appropriate and effective representations of destructive power.

#### *THE BLOOD RITE*

Blood sacrifice rather than be interpreted as something peculiar, heralding the presence of a malevolent form, is one particular kind of activity within a procedure, which like other procedures, relies on a general tradition and takes reference from metaphysical speculations. In the case of Kali, commentators presume that the killings entail the placation of an essentially sinister, evil, deity (Payne 1933: 137; Nandy 1980: 8-9; Obeyesekere 1981: 156), as mentioned earlier. Otherwise blood sacrifice is identified as signifying a "carnivorous" deity to be opposed to the "vegetarian" ones and outside the mainstream of Hinduism, existing only in practice, not consciousness" (Dumont 1980: 271).

Of worship in general the rationale behind the varying nature of the offerings is that of commensurateness -- the item proffered should be commensurate with the nature of the deity concerned.<sup>1</sup> Because the animal is killed there is no necessity to automatically label this "propitiation" or "placation" insofar as it simply follows the same principle that applies in other rites. This is how one pundit explained the matter:

The sacrificial animal is black and it is offered to Mahakali who is also black. It is thought that Kali is affected by *tamoguna*. (Mahasarasvati, knowledge, is affected by *sattvaguna* and Mahalaksmi, wealth, by *rajoguna*...). *Tamas* is a sign of darkness therefore, Mahakali is black. And when persons are affected by *tamoguna* they are angry (*krodha*). To make a person powerful, we should give him meat and honey -- wine sometimes. Our Mahakali drinks wine. We worship Kali to destroy our enemies (*satru*). The action of killing is the work of *tamoguna* and therefore the goddess Kali is worshipped by *bali*, killing the goat and giving it to her. Kali is black, *bali* is black... Mahakali is the one worshipped on Kalaratri night (in Kondos 1981: 60).

Thus Kali as the Goddess of destruction is given destroyed things commensurate with her nature.<sup>2</sup>

Any rite, moreover, has as its culmination the taking onto and into the worshipper, those entities that have been

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1. Offerings are distinguished according to the *triguna* format and the male/female demarcation. Those belonging to the *sattva* category include, for example, things that have been preserved through being cooked in ghee and sugar like sweets; an instance applying to the *rajas* category, is the pomegranate with its myriad of red pulpy pods; while for the *tamas* category, the sacrificial object which is always a living thing (animal or vegetable) is used. The male/female distinction is evident in the banana and "orange" (*suntala*).
  2. Just as the southern (destructive) face of Siva has a buffalo slaughtered for it.

brought into contact with the deity and without such an action, the rite is said to be "incomplete". What was originally an offering by the end has become transformed stuff and from that moment on is termed the *prasada* and *tika*. "Prasada" could be translated as "divine grace" yet its concreteness reveals its ontological dimension and links it to the metaphysical domain. So it may be understood as the embodiment of divine favour as well as god-stuff.

It goes without saying that the entire blood sequences of the Dasai series cannot be outlined here, so I shall restrict attention to those components that I see as most relevant for an understanding of the significance of the rites. While performances may vary according to family tradition, nonetheless there are certain sequences and principles which are constant (see Ghosha 1871).

Out of the details there are three key actions which provide the means of connecting the ritualist to the goddess. Firstly, there is the articulation of the "armour defence" (*kavaccha*) mantra; secondly, the treatment of the sword to be used in killing and; thirdly, the ritualist's handling of the slain animal itself.

In the armour set of mantras the ritualist establishes a kind of protective shield for his body by invoking the invisible divine forms, the nine Durgas (or eight Matrikas)<sup>1</sup> (see Jagadisvaranda 1972: XIV-XX). Just as these goddesses are taken as the relevant forces in the defence of a place, as noted before, they are also implicated in the protection of a person.

The same kind of orientation, the contacting of Devi's

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1. Matrikas translated as "mothers", also refers to a set of specific *mantras*.



powers for human use, appears in the treatment of the cutting implement. In Nepal this is often a *kukuri*, in Bengal it is the moon sword (*chandrahas*) known as the scimitar. Into this the ritualist invokes the goddess' presence to the cutting edge and some male gods to the other parts (see Ghosha 1871:63-4).

The goat, always perfect and generally black, is the most popular sacrificial offering for the black goddess. Its significance is rendered differently by different people. In Nepal some refer to it as the mythic buffalo demon, Mahisasura, while others to the idea of any obstacle that needs to be erased. Some confess that it could be rendered as a specific personal enemy. In Bengal it was an Englishman (Payne 1933: 104-5). But whatever the orientation, in the ritual, the goat is transformed,<sup>1</sup> just like other offerings, by being taken backwards in the evolutionary movement reducing it to the essence particles (or the anthropomorphic version, the primal gods) which underlie the manifest world.<sup>2</sup> Ordinarily this process is called purification but fails to bring out the specific nature of what's involved for it entails the return movement to the primal forms.

The treatment of the goat: armed with the weapon enhanced by the presence of cosmic strength, the ritualist kills the goat itself brought to special state of essence-substance, and immediately takes that part of the animal which family tradition stipulates and quickly sprinkles the blood onto a *yantra* (the design form of the goddess) an idol or the cosmic pot, whatever family custom demands, doing all this at the precise moment when the cosmic destructive force is regarded as being pervasively present. After that all secondary forms like the family's god,

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1. In Nepal people claim that the goat is given a choice by either moving or not moving its head when water is sprinkled on it.
  2. The fate of the goat, according to some Nepalis, is rebirth into a higher form.

and the family's implements will also "be put there, to catch Kali's power" and get sprinkled with blood. The culmination point is reached when the ritualist takes that goddess-contacted stuff onto himself in the form of a blood *tika*. Then through Tantric *homa* during which the fiercest of the destructive forces (both male and female) are invoked, specific parts of the animal are cooked and eaten in the shrine room by the initiated men of the household. This is the *mahaprasada*, the great potency of Kali.

Through a complex range of actions, geared according to the rationale of certain metaphysical premises, the ritualist believes that some alteration has been produced by the encounter that is reached at the climax with the taking of *prasada* and the *tika*. In their eyes they have become infused with the formidable god-stuff, transformed through the ritual process and now concretised in those things taken into and onto themselves.<sup>1</sup> The rite to Kali does not however diverge in principle since the transformation and the *prasada*-taking are constant. What varies, varies according to the nature of the deity concerned. Each festival moreover, has its specific long-term goal (*phala*, literally fruit) which obviously also varies. In the case of the endeavours during the night of Kali the long-term goal of "victory over the enemy" is intrinsically related

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1. One adept described the alteration of the blood as going beyond "even holiness". Through employing the right mantras and hand gestures he said that he brought the blood back to the primal essence, air *vayu* (one of the eternal particles, the *mahatattva*). He elaborated:

When you plant the barley in soil this is the growth stage. When you kill the goat this is decay. But when you offer it to relatives later it is *turya* (literally, the fourth). *Turya* equals all three stages in one, creation, (*srsti*), maintenance (*sthiti*) and destruction (*sanhara*) together are *turya*...when creation, maintenance and destruction are in one, this is the fourth state (in Kondos, 1981: 61).

to the immediate finale of the ritual. In a sense this is possible through the grasping of the appropriate kind of power, given that the ritualist obtains the primal Kali-substance.

A few general observations can be made about the nature of blood sacrifice. It is not a mechanical routine of commemoration but each rite is approached as an endeavour de nouveau a point that will be taken up again later. It constitutes work, working with what are deemed to be invisible powers that propel the operation of the entire cosmos, what in the west is treated by the sciences and its sophisticated instruments. For the adept there is a technology which takes as a basic premise that particular sound forms and actions can hone into that invisible operation and can be manipulated by the human through his body and mind when working on material things (the outside objects or the inside bodily components). Put differently, for the adept, the invisible forces are there for him to harness. The orientation, therefore, is not exactly one of humility and obedience, a cowering before the deity but one of extraordinary human competence...that he can hook-up with the powers of the universe. Such forces, whether Kali or any other form, are not viewed as aloof but amenable to human ritual endeavours. This kind of orientation indicates the relevance of the two major themes, the metaphysical view of things and the human/god connexion of what, for a better word, I have called the "political style of the favour, or divine grace". But if, in the case of Kali, it is about the gaining of destructive potency, how does this bear on the culture and personality thesis? Is blood sacrifice to be understood as fantasy for the working through of castration anxieties, self-aggressing in the mother's cause (Nandy 1980: 28, 35-6)?

For a consideration of this thesis, the significance of certain cultural and historical points need to be borne in mind. Firstly blood sacrifice to the fierce Goddess was and

is a state backed event associated with the king's tutelary deity and seems to have been a common practice not only in Nepal but in other Hindu kingdoms in the sub-continent (Forster 1983: 134-8; Payne 1933: 91-2). Furthermore, if the records are reliable worship of Kali and Durga Puja were introduced into the Bengali region by the king of Nadia, and where Kali worship was passionately promoted for the breach entailed the punishment of death (Chakravarti 1963: 92, 102). Such details suggest that the blood sacrifices might not have entailed a spontaneous eruption in response to psychological discontent relating to mother but were perhaps imposed on the population or introduced by the king after which the subjects followed. Of course the difficulty with my speculation is that a rite may be followed for reasons other than that which appeared with its introduction.

The second reason is perhaps more substantial inasmuch as the culture and personality school claim that blood sacrifice constitutes "self-aggressing" actions done in the "mother's cause" and it is significant that many of the ardent ritualists were actually involved in and were exceptionally successful at the wielding of violence against others. The list includes the seventeenth century warrior-king, Sivaji, in one part of India, the brigands (known as the Thugees) and the resistance fighters against the British in different parts of India and in Bengal, "giving a goat to Kali" was a cryptogram for "killing an Englishman" (Payne 1933: 91-104). What we notice is that in the above instances the rites figure in concrete contexts where the ritual goal relates to the ritualist's own specific enemies and actual violent confrontations. Put differently, in many cases the ritualist has his own particular external enemies where their obliteration is specifically linked to the sacrificial undertaking. We are also reminded of the rule of precedence given for the performance -- "just as Rama was able to gain victory over the demon by worshipping Dévi according to

blood sacrifice so we also worship..." Since blood sacrifice is viewed as a technique for gaining efficacy in violence to be deployed against a concrete enemy through the tapping of cosmic destructive potency which is real in their theorizing then to treat it as "fantasy" preinterprets the cultural events according to the terms of the psychoanalytic paradigm.

At present in Nepal, in addition to the king, the men of high office are particularly involved in the night of Kali. For them, the rite is not exactly about submitting to and placating a "malevolent" goddess, but the grasping of the primal destructive power, for their own specific purposes. They attribute their success to having made the connexion (see Kondos 1982). The outcome of the rite, in the words of one practitioner, is "strength, courage and success".

But as we have seen in Nepal, it is not restricted to any one section of the population and perhaps predictably so because the goal "annihilation of obstruction" seems to have universal appeal. Variations as to what specifically is involved can reveal people's proclivities: the Buddhists draw the head sporting a top-knot, the diagnostic feature of the Hindu twice-born in general and the Brahmin in particular, and on this head place the sacrificial animal (a pumpkin as surrogate). Of course it would be foolhardy to claim that any specific objective is identical for an entire universe and applicable for all time since individual variations and historical contingencies would impinge. What seems clear is that the general goal of destruction over the enemy, the goal of victory, is vague enough to cater to variations as these change over time and would partly explain its persisting appeal in those Hindu societies or segments where it is part of local tradition.

## Some Problematic Issues:

## (a) A Capricious Devi?

What about the association between Devi and calamities, especially small-pox, the awful disease which "either kills you or makes you ugly", an association that has been taken up by various writers and interpreted as signifying a highly negative figure. Payne, for example, uses clusters of epithets like "conscienceless and irresponsible", "capricious", "cruel and terrible" (1933: 106, 134). Nandy's portrayal also seems to reflect this in his rendition of the fierce goddess as one viewed as "unpredictable", "treacherous", "eager to betray and prone to aggression" (1980: 8-9). Such combinations in sum evoke the idea of Devi as the unjustifiable perpetrator of human suffering through behaving arbitrarily. From which it follows that the deity is understood as "cruel" at best, and at worst "evil". It seems to me that the introduction of this kind of vocabulary into the discussion is at variance with the nature of Hindu conceptions. What is involved?

It would seem that it is the metaphysical framework which is relevant here. On the one hand people say, in the context of say, small-pox, "Devi is the smallpox goddess, she is the power behind small-pox but she is not the one to blame". Invariably they will also insist that Devi, like other gods, "is not evil". Regardless of how the issue is posed they do not budge from this position. Their commentary appears to relate to metaphysical proposition -- that any particular state or process relies on invisible forces, whether this refers to the digesting of food, the self-healing properties of trees or the sudden appearance of lightning and the following rain. Since small-pox damages and kills, the relevant deity is Kali. So, although Devi is understood as the source of the destructive power, she is not identified as the one who is exactly "responsible" for inflicting the disease. Some people in fact

view the goddess as the deity who protects the community against such diseases and calamities (see Chakravati 1963: 93; Dumont 1980: 270). Irrespective of how people pose the connexion between the goddess and the calamity to apply epithets like "capricious", "conscienceless", "arbitrary" is to introduce concepts that are not only discordant in a discourse which is metaphysical but also incipiently introduces value laden terms.

For us these notions are charged terms inasmuch as they can evoke the idea of a deity who makes the "innocents suffer" and hence stands as an "unjust" and therefore a "cruel", "evil" power. It seems to me inherent in this kind of approach are certain western presuppositions about the constructs, "innocence" and "responsibility".

According to Hindu postulates, as I understand them, the cause of suffering is located in no one spot and the locus of responsibility is not at all straightforward (see commentary on "Hymn to Kali", in Woodroffe 1973: 301-3; Layle 1973: 79-82, 127-158). While western conceptions identify the person as a "subject" who can be deemed culpable for his acts, innocent or guilty of a crime (see Foucault in Bouchard 1977: 218-233) Hindu speculations posit that a range of factors impinge on the matter of what we would call "innocence" and "responsibility". Another point of divergence is that from the western perspective, the idea of a "sin" occurring without the actor's intention would be anathema to its mode of judgment. Yet Hindu theorizing incorporates the involuntary as readily as the voluntary.

Conditions for suffering belong to existences in *samsara* and entail various dimensions. Doctrine formulates the idea of a person's self-involvement in the concept of *karmaphala* — action generating its specific fruits but where our conceptions of guilt and innocence are not quite relevant (nor as we shall see later are our conceptions of reward and punishment). In

addition and related to the domain of *karmaphala* are the planetary forces which are seen as influencing the nature of people's lives. Other humans of course would also impinge. Even the absolute is implicated.<sup>1</sup> So are the gods as the underlying powers in the universe which make existence possible. It should also be mentioned that gods are seen as the avenue of obtaining one's desires, countervailing planetary influences, etc. by getting them on side through devotion and this is what a lot of ritual is about.<sup>2</sup> Noteworthy is how a number of domains, (see Gellner 1983: 20-1) that we tend to keep separate are brought together, incorporating a particular formulation about deserts in the idea of *karmaphala* which differs from that of the western discourse; cosmic powers and processes, alongside the important "political" orientation, the possibility of gaining divine "favour" to countervail the undesirable.

This kind of approach diverges from the western and to tackle it from that perspective would distort Hindu definitions, preoccupations and practices. Put differently, when Payne describes the goddess as "conscienceless", implicitly he is introducing a western tradition with its particular "regime of justice" that is alien. It also betrays a certitude in the possibility of its obverse the conscience of "justice" and a naive belief that justice is desirable and desired. Justice

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1. Regardless of how the Absolute (Paramatman) is named, whether conceived as Siva, Sakti, Krisna or Parabrahman. The famous revelation in the "Bhagavad Gita", where Krisna reveals his supreme nature, embracing the "totality", is replicated in contexts where other names are given to the godhead. In Devi's case it appears in the "Sri Mad Devi Bhagavatam". Within this conceptualization the epithet "demoness" (*asuri*) which is used in one passage of "The Chandi" becomes comprehensible.
  2. It includes worship as well as the son's orienting good future conditions for the dead parent in the funeral rites he executes.



emanating from a "consciencefull" god-head where only the "virtuous" are rewarded and the "evil" punished would indeed be terrible, undesirable for most want compassion, mercy, boons and perquisites, not their "deserts". Payne not only tackles Hindu definitions taking reference from a western framework but also allows an element of bias to creep into his discussion. First of all, it should be said that many commentators, and not just Payne, while concentrating on the Kali figure often neglect to mention other deities who also evoke a great deal of trepidation and that Kali is not to be presented as the sole exemplar of the fearful. Such beings include the *pitris* (the dead forebears) and the god of death, Yamaraja. The Kathmandu Black Bhairab standing outside the old palace is a most formidable figure for Nepalis, some of whom refer to the past when confessions were declared before it. False testimony is said to have brought the wrath of the god. To a certain extent, by omitting reference to these other fearful beings and concentrating on Kali, there is the risk of her coming to stand as the sole exemplar of the frightening. Similar distortions may creep into the exposition via the avenue of transcription. Whenever Nepalis, for example, translate the "krodha" they use the English word "fierce" or "angry". Should the word "aggressive" arise in a discussion, this is immediately and emphatically corrected.

In his exposition of people's orientation to the fierce goddess, Payne not only isolates but stresses the presence of the orientation of "reproach" (1933: 95-7). Although he acknowledges that this is not unique to this context and is found in other "punitive" religions, the identification and attention but especially his stress on this orientation tends to enhance the negativity of the fierce goddess. Any god, any kind of god of any religion is likely to be reproached when a devotee does not obtain what is ardently desired and there is nothing peculiar about this happening in the context of Kali.

In the passages he cites it is significant that the Hindu writers refer to the idea of Devi as haven etc. just as frequently, if not more so, than expressing "reproach" (see 1933: 95-105).

It would seem that while Hindu thought situates the goddess as undeniably destructive, it does not I think delineate this form as a capricious deity, whose arbitrariness impels the suffering of the innocent, thus rendering her an evil or cruel deity.

(b) A Punitive Goddess?

What of the epithet "punitive" that is sometimes applied to the association between the goddess' anger and the bloody exploits.<sup>1</sup> The same kind of difficulty occurs with the idea of a punitive goddess as with that of an "arbitrary" one, for to treat angry activities as signalling a punitive nature, I think, would dislocate Hindu conceptions from the ontological framework, as well as ignore some other relevant propositions. Before attending to the question of Devi's punitive nature it is necessary to briefly consider how Hindu theorizing treats the issue of "punishment and reward".

Where the west talks of rewards and punishments, Hindu thought refers to processes about the fruition of actions (*karmaphala*). In such a context it is not a matter of simply harvesting what you reap (a good heaven and eternity; a bad hell forever) but one of generating future conditions

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1. There is no doubt that there is a concern not to displease the goddess and that the non-performance of sacrifice is declared as provoking her wrath with the attendant due consequences. Yet this is not unique to Kali insofar as many rites are prescribed as obligatory.

according to the particular nature of the prior activities.<sup>1</sup> More precisely, doctrine declares that different kinds of acts have different kinds of ontological consequences where the possibilities entail three major kinds which follow the *guna* format. If a person's behaviour, for example, is dark and animal-like then in a subsequent rebirth that person's situation is deemed to correspond, following the principle of commensurateness and so on for the other two major types (see Bhagavad-Gita IV, 3-20; Manu XII, 30-51 in Buhler (tr.) 1963: 491-495). Assessment of the three possibilities is made according to a scheme of preferences (Kondos, 1981). Even the most preferred is depicted as also keeping a person rivetted to the rebirth cycle.<sup>2</sup> For our purposes, what all this means is that Hindu ideas about "punishment and rewards" are based on metaphysical and hence ontological conceptions. In such conceptions the binary evaluation of good and bad and the oppositional relation of either/or of the adversary position of western law (innocence versus guilt) are irrelevant. The approach could be summed up as event-centred where theorizing charts the idea of processes in time and where resultant states take reference from ontological rather than abstract concepts. The principle underlying ontological processes is that of commensurateness -- the particular effect corresponds with the particular nature of its

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1. According to one pundit the particular effects cannot be totally exhausted but leave their specific "traces" (*vasana*) and it is these which keep a person involved in the rebirth circuit. Another said, "In Hinduism there is no zero... something will remain".
  2. It should also be mentioned that the god who presides over this domain is Dharmaraja (or Yamaraja for some people) and not Devi. Furthermore funeral rites are understood as activities which in some way or other propel a favourable rebirth state for the dead parent which is one reason why sons are so highly prized. The rationale of those rites also take heed from ontological processes. For example, the son builds up a ritual body for the parent's spirit which replicates the embryo's development.

source. In certain aspects, anger and the event in which it occurs also takes reference from this kind of framework.

Anger is a mental state or mood (*bhava*) which is viewed as having its corresponding capability. Pundits refer to these states as dispositions that link up with particular activities and stress the necessity that a Brahmin, for example, has a "controlled" or "quiet mind" when persuing intellectual tasks; similarly they say that a "passionate" mood is required when domination of others is the relevant task, allocating this to the warrior (*ksatrya*) realm of action. At the divine plane "anger" (*krodha*) is associated with the destructive forms like Rudra, Vairaba and Kali. In this kind of conceptualization, anger, (passion and quiet) are ontologically located dispositions that correspond to particular capabilities. The particular mood, anger, is relevant for the manifestation of its corresponding capability just like the others. The same metaphysical framework seems to apply in a curious custom which at first sight might be interpreted as indicative of a punitive deity. During a small-pox epidemic people refrain from frying food explaining that it makes a sizzling sound that will bring the goddess to the place. From this custom it might be inferred that here is an instance of a punitive goddess where the noise is seen as arousing her anger and provoking retaliation. People, however, do not formulate the situation along these lines at all. What seems to be relevant is the Hindu conceptions of sound where a particular sound is posited as the mantra form of a deity and its articulation in rituals is one means of bringing that particular deity to the place. In which case of cooking precaution is not about avoiding "punishment", but about not instigating a metaphysical process that is undesirable. Similarly to read the association between Devi's anger and the bloody fighting, detailed so graphically in the myths, as indicative of a punitive nature would misrepresent the ontological framework inasmuch as the appropriate mood for efficacy

in such exploits is anger. In any event where the deity is angered, as mentioned before, this occurs in the context of an activity which is commensurate with that disposition, a battling against a provocation and finally its subjugation. It is the idea of doing battle and defeating whatever is to be defeated which is delineated.

When the myths about the goddess' horrific exploits are considered what emerges is that they appear to have little to do with punitive measures. The descriptions of the battles against the demon where one might expect a straightforward confrontation of "good" against "evil"<sup>1</sup> instead incorporate metaphysics which includes the open-endedness of time in its notion of recurrent cycles as well as the complex of the "favour" or divine grace.

To consider a few details of one myth which is expressly associated with Dasai: The relationship between Devi and the demon Mahisasura, should exhibit an incontrovertible instance of an oppositional structure of good and bad and bring to the

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1. The relation of ally/enemy is sometimes presented as involving an oppositional structure. It does not however involve a pair but a triadic universe of self/ally/enemy. Self and enemy stand in an actual relationship of conflict which is different from the conceptual idea of structured opposition (say the anthropologists "pure/impure", an idea and its negation with its monothetic focus). From the ontological point of view the gods' "ally", Devi, and the god's enemy", the demon, are comparable, both fighters. When it comes to the wider range of relationships (self and ally and self and enemy) it might appear that here there is structured opposition, alliance and hostility. This, however would merely impose a conceptual oppositional format which shrinks a universe of possibilities omitting the third, say a third (neutrality) but in so doing the universe is rendered monothetic. If alliance, hostility and indifference can appear as possible kinds of relationships, then to impute the necessity of opposition derives from adherence to the premises of structuralism (Deleuze and Guattari 1977 *Passim*).

fore the punitive aspect of the goddess but it does not, for the matter is complicated by two points. The demon is also worshipped in the rite and is deemed to have an august ancestry. Although there are a number of esoteric issues implicated here, some of which remain secret, what is known is that Siva was a forebear of the demon. At one level the myth describes how Siva assumed the form of a she-buffalo, with which a sage had intercourse and the demon Mahisa was born. Esoterically it relates to Samkhyam conceptions about the composition of things according to the principle of immanence that underlies processual creation. Therefore if the primal forms (or forces) are inherent in subsequent and more evolved forms this would apply even to demons, right down to animals and anything else at the lowest reaches. The demon though different, is not demarcated as the god's opposite since it contains as it must, something of the primal stuff.<sup>1</sup> As to the background of the other point, the demon's incorporation into the worship: the myth describes how this demon had troubled the gods, eventually gained sway and could not be toppled. So the gods called Devi to their aid. She fought the demon and his armies and defeated them. But then the demon requested a boon, that he not be killed, and which the Devi granted. In the icon the demon's skin opens out and reveals a human form rising up from within. Just as the Hindu metaphysical premises are at variance with the western prescription of oppositional structures (god and demon) so does the Hindu stipulation of favouring in the destiny of the "villain" appear to be at odds without conceptions of "justice". The demon at the end is not subjected to a hell-fire of punishment but rather is given "immortality". This means

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1. Connexions and distinctions between the divine and the more evolved form can be discerned in the two names. Siva is Mahesa and the progeny is Mahisa, the buffalo. Since the buffalo is also associated with death, the conditioned nature (death and birth) of the buffalo, like that of his father, the sage is implicated in the imagery.

that defeat, a "bad event" for the villain, does not automatically entail "bad" consequence since the outcome is complicated by the premise of a compassionate goddess. It also incorporates what we might call a basic non-tragic orientation, encapsulated in the Hindu idea of the open-endedness of existence in time. The expert's commentary brings the points together:

"In previous kalpas the goddess defeated the demon with great difficulty but in one kalpa the 10-handed Kali did not have to kill Mahisasura, because he himself worshipped goddess Durga for many years. In other words -

Mahisasura demon, his evil genius was gradually purified. The goddess turned his evil through her powers. So he himself worshipped Durga. She came and asked him what he wanted. He wanted to know what happened before and she revealed her other forms. At last he said, "there should be a victory over evil. It is a must". So that buffalo's soul mixed with Katyayani Durga. According to Hindu Tantrism, there will be no rebirth for Mahisasura" (also see Kalika Purana 62: 156-164 in Van Kooij 1972: 119).

It is also an account of the esoteric means of short-circuiting rebirth detailed as a story which, whatever else it contains in its cryptic language, at least highlights the idea of the possibility of alteration where the goddess is identified as the relevant power as well as the boon giver. It also relates to the question of suffering raised earlier.

Given that existence in time is construed as open-ended, there is always the possibility for change. In that undesirable states are deemed impermanent there cannot be, nor are there, any bad endings in the myths.

Such cursory statements hardly reflect the complexities of Hindu thought but merely serve to indicate that within that framework, as I understand it, designations like "capricious" and "punitive" fit awkwardly. Where we might identify capriciousness as characterizing the deity's involvement in a calamity like small-pox I have suggested that the Hindu approach

is metaphysical. When a Hindu myth details a confrontation between god and demon it also inserts the idea of the metaphysical interconnectedness between them. This means that in this kind of discourse there is no easy oppositional categorization and evaluation (gods/demons; good/bad and no carve up of the world into gods out there (nature) and humans here (culture or society) however the dichotomy is phrased). Since the demon is fixed to the icon and gets its tika and offerings just like the deity, on this hangs no tale of moralistic retribution. The point is discernible to all who see the icon whether or not they are party to the Tantric disquisitions. For the erudite, the myth details the way to gain mastery over what is deemed to need control -- it is to resort to the powers of the feminine cosmic principle. In other words the introduction of the concept "punitive" and all that it evokes appears to be injecting a vocabulary that does not derive from the cultural dimensions as I read them. While Hindu thought elaborates a metaphysics, is preoccupied with ontological states and the possibility of alteration, it also and always entails a procedure and from that point of view is oriented to action (see Saksena 1967: 32, 37). The pragmatic orientation may be discerned in another dimension of blood sacrifice where the actor's "fear" and the goddess' ferocity (*krodha*) are associated.

#### The Dasai Blood Sacrifice as Heroic Endeavour

Of course, danger is involved, how could it not be if the ritualist reaches for and confronts what is defined as the destructive power in the universe. But the implication of danger need not signify a highly undesirable event so that at this part of the discussion extreme negativity becomes pertinent at last.

Not only is danger involved as a dimension of that kind of



power but danger is also built into certain action sequences of the blood sacrifice procedure. It is not that kind of activity which simply requires a mechanical follow through of directions but entails certain concrete actions which carry the possibility of going wrong. For example, there is the stipulation that the goat must be killed in one blow and should a ritualist fumble then another goat must be killed. Such misadventures are interpreted as ominous and auguring ill. A Chetri remembered the first time he killed a goat when he was eight years old and confessed that he felt great trepidation, uncertain whether he would be able to accomplish the task successfully. Such possibilities are not unique to Kalaratri or blood sacrifice but occur with other rites as well. However, what distinguishes<sup>1</sup> is a greater likelihood for misjudgement and misadventures and a wider range of instances for occurrence. This means that the sacrificial rite constitutes an experiment without in-built guarantees. Within the metaphysical framework the experimental nature of the procedural sequence makes sense since each rite is an event de nouveau where the ritualist is trying to make the connection with cosmic powers. "The higher the destructive power", as explained by one expert, "the greater the risks and the greater the prize". His comment also accords with the suggestion that people themselves approach the occasion as an event which is not pre-programmed for easy accomplishment, irrespective of esoteric level involved.

If risks are incorporated into the procedural format and thereby automatically involve the actors in a fearful situation, the event is not directed at repressing fear but experiencing it.

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1. Another risk involves the necessity to keep the lamp burning. The animal's reactions, like crying, are also taken into account. Should this happen it is viewed as auguring ill. One would also suspect that exactitude in timing, as with other Hindu rites, would be relevant and in this instance especially so if the ritualist is to "catch" the destructive power in any of its forms.

But in so doing, that is by confronting the dangers and taking the risks, the ritualist must act courageously since courage can only be experienced in such a context. Some Tantrics refer to their practices as the way of the hero (*virya*) underlining the necessity for daring, and accuse the abstainers of cowardice. As envisaged by them, performance is preferable to not trying at all even if certain sequences carry the possibility of failure.

If blood sacrifice is considered from the perspective which locates such events as theory-practices which define what is to be taken as relevant, what is to be its meaning and its significance and which at the same time also induces a sense of actuality, certain conclusions may be drawn. Such enactments, whatever else, may be understood as cultural forms which not only inculcate ideas but also impel experience and thereby generate the terms of reality which in this instance is the definition of self as hero. The rite of blood sacrifice provides a context for familiarization with killing, it cautions dexterity in the use of weapons and thereby affords the occasion for the emotional training in daring (see Chakravarti 1963: 43). It also underlines the relevance, necessity and efficacy of violence. Traditional Hindu society, I have argued elsewhere (1981), was essentially militaristic. It is underscored at the metaphysical level by tradition which asserts that the soldier killed in battle goes straight to heaven. If that is the case then the hero definition of its major public actors accords with the character of this kind of state and the demands made on these subjects.<sup>1</sup>

That Durga Puja with its blood sacrifice sequences was supported by the rulers of militaristic states, like Nepal, where violence was not only used against the enemy without,

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1. According to doctrine, though Brahmins were not expected to fight since killing affects their *sattvika* state, nonetheless they may fight when the occasion demands.

but also within, where the mode of punishment produced spectacularly visible and irreversible effects -- amputation of limbs and face branding (Kondos 1981) -- is not surprising since it accords with social values. Today Nepalese military and police officers each contributes an animal to be slaughtered in the state organized sacrifices. None of this, of course, is to say that destructive force is not pertinent outside the militaristic context. Since the fierce goddess is posited as one of the powers in cosmic processes and blood sacrifice is the means of tapping that power, the ritual has relevance in any circumstance according to what is seen as warranting destruction.

This reintroduces the important point, that blood sacrifice like other rites entails work. The fact that ritual texts are called "procedures" underlines their directional nature. As work procedures, rites have specific objectives. This also means that rites constitute actualisations in a temporal frame where the ritualist produces a new state in the entities and beings concerned and where invariably he implicates the invisible cosmic powers.

It would seem that the Hindu orientation entails the idea of human indominantibility. On the one hand it posits the existence of cosmic forces -- vast, grand, universal and imperishable yet, on the other hand, it also posits that humans are not utterly impotent in the face of such powers but may through the right methodology insert themselves into the cosmic relays of power. From that point of view it posits the idea that humans are not at the mercy of such powers but that these are amenable to be tapped through human effort. The observation also tallies with their scheme about the nature of humans for what is instated as the human characteristic par excellence is will (*iccha*) a capacity to manoeuvre things in the future. A human being is also automatically instated as heroic (where

the one term *virya* signifies human, human seed,<sup>1</sup> hero). The other capabilities allocated are knowledge (*gnana*) and the capacity to implement whatever is to be implemented (*kriya*). They comprise the set, I know, I can, I do. Whatever the goal the human characteristic (will) is highly relevant, though in any endeavour all capabilities are involved. Their notions about human capacity to act upon the things of the universe and the ritual objective of blood-sacrifice come together in the production of the great *prasada* (*mahaprasada*).

If the production of the great *prasada* entails the assumption that the destructive force can be grabbed it suggests that their orientation is not that of self-negation nor even propitiation but a presumption of human import, since it presupposes that the ritualist can actually bring about a cosmic connexion.

It would seem that since it is the initiated men of the household who ritually make the great *prasada* and infuse themselves with Kali's destructive power, exclusivity is being effected here. During the night of Kali, utilizing the family's esoteric tradition, not only is the goat killed, is made to contact Devi, but its blood is taken as the great item of *sacra* (*mahaprasada*) by the men and the men only. In some cases the parts of meat are also cooked and eaten there in the shrineroom by the men. The rest, the ordinary *prasada*, is shared, distributed later to other members of the household.<sup>2</sup> While the psychoanalytic approach portrays bloody sacrifices as indicate of men's subliminal sensing of an evil and castrating

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1. It is a particular kind that does not seem to fit into Kristeva's conceptualization of texts which contain two opposed (and interrelated) modes of expression, the "symbolic", signifying law; and the "semiotic", the expression of inarticulate "drives", through rhythm and tonality, as exemplified in poetry (Kristeva 1980:124-47).

2. The other great *prasada*, the barley shoots, is also a male monopoly. Seeds are planted at the beginning of Dasai on the first day and are harvested at the end. Those growing around the central object (the "cosmic pot") are exclusively taken by the initiated men.

mother, it is worth noticing that it is her alleged victims who tap the prized feminine potency holding it exclusively for themselves. Inasmuch as rites for a believer are not fantasy, the exclusion of women is, I think, significant.

### Exclusions

The general phenomenon of exclusion has been approached by some authors in terms of "the solidarity of the lineage" (Bennet 1979). The argument depends on a certain approach to kinship in that it locates wives as affines in kinship systems which follow the patrilineal principle. By classifying the wives of the household "affines" and thereby standing as outsiders to the lineage, the argument appears to make sense. Yet such a location is problematic in that wives are definitely incorporated as members of the line (*harnata*) and become ancestors through the son's performance of his mother's death rites.<sup>1</sup> Daughters moreover are also excluded from the sacrifices. In fact, irrespective of whether a woman is wife, mother or daughter, she does not participate in the sacrificial rites. Given that all three kinds of female kin, wife, mother, daughter, irrespective of how they are classified, are barred, it is fair to say that exclusion relates to gender rather than kinship.

The reasons for female exclusion preferred by Nepalese women covers an assortment of ideas. Some explained the matter in terms of a general structural principle that the head of the household is responsible for the well-being of the family and undertakes a range of rites; other women related their exclusion

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1. I agree with Fruzzetti's suggestion that "lineage" is not the appropriate term for the groupings based on male descent since the term lineage excludes the wives whereas in the Hindu household the women are implicated. Fruzzetti describes their position as "not of the line, but in the line" (1982: 28).

to the periodic recurrence of menstruation and their defilement which would prevent their involvement.<sup>1</sup> While repeating these suggestions, men's commentary on exclusions took a different line in one respect, referring to the risk involved for women. As one man elaborated, "if the woman obtains the Devi mantra which is also the mantra of witches,<sup>2</sup> the woman may use it in the wrong way". His statement attributes the exclusion to an imputed inherent weakness in women injecting a different dimension.<sup>3</sup> In some households, however, women are in fact given the Devi mantra, but during the night of Kalaratri, when the sacrifices are performed in the shrineroom, they are nonetheless restricted entry, despite their access to the mantra in those cases. Of interest is the discrepancy in that one point where it is the men who justify the exclusion in terms of some imputed weakness in women.

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1. Of course, this need not preclude the woman's participation on the occasions when she is not menstruating.
  2. Witches (*bokshi*) are not perceived as affecting the masculine sex, but only other women. While the witch is seen as having destructive powers like Devi the two are definitely not equated. One Nepalese, clearly detailing the nature of the connexion, commented, "We turn to Durgadevi to fight the *bokshi* (witches) as well as other frightening things like the *bhuta* and *preta* (the lingering spirits of the dead)".
  3. It might seem that the argument for exclusion could take the form: since women are polluting, hence are dangerous and therefore in "need of control", an argument that could then be taken to explain women's subordinate position. The matter obviously is complex. Here I merely want to stress that this kind of argument preempts a range of matters. What one notices is that in this context women refer to periodic impurity which signifies the wrong ontological state for a holy activity. It is the inappropriate ontological state that is seen as critical. The other reason given for exclusion relates to some imputed weakness of character, a point heralded in Manu (IX, 17) who boldly outlines base feminine dispositions (in Buhler 1969: 330).

Whatever the reasons, women's exclusion from Dasai rites in general and Kalaratri in particular is merely one instance of a general rule. The Parbatya women are not initiated, are prohibited from touching the Sivalingam,<sup>1</sup> do not execute the death rites for their parents, nor can they learn the sacred language Sanskrit, regarded as the key to esoteric knowledge whereas in contrast the Parbatya men are permitted access to all these worthwhile activities. Dasai is simply another case in point. In that these are seen as particularly valuable within their framework, neither make-believe, fantasies, nor empty routines, it means that women are prohibited from having the same kind of access as do the men. Because of the intangible nature of such disadvantages there is a risk that they may be overlooked. If we are to draw out the sociological significance it is necessary to stress that such exclusions are exclusions from access to what, for believers, are the "true"<sup>2</sup> powers behind things. Though it might sound somewhat odd to the westerner, in effect, the pattern of inclusion and exclusion, entails the differential access to colossal universal powers and with blood sacrifice to the cosmic forces of destruction, here determined according to gender location. Since it is the men who distribute the lesser kind to the women, the women are rendered the dependents. Inasmuch as rites for a believer are not fantasy, the exclusions give the men a monopolistic hold on such ritual endeavours and thus women are prevented from acting.

The patterning also bears on definitions about men and

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1. Instead doctrine stipulates the *baby* Krishna as the relevant deity for women. In ordinary worship there is a set of five great forms (Ganesa, Siva, Devi, Visnu and Surya) which is usually attended to.
  2. "True", according to one Nepalese expert, is what "endures" and is "not ephemeral".

women. In that Dasai in general, but especially the blood sacrifice event, insert the men as the relevant gender in what for Hindus is an important realm of activity, the patterning demarcates the men as the repositories of esoteric knowledge, the relevant actors in extraordinary work as well as the gender which perpetuates family tradition. If it is the men who are exclusively permitted to undertake such inordinately important events, the arrangements both constitute and actualize the idea of male pre-eminence and thereby define and render the women as subordinate to them. This approach again diverges from that of the culture and personality school.

If that school interprets blood-sacrifices as fantasies relating to castration provoked by experiences of a "devouring", "threatening mother" or an "aggressive" and "treacherous mother", the outcome of its analysis is a highly negative portrayal of women (see Kakar 1978: 87-93, 173; Nandy 1980: 14, 27-8, 43). That perspective imputes that women in Hindu society act negatively and are experienced negatively by men, inscribing men as women's victims. Put differently, if that school renders blood sacrifice as the men's strategy for working out their castration problems resulting from experiences with mother, beneath it all, the school instates mother as blameworthy. As I have indicated, in my understanding, blood sacrifice performed during Dasai, is an event where men tap what for them are the extraordinary powers in the universe, produce god-stuff and distribute the lesser version to the women and thereby render women dependent. Whether or not the men can be portrayed as women's "victims", I would take cognizance of the cultural formulations which deem men the significant cosmic actors and define them as the pre-eminent sex. Furthermore, since it is the men who produce potent ritual stuff this kind of one sex ritual participation actualizes and makes plausible the idea of male specialness. The masculine then is both established as and becomes the important gender within the family. Whatever else, the sacrifice



complex, aggrandises men and in contrast situates the women as of lesser consequence as well as cedes men the "cosmic" advantages.

It is possible that the culture and personality school, by approaching blood-sacrifice in a pre-interpreted way, presuming that it constitutes fantasy for the acting out of men's problems effected through mother's behaviour, has side-stepped a close investigation of the indigenous set-up, and it seems to have missed what repercussions that set-up has in the area of gender definitions and appraisals. If the rites are therapeutic as the school insists, and I am not saying that they are or they aren't, this has a high cost for the women -- men's therapy and women's exclusion; men's aggrandisement and women's diminution; men's ritual expertise and women's dependence. It is also possible that a male bias,<sup>1</sup> whether inherent in the theory of the theorist, has crept into the inquiry in the selection of material for investigation despite the undeniable sensitivity to women's issues expressed by some of the proponents of this approach (see Nandy 1980: 37-43; Kakar 1978: passim).

*FROM THE OTHER SIDE*

(a) Wife

Particularly disturbing is the school's concentrated focus on the Kali imagery and the blood sacrifices, while another ritual which specifically bears on the male/female relationship

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1. If the unconscious refers to that domain which is pre-social, it is difficult to understand how Kali can be sensed as "evil" since "evil" is a social concept. Consider this passage: "The mother in the infantile consciousness is both good and bad: in the Kali ritual the evil, castrating image of the mother is predominant, as Carstairs has also noted for his North Indian Village" (Obeyesekere 1981:156).

and which is therefore extremely important, appears to have been neglected. As we have seen, where commentators on male/female relations take as their field the horrific Kali figure along with the blood-thirsty sacrifices and from this human/god interaction draw inferences about the nature of the relationship between man and women, scant<sup>1</sup> attention is given to a concrete ritual where the two human sexes confront each other, specifically, the ritual of husband worship.

In any orthodox household a Hindu wife daily does *pūja* to her husband along the same lines as to the idol of the shrine-room. This is not unique to Nepal where variations occur (Fruzzetti: 1982: 13) the idea nonetheless, is present. If not daily, a Nepalese wife performs the rite at least once a year (Stevenson 1971: 109). The main sequences are straightforward: the wife sits at her husband's feet, makes offerings, then she dips his big toe in water and sprinkles that water over her head and into her mouth as *prasada*. Irrespective of how the culture and personality school would interpret the event, the cultural idea it distills and plays out is, I think, clear enough -- the precise demarcation of humans into two ontologically distinct kinds of beings, the man, a god; the woman, a human worshipper. According to the terms of the ritual enactment, the husband is not merely rendered superordinate to the woman but defined and treated as a member of an entirely different category of being, the divine. So, despite the grandeur of the metaphysical disquisitions which designate a man and his wife as half/half in a relation of being and its energy to become (Siva/Sakti; a man/and his energy); despite the formulations that depict both men and women as the evolved forms of the great primal principles, we notice that in the human ritual a new "truth" is inserted.

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1. Kakar for example simply cites Manu's edit that a wife should worship her husband as a god (1978: 73).

Whether the rite is effective in producing a "reality" is another matter. In any kind of intimate situation of subordination, it does not automatically follow that the subordinate person concurs with the definition being elaborated. The stance from the top, however, is less problematic since the terms are enticingly attractive and there is little reason to suspect that the men would reject its propositions. Furthermore, these propositions appear in conjunction with others which state that the man can do no wrong as far as the wife is concerned.<sup>1</sup> Given that the cultural formulations declare that his divinity is to pertain merely by virtue of location as husband, without any concomittant imperatives required, given such details of everyday life, one is wary of the culture and personality school's emphasis on the male as victim. To say as Kakar (1978: 118) does that the women in late maturity<sup>2</sup> treat the husband's superordinate position in a perfunctory way and gain domestic power and involvement in family decisions, ignores<sup>3</sup> and deflects attention from the import of the institute's proposals, that the husband is the pre-eminent person of the pair with a structural carte blanche, that he can do no wrong,

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1. And endorsed by the authority of the scriptural institutes:

Though destitute of virtue, or seeking pleasure (elsewhere), or devoid of good qualities, (yet) a husband must be constantly worshipped as a god by a faithful wife (Manu V, 154 in Buhler 1969:196).

2. By referring to late maturity Kakar distracts focus on the long period, the decades, when deference may not be given "perfectorily" (1978: 118).
3. Domestic power is not "independence" as Kakar implies (1978: 118) but managerial responsibility. As for decision-making it can carry attendant burdens since decisions are generally required in problematic contexts and often results in favouring some members of the extended household to the disadvantage of others (e.g. which grandson goes to college).

and if a woman wanted to disengage herself from that relationship, traditionally this was impossible. It is not the good husband in "practical" life who provides the test case for the "normative" regulations but the "bad" because it is in such a context that the woman's lack of autonomy becomes a clear issue and is revealed for what it is.

(b) Mother

There are comparable difficulties in the school's treatment of mother. While it claims to heed the cultural definitions, its selection of foci for investigation appear limited and could, I think, be extended further. While it tends to orient its analysis along the line of the mother's "negative" effects on the psyche of the young sons and identifies this as a key complex of Hindu social and psychological life, yet it seems to have inadequately treated certain cultural constructs that impel negative influences in the other direction (son to mother).

To this effect a range of homilies about mother appear and reappear in people's discussions, "Mother is all forgiving" is one. Another states that a "son's misdemeanours drain away like water from a colander". The proposals indicate, amongst other things, that mother is expected to disregard all her son's faults regardless of how she might assess them and follow the cultural imperative to be "all forgiving". Such homilies (as well as many others) not only provide a commentary on people's beliefs about the maternal disposition but also inscribe the required course of behaviour for mothers which in this instance gives the advantage to the son while making demands on the mother.

A further idea about the mother/son relationship is raised in terms of how it bears on the worship of the mother goddess.

Where the culture and personality school interprets blood sacrifice as relating to placation of the goddess, the projected image of an "unreliable" and "treacherous" mother, Nepalese participants commenting on the Dasai series are wont to say

We worship Sakti because it is Sakti who is to look after the creation, that is, the people...To please a mother is easier than to please a father.

Insofar as mother is regarded as "easier to please", it stands as a commentary on behaviour as well as the regulatory charting of ideal behaviour. What this suggests is that in this instance at least mother has actually become what the cultural definition prescribes. It would seem therefore that in the son's assessment, mother is readily amenable to manipulation.

The same general point is made by Nehru and referred to by Kakar who ignores its import. Nehru says, "I had no fear of her, for I knew that she would condone everything I did, and because of her excessive and indiscriminating love for me, I tried to dominate over her a little" (Kakar 1978: 83). Rather than scrutinise the significance of the statement, Kakar labels it the son's "idealisation of the mother" and immediately shifts attention to the fact that this does not apply to the daughter (ibid: 83). The son's maximization of mother's unconditioned love is not at all spelt out by Kakar. And to compound matters, what Kakar does highlight later in his investigation of the mother/son tie is the negative result for the son, that her unconscious desires "compel the son to act as her saviour" (ibid: 89). The lack of follow-through when it is a matter of a negative portrayal of men while sharply focusing on the negative aspects of women reveal a bias, despite the scope and depth of Kakar's investigation.

## (c) Daughter

To turn to daughter, the third important position for a woman. Here I want to briefly consider two areas: firstly to refer to a myth associated with sacrifice where daughter features; and secondly to consider a few but crucial aspects that arise in the daughter relation. My remarks as with the others (wife and mother) are not comprehensive since that kind of detailing is not my objective (see Fruzzetti 1982).

Unlike the culture and personality school which connects blood-sacrifice to the son's castration fears of mother, Hindu commentators explicitly associate this kind of rite with a metaphysical event which involves father and daughter as well as the son-in-law. That event may also contain references to incest prohibitions and if that is the case, the relationship involved does not accord with the mother/son alignment as identified by the school.

The nature of the connexion between blood sacrifice and the myth is elaborated in this expert's statement:

"Kalaratri, the occasion of the blood sacrifices, is considered to be the dreadful event because on the same day the head of the father of Parvati, Dakṣi, had been sacrificed in the fire by Virabhadra, the anger part (*umsa*) of Mahadeva (Siva).

According to this well-known myth, Dakṣi, the father of progeny (himself the son of Brahma) was persuaded by Brahma to bestow his daughter in marriage although he, Dakṣi, was reluctant, having strong lustful desires for his daughter. His daughter, in the myth called Sati, was herself an emanation of Devi who had agreed to manifest in human form for the sake of the creation. She however, had insisted that if Dakṣi angered her, she, the great Devi would withdraw that power. Later on, Dakṣi held a great feast but did not invite Siva and so by slighting his son-in-law Dakṣi revealed his resentment of the marriage

and his antipathy towards his son-in-law (Kramrisch 1981:315). In response Siva descended on the place and from his body the fierce emanations evolved.<sup>1</sup> They destroyed the sacrifice and hurled Dakṣia's head into the fire. As promised, Devi, withdraw her power through the destructive fire (which correlates with the metaphysical idea of *pralaya*). And so the cycle came to a close (ibid: 325).<sup>2</sup> Later Siva restored his father-in-law's head with that of a goat, signifying "desire", which earmarks humans, their capacity to reproduce and transmigrate (see ibid: 316) and with this the beginnings of another cycle.<sup>3</sup>

Since this myth about Dakṣia is expressly associated with the Dasai blood sacrifices and if it does hold ideas about incest prohibitions, then the important pair is father/daughter where the sexual projection of desire is from the father.<sup>4</sup> If blood sacrifice relates to the theme of incest (father's desire of daughter) then the school's interpretation which portrays it as the son's strategy for coping with the mother-engendered castration fears, if that is the case, then within its own psychoanalytic tenets its rendition of blood sacrifice is somewhat problematic.

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1. In one version, it is the angry emanations of Devi.
  2. The beheading of Dakṣia, the patriarchal father of mankind, may also be understood from this point of view.
  3. As with the other myths there is no awful punishment but a defeat and a bestowing of divine favour, for Dakṣia is granted salvation in the end (ibid: 333).
  4. The myth referring to the previous cycle where Brahma (Dakṣia's father) figures, parallels that of Dakṣia where Brahma also lusts after his daughter. In his investigation of the myth Kakar stresses the daughter's incestuous desires for father and more or less ignores the father's, despite the fact that the account he cites also begins with that point: "Brahma (the Creator) has displayed desire for his daughter" (Kakar 1978: 69-70). Compare Kramrisch's rendition of the same myth in which Brahma's lustfulness (1981: 303-5, 309) for his daughter is unambiguously highlighted.

Whatever the outcome of such problems there is one noticeable point -- that the culture and personality school has a proclivity to introduce the castration thesis in contexts where it might not be relevant and refrain from considering other possibilities that might be relevant and hence over determine the import of the mother/son tie and its castration theme for social and cultural institutions. Comparable misgivings arise in the school's handling of the daughter's life-fate.

It seems to me that in the treatment of the daughter's social situation a particular slant creeps into the school's analysis in terms of its selections, stresses and omissions. While a great deal of attention is directed at the hypothesized trauma of castration when it comes to the known, visible and unequivocal shock which occurs with the daughter's dislocation from the family at marriage, there is a tendency to mitigate the negative effect that this might have on her and not to closely scrutinize the possible psychological repercussions on the girl.

That approach, in my opinion, has mitigated the negativity of it all, despite its recognition of the hardships faced by the daughter. This is done firstly by suggesting that certain customs ease the girl's transition to the marital state, customs like female rites (first menstruation), stories and proverbs about feminine ideals of behaviour all of which supposedly "prepare" the girl for marriage; and secondly by claiming that marriage is gradually introduced since the girl's time is "dispersed" between her marital and natal home where "relief" is provided (Kakar, 1978: 75). Against this one may ask whether such procedure were actually effective in easing the break or are they simply suggestions that need to be substantiated. What I think ought to be stressed is that marriages were and are enforced; children were and still are involved; the girl was and is given as a gift which is irrevocable.



Let me spell out what these entail and draw out what I surmise is their significance. The girl is given to a stranger family whether she wants the particular boy or not and whether she wants marriage or not. The enforcement dimension of marriage should not be obscured by statements like "to marry one's daughter off" (ibid: 71). If marriages are arranged and often enforced against the girl's will this enforcement would have repercussions for the child's psyche which would extend beyond the areas of "struggle for identity" and "renunciation of her erotic impulses for her family" that are highlighted by the school (see Kakar ibid: 72). Secondly, one should not forget that children were and to a certain extent still are involved, despite the reformatory legislation which bans child marriage. Traditionally the age was very young and in the case of orthodox Brahmins, around eight years. Therefore in those instances where child marriage occurs, the insertion into a stranger family entails a dislocation which for a child would have been an inordinately alarming experience. Thirdly, from the orthodox point of view she is the gift which cannot be returned. For her the marriage is not only irrevocable but is operative for the duration of her life should she outlive her husband. While prohibition of divorce traditionally also applied to the boy but, since polygyny was possible, the fixedness of his relationship with her was attenuated. The girl would know that marriage in the stranger household, is forever, regardless of her desires. From this one may ask: what about the trauma of *konya dan*?

Recognition of the irreversibility of her position as a gift given not only would entail awareness that she has been rendered absolutely detachable and detached from her natal kin but also that she has to accept that she cannot expect support from those who had been closest to herself. For the young girl, there is no way out except suicide.<sup>1</sup> The young girl learns the

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1. Or running off with another man which would bring its attendant problems.

startling fact that she is alone, not simply "lonely" as Kakar stresses (ibid: 72). In such a situation, the girl is forced to confront, what is I think an unacceptable fact for any human, that she is without support from any direction, even from her natal family, should she reject her marital condition.

The discontent, I would argue, is often manifested in what is identified as a witchcraft attack. The "illness" takes the form of a listlessness, lack of appetite, withdrawing into self, which having no recognisable medical bases (either Ayurvedic or western), is attributed to the baneful influence of some witch. What is significant is that it is in the new bride that most of these "ailments" erupt and constitute a characteristically feminine disorder. Given the nature of the disorder, the category of persons involved and the timing of the occurrence (the initial stage of marriage) then this configuration to my mind indicates the bride's extreme discontent and impotence in an unalterable situation. If that is the case and bearing in mind that nothing comparable is manifested by men, the thesis which presents the son as victim of mother as the lier-motif of its analysis of Hindu life, in my view, provokes some reasons for disquiet.

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