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MAHAMAYA: WOMB OF THE UNIVERSE

BY

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A DISSERTATION

**Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of**

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Anthropology

1995

ABSTRACT

MAHAMAYA, THE WOMB OF THE UNIVERSE

By

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South Asian Ethnographers have assumed that the worship of the Hindu goddess Shakti has existed on the margins of Indian society. It has been assumed that Shakti and goddess worship is part of the “little traditions” of Hindu society. My research on the Mathil community of North Bihar, India, however, shows that the goddess is part of the “great tradition” of Hinduism and she is the dominant textual deity of this region.

The reason that her role within Hinduism has been misunderstood by anthropologists has to do with the complex symbolism and rituals associated with her worship. During the course of Durga puja (the most important ritual of this area) the goddess reveals herself as the “deconstructive” deity, who is closely associated with both ends of several key oppositions within the Mathil community (including, culture verses nature, self verses other, and most importantly, the transcendent verses the everyday). By being on either end of an opposition, the goddess effectively collapses or

deconstructs such oppositions and presents herself as a powerful symbol of the transcendent.

Yet because of her ability to deconstruct oppositions, the goddess is closely associated with the everyday problems of existence, including the problems of personal identity, which in this society is expressed in the idiom of spirit possession. Indigenous healers (called ojhas) use the symbol of the goddess to re-negotiate the identities of individuals experiencing a crisis of identity.

It is my contention that the goddess is able to end the deferment of identity formation, postulated in the psychological theories of J. Lacan, by grounding the identity of the possessed individual. Healing rituals, in this society, set up an intersubjective dialogue between the patient and the goddess which helps to ground the identity of the patient because they are formally being recognized by the goddess, who's reality is beyond question. In this way the ojha helps re-negotiate the social roles of the patient in a manner that makes emotional sense to the patient.

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**This work is dedicated to the memory of my mother Tara,
who's spirit sustained me throughout this project, and to my wife Jo for her
encouragement and love.**

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my committee, John Hinnant, Kenneth David, Paul Edwardo Muller-Ortega, and especially Robert McKinley for his insights, comments and indulgence. Dr. Indranand Sihna's help with Sanskrit translations and insights into Hindu philosophy was invaluable. The help of David Perusek, Steven Zacks and Jo Ellen Sperry in editing the manuscript was much appreciated. In addition there are several people, too numerous to name, who's support (both emotional and scholastic) throughout this long process was crucial to its' completion.

I would especially like to thank Hira and Binu Sinha and their families for providing me with shelter and support during my fieldwork. Finally I would like to extend my most sincere appreciation and thanks to all the men and women of Champanagar who took the time and trouble to answer my seemingly endless and trivial queries. Without their help and support this work would not have been possible.

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INTRODUCTION

The first time I saw Champanagar, I was 14 years old. Having more or less grown up in the American mid-west, my parents decided it was high time that we as a family visit India and get back in touch with our family and roots. As fate would have it, I got to Champanagar just in time for Durga puja. At the time what impressed me most about this ritual was the Santhals (formally a hunting/gathering culture, native to N. Bihar) who danced around the palace gates of Champanagar, sticking long sharp needles through their tongues and cheeks, seemingly impervious to the pain. As a mid-westerner I certainly knew about religious fanaticism, but I had never seen anybody express their devotion in quite this way, nor had I ever seen a religious ceremony that was so markedly sensual in nature. For the worship of the goddess Durga is nothing if not a sensual experience. It engages every sense: the sense of sight, smell, taste, sound and touch. But most importantly it engages ones heart. It is impossible to witness such a ritual without understanding at the onset that such things are to be felt and not known.

This ethnography tries to understand the logic behind the passion that such rituals elicit. At one level, my focus is on spirit healers and spirit possession. But it quickly became obvious to me that such topics in Mathil society are intimately linked to goddess worship and the philosophical tradition within Hinduism called Tantra. Consequently,

the focus of this ethnography, which started off by considering personhood in Mathil society, shifted to include the nature and significance of goddess worship in the community of Champanagar. By understanding the role of the goddess within this community I was able to draw certain conclusions about the nature of personhood in this culture.

Champanagar is a small town in the district of Purnea, which is located in the northern part of Bihar, India. Unlike the dry hot weather that characterizes the southern part of Bihar (Bihar south of the Ganges) this area is flat and semi-tropical. Wedged between the Ganges to the south, and the Himalayas to the north, this lush green area stands in marked contrast to the semi-arid regions of the Gangetic plains. The people here are, by and large, paddy or jute farmers. There isn't much in the way of industry or even those conveniences one associates with modernity.

The ethnic group that dominates the region call themselves Mathil (a group that I myself belong to). Mathila is a truly ancient region, mentioned in such Hindu epics as the Ramainaya (the father of Sita, Janake, was said to be a king of Mathila). These people take pride in their glorious past, a past that links them to highly traditional Hindu values and lifestyles. But this region has long been politically diminutive. They focus their attention and self esteem on upholding religious and philosophical knowledge rather than on political power. Consequently, for the past 100 years or more, Mathila has been a taken for granted polis. It is one of the most backward areas in India. There is little here in the way of roads or transportation, electricity or towns.

The real center of Mathila is the district of Dharbanga, and the true king of the Mathil people use to live in the town of Dharabanga. Purnia is really at the hinterlands of the Mathil world, but is none-the-less predominantly Mathil. The local kings of this region were rivals to the king of Dharbanga, and we shall talk about them in Chapter 8. The institution of kingship is crucial to understanding the religion of this area because it is the king who undertakes the performance of all the major rituals of the community. The king was also traditionally the patron of the priestly caste, the Brahmins. Thus despite the waning of their political power, the king is still a central feature of the social world of this community.

Mathila, through the centuries, has undergone several religious movements. Patlaputra, the ancient capital of the Maurya empire, is still the site of the current political center of Bihar (the modern day city of Patna). Buddhism certainly was once a major sect of this entire region, but few signs of it remain today. The dominant religious tradition of this area today can legitimately be called Tantric. Tantra, as a philosophical movement within Hinduism, dates back to the 4th century AD but it was not until around the 6th century that it had firmly established itself within the mainstream of Hinduism. Thus it is one of the most modern Hindu philosophical movements. It was probably around this era that Tantra established itself in Mathil society and has been the dominant religious tradition of the area ever since. Here Tantra is synonymous with the Shakta tradition of Hinduism. That is, here the dominant deity is the goddess Shakti. The major rituals of this region, which we shall talk about in Chapters 3, 4, and 5, revolve around the tantric worship of the goddess.

I started off my fieldwork with the idea that I would focus on indigenous healers of this region, called *ojhas*, in an attempt to understand the concepts of personhood within Mathil society. But the institutions that legitimate and justify healing and personhood seem to be so closely related to the concepts of Tantra and goddess worship that I found it impossible to say anything about *ojhas* without first understanding the cult of the goddess. The link between the goddess and healing rituals were hammered into me time and again by the *ojhas* I interviewed. Consequently, the emphasis of this work shifted somewhat from trying to understand *ojhas* and healing to trying to understand the role of the goddess and the religious systems of Mathil society. In the end, these two topics certainly complement each other, and both must be addressed if one is to understand personhood as it is defined within Mathil society.

I thought it might be useful to give a brief account of the way South Asian ethnographers have dealt with goddess worship in the past, as such a review points out some of the instructive oversights of South Asian ethnography.

THE GODDESS IN WESTERN SCHOLARSHIP

The Marginalized Goddess: What is interesting about the way South Asian ethnographers have dealt with the role of the goddess within Hinduism is that, by and large, they have viewed her as peripheral. This, I think, is attributable to the undue influence that Redfield's model of great vs. little tradition in peasant societies has had on Indian ethnographies (Redfield, 1955). By and large, Indian ethnographers have treated goddess worship as being part of the 'little' tradition of Hindu society.

This bias has extended to the treatment of Tantra itself. Because of the bias introduced by the great/little tradition model of studying society, Tantra has been relegated to the local traditions of Indian society. Thus it has been viewed as something apart from the mainstream of Hinduism, or worse, it has been ignored altogether. This tendency to see Tantra and goddess worship as part of the local tradition of Indian society has caused Indian ethnographers to deal with Tantra in an unsystematic way. This bias has its roots in some older ethnographies, but has persisted to the present day, and has flawed several otherwise excellent works.

L. Babb views the goddess (and the tantric philosophy associated with her) as part of the little tradition of India (Babb, 1970, 1975). According to him, the goddess is malevolent when unwed, but benevolent and part of the (textual) great tradition when wed. “When female dominates male the pair is sinister; when male dominates female the pair is benign” (Babb, 1975, pp. 226). In her unwed form she is associated with birth, death, sex, disease, agriculture, etc.; in other words with all the dynamic aspects of existence that effect the everyday life of the community. Thus Babb is mistaken to call the goddess the “sinister” force of the universe, she is rather the dynamic force of the universe, and her name “Shakti” (power) implies this. She is always associated with her consort Siva, the passive force of the universe. These forces are neither good or bad, but rather a part of existence itself. Neither is complete or possible without the other. Babb points out that the goddess is more ‘polluted’ than the ‘textual’ deities of Hinduism, and thus is more approachable by everyday mortals. Pollution is definitely not the right word to use when describing the goddess, but whatever we say of her could

equally well be said of her consort Siva (see Ch. 4 or 5). The “polluted” deities, Shakti and Siva, mediated between the high textual gods and the local gods of the village (the little tradition). Great tradition goddesses as well as local deities are closely linked to Shakti, as Babb points out. Shakti and Siva are linked to the everyday problems of existence, such as spirit possession, the problems of agriculture, etc. We can see that the goddess and her consort offer a complex symbolic mediation between great and little traditions. What is more, and is a point Babb neglects, Shakti and Siva are textual deities, and thus are well established within the great tradition of Hinduism. Yet Babb by implying that they are only a part of the little tradition, is blind to the textual literature on the goddess, and thus neglects to study her significance in a systematic way. A reading of this textual tradition precludes any simple dichotomy between sinister and benevolent, or between male and female deities.

Babb’s line of reasoning is taken up by J. Preston (Preston, 1980). Preston, in his assessment of goddess worship in Cuttack Orissa, feels that goddess worship is part of a “tribal” form of worship, but gives no evidence to back this up. Like Babb, Preston views the goddess as sinister, but then goes on to discuss the fact that goddess’ such as Durga are associated with caring for the ill, the possessed, and those afflicted by misfortune. That is, the goddess looks after the everyday needs of her worshipers. Preston states that the cult of the goddess (Tantra) is an “unorthodox interpretation” of Hinduism (Preston, 1980, p.19). Tantra and goddess worship is viewed as non-brahmanic. But according to Hindu tradition, Tantra is an orthodoxy, as attested by the various sacred texts that deal with the nature and qualities of the goddess (see for

instance Brown's analysis of the Devi Bhagvat Puran, 1990, or Coburn's translation of the Devi-Mahatmya, 1991). It is the so called 'left handed orthodox school' of Hinduism. To Preston, goddess worship is a way for marginal groups to integrate into Hinduism, because it has remained a folk tradition that operates on the margins of Hinduism. "Secular themes are easy to integrate in the goddess cult because it has remained essentially a folk tradition, which has operated at the margins of classical Hinduism for thousands of years" (Preston, 1980, p.90). The goddess mediates between tradition and modernity, as well as between different groups within Hindu society. Thus despite her marginal nature, the goddess seems to serve a crucial role in Cuttack society. Both Preston and Babb imply that the goddess is marginal to the great traditions of Hinduism because of her association with the immediate realities of the community.

S. Kakar feels that although Tantra has a pan-Indian spread, it represents a, "resurrection of the ancient pre-Aryan religion of the mother" (Kakar, 1982, p.152). But Kakar presents us with no evidence to link Tantra and goddess worship to pre-Aryan religions. Kakar, like Preston and Babb, feels that Tantra and goddess worship has tended to exist on the fringes of Indian society. He too assumes that the goddess is sinister, and is associated with a fear of womanhood.

This tendency to marginalize the role of goddess worship in Hinduism has been a major problem of Indian ethnography. T.N. Madan, in his discussion of Indian religion pays no attention either to goddess worship or to Tantra (Madan, 1989). Unfortunately the great/little tradition model that marginalized the role of Tantra, which, as I will argue, mediates between the textual and regional traditions of Hinduism, has blinded

Indian ethnographers to the importance of this tradition. Authors such as Daniel, in his excellent discussion of Tamil personhood (Daniel, 1984), discusses practices and concepts that would legitimately be called tantric, but doesn't focus on Tantra itself.

Because of this he misses the indigenous thoughts (philosophies) that deal with the relationship between analytic and synthetic knowledge, a crucial focus of his work.

Tantric philosophy views the goddess Shakti as that which can be differentiated, that is, Shakti is a symbol of analytic knowledge. Siva, her consort, is that which can not be differentiated, a symbol synthetic knowledge. It is the relationship between these two important ordering principles of Indian society that tantric philosophy takes up.

Therefore, Daniel's work would have been much more complete had he paid closer attention to what Tantra has to say about analytic and synthetic knowledge. Raheja talks briefly about the role of the goddess (such as Kali) and the rituals associated with her, but does not follow up on it (Raheja, 1988). This is a crucial mistake, as her ethnography attempts to understand the logic of power and status in north India. The work would have been much richer if she focused more on the role of Shakti (power) in the ingestion of polluted substances. The status of the *brahmin* is to a great degree dependent on his *shakti*, and his consequent ability to ingest the pollution of a gift and yet be unpolluted by it. In this he plays a role similar to the great god Siva, who drinks the cosmic poison of the universe, and yet is unaffected by it. Raheja's work focuses on the status and ritual pollution of giving and receiving gifts. It is odd that she chose not to explore the logic of Shakti worship and tantric philosophy which seems crucial to this process. These omissions are due to the tradition within Indian ethnography that has

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viewed Tantra and goddess worship as part of the little tradition, and thus has not studied it in a systematic manner.

The exception to these omissions within anthropology has been the works of S. Wadley and D. Kopf. Wadley sees Shakti and the tantric philosophy behind goddess worship as a key ordering principle of Indian society (Wadely, 1975, 1977). Wadley's work point out the importance of studying Tantra and goddess worship in more detail, as it is an important aspect of Indian social structure. Kopf gives us a historical look at the role of Tantra in Bengal. Tantra in Bengal played a key role in reasserting the status of women. According to him,

“common features of the counter traditions were a softening of patriarchal authoritarian values; a concept of love distinguished from lust and representing a sanctified view of sexuality; an erotic vision of divinity or the use of sexual bliss as a metaphor of spiritual bliss; a deepening interest in feeling or emotion; and a sympathetic depiction of women as human beings” (Kopf, 1984, p.163).

Both these works begin to deal with Tantra in a more systematic manner. They provide us with a good base on which to build a more detailed study on the role of Tantra in Indian social structure.

Tantra in Religious Studies: Although Indian ethnography has paid little attention to Tantra and goddess worship, the field of religious studies has provided some excellent translations and interpretations of certain key tantric works. This is because Sanskrit scholars did not buy into the great/little tradition model that blinded anthropologists to the importance of certain indigenous traditions. J.F. Stahl, in his classic article, pointed out that things such as possession, which has been seen as part of the little traditions of India, were actually part of the great textual tradition of Hinduism (Stahl, 1963). Thus,

it was important to study such things in a more systematic manner than most anthropologists have done.

M. Eliade provides an excellent introduction to the philosophy of Tantra. He points out that Tantra quickly became incorporated into the mainstream of Indian thought and culture.

“We do not know why and under what circumstances it came to designate a great philosophical and religious movement which, appearing as early as the fourth century of our era, assumed the form of a pan-Indian vogue from the sixth century onward....It is a pan-Indian movement, for it is assimilated by all the great Indian religions and by all the sectarian schools.” (Eliade, 1958, p.200)

It is a pan-Indian movement with a long and complex textual and philosophical tradition. Eliade was among the first generation of contemporary scholars to study Tantra in a systematic manner.

The works of Muller-Ortega (1989), Silburn (1988), Mackenzie Brown (1990), Brooks (1990), Coburn (1991), etc., carry on this tradition. They give us detailed translations and analysis of certain key tantric texts. These authors take Tantra at a deep philosophical level and give the English speaking world the first real look at Tantra as a system of philosophy. The problem with such works is that they are focused on a textual and philosophical level, and do not attempt to understand Tantra as a social system.

The works of the above mentioned Sanskrit scholars provide a good background by which to approach Tantra as a social system. They lay to rest the idea that Tantra and goddess worship is marginal to mainstream Hinduism. In this work I will expand on the background provided by such scholars by analyzing Tantra as a religious system. That is, I will analyze Tantra not only from a textual or philosophical point of view, but also

as a social system. Tantra is a dominant ideology in Mathil society, not some marginal esoteric philosophy. Rituals such as Durga puja are crucial to understanding the Mathil psyche, and so we will devote much time to understanding their relevance.

THE ROLE OF TANTRA AND THE DEVI

The central reason for the misreading of goddess worship by so many bright and insightful ethnographers has to do with the unique philosophy that Tantra presents.

Tantra is one of the many internal reform movements that took place in Indian society, but unlike Jainism or Buddhism, Tantra insisted that it was an orthodox movement. This meant that it did not reject the Vedas or the truths that are said to reside therein. Nonetheless, the Tantrics proposed a radically new perspective that represented a mature philosophical rethinking of Hindu theology (see Sanderson, 1985). Even while insisting on the absolute validity of the Vedas, they came up with a radical new liturgy and philosophy that they felt was more suitable to the *Kali yuga* (the contemporary epoch).

As the Vedas were written at an earlier time, the truths that they contained were still legitimate, but the path it recommended to achieve these truths were no longer feasible in this corrupted era. Thus Tantric authors hoped to remedy some of the esoteric shortcomings of earlier Hindu philosophy.

They did this by emphasizing, above all else, the practical. This is so at a philosophical level as Tantra proposes a system of meditation that is supposed to give the serious student enlightenment in their own lifetime. But for our purposes the more

important point is that Tantra did not shy away from the everyday practical problems of existence. J.C. Heesterman in a series of brilliant articles has delineated the central problem of classical Hindu thought, namely, that Hindu philosophy saw a radical rupture between the world of the transcendent (in other words, between the goals and worldview of the ascetic) and the mundane world of everyday life (Heesterman, 1985). The ascetic would traditionally extract him or her self from the everyday world completely. This meant that the everyday world had no real link (ideologically) to the ultimate goals of Hindu theology. Tantra on the other hand, seems to have found a way around this 'inner conflict' of Hinduism by specifically linking the everyday world of power and politics to the transcendent world of the ascetic. This is so because one of the hallmarks of tantric philosophy is that it sees the path toward enlightenment in the everyday sensual experiences of life. Sex, power, food, etc., are all used as meditations to achieve transcendence. That is, in the very mist of the mundane world, there is the transcendent. This is so because Tantra is, to an extent, an existential philosophy. The passions of existence, far from being rejected, are seen as the only path toward a higher consciousness. If channeled properly, any human passion can be put to the service of enlightenment. Thus Tantra proposed a philosophy that integrated the everyday world of Indian society to the world of the ascetic.

The crucial point is that Tantra seems to deliberately mediate between 'great' traditions and 'little' traditions. The everyday non-textual traditions are made part of the great traditions of Hinduism in this philosophy. As Tantra established itself as one of the dominant movements of contemporary Indian philosophy, the distinction between great

and little traditions has become so murky as to be useful only as a heuristic device. Consequently, any understanding of Mathil society has to be both textual and ethnographic. This ethnography will show how closely related the textual tradition is to the practical institutions of healing. The two are so closely related that one can not really talk about healing ritual without first understanding the role of the textual goddess in Mathil society.

By paying close attention to both the textual deity and how she is actualized in practice, I have been able to draw certain conclusions about personhood in Mathil society. The self in this society seems to fit the Lacanian model of personhood (Lacan, 1977, 1978). The self only exists or becomes manifest in its ongoing relationship with others. That is, the self in Mathil society always implies the other of an intersubjective moment. The self is only objectified by recognizing itself in the desire of the other. It is when this relationship between the self and the other breaks down that the *ojha* (spirit healer) must step in to try and reestablish a relationship between the self and the social; a relationship that will ground the self by linking it to the goddess. It is significant that the self in Mathil society is so tied to the desire of the other, for desire is indeed a loaded term in Hindu philosophy. Desire is the only explanation that Hindus seem to offer to account for creation itself. "Desire entered the One in the beginning. It was the earliest seed, of thought the product. The sages searching in their hearts with wisdom; Found out the bond of being in non-being." (Rg Ved, X. 129, as found in Radhakrishnan and Moore, 1957). Thus the objectification of the universe itself resulted from desire. It is desire that seems to sustain creation, the desire of Siva for Shakti and Shakti for Siva.

That is, the desire of the transcendent for the differentiated universe and the desire of the differentiated universe for the transcendent. It is desire that unites the self to the other, but most importantly, it is desire that unites the human self to the divine.

It is this last and most crucial play of desire, the mutual desire that unites the self and the divine, that is made manifest in the rituals of Mathil society. Therefore, in order to understand the concepts of personhood in Mathil society, it is crucial to understand the relationship that is set up between the self and the divine. It is this relationship that this work will explore.

The reason I have spent so much time discussing the nature of the Goddess in Indian society has to do with the fact that spirit healers in Mathila justify their ability to heal exclusively in terms of Goddess worship. More generally, ritual seems to be closely tied to the expression and mediation of spirit possession. The ritual cycle, which is discussed in chapter 3, specifies the time that possessed individuals are most likely to go into an 'active' phase of possession. By conceptualizing summer as a time of disorder and winter as a time of order, the ritual cycle delineates the legitimate expression of personal trauma in the idiom of spirit possession. But without a doubt, the most elaborate and significant rituals in this region revolve around the worship of the goddess, especially the worship of the goddess in her most awesome form, when she is worshipped as Durga. Consequently, in order to know anything about the nature of spirit healers in Mathil society, we must first understand the significance of the Goddess and Goddess worship in this society. Chapters four and five will give the reader a general introduction to the nature and importance of Goddess worship in this culture.

But closely associated with the goddess is her consort, the great lord Siva.

Indeed, in many ways Siva and Shakti represent two aspects of the same divine principle. This is expressed metaphorically by the fact that the divine couple is often represented in the act of copulation. The two are seen as inseparable, and so to know one one has to address the other. This crucial fact will be discussed in chapter two in my analysis of the Siva-lingum. The Siva-lingum is the dominant symbolic representation of the great god Siva, but as we shall show, the fact that this symbol is a graphic representation of the eternal union of Siva and Shakti implies that wherever there is Siva there is Shakti and vice versa. Spirit healers therefore consider themselves to be devotees of both deities. But for philosophical and symbolic reasons, Siva is seen as the dormant partner while the goddess Shakti is seen as the active. It is for this reason that spirit healers focus on goddess worship, for it is she that is ultimately able to help a possessed individual.

The other institution that has a direct bearing on spirit possession is the central institution of kinship. Mathila has a fairly sharply defined life-cycle trajectory. Changes in an individual social status tend to be closely associated with the logic of kinship. For an individual's primary group of reference, in this society, is his or her kin network. By understanding the nature of kinship in this society (discussed in chapter eight) we will be in a position that allows us to predict the crisis moments in an individuals life. For such crisis moments tend to occur during periods of transition. The moment when an individual is expected to change their status, say from youth to adulthood, or from outsider to insider within a kin network, are the moments when they are most likely to experience psychological trauma. And it is precisely at such moments that they are most

likely to express such trauma in the form of spirit possession. Consequently, by understanding something about kinship in Mathil society, we will be in a position to predict the phases in an individual's life when they are likely to be attacked by spirits, an idea we shall take up in chapter nine.

The focus of this work is on spirit healers (called *ojhas*) in Mathil society and the nature of spirit possession. But as is always the case with social institutions any one topic implies a multitude of related topics. One must attempt to understand the interconnections between such related institutions if one is to gain any meaningful understanding of a given institution. Therefore, the subject of *ojhas* and spirit possession can't be understood without first understanding other institutions such as ritual and kinship which have a direct bearing on it.

It is for this reason that I have structured this work the way that I have. Chapter one gives the reader an introduction, a first look at *ojhas* and what they do. But before we can consider the implications of the healing rituals that the *ojha* performs, we must look at other related institutions. Therefore I do not directly take up the topic of spirit possession and *ojhas* again until the final chapter (chapter nine). The intervening chapters are meant to give the reader the necessary background by which to make sense of what spirit possession and personhood in Mathil society is about.

CHAPTER ONE: OJHAS

Ojhas are part-time medical specialists. They are usually small-scale farmers, or farm laborers who have undertaken a period of training under a *tantric* adept or an established healer. *Ojhas* are usually the first people that a villager will consult during a time of medical crisis.

Because of the flexible nature of this institution, there are no clear boundaries between a healer and a non-healer. It is more a matter of degree than any absolute criteria that distinguishes an *ojha* from a non-*ojha*. Since just about everyone has seen or is familiar with the indigenous healing rituals of this area, and as such healing rituals are justified within the idiom of “magic”, (i.e. something that results automatically from the performance of certain actions, and consequently, the individual performing the action need not be anyone special) anyone is at liberty to try their hand at healing. It is not at all unusual for a neighbor or a relative to be the first person to try to heal a possessed individual. It is only when such local efforts fail that a ‘real’ *ojha* (i.e. one who accepts money, or has a reputation for healing) is called. The following example taken from my field notes may help to illustrate this point.

Kilisri Devi was a woman in her mid fifties. She was possessed one day shortly after her neighbor died. According to her, she went to cut some *shinghi* (a type of vegetable) and a tree one night, when she was attacked by a spirit being. She didn’t realize what had happened till the following morning, at which time she began to rave about being possessed. “I was not conscious [or in my right mind],” she told me.

The local villagers gathered around her and debated what course of action should be taken. It was agreed that her neighbor (the one that had died) was the one who had possessed her. The ghost of the neighbor had been ‘tied’ to a tree (*bhano* in Mathli, literally to tie) by a local *ojha*. Now the ghost lives in the tree, the very same

tree she had gone to cut down.¹ No *ojha* was called. Instead a neighborhood boy by the name of Sanjay (age 16 or 17) along with other villagers decided to take matters into their own hands. They took a few burning embers and put *peeple* leaves, hair and chili peppers on them. The smoke that resulted from this action was then allowed to engulf the patient (Kilisri Devi). Despite her raving, the villagers forced her to inhale the smoke. Now in case you have never been around an Indian kitchen, chili pepper smoke is quite unpleasant indeed. It is sort of like inhaling black pepper. As she breathed in the smoke, Kilisri Devi raved even more, but eventually the experience was so unpleasant that the ghost decided to leave her body. I asked Sanjay, “how did you know about the peppers?” He said, “I have seen it done around here. When we put the smoke, she went to the tree (where the ghost lives) and fell down. We splashed water on her head and the ghost left. Some Mohammadian *ojha* was called to nail the ghost to the tree. I can’t remember his name. The ghost is nailed to the Boa tree.”

This example illustrates the casual nature of such healing rituals. Anyone who has seen such a ritual is welcome to try their hand at it. In fact, this was to become a major obstacle in my own work, because the more questions I asked about such rituals, the more my reputation as a ‘healer’ flourished. Mind you, this was totally beyond my control; despite my insistence that I was only a student of anthropology who was trying to understand the nature of such things, the villagers assumed that because I was studying such rituals, I too must be a powerful *ojha*. Consequently, after the first month or so of my stay in Champanagar, I could not go to see any such rituals without myself being asked to help cure the patient (on reflection, I rather think that my refusal to help was interpreted as a sign of stinginess or ill will by many of the locals). Even the *ojhas* that I interviewed tended to assume that my ‘guru’ had sent me to Purenia to find out

¹ *Ojhas* usually get rid of troublesome ghosts by ‘tying’ them to either a tree or an old dilapidated house. This is done by first calling upon the spirit (i.e. inducing an active phase of possession in the patient) then chasing the ghost out of the patient. Once the ghost has left, the *ojha* will use various *mantras* (usually quite non-nonsensical little rhymes recited in the local language) to ‘hold’ the ghost. Once the ghost is captured in this way, the *ojha* ties it permanently by driving an iron nail into a tree.

new techniques of healing. They mostly treated me as a fellow *ojha*. For by the logic of such things, why else would anyone spend so much time and trouble learning about it?

This points out an important element of such rituals. Namely that they are first and foremost a practical response to a medical emergency. Unlike the *brahmin* priest, who performs rituals for the general well being of the community or the world at large, the *ojha* performs rituals to help solve a specific problem. Thus the old distinction between magic and religion seems to work fairly well here, Van Baal sums up this distinction by defining magic as, “simple rites performed for the purpose of concrete ends,” while religion is defined as, “all explicate and implicate notions and ideas, accepted as true, which relate to a reality which cannot be verified empirically” (Van Baal, 1971, p.6 and p.3). But it is important to keep in mind that both *ojhas* and *Brahmins* are working within the same over-all frame of reference. This is a point we will consider in detail at another time, but for now it is enough to say that both legitimate themselves by referring to exactly the same world view. This also helps us to understand the difference between an *ojha* proper and a local villager, like Sanjay in our above example, who responds to an emergency by performing a healing ritual; an *ojha* establishes him (or her) self as such by the reputation they gain through healing people. That is, an *ojha* is someone villagers recognize and identify as a healer. There are no clear and fast boundaries between an *ojha* and a regular individual, the only thing that distinguishes one from the other is the ephemeral nature of reputation. What this points out again is the practical nature of such institutions. Because a person only gains his or

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her ² reputation as a healer by healing. The more successful an *ojha* is, the greater his reputation.

Given this state of affairs, it makes sense that the majority of *ojhas* I interviewed spent a good deal of time telling me just how powerful they are. They are prone to shameless bargaining, because such boasting only adds to their reputation as fearless healers who do not shy away from confrontations with ghosts. Not only does this vanity add to their reputation, but I think, it also helps them deal with situations that any sane person (in this society) would run away from.³ *Ojhas*, like everyone else, seem to firmly believe in the reality of ghosts or *dines* (witches) who are said to have the power to seriously harm individuals. Therefore it seems psychologically necessary for *ojhas* to convince themselves of their own power in order to confront such malevolent entities. An example might help the reader understand the hyper-confidence that such individuals possess.

I was talking to Pharabho Mondal, an *ojha* of some repute, about a Muslim woman who had been possessed. I told him that the spirit was a particularly powerful one. His response was: “No matter how powerful a ghost, if my true *guru*’s blessings are with me, it can be controlled...It doesn’t matter if it is a Hindu ghost who has promised to be there or a Muslim ghost who has promised on the Koran, it will come under my control. I am the *daroga* (police-inspector) of ghosts. It doesn’t matter if its night or day, they will run away after seeing me. But if he doesn’t, I will just take some salt and read *mantras* over it and no matter where he [the ghost] goes, I will vanquish him. I am the *daroga* of ghosts. If I feel like it, I will let him go, or bind him to a tree or bury him.”

² In theory women can become healers. I have heard many stories of powerful female healers, but I never actually met a woman who was considered to be an *ojha*.

³ This is not all that different from doctors, especially surgeons etc. in our own society. Such people have to convince themselves of their own omnipotence if they are to perform the stressful task of cutting open a person’s chest or brain.

Individuals like Pharabho even seem to feel that their reputations spill over to the world of spirits. The very act of consulting such an individual will make the ghost run away. Pharabho is an especially boastful individual, but just about every *ojha* I met took pains to assure me (or was it themselves?) that they were indeed powerful people, who were feared by witches and ghosts.

Now in Mathil society, just about everyone (except perhaps for the ‘modern’ educated elite) believes in the power of the *ojha*. It is not even so much a matter of belief, *ojhas*, like ghosts and witches, are simply a fact of life. People may be skeptical about an individual *ojha* and his powers, but no one really questions the fact that some *ojha*’s really do have the ability to do battle with spirit beings. But Champanagar, along with the rest of India, is in the process of re-inventing itself. “Modernity” is finally having an impact on even such remote areas of Indian. Consequently, along with electricity (which is irregular at best) video huts, T.V.s and the like, Champanagar also has two bio-medical doctors, one homeopathic doctor, and a *compounder* (a compounder is a pharmacist in the local language). I thought it would be interesting to interview such people to see what they think about *ojhas*.

The first doctor I interviewed, A.K. Singh, was very hostile toward *ojhas*. Throughout the interview, he seemed very tense and ill at ease by my line of questioning. I think he was trying very hard to appear ‘modern’, especially since he knew I had come from America, the promised land of modernity. This would tend to cast doubt on the sincerity of his responses, but I include them none-the-less. In keeping with his modern persona, the good doctor kept speaking to me in broken English (which was very

difficult to understand), or Hindi, and not Mathili, the local, but apparently lower status language of the area.

At first he denied that any ‘possessed’ person had ever visited him. He kept insisting that there is no such thing as possession. When I pressed him on this point, he finally said that there are certain people, mostly young women who pretend to be possessed. According to him, such people usually are experiencing some kind of domestic problem, problems with their husbands or in-laws. In such cases, he said,

“I give them a painful injection, or I give them “water” [an I.V.] to make sure they stop pretending. [that is, he gives them a deliberately painful treatment to make sure they will stop coming to him] For example, there is a young woman from Jagni who kept fainting every few weeks. She came [to his clinic] three times. Each time I gave her a painful injection and water.⁴ After the third time she complained about the cost of the treatment, so I yelled at her. I told her, ‘Why are you wasting your husbands money when you know you are not sick!’ She never returned after this...The big problem is when they [*ojhas*] try to cure snake bites. 70-75% of snakes are not poisonous so then *jhar phoor* (literally to sweep, the act of ritual healing that *ojhas* perform) is effective. However, when it is a poisonous snake, and the patient is near death, then the *ojha* refers them to us. Usually too late.”

As we can see, the good doctor does not much care for *ojhas*. Dr. Singh felt that all *ojhas* are charlatans, and he did not feel that there is any such thing as a ‘mental’ disease. He felt that all problems, including the ‘hysteria’ of young women, were at heart medical (or biological) problems. As there is no such thing as ghosts, people can not be possessed by them, and anyone who claims to be or anyone who claims to do *jhar phoor* to get rid of ghosts, is obviously a fake.

⁴ Giving people saline water IVs is a very popular cure for just about any illness, but especially for ‘nervous’ or mental illness. Patients will measure the seriousness of their illness and the power of the cure by the number of bottles they were given. E.g. “It was a powerful illness, the doctor gave me 5 bottles.” I have asked around and still haven’t found any connection between saline IVs and mental disorders. But just about everyone in this society, educated or not, believes in their efficacy.

The other doctor in town, Dr. J.P. Singh, was a little more generous. At first he too denied ever having dealt with a possessed person. But then told me that most of his patients were lower class, and lower caste individuals. The majority of them, he said, were illiterate, and so tended to believe in *ojhas*. According to Dr. Singh, such people will go to an *ojha* first and only come to him if the *ojha* has failed. The *ojhas* themselves recommend their clients come visit the doctor in cases they know they can not cure. They tend to send the 'physical' cases to him.

I asked if he had ever sent one of his patients to an *ojha*. At first he said he had never done so, but when I asked him specifically about 'hysterical' patients, he said that in cases of hysteria he knew that the illness will get better by itself. In his opinion, the majority of such cases can be cured by marrying the woman off or by sending for her husband to come back and live with her. "Hysteria" seems to be a catch-all phrase that is used by the educated elite of this area to describe any mental problem. It is most closely associated with young women who are thought to be sexually frustrated. In such cases, Dr. Singh will give the person a saline I.V., or a sedative, but if this doesn't help, or if the patient is too poor to afford the treatment, then he tells them to go see an *ojha*! The doctor's reasoning for this is that whatever else they may do, *ojhas* don't hurt the patient in any way, and in such cases (i.e. in cases of hysteria) they seem to be successful. So Dr. Singh told me that *ojhas* recommend patients to him, and he recommends patients to them.

When I asked him to tell me more about *ojhas*, he went on to say that hysteria is often associated with sexual traumas. It is a disease like any other, but a 'mental'

disease. He said that the *jahar phoor* that the *ojha* does is a kind of psychotherapy, a local (*desi*) version of therapy. So in a way, the *ojha* is the equivalent of a therapist, and this is what makes them successful. As we see, the bio-medical doctors in Champanagar seem to be split in their opinion of *ojhas*. One discounts them entirely, while the other feels they do have some effect in treating mental problems.

I asked the homeopathic doctor in town, an individual by the name of Ram Singh about *ojhas* and specifically about the case of Kalanand's sister a woman in her early twenties who was actively possessed, as I knew beforehand that he had been consulted on her behalf. At first Ram denied that he ever had any dealings with *ojhas*, or ever recommended such people to his patients. But then he said that patients, especially young people often come to him with 'hysterical' symptoms. In such cases a doctor would give them 'water' (i.e. an I.V.) then recommend to them that they seek the kind of cure that they find most comfortable. It is a matter of their choice which cure they find most appealing, literally what he said was it is a matter of taste, "what they wish to eat is what will satisfy them."

When he saw that I agreed with him, he gained confidence and went on. He said that homeopathy cures both mental and physical ailments and he gets patients who suffer from both. But often times when one deals with hysteria, a medicine will be given that cures it, but two days later the symptoms return. So it is good to give the patient a 'medical' treatment and then encourage them to get whatever kind of 'mental' treatment they find helpful. After all, in cases which involve mental symptoms, the patient will only respond to mental approaches to treatment. Hence they will not be satisfied (or fulfilled)

unless they are given the treatment they believe in. Because most of the people in this area believe in *jhar phoor* the doctor should encourage them to go to an *ojha*, if it looks like that is what they need. Consequently, the doctor had no hesitation in recommending *ojhas* in cases that involved mental symptoms.

The compounder (or pharmacist) in town is related to the homeopathic doctor. His name is Sanjeev Singh and he probably deals with more patients than any of the other three individuals we have so far considered. This is so because patients often bypass the doctors in town altogether and come directly to him or one of his assistants. I talked to him on several occasions, and of all the people I talked to, he seemed to be the most sympathetic toward *ojhas* and their abilities. He said he had no hesitation in recommending them, and they often tell their patients to consult him, especially in cases that involve infections etc. According to Sanjeev, people often have 'mental' problems, problems that involve their sexuality or their family. All that a doctor can do in such cases is give them 'water' (an I.V.) or a sleeping pill. This may or may not help. According to him, curing such mental problems is a matter of belief, and this is where *ojhas* have a useful part to play in the medical system of the area. Because people believe in *ojhas* and their ability to heal them, *ojhas* are effective in healing them. Sanjeev's view is that *ojhas* and doctors must be integrated into an overall system that divides illness into categories that are best treated either by medicine or by healing rituals.

The *ojhas* I interviewed were generally in agreement with the above view. They seem to have no hesitation in labeling certain diseases (*khusts* or suffering) as being

purely somatic and so within the domain of doctors. Other *khusts*, on the other hand, are caused by spirit attacks and so in such cases the *ojhas* brand of healing would be more effective. Here is an excerpt from an interview with Pharabho Mondal.

Me: So when people experience illness (*khust*) it is because of a *dine* (witch) ?
 PM: No. There is also illness. If there is an illness of the body, then I will be told [i.e. by my spirit or familiar]. I will know that *jhar phoor* [*jhar phoor* is the act of exorcism by which the *ojha* heals individuals] will not work. Take him to a doctor and get an injection or pills, or whatever. But if it says [i.e. his spirit familiar] that *jhar phoor* will work, that I can help you [with *jhar phoor*], then it [the illness] will end right there. They will find relief [*aram*, that is, they will be cured].

In fact toward the end of my stay at Champanagar, one of my most useful *ojha* informants, Basudev Yadav, had a rather serious stomach flu (which is not at all unusual in these parts, I myself had been stricken by it on several occasions). When I suggested to him that I pick up some medicine for him from the compounder, he was more than grateful. He had no hesitation in using bio-medical treatments in cases of somatic illness, but this did not mean that he did not believe in his own abilities to cure possessed individuals.⁵

Before we turn our attention away from the relationship between *ojhas* and the bio-medical systems in Champanagar, there are a few sociological factors we must consider. These revolve around the profoundly different role that a doctor assumes when compared to other healers. Doctors tend to set themselves apart from the local community, as can be seen by the initial hesitation that each expressed when asked about possession. Their first reaction was to deny that possessions exist at all, yet if my experiences at Champanagar is any indication of the realities of that community, than

⁵ I'm not sure if the pills helped or not, as I had to leave town before B.D. got better.

doctors deal with possession on a regular basis. In the 'explanatory model' (to use Kleinman's term) of local villagers, who are after all the audience that the doctor addresses, possession is a regular and widely used medical category. To deny it exists at all indicates just how alien the explanatory model of the doctor is from that of the patient (it is interesting as well that doctors insist on speaking in English or Hindi and not the local language of the community). This is not surprising. Doctors tend to see themselves (as do all of the educated elite of this community) as 'modern' and thus as someone no longer taken in by the 'superstitions' of the local community. We will have the opportunity to talk more about the relationship between 'modern' educated people and *ojhas* at a later point. The thing that concerns us here is the fact that doctors, unlike *ojhas*, do not try to integrate their medical models into the existing social structure. Therefore, doctors tend to be apart or alienated from the local community. *Ojhas* on the other hand, are very much a part of the immediate community, and present their patients with explanatory models that can be readily understood.

Moreover, the community of Champanagar has had its problems in the past with government doctors. I certainly do not wish to imply that the current doctors in town are in any way unscrupulous, but in the past, the doctors who have practiced here tended to be more concerned with money than with healing. The last doctor who was stationed in Champanagar would not even look at a patient unless he was paid first. As a government doctor, the medicine he received was to be given out for free, so the fact that he charged people for it was his way of milking the system. This practice got him into trouble eventually, for he refused to treat the son of a local villager who had been

bitten by a snake. All government doctors in this area carry snake anti-venom and are supposed to treat snake-bite victims for free. But this particular doctor would only treat snake bite victims if they gave him a substantial fee up front. The villager who had come with his son was too poor to pay the fee and while he pleaded with the doctor to save his son's life, the boy died (the son had been bit by a *kerait*, which, unlike cobras, have a fast acting poison. You really have to act quickly if you are unfortunate enough to be bitten by one. Unfortunately both *kerait*s and cobras abound in this region).

The villager was understandably irate. He gathered up his friends and that night they broke into the doctors house. They beat the doctor to within an inch of his life. I was told that if it hadn't been for his wife's pleas to spare his life, the villagers would have killed the hapless man.

This example points out the tension that exists between the 'modern' doctors and the lifeway of local villagers. But for our purposes the crucial point to be made about doctors is that they seem to offer next to nothing for people who are suffering from 'mental' problems, or what the locals would call possession (*bhoot lagni*, to be taken by a ghost). As possession and belief in the reality of ghosts and witches is quite prevalent in this region, this blind spot in the bio-medical system of healing is quite significant in explaining the prevalence of *ojhas*. The doctors seem to be able only to offer the individual inflicted by such an ailment placebo treatments (sedatives or I.V.'s, which incidentally, the villagers, if not the doctor, seem to believe in firmly), while the *ojha* performs specific healing rituals tailor made to the needs of the individual. Therefore, even though villagers firmly believe in the efficacy of bio-medicine, they will still turn to

ojhas when the need arises. The popularity of bio-medicine in no way threatens the existence of *ojhas*.

It is time now to focus our attention on what *ojhas* actually do. *Ojhas* generally deal with two categories of illness. Firstly they heal snake bite victims. Snakes are closely associated with the goddess Bisari (also called Mansa Devi). Consequently, *ojhas* make a point of praying to the goddess Bisari, especially during the summer time when her annual puja takes place. As one of the *ojhas* told me,

“*Sarkar*, Bisari is the goddess of snakes. You know the *nag* [cobra] around Shankar-jee [another name of Siva], we do puja to it.... If you don't do that puja, you can't *jharo* [sweep or heal] snake bites. You offer milk and popcorn to get rid of the poison, but if you don't get the *shakti* once a year [i.e. during Bisari puja] the poison won't come down.”⁶

In fact Bisari puja is quite important in this area, and many people will make offerings to the goddess Bisari during this time. But Mansa Devi is closely associated with the lord Siva. According to the origin myth that is told about her, she is the black cobra that is constantly wrapped around the neck of Siva.

Initially I was confused by this, because I knew that the lord Siva is closely associated with snakes. Thus I assumed that he must be the god that is ‘in charge’ so to speak, of snakes. But this is not the case. Siva is closely linked to all goddesses, but it is the goddess who is the active party in each case, while Siva plays a distant or passive role. What I mean by this is that Siva is closely linked to snakes (every representation of Siva will show him covered by snakes) but when trying to control snakes (or cure snake

⁶ There are two meanings to the expression “won't come down.” On the one hand, in Mathili an illness is said to ‘rise’ as it progresses and ‘come down’ as it breaks. On the other hand, *ojhas* tend to feel that snake venom rises within the patient until at length it reaches the head. If this should happen the patient is sure to die. The *ojha* attempts to bring down (physically) the poison until it is discharged from the body altogether. The act of *jharoing* (to sweep) is the act by which the *ojha* achieves this end.

bites) it is the goddess that must be worshipped. This is true of possession as well, which is the other category of illness that *ojhas* deal with.

Along with snake bites, *ojhas* specialize in healing people who have been attacked by spirit beings. Such beings can be generally divided into ghosts and witches. In such cases, the *ojha* will do a prayer to the goddess Shakti, either in the form of Durga or Kali, though Kali seems to be more preferred. Actually, the offering is made simply to the goddess (Shakti), the *mantra* used while *jharoing* people (that is, while the *ojha* ‘brushes’ or strokes the body of the victim) specifies which goddess is being evoked. Thus the offerings that are most commonly used, *sindur* (red vermilion), a red *sari*, *ganja* (which is closely linked to Siva, the consort of Shakti) and a pigeon, would be appropriate for any form of the goddess. Consequently, the *ojha* (like anyone else who wishes to gain power) is required to perform special rituals during the annual worship of the goddess, a ten day ritual that I detail in chapter four. They emphasize Nisa puja (or midnight *puja*) that takes place during the course of this ten day ritual. Some *ojhas* also feel that special care and praying must be undertaken on the night of Kali puja (which takes place shortly after Durga puja, and is dealt with in chapter five). Again the power to heal is closely linked to appeasing the goddess. Unless a person makes his or her mantra *siddhi* (active, or pure) during the appropriate ritual time set aside for the worship of the goddess, it is thought their *mantra* will lose it’s effectiveness, and be powerless to heal people.

But again Siva ends up being the ‘hidden god’ when dealing with possession. As the lord of the underworld, Siva is the god of ghosts, one of his names is “Maha Bhoot”

or “great ghost”. As the lord of death and the lord of the underworld, one would think that he would be the god most closely linked to the healing of a possessed individual. But this is not the case; rather it is his consort Shakti (in the form of Durga or Kali) that is invoked when dealing with spirit beings. What this points out is that Shakti and Siva are closely linked deities, and it is often hard to know where one ends and the other begins. Here is a long excerpt from an interview I conducted with seven *ojhas* (and a few field hands) :

“Me: One thing I don’t understand. They say that ghosts and *parriats* [a kind of ghost or spirit being] are all the *duits* [minions or servants] of Kali...

BD: They are all the minions of *Durga* and Kali.

PM: There are other kinds of ghosts. Durga and Kali have their *jogin’s* [*yoginies* or female attendants of the goddess. They are depicted as a great ghost army that surrounds the goddess] but there are others; *banaia bhoots* [or wild ghosts] that don’t belong to them.

BD: They are the ones that live in the forest. Or in the trees.

PM: They [i.e. the *banaia bhoots*] can’t compete with them [i.e. the *jogin’s*].

Me: Oh, because they are...

PM: The *jogin’s* can conquer them. Those are *Kan-Kali* [the skeleton form of Kali], and it is that *jogin*; Kali and Durga don’t come themselves, they send the *jogin*. So if one sits down to do *jog* [yoga or meditation] to the *jogin*, then Ma-Durga herself will not come, but her *jogin* will. It is the *jogin* that is giving protection from above. Once the *jogin* is engaged, it will chase it [the ghost] away. It is the *jogin* that gives the order; it will take away it’s [i.e. the ghost’s] form and replace it, by its *maya* [a concept closely linked to the goddess, in fact her name is ‘Maha-Maya’ or great *maya*, that is often translated as illusion. But here it is used not as illusion but as the power to manipulate the physical world] with its own form [i.e. it will replace the wild ghost with itself].

Me: But what I’m asking is this, Siva is the god of ghosts, right?

BD: Yes.

Me: But when someone is possessed or attacked by a ghost, everyone says that *Kali-mai* is the goddess of ghosts, right?

General: Yes.

Me: When someone is possessed they do puja to Kali-Mai. But why is this? Why don’t they worship Siva *bhagwan* [god]?

PM: Yes. Siva *bhagwan*, without Mahadev [another name of Siva], *sarkar*, I mean Shankar [yet another name of Siva]; the *Ganga* [Ganges] itself flows from his head, so all things are under his domain. Without praying to him, no *mantra*

will work. You have to pray to him. To Mahadev, to Siva, to Shankar, to these three. Me: What about Rudra [a name of Siva], or is it the same thing?

PM: Yes, it's the same. People say different things depending on what they know, I say Shankar.

Me: O.K., these three. But what I'm saying is why don't people worship Shankar when they are possessed. After all he is...

PM: But we do, we say his name.

Me: Yes, you say his name, but you do Kali puja.

PM: We do *puja* to all the *devatas* [gods]. Fifty six *corores* of *devatas* [a *corore* is a hundred million] are worshipped. Fifty six *coreores*, not just one. Or sixty four *corores*, we have to worship them all. Not just Kali or Durga, we have to worship all the forms.

BD: Say there are five people sitting, like now. You call them to do work, but not all of them will speak [i.e. I had called the *ojhas* to be interviewed. Basu Dev is saying that although there were seven *ojhas* (not 5) present, only he and Pharabho actually spoke]. You call them all, but only a few do the work, but you still call us all.

PM: In the end, you have to take Siva's name when doing a *puja*. The work will not be done till you take his name.

BD: No. [i.e., no, it won't get done]

PM: He is the lord of all.

Nirpain (a field hand): You have to take Mahadev's name in all things.

PM: Yes.

Me: But you also have to take Shakti's name in all things? I mean in all these *pujas*, you have to mention the *bhagwati* [goddess] at least once.

General: Yes.

Me: So what you are saying is that Mahadev is more emphasized when doing snake *puja*, while the *bhagwati* is more emphasized in ghost *puja*? [i.e. *pujas* to get rid of ghosts]

General: Yes.

Me: That's what I'm asking, why is Mahadev more important to snakes and Shakti to ghosts? [note that this was a mistake on my part. It is Mansa Devi that is emphasized in the healing of snakes, as I found out later]

PM: *Bhagwati*, Basari... I mean, is to Siva... What I mean to say is, you have to worship Shankar-jee to make the *Bhagwati* appear, it is within his power. The *Bhagwati* is in every "lane", not just one "lane". but Shankar-jee is in one "lane" Shankar-jee isn't in every lane. [emphasis mine]

BD: Yes his name is said.

PM: Yes we will do *puja* to everyone, but we will take Shankar-jee's name.

Me: But he doesn't do many things?

PM: He brings peace [or makes, bestows peace]

Me: He makes things peaceful?

PM: He is the master of peace during a *puja*. He is a thing of truth. With truth comes stability. With that word, stability cs to all."

What the above conversation points out are some of the crucial features of the world view of this region. On the one hand, we have a hierarchy of power set up, with ghosts being controlled by the *jogin*'s of the goddess, and the *jogins* are in turn controlled by the goddess. So if one wishes to control a ghost one must worship the goddess, but it is her *jogins* who will be sent to actually control the ghost. But the goddess herself is closely linked to the lord Siva. In order to activate her, you must worship him. However, the relationship between the god and the goddess is not a simple one. Siva doesn't directly control the goddess.

The relationship between Siva and Shakti is a complex matter, and one we shall endeavor to unravel in this work. Siva is the supreme lord who has control over all creation. "Bhoot" means not only ghost, but in the Sanskrit it refers to "what has already existed" (or what is actualized, as opposed to what remains unmanifest). That is, it refers to all physical beings. Thus as the "Maha-bhoot", Siva has dominion over all creation. Yet as Pharabho says, he is only in one "lane". He is the bestower of peace and tranquillity, but not the person to inculcate when one is faced with the actual problems of existence. It is rather the goddess, who works in every "lane", that must be consulted, when dealing with a practical problem of existence.

This may strike the reader as odd (it certainly took me quite some time to figure out what the above conversation was referring to). But what is crucial to understanding the role and function of *ojhas* in this society is the fact that 'Hinduism' in Mathil society means Tantric Hinduism. Tantra, the esoteric philosophy of enlightenment, is here part and parcel of everyday life and everyday worship. It is not a remote philosophical

movement confined to the discourses of seldom seen ascetics; rather it is the dominant religion of this area. Consequently, it is the goddess that is the dominant Hindu deity of Mathil *samaj* (society, or world). She is not seen as being part of a 'little tradition', or a vestige of some remote tribal past, but rather she is worshipped as part of the 'great tradition' of Hinduism. By 'great tradition', I mean that the goddess is clearly part of the textual tradition of Hinduism and her worship is done as a vedic *yuga* (that is, as part of the prescribed procedure of *puja* mentioned in the sacred textual literature of Hinduism).

Therefore, if we wish to understand what *ojhas* and the notion of personhood is about in this society, we must first understand what the role of the goddess is in this society. Briefly, the goddess is seen as the principle which underlies the active universe, as part of the dynamic principle of life. She is therefore in charge of all that transpires within the world of existence. It is for this reason that she is 'in every lane.' But, in keeping with Tantric philosophy, the goddess is always seen as being united with her consort Siva. The two are different sides of the same coin, and thus one always implies the other. Siva is the complement of the goddess, and so is seen as the principle that underlies the passive (or transcendent) universe. It is for this reason that he is only in 'one lane,' the lane that implies *shanti* (peace or tranquillity, i.e. transcendence). We will have occasion to take up each of these issues by turn. The point to keep in mind here is that the *ojha* can be seen as a low level Tantric adept. Consequently, every *ojha*, just like every ascetic, has to spend a period of time training under a *guru* (or master), who is usually a Tantric ascetic or someone known to have *shakti* (which, more or less amounts to the same thing). Each of the *ojhas* I interviewed were able to give me lineage of their

guru's spiritual line. This is really no different from the way ascetics gain knowledge, and so, power. In the conversation I quoted above, the reason that only two *ojhas* were speaking, while the other five remained silent, was that the other five were the disciples of Pharabho Mondal, and so were not inclined to speak in their *guru*'s presence. As Pharabho once told me, "without a *guru* there is no knowledge." The *ojha* then legitimates his power and his practice by referring to a Tantric world view.

This link between the *ojha* and the ascetic will be discussed in detail in chapter six. For now the important point is that the *ojha* explains healing, and so implicitly personhood, in terms of a tantric philosophy. The notion of personhood here is profoundly Hegelian; the self in this society is always a social self that exists only in relation to the other of a social encounter. Thus the concept of the self is a dynamic one and one that can only be understood as it manifests itself in an ongoing social process. We will take this issue up in our final chapter, but to briefly indicate what I mean, the self in this society always implies the other. This is true not only of the divine self (Siva and Shakti unite to form the transcendent self of Bhrama), but also of the human self. People in this society exist only in relationship to others, and if something threatens the links that unite the self to the other, the resulting crisis of personhood is expressed in terms of possession and spirit attack. As I said, we will look more deeply at the relationship between the self and the other in our final chapter, but before we can get there we must look closely at what Siva and Shakti mean in this society, and how they relate to personhood.

The model of personhood embedded within this system of healing seems to be fairly prevalent and uniform within Mathil society. Not only the local villager and under class of this community prescribe to it, but everybody in this society believes it to some extent. This society, especially during the time of my fieldwork, is extremely divided. There are the perennial conflicts between Hindus and Muslims, between the high castes (who generally support the Bharati Janta Party, or B.J.P. political party, which is a semi-fascist Hindu fundamentalist party) and the low castes (who generally support the Janta Dal party, in fact Bihar was the only state in India that retained a Janta Dal government during the time of my fieldwork), between the rich and the poor (especially the ‘modern’ rich and the ‘traditional’ or ‘backward’ poor). Yet all these divisions seem to be transcended when we begin to consider personhood and the belief systems perpetuated by *ojhas*.

At one point I asked Basu Dev about the kinds of people who most frequently consults *ojhas*. His response was:

“BD: everyone comes, *sarkar*.

Me: Men, women?

BD: Everyone comes.

Me: Children?

BD: Everyone. Everyone! Children, women, those [pointing to Champanagar] sitting at home. The rich, the rich!

Me: The rich?

BD: Yes. Your grand-father, *Majhala Sarkar* [or “middle Sarkar”, a cousin of my grandfather, and so by this kinship system, my grandfather. Also one of the ‘princes’ or royalty of the local community], he had a toothache, he left the world [i.e. he has since passed away], but he called someone to *jharo* him. My name is known to *Bara Sarkar* [“big Sarkar”, the older brother of the man in question] and he said ‘call him, he will *jharo* you.’...

Me: Do Muslims come?

BD: Everyone, everyone, absolutely.”

Basu Dev wasn't exaggerating. I was surprised to learn that despite the recent hostilities between Hindus and Muslims, both groups equally believed in the legitimacy of *ojhas*. One of my key informants, Mu'in, told me (and in fact took me to see for myself) that Muslims have no hesitation in inviting a Hindu *ojha*, if they think that such a person can help. When such *ojhas* are invited, the *ojha*, with the approval and support of the Muslim villagers, will do prayer to the (Hindu) goddess! Conversely, Hindu villages seem to have no hesitation in inviting a Muslim healer, and such healers too make offerings to the goddess.

I had the good fortune to speak to a *mullah* (a Muslim priest) in the town of Purnea. This man had a reputation of being a very good *ojha*. His views, as a religious man, were a little more doctrinaire than that of the local Muslim *ojhas* I talked to. It is important to point out that the tensions between Hindus and Muslims had reached a crescendo only months prior this interview. Some of the bloodiest rioting had taken place in the town of Bhagalpur, only 60 miles south of Purnea.

Consequently, Mohmood Alium was quite tense during our interview. For one thing, he refused to speak in Mathili (a language he knew perfectly well) insisting instead on speaking in Urduised Hindi (my informant Mu'in, who had arranged the interview, spoke even worse Hindi than I did. Consequently, he could follow nothing of our conversation and decided to take a nap during the interview). At any rate, despite the hostility that existed between Hindus and Muslims, Mohmood Alium told me that healing is a matter of belief. Praying to the goddess will help heal a possessed individual, just as

surely as praying to Allah. He himself prays to Allah when healing an individual, but he did not discount the effectiveness of praying to the goddess.

At a local level, as I said, Muslim healers will often offer prayers to the goddess. Actually, the *ojha* often makes prayer to the *gram devata* (village or local deity). But such deities are seen as the minions of the goddess. So in order to secure their help in healing a possessed individual, one offers them *sindur* (red vermillion), *saris*, etc.; things that please the goddess. When Mu'in's village was plagued by a spirit being, they tried several *ojhas* until finally it was a Hindu *ojha* that was able to help them. He determined that the problem resulted from the fact that the Muslim villagers had cut down a tree sacred to the goddess, a tree that stood in front of what was once a goddess temple (although how he knew this is anybody's guess, as no sign of the temple is visible today). The Muslim villagers then made offerings to the Devi to appease her and this finally got rid of the malevolent entity.

The prevalence of the belief in *ojhas* seems to cut across class lines. The vast majority of the 'educated elite' of this area responded to my inquiries about *ojhas* the same way that the doctors at Champanagar did (actually, I did not really initiate interviews with such individuals. Rather when they heard about the topic of my research, they tended to seek me out). At first they all would say that *ojhas* are a bunch of charlatans. At any rate, Bihar doesn't have any 'real' *ojhas*, as we are no longer so 'backward.' If I really wanted to see some magic, I should go to Madha Pradase. Once such disclaimers had been stated (and as a rule, I nodded politely to the 'advice' that such august individuals would give me), the real fun started. Because almost to the man,

each individual after having told me emphatically that they didn't believe in *ojhas*, and didn't even think any existed in this area, would then proceed to tell me a story about a spirit possession and a healing ritual that they themselves had witnessed. In each case, some 'respectable' persons child or relative had been attacked by a ghost (by the logic of such things, because they were 'respectable' they obviously weren't faking it), and a low caste servant in the community was called in to heal them.

Here is an example of one such story:

Arun Prasad is a professor of Chemistry at Purnea college. I met him at a wedding reception in the town of Purnea. Actually, he approached me, as he had heard that I had come from America to research *ojhas* (several people that night approached me for this reason. People seemed to be fascinated that anyone would be interested in such a topic). Arun started out by telling me that he didn't believe in *ojhas*, etc. But presently he said that there was one time when he himself had witnessed a healing (*jhar phoor*) ritual.

A relative of his, a young girl surprised everyone one day by saying that she had seen a headless woman in their yard the previous night. The parents dismissed the story, but the girl kept insisting on its validity. As the days passed, she insisted that the headless woman kept appearing to her. Finally the parents decided to consult an *ojha*. The *ojha* was a servant of a friend.

The *ojha* knew right away what the problem was. He did *jhar phoor* to make the ghost appear. The ghost took possession of the child's body and talked through her. The ghost insisted that she was the mother of the child in a previous life time (Arun Prasad witnessed this healing ritual first hand). The *ojha* commanded the ghost to leave the child alone, and threatened that if the ghost did not leave, he would have to capture it (i.e. nail it to a tree). At length, the ghost said that it would leave. The ghost said that it had another daughter (again from a previous life) who lived in England. The ghost said that it would go visit this daughter and leave the child alone. The child was saved and experienced no further attacks.

This is just one of several such stories related to me by such educated skeptics.

They all follow the same form. People who insist they don't believe in *ojhas* or ghosts, then turn around to tell of spirit attacks they have witnessed first hand. Inevitably the *ojha* is of lower class, and usually of a lower caste (often the servant of a friend).

This story points out some key features of the healing system that *ojhas* are a part of. Firstly, they do tend to be low class and low caste individuals, thus they are part of the 'folk' traditions of the area. Rich people who tend to be (or think of themselves) as more educated, will only turn to *ojhas* as a last resort, while the local villagers of the area turn to *ojhas* first. High caste individuals or well to do individuals who dabble in the occult tend to label themselves (and get labeled) as 'Tantric' *yogies*. In practice, they do much the same sort of thing, as the philosophy of Tantra says that power (*shakti*) is power. Power can be used to further spiritual ends, or it can be used for practical ends, like healing people possessed by ghosts (or any other afflictions). And while rich people may not believe in *ojhas*, nobody questions the validity and power of an ascetic. This is a crucial point, because *ojhas* legitimate their practices by referring to exactly the same concepts and world view that is part of the dominant religious system of this area. Concepts such as *yoga*, *shakti*, or reincarnation and the like, are widely believed in. Thus one may question the legitimacy of an *ojha*, but no one that I met seriously questioned the validity of such concepts, and so, the ability of some individuals (such as a Tantric *yogi*) to actually perform magical feats.

We see then that despite the apparent need of the educated elite to distance themselves from the 'backward superstitions' of this area, they themselves tend to believe in such superstitions at some level. There is almost a need on their part to believe that such things could happen. The thing that unites the 'uneducated villagers' with the urban ruling class is the concepts and beliefs embedded within Tantric Hinduism, and especially within the concepts and beliefs that revolve around the worship

of the goddess. For the goddess, in Mathil society, addressed every segment of the society. Belief in her power and her reality is shared by all, regardless of class or even (apparently) religion.

This is, I think, why *ojhas* persist in this region. Their legitimization of their abilities is just too plausible to Mathil sensibilities for people to reject them outright. Therefore, it is crucial for us to understand what exactly the role of the goddess is in Mathil society.

Consequently, the next few chapters will be devoted to understanding the nature of Siva and Shakti in Mathil society. It is only after we have understood something about the importance and relevance of these two deities that we will be able to understand anything about *ojhas* and how they are able to help people experiencing spirit possession.

CHAPTER TWO: THE HIDDEN GOD. AN ANALYSIS OF THE SIVA- LINGUM

Although the Goddess is the dominant deity in Mathil society, her consort Siva is also considered an important god. Indeed, at some levels Siva and Shakti seem to be equally important, or rather the two are so closely linked that they may be seen as different aspects of one supreme divine form. This can be seen in the fact that they share many of the same qualities, their close association to snakes, ghosts, asceticism, and finally and most importantly, the mediation of pollution and transcendence.

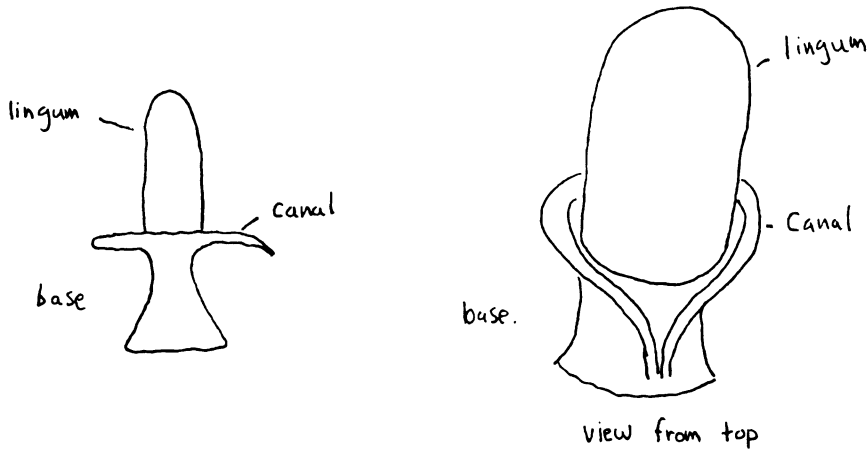
Consequently, before proceeding to a discussion of the major ritual cycle of this area, it might be illuminating to discuss the *Sivaling*, one of the 'dominant symbols' of this culture. Using the insights of V. Turner, one is led to the conclusion that the worship of Siva does not represent a cult or a sect that is separate from the worship of the Goddess (that is, it does not, like the Vasinivates, represent a rival sect). There is an ideological continuity between the representation of Siva and the logic of Goddess worship.

The Siva Temple

Siva temples are scattered throughout the region, and tend to come in a uniform style. These temples can come in very elaborate forms (such as the main Siva temple of this region, which is located at Deva-Ghar, which we shall have occasion to talk about in

the next chapter), representing great temple complexes; or they can be simple one room affairs that are found near ponds in just about every village. At any rate, the central focus of such temples, no matter how elaborate, is the *Sivaling*. In elaborate temples, which have shrines to many gods, the *Sivaling* is housed in the inner sanctum and is the focus of the temple complex (e.g., the temple at Deva-Ghar).

The shrine that houses the *lingum* (or phallus of Siva) tends to be a rather small room without windows. The room is either round or octagonal and the *lingum* is housed at its center. Such shrines are claustrophobic, often damp (with the water used to worship the *lingum*) and often have soot covered walls. The *lingum* itself is made of black stone that is two thirds higher than its base. The base is a circular structure that has a lip at its end and a canal from which the water poured over the *lingum* is channeled. (see diagram)



These three elements, the base, the protruding cylindrical stone, and the canal on the base are the three definitive elements of the *Sivaling*. In Sanskrit these are called *Rudrangsha* (the protruding stone), *Vedi* (the base) and *Ambupranali* (the canal for the

water, From J. Mishra, 1959). But the point I would like to make here is that at the symbolic level, these elements have a sensory imagery that is undeniable (and one incidentally that some, though by no means all of my informants recognized).

At the sensory level, the protruding stone is referred to as a *lingum*, the *lingum* of Siva. That is, it is meant to represent Siva's phallus. The base then becomes the *yoni* of Shakti, literally her womb or vagina. The stone is worshipped by pouring water (*amrit* or nectar) or a mixture of water, milk, honey, etc. over the top of it and allowing this mixture to trickle down to the base, where it flows to the lip of the structure. Here it is collected by the priest and used as *Chandrograt* (or *Chandro dat*, which literally means 'fluid that has touched the feet of a god,' or a liquid sacrament that is used during the course of a *puja*), the sacrament that is given to the devotee, who, after swallowing it, smears what is left over his head. Flowers or other offerings may be placed on top of the stone, again becoming sanctified by their association with the symbol.

What I am suggesting is that at the sensory pole of the symbol, a blatant expression of sex and sexuality is being represented. The phallus of Siva and the vagina of Shakti are represented in eternal union. The sacrament (*Chandrograt*, the liquid sacrament given to the devotee after a *puja*) that the devotees incorporate into themselves is the sexual fluids that result from the union of Siva and Shakti. Normally sex and sexuality is thought to be pollution in Hindu society, but here it becomes the medium that links humans to the divine. But the symbol is more than just a representation of the sexual union of Siva and Shakti; the focus is on the perspective of the devotee, which has been clearly defined. The devotee seeing the *Sivaling*, is viewing

the act of cosmic union from the 'inside', as it were. What I am suggesting is that the shrine itself is a representation of a womb; the womb of Shakti. Thus, the devotee, is like a child within a womb, seeing the act of union of his mother (Shakti) with his father (Siva). Hence the enclosed circular design of the shrine. The devotee is 'enveloped' by Shakti, just as the Goddess' *yonī* envelopes Siva. The only point of contact between the devotee and Siva is from the sexual contact between him and his consort. In a strange inversion then, the Siva temple becomes a representation of Shakti's womb.

A psychologist may be content with such an exegesis. But one of the central insights of Turner is that symbols can not be reduced down to a biological level of meaning. Unlike the Freudians, who see symbols as a universal process that can be reduced down to a root anatomical level of meaning, Turner focuses on the relationship between the physiological, affect laden sensory pole of a symbol, and its ideological content (Turner, 1967, P.30). Symbols thus do not have any one root meaning, and so must be understood as having both sensory and ideological content. It is at the level of the ideological that one can clearly see how the worship of Siva relates back to a Shakta world view (Shakta are tantric worshipers of the goddess, the dominant religious sect in Mathil society), and why Siva and Shakti are so closely linked in this brand of Hinduism.

At the ideological level, Shakti is defined as "name and form" (Saraswati-Rahasyopanishad, Shloka 23) while Bhrama is defined as "existence, consciousness and bliss." Shakti here is defined as the kinetic energy of the universe, the force behind the manifest universe. She is defined in terms of differentiation and flux. She is *prikriti*, the force that manifests the universe. Her active nature is further implied by the fact that she

is often represented as the active partner sexually (i.e., she sits on top of her consort Siva). Symbolically then, she represents the world of form, the world of flux, which is ruled(at a philosophical, physical, and social level) by power.

The point of all this is that we are all part of this dynamic manifest world. We are all 'born' into the world of Shakti. Hence, by extension, she becomes the representation of the supreme mother. She is thus called the "womb of the universe" (see Brown, 1990; pp. 129). It is her role as the supreme mother that defines her relationship to creation. We are all the 'children' of Shakti. That is, at the level of ideology, the world around us (the manifest world) is the 'obvious' or given reality of everyday existence, the world we were born into. It requires no extension of ordinary consciousness to know this world, the world that is defined through differentiation, defined, in other words, by our senses. And this empirical world is the world of Shakti, the world of power.

Her consort, Siva, is also called Bhrama, the transcendent. "Maya is *prikriti*, the possessor of Maya is Maheshwara [Siva]. This whole creation, as his extension, fills up this universe" (Shawetashwatara-Upanidshad, 4.9-10). He too is the force behind the universe, but he, as Bhrama, is dormant, passive. As the transcendent, he becomes the non-differentiated universe. As *purusa* (the inert principle of the universe, or that which is beyond nature), he is spirit, that which is outside of time and space, that is, outside of that which can be felt or known through the senses. So he symbolizes the underlying unity or the 'oneness' that lies under the differentiated universe. As the undifferentiated universe, he is without qualities, and thus, this aspect of the universe makes no

distinctions between things. He literally lies under Shakti. As the dormant and inactive principle of the universe, he is symbolically represented as the passive sexual partner of Shakti. The woman is here on top because she is active. This says less about sex roles or the ambivalent nature of women in Indian society, than about the nature of the universe, as defined in Tantric philosophy. That is, the activity of Shakti (and her sexual/physical dominance) has more to do with the symbolization of philosophical assumptions than sex roles. The reason Shakti becomes active has to do with the fact that she is linked to the idea of motherhood or creation, the manifest universe into which we are born.

We are born into the manifest universe, and so its reality is immediate. The world of the undifferentiated universe, on the other hand, is not immediate. We do not 'naturally' see the unity or the oneness of the universe or the logic that ties together all reality. This is the logic of transcendence, and so, by definition, it is not part of the everyday reality that we live in. Thus the world of Siva is not 'obvious.' It requires a different state of consciousness to be realized. And this consciousness must necessarily pass through the manifest universe to be attained. That is, the 'natural' state of consciousness is formed in the everyday consciousness of the differentiated universe, but this universe is linked to the undifferentiated universe by the act of divine play, the act of divine sexuality.

If we wanted to, we could put a Freudian spin on the exegesis. Here the central point would be that the connection between the child and the mother is primary. The first 'world' (psychological reality) that the child knows is the world dominated by the

child/mother relationship. She is the first object of desire. But this relationship is juvenile and in order to gain an adult personality, the child must establish a relationship with the father. This connection between the child and the father is not a given, it requires several stages of psychological growth to be completed. Most importantly, the child must successfully undergo the oedipal complex in order to establish a mature adult relationship with the father. And this complex drives home the fact of the erotic relationship between the father and the mother. It is only by realizing the erotic bond between father and mother, and accepting this bond as legitimate, that the child is in a position to enter adulthood. Something similar is perhaps being said in the Siva/Shakti ideology as represented by the *Sivaling*. However, this symbol speaks of a soteriological, and not a psychological journey. The difference then, between a strictly psychological interpretation of the *lingum*, and a cultural interpretation, has to do with the added level of complexity imposed upon the psychological by the religious assertion that ultimately Siva and Shakti are one reality. The cultural interpretation has to work at the psychological and the ideological levels simultaneously. Something more than stages of psychological development is being implied.

At a higher level of consciousness, the *Sivaling* is implying the unity of Siva and Shakti. This is symbolized by the act of sexual union; neither is complete without the other, and so both imply the other. Rather than postulating an absolute binary opposition, the idea here is that elements of the undifferentiated universe are already present in Shakti and vice versa. So in the midst of the manifest universe (the universe that is Shakti) there is the unmanifest universe (the universe that is Siva). And

conversely, in the unmanifest universe, which in this society is represented by a dot called Chinchini Shakti, there is already present the manifest universe, which is why the symbol that represents it is called Shakti (or a form of Shakti) and not Siva. This dot is found at the center of all *mandala* designs; the *mandala* represents the unfolding universe or the manifest universe. The dot at its center is the potential or unmanifest universe; that from which the universe is actualized. It is only because of this way that any leap of consciousness from the world of Shakti to the world of Siva is possible. This ultimate unity or collapse of opposition is represented by the act of conjugal union; Shakti and Siva are inseparable. No priority (at least at a philosophical level) can be given to either order, or rather, both realities are necessary for the existence of the other, and for the existence of the universe. Since Siva and Shakti are always joined, it follows that to know the ultimate essence of Shakti, that is, to 'know' anything in this world as it really is, to get to its root or essence, is also to know Siva or the transcendent universe. At the heart of the differentiated universe (or was it the vagina?) is the undifferentiated universe. So the possibility of transcendence exists in the pursuit of all physical phenomenon. "Tantrics base their claims for both metaphysical unity and diversity in creation by appealing to a theistic notion that literally conceives of the universe as a product of Siva and Shakti's conjugal union"(Brooks, 1990; pp.67). This is a crucial linking of the profane with the sacred, because it opens up the possibility that the 'inner conflict' of Heesterman can be gotten around (Heesterman, 1985). That is, and we shall talk more about this later, it links the everyday world of political and mundane reality to the transcendent reality. Sex, intoxication, power, etc. all the things that a renouncer

turns his back on, here are valorized as the path toward transcendence. Because they are aspects of Shakti (the everyday mundane world) they must have, at their root, Siva. And it is this relationship between the two worlds that is being symbolized by the *Sivaling*.

The Durga Temple

The other prevalent temple style of this region is the *Durga-stan*, or the temples dedicated to the goddess Durga. Such temples are noteworthy because of the striking contrast between them and Siva temples. Unlike the Siva temple which houses the *Sivaling*, the Durga temple has no central symbol. Durga temples are rectangular buildings divided into three sections. The central section is the entrance to the temple and is twice as large as the two adjoining rooms. Such temples are not part of temple complexes (at least none that I saw were) as many Siva temples are. They tend to be very plain buildings with little or nothing in the way of elaborate architectural designs or artwork (as we shall see, the art that such temples house revolves around ritual, that is, it is the temporary or performance art of *puja*).

Now what is interesting about such temples is the fact that the central room, which is the main part of the temple, houses no image. In fact for most of the year the central room is empty! It is the room to the left of the main room that houses the permanent image of the goddess. This image is usually a small stone statue of Durga. The room to the right of center houses a permanent image of another god (sometimes another goddess, like Kali, sometimes an image of Vishnu). The architecture underscores something significant about the relationship of the Goddess to the world of

humans. The central part of the temple, where one would expect the image of the Goddess to be housed is empty, except on the occasion of specific *pujas*. That is, the Goddess is contextual and 'made' by men (manifest) only at the time of *puja*.

The central room comes alive during Durga puja. It is at this time that an image of the goddess Durga, along with Laksmi, Saraswati, Kali and any other deities that relate to her, like Skanda, Siva, Ganesha etc. (depending on the fortunes of the community) are made of clay and housed in the central room. The *puja* itself slowly manifests the goddess in her full form, that is, this is a gradual process involving many rituals (to be discussed in another chapter). At the end of the *puja*, the images are ceremonially discarded in the local river. The point is that the Goddess becomes manifest in ordinary, everyday objects, such as clay, grass, certain kinds of fruit, etc. By performing the appropriate rituals, humans can activate the true nature of such objects, such that they, for a brief period become the Goddess, the supreme deity.

This idea of an impermanent representation of divinity seems to be a general trend in Hinduism (see Waghorne and Cutler ed. 1985, esp. the articles by Preston and Courtright). The emphasis is on the process of manifestation, which intimately links the world of the divine with the world of humans. In other words, impermanence allows for an immediate connection between the divine and the human world, a connection driven home by the process of perpetual creation and destruction. This immediacy once again buttresses the ideology found in the *Sivaling*. Namely that the Goddess is the manifest universe, and so has a direct connection to humans, while her consort Siva is distant. This theme is, I think, the reason Durga temples have no permanent dominant symbol contained within them. Unlike the *Sivaling*, which is a representation of the permanent

transcendental order and its intrusion into the everyday contextual world, the Durga temple represents the contextual world, which is joined to the transcendental only by an act of human labor. Only at specific ritual moments, and only with a great deal of ritual care, can the everyday contextual world of humans manifest its link to the transcendental world, which is beyond context. This points out the fluid nature of the manifest universe, a universe of changing contexts. While the *Sivaling* points out the permanent nature of the undifferentiated universe. What we have then are representations of the Goddess and the god Siva that buttress each other to form a consistent world view.

CHAPTER THREE: THE RITUAL CYCLE

The ritual cycle of Maithila is a complex structure that defies any simplistic generalizations. Having said this, I would none-the-less like to point out certain features of this cycle that may shed light on the way time is defined in this society and the significance of time to personhood. It must be stated at the onset that the ritual cycle is far more complicated than I could hope to present here (for a more complete discussion see, R. Jha, 1982). What I would like to focus on in this chapter are the major rituals performed in the region. What we find by such an analysis is the fact that the ritual cycle sets up an opposition between winter as a time of social order and summer as a time of disorder. By so doing the ritual cycle legitimates times when individuals can vent their personal or psychological frustrations.

Of course in this society as in any other, it is up to individuals to decide just how devout they wish to be. So it is possible for an individual to spend their entire existence focusing on nothing but ritual. There are indeed many such individuals (mainly widows or widowers, high cast individuals, or individuals who, all told, have too much time on their hands!). Such individuals perform rituals on a daily basis and there are enough 'minor' rituals to go around to keep a person busy for a lifetime. When I say minor, I do not mean to downplay the importance of such rituals, especially to the life and sensibilities of such devote individuals. What I mean rather is that such rituals are not performed by the community at large. They thus tend to be private in nature, and so

have not been included in this work. As Pharabho said there are fifty four or sixty four hundred million gods that should be worshipped, but not all of these gods are central or even commonly known to all. I felt it was important to discuss the ritual cycle, even in this simplistic and generalized way, as a means of situating the major ritual of this area, namely Durga puja, which shall be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

The ritual cycle seems to be structured around the seasons. The major opposition is between winter and summer. Summer is the time of pollution. The gods are said to be asleep at this time, consequently, it is a time of great danger. It is at this time that the major healing rituals take place, because it is during this season that ghosts, snakes and infectious diseases abound (although it was my experience that snakes and disease have no seasons!). All such afflictions are under the domain of the goddess and so all healing rituals revolve around her worship. But such rituals are personal and not part of the ritual cycle of the community. Indeed, summer is a time of little or no ritual activity, aside from *Rama-nami* (a ritual devoted to the worship of the god Ram), there are no major rituals performed during this period. So *Grishma* (summer) is marked as a time of ritual silence, social disorder and personal anguish.

Winter is the opposite of summer and considered a time of bounty. The gods are awake and so fully active in the social world of men. Few rituals of affliction take place at this time, ghosts etc. are thought to be inactive. Interestingly enough, this means that few, if any rituals take place during this season (the months of *Pusa* and *Magha*). This is because the major ritual cycle of Durga puja has just been performed, and as I will argue, the balance of nature and society has been restored. Thus, there is no need to perform

any major rituals at this time. The main point that this opposition between summer and winter (*Grishma* and *Shishira*) brings up is the fact that the major rituals tend to clump around these seasons, between the disorder of summer and the order of winter.

The major ritual season begins in early autumn, during the season of *Shishira*, which includes the months of *Bhadava* and *Aswina* (see diagram). The cycle is started by Bisari puja (worship of the snake goddess, also called Mansa devi) which marks the beginning of the "ritual season" and the cycle of goddess worship. The major ritual of *Deva-Utthana Ekadashi* or "waking the gods" takes place at this time. This initiates a hectic ritual time where rituals follow each other in quick succession. The waking of the gods is followed by *Churthi Chandrama Shashti* (worship of the sun god) which is closely followed by the major ritual of *Navratri* ("nine nights") or *Dharasha*. This is the Durga puja ritual (which shall be discussed in detail elsewhere). Durga puja is followed by Laksmi puja, *Dwali* and Kali puja (which take place on the same day). In fact this is a period of non stop ritual activity, which overflows into the season of late autumn-early winter (*Hemant*, which includes the months of *Krairtika* and *Agrahana*). These major rituals (as I will argue in the next chapter) recreate the ordered world of society. Once this act of creation is complete, we are in winter, and there is a marked lull in the ritual world.

Seasons**Rituals****Bhadava (or the rainy season) Varsha****Janmasthami (or the birth
of Krsna)
Lakshmi puja
Anant puja****Aswina****Sharad or
Autumn****Dashmi (Nava-Ratri or
Durga puja)
Kojagra (Lakshmi puja)****Kartika****Hemant or
late Autumn****Shyama Puja
Govardhana
Bhratri-Divitiya
Devo-ththana****Agrahana****None****Pausa****None****Shishir or Winter****Magha****Ganash puja
Saraswati puja****Phalguna****Shiva-Ratri
Holi****Vasant or Spring****Chaitra****Nava-Ratra
Laksmi puja
Rama-Navami****Vaishakha****Akshaya-triteya
Purnima****Grishma or Summer****Jayshtthya****None****Asharha****Ratha-Yatra****Shravana****Varsha or rainy season****Manasa Devi puja
Madhu-Shravani
Raksha-Bhandan**

Springtime brings to an end the major rituals involving the goddess. Late winter is the time of Saraswiti puja, which is the last ritual of the long goddess worship cycle. There is a gap between Kali puja (which takes place in *Hemant* or late autumn) and Sarasawiti puja (which takes place in *Shishir*, the end of winter and the beginning of spring). I think this gap is significant. Winter, the auspicious season, is bounded by the worship of the goddess, Durga puja at its onset, and Saraswaiti puja at its close. Winter is thus framed by order; the major rituals to the goddess which re-establish the ordered world. It is interesting that autumn is not a time of bounty. During Durga puja, people have not as yet harvested the winter crop, so this is not really a time of plenty, although this is the time of the major rituals of this area that involve considerable financial investments by the community. Winter, by contrast, is a time of plenty, but as the order of society has been established, no major rituals take place during this time. Springtime brings to an end the influences of the order created by Durga puja, and consequently it is the beginning of the disordered world of summer.

This disorder is reflected in the nature of the two major rituals of spring. In contrast to the solemn and high rituals of Durga/Kali puja, Saraswiti puja which takes place at the onset of spring is wild and disorderly. Every community within a village will perform their own *puja*; that is, the *puja* doesn't center around the temple. Each community has its own image of the goddess made and there is much drinking and rough housing involved in the local worship of Saraswiti. Cars and taxies are stopped on the road by young men and a 'contribution' to the cost of the local *puja* is demanded of all who travel on this day (nothing of the sort takes place during Durga puja which is a

much more elaborate and expensive affair). The drinking in particular seems significant as it stands in such marked contrast to the formal behavior displayed during other goddess rituals. Now the older informants that I talked to (including my father) were shocked by this observation. According to them, Saraswiti puja is as formal and austere a ritual as any of the other goddess *puja*'s. They insisted quite strongly that the demand for 'toll' or the drunkenness of young men on this day was a 'corruption' of the *puja*, and they assured me that when they were young no such behavior took place. If this is true, it is significant. The change in the context of Saraswiti puja seems consistent with the way the ritual cycle as a whole is structured. It makes sense that out of all the *pujas* that could have been 'corrupted' it should have been Saraswiti puja that was. Not because Saraswiti (the goddess of knowledge and creativity) is in any way bawdy or lowly, in fact she is just the opposite, as she is clearly a goddess of the 'great' tradition, but because her worship falls at the onset of springtime.

The other major ritual that comes toward the end of springtime is *Holi*, the "festival of love" as Marriott put it. Actually Marriott does a good job describing the mood of this ritual of reversal (Marriott, 1966). Certain points need to be elaborated upon before we can understand what this ritual is about. The day starts out by people chanting *bura na mano Holi hai* ("don't take offense, it's Holi") or other such framing chants that define the day as a day of license. Special festive foods are prepared and eaten. People in this area drink *thundai* (a milk and almond drink) laced with large quantities of *bhang* (pureed marijuana). This puts everyone in the mood for the days activities. Large buckets of colored water are to be found everywhere and people use

phuschkaries (large syringe like squirt guns, the original super soakers!) to dose each other with the colored water. There is much sexual license, normally tabooed people openly 'play' *Holi*; that is, avoidance relationships etc. are suspended on this day. The license extends to the entire community, so on this day anyone may (in theory) come into contact, even members of different casts who normally avoid each other. It is perhaps significant that *Holi* is "played" and not performed, like other ritual (people can perform a *pūja*, but you have to "play" *Holi*). The importance of this, I think, is that the ritual is framed in such a way that it already implies a meta communication. That is, the normal rules of social order are suspended, or being played around with. On this day, social rules are defined by the rules of the game of *Holi*. Thus, on this day, proper conduct is defined in terms of the game and not in terms of standing societal norms. This 'play' is closely associated with sex and sexuality, not only because bawdy behavior abounds but because artistically the play of *Holi* is associated with the divine play of the god Kṛṣṇa with his consort Rādhā. This is a common enough motif in north Indian art, and it extends to music as well. *Rāgas* that are sung during the *Vasant* season are often about coquettish lovers who complain about the revelry of *Holi* going too far. Often too such songs are linked to Kṛṣṇa, who is the singer's tormentor. The mood of such songs, if I may be so bold as to gloss them in this way, is of innocent but sexually charged love play. The songs (as so many erotic songs of Indian classical and light classical music) are thus devotional, as they represent the ideal *bhakt* (devotee) who give themselves completely to the lord Kṛṣṇa. And this attitude of devotional love-play characterizes *Holi*.

What is this ritual about? The first thing to be noted is that this is the time of harvest, and harvesting points out the opposition between life and death. The harvesting of the plant is also the death of the plant. So in the cycle of agriculture, which is necessary for the life of humans, as it produces food, implies death for the plant. But as agriculture is a cycle (the planting of the summer crop is not too far off) death also implies rebirth. At the level of material culture, the festival implies something about the link between life and death, birth and rebirth (a concept central to Hindu cosmology). Death is essential for life, and the festival points out that the cycle of life and death is not a great tragedy, but the divine play of the gods. The festival thus mediates between life and death.

The liminality of the festival is pointed out by the use of color. Color in Indian society has implications for social order, a metaphor for classification. The term *varna*, used in the Bhagavad-Gita to describe the stratification necessary for social order (i.e., the caste system) literally means color (Bhagavad-Gita, Ch.1, 43). Each segment of society is thought to be of a different color, and it is only by keeping such colors separate and discreet that social order is possible. Indeed all creation is viewed as different combinations of the *gunas* (or qualities) of *prakriti*, and each of these *gunas* are represented not only by a different goddess, but by different colors. *Ragas*, the system by which classical music is classified is another term for color. Each *raga* is thought to represent a different mood and so a different color (although as far as I know the specific color of each *raga*, as the specific color of each caste, hasn't been specified). The point isn't the colors themselves, but the fact that color is being used as a metaphor for order.

This use of color points out one of the central features of the *Holi* festival, namely the random mixing of colors. The squirting of colored water has the effect of mixing up discreet colors in haphazard fashion. The net effect is a psychedelic mix of colors literally all over one's body. The body itself is used as a symbol of the breakdown of social order. It is significant that it is the body (the individual) that is thus employed, because it points out the central tension between the individual and the social order, a tension so crucial to the critical philosophy of Freud (Freud, 1961, see also Marcuse, 1955). The body here is used to symbolize the fact that the discreet categories of social groups are broken down in the erotic play of *Holi*; that is, different castes are allowed to intermingle freely in this play of colors. The squirting of colored water then is symbolically pointing out the breakdown of normal social order, the liminality of the festival.

This collapsing of the normal order is not confined to the level of the social. The emphasis on sexuality, I think, reflects the idea of collapsing boundaries at the level of the individual. Sex, in Tantric philosophy, is used as a metaphor for the collapse of the boundaries between the self and the other. "Tantrism thus shows how the supreme experience encompasses all the levels of reality, how oneness suddenly arises in the very midst of duality " (the duality of male/female, transcendental/mundane etc., Silburn 1988, p.138). Of course, Tantric sexual practices are not just sex. The point is not that the opposition between the self and the other is being collapsed literally, any more than the order of the caste system is being rejected, rather sex, like color becomes a symbol that points to the possibility of such a transcendence. Sex here is a symbol of individual

transcendence, the self which is isolated can bridge the gap between the self and the other and in the process, between the mundane and the transcendent universe. This is so because the first step towards transcendence is the recognition that there is a unity that underlies the apparent separation of things. That is, underneath the manifest universe (the world of Maya or Shakti) there exists the unmanifest universe of Bhrama (or Siva). The collapse of the opposition between the self and the other is a crucial step by which the consciousness of the individual begins to see the underlying unity that is Bhrama (see Silburn, 1988).

Sexuality becomes the link that unites the world of men to the transcendental order of the divine. And this central symbol of Tantric philosophy is being played around with in the festival of *Holi*. This notion of sexuality as collapsing opposition was pointed out in our discussion of the *Siva-lingum*. *Purus* (that which is beyond nature) and *prakriti* (that which is nature) are inseparably united and this unity is symbolized by representing them in the act of sexual union. This would explain the erotic nature of the songs sung to Krsna, which are closely associated with the festival of *Holi*. The act of personal devotion (the complete surrender of body and soul) to the divine is the definition of the true *bhakt*. As Brooks points out, binary duality in Hindu philosophy is postulated only to reveal the deeper unity of transcendent consciousness (Brooks, 1990, p.69-70). In tantra, sex can be used as a *sadhana* (discipline or meditation) to achieve transcendence. In the Krsna dominated *Bhakti* movement, sex becomes a metaphor for the proper attitude of the devotee toward the divine. We are to see the transcendent as a lover sees the object of his or her desire.

This theme of glimpsing the transcendent, the *ananda* (bliss) of the divine, by altering the normal rules of conduct, by reversing the rules of mundane reality, is further enforced by the ritual use of drugs. The drinking of *bhang* as a *sadhana* (discipline or practice) to achieve transcendence is another Tantric innovation. *Bhang* is closely associated with Siva, and the intoxication that alters the everyday consciousness of the devotee, holds out the possibility of glimpsing the *ananda* of the divine. Again *bhang* is being used as a symbol of the collapse of everyday reality at the level of consciousness itself.

So the *Holi* festival works on at least four levels. The opposition and the collapse of the opposition between life and death is being pointed out, the social order is collapsed, as is the order that differentiates the self from the other. Finally, the order of normal consciousness is collapsed. The collapse of each of these orders implies the transcendent. So what is being specified is the relationship between the divine world and the world of humans, a relationship that is ideally sustained in the act of personal devotion. At each level an aspect of subjective experience is being addressed; whether it be life verses death, everyday consciousness verses altered states of consciousness or self verses the other, each of these has something to say about the personal experience of being alive. The festival then emphasizes the person, more than the community. And this is significant because the end of *Holi* ushers in the harsh months of summer. We have said that summer is a time of disorder. This is not quite accurate. Like *Holi*, summer is a time that focuses social attention on the individual as opposed to the social; that is, it is at this time that people experiencing personal problems are likely to be

possessed by a spirit. It is a time of madness, as it were, a time when society sanctions the venting of personal problems or allows the directed expression of what Freud would call phantasy. The societal response to such personal crisis is to perform a healing ritual that re-establishes a relationship between the individual and the Goddess (a point we shall return to elsewhere). This opposition between summer and winter was pointed out to me by the *ojhas* I interviewed. I was curious as to why so few people seemed to experience spirit possession after Durga puja. I was told that this was so because after the *puja* the Goddess, who controls spirit beings, was fully active in the social world. Consequently the balance between the spirit world and the world of humans had been restored and so spirits were unlikely to trouble humans at this time. By contrast, summer was the time when the services of the *ojha* was most in demand.

The point is that rituals like *Holi* are about a personal link between the individual and the divine. The rituals that frame winter are about social order and the link between the divine and the social world. In *Holi*, the emphasis is on the devotion or the personal love of individuals that links them to the transcendent, while in the rituals of healing that dominate the summer months, the emphasis is on the love that the divine (the Goddess as caring mother) manifests toward the individual by taking a personal interest in their mundane existence. The rituals that frame summer are about personal order or the link between the divine and the individual. But the individual can only be manifest when the social order is stripped away, or rather, momentarily suspended. The opposition between summer and winter is not really about disorder verses order, but rather about

the transcendental nature of the divine that asserts itself at a personal and at a social level. Either way it is love or desire that unites the transcendental world to the mundane.

It is this emphasis on personal devotion, personal love that defines *Holi's* role in the ritual cycle. As I said, summer is framed on either side by rituals that define its character. *Holi* initiates summer, while the great pilgrimage of *Sravana* marks the end of summer. Again the pilgrimage emphasizes the personal devotion of the individual, a devotion that unites him or her to the transcendent. This important event takes place during the season of *Varsha*, the rainy season, the end of summer. People from all parts of the region (and even from adjoining states) gather at the town of Sultangunj (my home town). Here, on a rocky island, in the middle of the Ganges stands the ancient Siva temple of Ajagaivinath. At this auspicious place, the pilgrims fill up two containers of Ganges water which are carried on a bamboo stick, and walk some sixty miles south to the temple of Deva-Ghar. This temple is considered one of the twelve *joti-lingums* of Siva (*joti* means light, but here the connotation is more to power, hence *joti-lingum* could be translated as 'a lighted phallus' or a 'power phallus').

What is interesting about this pilgrimage, is that, once again, the social order is suspended for an act of personal devotion. The pilgrims wear simple saffron colored clothes, an indication of the fact that they have been stripped of social status and social markers. They are called "*bhol Bums*" (or "say Bum"), and they refer to each other as *Bum's* (Bum-Bum being a name of Siva). That is, they are stripped of their social identity, their clothes and their name. They are not allowed to wear shoes and must trek the sixty miles at great personal hardship through mountains and, formerly tiger infested

forest areas (actually, most of the forest area and tigers have vanished in recent times). The point is that the social markers of caste and gender are here suspended. The emphasis is on the personal hardship that the pilgrim displays as a sign of his or her personal devotion to the divine (hardship indeed, see Daniel's description of what such pilgrimages are like; Daniel, 1984). Love or the act of devotion, links the divine to the human world. Once the pilgrim reaches Deva-Ghar, he or she pours the Ganges water on the *Siva-lingum*, the *joti lingum*, there (usually, as the crowds are so big, the water is given to a priest who actually does the pouring). As we have seen, the *lingum* is a symbol of the divine copulation between Siva and Shakti. By pouring water over it the community is being reminded of the link between the manifest and the unmanifest universe. To be Freudian about it, the transcendent (and so dormant) principle of the universe is literally 'ejaculating' into the manifest universe, thus linking the two in an act of cosmic passion. It is significant that this link is sustained by desire, the desire of the divine that created the universe in the first place, and equally, the desire that links the pilgrim (individually) to the divine. And this link, once established, ends the period of summer.

So as we have seen, the periods of summer and winter are framed by rituals in such a way as to define their social meaning. Taking a cue from Freud, we could say that what this opposition is addressing is the tension between social needs and individual wants. Summer is the time for the free (though directed) expression of individual needs or desires (phantasies). It is framed by rituals that emphasize the personal relationship between humans and the divine. Winter on the other hand, is a time for social order,

when the needs of the community for order take precedence over the needs of the individual. But unlike the analysis that Freud offers for western society (Freud, 1961), here both ends of the opposition are made legitimate and meaningful by Mathil social structure (see Obeyesekere, 1981, especially pp. 165-167).

This society does not ignore individuals and their desires, but rather gives such emotional needs a legitimate time and structure for expression. Summer is defined as such a time, a time when the phantasy life of the individual is allowed to surface and is channeled by the structure of healing rituals into a socially acceptable form. Winter, on the other hand, emphasizes the necessity of social order. It is the great ritual of Durga puja that frames winter as a time of order, and it is upon this ritual that we shall now focus our attention.

CHAPTER FOUR: SHREE DURGA PUJA

Durga puja is the most dramatic moment in a long ritual cycle devoted to the goddess. The cycle begins with Bisari puja (*puja* to the snake goddess) and ends with Saraswiti puja (*puja* to goddess of creativity and knowledge). In between, other aspects of the goddess are also worshipped, including Durga, Laksmi, and Kali. But by far the most spectacular and intense *puja* is reserved for the goddess Durga. If the ritual cycle of Mathila can be viewed as a work of art, then Durga puja represents the denouement of that work, the point at which the dramatic tensions of the plot collapse.

In this chapter I would like to present a preliminary description and analysis of Durga puja. It is preliminary because the *puja* itself is so complex as to require a book unto itself. The central theme of this *puja*, I believe, is the revelation of the transcendental nature of the goddess. We have had occasion (in our discussion of *Holi* and the symbolism of the *Siva-lingum*) to point out the fact that in this society transcendence is closely related to the collapse or mediation of opposition. This is especially true of *tantric* Hinduism, although it may represent a more general theme within Hindu culture. If modern western philosophy began with the Kantian assumption that all concepts must presuppose time and space, serious Hindu philosophy began with the assumption that only the divine (i.e., Bhrama) transcends time and space. This is the logic behind the mystical nature of Upnadishadic writing. One can not manifest (even in

words) the transcendent, and so one is forced to turn to ritual to try and approximate symbolically the nature of the divine. Hence the *puja* can not be reduced down to the text of the *puja*. The text is important, but the act of ritual is equally important. In Mathil society, the transcendent is represented by the Devi.

It is difficult to think of Indian society without thinking of structure and hierarchy. Models of India that emphasize these concepts are fine, as far as they go, but they are incomplete. Hindu culture itself seems to have reflected upon such models and played around with the notion of binary opposition. If, as some ethnographers have argued, Indian society is framed around the opposition of purity and pollution (Dumont, 1970), male and female (Babb, 1970 and 1975), or even giver and receiver (Raheja, 1988), then the Indian notion of divinity and *puja* becomes the deconstructive moment that collapses such oppositions. It neither rejects nor negates such opposition, but rather 'plays' with them in such a way that ultimately they are transcended. At this point I am simply making certain assertions as a way to guide the reader through the significant events of Durga puja. As we proceed, it may be useful to keep these assertions in mind.

I have broken down the following section into two chapters. The first part considers the *puja* as a performance, focusing on how the performers (priests) and audience (villagers and myself) acted or reacted to the events. The second part considers the text of the *puja*, the libretto as it were. Here the emphasis shall be more on the analysis or the thematic of the event. It will be useful to refer to the text of the *puja* as we try and draw out its major themes, and so I have provided a translation of the text in an appendix.

THE FIRST DAY

In Champanagar, Durga puja is commissioned by the local royal family, the Sinha's of *Raj Banali*. They have taken care to preserve all the pomp and ceremony that this *puja* entails for the past 150 years.⁷ The *puja* is performed simultaneously at three locations in town. It is performed at the *ghosain ghar* ("divine house") or family temple within the palace at Champanagar, and it is also performed at the *Devi-stan* (or 'goddess' place', i.e. goddess temple) in town (also built and maintained by this family). As the *Devi-stan* has a permanent image of the goddess, the *puja* must be done at two separate locations within this temple. It must be performed before the permanent image (a small statue of a ten armed Durga in the left room of the temple), as well as in the central room of the temple, which houses the impermanent and life sized statue of Durga and her family. The general rule is that all images of the goddess Durga must be worshipped at this time.

On the first day of the *puja*, a whole barrage of *brahmin* priests are formally invited by the royal family and must formally agree to do the *puja* to the goddess Durga for the next ten days. After this the priests split up to perform the *puja* at the three different goddess images. Each *puja* involves at least two people, a priest who takes on the role of *pujagari* or *yagman* (i.e., the one performing the *puja*, actually he is a stand in for a family member, as ideally a member of the family should perform this role) and a priest who takes on the role of *prohit* or the ritual specialist who directs the *yagman*.

⁷. It seems significant that of all the rituals that kingship use to entail, this *puja* is the one event that the royal family has taken the trouble and expense to maintain.

In addition to the three Durga *pujas* that are done, there are also *pujas* performed to the god Siva, the consort of the Devi. Ten thousand small clay Siva's are made at the *gossain ghar* and at the Siva temple in town (it would be a stretch to call these images, they are really just lumps of clay that are treated as though they were *murtis* or statues of Siva). The images at the *gossain ghar* are worshipped for the benefit of the patron family (i.e., the Sinha's). Here a prayer is done for each living family member by turn. This includes all living women of the family, even those who have married out. For each family head, a *supari* (betel nut) is offered to the deity, and after the *puja* is performed, he must eat it.

In the meantime, at the main *Durga-stan* in town, the impermanent image of the goddess has been put into the central room of the temple. At this point, the *murti* is said to be incomplete; slowly she will be given jewelry, clothes, weapons and most importantly, on the seventh day, she will be given her eyes (i.e., the pupils of her eyes will be painted in). It is not until this point that she is fully active, or alive. I will focus on this *murti* to the exclusion of all others, because it is the most important Devi temple in town. As a village temple (as opposed to a house shrine) it is frequented by all. Also, it is here that the *murti* of the goddess is housed and given life.⁸ This temple is the central focus of town rituals, and so seemed the logical place to concentrate my energies.

On the first day of *Dashmi* (literally "10 days" or ten days of *puja* to the goddess) the *puja* begins early in the morning. After the initial invocations to the gods, who are to

⁸. The *gosain ghar* temple is just as big as the village temple, but as a house shrine, it is not as central as the Devi temple in town. It does not house any *murti*'s of the goddess, as does the village temple. As is true of most *gosain ghar*'s, the goddess is represented only by a red piece of cloth, hung on the wall.

witness the *puja*, the *phat* or story of Durga is read (all in Sanskrit incidentally, which few people in town understand). The *khurg* (sword) which belongs to the temple, is formally washed and a *tika* (dot) of *sindur* or red vermilion is put upon it (the *sindur* signifies a married woman, here it represents the goddess). A goat is washed outside the temple and then brought within it. Here the animal is formally (symbolically) washed by the priest. It is made pure by symbolically cleansing various parts of its body. After this, the priest places flowers and leaves on its head. The *khurg* is touched to its neck, as the prayers are completed. The goat has to shake off the flowers on its head, as a sign that it has formally consented to be sacrificed (i.e., the will of the goddess to receive the goat unto her abode has to be manifest by an act of the goat itself).

The goat is then taken to a post outside the temple (the post is a y shaped stick) where it is beheaded. The priest yells, "*Jai Durga*," as he strikes. He quickly picks up the head (which to my surprise continues to wiggle and attempts to cry out) and takes it into the temple. Here in front of the deity, it is placed on the right side of the *puja* offerings and flowers are put on top of it.

By this point, as the priest continues with the *puja*, the *ghari ghanta* begins (*ghari ghanta* refers to the drums and conch shell that are blown at the end of every *puja*, signifying that the *arti* is about to begin). As the *puja* comes to an end, the *arti* (or sacred lamps) are lit. The *arti* is passed around so that all may formally do *pranam* to it (this is done by holding ones hands above the flame, then folding them and bowing before the flame, as a sign of respect). At this point the temple has become very animated and noisy. Little boys are busy beating on cymbals and drums and one is

blowing on a *shanka* (conch shell), as the *arti* is passed around so that all may receive its blessings (according to tradition, the more noise one makes the better). When all have offered their respects to the sacred flame, the temple is cleared of people and the priest closes its doors. Water is sprinkled by him upon the threshold of the door. The temple is deserted and closed in this manner so that the goddess (who is the only person left inside) may partake of her *bhoj* (or feast). That is, while the devotees wait outside, the deity is said to symbolically eat the various offerings that have been made to her. After an appropriate amount of time has lapsed (five minutes or so) the priest knocks on the door of the temple three times, to signify that the temple is about to be reopened. As he opens the door, people shout, "*jai Durga*."

The priest then enters the temple and sits down again to finish the morning *puja*. The head of the goat is removed and a red cloth covers the *prasad* or offerings to the goddess, which are mainly different kinds of sweets (a red cloth was used in the central room of the temple, a yellow one was used in the adjoining room). With the final completion of the morning *puja*, the *prasad* and the *chandrogat* (water that was used during the *puja*, and so water that has absorbed the essence of the deity) is given to all who are present, and some is saved to be given to the family that sponsored the *puja*. The eating of the *prasad* again signifies the formal deference one has to pay to the deity. The act of eating a persons leftovers is considered very polluting and you would only do it if the person was closely related to you, and so shared in your essence, e.g. your parents or your children, etc. The point is not only that leftovers of the deity are still so powerful as to be a blessing and not a pollution to the devotee, but also that the deity

and the devotee have become symbolically related. In eating the deities leftovers, we share in the deities essence, but at the same time we show the marks of social closeness to her. If for some reason a person does not wish to eat the *prasad*, he or she must at the very least do *pranam* to it.

This symbolic sharing of the essence of the deity formally ends the *puja*. It seems significant that the act of feasting is the final act of a *puja*. The *bhoj*, or feast, is a symbolic union between the devotee and the deity. Food comes to symbolize the social relationship between humans and the goddess. To share food with the deity is to share in a reciprocal social relationship with her. We give her food and she gives us her blessings, in the form of the self-same food. That is, the act of eating *prasad* establishes a social discourse between the devotee and the goddess.

The morning *puja* ends at around ten o'clock. On this the first day, not too many people come to attend the event. The people who did show up were mostly women, young mothers with their children. They were dressed in very neat and clean clothes. They would come up to the door of the temple and bow to the newly installed *murti* of Durga. Then they would walk over to the Kali temple next door and pay their respects to the goddess there. Only about a dozen women in all showed up. For the rest of the day, I noticed that everyone who passed by the temple would bow to the goddess. The road that runs next to the temple is quite a distance away, but everyone who walked upon it would still take the time to bow in the direction of the temple.⁹

⁹. A few days later, I saw one of my Muslim informants bow to the image of the goddess, as he walked by the temple. When I asked him about it, he said that just because his great-grandfather had decided to convert to Islam didn't mean that he shouldn't show the proper deference to the Devi.

The evening *puja* begins at about 6:30. This is a shortened version of the morning *puja*. The *phat* (or story of Durga) is abbreviated and sung by the priest. There are many more people who show up for the evening *puja*. They wander in and out of the temple and bow to the goddess. After the *puja* is over, the *ghari ghanta* is done and the *arti* is passed around.

A CRACK IN THE FABRIC OF THE UNIVERSE

On the second day, the morning *puja* is done in much the same way as the day before except that no goat sacrifice is made on this morning. There are many more children playing in the temple courtyard today. The town is slowly taking on a festive atmosphere. The main market and surrounding area has been rented out to store owners who set up shop for the duration of the *puja*. Mostly they are selling trinkets and toys, along with food. In addition, another three video halls are in the process of being erected (normally C-nagar only has one video hall). During this time people will buy little items (like ribbons for little girls, tikkies or cosmetic dots that are put on the forehead, for women, etc.) to get into the festive spirit.

In the evening the *puja* is again done and the *phat* is sung by the priest and his son (who is in training to be a priest). Today's *puja* is called *pancho puja*. No one really pays much attention to the *puja* itself. No one is in the room except for the priests and myself, and the occasional child peeping through the door.

During a lull in the evening *puja*, Krishanaish *pundit*, the main *prohit* (he likes to call himself the '*raj prohit*') of this family tells me, "everything has *vidya* [knowledge, an attribute of the goddess or a name of the goddess Saraswati] if you have the *shakti* to

pull it out. Even this wall [pointing to a pillar of the temple] has *vidya*." Krishanaish *pundit* told me that during all the days of Durga puja, he also does a (private) *puja* to the goddess Kali, at the Siva temple. *Pundit-jee* insists that Kali is the goddess of Tantra and so must be worshipped at this time.

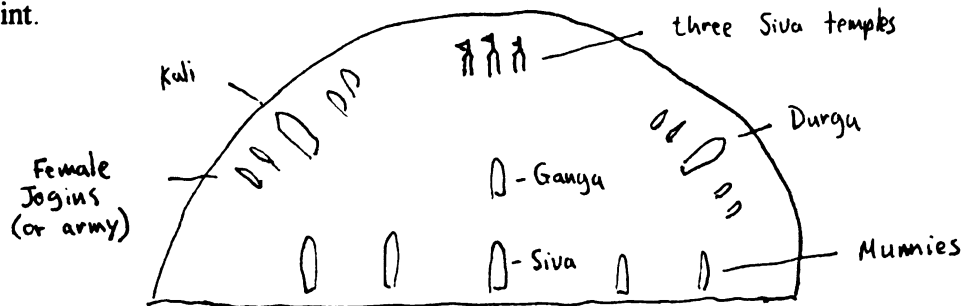
The next day the *puja* goes on as usual. Late in the evening, Pinku (the house-boy where I'm staying) comes to me in a frightened state. He claims that when he went to the roof of the building to take down the laundry, he heard the voice of a *chorrail*. A *chorrail* is a vampire like creature that calls out to people in the voice of a friend (in this case, it assumed the voice of a mistress of the house, who was in Bombay at the time). The *chorrail* will call out to its victim three times, and if you answer back, it will immediately attack you and suck out all your blood. What is more, it can attack a victim in this manner over a long period of time without him being consciously aware that he is under its spell. Pinku is visibly frightened and scared to sleep downstairs by himself.

There is a feeling I get during the next few days, the reader may or may not wish to credit. It is as though there is a crack or rupture in the normal social fabric. The line that divides the world of ghosts from the world of men seems to be breached. Not only are people reporting strange events (such as *chorrail* attacks) there also seems to be an increase in spirit possessions. Actually it is not so much that people are being attacked, but rather that those people who are already possessed seem to be going into an "active" phase of possession. In the next few days I saw no less than seven possessed people. People seem more willing, eager even to talk about such things. On the other hand, all the *ojhas* in town seem to have left. One of them told me that this was not a good time

to try and cure people, as the goddess is in an active phase. Later I was to learn that most of the *ojhas* are preoccupied with the rituals surrounding the *puja*, because it is at this time that they must activate their *mantras*.

MURTIES

On the fifth day of the *puja*, the top arch or *chanoba* is hoisted over statue. The *chanoba* is a painted arch that is suspended over the *murties* of the deities. This more or less completes the decorations. The only thing that remains is to put on the jewelry and give the goddess her eyes. It may be useful to diagram the statues as they appear at this point.



The *chanoba*, or top portion is painted. In its center is painted three Siva temples, with a *Siva-lingum* clearly visible in the center temple. The flags on top of the temple are flying to the left. On the left side is an army of *joginis* or the female minions of the goddess. These appear as terrible female demon warriors. At their center appears a naked Kali, standing on top of a lion. On the right side we find the same thing only the army is lead by a (clothed) Durga, also standing atop a lion.

Next we have a picture of the goddess Ganga. She is immediately on top of a small statue of Siva. Flanking Siva, to the left are the *munies* (holy men mentioned in the scriptures) Sanah and Daudan, to the right are Narid and Visisht.

Below this are the *murties* proper. These are painted, life size statues, made of clay and decorated with clothes, weapons, etc. In the center we see an eight armed Durga. She is on top of her vehicle, Narsiman (the lion). One of her feet is pressing against the demon Mashaisur, who she is in the act of destroying. He is pictured under the lion, being ripped apart by it, while a spear from Durga's hand pierces his breast.

Surrounding this central image are the different aspects of the goddess and her family. To her left (our right) is Saraswati, goddess of learning and creativity. To her left is Kartikay or Skanda, son of the goddess. And finally to his left is Vijaya, or the goddess as supreme ascendance (victory).

To Durga's right (our left) is the goddess Lakshmi, goddess of prosperity and worldly happiness. To her right is the god Ganash, another 'son' of the goddess. To his right is Jaya or the goddess personified as victory. Finally, breaking the symmetry of the whole spectacle, off to the Jaya's right side is the goddess Kali, with her feet upon Siva.

Durga is yellow in color as is Lskshmi and Kartikay. Ganash has a white face but a deep red body. Saraswati is a paste white, while Kali is a deep blue.

Up till now, all the *pujas* have been performed in front of the image of Kali (actually the *pujas* have been done slightly to the left of the image). I note in passing that the statues of Kali in this temple always have Kali with both feet on Siva. This is significant as this depiction of Kali is linked to Tantric iconography. In order to understand this it is necessary to (briefly) tell the story of Kali.

Kali (or rather Durga) was created to kill a demon who had the power to create a new self every time a drop of his blood touched the earth. So in his conflict with the goddess, he created a whole army of demons every time he was struck by her. This enraged her (she is still Durga at this point) and made her turn black with rage, at which point she turns into Kali. She went on a killing frenzy, collecting all the demons blood in a pot before it could reach the ground. She drinks this blood and in an intoxicated frenzy goes on a killing rampage (i.e., continues killing even after the demon is destroyed). The *devas* are perplexed, if she isn't stopped all of creation will soon be destroyed. The only one who can stop her is her consort, Siva. He lays himself down in front of her path, and the instant that her foot touches him, she is brought back to her senses and smiles, pleased by the gods deception.¹⁰ But in the Tantric version of the story, she does not

¹⁰ Note the parallels between this and the story of Siva and Uma. They seem to be symmetrical myths that closely link Siva to his consort. According to this myth, Sati was the first wife of Siva. When her father Daksha decided to hold a *yaga*, he invited all the gods but Siva, as he did not approve of Siva, or his daughter's marriage to him. Sati is angered by this and decides to go to her father's *yaga*, despite the objections of her husband. Unable to bare the shame of her father's rejection, she throws herself into the sacred fire of the *yaga* (note that in the text of Durga puja, Durga is often referred to as the destroyer of Daksha's *yaga*, thus linking Durga to Sati and all other incarnations of the Devi). When Siva learns of this, he is outraged. He attacks the assemblies crowd and picks up the charred body of Sati. In a frenzied state he begins to dance the *tandam* dance; the dance of destruction by which he, the lord of destruction, ends each cycle of creation. The *devas* are perplexed, unless he is stopped, creation will

stop there but proceeds to put her other foot on top of Siva, thus affirming her ascendance over him. Implicitly then (as I was told) what is being symbolized is the sexual ascendancy of women, i.e., the 'woman on top' position. And it is in this position, with both feet atop Siva, a bowl of blood in hand, a garland of limbs and heads around her neck, a long red tongue sticking out of a smiling face, that she is represented at Champanagar.

BAIL NOIT

On the sixth day, a procession leaves from the *Dehori* (or palace) at around 4:00 P.M. or so. An elephant is at the head of the procession, with the children of the local *raja's* family, dressed in their finest clothes, riding upon it. In front of the elephant are two bearers carrying ceremonial silver spears, and another two carrying silver clubs shaped in the form of a lion. Behind this are various members of the royal family (all dressed in their finest clothes) and behind them are the priests and local town folk. The procession walks to a *bail* (or wood apple) tree, about a mile out of town. I was told by the priest, among others, that the tree must be from outside the village. This tree which is considered sacred to the lord Siva, is also said to be the home of the goddess.

Upon arriving at the tree, a *puja* is done to it, invoking the goddess that resides there. The upshot of the *puja* is to give the goddess a formal invitation to join the *puja*

come to an end. Vishnu sends his *chakra* (weapon) to dismember the corpse of Sati, which is still held in the arms of Siva. As her body is dismembered, different parts of her fall to the ground and at each of these sights is erected an important goddess temple (e.g., the great temple at Kamakhia in Assam is where her vagina is said to have fallen. Note that this myth links all the various regional goddess' to Shakti). Siva, oblivious to Vishnu's plot continues his dance of death. Finally the gods hit upon the idea of sending the goddess (now re-incarnated as Uma, or Parvati) to lay down before Siva. As soon as he touches her with his feet, he comes to his senses and abandons his destruction of creation. The parallels between this story and the story of Kali are too striking to be ignored. In each case, it is desire (or the recognition of the self in the other) that stops the excesses or unbridled thanatos of the deity.

at the temple the next morning. This *puja* is known as the *Bail noit* (or *Bail* invitation). Nine different types of vegetation, each of which signifies a different aspect of the goddess are tied in a bundle and this is said to signify the *noit* (or invitation). A twin *bail* fruit is tied with a piece of cloth (the villagers insisted that it has to be a twin fruit, and the fact that this particular tree tends to produce twin fruits is a sign that the goddess indeed resides within it). The fruit is a representative of the goddess (i.e., it is treated as the goddess). After doing a brief *puja* in front of the tree an *arti* is passed around; *prasad* and *ghari ghanta* are done as with all other *pujas*. This marks the end of the *bail noit* and the procession then proceeds back to the village.

At the temple, the evening *puja* is done as usual. From this day on the small town of Champanagar has transformed itself into a bustling market place. There are people and vendors everywhere. The video halls and shop keepers have taken to blasting Hindi movie songs on loud speakers (well into the night). The little hamlet has come to resemble a large town.

Early the next morning, on the 7th day, a smaller procession (without an elephant etc.) sets off once again to the *bail* tree. Here a brief *puja* is done to the goddess and she is worshipped as the *bail* fruit. At the conclusion of the *puja* the fruit is cut from the tree. This, along with the bundle that was left there on the previous evening, is taken back to the temple.

Back at the temple, the statue of the goddess Durga is finally given life. On the morning of this the 7th day, the eyes (or pupils) are put on the *murti*. This is said to awaken the goddess, and the first sight that she must 'see' is blood. Consequently, the

instant that the statue maker gives her eyes, a goat is sacrificed by the priest. The statue maker told me that ideally a *kumari* (or pre-pubescent girl) should paint on the eyes.

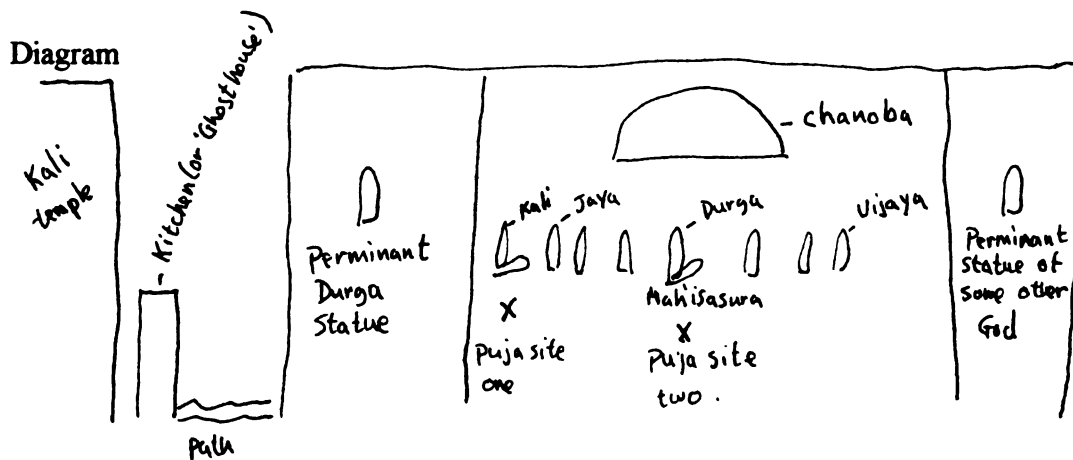
When the *bail* fruit is brought to the temple, the priests go the kitchen area, which is a separate small one room building to the left of the temple. Here in the kitchen, which is in the space between the Durga and Kali temples, a *puja* is done to the goddess and to her minions, that is, to ghosts and other spirit beings. From hence forth, the kitchen is known as the 'ghost house.' During the *puja*, the priest formally invites all the spirit beings to attend the *puja*, and then he requests them to stay in this room and eat the *prasad* that is offered them (the *prasad* includes meat, which is not normally used on such occasions). The ghosts are being appeased so that they will not disrupt the main *puja*, which will be held in the temple. The bundle that has nine different types of vegetation in it, is said to hold the ghosts. As ghosts live in trees and as the bundle (and *bail* fruit) is also the product of trees, there seems to be a close association between the goddess and ghosts.

After the *puja* in the kitchen, the bundle of plants along with the *bail* fruit is tied with a red cloth, and carried to the temple. The short (and dirty) path from the kitchen to the temple is prayed to as the bundle is moved. Flowers, rice etc., are thrown in the direction of the temple (toward the statue of the goddess). Having finished with this *puja*, the ghosts are asked to stay in the kitchen and leave us humans alone.

Inside the temple, the *puja* is moved from the left side of the statue of Kali/Siva (where all the *pujas* till this point have taken place) to the center of the temple, by the

feet of the statue of Durga. But before this shift, the bundle of vegetation is put at the feet of Kali/Siva and a brief *puja* is done there.

The bundle contains the leaves of plants that are sacred to the goddess. They represent different aspects of her. They include: the banana tree, which is worshipped as the Kankalini goddess; Rait Kantika is the goddess of the *Drona* plant (a mythical plant, like *soma*; here it is represented by the *anmoid* plant); Lakshmi is associated with *dhan* or paddy; Durga with *haridrika* (or *haldi*); Chamunda with the *manna* leaf; Kalikay with *kanchu*; Siva with a *bail* leaf; Shoka Hrita or the 'pleased goddess' (i.e., the goddess that takes away sorrow) with the *Asoak* leaf; Kartiki or the shakti of Kartikay with the *jayanti* tree. All these goddess' are worshipped in turn. Each of these goddess' (and Siva) are being asked to bless the *puja* so that the *puja* can shift from the left side (i.e., the side where the plants are placed and where the ghosts reside) to the center, in front of the statue of Durga. At the end of the *puja* to these plants, the priest formally bows to the statue of Durga, and then moves the *puja* toward her (to the center of the temple)



The bundle of vegetation is kept in front of the Kali *murti* (where the *puja* has taken place till this point). The *puja* moves to the center of the temple, in front of Durga's statue.

By this time, the crowd outside the temple has become very large. The entire village seems to have shown up to pay their respects to the goddess. Men and women are dressed in their finest clothes. People, especially the older ones, have become very formal in their deference to the *murti*. They come into the temple, bow to the goddess and then exit walking backwards, bowing all the while. The crowd around the temple has gotten so large that it is difficult to walk in and out of the place.

The statue of Durga should have eighteen arms, to represent each of her aspects. But mostly she is depicted with ten arms (as in the permanent image of her) or with eight arms, as in the impermanent *murti* of her (there is a small brass statue of an eighteen armed Durga next to the permanent statue of her in the temple). At any rate, when the *puja* is moved to the center of the temple, each of the eighteen aspects (or *ungs*) of the goddess is worshipped by turn. Then each of the gods and goddess' that are represented are worshipped (Lakshmi Saraswati, Ganesh, Kartika, etc.). After the priest has completed his prayer to Dhuchin Kali (the Kali that faces south, the 'house' deity of the *raja's* who sponsor the *puja*) a silent prayer is done for each of the other deities. Then a prayer is done for Ganga (who is on top of the painted arch, above Siva). After this a prayer is done to Siva, and the *munies* who flank him. In other words, by turn, each of the deities represented is prayed to. Finally a long prayer is offered to Siva.

After this a goat is brought into the temple and prayed to (made pure by symbolically washing various parts of its body, as on the first day). Then the *khurg* (sword) is prayed to. The goat is then taken out to be sacrificed. The *ghari ghanta* and *arti* are performed as usual.

The *puja* at night was pretty much the usual affair. The only difference was that it was attended by many members of the royal family (the ones that own the temple).

The women sat to the left side, while the men sat on the right (I asked why this was so, but no one seemed to know). The town folk also came in numbers for the evening *puja*. On this, the seventh day of *puja*, the goddess was given her jewelry and her weapons. Because the jewelry is of considerable value, from this day on guards were posted outside the temple. Outside the temple, the town is in a lively festive mood.

Due to astrological reasons, on this year the seventh day of the *puja* repeated itself. So the next day the *puja* for the 7th day was repeated. Not the procession to the *bail* tree etc., but rather the morning *puja* started out in front of the Kali *murti* and was then moved to the Durga *murti*. At night the *pujas* was more or less as before.

NISA PUJA

But on this night, we performed Nisa puja (or 'midnight puja'). This is, as the priest (and just about everyone else) told me, a Tantric puja. Most *vedic pujas* are done in the morning, and must be completed before noon, which is normally the most auspicious time to perform a *yaga* (or *vedic* sacrifice, *puja*). But Tantrics consider midnight the most auspicious time to worship the goddess, a time when the spirits are on the loose. This *puja* is done to the female minions of Durga, represented as dark, demon like creatures. Each *jojani* (or female devotee of Durga) is worshipped in turn, all hundred and eight of them. The puja itself is done to the *bhoots* (ghosts), *paraits*, *dakins* etc. that form Durga's army. The goddess herself is seen here in her *bhasal* (awesome, or frightening) *rupa* (form).

Normally an Indian town more or less shuts down by this hour (actually people are in bed by ten P.M.). But because of the *mela* (or fair) that has formed for the festival, there are still a few men wandering about near the video halls. But no one, save for the priests and myself, is at the temple this night. All in all the temple is a pretty spooky place to be.

Nisa *puja* is a very long *puja* (it didn't finish until at least 2:00 A.M.). The goat that is to be sacrificed should ideally be black. It is tied to the temple pillar until the priest is ready for it. All the while it kept crying, sounding very much like a human infant. Pariah dogs are outside the temple, by the sacrificial post, licking the blood from previous sacrifices.

One of the highlights of this *puja* is the sacrifice of the '*rippu*'. A small rice paste effigy of a man is placed to the left of the goddess. This man is referred to as *rippu* or 'the enemy'. He is cut in half, with a small knife. The goddess is being asked to kill our enemies, or rather, our enemy is being offered as a sacrifice to the goddess. After the killing of the *rippu*, the goat is sacrificed. Then a green coconut is cut with the same sword. *Ghari ghanta* and *arti* signal the end of the *puja*.

This was, to me the most dramatic *puja* in the entire ten day festival (its intensity was rivaled only by Kali *puja*, which we shall discuss elsewhere). I was told that from this night forth, the *murti* of the goddess will change. People claim to see a radiance or transformation of the statue, which is now filled with *shakti* (i.e., it is said to be alive, even to the point of being dangerous). It is common knowledge that on this night every Tantric adept, *ojha* or *dine*, will be performing special secret ceremonies to make their

mantra's siddhi (active). The *ojhas* that I talked to said that it is absolutely necessary to perform the left handed Tantric *pujas* on this night (the "*bhoot puja*" or ghost *puja*) if one wishes to retain one's power. *Dines* (or witches) are said to sacrifice a human victim on this night, in order to retain their power. So to a witch, the symbolic enemy that the priest sacrifices is turned into an actual victim. As for the rest, witches, renouncers or healers, all are said to do this *puja* naked, offering blood and semen in a skull to the goddess, which is then used as *changrogat* (or the liquid sacrament that has touched the feet of the divine).

Whether or not these things are actually true, I can not say. For obvious reasons, any such rite is done in secret, and a *guru* will only invite his or her most accomplished students to participate. But even if no such rites actually take place, there is hardly a villager who doesn't believe that they do. Everyone knows that this night is a night of extreme danger. The liminality of the entire *dashmi* period is attested to by the fact that no one is supposed to cut their nails or hair during the entire ten day period. It is as though a crack has been opened between the human world and the spirit world, and only the goddess is in a position to see you safely through this period. She is the only one who has authority over both ghosts (along with witches, snakes and other spirit beings) and humans.

It is hard not to get caught up in the passion and intensity of such an event. As I walked home from the temple in the wee hours of the morning, I realized that there wasn't a soul around. Had I been bit by a snake (or attacked by a ghost) no one would

have heard me call out. It is at times like this that one stops being an observer and starts becoming a participant. I, like everyone else, was in the hands of the goddess.

EIGHTH DAY

By the eighth day, the temple has become so crowded that it is extremely difficult to enter it. By order of the temple patrons, local villagers are not allowed to enter the temple. But they come anyway, and come in droves. It seems as though villagers from miles around have come to pay their respects to the goddess on this day. There are also many *saddhus* (ascetics) in the crowd. Everyone is dressed in their finest clothes and all are carrying *artis* or *prasad* to offer to the goddess. They give such offerings to the priests (and the local anthropologist, who is in the privileged position of being allowed into the temple) who then place it at the feet of the goddess. After the *puja* such *prasad* is taken by the giver to be distributed to family and friends. People wander from the Durga to the Kali temple, bowing solemnly to each deity. The amount of people who have turned up is truly incredible considering the size of the town. People are sitting out on the compound of the temple, young men are checking out the local belles and vice versa. Generally, there is a festive carnival mood to the whole event.

I was told that Nisa puja is the turning point of the entire ritual. The goddess is now fully active and there is from here on in, a constant crowd around the temple. The guards have to help me enter or exit the temple.

This is also the day when juniors will formally show their deference to seniors by doing *pranam* to them. This little ritual isn't solemn or particularly formal; in the morning my 'brothers' and 'sisters' (fathers second cousins' children) came barging into

my room, quickly touching my feet and then demanding money. Juniors expect their elders to give them money to 'see' the *mala* (or fair). But this act of asking for and giving blessings isn't restricted to kinsmen. All the servants or clients of a patron expect the patron on this day to give them new clothes or money (clothes are more traditional). The net effect is to re-establish the hierarchy of patron/client relationships, of junior/senior relationships.

In the evening the crowd that had gathered to watch the *puja* was very large. They watched the *puja* with great intensity, following the *pundits* every move. Almost everyone from the palace has shown up on this night (women sitting to the left and men to the right). The *murties* are sprinkled with water and *attars* (scents) are put on the deity.

After the *puja*, the women of the palace pour *sindur* (red vermillion) on the goddess' right hand (the hand that is holding the spear that is in the act of killing Mashasaure). After the *sindur* has touched Durga's right hand, it is taken to the statue of Kali, where the process is repeated. Contact with the deity has made the *sindur* holy, and this *sindur* is given to each of the married women of the lineage, to be used by them for the following year. *Sindur* is put on the part of a married women's hair, as a symbol of her married status.

'THE GODDESS LOVES BLOOD'

On the ninth day, there is a very large crowd outside the temple. It is so crowded that even the guards have a hard time letting me in. There is a long line of people waiting by the sacrificial post with their goats. Each has come to make a sacrifice to the

goddess. The sacrificing continues for several hours. The temple priests charge a minimal amount of money for each goat they have to kill. The priests and I estimated that some three hundred goats were sacrificed on this day.¹¹

Immediately after the *arti* was performed, the crowd outside the temple tried to push their way in. A barrage of *pundits* waited at the temple door, waiting to perform a quick *puja* for each person who brought a sacrifice to the goddess. Bamboo gates were erected to control the crowd. But this didn't do much good, as the impatient crowd pushed to get into the temple. On this day, everyone is required to come and pay their respects to the goddess.

By mid-morning goats are being sacrificed left and right. The crowd outside has become a mob scene. The 'line' in which people are supposed to stand has lost all meaning. Women are pushing their way to the temple with plates full of sweets to offer to the goddess. As they are not allowed into the temple (not that this really stops them) they hand their offerings to anyone (myself included) that is within the temple. Even if the offerings were not given with a prayer (as should be done) at least they spend some time by the feet of the goddess and this was apparently enough to transform them into *prasad*. The *pundits* spend the rest of the day performing such prayers and making sacrifices for a fee.

By the evening the crowd has died down somewhat. By comparison to the morning *puja*, the people who did show up were positively sedate. But with the

¹¹ . Incidentally, as I had been asking about ghosts and *ojhas* for the last several months, the priests, along with my family and friends thought it would be a good idea for me to offer a sacrifice to the goddess. Not wanting to take any chances, I decided to purchase a goat to sacrifice at Champanagar, and another to be sacrificed in my name in my hometown of Sultangunj. My goat was the first in line.

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sounding of the *ghari ghanta*, a crowd began to gather again, to participate in the *arti* and to bow to the goddess. On this day little shops have sprung up on the road next to the temple. They sell sweets and flowers that are offered to the goddess. The *pundits* are still at the business of taking such offerings and performing a brief *puja* for a price. After the *puja* (after the sweets have been put by the goddess' feet) they are given back to the devotee to be eaten as *prasad*.

BISARJAN

On the tenth and final day of the *puja*, the morning prayers are no longer done to the statue, but to the various vegetation which has been placed to the right of the statue. The *pundit* offers jasmine, *sindur*, hibiscus flowers, coconuts etc. to the deity. The prayer is done to the flowers of a creeper, known as *apragatya* (a plant sacred to Durga, which literally means victory). A red *sari* is offered to the goddess.

During each *puja*, for the last ten days, the goddess has been formally invited to come to the *puja* and to bless us with her presence. Today however, at the end of the *puja*, she is formally asked to leave and to come back next year. After the *arti* and *ghari ghanta*, the *pundits* circle the temple three times. Then sacrifices are made and the *bisarjin puja* (or formal procession that will dispose of the statues) is done.

Around noon all the *pundits* that have taken part in the *puja* go to the *dehori* (or palace of the sponsors). Here all the men of the house have gathered in a room, each facing north, while the priests bless them by sprinkling them on the head with the water that was placed in the *kalais* (earthen pot) on the first day of *Dasara*. This pot had been placed on a clump of earth that was sewn with barley seeds. These seeds, which have

sprouted within the last ten days are now placed on the heads of each male family member. Then a garland of the *apragatya* plant is put on the right hand of each male family member. A bag of coins, containing a hundred and one Rs (a hundred and one or all odd numbers being auspicious) is passed around, and each person present is supposed to put his hand in the bag and shake the coins. Later the money is taken to the *gossain ghar* (family goddess temple) and given to the goddess, after which it is distributed to the *brahmins*. *Sindur* is used to put a *tika* on the head of each family member.

The women go through a similar ceremony, however here the *sindur* is used as *sindur* for the married women (i.e., they put the vermilion in the part of their hair). All this is done to insure the 'victory' or success for the patron family for the coming year. The link between the fortunes of the royal family and the festival of the goddess is further specified by the blessings that are performed to all the arms (guns, swords, etc.) that the royal patrons possess.

At about 4:00 in the afternoon, the evening *pujas* are completed. The goddess (with her entourage) is taken out of the temple and placed on her *routh* (or chariot). There is a separate chariot for Kali and Durga and one for all the other deities (Siva, Ganash etc.). The mood of the town is intensely passionate. People have come from miles around. Villagers, still wishing to have their offerings blessed by the goddess, have taken to throwing sweets at her statue. The men of the royal patron family, who will accompany the *murti* to the river, are constantly being pelted by such offerings. They stand there, next to the statue, with the priests, barefoot. They are not allowed to wear shoes, as the ground that the goddess traverses is instantly transformed to sacred space.

The Santhals (the local aboriginal peoples) have come to the village in large numbers. The Santhal men are dancing in groups of eight to ten. Each group has several people with short sticks in their hands. They keep these so that if anyone gets overwhelmed by the trances that the Santhals go into at this time, they can cordon him off (i.e., two or three men will literally form a small enclosure around the tranced out individual). But such precautions seem to do little. Entire groups of Santhals have gone into dancing frenzies, and in a trance state, they charge the chariot holding the goddess (I was told that in such a state, individuals are 'pulled' toward the goddess). The only thing that stops them are the priests (and the ethnographer who the priests have recruited) who have come prepared with large buckets of holy water (water that has been used during the *puja* or has touched the goddess and so is full of her *shakti*). These buckets have hundreds of flowers in them, and the flowers along with the water is thrown at the charging Santhals. The instant that they are touched by the water, they fall down, prostrated, shaking, as though in a convulsion.¹²

All in all the event reminds one of a mock battle, with wave after wave of trance induced Santhals charging straight for the goddess. A short warning is sounded as someone will yell out, "Santhals", and everyone clears a path for them. I was told that if they are not stopped they would destroy the statue in a frenzied state. This happened two years ago when one of the arms of the goddess was broken by a tranced out Santhal. Only the priests are in a position to rebuff them, by pelting them with flowers and water.

¹². It is unwise to be in between the goddess and such charging Santhals, as they let nothing stand in their way. Last year, one of the senior members of the royal family was unfortunate enough to be in such a position and was unceremoniously knocked down.

Once touched by the *shakti* within the flower they fall down around the *murti*, quivering as though they were in the throws of death. Some Santhals have gone so deeply into a trance that they start piercing their cheeks and tongue with large steel needles. Some then cap the needles with a small trident, symbol of the lord Siva.

As dense and chaotic as the crowd is around the statue, there is an even larger crowd lining the streets that the goddess will travel and a positively huge crowd waiting at the gates of the *dehori*. As the goddess moves slowly through the town the entire crowd goes into a frenzied state, pelting the image with *gillabies* and other sweets. The mood has shifted from a carnival atmosphere into a passion play. Everyone bows deeply as the goddess passes by them.

The procession is lead by the statue of Kali/Siva, followed by the chariot housing the other gods, and finally, the chariot that holds the goddess Durga. The procession reaches the *dehori*, where it is joined by the remaining men and children of the royal lineage. It rests here awhile as the crowd outside continues to beat drums and dance in a trance state. Then it begins its slow journey to the river (a small stream about a mile and a half outside of town). It reached the river around twilight, half the crowd turned back before actually reaching the river. By the time we were ready to submerge the statues in the river, it was pitch dark.

On the night of the tenth day, the *mela* (fair) in town started in earnest. It continued on for the next 5 to 10 days. Today it is a requirement that you touch the feet of your elders. Also servants (or clients) will touch the feet of their patrons. As clothes and money have already been given to juniors and clients, today the elders mostly give

food, as a blessing. One must accept this food even if it is only a token amount. This finally ends the ritual of Durga puja.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE DECONSTRUCTIVE DEITY

So far we have considered Durga *puja* from a descriptive ethnographic perspective. It is time now to turn our attention to the text of the *puja*, and see what themes emerge. I think that the text and the performance converge around the idea of opposition and the collapse of opposition. The Devi's transcendental nature is implied (only implied) by her ability to be simultaneously at both ends of an opposition. Thus in order to understand her nature (and consequently our nature) it is necessary for the devotee to transcend or collapse such opposition. And this deconstructive moment is what Durga *puja* is all about.

In order to show how this works, I thought it would be useful to simply list some of the crucial oppositions that the *puja* 'plays' around with. These oppositions, let us keep in mind, are crucial to Indian society (I do not wish to attribute anything universal about such concepts). In what follows I draw from both the text of the *puja* (provided in an appendix) as well as on our ethnographic description of the event.

Culture and Nature: It must be obvious to the reader by now that in Mathil society, Durga is closely linked to both culture and nature.

She is a representation of culture because she 'lives' in the very heart of social space. That is, the Durga temple is the center of the town's ritual and social activity. Consequently

Durga is at the center of social space.¹³ This is further enforced at a personal level, as the goddess is placed in the most pure and sanctified space within a house; namely the *ghosian ghar*. Here is an excerpt from a conversation with Krishnash *pundit* (the main *pundit* during the *puja*).

"*Gossain ghar*. Meaning *gossainia's* house, meaning the house of the god that is associated with my [a] lineage. *Kul* [lineage] Devi's house. In my opinion, there are two traditions that relate to this. I have seen this for many years, for the last 50, 60, 70 years.... In the main dwelling, either on the western or the southern side is where the kitchen is. Inside the kitchen, on one side is established the *Kul Devi* [family goddess]. In the kitchen, on one side is the kitchen, on the other the *gossian ghar*.... The reason is because without washing your hands and feet, you can't go to the kitchen, and without washing, you can't bow to the goddess."

So the goddess resides in the central ritual space of a house, that is, in the purest place of a house, and in the central ritual space of a village.

At the same time, there seems to be a strong link between the goddess and nature. This link is made explicit in part 8 of the text, the "*Bail noit*" procession (*Bail* is called *Vilwa* in Sanskrit). Although not specified in the text, the villagers at Champanagar insisted that the *Bail* tree used in this *puja* must be outside the village. So we already have a clue as to the significance of this event.

The tree itself is worshipped as Durga. The *yagman* says, "Oh Devi! Residing in this *Vilwa* branch! Bestow on me thy emporia grace." (part 9 of the text). Later, "Oh auspicious Shree fruit! Oh embodiment of Durga! Oh Chanunda! Come! Come. Oh Durga! You have been stabilized in this mud image and this *Vilwa*." And if this link between the goddess and nature wasn't explicate enough, the same *puja* goes on to specify the nine kinds of vegetation

¹³. As we shall see in our discussion of kinship and kingship, the first thing that a king who wishes to establish a new center or village does, is to build a *Durga-stan*.

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that represents the different aspects of the goddess (banana, *drona*, paddy, turmeric, *manna*, *kanchu*, *vilwa*, *shoke* and *jayanti*, see part 12 of the text).

Meanwhile back at the temple, the *murti* of the goddess has been clearly marked as a social person. The statue is treated as an honored guest, being offered all the hospitality that the town is in a position to provide; including cloths, jewelry, and even *attar*. But, and this is crucial, this image isn't complete, isn't alive until it is linked to the vegetation. That is, the act of bringing the *vilwa* fruit and the nine kinds of vegetation to the temple finally collapses the culture/nature opposition. "...At an auspicious moment, collorium should be made with *ghee* on the *vilwa* leaf and put in the eyes of the image... 'Here are your eyes, Oh Devi!'" (from part 9) Bringing the fruits and vegetation to the temple is the final act by which the statue of the goddess is transformed into a social person. It is at the moment when the natural end is linked to the cultural end of the opposition that the Devi is finally complete as a person.

This theme is consistently followed in other culture/nature symbols that are utilized during the *puja*. The Devi is linked to the king; not only does the royal family sponsor the *puja*, but the power and authority of the king are blessed by the goddess on the final day of the ceremony. The king, along with the *brahmin* who performs the *yaga* on his behalf, are at the apex of Indian society. Hence they are the upholders of *dhrama* (moral law) or cultural rules. But this aspect of the goddess is counterbalanced by her close association with the Santahals of the region. These aboriginal populations (throughout east India) seem to have an especially close link to the goddess, and as we have seen, certainly display this devotion in a more dramatic manner than anyone else. But these people are considered apart from traditional Hindu (brahamanic) society. They do not usually employ *brahmin* priests for their

rituals, and are thought to violate normal rules of conduct (by eating meat, drinking liquor, etc.). If the king and *brahmin* are the representatives of culture, then the Santhals take on the role of outsider, of nature. Yet both ends of this opposition are equally devout in their respect for the goddess.¹⁴

Married and Unmarried: The goddess is clearly marked in the text of the *puja* as married.

Consider this passage from part 5:

"You are the Kali, the Kanala (Lakshmi), the consort of Bhrama, of Siva, you are Jaya and Vijaya, you are Lakshmi (consort of Vishnu) in *Vishmuloka* (Vishnu's abode) and you are Parviti in *Kailash* (abode of Siva), Saraswati in *Brahmaloka* (abode of Bhrama), Indrani (consort of Indra) who is always respected by Indra..." and so on. Later in the same section, "Oh Queen of all Devas, Oh Mother of the Universe....Oh Mistress of all beings." [emphasis is mine]. But of course, she is most clearly and most often linked to Siva, e.g., "Oh the lifeblood of Shankar"(part 4) or, "Oh beloved of Siva" etc.

As this and several other passages make clear, the goddess is definitely wed. As the *shakti* (power) of all the gods, she is the mistress of all beings, implying that all women are *shakti*. The idea here is that the goddess is closely linked to married women. This is made explicit in the ritual tradition of women pouring *sinchur* on the goddess' hand, on the eighth

¹⁴. 'Nature' in Indian society seems to have the added connotation of being a place of liberation. The renouncer leaves the social world of the village, to seek his liberation in the forest. The close link between the renouncer and the Devi makes him, like her, a mediator between culture and nature. He more than the king or the *brahmin* is at the heart of Indian culture, but at the same time, he is also apart from that culture, choosing to spend his life in nature. This I think is no accident. Transcendence is always linked to the ability to deconstruct opposition. (for the link between the renouncer and the forest, see J.C. Heesterman, 1985, esp. ch. 2)

day of the *puja*. This *sindur* which is a symbol to indicate a woman's married state in this region, clearly links the goddess to wedded women. The text of the *puja* enforces this association in the passage, "with *sindur*: 'This vermilion, created as the symbolic decoration of all married women, is offered to Thee, Oh Devi.'"(part 5)

Incidentally, the wedded status of the Devi is not related to whether she is represented as a malevolent or a benevolent being (see Babb, 1970 and 1975). During Nisa *puja*, the goddess is represented in her terrible form, "Oh, Maha-Devi, with terrible teeth and scary face, who loves offerings of blood and flesh." Here she is seen as the general of a great demon army. Yet she is still specifically linked to her consort Siva, "Oh beloved of Hara (Siva)." This is true of Kali as well. In fact, it would be hard to make sense of the myth of Kali (see above) if she were not wed to Siva. So the goddess' wedded status is not related to whether she is seen as a destroyer or as a loving mother.

On the other hand, the goddess is also contemplated as an un-wed maiden (*kumari*). The whole point of the *kumari puja* (part 16) is to contemplate the goddess as a pre-pubescent maiden. "I meditate on the young, maiden form of the goddess, with smiling countenance like a lotus in full bloom...etc." The unwed status of the goddess, or the link between her and a *kumari* is reinforced by the statue makers insistence that a *kumari* (and not he) should give the goddess her eyes.

This should not confuse us. The goddess is associated with all women. She is, "the mistress of all beings." Consequently, she is represented as and linked to all aspects of womanhood (benevolent/malevolent; terrible of form/beautiful in form; black/white; married/unmarried; etc.). The point is that she is both wed and unwed, and this is true of any

of her forms. Therefore no simple dichotomy between good and benevolence versus evil and malevolent can be made.

Humans vs. Ghosts: Many of the associations of this opposition have already been covered under our culture/nature section. I include the human/ghost opposition only because it seems so important to the residents of Champanagar. Obviously, the very possibility of healing spirits could not exist if the goddess did not mediate between the human and the spirit worlds. Therefore, *ojhas* (as well as *dines*) are closely linked to the goddess. As we saw in the interview with Phrabho and Basu Dev in Chapter one, the goddess is in charge of *jogins* and *jogins* in turn control ghosts. So there is a hierarchy in the spirit world, and the goddess is at its apex. This is equally true of the world of humans. The first person that a human will turn to in times of trouble is the local village god (the *gram devata*). Such local gods, as we have already seen, are said to be the agents of the goddess. Humans and ghosts are equally under her control.

The world of spirits and the world of humans are interconnected, as *jogins* tend to be seen as moral agents. They will possess people who have in some way violated the social norm. What we have here is a spiritual chain of command. Shakti is in command of all spirits and sends her minions (her demon warriors), called *jogins*, to do her bidding. These demons can then help the *ojha* to fight evil ghosts. In other words, the *jogins* control the ghosts and **Durga** controls them.

But to get back to our opposition, Durga as we have seen is closely linked to the world of humans. She is called master of the universe, in the text of the *puja*, and is in every way treated as a royal personage during the ceremony (being formally offered food, clothes, jewelry etc.). Her link to the human world is specified in the *puja*, where she is asked repeatedly to bless our *arth*, *kama*, *dharma*, and *moksa*. That is, she is seen as being in charge of all human pursuits.

At the same time, she is linked to the spirit world. She, like the ghosts she controls, is seen as living in vegetation (the *bail* tree and the nine other kinds of trees mentioned in the text, along with the *apragatia* creeper, mentioned on the last day of the *puja*). During Nisa *puja* she is worshipped as the general of a ghost army (the *jogins* mentioned by Basu Dev and Parabho Mondal). She is even represented pictorially (in the *Chanaba*) at the head of this demon army.

Clearly then Durga is part of both the human and the spirit world. It is only by praying to her that these worlds are kept separate, or kept in balance. This would explain the ambivalence people feel during the time of *puja*. It is a time of danger, because by activating the goddess, one also activates the world of ghosts. If all goes well (i.e., if the *puja* is performed correctly) and the goddess is pleased, then she will put these separate realms in their proper place.

Giver and Receiver: I include this opposition as a response to Prof. Gloria Goodwin Raheja's book Poison in the Gift. According to Prof. Raheja, accepting a gift in the Indian context,

always implies an inferior status and a willingness on the part of the receiver to take away or ingest the ritual pollution of the giver (Raheja, 1988). Thus she feels that gift giving is always an asymmetrical process that carries with it the taint of ritual pollution. But if this were so the complex reciprocal exchanges embedded within the ten day ritual of Durga puja would make little sense. The goddess is offered (and receives) many gifts from the devotee (see for e.g. part 2, where she is offered an *asan*, feet cleaning water, *udavarttana*, etc.). Does this mean she is polluted or of an inferior status to the devotee? Or again, juniors and *brahmins* receive gifts from seniors during this time, but to say that a son or a daughter is taking away the pollution of a parent would be silly (even offensive) to the natives of this area.

I do not mean to imply that there aren't times when the process of receiving a gift carries with it the taint of pollution. Prof. Raheja does a good job of pointing out such examples. However, it seems to me that too many South Asian ethnographers wish to make one aspect of Indian society the bedrock of the entire culture. Partly this is a result of the influence of structuralism on South Asian scholars. I am not saying that such models haven't helped us understand India, all I am saying is that one should be cautious in any attempt to represent such an old and complex culture.

I think it is far better to go with a more basic analysis of what it means to give and receive, namely that the act of gift giving implies a social connectedness. In the social world, such gifts do tend to delineate hierarchies. That is, it is the patron that is giving to the client; it is the elder that is giving to the junior. This certainly seems to imply that the status of the receiver is lower than the status of the giver (although, as far as I could tell, this has little to do with purity or pollution).

But when we turn our attention to the exchanges between the deity and humanity, a far more complex picture emerges. Here the act of giving and receiving does not seem to imply hierarchy. This would be consistent with Heesterman's view that in Indian society there is a radical rupture between the social world of humans, and the transcendental world of sacrifice. Exchange between humans implies hierarchy, but exchanges between humans and divinity does nothing of the sort. The entire ten days of *puja* is a series of exchanges between humans and the goddess. The term *yaga* means sacrifice, in Sanskrit, and so every *yaga* implies an exchange between humans and the divine.

We give her clothes, food, jewelry, incense, sandalwood, flowers, blood sacrifice, etc., but these self same gifts are given back to us by the goddess in the form of a blessing. A generalized reciprocal exchange is set up between the goddess and the community, generalized because the gifts being exchanged are certainly not of equal value (actually, a reciprocal exchange is set up with each individual within the community, as each will sooner or later partake of the blessings of the goddess). This is significant because each and every individual of the community, in the course of the ten day ritual, will enter into a social relationship with the goddess.

This is most clearly marked in the symbolic feast that takes place at the end of every *puja*. The goddess and the devotee participate in the *bhoje* (feast) that is offered to the goddess at the end of the *puja*. We give the goddess food, but in exchange, in the very act of accepting our gift, she gives us her blessing. This blessing comes in the form of eating the goddess' leftovers, or sharing in her essence. This *prasad* is thought to be so powerful that it has the ability to re-order (or restore) the balance of an individual. It is for this reason that

people who suffer from spirit possession need to perform a *puja* to the goddess, offering her sweets, or *ganga*, or in the case of a particularly powerful spirit, offering her a pigeon or a goat (blood sacrifice). This is an important point and one we shall return to.

The act of sharing in a feast with the goddess reestablishes the natural order of the world. This point was driven home to me in a conversation with Basu Dev:

"Me: These ghosts or *yogins*, how do they get out of it? I mean once they turn into a ghost or a *yogin* how do they...

BD: They get out of it, *sarkar*, like this. A *bhakti* [devotee] is doing *puja* to god. After the *puja* they get *prasad*. They take some of that *prasad* home with them. Now they (i.e., the ghosts) take a human form and meet him on his path (i.e., the devotee). Just like me and you, they come to the *bhakti* and ask for *prasad*. Once they get the *prasad*, their *bhoot yoni* [i.e. 'ghost womb'] is canceled.

Me: I didn't get that, tell it to me again.

BD: The *prasad* that the *bhakti* has, he eats some of it and takes the rest to distribute to other villagers and his family and children. So he wraps up the *prasad* and goes on his way home. He takes it home with him to give to people. Now the ghosts, who roam around, those ghosts, those ghosts turn into people, just like you and me, and stand on the path. [They say], '*Sarkar*, where are you coming from, where is your home. Please give me some *prasad* too, I am very hungry.' Why wouldn't he [i.e., the *bhakti*] give him some *prasad*? Of course he will give him *prasad*. When it eats the *prasad*, he stops being a ghost."

As this conversation illustrates, the instant a ghost partakes of the feast, that is the social, he is released from the limbo of *parriat yoni* (also called *bhoot yoni*, the ghost womb or place where the soul of a dead person goes before being reborn). The social act of feasting ends the deferment of death. We shall talk more of this later.

My point here is simply to show that during the ritual of Durga *puja*, the goddess is both giver (giver of order, giver of blessings, etc.) and receiver. This seems to me to imply that the act of giving and receiving between humans and the deity is a reciprocal process that establishes a social bond between the two.

We could continue on with such oppositions, but I think that I have established the fact that the goddess mediates between oppositions. By being linked to both poles of an opposition, she effectively deconstructs the dichotomy. Before we leave this line of reasoning, I would like to highlight what I feel are the three most important dichotomies that the goddess deconstructs. In the process of establishing herself on both sides of these oppositions, she clearly reveals herself as the transcendent.¹⁵

Purity and Pollution: This crucial opposition, according to Dumont is central to Indian society (Dumont, 1970). Hierarchy in India tends to be justified in terms of purity and pollution. Yet to the transcendent, neither purity nor pollution exists. Consequently, the goddess is both the apex of purity and the acme of pollution.

As with all *pujas*, great care is taken during this event to purify the space where the *puja* will be performed. Part 1 of the text specifies how one should purify the seat (*asan*) to be used during the *puja*. Not only is the space purified but the *yagman* performing the rite must also be made pure. Each representation of the goddess (e.g. the pots that represents her in Part 2) is preceded by the purification of the spot that it will rest upon. The pot itself contains water from all the *tirtha's* of the world. One can't really ask for anything purer than that (incidentally, the pot itself should be of a pure substance, ideally gold, silver or copper, see part 3).

¹⁵ Of course it is the case that every deity is seen as the transcendent in their temple or during the time of their worship. However, in this society as Durga puja is the most elaborate ritual, Durga is more closely linked to the transcendent than any other deity.

Once the pot is established, the goddess herself is invoked as followed: "*Om! Hring, Kling, Chamundai Vichai*. The skull of Heaven's, the birth place of all beings, the purest of the pure, crimsoned by the blood of all *asuras*, white in complexion, drinker of ambrosia, the skull of the goddess. I bow to Thee!" [emphasis mine]

This passage clues us into the fact that the goddess is pure, but also polluted. Images of blood (a very polluting substance) skulls and death are invoked even as the text assures us of the absolute purity of the goddess.

This theme of purity and pollution is constantly being highlighted in the performance of the *puja*. After all the care that the *yagman* takes to purify the sacred space on which the *puja* will take place, he then turns around and puts the severed head of a goat within this sanctified space. Normally nothing remotely connected with death is allowed near the site of a *puja*. Not only must the spot be cleared of any blood or other impure substances, but even people who are in mourning are not allowed to attend such events. Here however, the goddess' nature as both pure and impure implies that she is unaffected by the contagion of death and impurity.

This is crucial to understanding her nature. It is only because she can, at the same time, be both pure and impure that she is in the position to reach out to and interact with all members of society. Unlike the other transcendental deities, such as Vishnu, this goddess can be worshipped by anyone.¹⁶ What this means is that the "inner conflict" that Heesterman speaks of is to an extent mediated by the Devi (Heesterman, 1986). The crisis point of Hindu

¹⁶ . Vishnu seems to be a particularly stringent deity in this regard. His devotees spend an inordinate amount of time obsessing over ritual purity. Most Vishnavites are vegetarians, who shun liquor etc. In other words, even if they aren't *bhramins* themselves, they tend to conform to the codes of *brahmanic* society.

theology revolved around the question of what to do with the mundane social world. The renouncer could maintain his legitimacy only so long as he totally distanced himself from the polluted secular world. This in effect meant that there was a radical break between the transcendental world of the ascetic and the profane world of the king. And this is fine, as long as you are a renouncer, but the question becomes, how do normal humans (the ones that are still in the polluted world) relate to the transcendent. The Devi, by being closely associated with both pollution and purity is able to bridge the gap between these two realms.

Consequently, the goddess' devotees need not follow the strict code of conduct prescribed by brahmanic society. As we have seen, the least 'brahmanic' section of this community (namely the Santhals) are among the most devout followers of the goddess, and no one would question this. It makes perfect sense that the Deve-Mahatmaya is told to a deposed king and a merchant (see Colburn, 1991). The goddess may be the perfect symbol of the transcendent in her role as the purest of the pure, but she is also the perfect symbol for the achievement of *arth*, *kama*, and *dharama* (worldly well being) in her role as the polluted deity.

Time and again, the theme of pollution that implies victory crops up in the text of Durga puja. For example, in part 3 of the text we see the passage, "You carry (all sorts of) different weapons. You wear garlands of skulls that give blessings and relief from fear to worshipers." The pollution of death is transformed in the relief from fear. Or again, after the goat is sacrificed (part 15), "Taking a little blood from the *khadga* (sword), a dot on the forehead should be put with: 'Om! Whatever I may touch by my feet or see with my eyes,

should come under my power, even if full of animosity toward me." Here the pollution of blood is transformed into victory over ones enemies.

But nowhere is the link between victory and pollution more clearly stated than in the process of *bali* (sacrifice). Here the ultimate in polluting actions, taking a life, becomes the symbol of *moksha* (liberation, and so transcendence). First the sword is worshipped as the upholder of *dhrama*, "Oh *Khadga* of sharp edge, and terrible form! You have glory, victory, and *dharma* as your qualities. We bow to Thee." Then, and this is the crucial point, the goat is told, "Conquer the terrible pain of the strike of this *Khadga*, and by the grace of Devi, emancipate yourself as well as ourselves... For protection, you were in this bondage, for attaining *mukti*, you are released by me. Oh good animal! By propitiating the Devi, proceed to heaven. Having discarded this body, become of divinely form." Clearly the act of sacrifice is linked to the extinction of animal bondage, therefore it is linked to *mukti* or liberation. The most polluting of actions, the taking of a life, becomes the symbol for our highest aspiration, the realization of the transcendent.

It is only after the sacrifice that the text of the *puja* even mentions *moksha* (part 16). Till this point the Devi has been asked to uphold *dhrama*, *arth* and *kama*, but the final goal of human kind, the attainment of *moksha* can only be evoked after the deconstruction of pollution and purity is completed.

It is interesting that sacrifice also has the effect of linking the transcendent and the mundane, by collapsing the distinction between purity and pollution. The sacrificial animal goes from being a creature of the mundane world who is then transformed by the *brahmin* into a sanctified animal. The ritual purity of the animal is insured by the various acts of

cleansing that the *brahmin* performs prior to the sacrifice. In this way the animal, from the perspective of the human subject, can mediate between the mundane world that they inhabit and the transcendent world of the deity. But at the same time, in the instant that the animal is dispatched, he crosses over into the realm of the transcendent (i.e., is accepted by the Devi). But in that world, no distinctions between purity and pollution can exist; the Devi makes no distinction between the sanctified act of sacrifice and the mundane act of murder. To her death and life are one, purity and pollution are one, and sacrifice and murder are one.

So the sacrificial victim follows a path from mundane, to sanctified but then back to the mundane (or to a state where the mundane and the sacred are no different). This means that for a moment, for the horrible moment of ritual murder, the human subject who performs the sacrifice can glimpse the transcendent world of the Devi; a world in which sacrifice and murder are no different in form.

This theme of sacrifice is a complex one and one we will take up again later. But before proceeding to this, there is one more point I wish to make. One of the highlights of Nisa puja (part 18) is the sacrifice of the enemy (or rival) represented as a small rice paste effigy. This harkens back to the older idea of *puja* as a ritualized violent contest between rivals (see Heesterman, 1986). The rival who loses this contest is (symbolically) killed. Now according to Heesterman, the inner conflict of Hinduism resulted from the banishment of violence (or rivalry) from the act of *puja*. By distancing themselves from the reciprocal violence of the *puja* contest, the *brahmin* priest was able to claim absolute authority as the representative of the transcendent. Here we see the reverse process, where elements of the

rivalry submerged within Hindu worship are again allowed to surface. This idea of *puja* as a ritual contest between rivals is clearly indicated during Nisa puja.

True to form, this *puja* has several 'left handed' or Tantric elements associated with it. Not only is there an element of human sacrifice (symbolic, of course) but on this night the goddess is evoked specifically to attain power, or victory. "Today, for the destruction of my enemies..." Not only are all the aspects of the goddess specified and worshipped on this night (including her terrible forms), the *puja* also worships Bhairava, the god of death. The *puja* ends by worshipping the ghosts and spirit beings, that on the previous day (part 9, seventh day *puja*) were formally requested to leave the sight of the *puja*. In other words, those spirit beings who are normally disruptive and so banished from the sacred space created at a *puja* (part 1 and part 9) are here requested to attend the *puja*: "Om! Tonight, *Loka-Palas*, the nine planets, constellations, *Asuras*, *Gandarva's*, *Yaksha*, *Rakshasa*, *Vidyadham*, *Parmaga*, elephants, animals, *bhoota*, *pishachu*, meat-eating demons, *yoginis*, *dakins*, are offered these edibles." So the goddess' association with the polluted world of spirit beings (meat-eating demons and the like) is here specified. And this theme of the conquest of ones enemies by left handed Tantric practices is elaborated upon by the left handed worshipers of the goddess. If you recall, this night is the night that *ojhas*, witches and ascetics are said to make their *mantras siddhi*. On this night the town folk think that such people, but especially witches, take the notion of killing ones enemies literally. By using the magical power that one gains by performing Nisa puja, the witch magically kills (sacrifices) a victim on this night.

Here the collapse of the distinction between murder and sacrifice is brought to fruition. The collapse of this distinction which is the logic of the world inhabited by the Devi

and her meat eating minions, is temporally applied to the devotee. The devotee is so close to the transcendent world by this point in the ritual, that the sacrificial victim (at least symbolically) can legitimately be his rival. Because they have become so closely linked to the goddess the *prohit* and the *yagman* are able to, at least temporarily, visualize the logic of her non-distinction between murder and sacrifice. Consequently, by ritually killing their rival, they are able to collapse this distinction.

The point of all this, I think, is to bridge the gap between the ethereal world of the *brahmin* and the secular world of the rest of society. The Devi addresses us at two levels: the level of the pure, transcendent world; and the level of the defiled world of politics. By so doing, she breaks the inner conflict of Hinduism. Therefore, she makes herself easily accessible to all. For regardless of whether one seeks *moksha* or simply to vanquish ones enemies, one must still seek the Devi.

Siva and Shakti: The goddess as the *shakti* of the universe, is closely linked to all the *devas* (as we saw in our discussion of her wed and unwed status). However, she is most closely linked to Siva, both in the text of the *puja* and in everyday belief. In fact, as we said in our discussion of the *Siva-lingum*, Siva and Shakti represent the two complementary principles of the universe. Thus, they always imply each other. During Durga puja this theme is taken to its logical conclusion, where the line between Siva and Shakti are blurred to the point where Shakti becomes Siva. Or to put it another way, the opposition of Siva and Shakti, between self and the other, are being deconstructed within the *puja*.

In part three of the *puja* the goddess is evoked in the following manner:

"*Om!* You shine like a thousand suns. Your rays are cool like a thousand moons; you have 18 arms, five heads and three eyes on each; you are poised in the center of the ocean of Ambrosia sitting on the lotus of creation; Your carrier is the bull, your throat is blue, and you wear most beautiful ornaments. You carry the skull and the sword and play on cymbals and drums. You carry the *pashu*, and *ankush*. You have a huge club in hand and a plough...etc."

In this passage the goddess is being contemplated as various other deities, not as the consort of these deities, but as the deities themselves. The one sitting on the lotus of creation is a reference to Bhrama (the creator). The god who's carrier is the bull, who has a blue throat, plays the drums and cymbals, and carries a *pashu*, is obviously Siva. While the *ankush* and club refers to Indra, and the plough to Balram. In other words, the goddess is here contemplated as the embodiment of various (male) deities. But as we have seen, the male deity that the goddess is most closely linked throughout the text is Siva (see for instance, part 4, "Oh the life blood of Shankar").

It is not until part 8 and 9 (the *Vilwa puja*) that a deliberate attempt is made to confuse the identities of Siva and Shakti. The *vilwa* tree (or *bail* tree, in Mathili) is closely linked to Siva, and not Shakti. This link is specified in the early morning worship of the tree, where the *yagman* says, "Oh Tree! Oh king of all vegetation's! Oh Beloved of Siva!" Later, the tree is called the "beloved of Uma," Uma being the consort of Siva. Normally, the *bail* tree is associated with Siva because its branches come in groups of three leaves. These leaves are said to represent the three *gunas*, while the fruit is said to represent the universe. The text itself seems to confirm the fact that the tree is sacred to Siva.

But by the time the fruit of the tree is taken to the temple, it seems to have transformed itself into Durga. "Oh auspicious *Shree* fruit! Oh embodiment of Durga! Oh

Chaminda! Come, come. Oh Durga! You have been stabilized in this mud image and this *vilwa*. Bless us in our abode." Now if you recall, the final act by which the goddess is objectified or personified in her *murti*, is done by painting in her pupils. It is not until this point that the image is said to be complete. Interestingly enough, the 'brush' that is used to paint in the pupils is made from *bail* leaves. So the ultimate personification of the goddess comes only by linking her to the *bail* tree, which we have seen is closely associated with her consort Siva. The significance of this is that the self, even the self of the goddess, can only be objectified by being linked to the other of Siva. The self, even the divine self, is part of an intersubjective dialectical process, where its objectification is dependent on its link to the other of the intersubjective encounter. This initiates the process by which Siva and Shakti end up representing each other. For when the nine different kinds of vegetation that represent the nine aspects of the goddess have been brought back to the temple, the *bail* leaf is part of the package. But even now (even after it has been clearly marked as a representation of the goddess) it is worshipped as the embodiment of Siva (and not Shakti). Siva seems to be one of the embodiments of Shakti and vice versa. With the *bail* tree we are constantly flip-flopping between it being a representation of Siva and Shakti.

The other significant moment when Durga and Siva are equated comes during the *Trishilini puja* (part 19). Here a trident of wood is erected and then washed with a mixture of water, milk, yogurt, honey, *ghee*, and sugar. After this, it is worshipped as Durga. What is telling about this is that the trident is normally the weapon of Siva.¹⁷ This is so because

¹⁷ . I was told by Prof. Muller-Ortega that it might be the case that originally the *trisul* was the weapon of Shakti and not Siva. Although I have not been able to find any such reference, for our purposes, it hardly matters. The fact is that in contemporary Mathil society, the *trisul* is definitely seen as a symbol of Siva. In fact most Siva temples have a *trisul* on top of the building.

Siva in his role as the destroyer, uses the three *shuls*, or three kinds of suffering, to destroy creation. Just about every contemporary icon or representation of Siva will show him with a trident in his hand.

But as with the *Siva-lingum*, the act of sex symbolically collapses the distinction between male and female, between Siva and Shakti. As in the *Siva-lingum*, the act of pouring the mixture honey, yogurt, milk, etc., over the symbol of Siva is, I think, an act of symbolic copulation (the tie in between this and the *chandrogat* poured over the *Siva-lingum* and the pouring of the mixture over the trident is too close to be coincidence). The act of sexuality transforms the trident from a symbol of Siva to a symbol of Durga: "Next, Durga should be invoked in it with the usual *avahama*..."(part 19).

The blurring of the distinction between Siva and Shakti is important for two reasons. Firstly, it collapses the male/female opposition that some South Asian scholars have picked up on (see Babb, 1970 and 1975). This would also explain the curious androgyny of the goddess that scholars such as Mackinzi-Brown, 1990, have noted). This again is a symbol of transcendence, where sex and sexuality is used to ultimately collapse gender. The *atma*, or *brahma* is androgynous, or rather, to the transcendent, gender is irrelevant. One of the most potent icons of Siva, the Siva-Ardhanari, shows the deity as half male and half female. This re-enforces the tantric theme that sex (or passion of any kind) can be used as a tool to collapse the difference that we perceive between the self and the other. Once our consciousness can see itself in the other, once it has gotten past the illusion of self, it is, according to Hindu philosophy, well on its way toward *mukti*. Hence, the Tantric adept doesn't reject the pleasures of this world, because it is only this *ananda* (pleasure, or bliss)

that allows us to glean the ultimate *ananda* that is divinity. In other words, it is only pleasure that allows for the possibility of escaping the confines of our limited consciousness.

Such matters are best left to theologians, my point is not to engage in such philosophical speculations, but rather to show how such a view effects the community being studied. In effect what such a philosophy does is to allow for the legitimate pursuit of worldly gains. The devotee need not oppose pleasure (*arth* or *kama*) with the ultimate goal of *moksa*. According to such a view, one can only gain *moksa* by pursuing worldly pleasures. But this leaves us with a continuum. While worldly pursuits are legitimate, the true devotee (the renouncer) uses them only as a means to gain the ultimate goal of a Hindu, the goal of liberation from the world. On the other hand, those who do not have such lofty ambitions can content themselves with the acquisition of *shakti* (power), that is, with worldly gain. As *shakti* is Shakti, it can be used either to further ones spiritual or worldly aims. Either way, the process is the same, and either way, one must engage in a relationship with the goddess.

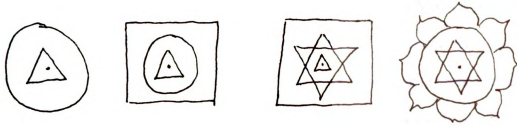
The second implication I see in the collapse of the Siva/Shakti opposition has to do with a deeper theological issue within Hinduism. It tells us something about the character or nature of divinity as envisioned by this society, and requires a separate section unto itself.

The Manifest and the Unmanifest: It is interesting to note that the whole first part of Durga puja concerns itself with the representation of the transcendental form of the goddess. This form, called the *para* (or unmanifest, highest) form of the deity can, of course, never be represented directly. It can and is however, given symbolic representation in *apara* diagrams.

In part one of the *puja*, the *yagman* is told to draw a symbol, a triangle with a dot in the center, that is immediately covered up by the *asan* on which he sits. The triangle is meant to be a representation of the *para* form of the god Siva (reference), with the dot as a representation of the Chinchina Shakti (or the Shakti that existed prior to the manifest universe). This theme of drawing the transcendental form of the deity, only to cover it up is repeated several times, each time in a more elaborate manner. In Part 2, the same triangle is drawn, only this time it is covered by a pot of water that is said to represent the rivers of the world. In part 3, a more elaborate image is drawn, representing the *para* form of Siva and Shakti, joined in sexual union. This image is again covered by a pot which is then filled with water (symbolic of all the *tirtha*'s of the world). Then grain and other symbolic bounties of the earth are put into the pot. The pot is said to sit on the cardinal points of the earth. The pot is the earth. And the Devi is evoked within it.

Finally, in part 4 (the *kalash-stahapana*), we see once again the same pattern. Two intersecting triangles are drawn, only this time an eight petal lotus surrounds the image. The eight petal lotus is said to represent the manifest form of the deity (i.e., the manifest universe). Again this image is covered by a pot that then represents the universe. Around the pot are planted seeds of barley, which are, on the tenth day, used as a blessing for the sponsors of the *puja*.

diagram



In the first two diagrams, we see a representation of the Unmanifest forms of Siva and Shakti. The triangle represents Siva and the dot Shakti. In the third diagram the 'para' form sits at the center of two intersecting triangles. The triangle's represent the sexual union of Siva and Shakti. In the final diagram the sexual union of Siva and Shakti are represented with an eight petal lotus around them. This lotus signifies that the diagrams represents a manifest form of Siva and Shakti, but the dot in the center still implies the unmanifest form of Shakti.

In each case, the symbol that represents the 'true' nature of the deity is covered up as soon as it is drawn. The point is that the transcendent can not be represented, and though one tries to approximate its nature, such an approximation is never to be confused with the actual. Consequently, no sooner is the *para* form represented than it is covered up. But even though it is out of sight, the 'trace' of the transcendent (to use Derrida's term) remains. And this trace will continue to exist throughout the ten day ritual.

The attention of the *yagman* and the devotee shifts to the pot, the *murti*, the *valva* tree, etc., but the true image of the goddess remains hidden, literally, beneath the 'manifest' forms of her that capture our attention. This is a crucial point, because the entire ritual revolves around it. It also helps us to understand the nature of the relationship between Siva and Shakti.

As we saw in our discussion of the *Siva-lingum*, Siva is represented in Siva temples as the transcendent (and so unmanifest) principle of the universe, while Shakti is seen as the womb of the universe; the manifest form of creation. This idea is expressed in the worship of the goddess as well, and she is clearly equated with the manifest universe. Not only is she evoked within the pot that is a symbol of that universe, in part 11 she is specifically called the universe.

"Om! Oh Durga, Durga, Mahamaya [great or supreme *maya*. *Maya* can be translated as 'illusion' but only in the sense that it is the illusion of perception that doesn't see the unmanifest beneath the manifest form of things] Oh Incarnate-Power....You are the life-giving water in all creation, you are shining radiance in all luminations. You are *yoga-maya* and air in space. You are the *prithvi* [earth] which carries all scents. You are perpetual in all different kinds. You are the universe, the master of the universe, and the power behind the universe..."

On the other hand, during the course of the *puja*, Siva becomes the representative of the manifest universe, while Shakti, as his consort, becomes the supreme symbol of the transcendent. So the symbolic equation of the *Siva-lingum* is here reversed. In a Siva temple, Siva is the representation of the transcendent, while Shakti is the symbol of the manifest universe. Here we have the exact opposite, with Siva representing the manifest universe and Shakti representing the transcendent. This theme is most clearly drawn out in the *puja*'s handling of sacrifice. In Hindu cosmogony, sacrifice is closely linked to the creation of the universe. It was through the act of sacrifice (*yaga*) that Prajapati created all life (see the Rg Veda, X. 90). This theme, though not directly taken up by the ritual, still

seems to be significant. Sacrifice links this, as all *yagas*, to the act of creation (or re-creation) of the universe. At any rate, the ritual certainly seems to re-establish the social order of the universe (hierarchy, separation of human and ghost realms, etc.). But the most significant aspect of sacrifice, in this text, revolves around the nature of Siva and Shakti. Siva is the sacrifice.

In a startling passage in part 14 of the text, the demon Mahishasura is equated with Siva: "*Om!* Oh Brave one! Though in the form of a buffalo, you are the incarnation of *sada-Siva*, and are *Siva-rupa*." This link between the buffalo and Siva is taken up later in part 20, when the *mashish* (buffalo) which is to be sacrificed, is worshipped as Siva. Now the *mashish* is obviously linked to the demon Mashishasura (who is depicted as half human, and half buffalo) but it is also linked to Siva, who's vehicle is the buffalo. In part 20, the buffalo is called the vehicle of *dharma*, the carrier of Yama (god of death and a minion of Siva). Far from being represented as a demon or a disruptive force, the buffalo and the demon Mahisasura are seen as noble beings (both in part 14 and part 20). The *yagman* says to the buffalo, "discarding this form, take the form of Gandarva. On your forehead resides Siva, in your horns resides the lover of Parviti (consort of Siva), and you have been blessed with the affection of Durga for a hundred years for sure."

At first glance, one might be tempted to take a Freudian view of this passage. The argument would go something like this; the goddess is a symbol of the assertion of women over men, thus she is seen as a castrating female, ready to kill her consort. But such an analysis would be a radical departure from what we have discovered so far about the nature

of the *puja*. It seems more consistent to continue with our theme of the *puja* as the collapse of opposition, in which case the equation of the *Mahis* with Siva becomes consistently clear.

Along with his other attributes, Siva is also seen as Pashu-Pati, or the master of all animals. Siva is *Pashu*, or animal form. Now *Pashu* comes out of *Prakriti*, or the dynamic manifest universe (as opposed to *Purusa*, the inert, spiritual force of the universe). *Pashu* has two parts, the *maya* that is the body, and the head that houses its consciousness. The body becomes the symbol of lower consciousness, or bondage. Hence in part 15 of the text (during the goat sacrifice), the goat is told that the head represents 'mental prowess,' while the body is animal bondage. Once this body is sacrificed, the higher consciousness or *mukti* is made possible. So the goat (as the buffalo and Mashiasura) are sacrificed by the Devi as a favor to it, as a way to release it from the bondage of animal form.

But we too are *Pashu*! That is, we too are of animal form. As part of the manifest universe, the *yagman* is using the goat (and later, the buffalo) as a substitute for none other than himself. We have become equated with Siva, who is killed by the grace of the Devi only so that we can understand our higher nature, our transcendent nature. This, I think, is the significance of the *Bhoot Bali* (or ghost sacrifice) mentioned at the end of Nisa puja. The *bhoot* being mentioned here is a reference to animal form, that which has already existed. What is being sacrificed is the *yagman* himself (or rather, his animal nature). Consequently, the sacrifice is done to please all animals, or *bhoots*: "Om! Jackals, *Kanghal's*, *vetal's*, *putanas*, foxes, be all propitiated by these offerings." (part 18). All sacrifices during Durga puja come in this way to represent the *yagman* himself. Consequently, the body of the

yagman becomes the sacrificer and the sacrificed. This certainly links the act of sacrifice back to the myth of Prajapati, who in the act of creation, is the sacrificial victim.

But to get back to Siva, the equation of Shankar with the animal to be sacrificed collapses the opposition between the manifest and the unmanifest universe. Normally, as we have seen, Siva represents the transcendent (the nonmanifest universe) while his consort, Shakti represents the *maya* of creation. Here however, their roles have been reversed; Siva becomes equated with the manifest universe (animal beings) while Shakti, in the form of Durga, takes on the role of the transcendent. The animal nature of creation is transcended only by the grace of the Devi. And it is for this reason that the first mention of *moksa* in the text of the *puja*, comes only after the revelation that Siva is Mahasasura.¹⁸ This implies that only the collapse of the Siva/Shakti opposition or the manifest/unmanifest opposition can lead the devotee to true liberation.

In an insightful collection of articles, a number of South Asian scholars have noted the theme of impermanence that seems to be central to Hindu *puja* (see, Gods of Flesh, Gods of Stone, Waghorne and Cutler, 1985). Many of the themes that we have touched upon in our discussion of Durga puja are also articulated by these scholars (see especially P. Conrtright, and S. Ingles in Waghorne and Cutler, 1985). I would like to conclude our analysis of Durga puja by saying something about the impermanent nature of the *murti*, which relates to the manifest/unmanifest nature of the goddess.

¹⁸. If this line of reasoning has legitimacy, it would help us to understand the blood thirsty iconography associated with the goddess. The goddess loves blood and sacrifice because sacrifice becomes the ultimate symbol of liberation, and so victory. This is why polluted images of death throughout the *puja* come to represent victory and conquest. The goddess destroys our enemies, but the enemy is none other than the illusion of things, that we see through our limited consciousness.

Since the goddess is both in and out of time and space, her 'true' nature can never be captured (at least not within time and space). She can only be represented symbolically, and even then, her true nature can only be hinted at. We have already seen this in the 'trace' of the transcendent that is implied in the diagrams at the very beginning of the *puja*. The diagrams are covered as soon as they are made. In a sense, every representation of the goddess follows the same process. That is, the symbols used to represent her can never capture her true essence, the *para* form can never be captured by an *apara* representation, and so must be discarded, lest the devotee mistake the image for the reality. Consequently, each of the various representations of the goddess are impermanent. The impermanence of the *murti* is related to the impermanence of the *valwa* fruit, or the pot of water that represents the goddess.

This point is driven home during the last day of the *puja*. After all the time and trouble that the devotee has invested into representing the goddess, slowly bringing her *murti* to life, he has to then turn around and declare the *murti* to be incomplete! In part 22 of the text, the *yagman* address the goddess by saying, "...I do not know your form, nor your body, nor all your attributes. There is only one thing I am aware of and that is my reverence to your lotus-like feet." So even after the elaborate care that the *yagman* and the *prohit* have taken to activate and so manifest the goddess, they are in the end forced to declare that none of their efforts can truly manifest the Devi. Even the *devas*, like Brahma, can not, according to the text, perform the *puja* well enough to truly manifest the Devi. All that the *yagman* can know is the most polluted (most base) aspect of the Devi, namely her feet. The final act that the *yagman* performs before sending the *murti* on its way to the river, is to hold its feet. This, I

think, tells us something about why any representation of the transcendent must be impermanent. The transcendent, which is both manifest and unmanifest, can never be fully represented within a world that is delineated by time and space. All that the *puja* has done then is allow the devotee to contemplate the nature of the transcendent by focusing his or her attention on the rituals and symbols of the *puja*.

Interestingly enough, it is also precisely at this moment that the Santhals express their act of supreme devotion to the goddess. For it is at this moment that the *murti* of the Devi is taken outside the temple and the Santhals, who have been waiting for her, go into their frenzied trance state. This is significant because it links the Santhals to the *brahmin*, the outsiders of this society to its insiders. For the *brahmin* like the Santhal is forced to declare that his link to the Devi is sustained by nothing but his devotion or *bhakti* to her. All the elaborate care that he has taken to manifest her has failed to capture her true nature. The only benefit of the entire ritual is to make the *yagman* and the *prohit* (and by extension, all who partake of the ritual) aware of their “reverence” to her lotus like feet, i.e., make them aware of their devotion to her. Despite his ritual expertise the *brahmin* is no different from the Santhal as both are linked to the goddess only by the personal devotion they feel. And the whole point of the ten day long *puja* is only to concentrate or activate this devotion by making its participants focus on the rituals and symbols that it employs.

Conclusion: This *puja* is obviously too complex for me to do justice to, or even point out its major themes. Instead, I focus on those aspects of the *puja* that have relevance to my

particular interests in this ethnography. There are at least two levels that we must address the goddess at: namely the social, and the individual. The goddess is the upholder of order (both spiritual and societal) and the goddess is a symbol for the liberation (objectification, or self-actualization) of the individual.

The *puja* has several elements that establish or re-create the ordered world of Mathil society. Not only does the *yaga* seem to re-establish the balance between the world of humans and the world of spirits, it also seems to re-affirm the social realities of hierarchy and structure. It does so by legitimating authority, the authority of the king (especially during *Aparajitia puja*, part 23) and the hierarchy of the social. During the course of the *puja*, juniors will formally mark their deference toward elders or their patrons. The goddess also seems to legitimate the relationships between men and women, establish the ritual superiority of the *bhramin* as he is the only one who can perform her worship and his ritual authority is extended to those elements of society that do not normally accept it, namely the Santhals. Ultimately, through the symbolism of sacrifice, creation itself is reaffirmed. Anyway, as the upholder of *dhrama*, the Devi is certainly the upholder of the social order.

At the same time, the Devi is also the perfect symbol for the objectification of the self. As the mediator of opposition, especially the mediator of the opposition between the self and the other, she ends the Lacanian process of self-deferment, or the incomplete ego; the self that emerges only in a future intersubjective encounter. Normally (in Lacanian thought) the self is constantly deferred, as it can only objectify(or actualize) itself in the desire of the other. Since we can never know the intentionality of the other, we can never truly know if we exist. What is interesting about the goddess, is that to an extent, she is both the desire and the

desired; she is both the self that wishes to be objectified and the other who's desire can objectify. This is so because she is none other than her consort Siva (and, of course, vice versa).

So the final point to make as far as the individual is concerned, about the deconstructive moment that the goddess represents, is that in the act of deconstruction, she firmly establishes herself as grounded, or if you prefer, she becomes the symbol of the self-actualized individual. By being simultaneously at either end of an opposition, the goddess ends the process of 'deferment', and establishes herself as the bedrock that is then in a position to objectify us. We will speak more of this later, What I wish to delineate here is that, paradoxically, the goddess in her role as deconstructor, finally ends the dialectical process and thus becomes the symbol of completion. This establishes her as the transcendental principle; that which is given, at least to the Hindu mind. Entering into a relationship with her, then, helps to ground the individual.¹⁹

What I find interesting about this is that the Freudian opposition between the individual and the social, between the id and the super ego, is here gotten around in the symbol of the Devi. She is at once the id, thanatos and eros incarnate, but at the same time she is also the upholder of the moral social order, the perfect symbol of the super ego.

¹⁹ The reader may wonder as to why I have used the term 'collapse' of oppositions rather than the Hegelian notion of mediation or synthesis. The concept of synthesis, as I understand it, implies the creation of a new opposition, an opposition at a higher level of abstraction. But in the course of Durga puja no such teleos is implied. The oppositions are not mediated and no new oppositions are created. At the end of the *puja* we go back to the normal world of Mathil society, and the same oppositions of purity and pollution, Siva and Shakti, or manifest and unmanifest insert themselves. However, for the devotee who has realized the underlying theme of the *puja*, such oppositions no longer have relevance. No new oppositions present themselves to the enlightened individual (which is why Tantra insists that it is a non-dualistic school of philosophy). This process of collapse can happen only at the level of consciousness, or *atma*, because it is only at this level that the individual can realize that he or she is no different from the absolute.

Consequently, the pursuit of individual desires, within Hinduism never implies social revolution. The individual renouncer is to an extent, the perfect narcissist; he or she is only concerned with the ultimate satisfaction of his or her needs. Perfect pleasure (*ananda*) and a pleasure that is self sustaining. Now one might think that the pursuit of absolute pleasure would be the antithesis of social order (certainly Freud did) but in Hindu society this is not the case.

For while the renouncer might be the symbol of absolute pleasure and so, individualism, he or she is also the symbol of the social ideal, the highest aspirations of the society. Thus although personally the renouncer might reject those things closely associated with the social (hierarchy, pollution, social morality, etc.) they do not end up being a revolutionary or disruptive force within society. Indeed, one could argue that they are what has held Indian society together for all these years.

This certainly relates to the conservative nature of Mathil society. The individual is given many options, even the option to rebel against society, but because all the possibilities of what it means to be human are encompassed by, and imply, the goddess, none of these possibilities end up rejecting the social order. The goddess is a totalizing institution.

CHAPTER SIX: IN THE WAKE OF DURGA PUJA

The worship of Lakshmi and Kali follow close on the heels of Durga puja. The deconstructive nature of the goddess, which was established during the course of Durga puja, is elaborated upon in the worship of other goddess'. Durga is a representative of Shakti herself, that is, she is the symbol of the complete or absolute goddess. Once she has been worshipped in this form, the subsequent goddess *puja*'s break Shakti down into her component elements or attributes (each of which corresponds to a different *guna*), which are represented by different deities. Consequently Lakshmi and Kali represent radically different elements of the goddess, but their *puja*'s follow each other in such close proximity that the deconstructive nature of the absolute or complete goddess, Shakti, is hard to miss.

This deconstructive theme is consistently followed in each of the representations or attributes of Shakti. It is tempting to equate Lakshmi with her usual attribute, that of prosperity, light or good fortune. But while such an equation is true at one level, the exact opposite is true at another. Lakshmi may be a symbol of prosperity at one level, but is a symbol of entrapment and bondage at another. Kali is a symbol of destruction or darkness at one level, but she becomes a symbol of liberation and victory at another. In this chapter I will briefly delineate how Kali and Lakshmi end up representing aspects of reality that on a surface level seem to be the exact opposite of how they are envisioned.

On the next full moon following *Dhashmi*, the worship of the goddess Lakshmi is performed (in the year that I did fieldwork, it happened four days after the end of Durga puja). A new life-sized clay statue of Lakshmi is installed in the *Durga-stan*. She is adorned with clothes, jewelry, etc. She stands upon a lotus and under the lotus are two small owls (her vehicle). The statue is surrounded by many lotus flowers (made of clay and paper).

The entrance of the temple is decorated with banana leaves, an auspicious tree that represents prosperity. The entire *puja* is devoted to the advancement of prosperity and well being, which are the attributes of the goddess Lakshmi. During most *pujas*, the deity is formally invited to the event, and then formally asked to leave. During this *puja* however, the goddess isn't asked to leave, in the hopes that the prosperity that she brings, will remain in the community for the entire year. Consequently, this is a silent *puja*, so as not to startle or drive the goddess away. No *ghari ghanta* is rung during the ceremony, and even the bell that the priest usually rings during the course of a *puja*, is kept silent. All loud noises should be avoided on this day.²⁰

During the *puja*, a lamp is lit on the left side of the *murti*. Here too is erected a pot (*kalish*). Offerings of sweets, fruits etc., are placed to the right of the image. The *puja* is performed on a tray. At the beginning of the *puja* a triangle is made on the tray, and in its center is written the word ('shree'). Then a brief *puja* (about 40 minutes) is done.

There weren't too many people in attendance during the ceremony. Those who did show up kept drifting in and out of the temple, placing offerings of sweets and fruits before the goddess. Women were told not to enter the temple during the service, but were not really

²⁰. Of course, the *mela* in town is still in full swing, and nothing was about to keep them quiet. However, they did seem to make an effort to turn down the volume of the songs, etc. playing on the loud speakers.

barred from doing so. They waited outside till after the *arti* (bowing to the sacred lamps) was performed. They had come prepared with their own lamps (*deeaps*) so that they could do their own *arti* before the goddess, after the *puja*. This was done to insure the success of their families for the upcoming year.²¹ All in all, the atmosphere was very subdued.

The statue of the goddess was submerged into the river the next day, around 4:00 P.M. Not too many people showed up to accompany the *murti* to the river. This ended the formal *puja* to the goddess Lakshmi (the real Shakti *puja*, as I was informed).

However, about two weeks after Lakshmi *puja* is the festival of Diwali, and this is closely linked to the worship of Lakshmi. This is the festival of lights, and every house is adorned with hundreds of little earthen lamps, or *deeaps*. Everyone has taken care to clean their house or shops. People take the custom of cleaning on this day quite seriously. They will even decorate their doors and cabinets etc., with various *alta* designs (*mandala* like designs made from rice paste). It is said that on this night the goddess Lakshmi walks upon the earth. She is said to be offended by dirt and so to have a dirty house on this day means that she will shun you for the coming year. Quite a calamity, as to be shunned by Lakshmi means that prosperity will allude you throughout the following year.

About 15 days prior to Durga *puja*, a brief *puja* is done to ones ancestors. This is called *Pitra Paksh*. The ancestors are given food and water etc., and are said to be around (roam) the earth from this day forth. But it is not until Diwali that such spirits are formally shown the house of their descendants. People light many earthen lamps and fill a pot (*kalash*)

²¹ . There is an especially close link between women and the goddess Lakshmi. Young girls or young brides are referred to as the 'Lakshmi of a house.' In the pre-capitalist worldview of Mathil *samaj*, there seems to be a close relationship between the potential fertility of women and wealth.

with grains to symbolize prosperity. The lamps are said to show the ancestors the way to their descendants house, so that they may see how their progeny are doing.²² This is done so that one's ancestors, like the goddess, will give their blessings and protection, thereby insure success in the coming year.

After the lighting of the lamps a brief *puja* is done to Lakshmi (the goddess of prosperity), and then the *prasad* offered to her is passed around to all present. The males of a household are then supposed to go to the *ghosain ghar*, where a *decap* is lit next to the image of the goddess. Each man then takes up a faggot and uses this lamp to light it. These lit faggots are then carried by each man to the entrance of the house where they are used to light a huge bonfire.²³

I was told that in the olden days the lighting of the bonfire was a time for much high-jinx. Men would leap over the fire, or walk across it. They would also light small balls of rubber, attached to a string and then swing it around over their heads. It seems to me that the significance of such events revolve around their potentially dangerous nature. What is significant is the chance element that such danger involves and the control that people show over this uncertainty. It is also for this reason that on this night there is a tradition of gambling. The person who wins on this night is marked as someone who the goddess has looked upon favorably. In other words, such a person is sure to have good fortune for the rest of the year.

²² . I was told that this night is chosen because on this night the moon is said to be closest to the earth. However, I could find no relationship between the proximity of the moon and the dwelling place of ones ancestors.

²³ . These faggots and the bonfire that is lit are exactly like a funeral pyre, although I am not sure why this is the case.

At any rate, three of the faggots are kept while the rest are thrown into the bonfire. These bundles will later be used to beat a *soop*. Late at night when the flame has died down, an old woman will take these three faggots and beat a *soop* upon the bonfire. While she beats, she yells out repeatedly, asking for prosperity to come and for poverty to leave.

After the men have lit the fire they all adjourn to participate in the fun of the festival. Little kids (and the young at heart) have spent days amassing as many firecrackers as they can afford. On this night they set off fireworks of all designs. This is a very festive time, especially for the young, who have much fun playing with their fireworks.

On this night it is important to do *parnam* to one's elders. Consequently, after the fireworks have died down, people will go to visit their relatives. As a blessing elders will give their juniors *prasad*. This is usually various kinds of sweets (sugar fried *makhans*, coconut *barfaees* and the like). Sweets are considered auspicious. As with Durga puja, this formal show of deference and blessings isn't restricted to kinsmen, clients (servants, etc.) will also come to touch the feet of their patrons.

But the mood of the evening changes abruptly, for on this very night one is supposed to worship the fierce goddess Kali. As with Nisa puja, Kali's worship is best done at midnight. The night itself is called *Maha Nisharatri* (or 'great midnight'). A newly installed life-sized statue of Kali has been put in the central room of the *Durga-stan*. The threshold of the temple has been decorated with banana leaves. Because Champanagar also has a permanent Kali temple (to the left of the Durga temple), one must perform the *puja* at two separate locations (before the permanent image at the Kali temple and before the impermanent image at the Durga temple).

No one but the people who will perform the *puja* have shown up at either temple. Again a hush descends over our little town, which just hours before was alive with the effervescence of hundreds of fireworks. Now the town is as quiet as the grave. Only a few pariah dogs hover outside the temple, eagerly awaiting the blood for the sacrifices to be made on this night. Two black goats who have been tied to the pillars on the verandah of the temple, cry out pathetically, awaiting their inevitable doom.

On this night the *yagman* (and *prohit*) have taken special care to approach the deity in a pure state. At one point the *prohit* formally asks the *yagman* if he is pure or not. Once the *puja* starts in earnest, the *yagman* has to symbolically purify himself by rinsing out his mouth and then sprinkling water on his back. The atmosphere inside the temple is deadly serious. We the audience, are formally requested not to speak, or interfere once the *puja* has started. It is said that there should be no interruptions during this *puja*, that is, once the *puja* has commenced, it must be completed without interruptions. This adds to the palpable sense of danger that this *puja* entails. The priest tells me that this is a Tantric *puja*, and in order to perform it, one must have *shakti*.

The *puja* is done to Dhaksin Kali (the Kali that faces south, and the *Kul devi* of the patron family). The *puja* starts on the right side of the *murti*, on a banana leaf. Then a silver tray is used to continue the *puja*. Upon this tray, the *yagman* makes a triangle of *sindur*. On the tray, one starts the *puja* from the left side. The *yagman* touches his mouth, heart, nose, ears, navel, arms and finally his head while he prays to the goddess. Then he does *pranam* to the deity. He uses his hand to block his right nostril while focusing on the *rajas*, *tamas*, and *satwa gunas*. These *gunas* are the three elements of *maya* by which the goddess creates or

manifests the universe. *Rajas guna* is associated with the goddess Lakshmi; *satwa guna* is associated with Saraswati; and *tamas* is associated with Kali. Everything in the manifest universe is made up of a combination of these three elements.

Different parts of the body are touched (focused upon) while praying to the goddess. Much of the *puja* is done in silence, i.e., the *yagman* is asked to chant the *giatri mantra* 10 times to himself etc. A long list of nonsense Tantric phonemes are recited while the *yagman* touches his right arm. The *puja* is filled with silent *japs* (*mantras* or chants).

Finally a sword is placed on the banana leaf. A triangle of *sindur* is painted, on which the *bali* (sacrifice) is placed. At this point, the sacrifice is only a *ladoo* (a gram-flour sweet). After this, a *vedic havan* is done (*vedic* according to Krishnash *pundit*). A fire is lit at the hearth of the goddess.²⁴ Various offerings are thrown in. Then the ash from this fire is put on a spoon and this is used to put *tikas* on everyone present. The *tika*, which I was told offers the devotee protection from evil forces, is a far more elaborate affair than the usual *tika* (usually a *tika* or dot is placed only on the devotees forehead). In this case a *tika* is put on the head, the left shoulder, the right shoulder, the neck and finally, the heart of each person present. Then the Tantric phoneme "Kring" is written on the sword with *sindur*.

The goat, which has just been washed, is shivering from the cold as it is led into the temple. It is symbolically cleansed (purified) by the *yagman* by touching various parts of it's body. Then the sword is prayed to. The goat is sacrificed outside the temple. Later the

²⁴. Due to political reasons, Krishnash *pundit* was assigned to the Kali temple instead of performing the *puja* at the main *Durga-stan*. The priest at the *Durga-stan* was particularly inept, and so I moved from the Durga temple to the Kali temple. The performance here was much more satisfying, and besides I felt a debt of allegiance to Krishnash *pundit*. At the Kali temple (but not at the Durga temple) there is a triangular permanent hearth built into the temple. It is here that the *havan* is performed.

sword is used to 'sacrifice' a gourd. After this, a *bisargin* is done. *Ghari ghanti* and the *arti* mark the end of the *puja*. By now it is 2:30 at night, and not a soul is awake as I walk home from the temple.

Conclusion: The theme of the goddess as mediator of opposition is consistently followed during the course of these two rituals. On the one hand, as the goddess Shree (Lakshmi), she offers us prosperity and material well being. She protects us from poverty and misfortune. Because of her close links to Vishnu (she is his consort), she is an especially pure deity. On the other hand, as Kali, she is the destroyer, especially of enemies which, as we have seen, relates to soteriological issues. If you recall during Durga puja destruction or sacrifice became the symbol of liberation, or *mukti*. The death of the body implied the ascendancy of a higher consciousness. In her role as the destroyer, the goddess Kali offers us not only protection from the physical dangers of rivals or ghosts, she also offers us the possibility of the escape from the bondage of animal form. Kali is closely linked to ghosts and spirit beings, and is said to be the consort of Siva, an ambivalent god, who's purity is often in question. She herself is often represented as a demon like warrior. None-the-less, she too is a benevolent deity that protects us from that which would do us harm, including our own nature.

It is interesting to note the Tantric themes taken up during Kali puja. As with Durga puja (but more clearly pronounced during this ritual) the body of the *yagman* becomes associated with the universe. This Tantric theme of associating the micro (individual) with the macro (universe) seems to be a key ingredient in goddess worship. It is for this reason that Tantric adepts are said to perform Kali puja in a markedly 'left handed' manner. As with

Nisa puja, Kali puja must be done by anyone who wishes to achieve the good will and therefore the *shakti* of the goddess.

And as with Durga puja, themes of deconstruction are prevalent on this night. The social order that is established during Diwali (doing *pranam* to ones elders etc.) is in marked contrast with the individual power that the *yagman* hopes to gain by performing Kali puja. The 'light' of Lakshmi (who is symbolically represented as yellow) is in marked contrast to the dark goddess Kali (symbolically represented as blue). At a superficial level, Laksmi is a symbol of goodness, light and prosperity, while Kali by contrast is sinister, dark and destructive. The good spirits (i.e. ancestors) that Diwali hopes to invite are contrasted to the dark spirits that Kali commands. Lakshmi is associated with life or the preservation of life (material well being), while Kali is associated with death or the extinction of animal bondage, and so, with liberation. These are not different deities, but rather different aspects of the one goddess, Shakti.

Therefore at a deeper level, the goddess' seem to reverse their roles, and Laksmi becomes a symbol of material entanglement, while Kali becomes a symbol of liberation. In this way Lakshmi becomes more closely associated with witchcraft or the egotistical pursuit of worldly pleasure over social responsibility, while Kali becomes more closely associated with the *yagman* or the renouncer and their emphasis on liberation. Thus the positive and negative aspects of each goddess is constantly being reversed, depending upon at what level she is being addressed. The following diagram may help to clarify what I mean.

**GODDESS'
Durga (or Shakti)**

Lakshmi		Kali
1. At the level of worldly pursuits	+ Prosperity	- Destruction
2. Consequences of goddesses actions, i.e., at the level of the transcendent	- Entanglement with material desires (the egotism of witchcraft)	+ Release from animal bondage (the path of the <i>yagman</i> or renouncer)
3. Human/other interactions	+ - Ancestors	+ - Enemies

The goddess' inverse their symbolic relevance depending on what level they are being addressed at. In terms of material well being, Lakshmi seems to be a positive deity, offering us contact with our ancestors, good fortune and prosperity. Kali, by contrast, is the goddess of destruction, darkness and death. Even her positive attributes, namely the destruction of one's enemies, is filled with the animosity and pollution of murder. Yet if we see these same attributes from the perspective of the transcendent, then what appears to be positive in the manifest world becomes negative. Lakshmi, from the perspective of the unmanifest universe offers us entanglement with the material world. This theme of entanglement is carried through to the level of the afterlife, for while socially the proper Hindu should show

reverence and piety toward his or her elders, it is something of an entanglement to overemphasize the bonds that unite us to them. Ideally the relationship between the individual and the people that they are related to is more a matter of duty, *dharma*, than the illusion or attachment of love. It is for these reasons that Kṛṣṇa tells Arjun in the Mahabharata that duty takes precedence over filial piety.²⁵ Ultimately, the return of one's ancestors must be viewed as a calamity, for it certainly means that the ancestors themselves have not reached the level of liberation and so are still caught in the cycle of birth and rebirth. The act of receiving the blessings of one's ancestors may be a good thing for the individual, but it is certainly a bad thing for the ancestors. This points out the egotistic nature of Lakshmi's blessings.

Kali, by contrast offers us a radically different notion of the afterlife. Here death is closely linked to the release from animal bondage. As we saw in our discussion of sacrifice in chapter five, sacrifice is a metaphor for the extinction of the animal form of the sacrifice, so that he may achieve the higher consciousness of the transcendent. Even the destruction of one's enemies implies the destruction of the lower consciousness for the attainment of liberation. The enemy (like any other sacrificial victim) is none other than the *yagman* (see especially the section on the manifest versus the unmanifest in Ch. Five). The afterlife here is being viewed from the perspective of the transcendent. From this venue, Kali as the goddess of destruction is that which detaches us from the illusion of animal form, from the tyranny of worldly existence.

So at the level of worldly pursuits Lakṣmi takes on a positive role as the goddess of prosperity, and Kali a negative role as the goddess of destruction. But at the level of the

²⁵ The entire point of the Bhagavat Gita is that if an individual follows his or her duty without the sentimental attachments that existence fosters, then they can become a renouncer even while they continue to live in the mundane world of politics.

transcendent Lakshmi comes to symbolize material entanglements, which is surely a negative role, while Kali symbolizes the positive values of detachment and liberation. Finally, at the level of human and other interactions both the goddesses can be viewed as both positive and negative. Lakshmi is positive as she sustains the links between the self and one's ancestors (socially a positive thing) but she is negative in that this very link implies an attachment to worldly relationships which is the opposite of liberation. At the level of human/other interactions Kali is also both negative and positive. She is negative because she symbolizes the destruction of one's enemies, which we have seen is closely linked to murder (see chapter five). But at the same time she is positive because the enemy in question is ideally none other than the self, which when destroyed leads the devotee to a higher plain of existence. So at the level of humans versus other interactions, the intentionality of the subject viewing the symbolism associated with the goddess becomes crucial. At this level, both goddesses present themselves as the deconstructive deity, which is simultaneously positive and negative.

CHAPTER SEVEN: DO WITCHES HAVE HAIRY PALMS?

Even before I set off to do fieldwork, the Mathil community here in the mid-west of America, told me that my project was ill advised. Time and again a friend of the family would come to visit and after hearing about my research topic, would inevitably shake their head and say, '*ojhas* just don't exist anymore.' Mathila, according to them, is just not as backward as it use to be and so beliefs in things like *ojhas* and *dines* have disappeared. Needless to say, this caused me a great deal of anxiety.

My anxiety only increased upon landing in Bombay. The people I met there confirmed the attitudes of my friends in America. They too felt that only the remotest areas of Madha Pradase or Assam still held on to the backward beliefs in *ojhas* or witchcraft. Interestingly enough, they would then go on to tell me about various ascetics or holy men they knew of that practiced 'real' magic. This seemingly unanimous belief that *ojhas* and witches are a thing of the past haunted me as I reached Patna and finally Champanagar. Everyone I encountered seemed to feel that my project was futile.

Even in Champanagar, the relatives I was staying with told me that *ojhas* and *dines* were a thing of the past. So it was a matter of some relief when I found that the small town of Champanagar has at least a half dozen *ojhas* and that if you were to count all the *ojhas* within a two mile radius of Champanagar, you would find at least a hundred individuals who claim to perform healing rites.

At first this fact was only a relief to me, as it meant I did not have to change the topic of my research. But as I reflected upon the contradictions between the perceptions of Mathila today by the elites of Indian society and the realities of a typical Mathil village, I felt it was important to explain the lack of fit between the two. The question that occurred to me was, why is the belief in *ojhas* and *dines* so persistent, and this is the subject of the current chapter.

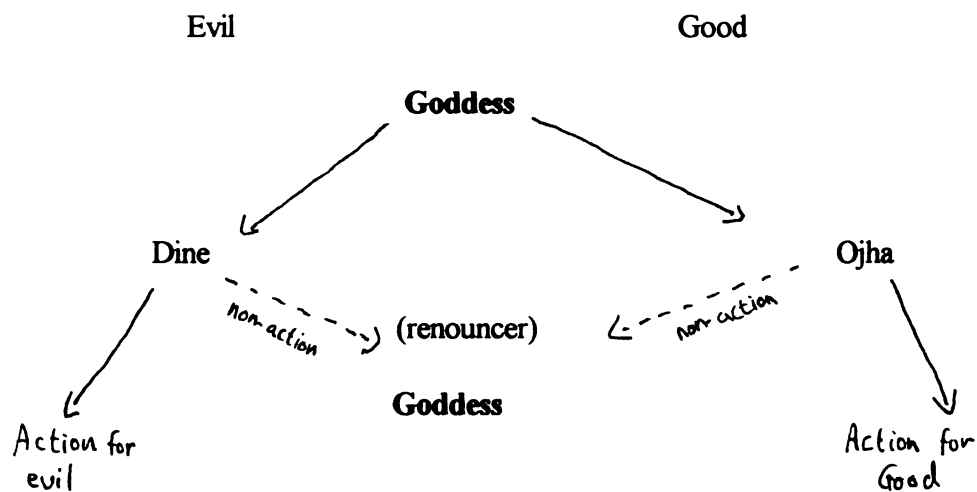
We have already seen in Chapter one that the educated elites of this society tend to try and distance themselves from such beliefs, but that when push comes to shove, even these people will not hesitate to call *ojhas*. As Basu Dev told me, even the local *rajas* (some of who were the same people who insisted that *ojhas* don't exist) have employed him on occasion. So *ojhas*, like *dines* continue to exist in this society despite the apparent need of modern rationalism to discredit them.

The reason for this, I think, is that *ojhas*, *dines*, and renouncers (*sanyasas*) are closely related concepts, and if one believes in one, then by the logic of this belief system, one is forced to believe in the possibility of the other two. And although the educated elite may not believe whole heartedly in *dines* or *ojhas*, they definitely do believe in the renouncer. The logic of the ascetic, in this society, is tied to the worship of the goddess. In Tantric philosophy (and just about every ascetic in India today is influenced to some degree by Tantric philosophy) one can only achieve enlightenment by focusing on the rituals and symbols of goddess worship. Most contemporary yogic manuals are thus devoted to the symbols and *sidhanas* prescribed by Tantric philosophy. So the renouncer, like the *ojha* and the *dine* justifies his or her power by referring to the exact same system of beliefs. The only

difference is that the renouncer and the *ojha* are seen in a positive light, while the *dine* is viewed negatively.

But the goddess is on both sides of this equation; she is both good and evil (though 'evil' may be the wrong word to use here, perhaps 'dark' would be more appropriate). Regardless of if one seeks power by performing negative rites or by performing a positive one, one still ultimately gains power only through the goddess (*shakti* is Shakti). Because power in this society is a value neutral term, one can gain power and ultimately liberation by pursuing either a negative or a positive path. In the final analysis, evil itself can lead to liberation just as surely as goodness. But power (*shakti*) only leads to liberation if one refrains from using it. What I mean by this is that, Tantra is an existential philosophy that feels that all sensation has the potential for liberation. Sexuality is good because it activates within the individual the same *ananda* (bliss) that created the universe (or the *ananda* of the divine). Or to put it another way, sexuality, or any other passionate experience, can trigger within the individual the power that, if channeled properly, leads to a higher consciousness, and ultimately to the transcendent. This is so because at the heart of the manifest universe (Shakti) is the transcendent (Siva, or Bramha). So if one pursues any sensation to its ultimate level, one will find at its core the transcendent. The problem is that most sensations quickly dissipate, and leave the individual at the same level of consciousness as they were prior to the experience. Sexuality is the quintessential such experience in Tantric thought. For a brief moment the individual experiences the *ananda* of the transcendent, but the energy (or *shakti*) that he or she has tapped into quickly dissipates back into the universe in the course of normal sexuality. It is only when the energy, and so consciousness, of sexuality is captured or

suspended, that it can lead the individual to a higher plane of consciousness (or awaken the *Kundalini* within them). So action or the actualization of power leads to the dispersion of the psychic energy that passion produces. This is an often used motif in Hindu mythology, where *rishis* or gods must store up their power through meditation or must recharge their power if they are moved to action. It is only by non-action (or the deferment of action) that one can gain enlightenment. So in this worldview we have a model of the world that looks something like this:



The goddess in her role as the deconstructor of oppositions is on the side of both good and evil. Both the *dine* and the *ojha* use the exact same logic to gain their mystical powers. They are both equally devote in their worship of the Devi. So the question is why are *dines* seen as bad while *ojhas* are seen as good?

In order to understand why dines are evil, I will have to first say something about the nature of ritual in general. It is only by understanding the relationship between the ritual moment and personhood that we can begin to understand the role of the *dine* and the *ojha* in Mathil society.

V. Turner's model of ritual attempted to link the Durkheimian perspective of the social to the Freudian emphasis on the symbolic. To Turner, rituals are effective because they link the affect of the individual to the norms of society (Turner, 1967). This model of ritual has been taken up by such thinkers as Obeyesekere, who again focuses on the affective force of a symbol and how such symbols are integrated into a social worldview (Obeyesekere, 1981). Such works point to the intimate link between psychology and ritual. Rituals must be understood not only in terms of a societal process but in terms of individual psychological processes as well. This is all fine and well, but I feel that the link between ritual and psychology goes deeper than the affective nature of symbols. Rituals, at least in the Mathil context, seem to do nothing less than define the self by setting up a relationship between the self and the community. Adopting such a perspective helps us to understand the link between the community rituals, such as Durga puja, and the personal rituals of healing that is so prevalent in this region.

In Lacanian psychology, the self is objectified only by its recognition by the other; that is, in the act of intersubjectivity. Dialogue can be seen as one such process of mutual self recognition. But dialogue, like society itself, is governed by rules, and such rules are always prior to any given intersubjective moment. All intersubjective utterances are interpreted with reference to such rules, that is, there is no immediate access to the intentions of the other.

Thus the objectification of the self by the recognition of ourselves in the dialogue of the other is always subject to interpretation; we can never be sure if we have legitimately interpreted the intentions of the other, and so we can never be sure we have been objectified. The confidence we have in this recognition of ourselves by the other (and thus, the confidence we have in ourselves) is predicated on the confidence we have in our interpretation of the rules of society. We can never be sure if the other has truly recognized us, or if we have just misinterpreted their intentions. This leads to the realization that only the Other, of social order, is truly in the position to objectify us, as only the Other (i.e., society) is fully objectified without reference to the other of the intersubjective encounter. But this Other (the 'transcendental signifier' of Derrida) never speaks to us, and thus, the self, to Lacan is never fully objectified (Lacan, 1973; see also Dews, 1987, p.45-86).

V. Crapanzano, in his book Tuhami, claims in passing that the social order can be the frame of reference by which the self is objectified. In Moroccan society, the saints and jinn's are such a constant point of reference, and are consulted at times of social and personal crisis (Crapanzano, 1980, p.81). This is so because, like the rules of dialogue, they exist prior to any intersubjective encounter. Consequently their reality (objectification) isn't subject to the uncertainties of intersubjectivity. To Crapanzano, they become the Other of identity definition (p.82) but as they seem to be out of touch with modern times, their Otherness is in question. That is, Crapanzano implies that because the social structure of Moroccan society is disintegrating, it can no longer serve to objectify the self. Consequently, he doesn't take up this perspective in any meaningful way.

The implication, however, is that all social structure can be viewed as the Lacanian Other. Social structure precedes any intersubjective moment (orders intersubjectivity) and so orders all social reality, including the self. This clues us in on the intimate connection between ritual and the individual. The self is spoken to (objectified) by the social structure of society in the form of rituals. With such a model we are in a position that allows us to re-read many of the important works of psychological anthropology. In Turner's work, the significant Other of social order comes in the form of 'ancestral shades' (Turner, 1967). Through misfortune, the spirit of the Other speaks to specific individuals, and the individual is forced to respond; that is, recognize the 'other' of the spirit. Thus 'shades' create an intersubjective dialogue, but a dialogue where one partner (the spirit) is guaranteed as grounded (objectified) by the social structure of Ndembu society (by the rules of dialogue itself). In other works, one partner is by definition (by the rules of intersubjectivity) objectified, and as this partner is recognizing you,, you become objectified. The Lacanian deferment of the self is gotten around in such rituals by grounding one partner of the intersubjective encounter, and such a grounding can not be questioned as it is legitimated by the very rules of intersubjective dialogue, that is, it is legitimated by the social structure of Ndembu society.

Grace Gredys Harris' work on the Taita can be read in the same way (Harris, 1978). A self in Taita society is always in the process of becoming. The more social ties one creates, which happens as one gets older and has more social dependents and friends, the more of a person one becomes. In other words, personhood here seems to be dependent on the density of ones intersubjective network. This process of

personhood seems to be complete only when one's father dies and a person can then take on a house shrine as a symbol of their new found autonomy. But one's parents never go away. They become ancestor spirits and make themselves felt by inflicting misfortune for the breaking of social rules. So the parents ultimate authority over the child is recognized in death (p.91). Here again the unquestioned personhood of the dead is used to both expose the everyday social tensions of the community (a point made by both Harris and Turner) and to objectify the self by creating a relationship between a person and the spirit. The self is objectified by the fact that the spirit is recognizing the self, and it seems that the Taita recognize the fact that it is only at this point (when a relationship between the self and a spirit is created), that a person becomes autonomous, or fully a person. There is no need to belabor this point, one can make a similar case for Obeyesekere's work on Sri Lankan spirit possession. Here it is not the dead, but gods or other spirit beings that serve the same function of objectifying the self by engaging the self in a dialogue with a subject who is by definition objectified.

Liminal periods or rites of passage can be made sense of by reference to such a model. To Turner, liminality is, "essentially unstructured (destructured or pre-structured.)" Liminal phases put people in close contact with the supernatural. Thus, liminality collapses opposition (Turner, 1967, p.99). In such periods people are, "that which is neither this nor that, and yet both." (p.99). All this has the effect of forcing people to think about their culture (p.105). During rites of passage, alternative models of reality are presented to the initiate (what Turner calls 'monstrous forms'), which implies that culture could be different from what it is. It is as though the correct cultural

form (that which actually exists) was being re-shaped even as the ceremony proceeds (p.106). Such liminal periods strip initiates of their identity and social status, and therefore allow them to stand in a direct relationship to the Other of the social order. That is, it gives them a direct access to, sets up a direct dialogue with, social structure. But it is not only social structure that is being directly addressed, the initiates also stand in a direct (immediate) relationship with each other. Liminality creates an immediate intersubjective moment, unmediated by an 'interpretation' of the other's intentions. This is similar to how Berger and Luckmann characterize the founding moment of an institution in that individuals are not going from a 'history' that needs to be legitimated by reference to other ideologies (and so subject to interpretation) but are rather in a process of creating or re-creating institutions on the basis of what makes emotional sense to them (Berger and Luckmann, 1967). The creation of a relationship of equality between them, the equality of dialogue ('communitas' in Turner's words) make of the initiates a constant group of reference in each others lives. So what such rituals do is create an intersubjective moment that is immediately self present, and thus define the self within this moment. Note that none of this actually gets away from structure (Turner more than anybody else, presented us with the 'structure' of 'anti-structure'), but society structures such liminal periods as if structure was not involved. The question is why? The answer is to act out a moment that transforms the self or defines the self, by creating the immediate intersubjective dialogue by which the self can be objectified. Liminal phases become processes that set up relationships between the self and the Other of social structure.

But to get back to the matter at hand, namely Mathil social structure, I would like to point out how this model of ritual can help us to make sense of *ojhas* (healers) and *dines* (witches). The first point to be noted is that *ojhas* help people in periods of crisis, expressed here in the idiom of spirit possession, by re-establishing a relationship between them and the Other of the Goddess. The great goddess of the Durga puja ritual is intimately linked to spirit possession. Great community rituals, like Durga puja, establish a personal relationship between the devotee and the Other of the social order. Such rituals are periodic and serve not only to re-establish the ordered world of society (re-create social structure) but also re-establish individual identity by creating a means of communication between the deity and the individual. Indeed the two (personal and social order) are closely linked. As we have seen, rituals like Durga puja set about creating the universe as though it was being formed even as the *puja* is acted out. In other words, as in a rite of passage, the *puja* appeals to what makes emotional sense to the devotee. It is as though the world was being created right before one's eyes, so such events need not fall back on other ideologies to justify themselves, and are, to this extent, self-contained. Thus personality and personhood are intimately linked to ritual, not because of the affective nature of symbolic communication (or rather, not only because of this) but because the very nature of personhood is tied to creating a dialogue with a social order, and this is precisely what a ritual is. *Ojhas* continue this process by performing healing rituals that address specific individuals at times of need in their life. Such periods of crisis are the collapse of social identity (when the social order no longer makes emotional sense), and viewed in this way, we can understand the logic of healing

rituals. It is precisely at the moment when the person is most deferred (ungrounded) that such rituals re-establish a dialogue between the self and the Other of society. It is at the moment when one's social identity no longer makes emotional sense that healing rituals reaffirm this identity by linking it to social structure. In this way they renegotiates the ongoing dialogue between the self and society. We will talk more about this later.

The point I would like to turn to now is the nature of sorcery. At one interview I was talking to several *ojhas*, when one of them, Pharabho Mondal, began to needle another, Bhasudeva Yadhav, about the fact that he had trained under both an *ojha* and a *dine*! Bhasudeva was visibly distressed, so I decided to intervene. I asked the group, "what is the difference between an *ojha* and a *dine*, they both seem to have *shakti*?" This lead to a general discussion where everyone seemed to agree that *dines* and *ojhas* are equally empowered with *shakti*. Both engage in esoteric practices that violate social norms to get such power. Ultimately, the process is the same for both, the difference is in what they do with their *shakti*. This struck a cord with me, and certainly got Basudeva out of what might have been an embarrassing moment. Turner, Harris and Evans-Pritchard (1976) all make the point that sorcery is like magic, that is, is no different as a process; but is none-the-less viewed as the greatest social evil. But what is evil about it? *Dines* in Mathil society are often seen in the popular imagination as older widowed women, who have outlived their children. This is perhaps the greatest calamity that could befall a normal woman; to lose her husband is bad enough, but to lose her children effectively cuts her off from any long term social networks. Women normally gain in status as they grow older, because as their children grow up and reproduce they

become firmly established as an elder of their husbands lineage. That is age brings status, but largely because of its link to a kinship network. Now what makes a *dine* so frightening to the average Mathil is the fact that she is said to be capable of deliberately killing her own family (note that a *dine* need not be a woman, but is popularly seen as one). This is because in order to gain her powers, a *dine* needs to make a blood sacrifice to the goddess, especially on the sixth night of Durga puja (Nisha puja), a sacred time when all who wish power, both *dines* and tantric adepts, perform special secret ceremonies. Tantrics are said to perform all kinds of left-handed rituals, such as doing the *puja* naked, filling skulls with urine or blood etc. *Dines* are said to gain or reaffirm their power on this night by making a human sacrifice to the goddess. If they have no victims handy, they will turn on their own husbands or children. Such sacrifices are carried out magically; the *dine* will throw a stick through the air that turns into a flying snake (a ghost-snake) and bites its victim. The following story, told to me by Mu'in, one of my best informants and friends gets at the horror and pathos of such events.

Mu'in told me that sometime ago his family was sitting around as usual, when all of a sudden his thirteen year old daughter (his eldest child) got up from her bed and said, 'something has bit me.' On her right hand, between the second and third knuckle, there was indeed a bite mark, and blood. But Mu'in shone his flashlight right away and saw no snake. Now Mu'in claims that after a snake bites someone, they themselves stick around, they may even faint (they are said to be intoxicated by biting people). So if you don't see the snake afterwards, then it is a *dine* and not a snake that has attacked (i.e., a 'ghost snake' sent by a *dine*).

Not wanting to take any chances, Mu'in put turmeric on the girls wound and rushed her to an *ojha* to get rid of the poison. The *ojha* said, 'take off the turmeric.' Mu'in objected to this, but the *ojha* said that if it was a snake bite, then he could cure it, but if it was a *dine*, then he could do nothing. Either way, the turmeric would not help. The *ojha* concluded that no snake had bit the girl, but he would none-the-less try and get rid of the poison. So Mu'in took off the turmeric. The *ojha* then *jharoed* the poison out, and Mu'in said that the crafty *dine* let the poison go down while the *ojha* was present.

The girl got better, and said she was feeling fine. But on the way back home, the *dine* put the poison back. The girl began to complain about dizziness. Mu'in knew that this was a bad sign, he knew then that she would die. Once they reached home, she asked for water. Everyone told Mu'in not to give her any, as it would make the poison go straight to her head. But Mu'in said, 'she is dead anyway, so why deny her the water.' She died shortly after this.

A few months later Mu'in heard a commotion in his village. His grand-daughter (by kinship classifications) was bitten in exactly the same spot as his daughter had been. She too was thirteen years old. After his daughter's death, people told Mu'in that if he had taken her to the hospital in Purena instead of taking her to an *ojha*, she would still be alive. This thought stuck with him, so he borrowed a motorcycle and rushed his grand-daughter to the hospital. There she was given injections for the snake bite, but to no avail. Within three hours she was dead. Now no snake was spotted by her or her family

either, so Mu'in concluded that it must have been a *dine* in both cases, and even if he had taken his daughter to the hospital, she would still have died.

Dines, according to Mu'in, when they are just learning their trade will go to the forest and pick up a stick. They recite a *mantra* over the twig twelve times, then they throw it into the air. The twig flies to the intended victim and is transformed into a snake. It bites the victim, and if the victim dies, then the *shakti* of the *dine* is increased. After this, the *dine* is so powerful that they can kill anyone by his magic. The victim of such first attacks (i.e., the first time a *dine* kills someone) are either the oldest child or a pre-pubescent girl (*kumari*). His daughter fit both categories. Such attacks cannot be treated in the same way as snake bites, as it will do no good.

This is an especially frightening image considering the fact that the region is infested by cobras and *karaits*, both of which are highly venomous snakes. In the first month of my fieldwork I heard of ten locals who died from snake bites. After the first month, I stopped keeping track, for fear that I would never have the courage to step out of my house again. Some things it is best not to know! And of course, one can never tell if a snake is a snake or a ghost-snake sent by a witch! The important point is that the *dine* is willing to kill those very people that any normal person would sacrifice his or her all for.

The fact that a *dine* would kill his or her own family clues us in on what is so evil about witchcraft, namely that it is anti-social. A witch among the Azande, Ndembu or Mathil, is one who uses their power for personal gain. The process of witchcraft is no different from other kinds of socially useful magic, but witchcraft is evil because of its

anti-social nature. But what exactly is anti-social about it? Sorcery uses the Other of society and is completely steeped in the cosmology of a given social order. That is, it can only be understood, like healing, by reference to the social order, it does not offer a counter-ideology. Thus, as in a ritual, the *dine* has 'immediate' access to the social order (the Other). The *dine* sets up a direct dialogue with the goddess, just as an *ojha* does. But *dines* uses this dialogue only to increase their power, while *ojhas* uses this dialogue to reestablish the social connection between an individual in crisis and the goddess. In this way, *dines* and *ojhas* become structural opposites, a fact attested to in the following interview with Pharabho and Basudev.

Me: But why do *dines* do this? [Hurt people]. Are they just like that or what?

PM: They learn to do it.

BD: They learn to do it. Those who learn to be a *dine* as a *kumari* (pre-pubescent girl) will not hesitate to kill their own husbands.

PM: Or even their own son.

BD: Those *kumari*'s who learn the *mantra*, they will promise to teach their children too. But if not, if the *guru* doesn't accept them or if they won't [i.e., if the children refuse to learn], then the *guru* says, 'sell the pillar in your house and give me that [i.e., give me some other compensation]. If not that then give me your *mang* [promise], that is, your *sindur* [i.e., serve me like you serve your husband, or have sex with me]. Or I will kill your husband.'

Me: So *dines* too have *gurus*?

BD: Yes...

Me: O.K. So a *dine* does these things because they get their *shakti* from them, just like you learn *tantra/mantra* from your *guru*, they use their evil eye etc.

PM and BD: Yes.

Me: Could anyone get more *shakti* from such actions? For example, could you get *shakti* from putting the evil eye on someone?

PM: Their pride [or enthusiasm] will increase every time they kill someone. If he kills two or three people he will feel increased vigor. Their lust to kill will increase. If someone [a likely candidate] should come along, they will find out their name. Without the name, they can't kill him.

Me: They can't kill without a name?

BD: No they need the name...

Me: What I'm asking is do you get something out of it [from helping people]. Do you get *shakti* from it, or do you just do it to help others? You said that *dines* get *shakti* from putting the evil eye on people right?

PM: Yes.

Me: Now when you do these things [i.e., help people], do you get something too?

PM: I get *shakti* because I help [or relieve, cure] people. Then my power increases. They [i.e., the *dine*] want to kill, I want to save. So our two powers are bound to come into conflict. When they do clash, they want to kill me, they want to kill the *ojha*. I too want my power to mess him up. So there is a clash. I have to finish it, so they can not get up again...

Me: About *dines*, do they do Tantric puja?

BD: Yes.

PM: In their house, *dines* usually do *puja* to the Devi. They do puja to the Devi. The *suria* [sun or sight] of the Devi. They don't have to go to their [i.e., the victims] house, they can kill them from their own home. Or if they meet someone on a path, they can kill them. But they have to know their name. Once they know the name, they can make an image out of dough or of cow dung.

Me: O.K. But first they have to make a human image?

PM: Yes, they have to make a human image.

BD: A *murti*.

PM: A *murti* just like the murti of the Devi or Durga that people do *puja* to, and then dump in the river, just like that, they make an image and use the name [of the victim] to kill him. They may use a knife or stick a needle in it, to give him a pain in the stomach. Whatever they do to the image, it will happen to the victim.

BD: There are many ways to kill someone. They can use *til* (sesame) or a doll of *khus* (grass), they can make an image like to do *puja* with, they make a *murti*.

Or they can use a needle to kill. Or they can make a *murti* out of sulfur to kill.

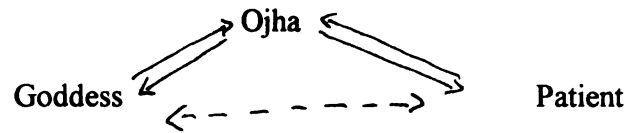
They can use sulfur to kill with. If they use a sulfur image, no one will be able to sit near him [i.e., the victim]. He will smell so bad that even his family won't sit near him. This is a very bad death. In the end, they will die.

Me: O.K. So they make an image of a person. A person who's name they know. And then...

BD: They will ask people of the area to get the name. They will say, 'tell me his name, tell me his father's name.' Then they will make an image. Once he gets sick and dies, they will bury the image. No *ojha*, or anyone else, will be able to help him. He will die sooner or later.

We see from the above that the *dine* does set up a dialogue with the other of an intersubjective encounter, but that such a dialogue is at heart negative. The *dine* has to know the name of his or her victim, which implies a social relationship, but a purely negative one. *Dines* set up an anti-social (or a negative social) relationship with their

victim. If we were to diagram the difference between the *ojha* and the *dine*, we would get a picture that looks something like this:



The *ojha* sets up a reciprocal exchange with the goddess, as he both gives and receives from her. He gives her sacrifices in the form of sweets, *sindur* or even the blood sacrifice of a pigeon. In exchange, the goddess gives him her blessings and her *shakti*, which he can then use to fight spirit beings. At the same time, the *ojha* sets up a reciprocal exchange with the patient. The patient gives the *ojha* money or other gifts, and in return the *ojha* activates for the patient the mystical powers he has gained by pleasing the goddess. Since the point of such rituals is to reestablish the link between the patient and the other of the social order (in this case, the goddess), the *ojha* becomes the medium by which this process is achieved. By setting up a reciprocal and so social relationship between himself and the goddess, and between himself and the patient, he implicitly sets up a social exchange between the patient and the goddess.

Dines on the other hand, set up a negative social relationship between themselves and the patient. The *dine* both gives and receives from the goddess, in much the same way as the *ojha*, but he or she only takes from the patient (or victim).



This is the crucial difference between the *dine* and the *ojha*. The *ojha* reestablishes the intersubjective dialogue between the patient and the goddess, while the *dine* uses the patient to increase their own power. The patient becomes the sacrifice of the *dine*. In this way, the *dine* is distorting the meaning of sacrifice itself. As we have seen, the sacrificial victim is a stand in for the sacrificer. But here, the sacrificial victim is only a means by which the *dine* seeks to increase their own power. In a normal sacrifice, the victim itself must consent to the violence that is done to it (see Chapter 5). Here, however, the victim is excluded from any involvement in the sacrificial process. The sacrificial animal here is a victim, pure and simple.

What is more, the anti-social nature of the *dine*'s sacrifice is further attested to by the fact that it is the victim of such attacks that are often the patient of the *ojha*. The *ojha* is trying to re-establish the social, the intersubjective moment between the goddess and the patient, while the *dine* is often the one responsible for the breakdown of this social encounter in the first place. Normally sacrifice is used as a symbol for the recreation of the ordered world of society, but here the sacrifice of the *dine* disrupts the order of the social world. *Dines* and *ojhas* seem to be structural opposites. The *ojha* establishes social relationships while the *dine* establishes anti-social relationships. This opposition is made clear in the above interview. Pharabho seems to take seriously the

idea that *dines* and *ojhas* are such opposites that if they should meet, one or the other has to be destroyed.

The opposition between the *ojha* and the *dine* is analogous to the opposition between the *devas*(gods) and the *asuras*(demons) in Hindu mythology. For although the goddess (or any other symbol of the transcendent) may be a totalizing institution that encompasses both good and evil, as the upholder of *dhrama*, and so the killer of the *asuras*, what is emphasized is her role as the upholder of good, or the moral order. No myth or legend of the goddess takes the opposite point of view (i.e., views her as the upholder of *adhrama*). So here the symmetry of the goddess breaks down. As we saw, the goddess in her role as the deconstructor of oppositions is on the side of both good and evil, but in her role as the upholder of *dhrama* she is clearly on the side of good and opposed to evil.

The *asuras* aren't exactly evil beings. If they were then why would the text of Durga puja call Mashasure 'noble'? In fact, it is often difficult to see the difference between the *asuras* and the *devatas*. They both get their power in exactly the same way, by practicing austerities that compel the great gods (the personification of universal order) to give the power. So the *asuras* are not really challenging the moral order or the fundamental laws of the universe assumed by Hindu philosophy. They only become powerful in the first place because they followed the laws that govern the universe. Therefore, they do not really pose a threat to the fundamental logic of the Hindu worldview, they do not really present a counter-ideology.

What differentiates the *asuras* from the *devas* is that they use the power they gain for their personal pleasure. Each powerful demon threatens the social order of the universe by attempting to become the master of the three worlds. And this attempt is undertaken for no reason but to further the glory of the demon. In the story of Durga and Mashasure, the fatal mistake of the *asura* king was to be vain enough to assume that he could possess the goddess. His vanity blinded him to the true nature of the goddess and he was willing to risk everything he had for the personal pleasure of having sex with her.

It seems to me then that the difference between the *devas* and the *asuras* is not so much about good and evil, but about the Freudian tension between the unbridled needs of the individual for pleasure, verses the needs of society for order. The social order upheld by the *devas* is in marked contrast to the narcissism of the *asuras*. The *asura* is the anti-god or the opposite of the god, because he used his power for purely personal ends. Even the *devas* fall into this trap. Lesser gods, like Indra, are constantly being reprimanded by the higher deities for emphasizing their personal glory or pleasure over their social role as the upholder of *dhrama*. H. Zimmer starts out his classic work on Hindu mythology by telling the story of Indra's pride and egotism and how Krsna had to remind Indra that in the end, he, Indra, had nothing to be boastful about (Zimmer, 1946). In this story, as in many others, the *devata* act like an *asura*, in that he emphasizes his personal pleasure over his social role. And this seems to be the greatest sin within Hindu cosmology; the hubris of power that rejects or forgets the obligation that power has to the upkeep or the social order.

I think something similar is at the center of the conflict between the *ojha* and the *dine*. The *dine*, like the *asura*, does not really threaten the fundamental laws of the social order (they are seen as devout worshipers of the goddess). They gain their power by practicing austerities, just like the *ojha* or the renouncer. The difference is that the *dine* like the *asura* emphasize their own pleasure at the expense of the social. The very act by which the *dine* gets power (by making a sacrificial victim of a human) is a disruption of the social order. The *ojha* attempts to re-establish the connection between the individual and the social, while the *dine* breaks this bond. In this way the dialogue that the *dine* set up between themselves and the Other of the goddess, is at heart narcissistic. The Other of the social order is being used here not to satisfy the needs of the self to objectify itself, and so to accept its responsibilities toward the social, a process that always implies a relationship of mutual obligation between the self and the Other, but rather uses the Other of the social order purely for personal gains, purely in an egotistical manner. It cheats the intersubjective moment. It denies the desire of the Other (of society and so the goddess) and its need for social order. The needs of the goddess in her role as the upholder of this social order are being ignored.

Sorcery is thus like the Freudian genital stage. The witch has some of the attributes of an adult, namely the ability to initiate a social encounter, but the narcissism of sorcerers makes them less than full fledged adults. The other is important to the witch, but is being used as a substitute for masturbation. That is, the *dine* is an egotist, unable to engage in a relationship with the other that acknowledges the mutual dependence of both parties for the fulfillment of their mutual desires. The *dine* is caught

in a web of their own desire that denies the relevance or the necessity of the social. The fulfillment of desire in Freudian theory is, after all, always a compromise. A fully formed ego recognizes that its desires must be channeled or limited in order to accommodate the desires of the other (i.e., one's lover). That is, the id which is a pure egotist, wants to possess all sexuality all the time. It makes of the lover an object, an object that exists for no reason but to fulfill its desires. It is the reality principle that forces it to acknowledge that this state of pure pleasure is impossible. In a social world, it must compromise its desires if it wishes to find any pleasure at all. But the *dine*, like the adolescent, is involved only with his or her own desires, and denies the dependency he or she has on the desires of the other. The *dine* does this in two ways: firstly the *dine* denies the needs or the desire of the other by using a human as a sacrificial victim. This act is certainly a disruption of the social order and even denies the rights of the sacrificial animal to consent to be sacrificed. Secondly, the *dine* denies the needs or the desires of the Other, namely the goddess. The goddess' need for social order is made manifest not only in the great *pūja* to the goddess Durga, but also in the personal healing rituals of the *ojha*, where she shows her willingness to help the individual in crisis re-establish their emotional commitment to their social role. In this way the *dine*'s anti-social nature is revealed, and it is for these reasons that the *dine* becomes the greatest evil.

The *ojha*, like the renouncer, on the other hand, is fully willing to accept their dependence on the desire of the Other. Thus, though the process that leads to power might be the same in each case, the essential point is that *ojhas* like the renouncers do not abandon society. They may flaunt its norms, but ultimately come back to embrace

the social order. That is, they accept their dependence upon others, and so, they accept the needs of society. For this, they become valued members of the community.

The point of all this is that psychological processes are intimately linked to social structure. Personhood can only be understood as a dialogue between the self and the Other of society. And only one who has fully accepted the responsibilities of such a dialogue is fully human. This is an ongoing process that finds expression in ritual. Ritual is tied to personhood not just because of the emotional content of symbols but because of the very structure of both ritual and the self. Therefore, no study of psychology can ignore the relationship between the self and the social.

CHAPTER EIGHT: KINSHIP AND KINGSHIP

My cousin (Fzd), who is considerably senior to me, was quite insistent that I attend her daughters wedding. Coming toward the end my stay in India, I saw the occasion as a time for some R. and R. Besides it had been a number of years since I had seen a proper Hindu wedding, so I decided to go. What amazed me was that I was treated with much respect and deference at the occasion. Most of the wedding party was made up of my aunts (Fz) and other relatives, who, so to speak, "out ranked" me. Indeed this fact was given cultural expression in the formal deference I was obligated to show such relatives by the act of touching their feet and asking for their blessing (elders bless juniors, and never the other way around), an act that is called *ghor lagni* or *pranam*, literally the act of touching a persons feet to ask for their *asirvad* or blessing (incidentally, this would be the same gesture of respect that a student would traditionally show toward a *guru*). It seemed odd then that they should make such a fuss about my presence. During the ceremony, however, I began to understand the significance of my presence. My cousin (and many others besides) repeatedly told me how nice it was that someone from "my family" had attended the wedding. Initially this struck me as strange, after all they were all from "my family". But this was not the case. In Mathil kinship women marry out of their natal family and become members of their husband's patriline, and only members of your patriline are true 'members' of your family. But more importantly, the overwhelming sense of this experience was that I was a representative of that patriline.

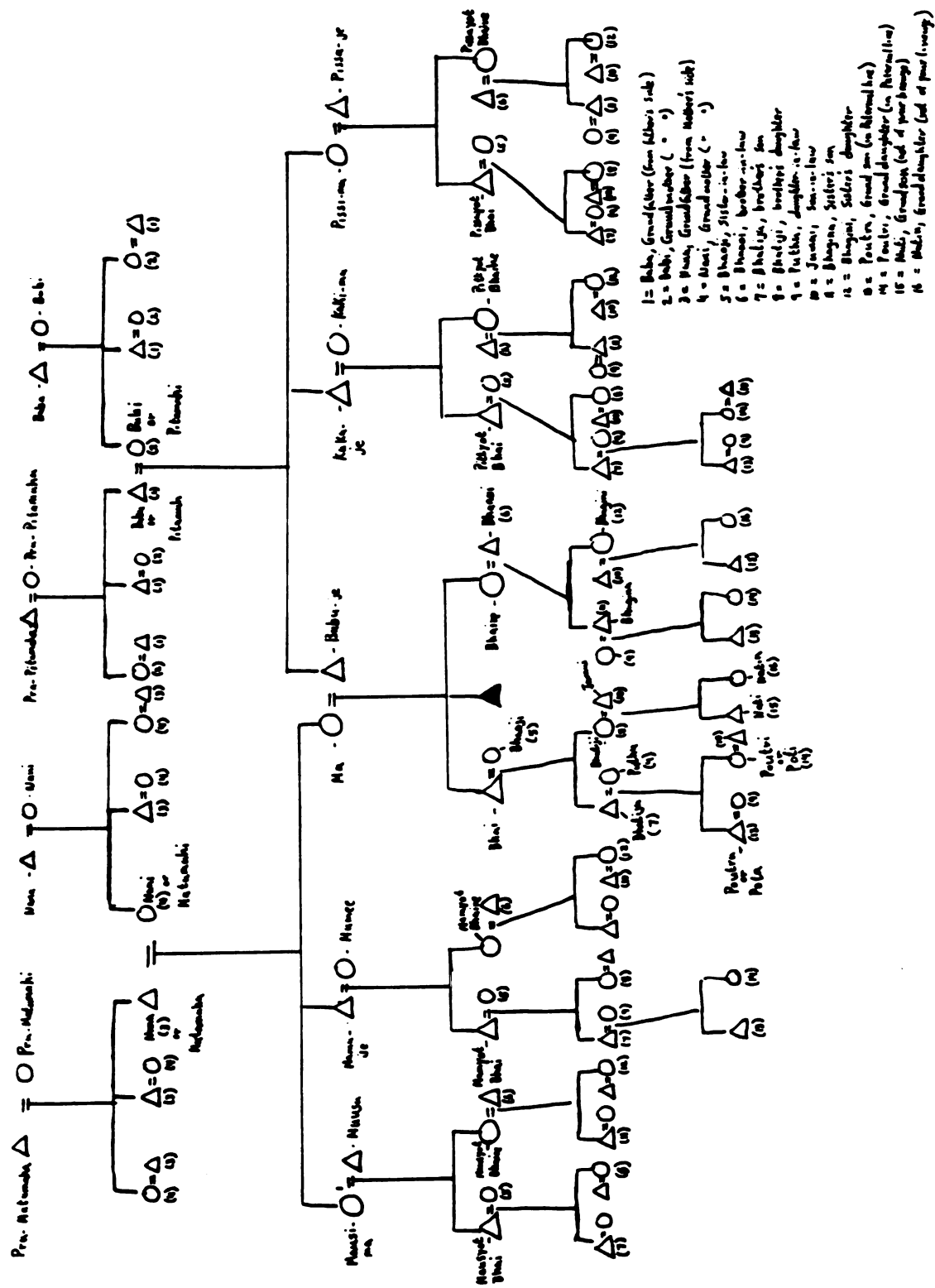
It wasn't me who attended the wedding, but 'my family' that made an appearance.

The first time I visited the temple at Ramnagar, the priests there had no idea who I was. Dressed in shorts and tennis shoes and peddling around on my bike, I must have cut a rather odd figure. The priests were very rude and I left without actually entering the Devi temple. Now the temple at Ramnagar was built by my great-great grandfather, but the estate that own the temple today has passed on to another family (my great great grandfather's daughter inherited this land and it has passed on to her husband's cognates). I thought little about this incident, but the current owners of Ramnagar and its temple, without my knowledge, took pains to reprimand the priests and let them know 'who I was.' The next time I went to Ramnagar, the priest came out to greet me long before I reached the temple. Their they had prepared a ceremony to commemorate the fact that someone 'of my family' had come back to visit the old place. With gongs ringing they chanted *mantras* over me and then put a *tika* on my forehead. After that, they personally showed me the *Durgastan* and began to reminisce about the history of 'my family.'

Again what struck me about this was the fact that my personal presence wasn't what was important, what was important was that a member of 'my family' had come to visit the temple. On occasions such as these, and there are many such occasions, one gets the feeling that one is just a stand in for one's family.

What these examples point out, I think, is that Mathila is a kin based society. What this means is that kinship is an important (if not the most important) ordering principle in this culture. But further, kinship here is closely tied to identity and personhood. As in the case of Bengali kinship (a closely related culture; for a time,

under the British, all of Mathila was administratively considered as a part of Bengal), kin identity comes in concentric circles; a 'segmentary lineage system' in which one's primary allegiance and identity is to one's immediate patriline, and then to ever widening circles of one's kindred (see Inden and Nicholas, 1977). One's 'personhood' is thus dependent on the context in which one find oneself. One can be, at a maximal level, a representative of one's lineage (a "Sinha", in my case) or a stand in for one's immediate minimal segment (the 'son of Indranand Sinha'). This minimal segment tends to take on a dominant role when dealing with members of one's own family, while the maximal level lineage of 'family' tends to be stressed when dealing with people who are outside one's family. In the examples above I was dealing with people who were outside my family (in the case of my cousin and aunts, they were women who had married out of the family, and so were no longer directly part of my lineage) and so what was stressed was my role as a Sinha. In other contexts, say in inter-family disputes (which we shall talk about presently) the emphasis is on the immediate kinship segment, namely you, your father, and your brothers. Of course this is a simplification. The widest context of belonging would include women who have married out of the family and their children. How much emphasis is placed on such ties are largely a matter of interpersonal interactions and politics (by this I mean choice). As long as you 'remember' and accept such ties, you are obligated to treat such tangential members of your larger kindred with all the respect (or indulgence, depending on if you are older or younger to them) due any other family member.



It will be useful to present a kinship chart before considering the implications of kinship in Mathil society. I would also like to point out, briefly, some of the significant features of this kinship system before attempting to say anything about its meaning (see chart on previous page).

Great Grand Parent's Generation: At this level importance is placed on patrilineal vs. matrilineal descent. The term *Pra-Pitamaha* is used for paternal great grand parents (agnatic), while *Pra-Matamaha* is used for maternal great grand parents (uterine). Both these terms are fairly formal, the majority of my informants simply referred to such people as *Par-Nana/Nani* ("great grand maternal father/mother") or *Par-Baba/Babi* ("great grand paternal father/mother"). In practice, should one actually have the opportunity to meet ones great grandparents, one would simply address them as *Nana/Nani* or *Baba/Babi*. It is interesting to note the patrilineal bias in this system, where the parents of ones grandmother (either maternal or paternal) are referred to by the more generic terms for grand parent. That is, one's maternal grandmother's parents would not be called *Pra-Matamaha* but simply *Nani* or *Nani*. Only ones maternal grandfather's parents have this title. Ones paternal grandmother's parents again are referred to by the generic *Baba/Babi* (not *Pra-Pitamaha*).

Grand Parent's Generation: The emphasis here is again on maternal vs. paternal descent. Maternal grandparents are called *Nana* (male) or *Nani* (female). And this is true regardless of if they are directly in your line or not, or if they are 'married' into the family or not. The same holds true for paternal grandparents (*Baba/Babi*).

Parent's Generation: This is the most marked group of Mathil kin types. Every class of people in this generation has a separate name, and these are actually used in addressing them (you would actually call, for example, your paternal uncle *Kaka-je*). It is interesting to note that all the females in this generation have the suffix '*ma*' (mother) added to their title, except for *Mamee* (mother's brother's wife) who already has the word '*ma*' as part of her title. Now what we need to keep in mind is that ideally Mathil households should be joint households, with patrilocal residency. Also your mother's immediate family has extensive contact with you so that in a very real sense the women of your parental generation do act as your surrogate mothers. And in a very real sense, especially with your paternal aunts, you are expected to treat them in the same manner that you would treat your mother. This ideal of multiple mothers is further enforced symbolically in the act of breast feeding. Any woman (but especially aunts, who are likely to have been lactating at the time of your infancy) who breast feeds you will feel it their right to be treated, for the rest of their lives, as if they were your mother. This also points out the importance of progeny in the acceptance of women into a lineage. In a strongly patrilineal society, like Mathila, there is always a tension between wives who 'marry in' to the family and 'real' members of the lineage. This tension is expressed by the fact that elder members of the lineage will refer to women who marry in as *bhahue* (daughter-in-law, or bride) or *kanya* (bride), even after such women have reached middle age and their wedding has become a dim memory to all. But the reminder of the 'alien-ness' of wives is counterbalanced by the fact that women have children. And it is through their children that women gain acceptance and status in their husband's lineage

(note however, that their status is of an interpersonal nature, the personal bond between them and the members of the next generation). This again points out the significance of breast milk. The more members of the lineage a woman has suckled, the deeper her ties (personal and symbolic) are to the lineage. Now it isn't necessary that a woman is actually lactating, the important thing is that she let the baby suckle, or held it in her *godh* (lap; it is perhaps significant that to adopt a child here is called *godh lani*, to take one into ones lap). That is, she acted as a mother to the child, as so, at some level, is a mother to it.

The same logic to an extent works for the men of this generation, although there is a much clearer division between the matrilineal and patrilineal sides. Every male member of your parents generation is to an extent, an extension of your father. So the relationship between you and your *Pissa-je* (the "je" here is an honorific suffix), *Kaka-je*, *Mausi-je*, and *Mama-je* is in theory, the same as your relationship to your father. Your must treat all these individuals with respect and deference. However, in practice, it is your *Kaka-je* (Fb) that is most closely linked to your father. Your *Mama*(Mb) or *Pissa* (Fzhub.) would generally be indulgent and open toward you, while your *Kaka* would be (like the ideal father) reserved and formal (note the difference between female and male roles here. Women relate to children through indulgence and love, interpersonal ties; while men, especially fathers, relate to their children through formal cultural ties). In theory your *Kaka-je* would be the first person you turn to for mediation of a dispute or help, should your own father be unavailable.

Own Generation: Although there are different terms for cross-cousins vs. parallel cousins, for both matra and patrilineal sides, in practice such people are never addressed by such terms. All members of this group are simply addressed as *bhai* or *bhaine* (brother or sister) for those older to you or by their name, if they are younger to you. This is another way of marking status, juniors never refer to elders by their name alone, and for significant elders such as father or mother, the name is never used. This also marks the disparity in status between men and women as an ideal wife never uses her husband's name. This is meant to be a way of showing respect. It seems that a deliberate attempt is being made to equate such relatives (the significant difference between them is not in terms of patri or matrilineal ties, but in terms of junior vs. senior status), and indeed close bonds tend to exist between cousins, and between your parents and your cousins. This generation is your primary group of reference, especially in extended households.

Children's Generation: Again, we see a tendency to gloss over differences. The salient distinction here is between the children of your "brother's" (*bhataja* or *batheige*) regardless of how such "brother's" are related to you, and your "sister's" children (*bhagana/bhagini*). In theory, the relationship between you and them is the same as between a parent and a child (it is considered the height of bad manners to imply that this isn't the case). This means that many of the privileges or obligations that are attached to the parent/child relationship are extended to your nephews and nieces. It would not be considered unusual for you to take in such relatives should they need to move near you for any reason, such as work or schooling (one of the great disadvantages of such

institutions to someone who grew up in the west is that your aunts and uncles would take offense if you were to say visit a town in which they lived and not stay with them). All such events tend to happen causally, and to imply that it may be a burden would be insulting. Of course, such arrangements are conducted with the understanding that you will treat your nephews and nieces with all the love or discipline of their actual parents.

Indeed when I set off to do fieldwork, I was worried about where I would stay (I had only visited Champanagar once before and it certainly did not have any hotels or places to rent). My father immediately made arrangements for me to live with his uncle (my grand-father's first cousin). I was unsure of this, as I really didn't know the man at all well. As it turned out, one of his nephews (and therefore my 'uncle') ended up, at the spur of the moment, taking me in instead (he was living alone in Champanagar, and so had more room to put me up). This was all done in the blink of an eye, and no amount of protest on my part about being a burden or contribution to household expenses was heeded. For the duration of my stay, Hira *Kaka* treated me as though I was his own son (in fact, as is so typically the case in Mathil kinship, he and his wife, who I had never meet prior to my fieldwork, took to calling me *bata* or son). This from a man I had only met once before in my life!

Grand-Children's Generation: The difference between matrilineal and patrilineal sides are here down played. The important difference is whether you are linked to the person (in an immediate sense) by a male or a female. If you are linked to them by a male (regardless of whether it is your brother's son or mother's sister's son's son) they are called *poutra* or *poutri* (*pota* or *potee* is the less formal usage). If you are linked by a

female, then they are called *nati* or *natine*. Past this generation, all male grandchildren's children are called *potra/potee*, while all female grandchildren's children are called *nait/natin*.

Grandparents here enjoy a good deal of status, and consequently your grandchildren are expected to treat you with much respect and deference. And this is true regardless of whether you are their matrilineal or patrilineal grandparent. Generally grandparents treat their grandkids with a good deal of affection and indulgence.

People who Marry In: In your own generation the term for people who marry into the family is generic; *bhaoji* for females (wife of 'brother') and *bahinow* for males (husband of 'sister'). And this is true of all your 'brothers' and 'sisters,' regardless of how they are related to you. The significant difference that this emphasizes is between members of 'your family' and those who are marrying into your family. Note that this is not the case for the generation above you, where people who marry in are given a feminine or masculine version of your relatives title (*Kaka's* wife is *Kakee*, *Pissi's* husband is *Pissa*, etc.). It seems to me then that to an extent, people who marry in are equated. This would imply that one's assimilation into a lineage is a result of seniority. As one moves from being married into a lineage to the role of being a senior member of a lineage (with juniors who show deference toward you) one becomes more 'fixed' as a full member of the lineage. Initially, however, all members marrying in to the lineage seem to be equated. This would tend to imply that one's assimilation into a lineage is a result of seniority. As one moves from being married into a lineage to the role of being a

senior member of a lineage (with juniors who show deference toward you), one becomes more fixed as a full member of the lineage.

This isn't quite true, as far as your relationship to such people are concerned. *Bahinow's* must uniformly be treated with respect, though not in an aloof or formal manner, but there is a real difference in the way one acts toward one's *bhaoji*. There exists a joking relationship between you and the wife of an older brother, such that there is a constant, and often sexually charged game not unlike the dozens between you and her. This is especially visible during the festival of Holi, where anything short of actual sex is permissible, and even expected; if you did not sexually accost your *bhaoji* on such occasions, people would wonder if something was amiss. On the other hand, there is something of an avoidance relationship between you and the wife of a younger brother. Ideally she would cover her face whenever she was in your presence (the term is *ghoge* or veil, which is done by sliding a *sari* way over the face) and you would address her in formal terms.

In fact, a woman marrying into a lineage generally has to treat all senior males in this formal manner (including her husband's older brothers, Father, Uncles, etc.). And for very senior members of the family (say her husband's father's generation and up), she will make her extreme deference apparent by speaking in the third person. Mathili has three kinds of speech: common speech used among equals, formal speech used toward seniors (a western example would be the difference between the French 'tu' and 'vous'),

and very formal speech, in which you address people as 'they' (e.g., "will they be going to town")²⁶.

Now one might get the impression that the actual relationship between seniors and juniors is very formal, but this is certainly not always the case (or rather, need not be the case). Although juniors are required to show deference, this is generally a superficial act, and in actuality, such relationships can be warm and friendly. This is so because while a bride should act respectfully toward, say her husband's aunt, the aunt (who ideally is close to the husband) is expected to act very warmly and openly toward the bride (in the same way as she is expected to act toward her own daughter-in-law).

I think what all this points to is the tension between family members and people who marry in, what Radcliff-Brown would have called social conjunction and disjunction. This tension is given structural expression in the form of joking relationships or avoidance relationships. The logic here would go something like this: your elder brother's wife is your 'senior' (symbolically expressed by the fact that you should touch her feet, *goar lagni*, when you meet her), yet she is not quite a real 'senior' of the lineage, in the same way, say as your paternal uncle would be. It is also often the case that she is (chronologically) younger than you (ideally a bride should be 10 years younger than her husband). This leads to a structural tension, where someone is, by the rules of kinship, your superior, yet in other ways, your equal or junior. This tension is mediated by joking relationships. No such tensions exist for the wife of your younger brother, and so this

²⁶. Needless to say, such subtlety was initially lost on me, as I would inevitably get confused by who exactly was being referred to.

relationship is not especially marked. Consequently the general rule of respect for elders (in this case, you) is followed.

For the next generation (your children's generation) and all consequent generations, there is a marked tendency to lump together all the people marrying into the family. This means that the wives of all male members of this generation (your *bhatija's* or *bhagina's*) are called by the same term *puthu* (or *bahau*, bride). This is true no matter how the male is related to you and extends down; i.e. your 'grandson's' wife (*poutra* or *nati*) is also called *puthu*. The husband's of the female members of this generation (i.e., your *bhatiji*, or *bhagini*) are uniformly called *jamai*, and again this extends down to the next generation also.

So far we have considered Mathil kinship from the perspective of a male ego. Something should be said about how this system would appear to a female ego. From a female perspective this system would seem somewhat disjointed, or perhaps more accurately, punctuated by abrupt changes. Females start out as members of their natal lineage. Their allegiance and loyalty to their father's lineage marks the early phase of their life. But from a very early age they are made aware of the fact that eventually they will leave this lineage and be adopted into the lineage of their husband. Marriage then marks an abrupt transition from one kin group of reference to another. After marriage, a woman's loyalty and allegiance is expected to shift from her father's to her husband's lineage, which is formally marked by her taking on her husband's *gotra* (clan or sub-caste).

But this shift comes in stages.²⁷ Initially there is a good deal of tension between a bride and her husband's family, especially her mother-in-law. Traditionally, women are entrusted with the management of the household and all household affairs. There is a hierarchical relationship between women in which the senior most woman enjoys a position of power over all others (this logic of seniority is followed down the line, with the wife of an elder brother 'out ranking' the wife of a younger). This means that in the ideal joint family situation, the mother-in-law would have absolute authority over all her daughter in laws. Even today, when many people choose not to live with their parents, there still tends to be a short period of time, right after the wedding, when the young couple will live with the husband's family.

The relationship between daughter-in-law and mother-in-law should be one of love and indulgence. But in practice, especially initially, there tends to be a good deal of tensions between them. Partially this is a structural tension; there is much pathos and grief that women and their parents feel at the time of marriage. This is true not only because of the close ties that tend to exist between parents, especially mothers, and their children, but also because young women, from an early age, contribute a considerable amount of labor to the upkeep of a household. The mother then is not only losing a beloved child, she is also losing a valuable worker. This makes marriage a fairly traumatic period for all involved. And this trauma isn't made any easier by the tentative

²⁷ . There is no certainty that this process will ever be completed. A woman who marries down (i.e. marries into a lower status family) or one who is unhappy with her marriage for whatever reason, might continue to assert her alien-ness from her husbands kin group.

status of a young bride within her husband's lineage. No matter how loving a mother-in-law is, she can't replace one's own mother.

So initially, the bride is put into an alien household, cut off from her own kin, and expected to work under the supervision of her mother-in-law. This is a traumatic period in a young woman's life (just ask any married Indian woman!) and one we shall talk about in our discussion of spirit possession. The young bride is referred to as *kanya* ("bride") or *bhahou* by her in-laws, and spends much of her time alone or silently helping with domestic chores. She is expected to cover her face (*ghoge lagnai*) in the presence of her father-in-law, or other senior members of the household, as a mark of respect. Generally she is treated very formally by her husband's kin, which only increases her sense of isolation. She is of course allowed to maintain contact with her parents and siblings, but going back to visit them too often, especially in the first year or so of marriage, is looked down upon, even by her own parents. Initially then, the bride is put into an alien lineage and treated in a very formal and reserved manner by her new kin.

All this changes, however, with the birth of her first child. For while her in-laws might treat her in a formal way, they are certain to treat her children with indulgence and love. A woman's children solidifies the link between her and her husband's lineage. Since they are full fledged members of this lineage, and since they show their mother the respect and formal deference due to any other elder member of this lineage, they act as the mechanism that firmly establishes their mother as a member of that lineage.²⁸ But

²⁸ . The conception of children is so crucial in this society that a barren woman is something of a social outcast. Traditionally marriages are for life, and until very recent times divorce was unheard of. However, a woman's inability to conceive would be grounds for her husband to take another wife, or even abandon his infertile bride. Consequently, couples will conceive soon after marriage. If they should put off having children, people will assume something is wrong. A friend of mine, a female anthropologist from Assam, was

this process isn't restricted to a woman's own children; as her sisters-in-law begin to have children she will assume the role of *Kaki-ma* toward them. This makes her a senior member of the lineage, with close personal ties to the next generation of that lineage. As we have stated earlier, this final act of assimilation is given formal expression in kinship terminology. A woman starts out being called *bhaoji* (by her husband's siblings) or *bhahou* (by her husband's seniors), both of which are rather generic or 'unmarked' terms. However as she assumes the role of senior, she will be referred to as *Kaki-ma* and later *Babi* (by her grandchildren's generation). This fully assimilates her into her husband's lineage.

Though time, she begins to identify more closely toward this lineage than toward her father's lineage. The density of her social ties within her husband's lineage make the people of that lineage her primary group of reference.

Institutions that Relate to Kinship: Now that we have sketched the parameters of Mathil kinship it is time to turn toward other institutions that have a bearing upon it. The first to be considered is caste or *jati* (*jait* in Mathili). This is central because it determines the choice of eligible marriage partners. In Mathila, the *jati*'s are ranked such that it is not so important whether you are a *Brahmin* or not. What is crucial (as far as marriage is concerned) is what kind of *Brahmin* you are. The highest caste *Brahmins* (

telling me that as she has been married for 8 years and has not as yet had a child, total strangers feel no hesitation or embarrassment in asking her if she is barren (something which understandably infuriates her). It is interesting to note that infertility is generally assumed to be a female problem. This is because of the strong particular nature of N. Indian society. Impotence in a man is a grave matter, that says as much about his 'character' as it does about his medical or somatic state.

the 'pure' Mathil *Brahmins*) are only 12 or 13 in number. These 13 *gotras* (or ranked clans) are forced to intermarry between themselves. Such marriages follow the logic of clan exogamy. Each person in this society belongs not only to a *jati* (caste) but to a *gotra*, or clan. Such *gotras* trace their descent to a mythical ancestor (usually a celebrated holy man mentioned in the scriptures). No real kin ties unite members of a *gotra*, nor as far as I could tell, does the *gotra* form any meaningful political or social unit. Its significance is purely in terms of marriage or other ritual occasions.²⁹ Aside from *gotra* exogamy, the only other time it becomes meaningful is at a funeral. Ideally your eldest son, then your youngest son, but never a middle son, would be responsible for cremating you. But should you have no son's, or should they be unavailable for any reason, it is a male member of your *gotra* that must take on this responsibility. As *gotras* are determined by patrilineal descent, in practice this means that any of your patrilineal male relatives are in a position to cremate you (that is, brother's son or brother's son's son, but not brother's daughter's son, or sister's children as they would belong to a different *gotra*). Any member of your matriliney, is naturally disqualified, as your mother's natal *gotra* will not be the same as yours. However, it is interesting to note that a woman changes her *gotra* to her husband's upon marriage.

Another important consideration when trying to understand kinship in Mathila, are incest taboo's. These have the effect of extending out the immediate kin group to include other branches of the family (the diagram we have considered shows us only one immediate kin group). Since the rule is that you must be six generations removed from

²⁹ . All *pujagaries*, i.e. a person performing a *puja*, have to specify their *gotra* before performing a *yaga*.

your patrilineal group and five generations from your matrilineal, in order to marry, it becomes necessary to keep track of the various branches of your kindred, if for no other reason than to keep track of who is and who is not a potential mate. The same terminology that is used for your immediate kin group is extended to other branches of your relatives. For example, your father's paternal uncle's children (FFB children) would be your father's *pittyot bhai's* and *bhaine's* (classificatory siblings), and consequently they would be your *kaka's* and *pissi-ma's*. The pattern is to refer to such individuals in terms of the generational position they occupy. All your father's 'brothers', i.e. cousins, would become either *kaka's* or *mama's*, depending on if they are his paternal or maternal cousins; conversely, all your mother's 'brothers' (and cousins) would be your *mama's* or *mausa's*. And the children of such people would be your *mamyot* or *mausyot bhai's* or *bhaine's*.

The closeness of such kin depends on the personal contact that individual members of the family have maintained through the years. It is always the case that one has to treat them with all the respect etc. due to any other *kaka* or *mama*, but as such relatives become more and more removed from you, it is often the case that you have little or no dealings with them. This, added to the fact of clan exogamy, leads to a complex situation where professional genealogists are often called upon to make sure two people are indeed in the position to marry.

The limited number of families that are available to any given individual as a legitimate marriage candidate (i.e. that are of the correct *jati* and an equal *gotra*), along with the strict incest taboos crates a dynamic situation that turns kinship into something

of a game. For example, your *pissa-je's* (FZH) relatives (his cousins or niece's) have no real relation to you, and consequently (as they would be members of an appropriate *gotra* for you to marry) they would be potential spouses. This means that any given relative of yours might end up being related to you in any number of ways, and the tie that ends up being stressed is often a matter of personal preference. A few examples may help to illustrate what I mean. The 'uncle' I was staying with (Hira *Kaka*) was related to the current owner of Ramnagar (Bum-Bum). On the one hand, in terms of Hira's patrilineal descent, Bum-Bum was his nephew, that is, Hira's grandfather was the uncle of Bum-Bum's grandmother (normally this tie would be remote enough to be down played, as Bum-Bum's grandmother 'married out' of the family). By this token, Bum-Bum was obligated to show respect to Hira. On the other hand, by matrilineal descent (that is, Hira's wife family) Bum-Bum ended up being Hira's *mama* (uncle), so by this connection, Hira was to show Bum-Bum respect. There was yet another tie that made them brothers (if this is all a bit sketchy, it is because they themselves weren't quite sure how these ties came about. Indeed Bum-Bum, who was quite a good friend of mine, sat down and tried to figure out how in the world we were related. It was quite an effort for me to remember my graduate seminar on kinship, but I finally was able to determine that Bum-Bum and I were of the same generation, and so Bum-Bum, who is older to me, would be my older 'brother.' This meant, and this was the upshot, I had to touch his feet). As far as Hira or Bum-Bum were concerned, all this meant that at any given time, Hira could do *parnam* to Bum-Bum as a sign of respect, or Bum-Bum could touch the feet of Hira. When I asked how they know which tie to emphasize, they both laughed,

and told me it depended on what they felt like that day (which wasn't really the case. Bum-Bum almost always touched the feet of Hira).

A more telling example comes from my own immediate kindred. My eldest *Pissa-je* (FZH) also happens to be a classificatory uncle of my mother. This meant that in terms of patrilineal ties he is my *Pissa*, but in terms of matrilineal ties he is my *Nana*(grandfather). What is significant about this is the fact that my father seems to deliberately downplay the matrilineal end of this relationship; to him it is more important that this *Pissa* of mine is his *bhanoi*. There is something of a joking relationship that exists between yourself and your *bhanoi* (I did not mention this earlier as it is not nearly as pronounced as the joking relationship between ego and an elder *bhaoji*). So between my father and his brother-in-law, there is a casual give and take relationship. However, my mother always focused on the fact that this man was her uncle. Consequently, as far as I am concerned, he is my *Nana* and I have always treated him as such (and vice versa). This example points out the dynamic nature of Mathil kinship. Because of the limited number of families that one can choose to marry from, through time individuals become 'related' in one way or another, to a wide group of people, and such relationships tend to be multi-stranded. Which strand of the such relationships is emphasized is often a matter of choice (though generally, the most important relation will be emphasized). In the example above, *Nana*'s are more important than *Pissa*'s and so this takes precedence.

As I have stated, Mithila, in the bad old days of Structural-Functionalism, would have been called a kin-based society. This does not mean that kinship is the only ordering principle, other institutions are certainly important in this society (caste,

kinship and religion come to mind). But as far as the everyday reality of any given individual is concerned, kin networks are certainly an important frame of reference.

Even people outside of your kin network, will be made into fictive kin, because kinship is such a central way of organizing social relationships. For example, if I were to have a close friend, he would, as a matter of course, be equated with my brother (I did not use the example of cross gender friendships because generally there is little contact between the sexes in this society. This changes after marriage, of course, but even then a friend of a different gender is always presented with their spouse). This means that my mother would tend to call my friend *bata* (son), my sister would call him *bhiaya* (brother) etc.

Should you visit a home in this region, the children of the household, without prompting, would refer to you as 'uncle'. Such fictive kin relationships may be extended to a village level. Women (young girls) of the village are seen as the 'daughters of the village' and young men as the sons. Practically speaking, this means that many of the rules of avoidance between the sexes are abandoned within the village, because fellow villagers are, after all, part of the family. I was rather shocked to see that most women within a village have no hesitation in walking around topless! Whenever they leave their village, say to go to 'town' (Champanagar hardly qualifies as a town, but in this area it is as close to a town as one gets) they will cover themselves. This is especially revealing given the rather conservative attitudes most people have toward sexuality or nudity.³⁰

³⁰ . It is interesting to note that the villagers of this town think of Americans as people who shamelessly walk around in their underwear (the closest translation they have for bikinis). This is not surprising considering that the only representations of the West that they have come from Magazine ads or from the porno movies that are shown on the sly at the local video hut. Given this state of affairs, it is no wonder that they think of Westerners as shameless, but what is interesting is that they seem to be totally blind to the fact that they themselves walk around in clothing that a typical westerner would consider scandalous.

Now given this state of affairs, one may assume that kinship, like ritual, has the ability to 'objectify' the self, as we discussed in the chapter on witchcraft. That is, like ritual, kinship exists prior to any given intersubjective moment, and is part of the taken for granted reality of the community. So, in theory, it should be able to objectify the self in the same way as a ritual moment does. But surprisingly this is not the case. This is so, I think, because of the many structural equivalencies that are part of this kinship system. Instead of objectifying the self, the kinship system actually seems to destabilize the self. Conflict seems to be built into the system (the ghost of Gluckman haunts Mathila). Partly this is the result of the instability of extended households, but I think more is involved. Joint household are the ideal. This means that people will try to get three generations of a family to live under the same roof. Patrilocal residency is the rule. This ideal makes a neat little microcosm, at least to the Mathil mind, where the entire social world of an individual is at his or her fingertips. That is, as kinship is so important and as ones kin are the most important group of reference to an individual, having all your kin living with you is a very satisfying and comfortable way of living. But this ideal, of course, falls short of reality. Sooner or later conflicts between brothers, sister-in-laws, etc. are bound to erupt, and when they do, there is much emotional baggage that will carry with them. It is one thing to fight with a roommate or a neighbor--- one can ignore such people if one chooses--- but in a joint household this option is not available. Conflicts that would generally (in American society) be resolved by 'letting off steam' (that is, a good afternoons worth of yelling) end up becoming life long vendettas. Much of this could be mediated by a clear 'family development cycle,' that is, a mechanism by

which joint families could peacefully split off. There is even an expression to describe this 'developmental stage' of the family, called the *diyadi jhagara*. A *diyad* is someone who is related to you and has rights to commonly held property. *Diyadi jhagara* then means a conflict or fight between *diyads*. A common piece of local wisdom states that one should never get involved in a *diyadi jhagara*, if one can avoid it (which is very good advice, indeed. Unfortunately for me, I had to acquire this wisdom the hard way). So it seems that my assumption that no good mechanism exists to split a joint family has some legitimacy. The problem with kinship models is that they always seem to be addressing some kind of a cultural ideal. It is hard, especially to an 'insider' to such a system, to speak in terms of such generalities. Every time you make a generalization, your mind automatically thinks of dozens of real life examples that counter your assertions. Mind you, there is nothing wrong with generalizations; cultural ideals do tell us something important about a culture, but they are incomplete pictures, and the only way to remedy this is by giving real life examples. Consequently, I would like to present a family history, to show how persistent such inter-family conflicts are.

The example I use is that of my own family. In a sense this is not a good example, as my family is considered a 'royal' lineage (a '*bara*' household, to use C.Jha's term; Jha, 1982). This means that they are not a real representation of a 'common' Mathil family. But I use them none-the-less for two important reasons: firstly because I know the story of this family better than that of any other. Largely this is due to the fact that they were royalty, and so they (and Mathil society) kept track of their history in ways that other families would not. History is important because it gives us a

longitudinal view that makes certain structural conflicts more apparent. As we shall see, certain structural conflicts keep cropping up generation after generation, conflicts that may be dismissed as an aberration if one were to focus on any one given cultural moment. The second point is that being a royal family, the Sinha's were in a position to live up to the ideals of Mathil society. That is, they do not represent a normal family, but they do, in many ways, represent a culturally ideal family. What this means is that many of the features of Mathil kinship are exaggerated. Again this makes the persistent features of such a system all the more apparent. Conflicts between family members would not normally lead to the high melodrama we are about to consider, but the process involved would be exactly the same.

One last point to consider is that such stories (and I call them 'stories' because they aren't quite a history) get told by different branches of this family in different ways. Hence there is a tendency for those telling the tale to completely reinterpret certain events to make their particular branch of the family look good.³¹ Note that the following isn't just a matter of family history. I was shocked to learn that many of these stories are part of the cultural tradition, that is, part of the folk history of the society itself. This point was driven home to me one day when I was sitting at the bazaar at Champanagar drinking my evening tea. A geriatric man approached me and asked, rather pointedly, "Who are you?" When I said my name was Govind (a house name, or a 'calling' name), he shook his head, and asked, "Who are you really?" I thought about this for a moment, as I'm not altogether comfortable with my membership in a royal family

³¹ As a member of this family, I have tried to be as objective as I possibly could in the following account. But as such stories are a matter of inter-family politics, I am sure that many members of my family would object to many parts of the following.

(this was to be a major burden in getting information in this part of the country), but finally decided to tell him that I was Yoganand Sinha (my 'formal' name and one that clearly marked me as a member of my family). Far from being satisfied, he probed further, asking me who my father was. When he got this information, he broke out into a wide toothless smile, as he was able to place me as the grandson of Kumar Krishanand Sinha, of Sultangunj. He himself had been in the employ of K. Ramanand Sinha (my grandfather's brother). The next hour was spent listening to him reminisce about Ramanand Sinha (a man I never met), and his relationships to his uncle Raja Krityanand Sinha, who was the last *raja* of Champanagar. Such encounters were not unusual. In a 'traditional' agrarian based economy, rich landholders, such as the *zamindar* family being considered, were one of the main employers in the immediate region. Further, such employment was often put in terms of patron/client relationships, so that close personal bonds tended to form between employer and employee, so close, that the patrons 'history' often became the history of the region at large, depending on the patron's influence.

Keeping my disclaimers in mind, let us now proceed to a brief history of the Sinha family for the last four generations. I start with Raja Lilanand Sinha because past this point the history gets very vague. Lilanand Sinha was a very rich and powerful man, who's wealth and status rivaled the Raja of Dharbanga (the real royal line in Mathila). He is said to have had an annual income of some 79 lacks Rs., quite a tidy sum even by today's standards. But he himself was not much of a manager, preferring to donate large sums of money and land to various charities (schools and the like). He had four wives,

but until the later part of his life, only one son, (Raja) Padamanand Sinha. These two people had a falling out, the details of which are a matter of interpretation. Those who wish to make Padamanand look good, insist that the falling out was over money. One story goes that the Raja of Dharbanga owed Lilanand a good deal of money and was unable to pay it. He and his brother came personally to Lilanand's *dhori* (house or palace) at Ramnagar to negotiate terms of payment. Lilanand was so flattered by this visit that he personally went out his gate to receive them, saying, "Mathila itself has come to my house" (a reference to the Raja of Dharbanga). Lilanand promptly tore up the documents of credit (i.e., forgave the debt) just because the Raja of Dharbanga had come to meet him. Then he said that he wouldn't allow the *raja* to leave without a present to honor him. The *raja* asked Lilanand for his prize elephant (by all accounts something of a family mascot), which Lilanand promptly gave him. This led to a fight between Lilanand and his son Padamanand. From the son's point of view, the father was being reckless with his generosity. Another version, less flattering to both parties, goes that one night both father and son were in their *meafil* enjoying some dancing girls. One particularly comely beauty put all the others to shame, and excited the manhood of both father and son. Lilanand said something to the effect of, "she is mine." Padamanand countered by saying, "a dancing girl belongs to no one" (i.e., she is anybody's). So in this version of the story a sexual rivalry over the girl led to a fight between father and son. Yet another version (this one clearly a Champanagar version) of the story goes that Padamanand Sinha along with his mother actually killed all the other sons of Lilanand while they were still infants! What 'really' happened is not as important for our purposes

as the fact that father and son did get into a conflict; so severe a conflict, in fact, that the father actually moved out of his own *dehori*, apparently at the spur of the moment.

What is clear is that in 1869 (or thereabouts) Lilanand Sinha loaded up his elephants and entourage (and 2 of 3 wives) and left his home. There are, of course, conflicting versions of this story as well. One of my uncles at Champanagar (who's versions of such things inevitably ends up making the Champanagar branch of the family look good) said that he left with his fourth wife, Rani Sitaviti (as far as I can tell though, he didn't actually marry Sitaviti until after this move). At any rate, R. Lilanand, with one or the other of his wives in tow, left Ramnagar. He told his bride that he would build a new *dehori* for her wherever his elephant decided to rest. It stopped to rest some two miles from home, where Lilanand built a new home that came to be known as Champanagar. There are many other stories about Lilanand, but they do not concern us here. What is significant is that Lilanand has two more sons with his new wife Sitaviti. This, or so the story goes, he did to spite his eldest son and sole heir. The two sons were Raja Kalanand Sinha and R. Krityanand Sinha, who was born after his father's death.

R. Padamand, upon hearing about his two new half-brothers, decided (or so the version at Champanagar would have us believe) to do away with his brothers and his step-mother. Rules of etiquette did not allow him to actually kill them (!), but he banned any mid-wife in his domain (which, we must keep in mind, was very extensive) from helping Sitaviti to deliver her second son. She had to hide herself away in a hut and deliver the baby alone. Her trusty servant, a man by the name of Ganase, arrived just

after the delivery and helped her clean the baby and nursed her back to health. Later this man helped Rani Sitaviti to 'escape' to the other side of the Ganges (south of Purnea into Bhagalpur), where she would be relatively safe from her nare-do-well step-son, Padamanand. Eventually she moved to one of Lilanand's estates in Calcutta, where she (single-handedly) raised her two young sons. But she was running out of money, and the meager allowance that Padamanand gave her was not enough to sustain her. One story that drives this point home, and is designed to pull at the heartstrings of any red-blooded Mathil, states that one day her two young princes (still quite young at this point) saw a victoria carriage. They were so impressed that they ran straight home to ask their mother to buy them one. She told them she had no money to do so, at which point they began to cry. They were inconsolable, and spent the next few days sulking. Sitaviti, being the good Mathil mother she was (or has become), couldn't stand to see her children in this state, and so pawned her last remaining bits of jewelry to buy the carriage (Jewelry in this society is the exclusive property of women. They may do with it what they please. However, to sell family jewelry is indeed a pathetic event. Ideally such jewelry is passed on from a mother to her daughter or her daughters-in-law).

At this point she realized that she had to legally challenge her step-son Padamanand, in order to assert the claims of her two sons over the land and revenue of Raj Banali (as this *zamindari* was called). With her sons safely in Calcutta, the *Rani* went to the district courts in Bhagalpur to present her case. She won her claim, and Banali Raj was divided into three parts, with Padamanand Sinha getting the lion's share (close to half) while the two younger brothers received rights to the other half of the

estate. But receiving rights to a *zamindari* and actually being able to collect on it are two separate matters. Raja Padamanand was still the dominant power in Purneia (where most of the land was) and he wasn't about to let Rani Sitaviti send her men to collect taxes on her lands. In a bold move, Sitaviti hired her own muscle men and decided to cross the river into Purneia. She went directly to Champanagar. When Padamanand heard about this, he sent his men after her. She was surrounded and forced to hold up in the Durga temple at Champanagar (the house temple built by her husband). Here she stayed for the next several days. The guards (who apparently were under orders to attack her) dared not go into the temple, as this would offend the goddess, and the *Rani* refused to come out. Finally she was able to get a message to her people back in Bhagalpur and they came in force to rescue her. This more or less ended her direct conflicts with Raja Padmanand, who had no choice but to honor her legal claims to Raj Banali. Sitaviti stayed the rest of her days at C-nagar and built much of the palace complex that now exists there (actually she only built a defensive wall as a precaution, and one palace, her son with her approval, did the rest).

Second Version (or the Ramnagar version of the story): the current owners of Ramnagar are the descendants of Padmanand Sinha's daughter. Consequently they have a slightly different view of the above story. In this view Padmanand was actually a generous and good man, who tried to protect the best interests of his family³². Apparently Ganashe(Sitaviti's servant) sent Padmanand a letter (which my sources swear

³² I am deliberately not mentioning the names of these sources on the off chance that they ever happen to read this. They may be embarrassed to learn that they hold such radically different views on these events. Some of the bad feelings that were created by these events linger on to the present day.

actually existed) saying something like, "What has happened has happened. It is best not to pursue this matter any further." This rather cryptic message implies the obvious (at least to the Mathil mind) that Ganashe was actually Sitaviti's lover, and her son Krityanand was sired by him and not by Lilanand Sinha; a titillating implication that was backed up by one of Krityanand's own grand-children. He said that at one point Krityanand called Ganashe to him and said, "people say I look like you. Why is that?" When Ganashe refused to answer, Raja Krityanand had him whipped severely. This would certainly explain why Padmanand would be so opposed to his brother's claim on Raj Banali (no one mentioned Kalanand Sinha, the older son, possibly because he was my great grandfather and they did not wish to offend me). Family is, as we have seen, very important and a bastard child has little claim to inheritance or legitimacy in Mathil society. The noble nature of Padmanand is further attested to by the fact that after Krityanand publicly molested Ganash, Padmanand came to his defense and set him up for the rest of his life. But we get ahead of ourselves. The central conflict between father and son is here seen in terms of property rights. The son tried to get Lilanand to be more responsible about money matters, which ticked off the old man and in a huff, Lilanand decided to leave (my father, along with the Ramnagar version of this story, insists that Padmanand actually begged his father to stay). At any rate, Lilanand was quite old at this point (perhaps in his sixties) and was paralyzed from the waist down. Consequently he was incapable of having children. When Sitivati filed suit against Padmanand, the letter by Ganash, which apparently proved her children were illegitimate, was submitted to the courts. Now in those days such documents were kept in a

"Reading Room" in the courthouse (no copies were made). After Padmanand's lawyers saw the letter, they gave it to the judge who put it in the reading room for Sitaviti's lawyers to look at. The lawyer, after seeing the letter, apparently ate it before anyone could stop him! In disgust, Padmanand apparently more or less decided to drop the case at this point, taking no further interest in the matter. It was his step-brother Kryptanand Sinha who decided to keep this vendetta alive.

But back to our story. Sitaviti had set up shop at Champanagar and was doing quite well. She managed to amass a fortune by prudently overseeing her estate (actually it was her *sautan*, co-wife, Chandra who was and remained the manager of Raj Banali, on a permanent lease from her husband Raja Lilanand). She built or oversaw the building of much of what is now a spectacular (though somewhat out of place) palace complex. Significantly, she is said to have personally commissioned the Siva temple there, a truly magnificent temple³³. In the meantime, her son's began to come into conflict. More specifically, Kriytanand Sinha, who still maintained an intense rivalry with his older step-brother Padmanand, began to come into conflict with his older full-brother, Kalanand. Apparently Kriytanand was donating jointly held land and properties to various charities (colleges, orphanages, etc.) but not putting his brother's name on such contributions. That is, he gave such donations in his name alone. This upset his older brother, but it really upset his older brother's eldest son, Kumar Ramanand Sinha. At this point in time, Kalanand's eldest son was about 19 years of age, while his younger son, Kumar Krishanand, was 9. Keep in mind that all of these people (Sitaviti, her co-

³³ Every time a new *dehori* is built, the first thing that goes up is the *Durgastan* (Goddess temple), so the men who establish such households tend to build those.

wife Chandra, Sitaviti's children and their wives and children) were all living under the same roof, so to speak (actually there are several buildings within the palace complex, but the effect is the same). Unlike his older brother Ramanand, Krishanand was quite fond of his uncle Krityanand. They shared many similar interests, which were to unite them throughout their lives (big game hunting, cars, and an exaggerated sense of royal demeanor).

While this little fragment of the melodrama was getting underway, Krityanand's first son (age of one and a half, or two years) died. Krityanand has several daughter's but no sons. This must have come as a great shock to all, and it added fuel to an already volatile situation. Krityanand's wife, Prabhabiti, began to accuse Kalanand's wife, Kalaviti, of being a *dine* (witch). Now this is not at all unusual, *dines* are reputed to 'sacrifice' the lives of family members through magic, but to accuse ones own sister-in-law is a bit much. The accusation was that not only had Kalaviti killed her nephew, but had used magic to insure that her sister-in-law would have no more sons. Krityanand took up this accusation and began to openly accuse his sister-in-law (older sister-in-law, mind you) of being a *dine*.³⁴ The mother of these two brothers, Rani Sitaviti, apparently sided with her younger son Krityanand, against her elder son. Witchcraft is a very serious charge, even in the 'enlightened' Purenia of today, but back in those days, people

³⁴ The man who told me this story, a grandson of Krityanand, put particular emphasis on the fact that Krityanand made this accusation despite the fact that he had a college education. The implication being that a college educated individual would surely not believe in such superstitions. Given my experiences with college students, this did not seem as ironic to me as it did to him.

It is interesting to note that the current members of Champanagar insist that Kalanand was somehow mentally imbalanced, feeble of mind. But they have no stories or evidence to back up this assertion. It would however, to their minds, justify to an extent Krityanand's treatment of his brother

say witches were actually killed if the charge was substantiated. Things had obviously gotten out of hand.

In 1919 Kalanand could take no more, and decided to move out of Champanagar. By this time Krityanand had two sons, so (as the logic of these things go) the charges of witchcraft were obviously wrong. But the bad blood between the two brothers remained. Kalanand moved to Ghar-Banali, some six miles away, where he founded his own *dehori*. But his tenure there was short lived, as he died just 3 years later (1922 or 1923). But as one character leaves the stage another must enter, and so Kumar Ramanand Sinha, Kalanand's eldest son, enters into the drama. Ramanand, as previously mentioned, was already angered by his uncle, Krityanand, but the accusation of witchcraft leveled at his mother, and his father's early death, served to fuel his anger. He took it upon himself to begin a life long vendetta against his uncle. Now Krityanand Sinha was a real *raja*, in the grand old tradition, but apparently this didn't lend itself well to good business sense. He had managed to squander much of his mother's hard gained fortune in grand business ventures, like his steel works or ceramic factory, that soon went bust. Besides, he was busy entertaining every Indian or British nobleman who happened by with shooting expeditions and the like (he even built a spectacular, though gaudy, *Naveratan*, literally a 9 room palace, or more accurately, a pleasure doom, at Champanagar, just to house passing dignitaries). The one *corore* (100 million) or so rupees that Rani Sitiviti has so carefully accumulated was soon exhausted. Far from seeing the writing on the wall, he continued to donate large sums of money to charities

(in his name, and not in the name of Banali, of course). By 1928 he was forced to borrow money.

In the meantime, his arch rival Ramanand, was doing quite well for himself. Unlike his uncle, Ramanand was a shrewd, if not heartless, businessman. He started up several business ventures (including a successful mill) that actually turned a profit. Soon his personal wealth exceeded that of Banali Raj. And this wealth was put to the service of shaming his uncle. He built up Ghar-Banali in a manner designed to put the palace at Champanagar to shame.³⁵ This rivalry between uncle and nephew lasted till Ramanand's death in 1943, at which point he was one of the richest men in India.

Meanwhile the descendants of Padmanand Sinha also were gaining in influence. The children of Padmanand's daughter (he had no sons, or rather none that survived) had done quite well for themselves, and they wished to use their wealth to humiliate Krityanand Sinha. My informant at Ramnagar tells me that they were close to bankrupting Krityanand shortly before his death. Once he died however, the matter was dropped. At any rate, it was a new era, and wealth and status had shifted from rural *zamandaries* to urban centers, and the descendants of Padmanand gravitated toward such urban centers (Ramnagar was deserted for several years. The current owner is in the process of reclaiming the palace, but it still looks like a ghost-house). But let us leave Krityanand Sinha at this point, and move on, briefly, to the next generation.

Ramanand Sinha, as we have said, hated his uncle Krityanand. His younger brother, Krishanand, on the other hand, adored him. This eventually lead to a conflict

³⁵ Nothing of this palace now remains. His son-in-law (he had no sons of his own) saw fit to destroy it by selling off it's bricks and tile work.

between the two brothers. According to the people at Champanagar, this was a rather intense and ugly conflict (though the sources from Sultangunj, Krishanand's *dehori*, deny that any meaningful tensions existed). Krishanand's wife, Chitra, was being mistreated by her mother-in-law, Kalaviti. She used to be beaten etc., by her, with the approval of Ramanand (this story was told to me by two sources at Champanagar, and one from Srinagar. However, my father insists that it is false, while my mother used to tell me that Kalaviti was a sweet old lady who went out of her way to make women marrying into the family, such as my mother, feel at home). This, along with the resentment between the two brother's over the uncle, eventually lead to Krishanand moving out to form his own *dehori* at Sultangunj (some 60 miles away, in the district of Bhagalpur). One story (told to me by a particularly partisan source at Champanagar) has it that Krishanand was poisoned by his older brother, the poison being given in the form of a *ladoo* (a sweet made from gram-flour). Krishanand didn't die however, and once he recovered moved out of Ghar-Banali. I asked my grandmother (Chitra) about all this and she insisted it wasn't true. She claimed her husband was suffering from typhoid and had not been poisoned (again, my father, the son of Krishanand, insists that Ramanand was a ruthless businessman but very kind and good natured to his kin). Whatever the truth of the matter is, the myth insists that there was bad blood between the two brothers. At any rate, in 1934 Krishanand Sinha officially filed for a partition of jointly held lands (jointly held by both Ramanand and Kriyanand). With the money he received from this, he set himself up at Sultangunj. The assumption that there was some bad blood between the two brothers is given support by the relationship between their wives. Ramanand's eldest

wife had no children. Krishanand, on the other hand, had several (three sons, 5 daughters). Krishanand's youngest son was tragically killed in a hunting accident while still in his early 20's. This was a great shock to Chitra, who began to accuse Ramanand's wife of being a *dine*. She insisted that witchcraft and jealousy had caused the death of her son. This little feud between the two women lasted some 30 years. Upon the death of their husbands, they both moved to Varanas, to await a pure death, as good Hindu widows should do, but despite the fact that they lived in the same town, they refused to speak to each other.

At this point I will end this 'story' of Raj Banali. I must stress again that the preceding account does not claim to be a 'history' in any true sense of the word.³⁶ Rather, it is more akin to 'court gossip,' but gossip which spans well over a hundred years. For our purposes the details are irrelevant. What is important are the structural conflicts that present themselves generation after generation. That is, it is not important why Krityanand Sinha and Ramanand Sinha came to be in conflict with each other, what is important is the conflict itself, and on this point there can be little doubt. The next generation brings us into contemporary times (Krishanand's son is Indranand, my father) and I am just a bit too close to this to comment upon it and maintain any pretensions to objectivity. I can only say that in the current generation of Sinha's (and related families) there are three intense conflicts that I have heard of (and in one of these conflicts I

³⁶ Most of these accounts were collected by me in an informal way. They were meant to be for my own amusement, and not really a part of my research. It is important to keep in mind that in Mathil households there is a strong demarcation between 'insider' vs. 'outsider.' Gossip such as this is meant for an 'insider' only, a member of the family. The stories that outsiders, or people who are not part of the family, tell tend to be far less dramatic, although the conflicts between, which is our main focus here, is still part of such stories.

myself was a player, although, in hindsight, a minor one). These conflicts involve: 1.) a nephew and his paternal uncle 2.) two nephews and their paternal uncle (along with the uncles support group, which includes his children and his sister-in-law) 3.) and finally two brothers and, by implication, their mother. All of these conflicts are intense and felt to be a matter of life and death, if you believe the rhetoric of the parties involved; I had the opportunity to speak to all of them. Violence is often threatened although generally not used in each of these conflicts. What I would like to say about this, is that being an 'insider' to at least one of these conflicts, one begins to understand the raw passions involved. It is not like a 'fight' in the American sense of the word but rather a vendetta in which kinsmen are transformed into the personification of evil (the Mahabharat has lost none of its currency in Indian society today). And as I mentioned earlier, everyone gets into the act. Everyone who is related to you feels it their right or duty to give you the benefit of their advice, or sympathy. It is perhaps because of this context, where one always has an audience that is being performed to, that such conflicts have to be justified in terms of grandiose ideologies such as *khandani izzath* (family honor) or justice.

People feel compelled to justify disputes over land and property (and all the disputes we have considered were, to an extent, about property) in terms of high minded principles.

Discussion: Let us turn now to an attempt to explain Mathil kinship. What becomes clear in the history of the Sinha family is that people who, by the rules of kinship, should be close actually end up coming into conflict. It is almost as though conflict was built into the system. In the first generation we considered, the conflict was between a father and a son. In the next, it was between brothers, son and step-mother, and sisters-in-law.

In the last generation we considered, the conflict was between nephew and uncle, brothers, and sisters-in-law. And these same relationships continue to create conflicts right up to the present generation. Such conflicts can be made sense of, I think, by referring to R. Girard's notion of structural equivalence. The argument here is that structural equivalence leads to identity instability and consequently, violence (Girard, 1977). Two people who occupy the same social space are bound to come into conflict, if, for no other reason, than to assert their own individuality.

One can see this process at work in the above family history. Each conflict was punctuated by one or the other of the parties moving out and establishing their own *dehori*. This act of establishing a new 'center' seems to be crucial for two reasons. In the first place, we are dealing here with *Rajas*, and the first rule of being a *raja* in this society is to put on a good show. The concept of a 'theater state' works well in this context. As there were few, if any, real political conflicts in the 100 years that we have spanned, the king had to show his power in ways other than conquest (i.e., military might). This was done in each case by building a new palace that tried to outdo all other family centers. Such centers were noted for their conspicuous opulence, and their founders became the nodal point for a new segment of the Sinha lineage. That is, the Sinha family is still divided in terms of such *dehories* and the descendants of their founders. The Srinagar branch (which we haven't talked about as that split happened six generations ago) is demarcated from the Champanagar or the Sultangunj branch of the family. Note that such branches are named for the *dehoris* that the founder established

rather than for the founder himself. This tells us something about the importance of establishing a new center of power and about what such centers mean.

For above all else, the men who establishes these households has to have personal charisma. As J. C. Heesterman has noted, Indian politics traditionally (and I would argue even today) revolve around the personal ties between a ruler and his subjects (Heesterman, 1986). This is like a patron/client relationship, but here the patron has to prove his ability to be a patron not so much in terms of money or influence (although this is certainly important) but in terms of his personal charisma (perhaps 'charisma' is the wrong word. What I mean is his ability to act like a king; the force or *shakti* of his personality) This is similar to B. Anderson's notion of power in the Javanese context where power is a personal attribute of the individual ruler (Anderson, 1972). Money or influence do not create power but are a result of the personal power of the ruler. This means that putting on a good show (i.e., establishing a splendid palace, etc.) is a crucial act by which an individual announces his authority and at the same time actualizes it. This would explain the meticulous care that each of these centers took to perform rituals etc., such as Durga puja. In a sense these rituals represented the best 'show' anyone could imagine, and a show that at the same time legitimated the authority of the *raja* (or invested him with power, *shakti*).³⁷ This would also explain why this family has faired so badly in modern times. For the nature of power and authority in India today has shifted right beneath the feet of such traditional families. Today power is measured in

³⁷. The rest of the characteristics associated with each of these individuals can be seen in the same light. Only a *raja* has the legitimate authority to kill a tiger, or be a patron of the arts, etc. And all of the above mentioned individuals engaged in such activities.

terms of money and influence, and only secondarily in terms of personal presence. The Sinha's on the other hand, seem to have clung on to the more traditional idea of power as personal charisma. So within one generation, they went from being the elite's of Indian society (*rajas*) to rather mediocre civil servants and farmers. They simply could not (or would not) understand the logic of power within the capitalist world view that is India today, or so it would appear.³⁸

Chart

<u>Conflict</u>	<u>Founder</u>
1. Lilanand vs. his eldest son, Padmanand	1. Lilanand founds Champanagar
2. Padmanand vs. his step-mother-in-law, Sitivati	2. Sitivati co-founds Champanagar
3. Krityanand vs. his elder brother, Kalanand	3. Kalanand establishes Ghar-Banali
4. Ramanand vs. his brother Krishanand	4. Krishanand establishes Sultangunj

The second point of establishing a new *dehori* or center is more a personal assertion of one's individuality. These two points (the social display of power and the need to assert individual identity) are of course closely related. But the focus here is somewhat different. From the perspective of the individual, one way of getting around the problem of being structurally equated to another is to establish (or attempt to

³⁸. The last of these traditionalists, the eldest son of *raja* Krityanand Sinha, maintained this persona of personal presence throughout his life. Several of my informants, including some well regarded *ojhas*, insisted that he had a divine nature— a god like presence that even they, as *ojhas*, were frightened of. Basudave even told me that he was reluctant to come see me at the dehori at Champanagar, for fear that his presence would offend this man. As he explained it, the curse of a *raja* is very powerful and he could do nothing to counter-act its effects.

establish) your own individuality. This can be done by establishing your own center of power with its own unique style or flavor. This is indeed true of the *dehoris* we have considered. Each new palace tried to outdo the last and the net effect was to create monuments in brick and mortar to the individuals who established them. This would also explain why such *dehoris* seem to have such a short life span. For the descendants of the founder did not have their identities as closely linked to the palace as he did. Consequently, they were not as involved with the upkeep of such places and through time such *dehoris* decayed into piles of rubble.

But this pattern of breaking off to establish a new household, and thus a new identity, only had limited success. Despite the magnificence of some of these buildings, the underlying structural conflict that motivated their creation never went away. That is, the act of breaking away from an old center to found a new one did little to end the underlying conflicts inherent in Mathil kinship. Krishanand Sinha could establish a new palace, but he could not escape the social equivalence between him and his older brother, Ramanand. So in a sense, the establishing of a new *dehori* was a futile effort. The conflicts that spawned such moves did not resolve themselves, nor did the underlying structural causes go away. It is, however, only in conflict, only in the various vendettas that we have considered that anything about the individual personalities of the actors emerge. Conflict is the only way to assert one's individuality, but at the same time, the underlying causes of such conflicts are what makes such assertions necessary.

We started off this chapter by noting that to a great degree, identity in Mathili is dependent on one's identification with one's lineage. To an extent---and this can be seen

in the terminology of Mathil kinship--- one is one's lineage. The most marked structural equivalencies happen between members of the minimal lineage segment (father and sons). But the father is a social role that is to a degree, extended out to include uncles (especially paternal uncles). It makes sense than that fathers and sons, uncles and nephews are bound to come into conflict. And this is not just a matter of property. If such conflicts were only about property, they would not carry the emotional and social intensity that they do.

The same logic would extend toward the women who marry into the family. A woman's structural role is defined in terms of her husband, or rather in terms of her role to her husband's lineage. Women are always subordinate to their husband (a fact that is driven home by the rule that they must touch his feet and not use his name), so no conflict is implied here. That is, since a clear asymmetric relationship exists between a husband and a wife, there is no possibility of structural equivalence or conflicts over identity. But women are to an extent equal to all other women marrying into the lineage, again, a fact driven home by kinship terminology (the term *poutho* is used for all daughters-in-law). Consequently, the structural equivalence, as far as women are concerned, is between sisters-in-law. They occupy the same social space vis-à-vis their husbands lineage. They are all outsiders to that lineage until they produce children, and such children are, to an extent, interchangeable. That is, there is a definite equivalence between mothers and aunts such that aunts are always seen as potential mothers, or rather mothers that could have been. It makes sense than that sisters-in-law will come

into conflict. In each case, it is the close identification between kin-members that seems to lead to conflict.³⁹

The point I would like to conclude with is that kinship is a central institution of Mathil society but does not have the power to objectify the self. In fact, it seems to destabilize the self. In our discussion of ritual, we noted the Lacanian idea (Lacan via Crapanzano) that the self can be objectified by a social institution as such institutions exist prior to any given intersubjective moment. But, and this is crucial, not just any institution has this ability. In the Mathil context, ritual seems to serve the function of objectifying the self but kinship does not. As we have seen, in the ritual context, one party (namely the deity) is grounded. That is, by definition, the deity is a social given who thus ends the process of deferment inherent in any other intersubjective moment by escaping the need to be objectified in the desire of the other. The deity, in this case Shakti, collapses the very notion of the difference between the self and the other (see section on the Siva/Shakti opposition in the chapter five). This social grounding of the divine self is what gives the deity the considerable power to objectify mortals. In the case of kinship, neither party is 'given'. Thus the self remains deferred. This personal tension creates a need for both parties to attempt to objectify themselves by asserting in dramatic and monumental ways, their individuality. But such efforts seem to be futile as the self can never escape this prison of deferment. Instead of objectifying the self,

³⁹ There is, according to Girard, one other way that structural equivalence is expressed, and that is incest. The idea of mimetic desire, or one's wish to possess all that belongs to one's structural equal (or potential equal) is certainly a good insight on Girard's part. But incest is too taboo a subject for me to report on. There are after all limits to what an ethnographer can legitimately talk about without damaging the reputations of the subjects being considered. It is enough for me to say that if this generation of Sinha's is any indication of past generations (and I have heard such stories), than incest is a very common phenomenon indeed. And one that follows the logic of mimetic desire.

kinship collapses down to the rivalries of structurally equivalent parties. Nor is it the case that ritual has this power to objectify the self because it is more central than kinship. Kinship is a central institution in this society, so the centrality of the institution alone is not a guide to its objectifying potential. What must be looked at is the way such institutions are constructed within a given society, and the meaning they hold within that society. That is, no generalizations are possible regarding institutions and their role in personality formation or maintenance. In each case, we must look at the specifics before we attempt to apply any general model of society or personality.

CHAPTER NINE: POSSESSION AND PERSONHOOD

We are finally in the position to talk about people who experience spirit possession. As we have seen, the kinship system in this society is set up in such a way that it is bound to produce certain crisis moments in the life of an individual. If such a crisis is intense enough then the individual is likely to vent his or her psychological frustrations (which amounts to an alienation from their assigned social roles) in the form of spirit possession. Further, the ritual cycle specifies summer as the time when such attacks are most likely to take place. By looking at people who are experiencing a crisis in their personal lives, we will be able to draw certain conclusions about personhood in Mathil society and how it relates to ritual. For the whole point of the healing ritual that an *ojha* performs is to re-establish a ritual relationship between an individual in crisis and the goddess.

The first point we need to consider is the nature of ghosts or more generally, spirit beings in this society. As we have already seen, ghosts are not necessarily evil or malicious beings. They are seen rather as beings who are similar to humans but of a different kind or class. In other words, just as there is a continuity between minor gods and humans, there is a continuity between humans and ghosts. Ghosts, like gods, are not radically different from humans, just a different sort of being. Consequently they, like

humans or all things that exist in the universe, are under the domain of the goddess. She is 'in charge' of ghosts, and they do her bidding.

This close link between the goddess and the spirit world was pointed out to me by Krishnash *pundit*. I had been told that one should never sleep near the *gohasan ghar* (god's house) at night, as all sorts of ghosts tend to materialize there in the night time. Although several people told me this (and a few even claimed to have seen such ghosts) no one seemed to know why this was the case. I finally had the chance to ask Krishnash *pundit* about it and this is what he said:

“Krishnash Pundit: In fact, I have never seen anyone sleep in that room. It is not customary. I think this is because the goddess should be left alone at night, left to

herself. Therefore, sleeping there or staying there is not proper. And another thing, because of her over-powering presence and awe, people dare not sleep there. No one has that kind of self confidence; her power is that awesome.

Me: People have told me that ghosts live there. Is that true?

KP: For average people they could be treated as ghosts [i.e., average people think of them as ghosts]. But actually when you learn from people with knowledge then you know that they are not ghosts, but attributes or servants of the goddess

Me: So they are part of her?

KP: It is a third rate knowledge that says they are ghosts. A higher knowledge knows that they are part and parcel of her presence, and not ghosts. They are always present with her. They are her power. Like Nava-Durga, Nava-Kalika, Yogani, Pramatha. But with Dhakshan-Kalika, who resides in a forest, there these ghosts remain personified. But in family deities [i.e., in *ghosain ghars*], they are not manifest. You should not suspect this. You should not suspect that there are ghosts here.

Me: So if there is a temple in a forest, those ghosts are dangerous?

KP: Yes! Therefore, the worship of the goddess in such temples is done at twelve midnight and only by accomplished *yogis*. But here anyone can worship, because she is in the form of peace and benevolence.”

What *pundit-jee* is saying is that ghosts are not something apart from the Devi.

They are her attributes, and so do her bidding. It is a third rate knowledge that says that

they are separate from her, but it is a third rate knowledge with which we are working. As part of the manifest universe ghosts like humans and all other living beings are only different aspects of the Devi. But this is a philosophical point that we will not take up. The point I wish to consider here is that ghosts, as the minions of the Devi, are moral agents.

For it is commonly believed that not being duly respectful to the gods will lead to either spirit attacks or snake attacks. Snakes, like ghosts, are thought of as the minions of the goddess (especially as the minions of the goddess Bisari). Basu Dev early on in my fieldwork told a story with an often repeated motif. According to him, people who do not believe in ghosts or who do not pay the proper respect to the worship of the gods, leave themselves open to divine retribution.

“BD: One person was like that.... I was doing Bisari puja, and he said, ‘Huh, these *guars* [A *guar* is an especially low caste individual] are doing Bisari puja?! A *telia* [a *telia* is also a low caste individual], a *telia* makes offerings at Bisari puja!’ He said, ‘Go, go. Get out of here.’ He then went back home. On his way home, he had to cross a ditch that had a bamboo pole across it. Right in the middle of his way, a snake blocked his path. It would not let him move a step. If he went back, the snake went back [followed]. No matter where he went, the snake followed; he lost his courage. He said [to the snake], ‘forgive me *sarkar*, for what I said, forgive me. I will sacrifice a *chagar* [goat] to you.’ When he said he would sacrifice a *chagar*, O.K., O.K., *sarkar* [i.e. the snake] sat down, it got off the pole. He began to make sacrifices of *chagars* [to the goddess].”

Stories similar to this one are to be found everywhere. Anyone who belittles the worship of a *Devatas*, be it the *gram devata* of a village, or the goddess Bisari, is asking for trouble. Logically then, it follows that virtue is a good defense against spirit or snake

attacks, and this indeed seems to be the case. As Pharabho once told me, “those who have *punna* [virtue] can’t be harmed by *dines* or by ghosts.”

The interesting thing about ghosts is that they are closely linked to humans. Ghosts can be seen as a kind of variation on human beings. The logic that applies to humans applies equally well to the spirit world. Like humans, ghosts are subject to the play of desire. If their desire is thwarted, they, like humans, experience a crisis in what should be their legitimate course of existence. What I mean by this is that ghosts are formed because while they lived their desires were thwarted. It is a persistent belief in this area that only young people who have died prematurely become ghosts. Billath Singh, a farm laborer who also sometimes dabbles in *jhar phoor*, told me, “those who have not completed their allotted full life span, they become ghosts.” If someone who is at the prime of life were to die suddenly, due to an accident, then they would likely become a ghost. Here is an excerpt from a conversation with Pharabho Mondal.

“Those who don’t finish [complete] their *karma* [fate], those who don’t complete their *karma*, they become ghosts or *jogins*. Those who complete their allotted time, that is, if god gives you a certain number of days and you live out all those days, nothing happens to those people. They do not turn into ghosts. God will reincarnate them into something else. But those who don’t complete their fate [destiny], who say, fall off a tree and die, or they were running and fell down and died, or a snake bit him and he died; well such people didn’t complete their destiny, so they turn into a ghost or a *jogin*.”

Normally then it is a young person who has died before their allotted time that turns into a ghost. This is because their soul or spirit wishes to fulfill its desire for a complete life. There are exceptions to this rule and the exceptions are telling. Sanjay, the boy we met in the first chapter, told me a story about how his mother was possessed.

His mother, who has since passed away, was attacked by a ghost every time she passed by a certain jack-fruit tree. An old woman used to live next to Sanjay's mother. One day this old woman was hungry and asked his mother for some corn *roties* (*makay ke roti*, or corn bread). His mother went home to fix it for her neighbor, but by the time she had finished and went back to the old lady, the poor woman had passed away. Later, when Sanjay's mother passed by the jack-fruit tree, she began to feel strange and kept asking for *makay ke roti*. She began to rave and said, 'I am the old woman, and I never got to eat my *makay ke roti*.' This story clues us into the fact that thwarted desire can lead to spirit attacks. A person whose desires are left unfulfilled, ends up becoming a ghost. The reason that such people are usually young is that it is the young who normally have not fulfilled their desires for life. Those who have lived to a ripe old age, in this society, are viewed as lucky people who have satisfied their worldly desire; their desire for marriage, for children and for the respectability and satisfaction that old age ensures. But those who die young are left unfulfilled and so come back to haunt people in the shape of ghosts.

As we have already seen, the thwarted desires of spirit beings that hold them in the limbo of the *parriat yoni* (ghost womb) can only be escaped if the ghost somehow manages to eat some *prasad*. That is, it is only by re-establishing a ritual relationship with the deity that the ghost is able to escape the undesirable state of being a ghost. Ghosts are suspended from the normal trajectory of existence. Normally a person should be reincarnated after death, but the ghost is suspended in the *parriat yoni* because its previous existence left it with thwarted desires and these unfulfilled desires led to the

suspension of the normal course of existence. This is significant because something very similar takes place in the world of humans.

Humans who experience thwarted desires tend to be the subject of spirit attacks. Such crisis moments are very predictable and tend to happen during times of transition. There are certain moments in the life-cycle of a person that seem to leave them open to spirit attacks. Such moments tend to be times when a person is forced by society, and the norms that they themselves have internalized, to take on the added responsibilities of adulthood. For it is the young who are by and large the subject of spirit attacks. As we have already seen, ghosts seldom trouble the aged. According to local wisdom this is because older people are thought to have fewer desires and because they are not able to withstand the rigors of spirit possession and so are likely to die if attacked by a ghost. This would not please the ghost, for the ghost only possesses individuals to satisfy its own worldly desires, the desire above all else for food or other creature comforts. This is why chili pepper smoke or any other unpleasantness will drive the ghost away from the body of a possessed individual. Should the possessed individual die, the ghost would have to find another person through which it could satisfy its desires. Therefore, it is usually the young who are possessed by spirits.

The fact that old people are too frail to withstand spirit attacks only tells us half the story. For there is more going on here than the simple explanation that local Mathils use to make sense of spirit possession. It is not just any youth that is possessed, but a youth at a very particular point in time, and a youth that is in some way experiencing a crisis moment in their existence who are the subject of spirit possession. These moments

tend to be different for males and females, as men and women in this society have somewhat different life-cycles. For men the crisis moment tends to come between the ages of 15 to 20, while for women the range is closer to 18 or 25 years of age. The vast majority of possessed individuals fall within these general parameters. There is also another point in time for women that lends itself to spirit attacks; women who are in their 50's or older tend to be the subject of such attacks, but such cases are far more unusual.

Promode Biswash's case of possession is not atypical of how and when young men experience spirit attacks. Promode was a domestic servant for one of the people living at the palace of Champanagar. He was about 18 years old, and his father had died some 5 years earlier. Consequently he was left to support his mother and his three sisters. At first he tried his hand at farming but soon made arrangements for others to help with the family farm while he went to work at Champanagar. Here is a description of how he was possessed.

“Me: O.K. tell me what happened.

PB: I had gone to cut some bamboo, well there is a *jammun* tree there. As I was cutting the bamboo, it became difficult to move my body. But still I kept cutting the bamboo. As I was cutting, I felt someone was on my neck. I got frightened. I felt that someone was going to catch me [or overpower me]. I got very frightened. I came to the market. I went to the *ojha*. The *ojha jharrowed* me [‘swept’ or performed a healing ritual]. There was one *parriat* in me.

Me: A *parriat*?

PB: Yes.

Me: That's what the *ojha* said?

PB: Yes, he said that there was one *parriat*.

Me: What did it feel like. I mean how did you know it was a ghost?

PB: Yes, I felt that someone had possessed me.

Me: The *ojha* said so?

PB: Yes, the *ojha* also said so. There is an *ojha* that lives in the *basti* [neighborhood] over here. He said that a *parriat* has possessed you. It lives in

the *jammun* tree. After three or four days, I went back there, I have a garden there. When I went there, I felt that something was happening to me. So I left.

Me: What did the *ojha* do?

PB: He *jharrowed* me. I asked him, 'what has happened to me?' He said, 'you have been possessed by a *parriat*.'

Me: Anything else? Did he have you do any *pujas*, or give you any *jarries* [talismans]?

PB: Yes. He gave me a *jarrie*. He gave me the *jarrie* and told me, 'Go. You don't need to be frightened anymore.' He had filled [activated] the *jarrie*.

Me: And he told you not to be frightened now?

PB: Yes, he told me I will feel no fear. It just recently broke, I had tied it to my arm, it just recently broke....

Me: How did he *jharrow* you. What did he do?

PB: He put his hand on my head and swept it down to my neck and threw the ghost away.

Me: And what did you feel?

PB: When he swept it off my neck, I felt that my neck had become lighter [i.e. a weight had been taken off my neck]."

Although Promode's case is a bit unusual in that his father had recently died, it is fairly representative of how spirits attack men. Usually they are fairly young, will go to cut a tree (or to defecate underneath one) and be attacked by a spirit. The treatment of such attacks can last anywhere from one instance of an *ojha jharroing* a person, to several years of *jharroing* by an *ojha*. But as far as I could tell, in the end everyone gets better (I have never come across anyone who continued to be possessed through out their life time). Promode's case is typical in that usually such individuals are about to, or already have assumed the responsibilities that are associated with adulthood. In Promode's case, this transition was made more dramatic by the death of his father, but even if his father had not died, the age at which Promode experienced a spirit attack is the age at which all men go through the transition from childhood to adulthood.

Being a patrilineal society, Mathils put a premium on sons. The birth of a son is a significant event, as we have seen in our discussion of Mathil kinship. Consequently, male children are generally spoiled by their parents. At any rate, male children are not expected to do much house work, especially when compared to girls. All of this changes abruptly at the age of 15 or there about. For by this time the body is thought to have reached adulthood, or as the Mathils would say, the 'age of reason'. It is at this time that the boy is expected to work like any other adult male. Now the lot of a typical Mathil peasant is quite hard indeed, and regardless of whether they are sent to work for a master or they take up the job of a farm laborer, they are expected to work quite hard. And it is not just the work that the boy is suddenly expected to perform, he must also assume the psychological responsibilities of a full grown adult male. This means that his mother and especially his sisters expect him to work on their behalf, and if he should slack off, they, along with everyone else, will remind him of his obligations toward them. As this society has a dowry system, any family that has an unwed girl has to plan years in advance to amass enough wealth to get her married into a respectable household. This was true in Promodes case, as he had to work and work hard so that his three sisters would have enough money to marry. And although Promode worked like a dog for next to no money, all that he made was sent off to his family.

This would be quite a burden for anybody, but an especially hard task for someone who has spent most of his childhood doing next to no work. But despite the fact that young men at the age of 15 or 16 are expected to take on an adult work load, they are not granted the full status of adulthood. Even in a case such as Promode's,

where his father has died, the young man is still not seen as a full grown adult and it is likely that others, especially his *kaka* (FB) will assume authority over him. Such individuals are in limbo, stuck between childhood and adulthood. They have all the responsibilities of adulthood but none of its authority.⁴⁰

The behavior that such young men exhibit when they are possessed is telling. Generally they act in what would be considered irresponsible ways. They tend to rant and rave, yell and in some cases even hit people. But what is very typical of such possessed individuals is that they eat lots of food, especially luxury food items, like meat or sweets. Ashoke Kumar Biswash's case is a good example of this. Ashoke was 17 years old when I interviewed him, and had been possessed on and off for about 7 or 8 months.

"I went from home to the market. I sat at the store. At one o'clock [P.M.] I went to the market after eating. I got hungry. The ghost said, 'You have to eat or else I will kill you.' I went to the hotel. I asked [the ghost], 'what should I eat: meat, rice, sweets?' The ghost said sweets. I ate 15 Rs. worth of sweets, I only had 10 Rs. I went to the cinema hall [video hut] to see a movie. I only stayed 15 or 20 minutes. I wanted to relieve myself. I went to a Boa tree to sit. After I was leaving, the ghost said, 'come with me to the tree and I will tell you things, your "name place" etc.' [I'm not sure what 'name place' refers to] So I went. Then I went back to the cinema hall. People asked, 'do you want to go home?' I said no. My home is here, I can go myself. I yelled and made a racket all the way home. I fell asleep. I kept making noise all night [i.e. I kept raving]. Seven or eight times. Finally an old woman heard. She said, 'he is possessed.' People gathered around. They called an *ojha* and he *jharrowed* me."

So at the very point in time when a young man is expected to take on the responsibilities of adulthood, he is most prone to spirit attacks. Such attacks give him the opportunity to protest his new social role in a way that does not reflect badly upon him. For when one is possessed, society recognizes that the individual is no longer

⁴⁰ A situation analogous to the lot of teenagers in American society.

responsible for his or her actions. In other words, a possessed individual is assigned a new social role for the duration of his or her possession, and this new role allows him or her to act in ways that are not normally appropriate. This point was driven home to me when I was interviewing the family of Bibi Hasani Khatun. Normally young women are very formal and respectful to strangers who came to visit their household. But during the course of the interview, Hasini Khatun suddenly came charging out of her hut (I was sitting outside in the village courtyard) and began to threaten me. She said she would grab my neck and flip me etc. The villagers who were talking to me were so frightened by her behavior that they all got up and ran away! Keep in mind that these people were her neighbors or her family members. Later her father and brother told me not to take her behavior personally, as it was the ghost within her and not her that had acted in this unseemly fashion. In fact, the ghost himself (through her) later came to me and asked me to forgive her for his behavior. From this example we see how spirit possession absolves the possessed individual from the social transgression they engage in.

The fact that the possessed individual is not held accountable for their actions is used to good advantage by such individuals, especially by possessed women. Men tend to verbally lash out at everyone, while women who are possessed tend to be far more specific about who they target their ire at. It is often the in-laws of a woman who bare the brunt of her ravings. This is significant because the age at which women tend to be possessed would be a time when the major conflict of her existence would revolve around her ability to be incorporated into her husbands lineage. In our discussion of Mathil kinship, we noted that marriage is the major turning point in a woman's life. She

is expected to sever her ties with her natal home and is gradually incorporated into her husbands lineage. But this incorporation comes in stages. The first crucial step is her ability to produce children. Once she has accomplished this, her role in her husbands lineage should be secured; she is well on her way to becoming a full fledged member of that lineage. What is interesting is that the majority of women who are possessed are of 18 to 25 years of age. Generally this means that they have already had one or two children. Consequently, their role in their husbands family is more or less set by this point. They should be fairly well integrated into the lineage, for their role within it will not change substantially until their children reach maturity and marry. So whatever the state of their relationship is to their in-laws, it is not likely to change in any meaningful way for another 16 or 18 years.

If a woman is for any reason unhappy with her role within her husband's family, there is little she can do about it. She can not really expect things to improve for quite a long time. It is this transition, from being a bride to being a full fledged member of her husband's lineage that seems to be crucial in explaining possession in women. For unlike men, women in this society begin to contribute a substantial share of labor toward the maintenance of a household from an early age. So maturity does not really represent any change in the amount of responsibility that a woman is expected to assume. It is rather the trauma of marriage and especially the trauma of not being accepted by her in-laws that creates a crisis in the life of a woman. The social isolation that results from such a rejection is often expressed in the idiom of spirit possession.

The case of Meena Devi is a good example of spirit possession in women.

Meena was about 20 years old at the time I interviewed her. She had two small children.

If the following conversation seems a bit disjointed, keep in mind that Meena was actively possessed at the time of this interview.

“I went to plant. I said, ‘I have a pain in my stomach. I won’t work.’ They said, ‘go ahead and work, you can stop if the pain is too much.’ So I worked. I couldn’t see, and was no longer conscious. I felt dizzy, as though I was being spun around. I came home and ate lots of food. I was taken home. I fell down. Then an *ojha* was called. Kulkeeth the *ojha*. The *ojha* said, ‘the ghost has been sent from your *sassor* [husband’s natal home].’ After ten minutes, at twelve o’clock noon, I felt better. The *ojha* rubbed oil and *jharrowed* me. It took three times [of *jharrowing*] but the ghost left. It left by the evening. Me: Why did the ghost come from your *sassor*? Promode (her brother): There was a fight [conflict] at the *sassor*. They wanted her to come back and she wouldn’t go. So her father-in-law, who knows *tantra-mantra* [i.e., magic], sent three *dakins* [spirit beings] to possess her. Those who are possessed eat lots of food.”

In another case, that of Nisa Devi, the conflict between her and her in-laws was even more clearly stated. Her husband, Arjuan Metha and her in-laws all agreed that she had been an ideal wife, she was young and pretty and a good worker. She had had two children and was in her early 20’s. Suddenly one day she was possessed by a ghost (she claimed she was possessed by the goddess Kali). What was interesting about this is that I interviewed her in her village with all her neighbors and in-laws present. She repeatedly called her mother-in-law stingy and blamed her possession on the fact that her mother-in-law was too cheap to make an offering to the goddess during Durga puja. The poor mother-in-law had no option but to listen to Nisa’s complaints about her. Normally a woman is expected to be quite formal and respectful toward her in-laws.

Openly criticizing them is just not done. As Nisa spoke, some of the neighbors joined in, asking the mother-in-law why she didn't treat her daughter-in-law better.

We see then that possession in women tends to be about the conflicts between them and their in-laws. Possession in men, on the other hand, tends to be about the conflicts that result from the transition from childhood to adulthood. In both cases, the conflicts are about social identity, or the anguish that is associated with changing social roles and status. Although much less common, there is another time that women tend to be open to spirit possession, and this too is a time of transition. Some women experience spirit possession in their late 50's. Such women tend to be widows with full grown children. Again this is a period in a woman's life when her social identity is in the process of changing. Usually such changes are positive; a woman gains status with age. As far as I could tell, the women I interviewed in this age bracket were not really experiencing any personal conflicts in their life. They were not fighting with their neighbors, etc. So it is not so much social conflict, as the personal conflicts that result from changing identity that seems to be crucial to whom is subject to spirit possession. For possession, in Mathil society, is closely tied to personal identity.

In both male and female possession, the intersubjective moment that defines the self changes during such crisis points in one's life history. The people who you are most closely linked to, and so the very individuals who are likely to be the most important players in your intersubjective world, suddenly change the rules of the intersubjective encounter. They change your social status by changing their attitudes toward you. As we have stated, the Lacanian model of personhood seems to fit quite well in the Mathil

context. Consequently, if the most significant players in a person's intersubjective game change the rules of that game, they in effect change you. For boys, the important players are the parents. By suddenly treating you as an adult, or by redefining the self to which their intersubjective encounters are addressed, they in effect change your identity. Such a change is not unexpected but neither is it desired or approved of by the self. For girls, the change is more dramatic. Not only are one's parents recognizing you as a different kind of person, they, to a large degree, disappear from your intersubjective world altogether. The frame of reference that a woman has known from childhood and the intersubjective rules that she has used to define her identity are abruptly abandoned. After marriage, it is her in-laws that define her intersubjective encounters and so define her identity. Again, this is not an unexpected transition, but it can often be a traumatic one. In either case, the social rules that have defined the self seem no longer to make emotional sense to the individual. As in a rite of passage, the identity of the individual has to be stripped away and re-established so that it once again is in agreement with what makes emotional sense to them. If the individual is alienated from the social roles that define him or her, then a crisis of identity results. Such crises are seen as a loss of identity. In two separate instances, I talked to women who have experienced emotional trauma as a result of being married.⁴¹ In both cases (they had never met each other) they expressed this trauma by not being able to recognize their reflection in a mirror. Even the infantile objectification of the self that is implied in Lacan's mirror stage of identity formation ceased to function for these women (Lacan, 1977, p. 1-8). Socially, this loss

⁴¹ Both these women were related to me, and I had the opportunity to speak to each at length. Because both were from the upper crust of this society, and so both were part of the 'modern' world that the upper classes tend to don, neither consulted an *ojha*.

of identity is recognized by assigning the possessed individual a new transitional identity. By being labeled 'possessed' society absolves the individuals of their social responsibilities and obligations, but at the same time, recognizes their loss of control over their identity. Their self, during the period of possession, is submerged altogether. The identity of 'possession' is not really an identity in the normal sense, rather it is a temporary social identity, created to account for the absence of the self that such periods of crisis entail.

It is precisely at moments of such personal crisis that an individual is likely to consult an *ojha*. The *ojha* re-establishes the identity of a possessed individual by re-establishing the intersubjective moment between the self and the other that defines the self. But the other of an intersubjective moment can be ambiguous. We are never really sure if they are recognizing us, and so objectifying us, or if we have simply misread their intentions. What is more, as they themselves rely on an intersubjective moment to define themselves, the possibility that their identity could be just as deferred as ours arises. The *ojha* bypasses the ambiguities of normal intersubjective encounters by establishing a relationship between the self and the Other of the social order. The Other is, by definition, grounded, and so no doubt can exist as to its existence. Thus if the Other of the social order recognizes the self, the deferment of personality that exists as a result of the ambiguities of an intersubjective moment is gotten around. This Other is none other than the goddess.

When a person is possessed, the *ojha* generally performs a deceptively simple healing ritual. The *ojha* will gently stroke the individual at whatever part of their body is

being effected, a process which is referred to as *jharrowing* (*jharrow* means to sweep). While stroking, the *ojha* chants whatever *mantra* he feels is most appropriate to the situation. Such *mantras* are generally nonsensical little rhymes, that are said in the local language (not in Sanskrit).⁴² Accomplished *ojhas* can have quite a repertoire of such *mantras*, but more generally, an *ojha* will have no more than three or four such *mantras* that are effective for any situation. Now as we have seen, *ojhas* feel that the effectiveness of their treatment is due to the blessings of the goddess. The *ojha*, like the goddess, is seen as someone who is capable of mediating oppositions. In other words, the liminality of the possessed individual, who is between social roles, is combated by the *ojha*, who is seen as someone who is constantly in a liminal state. As Basu Dev told me, “Just as the tape recorder ‘catches’ your voice, this [*mantra*] catches everything. The *mantra* is like a boat, you know the boats that take you from one side of the Ganges to the other; the *mantra* takes you from one side to the other. It takes you between life and death.” The *ojha*, just like the Tantric adept, is seen as a person who can mediate between this world and the world of spirit beings. In fact, people often view Tantrics and *ojhas* (the two terms are often interchangeable, for a Tantric is one who knows *tantra-mantra*, or magic) as being ghosts or spirit beings themselves. They are both human and spirit beings, which points out the continuity between these two realms. The Tantric and the *ojha* is said to have *shakti* (power, and so a higher consciousness) and

⁴² I collected many such *mantras*, for *ojhas* tend to feel that the power they have to heal is a result of the *mantra* and not of anything that they themselves do. Many *ojhas* would say nothing to me but the *mantras* they knew, as to them, this was the only thing of relevance that they had to offer me. But try as I might, I can make no sense of such rhymes. Here is an example of one such *mantra*, “Four ponds (male), and four ponds (female), Where the *guru* sets up a *hait* (fair, or store), Quickly he lays it out, Quickly he picks it up, Quickly ends the event (or the *bhat*, talk, or event).” The reader is free to try their hand at interpreting the above.

therefore can link two realms that others may see as discreet categories. This explains why *ojhas* feel that only the goddess is capable of healing the possessed. For as we have already seen, it is she and not the ethereal male deities of Hinduism, who is in the position to mediate between life and death, between humans and ghosts. This is what is so crucial about her ability to deconstruct oppositions, for in her role as the head of both the spirit and the human worlds, she is in a position to restore the balance between the two.

Healing rituals are really about establishing a relationship between the patient and the goddess. As a first step the *ojha* simply 'sweeps' (*jharrows*) the patient while chanting *mantras*. The goddess is implied in this because the *ojhas* justify and legitimate the power of such *mantras* by saying it pleases or activates the goddess. But should this first attempt at linking the patient and the goddess fail, more drastic measures are taken. The *ojha* will urge the family of the patient to make a sacrifice (do a *puja*) to the goddess, and he himself will preside over such a ritual.⁴³ Such sacrifices at first only involve rather inexpensive offerings made to the goddess. *Sindur* (red vermillion) or sweets are offered. But if this fails to achieve the desired ends, then the *ojha* will suggest offering a red *sari*, or *ganga* to the goddess, and if even this does not work, then, as a final step, a blood sacrifice is offered to the goddess. Usually this is a pigeon, but in extreme cases, a goat is sacrificed. Such *pujas* are non-vedic, and can be done

⁴³ Although it is not necessary that he perform it. The family of the possessed individual can decide to formally do a ritual employing a *bhramin* priest; who performs it is not as crucial as the fact that it is performed, although the *ojha* is usually employed to preside over it. This is so because the *ojha* is much cheaper than the *bhramin*. Besides, the *ojha* will perform the *puja* in keeping with the financial fortunes of the family involved. If they are poor, the *ojha* might suggest offering a flower to the goddess instead of more expensive offerings.

anywhere. The crucial feature of the *puja*, however, the eating of the *prasad* is still retained. Note that these offerings imply the goddess. Sweets can be offered to any god, but *sindur* is closely linked to married women and is offered during the course of any *puja* only to the goddess. The red *sari*, and the blood sacrifice is also exclusively linked to the goddess. *Ganga*, on the other hand, is sacred to her consort Siva who, as we have seen, does not actively involve himself in the affairs of humans. Rather the hope is that the goddess will be pleased because her husband is being honored in this way (at any rate, the *ganga* is offered to her and not to Siva).

Now as we noted in our discussion of Durga puja, sacrifice is a loaded concept in Hinduism. The very act of worship, called a *yaga*, means sacrifice. But sacrifice as we have seen, is a metaphor for the re-establishment of social (or cosmic) order. It recreates the original sacrifice of Prajapati that established the universe in the first place. So the use of sacrifice (be it the low level sacrifice of sweets or the ultimate sacrifice of an animal) is meant to re-establish the order that has been disrupted by the intrusion of a spirit being into the world of humans. Further, sacrifice, especially blood sacrifice, is closely linked to the sacrifice of the self. The animal is a stand in for the sacrificer himself (see chapter five). This clearly points out the liminal nature of healing rituals. The self of the patient is being recreated in the course of the ritual. The ritual itself is quite simple, what is so powerful about it is the various symbols that it manipulates.

Healing rituals establish a relationship between the self of the patient and the Other of the goddess. All such rituals refer to the goddess because in this society it is the goddess that is seen as the personification of the social order. This point is driven

home during the ritual cycle devoted to the goddess, where she is clearly marked as someone who incorporates all aspects of social existence. The rituals of Durga or Kali puja establish the role of the goddess within Mathil society, while the personal healing rituals that the *ojha* performs manipulates the symbols that such *pujas* establish to help individuals. Such healing rituals and the personal crisis of identity they are intended to rectify are even given a specific time within the framework of society, namely summer (see chapter three).⁴⁴ Summer is said to be the time when the gods are asleep and so the world is in a state of disorder. The boundaries that divide the world of humans from the world of ghosts is breached at this time. But though the gods may be asleep, the goddess is not. It is at this time that the majority of healing rituals take place. Because she is at the apex of both the world of ghosts and humans, the goddess is able to restore the balance between the two, either during the course of her formal worship by the community (see chapter four and five) or personally, in the lives of specific individuals.

Because the goddess is a totalizing institution, the personification of the social, the healing rituals that an *ojha* performs establishes a relationship between an individual and the goddess and in this way finally objectifies the deferred self of the individual. To put it another way, spirit possession disrupts the normal trajectory of a persons life cycle. But by being linked to the goddess the balance or order of one's personal life is restored. Thus, the deferment of the normal course a life should take collapses, and the individual is now free to once again assume the normal responsibilities and obligations that his or her social role demands. This is analogous to what happens to spirit beings. They too

⁴⁴ This is true as a general rule, but people can be possessed at any time. However, generally possessed individuals do not go through an active phase of possession until the summer months.

are experiencing a deferment of their normal life (or after-life) cycle. A person who dies should be reborn into another being. But the ghost, because he or she is still carrying the emotional baggage of a previous existence, defers this process. The emotional baggage is, for the ghost as for the human, tied to desire. The ghost wishes to continue to fulfill the desires of its previous existence, the desire for food, for marriage, for children, etc. The human wishes to continue to exist in his or her previous social role.⁴⁵ That is, they wish to retard the normal course of their existence so they can continue to indulge their appetites for youth or personal acceptance. In either case, what is being suspended is the normal course or *teleos* that a person's existence should take. But in either case, once the person is linked to the goddess, the balance of their existence is restored. Once a ghost eats *prasad* he or she leaves the *parriat yoni* and is reborn into another living being. Once a possessed individual performs a ritual to the goddess (which is also concluded by the eating of *prasad*) he or she is no longer possessed and is so able to continue with the social roles that their lives dictate. In either case, it is ritual that restores the balance of existence. Ritual is an important ordering principle for both the social and the personal.

And this, I think, is true for all manner of beings. For the relationship between an individual and the goddess is important in this society no matter who you are. For a possessed individual, the goddess is able to reestablish their social identity. For the peasant, the goddess establishes the ordered world of society. For the priest or the king, the goddess legitimates their authority. Finally, and most importantly, for the ascetic,

⁴⁵ Desire, in Hinduism, seems to be a concept that is responsible for any action, including the action that created the universe. But it is not necessarily a positive thing, for the one who is enlightened, the one

who wishes to know the ultimate truths of existence, for those individuals who wish to end the deferment of existence itself, the goddess is seen as the only being capable of helping them. Ultimately, in Hindu philosophy, existence itself is a kind of deferment, a disruption of the normal trajectory of consciousness that only reaches its conclusion when it has grasped the ultimate, the transcendent. In Mathil society, the goddess is that ultimate.

who is in touch with the transcendent, is beyond worldly desires. Or perhaps, the desires of such individuals are inexplicable to mere anthropologists.

CHAPTER TEN: CONCLUSION

The goddess Shakti's ability to collapse oppositions is brought to fruition by the *ojha*. By using the symbol of the goddess the *ojha* is able to help re-establish the social role of the individual suffering from a crisis of identity. The symbols and rituals associated with goddess worship point out the intimate connection between ritual and personality formation.

The goddess' transcendent nature is revealed during the course of Durga puja. In this ten day long ritual, the goddess is symbolically associated with both sides of several key oppositions of Mathil society. By being on both ends of an opposition, the goddess effectively collapses the relevance of such oppositions. It is this ability to transcend the mundane realities of existence that reveals the goddess' true nature. In Mathil society the goddess is the most important symbol of the transcendent.

The subsequent rituals associated with the goddess, such as Kali or Laksmi *pūja*, follow the basic deconstructive logic set up in the course of Durga puja. Each of these subsequent *pūjas* elaborate upon the theme that the goddess transcends oppositions by collapsing them. Because of her ability to be simultaneously on both ends of an opposition, the goddess can be both the symbol of the transcendent and at the same time the deity most closely associated with the mundane realities of existence. Thus she is, more than any other deity, associated with prosperity, agriculture, spirit possession or

any of the other aspects of existence that impact on the everyday lives of individuals. At the same time she is the deity most closely associated with transcendence or the ultimate actualization of an individual's potential. In this way the goddess becomes a symbol of the grounded intersubjective actor, whose reality is beyond question.

The *ojha* uses the symbol of the goddess to help ground the identity of an individual suffering from a crisis of identity. Such individuals express their trauma in the idiom of spirit possession. The healing rituals that the *ojha* performs re-establishes a connection between the individual in crisis and the social order that they are alienated from. The goddess is the personification of this social order. Thus by establishing a link between the individual and the goddess, the *ojha* in effect grounds the social identity of the patient by setting up an intersubjective dialogue between the social and the individual. Healing rituals are about the on going dialogue between the individual and the social order. Because such rituals formally set up a dialogue between the goddess and the individual in crisis, the individual's social identity becomes grounded as this identity is being recognized and implicitly legitimated by none other than the social order itself.

Therefore, there is an intimate link between ritual and the concept of personhood within Mathil society. Every social institution in theory has the potential to ground the individual as every social institution exists prior to any given social encounter. That is, the legitimacy or grounding of a social institution cannot be questioned by the social actor because such institutions to an extent order intersubjective encounters and so order the existence of the individual. Their relevance must be assumed by the social actor for

they structure the rules by which social actors interact and so objectify themselves. Yet as I have attempted to demonstrate, not all social institutions have the ability to ground the self. Kinship in Mathil society is a significant institution, yet seems to alienate individuals from his or her social roles. Kinship and the life-cycle trajectory that it implies sets up a situation in which an individual is likely to experience crisis moments in tier identity. Such crisis moments result from the abrupt changes in identity that are built into Mathil kinship, and also from the structural equivalencies that are part and parcel of this system. Personal identity is problematic in Mathil society and such problems are expressed in the form of spirit possession. Consequently, I conclude that only certain institutions have the ability to help the individual legitimate and order their social roles, while other institutions tend to de-center the individual. In each case we must look at the specific institution and its relevance to the society at large before assessing its relevance to personhood.

In Mathil society it is ritual and not kinship that is crucial to understanding personhood. Or rather both institutions are important but in totally opposite ways. Identity is linked to kinship but in a surprisingly negative way. For while kinship destabilizes personhood or individual identity, ritual re-establishes personal identity in a way that is tailor made to fit the emotional needs of the individual. At a more general level, it could be argued that any theory of personhood must necessarily take the cultural context within which the concept of the person is embedded if it is to have any legitimacy. One can not assume that any social institution has the ability to define or objectify the self. It is only after one has gained an understanding of the rituals and

symbols associated with the goddess that one is in a position to say anything about the category of the person in Mathil society.

During the course of this research it became apparent to me that medical systems, like psychological theory are so intimately connected to social structure that any attempt to divorce them would be problematic. Personality like healing systems can only be understood within the culture context, for such things exist only in relationship to the culture as a whole.

GLOSSARY

Alta	Mandal designs usually made from rice paste. These are usually drawn by women and used to decorate sacred spaces, such as the area where a puja will be performed.
Amrit	Ambrosia.
Anand	Pleasure or bliss. Anand refers to the state of consciousness that characterizes the transcendent, to be liberated, or achieve mukti, is to understand the anand of Brahma.
Apara	Manifest, as opposed to para (beyond manifestation).
Appragatia	A type of creeper that has white flowers. It is a plant sacred to the goddess.
Aram	Relief or rest. In common usage it refers to the end of an illness, or relief from a khust.
Arth	Worldly pursuits, especially the acquisition of power or wealth. Along with kama (pleasure or sensuality), dhrama (or morality, correct action), and moksa (liberation, or enlightenment), it is specified as one of the legitimate human pursuits.
Arti	The sacred flame that is passed around at the end of a puja. The devotee must formally bow to the flame (do pranam to it), both as a sign of respect to the deity and as a blessing from the deity.
Asan	Seat.
Atma or Brahma	Atma means soul or spirit. In Hindu philosophy, the atma is ultimately none other than Brahma, or the transcendent. See Brahma.
Baba and Babi	Baba means paternal grandfather; Babi is paternal grandmother.
Bail or Vilwa	Wood apple tree. Called bail in Mathili, vilwa in Sanskrit. A plant that is sacred to Siva.
Bali	Sacrifice; or the object that is to be sacrificed.
Bara	Big, or superior. Bara ghar refers to a high status family.
Barfaees	A kind of sweet, usually made from milk solids, or nut pastes.
Bata	Son.

Bhagana and Bhagini	Sister's son, daughter.
Bhagwan	God, or a Deva.
Bhagwati	A goddess. In Hindu philosophy all the goddess' are seen as different forms of attributes of the supreme goddess Shakti (see Shakti).
Bhai	Brother.
Bhaine	Sister.
Bhakt and the Bhakti movement	A Bhakt is a devotee, especially a devotee of Krsna, who was the dominant god of the Bhakti movement. The bhakti movement was started in North India in the fourteenth century by Caitanya Maha Phrabho. It emphasized devotion, especially erotic, as a metaphor for the relationship between the individual and the transcendent.
Bhang	Marijuana puree, a common intoxicant in North India.
Bhaoji	Older brother's wife.
Bhasal	Awesome; the bhasal form of a god or goddess is their awesome or total form. E.g. Krsna in the course of the Bhagwat Gita shows his bhasal form to Arjun
Bhataja and Bhateige	Brother's son, daughter.
Bhoj	Feast.
Bhoot or Parriat Yoni	Ghost womb. The perate yoni is where the soul goes after death, and from here it is reborn into another living being.
Bhoot; Bhoot lagni	Bhoot means ghost or a spirit being. Bhoot lagni is when a ghost possesses an individual, the act of being possessed
Bhrama	The transcendent principle of the universe; the universe. Bhrama is the supreme reality, that encompasses both the manifest and unmanifest universe. Because in Hindu philosophy consciousness or atma (which could also be translated as the soul) is closely linked to Bhrama, atma can also be used as another name form Bhrama. That is, supreme consciousness and transcendence are one and the same thing.
Brahmin	Highest of the four castes, traditionally a priestly caste
Chandrograt	Literally, 'liquid that has touched the feet of a Devata.' The liquid sacrament offered to the devotee after a puja.
Chanoba	The painted arch or awning.
Chinchini Shakti	The form of the goddess Shakti that existed prior to the creation of the manifest universe. Symbolically, she is represented as a dot, especially within a mandala design. It is form this dot that the universe unfolds.
Chorrail	A kind of spirit being, usually malevolent
Corore	one hundred million.

Dakin	A type of spirit being. Dakins can be malevolent, but are also often considered to be the servants of the goddess.
Deeaps	Earthen oil lamps. These are used during the course of a puja, and during the festival of Diwali.
Dehori	Palace.
Devatas of Deva	Gods (male).
Dhasara and Dhasmi	Dhasara literally means 'ten lost.' In North India, it is a ritual that celebrates the killing of Ravan (the ten headed demon) by the god Rama. But in East India it is often used interchangeably with Dhasmi (literally, 'ten days'), the ten day ritual devoted to the worship of the goddess Durga.
Dharama	Moral order or duty. It also refers to the quality or property of a thing (i.e., the dharama of an object). Along with Karma (the cosmic consequences of action) it is a central concept of Hindu philosophy, especially social philosophy. See also Karma.
Dine	A witch.
Duits	Minions, or servants.
Durga	An important manifestation of the goddess Shakti. Durga is the goddess that is closely linked to victory, or ascendancy. She was created by combining the shakti of all the Devatas, to destroy the asura Mahisasura. See Coburn, 1991
Durga-Stan	A Durga temple, a place where the goddess Durga resides.
Ganash	Son of Siva and Parviti. Ganash is the elephant headed god, who is the master of beginnings or thresholds.
Ganga	The Gangese. Ganga is also a goddess, who pours forth from the hair atop the Lord Siva.
Ganja	Marijuana, a plant sacred to the Lord Siva.
Ghari Ghanta	The cymbals, drums, and conch shell that are sounded toward the end of a puja.
Ghee	Clarified butter. A pure substance (because of its association to the sacred cow) that figures prominently in most yugas.
Ghoge Lagnai	A woman is expected to cover her face (with her sari) in the presence of her elders. Ghoge lagnai refers to this act.
Ghor Lagni	The act of doing pranam (see pranam). That is, the act of bowing down to touch the feet on a superior, and ask for their blessing.
Ghosain Ghar	House shrine, or temple. The Ghosain Ghar is usually part of the kitchen area of a house, and it is where an image of the Kul devata of the lineage is kept.
Ghram Devata	Village god, or the local (usually non-textual) god of an area.

Gillabies	A kind of sweet, made from fried gram flour.
Godh	Lap, or to cuddle.
Gotra	Sub-caste, or clan. Such clans trace their descent from a mythical ancestor, and maintain fictive kin relationships, especially with regards to marriage (gotra exogamy is the rule). Gotra's are ranked groups.
Gunas	Qualities; the three gunas' are: satwa, rajas, and tamas. They are the three forms or forces of Shakti by which she manifests the universe. Every object in the universe has a combination of these three qualities, although which quality is emphasized varies from one object to the next. Satwa guna is the quality of radiance, thinking and creativity and is associated with the goddess Saraswati. Rajas guna is the quality of striving, working and activity and is associated with the goddess Lakshmi. Tamas guna is the quality of lethargy, anger and indifference and is associated with the goddess Kali.
Guru	Master, or spiritual guide. More commonly, a teacher of any kind.
Holi	A ritual that takes place in early Spring, during the course of the ritual people will squirt colored water on each other. According to M. Marriott, it is a ritual of reversal, M. Marriott, 1966.
Indra	King of the devas (gods). Indra figures prominently in the earlier (pre Upadnashadic) traditions of Hinduism. As the king of the gods, he is closely linked to kingship among humans.
Jai (as in Jai-Durga)	Great; Jai-Durga would mean, 'great Durga.'
Jamai	Daughter's (or niece's) husband.
Jarrie	A talisman, or charm.
Jati	Caste; or species.
Jaya	Ascendancy or victory. This is an attribute of the goddess.
Jee	A suffix used as a honorific term. E.g. If your name was Bob, you may be addressed by your juniors as 'Bob-jee.'
Jhagara	Fight, or conflict.
Jhar Phoor	In Mathili this means 'to sweep.' In common usage, it means to perform a healing ritual. The ojha will sweep or stroke the body of the patient during the course of such rituals.
Jharo	Literally to sweep. In common usage it means to heal or perform a healing ritual.
Jog	Yoga in common usage.
Jogin	A spirit being, often thought of as a minion of the goddess. Jog is also often used in

	Mathili as yoga, or meditation.
Joti-lingum	Light or power lingam (phallus). Joti-lingum refers to a particularly powerful or active lingam, thus a very sacred Siva temple.
Kaka and Kaki	Kaka means uncle; father's brother. Kaki is the wife on one's Kaka.
Kalais	Pot, usually an earthen pot used in the course of a puja.
Kali	The <i>tamas</i> incarnation of Gori or Shakti. Kali is the goddess of destruction, or victory over one's enemies. She is the consort of the Lord Siva.
Kali Yuga	The last of the four epochs within Hindu cosmology. In Hindu thought, each epoch represents a corruption or deterioration of the purity of creation. Thus Tantric philosophy wishes to present us with a ritual and philosophical system that is appropriate for this corrupt age.
Kama	Pleasure, or sensuality. Kama, along with <i>arth</i> , <i>dhrama</i> , and <i>moksh</i> , is part of the legitimate human pursuits specified in the Vedas. It is most closely associated with sexuality, but, because in Hindu society sexuality involves all kinds of sensual pleasure, it is more properly translated as sensuality.
Kan-Kali	The skeleton form of the goddess Kali.
Kanya	Bride.
Karma	The cosmic law of cause and effect. In Hindu philosophy, every action has a cosmic consequence. Every good action (one that is in keeping with the laws of <i>dhrama</i>) comes back to the individual in the form of good fortune (in this or in the next life-time). Every evil action (one that would be called <i>adharmic</i>) results in misfortune. See also <i>Dhrama</i> .
Kartikay or Skanda	Son of Siva and Parviti. He is the god of war. Also called Murigan.
Khurg	Sword.
Khust	Suffering or pain. In common usage it refers to an affliction or illness.
Krsna	An avatar of Vishnu, and a prominent figure in the Mahabharata. He is the central god of the <i>bhakti</i> movement, and a major god of any Vishnivate sect.
Kul Devi	House or lineage Devi (goddess). Each lineage has a god or goddess that is sacred to it, and this deity must be represented and worshipped in the <i>ghosain ghar</i> of a house.
Kumar	Prince.
Kumari	A pre-pubescent girl; a virgin.
Lakshmi	A goddess, consort of Vishnu, the god of preservation. She is the goddess of god fortune, bounty, or wealth. The <i>rajas</i> incarnation of the Gori or Shakti.
Lingum	Phallus or shaft. The term lingam is closely linked to the god Siva, and he is often represented as a lingam.
Ma	Mother.

Mahamaya	The great or supreme Maya. Maya can be translated as illusion, or the power to manipulate physical form (see Maya). As the goddess is the manifest universe (the universe of form) maya or the ability to manipulate form is one of her attributes. Mahamaya then can be translated as Shakti, as the supreme form of the goddess.
Mahish	Waterbuffalo.
Makhan	A kind of kernel found on the underbelly of a pond weed. It is sort of like popcorn, and is often used as a pure food that is distributed as prasad in a puja.
Mama and Mami	Mama is one's mother's brother; mami is the wife of your mama.
Mammyot	Matrilineal.
Mantra	Sound, word, or phoneme that has magical properties.
Mashaisur	An asura (demon or rakshis). Mashaisur is represented in the form of a Mashis, or buffalo, who was so powerful that he conquered the three worlds. Durga was created by the devas (gods) to destroy him. See Coburn, 1991.
Mathil	an ethnic group found in N. Bihar
Mausa and Mausi	Mausi is one's mother's sister; mausa is the husband of your mausi.
Mausyot	Mother's sister's children.
Maya	Maya is a name or an attribute of the goddess. It is often translated as illusion, but its meaning is more akin to the ability to control physical appearance. The goddess is called Mahamaya because it is within her power to give the universe the appearance of form, of differentiation. In this way, the entire universe is Maya, the appearance of form.
Meafil	Assembly, or congregation. This term is especially associated with pleasure or sensuality (even prostitution). To hold a Meafil is to hold a sensual party, i.e., one that involves singing, dancing girls, or sexuality.
Moksa or Mukti	Liberation or enlightenment. This is the final goal of every living creature (along with arth, kama, and dhrama, it is part of the four legitimate goals of humans). Because Hindu philosophy links atma (soul or spirit) with Brahma (the transcendent), the achievement of moksa is the act by which the consciousness of the individual realizes that it is none other than Brahma (i.e., that it is part of the undifferentiated universe). Once one's consciousness has realized the link between atma and Brahma, the individual is liberated from the cycle of karma and dhrama, that is, the individual becomes one with the transcendent and so is no longer part of the cycle of life and death.
Munnie	Holy men, or enlightened souls. Munnies are mythical wise men mentioned in the scriptures (or in some cases, sages who actually wrote sacred texts, e.g. Vyas is a munnie who wrote the Mahabharata).
Murti	Statue or image of a deity.

Nag	A cobra.
Nana and Nani	Nana means maternal grandfather; nani is maternal grandmother.
Nati and Natine	Daughter's son, daughter.
Naveratan	Pleasure palace. Literally, a palace with nine different venues.
Noit	Invitation, especially a formal invitation to a ritual, such as a bhoj, or a wedding.
Ojha	Indigenous healers of Mathil society. They legitimate their power by referring to Tantra and goddess worship.
Par	Great, as in 'par-baba'; great grandfather.
Para	The ultimate or supreme form of an object (usually a god or goddess). Because the supreme form of a deity encompasses their unmanifest nature, the para form can actually be represented.
Parriats	A type of spirit being, usually malevolent.
Peeple	a type of tree.
Phat	Story, especially the story or origin myth of a god or goddess that is read out loud during the course of a puja. Normally such phats are taken from sacred texts and so are read in Sanskrit.
Pissa and Pissi	Pissi means father's sister; a Pissa is the husband of one's father's sister.
Pittyot	Patrilineal.
Poutra and Poutri (also Pota and Potee)	Grandson and grand daughter in Sanskrit. In Mathili or common usage, the terms would be Pota and Potee.
Pranam	The act of formally showing respect to a superior (either human or divine). One must bow down and touch the feet of the superior individual and then fold one's hands, as a way of formally asking for their asarvad, or blessing.
Prikriti	Natural power or form. Maya (or Shakti, the active manifest principle of the universe).
Prohit	A priest who assists or directs the performance of a yuga, or puja.
Pujagari	One who performs puja.
Pundit	Priest, especially one who performs pujas.
Purusa	Beyond nature. Something which is beyond Maya (or Brahma, the dormant unmanifest principle of the universe).
Puthu	Son's (or grandson's) wife.
Radha	Consort of the god Krsna. Together they are depicted as the perfect couple, and the

love that Radha has for Kṛṣṇa is meant to be an example for the love that humanity should show toward the divine, especially in the bhakti movement.

Raga	Literally 'color.' A raga is part of a system of musical classification in Indian classical music.
Raj Banali	Banali is the name of the royal house considered in chapter eight. The Sinha's first established themselves in the small village of Banali.
Raja	King.
Rani	Queen.
Roties	Unleavened bread.
Sadhana	Practice, or discipline.
Samaj	Society, or world.
Santhal	a formally hunting and gathering society indigenous to N. Bihar
Saraswati	A goddess, consort of Bhrama, the god of creation. She is the goddess of knowledge, creativity or art. The satwa incarnation of Gori or Shakti.
Sari	A long piece of cloth worn by Indian women. It is the traditional clothing for woman in India, just as a dhoti is traditional for men.
Sarkar	Sir; an honorific term used to address a person of higher status.
Sassor	A woman's husband's home (as opposed to her natal home).
Sautan	Co-wife.
Shakti	The female principle in Hinduism; a name of the goddess. Shakti also means power, so Shakti is the shakti (power) behind every god. That is, she is the consort of every deva.
Shankar	Another name of the Lord Siva
Shankar	Another name of Siva.
Shanti	Peace.
Siddhi	To activate; or to invoke the power of a mantra.
Sindur	Red vermilion. It is put on the part of a married woman's hair as a symbol of her married status.
Siva	A major god within Hinduism, part of the Hindu trinity who along with Bhrama and Vishnu combine to form Bramha or the supreme transcendental principle of the universe. In Tantric philosophy, he combines with Shakti to form Bramha. Thus he is purusa (the dormant principle of the universe), the male principle of the universe that unites with prikṛiti (the female and active principle of the universe) to form

	Bramha.
Soma	A mythical drink, mentioned in the sacred texts.
Tantra-mantra	Magic; or the ability to control events by the use of Tantra (the power that a Tantric can acquire) and mantra's. See also Mantra.
Thundai	A drink common to North India. It is made form milk almond paste and aromatic spices. It is often laced with bhang or marijuana puree.
Tika	Dot; the dot that is put on the forehead of the devotee during the course of a puja.
Tirtha	The bank of a holy river, or a holy place on the banks of a river.
Uma	The consort of Siva. After the burning of Sati in her father's sacrificial fire, she was reborn as Uma, the chosen consort of Siva. As Siva's consort, she is none other than another avtar or manifestation of Shakti.
Varna	Literally means 'color' in Sanskrit. The term was used in several religious texts as a way of describing metaphorically, the caste system.
Vidya	Knowledge; A name of the goddess Saraswati
Vijaya	Supreme or ultimate ascendancy or victory. This is an attribute of the goddess.
Yagman	One who undertakes the performance of a yaga, or puja. The puja is done by the yagman with the assistance of a phroit, or priest.
Yoginies or Jogini	A spirit being, often thought of as a minion of the goddess. A jogini is one who performs jog (yoga). So a jogini is one who performs jog to the goddess, and so is one of her followers. Yoginies are often depicted as the female demonic warriors of the goddess.
Yoni	Womb, or vagina. The sexual organ of a woman. Shakti is often referred to as the yoni of the universe, and together with the lingum of Siva, they form the transcendent principle of the universe, i.e. Bhrama.
Yaga	A vedic ritual.
Zamindar	A land holding family, or person. One who lends out land on a share-cropping basis.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX

SREE DURGA PUJA

MAHA-LAYA PROCEEDINGS

In the month of Ashwin, in the morning of the night of Pratipat day of Shukla Paksha, one should take his bath and do his/her daily rituals. Then one should read the auspicious *mantra* as follows: "Om! May Indra, Vridhashrawa, Sun, and Fire-Gods be favourable to us. May Takshaka (the king of reptiles), the creator *Pusha*, the *Asura* (the non-divine), the Earth with its ten direction be favorable to us consciously. May the winds blow in our favor, the master of the world called Soma (moon) be favourable to us, Brihaspati (the Guru of the Divine-beings) bless us, and the *Adityas* (the sons of Aditi, the Divine-mother) be favourable to us, etc."

1. Asana-Shuddhi (purifying the place to sit)

Taking three *kusha*'s and water in right hand, one should read, "Om! whether pure or defiled, or in whatever condition he, one who takes the name of Pundarikasha (the lotus eyed Vishnu), is at once purified externally, as well as internally. May that *pundarikasha* purify me."

Thus sprinkling water all around, one should sit on a comfortable mat (*asana*) in the lotus posture. Then with the *mantra*, "*Om!* protect, protect, *Hum, Phat, Swaha*," one should sprinkle water on the *Asana*. With, "*Om!* pure and solid be this earth, *Hum, Phat, Swaha*," one should purify the ground of one's seat. With "*Om! Hring!* I bow to this supportive *Asan*," one should make a triangle ' \triangle ' with red sandalwood paste. With, "*Om!* with life-supportive lives, hard as *Vajra* (the weapon of Indra), *Hum, Phat, Swaha*," one should draw the circle ' \bigcirc '

With "*Om! Han-Sah Om*," one should put the dot in the middle



With, "*Om! Hring!* I pray to the supportive *Asana*," one should worship the place with incense, flowers, rice, etc. Then recite, "*Om!* I pray to Ananta, *Om!* I pray to this clean *Asana*. *Om!* I pray to the lotus-*Asana*. *Om! Han-Sah Om!* I pray to the lotus- *Asana* names Maha-Preta." Then catching the *asana*, "Oh Goddess! The Earth and the *Lokas* (seven in number) is sustained by you and you are sustained by Vishnu. You be my daily protector and make this *Asana* pure."

Then with incense etc. one should worship Vastu-Purusha, Brahma, Dharma, Gyana, Vairagya and Aishwarya; in that order, starting from the east direction

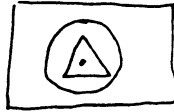
Then in between these angles, one should worship: Adharma, Agyana, Avairagya and Anaishwarya, Disha, Bidisha.

Then with the *Mantra*, "*Om!* Protect, protect *Hum-Phat-Swaha*. *Om! Ang-Hum-Phat-Swaha*," five times, one should purify all around.

With, "*Om! Astraya-Phat*," one should three times hit the earth with the left leg, and willing all the hinderances and troubles out from heaven and earth, one should clap three times above, and three times below. Then with the arrow posture (extended right arm) one should scatter *Laj-a* (puffed rice), sandlewood, grass-shoots, purified ash, with the *Mantra*, "*Om! Away with Bhoots, Pishachas, Parriats-Guhyakas*, all those earth bound *devas*. *Om! Away with those Bhoots* who may be hiding in the Earth; those who are creators of disturbance in these deeds should be banished by the orders of Lord Siva. Let those violent forces who intend violence against me, perish. Let Death, Disease, scare and anger befall on the heads of my enemies." Thus one should scatter the above things in all four directions.

2. Samanya Arghya-Sthapana

On the right side, the worshiper should purify the ground by sprinkling water, should use red sandlewood and sindur to make



and say, "*Om! I bow to this foundation for support*," and then do its worship with flowers etc. Then with, "*Om! Hrah! I establish the Samawya Arghya-Patra*," he should place a pot (*Patra*) of gold, silver, copper, or of what-so-ever possible, on it. He should fill it with water, sounding, *Om*, all the time. Then with *Ankush Mudra* he should invoke the *Tirtha's* from *Surya-Mandal* as follows:

"*Om!* May Ganga, Yamuna, Godavari, Saraswati, Narmada, Sindhu and Kaveri rivers dwell in this water.

Om! Oh Sun-God! In all this Brahamanda, whichever *Tirtha*'s have been touched by your rays, verily let them be transformed here."

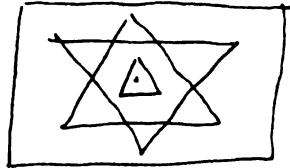
Then with 1) "*Om!* I bow to all the *Tirtha* on Ganga and the others; 2) *Om!* I bow to *Hridya* and all the other six embodied Gods; 3) *Om! Ing!* I bow to the ten forms in the Agni(fire)-*Mandala*; 4) *Om! Ung!* I bow to the sixteen forms of the Soma(moon)-*Mandala*;" he should worship with flowers etc.

Then ten times, he should repeat, "*Om! Aing, Hring, Kling! Chamunda Vichai,*" with *Dhanus-Mudra*.

Then he should cover the pot with *Matsya Mudra*, show *Yoni-Mudra* and finally sprinkle the sacred water from the pot on the articles intended for *puja* as also on himself.

3. Vishesha-Arghya-Sthapana

On his left, with, "*Om! Asu-Rekha, Bajra-Rakha Hum, Phat, Swaha,*" he should make



and with *kusha* sprinkle water with, "*Om lang!*"

With, "*Om Vang!*" he should wash the ground around, and then on the six angles, should worship *Hridaya*, etc., the six body-parts. Then with flowers and other offerings, he should worship at the four corners of the rectangle as follows: 1) on the east, with, "*Om! Purna-Giri-Pitthaya Namah*"; 2) on the south with, "*Om! Uddiyana Pitthaya Namaha*"; 3) on the west, "*Om! Kama-Rupa Pitthaya Namah*"; 4) on the north, "*Om! Jalandhar-Rupa Pitthaya Namah*"; 5) in the middle, "*Om! Supportive-Power be pleased; Om! Kurma (tortise) Sheshayam (thousand headed support of the universe) Namah.*"

Then he should worship the *Mandalas* as in the previous section (2).

With, "*Om! Hring, Phat,*" he should establish a tripod and worship it with, "*Om! I bow to the support.*"

With, "*Om! Astraya Phat,*" he should place a gold, silver copper or whatever is available, pot on the tripod.

With, "*Om! Hring, Kling, Chamundayai-Vichai,* th skull of Heavens, the birth-place of all beings, the purest of the pure, crimsoned by the blood of all *Asuras*, white in complexion, drinker of Ambrosia, the skull of the Goddess! I bow to Thee!" The pot should be worshiped with flowers etc.

With one's *Mula-Mantra*, thinking it to be nectar, one should pour water in the pot with a *shankha* (couch shell). Then with *Ankush-Mudra*, one should call upon the *Tirtha* from *Surya-Mandal* as in part 2; with, "*Om! Aing, Hring, Shring, Hrong: Om! Hring, Ling, Ing, Phat, Hansong, Hung,*" one should purify the water in the pot.

Then show the *Shankha, Dhenu,* and *Yoni Mudras*.

Then cover with *Matsya-Mudra*.

Then repeat the *Mula-Mantra*, ten times. Having put roots of *kusha*, hibiscus, and other plants in the pot, one should put rice, grass-shoots, yogurt, sesame-seeds, barley, different herbs, *vilwa* leaves in the pot. Then show *Trikhandamudra*.

With, "Om! I bow to Ganga and the other *Tirthas*; to *Hridaya* and the other six *Anga-Devatas*. Om! I bow to my beloved Goddess Durga along with her weapons, carrier, and her entire family," one should worship the pot.

Then one should do *Dhyana* of Durga as follows:

"Om! You shine like a thousand suns; Your rays are cool like a thousand moons; You have 18 arms, five heads and three eyes on each; You are poised in the center of the ocean of Ambrosia, sitting on the lotus of Creation; Your carrier is the Bull; Your throat is blue and You wear most beautiful ornaments. You carry the skull and the sword and play on cymbals and drums. You carry the *Pasha* (to tie the enemy) and *Ankush* (to pierce him). You have a huge club in hand and a plough (to fight). You carry (all sorts of) different weapons. You wear garlands of skull that give Blessings and relief from fear to worshipers.

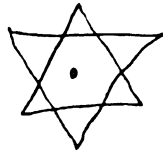
"Thus I also remember you of bright crimson colour, Oh Goddess of all Gods! You are the Elixir; you shine like infinite number of moons. You are also white like Snow-lilies and with your Five faces, three eyes on each, 18 arms, you are always eager to bestow Bliss. You are always smiling and cheerful, you have beautiful, big eyes, on your beautiful face."

With the following, one should then offer *Arghya* (water offering): "Om! offerings to *Anand-Vairawi*! To my beloved Goddess!!"

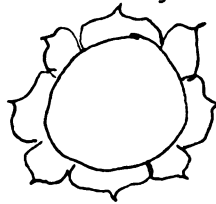
4. Kalasha- Sthapana

With powders of five colours, one should make a *Mandala* in the form of a lotus. Then taking *kusha*, sesame seeds, and water, one should do the *Samkalpa*: "Om! On this *Pratipada* day of *Shukla-Paksha* of *Ashwin* month, I perform this *Kalasha-Sthapana*, as part of the autumnal Durga-puja."

Then to one's left and to the right (or in front) of the Dieties, one should make an alter of holy sandal in the form of



or *Sarvato Bhadra* or a square surrounded by



a lotus of eight petals.

On this, one should preform *Kalash-Sthapana* according to the usual process for all *pujas*. In this *Kalash*, one should worship Ganesh, Varun, Brahma and Durga in the daily ritual form; and around it *Java* seed (barley seeds) should be planted to sprout, which will be removed as *Jayanti* on the 10th day: see "Aparajita-Puja"

5. Main Durga Puja (on Pratipada- Day)

On the *kalash*, with *kuksh*, *til* and water, perform the *Samkalpa* with; "I, (name) of *Gotra* (state *gotra*), for the prosperity, well-being, longevity, progeny, etc. will be performing the *Puja* of Durga-Devi, represented by this *Kalash*."

Then with *akshata* and flowers, after reciting the verse *Jayanti-Mangala-Kali* one should say, "Oh *Shree* Durga! Be pleased to be present here."

Then with one flower offering: "*Om* Devi Chandika! Along with your eighthfold *Shakti*, please do come. Please partake the proper share of these offerings by being in our midst. Oh Maha-Bhaga! Bestow all well beings to us. Oh the Lifeblood of Shankara! Destroy all our enemies. Oh the Destroyer of the *yagyan* of Daksha! Oh Maha-Ghora! The one surrounded by crores of *Yoginis*! Oh Bhadra-Kali! Oh Incarnate of all *Shaktis*! *Om Hring!* *Bhagavati* Durga Devi! We bow to you. Please accept this *Dhyana* flower offering along with all your family, graced with all your forms and weapons."

And with another flower: "Oh Durga, the Empress of all creation! Untill we finish this *Puja*, be pleased to dwell in this *Kalash*."

With water offering: "*Om!* By mere thought of the entire existance of *Akash*, Water, Earth, Fire and Air, with this water, we bathe Thee."

With sandalwood paste: "*Om!* Nourished by the moisture of Malaya mountain, full of different kinds of fragrance, cooling and pleasing, this *Chandan* is offered to you. Be pleased to accept." Then offer red sandalwood paste also.

With vermilion: "This vermilion, created as the symbolic decoration of all married women, is offered to Thee, oh Devi! Be pleased to decorate us also, with all befitting ornamentations."

With *akshata*: "These *akshata*, product of paddy, created before by Brahma, the life-sustainer of all living beings, is being offered to Thee, oh Bestower of all boons! Please accept."

With several flowers: "Emanating fragrant pollens, being followed by hords of attracted bees, grown in the *Ananda*-Garden, with these flower offerings, we bow to the Durga-Devi."

With *Vilwa* leaves: "Oh the Goddess of all Gods! these *Vilwa* leaves from the *Shree-Briksha* manifested from *Amrit* (nectar) always so dear to Shankar, we offer to Thee."

With flowers of the *Drona* tree: "these *Drona* flowers are always so dear to Bhrahma, Vishnu, and Mahesh. For the fulfillment of all our *Kama*, *Artha*, oh Durga! we offer these to Thee."

Then garments, *dhup*, *deepa*, different kinds of edibles and beetle nuts etc., should be offered.

Then with flowers: "Oh Durga! Oh Durga! Oh Mahamaya! Oh Universal *Shakti*-incarnate! You are the Kali, the Kamala (Lakshmi), the consort of Bhrama, of

Siva; you are Jaya and Vijaya; you are Lakshmi (consort of Vishnu) in *Vishnuloka*, and you are Parvati in *Kailash* (abode of Siva), Saraswati in *Brahmalok* (abode of Bhrama), Indrani (consort of Indra) who is always respected by Indra. You are Varahi, Narshinghi, Kaumari, Vaishnavi. You are the life-giving water of all creations, the fire also, Oh Shining Being! You are *Yogamaya*. You are the Air pervading all space. You are *Prithivi*, the container of source of smell. You have infinitely many forms and you are *Sanatani* (ever existant, free of decay). You are Creation-incarnate, the Goddess of all creation, the abode of all Powers in creation. Oh Blissful Durga Devi! Be benevolent to us, we bow to you."

"Oh Goddess of Creation! Oh affectionate Mother! Accept this offering of flowers of different kinds, full of several textures of fragrance."

Then with *Arti* (offering of lighted campher or oil lamps): "*Om!* The campher-stick, lighted with fire, is offered to Thee, oh queen of all *Devas*, oh Mother of the Universe!"

Then bowing before the Goddess: "*Om!* Oh Durga Devi, oh Mother of Creation! I bow to thee. Please pardon all the short-comings of our rituals, oh Maha-Maya! *Om!* Oh slayer of Mahishasura, Oh Maha-Maya, Oh Chamunda, Oh wearer of the garland of skulls, bless us with prosperity, health and power. Oh Mistress of all beings! Oh form of all forms! Oh power-incarnate! Oh Durga! we bow to Thee. Please protect us from all fears."

[Thus the *puja* should be done each day till the sixth. On the second day, hair tie; on the third, feet-colouring (*Alaktak*), *sindur* for the forehead, and looking-glass; on the

forth day, honey, head decor (*Tikuli*), collum for eyes; on the fifth day, four kinds of body decor, and ornaments.]

After the main *puja*, the *Teu-Dik-Pala's* and the Nine *Graha's* should be worshiped as in any other *puja*.

Then to the right side of the Devi, a perpetual *deepa* (lighted oil wick) to burn throughout the nine days and nights, should be offered with the following *mantra*, with *kusha*, *til* and water: "Om! This *deepa*, to perpetually light as the representation of Vishnu, we offer to Thee, oh Durga! With prayer to be blessed with blessing equal to the performance of *Vajapeya-Yajna*."

Then according to local (family) customs, different fruits, cooked edibles, rice pudding, etc. should be offered to the Devi. *Chandi-Pattha*, *Havana*, worship of maidens, feeding of maidens and married daughters of the family, and feeding the *Brahmins* should be performed. Dancing, singing, evening *Arti*, *Stotra-Pattha*, etc. should be continued everyday.

6. Second Day: Remant Puja

With flower and rice: "Om! Oh Remant, come and stay here along with your horse." Then with the ending, "Om! I bow to Remant along with his horse," all the usual offerings should be made.

Offer of Dhyana flower: "Oh King of all Horses! Oh son of the Sun-God! Oh Horse-Faced! We are in your protection. Please bless and protect us."

With folded hands: "Oh Son of Sun! Oh son of Chhaya! We bow to you to harness our horses in peace and well being."

Then the horse, Uchchaishrava, should be worshipped, everyday till the end of the ninth day, and in a yellow cloth, putting *Vallataka*, *Vacha*, *Kusttha*, mustard seeds, *neem* leaves, *Guggula*, *Ghee*, *Asphodita*, the yellow cloth should be tied with threads of five colours and tied to the neck of the horse.

7. Elephant Puja: The Sixth Day

With *Kusha* etc.: "I worship Kumud, Airavata and other divine Elephants."

On the east side, one should worship with all the offerings with the *mantras*:
 "Om Indraya Namah," "Om Airavate Namaha," "Om Avramave Namaha," "Om Agnaya Namaha," "Om Padmaya Namaha," "Om Kapilaya Namaha."

On the south side: "Om yamaya Namaha; Om Pushpa Dantaya Namaha; Om pingalaya Namaha."

On the east-south side: "Om Namaha to the King of Demons; Om Vamanaya Namaha; Om Anupamaya Namaha; Om Varunaya Namaha; Om Sarva-Bhumaya Namaha; Om Tamra-Karanaya Namaha."

On the South-west side: "Om Vayave Namaha; Om Anjanaya Namaha; Om Shuvrattantya Namaha."

On the north side: "Om Kubaraya Namaha; Om Nilaya Namaha; Om Anganaya Namaha."

In the middle: "*Om Vishnuave Namaha; Om Shriyae Namaha; Om Suryaya Namaha; Om Prithivayae Namaha; Om Antarikshaya Namaha.*"

Again, starting from the east all the way around: "*Om Vajraya Namaha; Om Shaktaye Namaha; Om Dandaya Namaha; Om Khadgaya Namaha; Om Pashaya Namaha; Om Ankushaya Namaha; Om Gadaya Namaha; Om Shulaya Namaha.*"

Thus the Elephant should be worshipped with all the five offerings.

8. Vilwa-Avimatrana: Sixth Day

Going to the *Vilwa* tree, with *kush*, *til* and water, one should do the *Shankalpa* of *Vilwa-Avimatrana*. Then the tree should be worshipped with the five offerings. Then in the *Vilwa* tree itself, Durga-Awahana and *puja* should be done as usual and with music, etc. She should be pleased.

Then the flower offerings: 1) "You, requested by Brahma, awakened to kill Ravana in order to favour Rama. I also awaken you today so I can vanquish my enemies, obtain endless pleasure and all kinds of prosperity. I want to take you to my home tomorrow morning so you can, there, fulfill all our desires. Oh, *Vilwa* Tree! Tomorrow morning you should bestow upon me two fruits and part of yourself, for the worship of Durga, Oh, Beloved of Maha-Deva."

Then with a yellow thread the *Vilwa* tree should be tied, and in a yellow cloth, a branch with two fruits should be gathered.

Finally *Arti* of the tree should be done.

9. Nava-Patrika Sthapana: Seventh Day

After the daily rituals, one should go to that *Vilwa* tree and worship it with all five offerings.

Then with folded hands: " Oh Tree! Oh king of all vegetations! Oh beloved of Siva! I have resolved to please Durga by worshipping her with your brach and fruits. Please do not resent the pain of parting with them."

Then with a sharp knife, cutting the branch along with the two fruits, by a single blow, chanting the two *mantras*: "*Om*! Cut, Cut. *Phat-hring-swaha*! *Om* Durga! Durga! The protector! *Swaha*!"

Holding these in hand: " *Om*! The *Devā*'s had taken thy branches and worshipped so it is said. I am also taking these, Oh Beloved of Uma! For the multiplication of progany, prosperity and longevity. Oh Devi! Residing in this *Vilwa* branch! Bestow on me the emperial grace. *Om*! Oh Chandika! Come to bestow all well being. Oh Katyayani! Accept our offerrings. We bow to you. Oh Beloved of Shankara!"

Thus, putting these on a carrier, they should be brought to the Durga puja *mandapa* and , putting them on a platform, they should be worshipped with the five offerings.

Then, coming to the outer door of the room, making a *Mandala* with cow dung, *Bhoot*, *Parriat*, *Pishacha* etc. should be warded off as follows: First they should be worshipped and offered boiled rice and meat with: "*Om*! Whichever *Bhoots*, *Parriats*,

Pishachas be on this earth, may they accept these offerings. Thus worshipped, let them vacate this place and observe our rituals from a distance."

Then on a palm leaf write, "*Om Phat!*" and seven times, with white mustard seeds, these should be scattered in all four directions to ward off the *Bhoots*.

Now the *Vilwa* branch should be worshipped with all the five offerings and the *mantra*, "*Om! We bow to Chamunda!*"

Then the platform with the *vilwa* should be taken to the Durga image with: "Oh auspicious Shree fruit! Oh embodiment of Durga! Oh Chamunda! Come, come. Oh Durga! You have been stabilized in this mud image and this *vilwa*. Bless us in our abode."

Then on the right side of the image, tied with white *Aparajita* creeper, the nine types of leaves of banana, pomagranate, paddy, turmaric, *manak*, *kachu*, *vilwa*, *ashoka*, and *jayanti* should be hung. Each of these should be worshipped and bathed. After that, at the auspicious moment, collorium should be made with *ghee* on the *vilwa* leaf and put in the eyes of the image; first in the right then the left and then the middle (on the forehead) eye with: "These eyes, luminous like the Moon, Sun and fire, oh Devi, shine like the three universes. *Om! Aing! Hring! Kling! Chamundayae Vichae!* Here are your eyes oh Devi! We bow to you."

Then, covered with a curtain, the offer of *Kusumanda-Bali* (gourd) should be made; on the right side of the *puja*, accessories should be put on the left, the *Naivedya* (offering) should be placed before starting the *puja*.

10. Durga Puja: Seventh Day

After doing *sankalpa* (vow) to perform the *puja*, with *kusha*, flower and rice in hand, the heart of the Image should be touched, with joined *Anamika* (finger next to the little one) and

thumb: "Oh Durga Devi! With all your paraphernalias and attendants, please grace this *puja*."

With a flower, "Oh Devi! I invoke you in this Image and this Shree (*vilwa*) fruit. Bestow long life, health and prosperity. *Om!* From Kailash, Vindhya and Himalaya, come to this Image and this *vilwa* branch along with your millions of *yogini* 's to partake in the share of this *yagna* offering. *Om! Aing-Hring-Kling! Chamunde!* Oh Destroyer of the *yagna* of Daksha! Come and stay here with all your followers."

Then with folded hands: "*Om!* Oh *Bhagawati!* Oh Mother! Giver of victory over adversories by their destruction! Oh the one worshipped by all Gods! I worship Thee with all devotion. Oh Devi who graces this branch! I please you with prayerful offerings of branches ladden with fruits and with pleasant blossoms. Oh Durga! Come, come near us, in these nine leaves, Oh Benefactor! Oh Destroyer! Accept our offerings. Oh Destroyer of the night of the demons! We seek your permission to perform this *sharadiya puja*. You are Chandi, Chand-rupa, oh All-Powerful! You are the power of all divinities. Come and stay during this *yagna* while we worship Thee." Further, "*Om!* With long, braided hair, crescent moon on forehead, having three eyes, face like a full

moon, complexion of an *Asati* flower, in beautiful eyes, full of budding youth, fully ornamented, with shining white teeth and full, erect breasts, body bent at three places (knees, hips and neck), the killer of Mahishasura, with skulls, hunting gears, bells, mirror, threatening bows and arrows, with flags and *damaru* (a kind of two faced drum), ropes (to bind the adversaries), all these in the left hands, and shining gears of war like *Shakti*, *Vajra*, *Ankusha*, crouch shell, *chakra*, arrows in the right hand, such a one is beholding the Mahisha deprived of head and shoulders. Likewise the demon without his head, still holding his *Khadaga* (a kind of sword), heart pierced by the *shula* (a kind of lance), with bloodied body, with bloodshot open eyes, tied in *naga-pasha*, twisted eye brows, pulled by the hair with a left-hand by the Devi with lion in attendance, should be visible. Devi is shown seated with her right leg resting on the lion and a little raised left one pressing the toe on Mahishasura. This appearance is being praised by the *Devas*. She is the Ugrachanda, Prachanda, Chanda-Nayika, Chanda, Chandavati, Chanda-Rupa, Ati-Chandika. Such Durga, surrounded by her 8 Shakti's, is mediated upon constantly, who is the bestower of *Dharma*, *Kama*, *Arth* and *Moksha*. To such a Durga, I offer this meditative flower."

Then the welcoming hymn: "1) Oh Mahamaya! Oh Chandika! Oh Benafactor of everyone! Welcome to you. Oh bestower of all wellbeings! Accept the various *puja*'s offered to you."

2)"Oh Queen of all the *Deva*'s! One who is easily propitiated by devotion! Surrounded by your retinues, be present here while we worship you."

Offer of *asana* (seat): " *Om!* Oh most auspicious one! Oh mother of all creation!
Oh master of all beings! Accept this shining, high and purified *asana*."

Offering of feet cleaning water: "*Om!* Accept this wash water from Ganga, which
alliviates the tiresomeness of feet after long journey."

Offering of *udavarttana* (body masage paste): "*Om!* Made with til oil and
fragrant herbs, please accept this *udavarttana*, Oh Devi!"

Offering of *arghya*: "*Om!* Containing *til*, rice, *kusha*, flowers, sents, fruits, etc.,
please accept this offering."

Offering of *achamana* (water to wash face): "*Om!* Even after bathing etc.,
whatever cleanliness be necessary, for that is this offered. Please accept."

Offering of bath: "*Om!* Invoking pure water from Heaven, Earth, Oceans, Stars,
and Wind, I bathe thee with this."

Offering of *madhu-parka* (yogart,sugar, *ghee*, and honey) put in and covered by
a bronz utensil: "On Maha-Devi! Oh daughter of the Mountain! This *madhu-parka*,
concockted by Brahma and offered by me, be pleased to accept."

Offering of *achaman*, again as before.

Offer of sandal-paste: "*Om!* Grown on Malaya-mountains, repleat with fragrance,
cool, pleasant, this sandal-paste is offered to Thee!"

Offer of red sandal-paste: "Oh Devi! The red-sandal paste, invented by Thyself, is
offered. Please accept."

Offer of *Sindur* (vermillion): "*Om!* This *sindur* was created as the decor of all
sadhwis' (women with husbands alive). Please accept, oh Devi!"

Offer of *kum-kum* (forehead red dot): "*Om!* Red like hibiscus flower, pleasant decor of the fore-head of ladies, this *kum-kum* is offered to Thee, oh Devi!"

Offer of rice : "*Om!* created by Brahma to sustain life in all living beings, this *Akshata* is offered to Thee, oh Devi!"

Offer of flowers, vilwa leaves, garland, lower and upper garments, ornaments, *dhup*, *deepa*, fragrance, lighted campher, and *naivedya*'s should be made, as usual. Similarly, rice pudding, sweet balls (*modaka* or *laddus*), pancakes (*pua*), fruits etc. should be separately offered. Then water to drink, water to wash hands, water to wash face, and bettle nut should be offered. Finally, colliruims of two kinds, feet coloring, hand fans, bells, and money (*Dakshina*) should be offered.

Then with flowers in folded hands: "*Om!* Oh Durga, Durga, Mahamaya! Oh Incarnate-Power! You are Kali, Kamala, Brahmi, Jaya, Vijaya, Siva, Lakshmi in the Vishnu-Loka, Parviti in Kalash, Saraswati in Brahma-Loka, and Indrani adored by Indra. You are Varahi, Narasinghi, Kaumari and Vaishnavi. You are life-giving water in all cration, you are shining radiance in all luminations. You are the *yoga-maya* and air in space. You are the *Prithvi* (Earth) which carries all scents. You are perpetual in all different kinds. You are the Universe, the Master of the Universe, and the Power behind the Universe. Oh Durga Devi! We bow to Thee. Oh Ever-Blissful! Bless us and accept this flower offering."

Then *artis* should be offered

Finally, pray as follows with *sashtanga-pranam* (bowing prostrated) : "Oh Durga, Oh Durga, Oh Mahamaya! Which-ever fashion our *puja* has been, may that be

deemed flawless by your grace, Oh Devi Siva, Oh Mahamaya! Whatever drawbacks might have occurred in our performance, Oh Mother of the Universe! please forgive. Oh Durga Devi! We pray and bow to Thee!"

12. Nava-Patrika-Durga Puja

Worship as follows with all five offerings:

- 1) On the banana leaf: "*Om Hring! Brahmanyai Namaha*:"
- 2) On the pomegranate leaf: "*Om! Rakta-Dantikayai Namaha*"
- 3) On the paddy leaf: "*Om! Hring Dhanyadhishtthai Lakshmiyai Namaha*"
- 4) On the tumeric leaf: "*Om! Hring Haridradhishtthatriyai Durgayai Namaha*"
- 5) On the *manak* leaf: "*Om! Hring Manadhishtthatriyai Chamundayai Namaha*"
- 6) On the *kachu* leaf: "*Om! Hring Kachu-patrikadhishtthatriyai Kaliyai Namaha*"
- 7) On the *vilwa* branch: "*Om! Hring Vitwadhishtthatriyai Shivayai Namaha*"
- 8) On the *ashoka* leaf: "*Om! Hring Ashokadhishtthatriyai Shokarahitayai Namaha*"
- 9) On the *jayanti* leaf: "*Om! Hring Jayantyadhishtthatriyai Kartikiyai Namaha*"

Then with folded hands, pray: "*Om! Oh Nava Durga in the leaves! Oh Beloved of Maha-Deva! Accept all our offering and protect us, Oh Maheshwari! Oh Maha-Devi! Oh Queen of all Devas! You have been invoked in these leaves. Bestow long-life, good health and Victory to us, Oh Devi! We hail Thee!*"

13. Worship of the Family of Durga

On the right of Durga-Image, Lakshmi should be invoked: "I invoke the beloved of Narayana, who is radiant like heated gold, who has two arms, whose eyes having sideways glance and shinning and beautiful like a calm, lighted flame and is decorated with collirium, who has a divine dress on and is decorated with *sindur* and *tilak*."

Thus invoked, she should be called upon: "*Om! Hring-Kling Bhoooh-Buvaha-Swaha* Lakshmi! Come and stay here"

Then worshipping with the usual five offerings, the flower offering should be made with: "*Om!* You are the consort of the Vishwa-Rupa (Vishnu), Oh Padma! Oh Devi! Oh Maha-Lakshmi! I bow to Thee. Please protect us from all sides."

Then to the left of Durga, Saraswati should be invoked: "*Om!* One, fair like the counc shell and shining like white moon, who has two arms and eyes like lotus, with sideways glance, radiant like light flame, dressed in divine garments and divine ornaments, whose power of voice is unsurpassed, is invoked by me."

Then calling, "*Om! Hring-Bhoooh-Bhovaha-Swaha Maha-Saraswati!* Come and stay here."

After worship with all five offerings, the flower offering should be made with, "*Om!* I bow to the Bhadra-Kali daily. I repeatedly bow to Saraswati, who is the abode of *Veda*, *Vedanta*, all *Vedanga*, and all *Vidyas*."

Then to the right of Lakshmi, Ganasha should be invoked and worshipped; to the left of Saraswati, Katrika should be worshipped. To the left of Katrika, Jaya should be worshipped with the ending, "*Om! Hring-Hring! Jayayai Namaha*."

Then to the right of Ganasha, Vijaya should be worshipped with the ending,
"Om! Aing-Hring! Bijayayai Namaha."

Finally, the ten *Dik-Palas* and the nine *Grahas* should be worshipped.

14. Worshipping Durga's Carriers

1) Lion (with flower): *"Om! One with sharp teeth and terrifying face, shoulders flourishing beautiful mane, four feet with nails like Vajra, called 'Maha-Singha'; Om Hrang-Hring! Oh Lion, the seat of Durga, come and stay here."*

Worship with the ending, *"Om! Vajra-nailed, having teeth as weapons, Oh Maha-Singha! I bow to Thee."*

Then Mahishasura should be invoked: *"Om! Oh Brave One! Though in the form of a buffalo, you are the incarnation of Sada-Siva and are Siva-Rupa. So I worship Thee, please forgive us. Om! Hring-Hring-Hung! Oh Mahishasura! Come and stay here."*

Worship with, *"Om! Mahishasuraya namaha."*

Then as usual, the Mouse, the Peacock, Remantaka and Uchchaishrava (the two horses), should be worshipped.

Then in front of the Image, Nawa-Vairava's should be worshipped as follows:

1) *"Om! Aing-Hring-Ang! Asitang-Vairavaya namaha."*

2) *"Om! Aing-Hring-Ing! Ruruda-Vairavaya namaha."*

3) *"Om! Aing-Hring-Ung! Chanda-Vairavaya namaha."*

- 4) "Om! Aing-Hring-Ring! Krodha-Vairavaya namaha."
- 5) "Om! Aing-Hring-Lring! Unmatta-Vairavaya namaha."
- 6) "Om! Aing-Hring-Aing! Bhayanaka-Vairavaya namaha."
- 7) "Om! Aing-Hring-Uung! Bhishana-Vairavaya namaha."
- 8) "Om! Aing-Hring-Ang! Sanghar-Vairavaya namaha."
- 9) "Om! Aing-Hring-Kang! Kapali-Vairavaya namaha."

Finally pray with folded hands: "Om! Oh slayer of Mahisha! Mahamaya!

Chamunda! One with skull-garland! We bow to Thee! Please bestow on us wealth, good health and valour, Oh Devi! Oh Durga, who is always decorated with *kum-kum* and sandal-paste, and who holds in her hand the blessing *vilwa* leaf! I seek Thy protection and am at your mercy."

In the evening, *arti* etc. should be performed.

15. Process of Goat Sacrifice

A goat, bathed and garlanded with red flowers, should be kept to the left of the worshipper, and be worshipped with the ending, "Om! *Chhagaya namaha*," with all five offerings. Then *sankalapa* (vow) as follows with flower, sandal-paste and rice:

"Today (on the seventh day, eighth day and ninth day) for successively multiplying my *punya* (auspicity), for the propiciation of Durga, this goat, representing the Fire-God, is being sacrificed by me."

In the right ear of the goat, whisper: "1) *Om!* Know the bondage of animal traits; (the) head represents mental prowess. May this goat be a beacon to us."

2) (*Pashu-Gayatri*): "*Om!* In the cration, Surayambhuva (Brahma) created *Pashu's* (animal-beings) for *yajna*. Therefore I am sacrificing you today in this *yajna*."

Then with all five offerings, the *khadga* (sword) should be worshipped with the ending, "*Om! Khadagaya namaha.*" With folded hands: "Oh *Khadga* of sharp edge and terrible form! You have glory, victory and protection of *dharma* as your qualities. We bow to Thee. You are the destroyer of the Demons. You fulfill the purpose of Shakti (Devi). You have to quickly sacrifice this animal, Oh King of *Khadgas!* We bow to Thee."

Touching the *khadga* to the neck of the goat: "Animals were created for *yajna*. Only for *yajna* should they be sacrificed. Thus sacrificed they surely go the heaven. Oh good animal! Conquor the terrible pain of the strike of this *khadga* and by the grace of Devi, emancipate yourself as well as ourselves."

Releasing the bondage of the animal: "For protection, you were in this bondage; for attaining *mutki*, you are released by me. Oh good animal! By propiciating the Devi, proceed to heaven. Having discarded this body, become of divinely form, and enjoy with the *Pramatha's* (retinues of Siva) as long as 14 Indra reign is sucession."

Then with, "*Om! Haing!*" the animal should be sacrifice. With, "*Om! Aing-Hring!* Oh Kaushiki! Be propiciated with this offering of flesh with blood," the offering of the flesh with blood should be made.

Then putting a *deepa* on the severed head of the goat, it should be put in front of the Image, with, "*Om!* Here is the offering of head of the goat-animal with *deepa* to Durga. *Hring!* I bow to the Devi."

After that, pray as follows: "Oh Maha-Devi, with terrible teeth and scary face, who loves offerings of blood and flesh! Accept this sacrifice along with animal blood and flesh! *Om!* You love blood in battles. This offering with *deepa*, please accept. Oh Three-eyed one! Oh Scary-faced! Oh Skull-garlanded one! Oh Destroyer of all Demons! Oh Carrier of *Khadga* and Death! Oh Slayer of Mahisha! Oh Mahamaya! Oh Destroyer of the Arrogance of the *Daityas*! I offer this sacrifice through this goat. Oh Beloved of Hara (Siva)! Please accept."

Taking a little blood from the *khadga*, a dot on the fore-head should be put with: "*Om!* Whatever I may touch by my feet or see with my eyes, should come under my power, even if full of animosity toward me."

Finally *dakshina* (offering to *brahmnins*) should be made for having successfully performed this sacrifice.

16. Kumari Puja (Worship of Maidens)

With *kusha*, *til*, and water (*sangkalpa*): "*Om!* Today (seventh, eighth and ninth days) for the fulfillment of various desires, for obtaining prosperity and later attaining the abode of the Devi, I will worship these maidens."

After washing the feet of the *kumari*'s, they should be seated facing east, on a neat place, cleaned and washed with cow-dung. Then they should be worshipped with all five offerings with the ending: "*Om! Hring!* I bow to (this) these (maiden) maidens."

They should be garlanded, given nice clothes and ornaments and should be fed in a pleasurable manner.

After they are fully satisfied with delicious foods, placing rice in their hands, one should say, "*Kshamadhvam*" (please forgive any short-comings). Then, having made them put the rice on the worshipper's head, the latter should recite: "I mediate on the young, maiden form of the Goddess, with smiling countenance like a lotus in full bloom, shining like the just rising sun, dressed in red clothes, red garland and decorated with all kinds of ornaments. She is joyfully frolicing with divine maidens and she fulfills all the wishes of her devotees."

Finally, one should propiciate the maidens with ample offerings of *dakshina*.

17. Puja: Eighth Day

Facing east, first *Sankalpa* for the eighth *puja* should be made. Then pray, "*Om!* Oh Jayanti! Mangala! Kali! Bhadra-Kali! Kapalini! Durga! Kshama! Siva! Dhatri! *Swaha! Swaha!* I bow to Thee."

With flower invocation: " *Om!* The one adorned with long tresses of hair, having cresecent moon on it, with three eyes, face like a full moon, whose complexion is like *Asati* flower, who is well poised and has beautiful eyes, who is full (of) youth and with

all kinds of ornaments, whose face is extremely charming, who possesses full, erect breasts, who stands with three bends in (her) body, who is the slayer of Mahishasura, in whose left hands are skulls, hunting-gear, bell, mirror, one fore-finger lifted, bow, flag, *Damaru*, and *Pasha*, and in the right hands are *Shakti* (a weapon), club, spear, sword, *Vajra* with sharp tip, crouch-shell, *chakra* and arrows, below who shows the buffalo with severed head yet holding a *khadga* in hand, with spear pierced in its heart, ornaments all scattered, (with) bloodied body and red-shot eyes, coiled (arrested) in *Naga-Pasha*, with distorted eye-brows and ugly face, dragged by the hair by Durga, and lion shown with blood in (its) mouth, on it rests the right foot of Durga, and her left foot toe is pressing on the buffalo, and who is being worshipped and praised in this form by the Celestial-Beings, who is Ugrachanda, Prachanda, Chandogra, Chanda-Nayika, Chanda, Chanda-Vati, Chanda-Rupa, Ati-Chandika, surrounded with Her eight *Shakti*'s (in attendance), such a Durga, who bestows *Artha-Kama-Dharma-Moksha*, is mediated upon by me. I offer this meditation flower to Durga and bow to her."

With flower and rice: "Oh Durga! Oh Maha-Bhage! Come and protect us always. Oh Devi! I invoke Thee so we can be successful in all our *Kama* and *Arth*. Entering this Image, being kind to us, please wait in it. Oh Bhadre! Oh Queen of the Universe! I pray to you. Be pleased to protect us forever. Oh Goddess Durga! Do come, stay near us with patience."

With water mixed with sandal paste and flowers, offer it for washing the feet, with:

1) "*Jayanti-Mangala*, etc. (repeat)"

2) "Oh Durga! Durga! Oh Protector! *Swaha*."

3) "*Om*! This water for washing feet is offered to Thee along with Thy retinues."

Then along with 2nd *mantra* above, *kum-kum*, *vilwa*-leaf, *akshata* (rice), *Durba* (grass-shoots), three *kusha*, *til* (sesame-seeds), water, barley should be offered.

Similarly, bathing water, *madhuperka* (see above), *achaman*, sandal-paste, *sindur*, and flowers should be offered.

With *vilwa*-leaves in folded hands, offer with the same 2nd *mantra* and, "*Om*! I offer these *vilwa*-leaves, Oh Queen of Divines! Which were gotten from *Amrita* (necter), from the *Shree* tree, and which are always loved by Siva."

With *drona*-flower, "*Om*! This flower is always adored by Bhrama, Vishnu, and Siva. For fulfillment of all our *arth-kama*, I offer this to Thee."

Similarly, *jati*, *champa*, lotus, lily, *mallicka*, *karavira*, hibiscus and other flowers should be offered. Then *agaru*, *guggula*, etc, should be put on burning ambers and offered, *deepa* should be offered, and so should *naivedya*, jewels, umbralla, footwear and clothes.

Then on the eight petal lotus, with *akshata* and flowers *avarana* and *pittha puja* should be offered as follows:

On south-east petal, "*Om*! *Hridayaya namaha*"

On south-west petal, "*Om*! *Durga! Shirase Swaha*"

On north-west petal, "*Om*! *Durga! Shikhayai Vashat*"

On north-east petal, "*Om*! *Rakshini! Kavachaya Hum*"

On the mid-petal, "*Om*! *Swaha! Netravyam Vaushat*"

On all sides, "*Om! Durga! Durga! Rakshini! Swaha Astraya Phat*"

Then with flower and *akshat*, the eight *shaktis* of the Devi should be worshipped as follows:

- 1) "*Om! Hring! Mangalayai namaha*"
- 2) "*Om! Hring! Kalyayi namaha*"
- 3) "*Om! Hring! Bhadra Kalyayi namaha*"
- 4) "*Om! Hring! Kapalinyayi namaha*"
- 5) "*Om! Hring! Shivayiyai namaha*"
- 6) "*Om! Hring! Dhatriyayi namaha*"
- 7) "*Om! Hring! Swadhayayi namaha*"
- 8) "*Om! Hring! Swahayayi namaha*"

And these should be worshipped with all five offerings. After that with folded hands different *sotras* (stanzas from the scriptures) should be recited, according to ones taste, in praise of Durga.

Then prayer should be made for blessings, such as: "Oh! Slayer of Mahish! Oh Maha-Maya! Chamunde! Oh wearer of skull-garland! Oh Devi! We pray to Thee.

Bestow wealth, good health and victory to us. Oh Maheshwari! Protect us against fears from *bhoot*, *parriat*, *pishacha*, *rakhasa's*, *devata's*, humans etc. Oh auspicious and all auspiciousities! Oh Shive! Oh one who can accomplish all desires! Uma! Brahamni!

Kaumari! Oh Vishwa-Rupa! Be pleased on us. *Om!* Bestow good appearance, victory, fame, Oh Goddess! Along with progeny, wealth and all other desirables. *Om!*

Propiciated with sandal-paste, *kum-kum*, *vilwa* leaves, Oh Durga! We have come under your protection."

Then as before, *Bali dana*, feeding of maidens, un-widowed women, and *brahmins* should be performed.

18. Midnitht Worship: Eighth Day

After doing *sankalpa* for *puja*, take *kusha*, *til*, water: "Oh Maheshwari! To obtain the abode of Crescent-Moon Headed One (Siva) and for Thy propiciation, I invoke Thee. *Om*! For the warding off of all evils, and for getting rid of all fears, Oh Maheshwari! and for the freedom from all worldly bondages, for attaining all wisdom, Oh Queen of all Divines! On this eighth *puja* date, I remember you."

Then recite, "*Om*! Oh the Beloved of Siva! I sing in your praise on this Eighth *puja* day to get rid of all the sins of this *Kali-Yuga*, and after passing through (this) misarable existance repeatedly, I pray to Thee in order to obtain the most glorious existance."

Then looking at the Image, "*Om*! Oh Durga Devi! Oh Maha-Maya! today I look up to you to attain auspicity and bliss of the highest order. *Om*! Oh Maha-Durga! To attain great prosperity, great wisdom, great valour, great power, long life, strength, fame, wealth, learning and spiritual enlightenment, I look up to you. For bliss, for fruits of giving cows to *brahmins*, for progress of progeny, I sing in Thy praise. So *Om*!

Today, for the destruction of my enemies, Oh Chandika! and for the increase in prosperity, attainment of desires, for all kinds of auspicious results, and for removal of all obstacles, I worship Thee on this eighth day."

For *puja*, first recite *Jayanti-Mangala* etc. (see above), and with "*Om! Durga-Dukrga-Rakshini!*" bow to the Image. Then, as before, perform the *puja*.

Then to the right of Durga, Jayanti should be worshipped with the ending,

- 1) "*Om! Hring! Jayantiyai namaha.*"
- 2) next, Mangala with, "*Om! Hring! Mangalayai namaha.*"
- 3) Kali with, "*Om! Hring! Kalyai namaha.*"
- 4) Bhadra-Kali with, "*Om! Hring! Bhadra-Kalyai namaha.*"
- 5) Kapalini with, "*Om! Hring! Kapalinyai namaha.*"
- 6) Durga with, "*Om! Hring! Durgayai namaha.*"
- 7) Kshema with, "*Om! Hring! Kshemayai namaha.*"
- 8) Siva with, "*Om! Hring! Sivayai namaha.*"
- 9) Dhatri with, "*Om! Hring! Dhatriyai namaha.*"
- 10) Swadha with, "*Om! Hring! Swadhayai namaha.*"
- 11) Swaha with, "*Om! Hring! Swahayai namaha.*"

On the back of the image:

- 12) Ugra-Chanda with, "*Om! Hring! Ugrachandayai namaha.*"
- 13) Prachanda with, "*Om! Hring! Prachandayai namaha.*"
- 14) Chandogra with, "*Om! Hring! Chandograyai namaha.*"
- 15) Chanda-Naika with, "*Om! Hring! Chanda-Naikayai namaha.*"

- 16) Chanda with, "*Om! Hring! Chandayai namaha.*"
- 17) Chandavati with, "*Om! Hring! Chandavatyai namaha.*"
- 18) Rudra-Chanda with, "*Om! Hring! Rudra-Chandayai namaha.*"
- 19) Chanda-Rupa with, "*Om! Hring! Chanda-Rupayai namaha.*"
- 20) Chandika with, "*Om! Hring! Chandikayai namaha.*"
- 21) Ugra-Dangstra with, "*Om! Hring! Ugra-Dangstrayai namaha.*"
- 22) Maha-Dangstra with, "*Om! Hring! Maha-Dangstrayani namaha.*"
- 23) Shubhra-Dangstra with, "*Om! Hring! Shubhra-Dungstrayai namaha.*"
- 24) Kalini-Dangstra with, "*Om! Hring! Kalinyai-Dungstrayai namaha.*"
- 25) Bhim-Nata with, "*Om! Hring! Bhim-Natayai namaha.*"
- 26) Vishalakshi with, "*Om! Hring! Vishalakshyai namaha.*"
- 27) Mangala with, "*Om! Hring! Mangalayai namaha.*"
- 28) Vijaya with, "*Om! Hring! Vijayayai namaha.*"
- 29) Jaya with, "*Om! Hring! Jayayai namaha.*"

In front of the Image:

- 30) Nandini with, "*Om! Hring! Nandinyai namaha.*"
- 31) Bhadra with, "*Om! Hring! Bhadrayai namaha.*"
- 32) Lakshmi with, "*Om! Hring! Lakshiyai namaha.*"
- 33) Kirti with, "*Om! Hring! Kirtyai namaha.*"
- 34) Yashaswini with, "*Om! Hring! Yashaswinyai namaha.*"
- 35) Koti-Yogni with, "*Om! Hring! Koti-yoginyai namaha.*"
- 36) Pushta with, "*Om! Hring! Pustayai namaha.*"

- 37) Medha with, "*Om! Hring! Medhayai namaha.*"
- 38) Shiva with, "*Om! Hring! Shivayai namaha.*"
- 39) Sadhwi with, "*Om! Hring! Sadhwiyai namaha.*"
- 40) Yasha with, "*Om! Hring! Yashayai namaha.*"
- 41) Shovana with, "*Om! Hring! Shovanayai namaha.*"
- 42) Jaya with, "*Om! Hring! Jayayai namaha.*"
- 43) Dhriti with, "*Om! Hring! Dhrityai namaha.*"
- 44) Ananda with, "*Om! Hring! Anandayai namaha.*"
- 45) Sunanda with, "*Om! Hring! Sunandayai namaha.*"

Then near the Image, in the same way:

- 1) Vijaya
- 2) Mangala
- 3) Bhadra
- 4) Dhriti
- 5) Shanta
- 6) Riddhi
- 7) Kshama
- 8) Siva
- 9) Siddhi
- 10) Trishti
- 11) Pushti
- 12) Uma

- 13) Rati
- 14) Dipti
- 15) Kanta
- 16) Yasha
- 17) Lakshmi
- 18) Tripura
- 19) Riddhi
- 20) Shakti
- 21) Jayavati
- 22) Brahmi
- 23) Jayanti
- 24) Aparajita
- 25) Ajita
- 26) Manasi
- 27) Shweta
- 28) Diti
- 29) Maya
- 30) Maha-Maya
- 31) Mohini
- 32) Rati-Lalsa
- 33) Tara
- 34) Vimana

- 35) Gauri
- 36) Kaushiki
- 37) Mati
- 38) Durga
- 39) Kriya
- 40) Arundhati
- 41) Ghanta
- 42) Karna
- 43) Kapalini
- 44) Raudri
- 45) Kali
- 46) Mayuri
- 47) Trinatra
- 48) Swarupa
- 49) Bahu-Rupa
- 50) Ripuha
- 51) Charchika
- 52) Ambika
- 53) Sura-Pujita
- 54) Vaivaswata
- 55) Kaumari
- 56) Maheswari

57) Vaishnavi

58) Maha-Lakshmi

59) Kartiki

60) Shia-Kuti

61) Barahi

62) Chamunda

Then around the Image:

63) Brahmani

64) Maheshwari

65) Kaumari

66) Vaishnavi

67) Varahi

68) Indrani

69) Chamunda

70) Maha-Lakshmi

71) Chandika

All should thus be worshipped as indicated above with "*Hring*"- root. Then, in front of the Devi Nava-Bhairava's should be worshiped as in (part) 14

Next the 12 *Kshatra-Pal's* should be worshipped as:

1) "*Om! Yaksha-Rajaya namah.*"

2) "*Om! Hunge, Kshaung! Katuk-Kshatra-Palaya maha-Vibhishanaya swaha namaha.*"

3) "*Om! bali-Bhadraya namaha.*"

- 4) "Om! Chitra-Mundaya namaha."
- 5) "Om! Sendra-Yakshaya namaha."
- 6) "Om! Jambhaya namaha."
- 7) "Om! Vetahaya namaha."
- 8) "Om! Bhishana-Kshatra-Palaya namaha."
- 9) "Om! Eka-Pada-Yakshaya namaha."
- 10) "Om! Agni-Jiva-Kshatra-Palaya namaha."
- 11) "Om! Kala-Kshatra-Palaya namaha."
- 12) "Om! Jang-Yakshaya namaha."

Next tht parts of Devi's body should be worshipped, as:

- 1) "Om! Kali! Kali! Hridayaya namaha."
- 2) "Om! Kali! Kali! Vajrini Shirsa namaha."
- 3) "Om! Kali! Kali! Vajreshwari Shikhayai namaha."
- 4) "Om! Kali! Kali! Vajreshwari kavachaya namaha."
- 5) "Om! Kali! Kali! Loha-Dangshtrayai swaha netratrayaya namaha."

Next worship of the five facets of Devi, as:

- 1) (On the head), "Om! Ishanaya namah."
- 2) (on the mouth), "Om! Kali, Kali, Tat-Purushaya namah."
- 3) (on heart), "Om! Vajreswari! Aghoraya namah."
- 4) (below), "Om! Loka-Dangstrayai-Vama-Devaya namah."
- 5) (all over the body), "Om! Swaha! Sadyo-Jataya namah."

Then worship the wepons as:

- 1) "Om! Kapalaya namah."
- 2) "Om! Khetakaya namah."
- 3) "Om! Ghantaya namah."
- 4) "Om! Darpanaya namaha."
- 5) "Om! Tarajanayai namha."
- 6) "Om! Dhanushe namah."
- 7) "Om! Dhwajaya namah."
- 8) "Om! Damarukaya namah."
- 9) "Om! Pashaya namah."
- 10) "Om! Dakshina-Hastaya namah."
- 11) "Om! Shaktaye namah."
- 12) "Om! Mudgaraya namah."
- 13) "Om! Shulaya namah."
- 14) "Om! Khadgaya namah."
- 15) "Om! Vajraya namah."
- 16) "Om! Angkushaya namah."
- 17) "Om! Shankhaya namah."
- 18) "Om! Chakraya namah."
- 19) "Om! Sharaya namah."
- 20) "Om! Sarvebhyo Devyastrevyo namaha."

Finally:

- 21) "Om! Yani yaniha mukhani prasiddhani ayudhani cha."

"Whichever main, renowned weapons be, destroyer of the adverseries, famous in the three universes, all those I worship especially on this 8th puja day. Let all these protect me everyday, and bestow all accomplishments. *Om!* I also worship the crown and other ornaments of the Devi."

"Om! Vajra-Nakha-Dangshtrayudhaya Maha-Singhasanaya Hum! Phat! Swaha! Singhasanaya namaha."

Then making an eight petalled lotus with sandal-paste, beginning with the east petal, Rudra-Chanda, Prachanda, Chandogra, Chanda-Niyaka, and in the middle, Ugra-Chanda should be worshipped with all five offerings.

After that the goat sacrifice should be offered as before. Next, making a triangle *Mandala* in the south-east direction, offerings of different edibles should be offered with:

"Om! Tonight, Loka-Palas, the Nine Planets, Constillations, Asuras, Gandharva's, Yaksha, Rakhasa, Vidyadhara, Pannaga, elephant's, animals, Bhoot, Pishacha, meat-eating demons, Yogini's, Dakini's, are offered these edibles."

Then *Bhoot-Bali* should be performed with:

"Om! Jackals, kangkal's, vetal's, putana's, foxes, be all propiciated by these offerings."

Finally, after *arti*, feeding of maidens, women with living husbands, and *brahmins* etc., should be done with festivities as before.

19. PUJA: 9th DAY: TRISHULINI PUJA

After *sankalpa* for this *puja*, on well cleansed earth, a trident of wood etc, should be made to stand and washed with water first and then with a mixture of milk, yogart, honey, *ghee* and sugar. Then again it should be washed with water. Next Durga should be invoked in it with the usual *avahana*, and *puja* with bathing water, *achamana*, *kum-kum*, *agaru*, camphor, sandal-paste, *sindur*, *akashata*, flowers, garland, *dhup*, *deepa*, *naivedya*, *achamana*, beetel nuts, dress, *putta-sutra* (dress-tying threads), white flower offering etc. should be done with the ending: "*Om! Chandikayai namaha.*"

Then, decorated with golden, bejewelled ornaments, the trident should be placed on a carrier or horse and, accompanied with procession of fanning *chamars* (a fan maid of the furry tail of a particular mountain animal-yak), various musical instruments playing, covered with *chhatra* (umbrella), it should be taken in front of the Durga image and established there.

There it should be again worshipped as before and several *stotras* in praise of Durga should be recited.

After that, as in the *puja* of the 8th day, all *devatas* like Durga etc., Nava-Patrika, Remant etc., should be worshipped.

Then, making an 8 petaled lotus of red-sandal-paste (*rakta chandan*), Chandaika should be worshipped in the middle of it. On its eight petals, starting with the eastern, respectively, Brahmani, Maheshwari, Kaumari, Vaishnavi, Barahi, Narasinghi, Aindri, Siva-Duti, should be worshipped, and in the middle Chamnda should be invoked and worshipped.

Finally, as before, feeding of maidens, *havana* and goat sacrifice should be performed.

If within means, *Mahish* (buffalo) sacrifice may be made.

20. PROCESS OF MAHISH-BALI

Going to the sacrificial alter, *Prithavi* (earth) should be invoked with, "I invoke the Goddess who holds all beings and is filled with good qualities, bestows all wishes, is the consort of Vishnu, is the means of progress, attainments, and is worshipped everywhere, which bears all agriculture products and is the source of all fragrance, who is the base of all creation. Oh Vasundhara adorned with blossoming lotuses! Please come to us."

With *Dhyana*-flowers:

"I invoke the Vagundhara, seated on a lotus throne, having beautiful crescent moon on the forehead, whose beautiful body has the colour of fresh grass shoots, who is messaging the sides of Daityari (Vishnu, in his service as a consort), and who is bestower of boons. In the war of Mahishasur, and all the Devata's, Oh *Prithavi*!, you were trampled and shaken. Now at the sacrifice of this *Mahisha* (buffalo), attain your contentment. At that time, you suffered the lashes of the hooves of *Mahisha*. Today, with the blood of this *Mahisha*, get peace of mind. I offer this *Dhayan-Pushpa*, Oh *Pritivi*! and bow to Thee."

Then worship with the five offerings. After that with, "*Om!* To one who stays in Hema-Kuta, mountains and is the slayer of animal-bondages, who is supreme to all supremes, the greatest of all Divinities and epitome of *Hung-Kara*. *Om! Hraha! Astraya Phut!*" With this peruse the entire body of the buffalo.

With, "*Om!* Between columns as high as the skies, tie, tie this buffalo, *Om! Phut! Swaha!*" The buffalo should be secured to a column.

Invoking Nava-Durga in a pot filled with water coloured with turmeric power, she should be worshipped with all the five offerings, in this order:

- 1) "*Om! Kaumaryai namaha.*"
- 2) "*Om! Vaishnavyai namaha.*"
- 3) "*Om! Brahmanyai namaha.*"
- 4) "*Om! Maheshwaryai namaha.*"
- 5) "*Om! Chamundayai namaha.*"
- 6) "*Om! Varahiyai namaha.*"
- 7) "*Om! Indranyai namaha.*"
- 8) "*Om! Ambikayai namaha.*"
- 9) "*Om! Kling!* The remover of all sins of all the universes! The Brahma-source incarnate! The supreme power! One of Supreme Beauty! *namaha.*"

With the same water, the buffalo should be bathed. Then with the ending, "*Om! Mahishaya namaha,*" the buffalo should be worshipped by the five offerings.

With, "*Om! Aing-aing, hring-hring, shreeng, shreeng, hung, hung!* I cleanse this buffalo for the incarnation of the one who resides in the realm of Varuna (the god of oceans),

the Chandika who has the appearance of a buffalo. *Swaha!*" the buffalo should be cleansed.

Then the buffalo should be offered a garment with the usual *yuvasuvasa mantra*, and between the horns, *sindur*, *alta*, and *pata-sutra* (a decorative thread), should be offered.

Holding a red garland, it should be put on the neck of the buffalo with: "*Om!* In the battle of Mahishasura, you fought a bitter battle, taking forms at will. Hence, let Chandika be propiciated by your sacrifice. *Om!* Oh fortunate *Mahisha!* You are known to be the vehicle of *Dharma*. By your very nature, then, you should bestow pleasure, food, wealth, and *dhrama* on us. Since you hate sin and are the carrier of Chandika, so you should vanquish our enemies and bestow good fortune on us, Oh Lulayak! Oh! Carrier of Yama! You are indestructible. You can take all forms at will. Oh Kasara! I bow to you. Bestow long life, wealth and fame to us. Discarding this form (of the Buffalo), take the form of Gandarva. On your forehead resides Siva, in your horns resides the lover of Parvati, and you have been blessed with the affection of Durga for a hundred years for sure." Then after bowing to the buffalo, in its different body parts, *Anga-Devata* should be worshipped as follows:

On the top of the head (*Brahma-Randhra*), "*Om! Brahamane namaha.*" On the nose, "*Om! Daminyai namaha.*"

On the ears, "*Om! Akashaya namaha.*"

On the Tongue, "*Om! Sarva-Mukhaya namaha.*"

On the eyes, "*Om! Jyotirbhyang namaha.*"

On the mouth, "*Om! Vishnave namaha.*"

On the forehead, "*Om! Chandramse namaha.*"

On the right cheek, "*Om! Shakraya namaha.*"

On the left cheek, "*Om! Vahni-Hridayaya namaha.*"

On the throat, "*Om! Soma-Vartine namaha.*"

On the front of the hair, "*Om! Nairitaya namaha.*"

On the middle of the eye brows, "*Om! Prachatase namaha.*"

On the root of the nose, "*Om! Shwasanaya namaha.*"

On the shoulders, "*Om! Dhaneshwaraya namaha.*"

In the heart, "*Om! Sarpa-Rajaya namaha.*"

Then the tying cloumn should be worshipped with all the five offerings, and then the flower offering be made with, "*Om! Oh coloum! you are the symbol of Stthanu (Siva). You were formely created by Bhrama. Therefore, I worship Thee today and tie this animal to Thee. At your root, resides Brahma. In your midrift, is Vishnu. In the top, is Rudra (Siva) himself. You be immovable. As immovable are the *Meru* and Himalaya mountains, and the other mountains, so be Thou. All the *Deva's*, *Yaksha's*, *Gandharva's*, serpants, *Rakshasa's* seek to be near you. So you be immovable.*"

Then the tying rope (*Pasha*) should be worshipped with all five offerings with the ending, "*Om! Pashaya namaha,*" and it should be bowed to with, "*Om! Oh Pasha!* You were created by Varuna and are always devoted to Him. Therefore, I worship you today. Bestow peace on us. You are the Witness-God. You are the vanquisher of all enemies. You are respected by all beings. Bestow *Pasha-Siddhi* on us."

Then with *kusha*, *til* and water: "I offer this *Mahisha* to Yama for our prosperity, progeny etc., and to propiciate the Goddess Durga along with all her families and retinues."

With flower offering, "*Om!* Through performance of *puja* and *havan*, you were born in the family of *Asura*'s. May the Devi be propiciated by your meat and blood. Vanquish my enemies. Fullfill our desires. Bestow progress on us. Allay, allay our sufferings, all sins and evil-mindedness. May your sacrifice with reverance in this worship, make us attain sucess in all *yagya* and *vrata*."

Then in the ear of the buffalo, say, "I may be aware of this animal-bondage; may wisdom lead in our worldly pursuits. Oh *Mahisha*! So guide us. *Om! Hring! Shring!* This *Bali* in the form of all the Brahmanda, please accept, *Swaha!*" Thus mentally offereing the *Bali* to Devi, the *khadga* should be worshipped as in the Goat sacrifice.

Then touching the *khadga* to the throat of the buffalo, read, "*Om! Aing-Shring!* Offer the supreme liberation to this *Mahish*; accept, accept this! *Swaha!*"

The rest should be done as in the goat sacrifice.

21. HAVAN, PROCESS

The *kunda* (bit of offering) should be surrounded on all four sides with *kusha*, and it should be purified with cow-dung. In a bronz pot, amber should be placed, and worshipped with all five offerings, and prayer be offered as, "*Om!* Oh Jagat-Dhatri! Oh

Mahamaya! Slayer of all enemies! Oh Mother! Oh Maheshwari! Accept our *Havan* offerings."

Then with *samidha* (dry twigs with *ghee*, etc.), offerings in the fire should be made with these three *mantras*:

- 1) "Om! *Bhuh swaha; Idam bhuh.*"
- 2) "Om! *Bhuvah swaha; Idam bhuvah.*"
- 3) "Om! *Shwah swaha; Idam Swah.*"

With *ghee*, honey, milk, and soaked *til*:

- 1) "Om! *Durga, Durga! Rakshini, Rakshini! Swaha.*"
- 2) "Om! *Hring! Daksha-Yagya-vinashinyai, Maha-Ghorayai, Yogini-Koti-Parivritayai, Hring! Bhadra-Kalyai namaha, swaha.*"
- 3) "Om! *Ambe, Ambike, Ambalika. Namanayati kushchanah, sasastyaha swakah, subhadrikam, kampeela Vasineem.*"
- 4) "Om! *Jayanti Mangala Kali. Bhadra Kali Kapalini. Durga Kshama Shiva Dhatri. Swadha swaha namstu te.*"

Or, one should do 108 offerings with, "Om! *Aing Hring-Cling! Chamundai vichai.*"

Then *purna-huti* (final offerings) should be made with the usual *mantra* having the ending as in 1) above.

Finally, with *trayayusha mantra*, the *bhasma* (ashes) should be dotted on the forehead, neck, shoulders and chest

21. EVENING PUJA: 9th DAY

After the usual *puja*, *stutis* of Durga (songs of praise) should be recited and *arti*, *bhajan*, dance and festivities should proceed.

22. PUJA: 10th DAY

No *bali* is offered on this day. After bowing to the Image with different *stotras* like *Jayanti-Mangala* etc. and taking out the *Jayanti* shoots (planted on the 1st day) from its tray, the following prayer should be offered: "*Om!* Oh slayer of *Mahisha!* Oh *Mahamaya!* Oh *Chamunda!* Oh *Munda-Malini!* Oh *Devi!* I bow to Thee. Bestow on us wealth, freedom from ailments, victory, good appearance, good fortune, dharma, prosperity and fulfillment of all desires."

After offering *kum-kum* etc., and reciting *Sarva-Mangalya* and other *stotras*, one should beseech pardon for short-comings as follows: "*Om!* Oh *Maheshwari!* Whatever we have offered in worship, eventhough falling short in proper proceedings, in proper enacting, and in proper reverence, may we yet bear desirable fruits by your grace. Even the divinities like *Brahma* etc. cannot perform your *puja* to perfection. Then what can I, being a mere mortal with little brain-power, do in this respect. I do not

know your form, nor your body, nor all your attributes. There is only one thing I am aware of and that is my reverence to your lotus-like feet. In deference to that reverence of mine, kindly accept these offerings of mine in the *sharat* season's *puja*, and go to your own place as you may please, bestowing on us lots of favours."

Then one flower should be offered in the north-east direction with: "*Om!* I bow to Chandeshwari. I bow to Nirmalya-Vasini."

Then holding the two feet of the Image and bowing, "*Om!* Kali, Kali, Maha-Kali! Kalika! Destroyer of all sins! Kali-Karali! Nishkranta-Kalika! Accept my prostrations. Oh! Rider of lion! Oh Chamunde! Oh Beloved of the carrier of the bow called Pinaka! Accept our offerings and be pleased on us, Oh Queen of all Divinities! On Devi Chamunda! Rise after accepting our auspicious offerings. Protect our welfare, along with your 8 *Shakti*'s! Proceed to your supreme abode, Oh Devi Chandika! May our *puja* be fulfilled. Go after bestowing wealth, welfare, victory, destruction of our enemies, and come back to us again. Proceed to the water of the river, yet stay in our home in spirit. Assuredely, come again next year (for our *puja*). *Om!* May all the *deva*'s go to their respective abodes, after bestowing desired blessings on us. Oh Parameshani! You go as you please along with your retinues. *Om! Hring!* Oh Druga Devi! You have been worshipped by us, along with your weapons, followers and retainers. Be pleased, forgive our short-comings, and go to your abode."

Then *Bisarjana* (farewell) should be done to all the rest of the worshipped divinities.

Afterwards, the Image should be lifted with, "*Om! Hring! Chamunde! Chal-Chal, Chalaya-Chalaya! Hung-Phut-Swaha!*"

Then, accompanied with music, dance and festivities, the Image should be brought to the river and with, "*Om! Durga! Durga! Mother of the Worlds! Having been worshipped, proceed to your destination. Come back to us again after one year. Taking with you our offering in this *puja*, offered to the best of our capacity, please proceed to your supreme abode, after bestowing all protections to us.*"

The Image should be immersed. Likewise, the images of the rest of the gods and goddesses should also be immersed.

Then coming back to the *puja* place, *Dakshina* is to be offered to *brahmins* and *shanti kalash* water should be sprinkled around with the relevant *mantras*.

23. APARAJITI, PUJA PROCESS

After *sankalpa* to do this *puja*, in a flat tray, an 8 patelled lotus should be made with sandal-paste. On it, an *aparajita* (a kind of flower-creeper) branch should be placed along with grass shoots, and tumeric roots. In the middle of the lotus, *aparajita* should be invoked. Then flower offerings should be made with, "*Om! Having four arms, yellow garments, decorated with all kinds of ornaments, having a fair complexion of pure quartz, soothing like *crores* of moons, with hands in the posture of bestowing freedom from fear and of bestowing all blessings, covered with decorative, yellow*

coloured clothes, possessing many decorative paraphernalias, surrounded by frolicking skylarks, to such an Aparijita-Devi! I bow and offer these *dhyana* flowers."

Then she should be worshipped with all the five offerings. After that the following should be similarly worshipped with the ending:

- 1) Kriya, "*Om! Kriyayai namaha.*"
- 2) Uma, "*Om! Umayai namaha.*"
- 3) Jaya, "*Om! Jayayai namaha.*"
- 4) Vijaya, "*Om! Vijayayai namaha.*"

Then the *aparijita* branch should be invoked as follows: "*Om! Oh Aparajita!* You are renowned as the best of creepers and bestower of all the *Kama* and *Artha*. Therefore, I wear you on myself. Oh Devi Aparajita! Be the source of all prosperity to me. By worshipping you, may I be favored with all greatness and may all my sins be washed away."

Then it should be wrapped on the right hand, with, "*Om! Oh Devi! Bestower of victory! Bestower of blessings! On this 10th puja day, I am wearing you on myself. I am putting you on my right and for continuous victory in my prusuits in life.*"

Then, as family rituals may require, the different weaponies may be worshipped.

Finally, holding a sword in hand, *Pradakshina* should be done and bowing to the goddess, the following should be recited, "*Om! Oh Maha-Devi! This puja has been offered to the best of our ability. Accept this and go to your supream abode at will, bestowing upon us all kinds of protection.*"

(The above text is from Varsha Kritya, by Pundit Ramachandra Jha,
Chaukhambha Vidya Bhawan, Varnasi, India, 1982. Translation by Dr. Indranand
Sinha)

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