In India, the Great Goddess has many names. She also has many shapes. “When she reveals herself, it is then said that she is born” (MP. 81.48). In essence she is immortal, in appearance feminine. She reveals herself in creation, in the manifest cosmos. Or, she has created it. She acts differently from any woman and any god. She is the Great Goddess in any of the forms which she assumes. They are her symbols and, as such, polyvalent.

Some of the myths of the goddess will be recounted here; step by step they are part of the structure in which her living image has its being.

In three of her figures the goddess confronts us moving, acting at great and decisive speed. The one rushes into existence out of the creator, out of the source itself, to return and be taken back again by the gods. Her name is Saranyu, she who runs. No description is given of her, no evocation of how she looked. She is what she does, pristine goddess, no embodiment, a power unallayed driving herself into situations which she creates. We are free to think of her to lend her human shape—that of a young woman—which she does not retain or which she changes in the course of her story as first told in the Rg-Veda and rendered differently subsequently.

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Her second figure, impetuous and undaunted, has the shape of a bitch. Her name is Saramā. Although not definitely proved, her name seems to derive from sar, to speed, the same root to which Saranyū owes her name. Her story is told in the Rg-Veda. Subsequently she is known as the mother of all dogs. While the myths of Saranyū and Saramā had attained their full meaning in the Rg-Veda, the third figure of the speeding goddess is that of Sarasvatī who is known as a river in heaven and on earth, flowing from Veda, into Purāṇas and present-day realization, even though on earth the river Sarasvatī has lost its power, has disappeared into the ground in the Panjab. Although the name Sarasvatī may or may not derive from sar, the three goddesses Saranyū, Saramā and Sarasvatī have speed in common, all are swift in their actions, vehement in their power.

SARANYŪ
Saranyū is the daughter of Tvaśtr, the god who fashioned the cosmos and all living beings (RV. 10.17.1). She had a brother Viśvarūpa, probably her twin, who, as his name says, had all forms. He had three heads (RV. 10.99.6), which would have destined him to rule over the three realms of the cosmos, heaven, mid-air, and earth. But perfect and complete as he was as form, he kept all the power to himself; he did not communicate, neither did he propagate. This was monstrous, for by keeping all his endowments, all his potentialities and wealth (“the cows”), cooped up, he deprived the cosmos of sustenance (RV 10.8.8–9). In the perfectness of his form he was felled by Indra, the new creator god, who was to open up all hidden treasures so that the world could share and enjoy them. Indra threw back into chaos the triple head of Viśvarūpa, the perfection of form itself (see RV. 10.8.9).

Saranyū, the sister of Viśvarūpa, was of a different nature. She rushed out from the father into creation. She hurried out into creation and got married (RV. 10.17.1). The wedding was announced by Tvaśtr. The time was the dawn of creation, and all the world came together on this occasion. She was married to Vivasvat, the Radiant. He is luminous and illumined, he is the creative Fire of the mind, the archetypal poet; through his messenger he brought the fire to man. Vivasvat’s brilliance comes from heaven and shines on earth. He is immortal by nature when he acts as priest on earth.

Marrying him, Saranyū has rushed into the light of creation as
it shines in heaven and earth. Her firstborn were twins. This runs in her family. She herself most probably was a twin. Her twin brother, though, was unlike her. As twins, fathered by Tvaṣṭṛ, the Shaper of all things, they represent two possibilities come into existence. The one is form in its perfection, a completely finished form, an end in itself, without future, and thus condemned. The only place for this finished form is a return to chaos. That was the destiny of Viśvarūpa, her brother.

Saranyū rushed into the light of creation which expands from heaven to earth and here her twins were born (RV. 10.10.10–12, 10.17.1). They were Yama and Yamī, were male and female and, as their names imply, each in turn was a twin in itself, was of twofold nature. This they had inherited from Vivasvat, immortal by nature if acting as priest on earth.

Yama, born here on earth, knew the possibilities within him. He was in creation, into which his mother had rushed. He knew he had to choose when acting: To stay in creation, to remain here, meant to propagate as creatures do. His sister tempted him, offered herself to him. He refused—and chose to die. He became the first mortal, and by his death he, the god, left the world of mortality and left his dear body behind in it as a token. “For [the sake of] the gods Yama chose death” (RV. 10.13.4)—and found for men the way beyond. There Yama the immortal drinks with the gods, in the furthest recess, under the well-leafed tree (RV. 10.135.1; 10.14.8).

Yami’s passion for Yama, the immortal, remained unfulfilled. Mankind did not spring from him who had brought death into the world and had returned to the gods. By his decision to become mortal he redeemed his immortal nature and showed mortal man the way to his kingdom. He opened the gate leading out of existence, the way back to the source.

But Yami’s passion was for Yama the mortal. She did not embrace him in his other nature, that of the creative fire. Yama is Fire (Agni), a fire that consumes and cannot be consumed. He is the fire of Death and the fire of Love. They burn at the gates of life, at the entry into life and the exit. Yama remains the immortal god. Of Yami little is heard but that woe seized her when the passion of her body had found no response. Yama and Yamī did not become the parents of the human race. The fires of Yama keep burning at the gates of life.

While all this happened Saranyū had become pregnant again. This time once more she carried twins. But now the gods removed
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Sarañyū from Vivasvat. They hid her, and she ascended back to the source whence she had come. On her way she gave birth to the Aśvins. One was born on earth, the other in heaven, both radiant, the Saviors-to-be of mankind that was to come into existence. Mankind was fathered by Vivasvat though not with Sarañyū. The gods had substituted a likeness, “Savarnā,” for his wife. He took her to be Sarañyū. She bore him a son, Manu, the father of man (RV.10.17.2).

The dawn of creation opens up with failure, deception, rejection, and withdrawal. Of the twin children of Tvaṣṭr, the fashioner of all created things, the son Viśvarūpa, in the perfection of his form, was a dead end. His decapitated triple head was thrown back into chaos by Indra, a younger creator god. Sarañyū, the twin sister of Viśvarūpa had rushed forth from the father into the light of creation. Truly, the whole of creation comes together at her wedding to Vivasvat, the radiance of heaven and of inspiration, here on earth. Her children are twins, male and female, but twins they are twice over, each in his own nature which is immortal and mortal. In Yama the immortal prevails, in Yamī the mortal. Yamī cannot fulfill her mortal passion (RV. 10.10.12–14). In Yamī the impetuosity of Sarañyū has run into flesh and blood. There is no release for her, but woe. Yama dies, leaves the dead body on earth, and ascends into the green golden radiance of the tree which grows in the furthest recess of heaven. Sarañyū lives through the agony of Yamī and the choice of Yama. She has to see that suffering are the wages of passion and death the price for immortality. But this was more than the gods would let a goddess bear. They removed Sarañyū from Vivasvat, her husband—she was pregnant once more—hid her from the mortals, and took her back to heaven. On the way she gave birth to twins, both male and free from conflict, one born here on earth the other in heaven (RV. 1.181.4). Thus the twin Healers of the ills of mankind-to-be came into existence. This is how Sarañyū returned from her rush into the radiance of creation and her descent to earth. She had given birth to death and passion and with them to the faculty of choosing and to the knowledge of release. Over and above, she bore the Healers, the Aśvins, to assuage the ills in creation. And then, having been taken back to the gods this impetuous goddess of knowledge and compassion was heard of no more.

In the myth of Sarañyū, the dual hems in her path and determines her fate though not her nature. She is the twin sister of Viśvarūpa; her husband embodies radiance on earth and in heaven,
and she gives birth to twins twice over. The first twins are male and female though each in its nature is a twin, both mortal and immortal. The second twins are free from the duality of sex; they are distinct by their birthplaces, namely, heaven and earth. Through all these dualities, headstrong Saranyū goes her straight way until, no longer by her own will but that of the gods, the celestial intelligence, she is made to reverse her direction that had led her from her source in heaven down to earth. Her ascension to heaven is a return, a homecoming from the world of pain, death, and dichotomy which she had brought about.

If Viśvarūpa, her twin brother, was finished in his perfection which he kept to himself, unsharing, incommunicative, fit only to be thrown into the chaos of indistinction, Saranyū, speeding away from the source, giving herself to Vivasvat, is also removed from the cosmos by the gods who decree her ascension. Moreover, they fill her place with another—a likeness—and it is from this substitute that the human race was to spring. Saranyū herself is beyond duality; she is untamed creative will, creating life in its heyday with its problems, ills, and balm. In her rush into creation and in her ascension she brought about the pattern of life. In her rush into creation she became the mother of death. In her ascension she gave birth to the Saviors. She leaves the dual world in a dual integrity. She left behind what she had created. The compassionate gods filled the void left by having taken her back, by placing a likeness in her place. This substitute acted out Saranyū’s role on earth. The likeness became the mother of mankind. The gods could afford to act with compassionate irony.

Yama left his body on earth, left his earthly remains: he left death on earth. Of his mother, whom the gods had taken back, nothing remained on earth. The gods filled the void with her likeness. They replaced her by a deception, not noticed by Vivasvat her husband nor by mankind who descended from her, but known to the poet-seers.

Saranyū having rushed into creation set up the pattern for man’s life on earth. Single minded and headstrong, the goddess in her creative will was drawn into the current of her own doing. She was saved by the gods in her ascension. At that moment she bore the Saviors of the world, the Aśvins, They were to heal the calamities of the world to which the progeny of her substitute would fall victims. In this creative foresight, Saranyū, the goddess, protects the progeny of Vivasvat, the husband whom she left on earth in the embrace of her likeness.
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The duality created without her will by the goddess who herself is the will to creation is a bequest of this goddess to mankind, which she brought about but which was not born from her.

Saramā

As swift as Saranyū, the daughter of Tvaśṭr and wife of Vivasvat, is Saramā (RV. 10.108). It is not said whose child she was. She did have children of her own, the Sarameyas, two dogs of varied color; mythically she was a bitch, the bitch of the gods (Nirukta 11.25). The Rg-Veda speaks of her as the messenger of Indra. Different from that of Saranyū, her progeny does not act out her role (RV. 10.14.10–12). While they take part in her nature their role is subordinate to her adventurous, imperious self. She is a bitch and acts for Indra, the new—in comparison with Tvaśṭr—creator god. She carries out a mission. Daring in her purpose, she achieves her end. The time of her exploit is later in the cosmic day—or night. The Paṇis, who were demons, robbers, and hoarders, had stolen “the cows” and other treasures (the Light) of the Aṅgirases, the primeval fire priests and seers, and hidden them in a mountain cave deep down and far away on the other side of the Rasā. Saramā finds the track of the robbers; she discovers the cave where the Paṇis guard the stolen treasures, the horses and cows. The Paṇis ask her how it was possible for her to cross the waters of the Rasā: “Which was the decisive point?” (paritakmyā; RV. 10.108.1). Saramā replies that she came as Indra’s messenger (dūṭi); in fact she came as his forerunner. She tells the Paṇis that the Rasā, afraid Saramā would leap over her current, helped her across as she was flying over the ends of the sky (RV. 10.108.5). So she came, driven forward by celestial power on an otherwise insuperable way, to the stronghold of treasures at the bottom of the rock. She refuses the offer of the Paṇis to stay with them and to become their sister; her only concern is that the cows should leave their rocky confinement by the right way (ṛtena), according to the order in the universe.

Not in every version of the myth does Saramā act as detachedly. Although she persists in rejecting the offer of the demons to stay with them—at the further bank of the Rasā—and of becoming their sister, the Bhod Devatā (8.24–35) tells of her weakness for the milk of the hidden cows. She greedily drinks the milk which the demons serve her. Her strength stimulated, she returns and again crosses the Rasā. On her return Indra asks whether she had seen the cows. Under the influence of the milk served by the demons...
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she replied "no" to Indra. Enraged, Indra struck her with his foot. She then threw up the milk and trembling with fear she went back to the Paṇis. Indra in his chariot followed her steps by the track of the spilled milk.

This additional account not only throws light on the weaknesses of Saramā, but it also clarifies the significance and timing of her exploit. Her great feat is the crossing of the formidable Rasā. This great river flowing around the heavenly sphere (ṚV. 9.41.6), as told elsewhere (*Jaim. Br.* 2.440), helped her to cross the Rasā in a ford at the ends of the sky in order to reach the cave of stolen treasures guarded by the demon robbers, far away on the other bank of the Rasā. The first question put to Saramā by the demons was on what critical point she had crossed the Rasā. We know she followed the path of cosmic order (ṛta: see *ṚV.* 10.108.11; 1.72.8; *pathyā ṛtasya* 3.31.5). But let us make sure what the Rasā is. This formidable river describes a great circle on the celestial sphere. It is the apparent annual path of the sun; on it shine the twenty-seven constellations or *ṇakṣatras*, which are traversed by the moon in its monthly course. The course of the sun and of the moon is flanked by the circle of the zodiac, which revolves on its axis once in a day. The planets revolve around the sun; they move along the ecliptic each in its own orbit or period of revolution around its own axis. This mighty stream of visible time, the ecliptic with its currents and eddies, was traversed by the daring Saramā at the critical moment of her venture. She crossed it by the path of Ṛta, that is according to the order of the cosmos.

We know the road that she had taken. She left her mark on it when, having rushed back to Indra full of the milk served to her by the Paṇis, there was an incident. She had indeed not seen the cows; she had found them, heard them bellow (*ṚV.* 3.31.6), and the Paṇis brought her some milk at her request. Anyhow Indra, getting a no in reply to his question whether she had seen the cows, kicked her in anger. Meaning to run back to the Paṇis and show Indra the way, she threw up the milk and it marked her path which Indra followed. Saramā’s path to the Paṇis is seen to this day. It is the Milky way, the galaxy.

In the sky "the galaxy was and remains the belt connecting North and South, above and below. But in the Golden Age [the Kṛta Yuga], when the vernal equinox was in Gemini, the autumnal equinox in Sagittarius, the Milky way had represented a visible equinoctial colure, a rather blurred one, to be true, but the celestial North and South were connected by this uninterrupted broad
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arch which intersected the ecliptic at its crossroads with the equator. The three great axes were united, the galactic avenue embracing the three worlds”¹ of gods, men and the demons in their cave down below, far away, on the further bank of the Rasā.

The milky way—the celestial Gangā of later days—does not appear to have any name of its own among the heavenly rivers of the Rg-Veda, the “seven sisters,” who have one lap in common where they received the one germ, Agni, the Fire (RV. 3.1.6). The Fire born in the flood of the celestial waters whose course is in heaven shines forth in the stars of mighty rivers of which the Ecliptic is the most awesome. “Out of the celestial flood the year [saṃvatsara] was born” sings a hymn (10.190.2) of the Rg-Veda. The year is the measure of time. The stars manifest its movement. A cosmogonic hymn sings of the birth of time from the celestial ocean which came out of cosmic Night; and Night out of Rātā or cosmic order and of Reality which arose out of the primordial heated effort (tapas) (10.190.1–2). The lights of the moving night sky, the flood of heaven, glow with the primordial effort of creation. Saramā speeds along by the way of Rātā and reaches the most awesome current at the moment when it allows itself to be crossed by the broad arch of the milky way at the time of the autumnal equinox. Then Saramā proceeds on the other bank of the Rasā down to the cave of the Panis, where she finds the cows and horses and all the treasure which will be the nourishment of her progeny (RV. 1.62.3); nourishment on which mankind also lives to this day (RV. 1.72.8). Saramā crossed the Rasā on the path of cosmic order when the autumnal equinox was in Sagittarius. The “cows and horses,” the Light, no doubt will be led out of the cave and will cross the Rasā when the vernal equinox will be in Gemini and all the light of dawn and sun will shine in a new spring of the world.

The time is the golden age, the Kṛta Yuga, which astronomically would be approximately 4500–4000 B.C.²

Saramā, the celestial bitch, the First Lady in Indian mytho-cosmic history had two sons, the Sarameyas. They are the messengers of Yama, King of the Dead. They guard the path to him and

² According to a drawing in R. Eisler, The Royal Art of Astrology (London, 1946), p. 90. The celestial North and South Poles were about six degrees away from the galactic equator in about 4330 B.C. I owe this calculation to Professor W. Blitzstein, director of the observatories, Department of Astronomy, University of Pennsylvania.
to the Fathers feasting in the furthest beyond; they also walk among men where they steal life (RV. 10.14.10–12). They are four-eyed uncanny dogs and have been thought to be sun and moon that take away the life of men. In the Purāṇas, the Saras- meyas have multiplied: they number 720. One of the twenty-eight hells where they live is called after them, Sarameya-dāna (Bhāgavata P. 5.26.7, 27). The number 720 is significant; 360 nycthemerons are a year, 360 nights watched by the moon dog, 360 days by the sun dog. As the time aspects of sun and moon, the two dogs give away their planetary origin, being the sons of Saramā, who traveled, marked—and maybe is herself—the milky way.

The milky way in post-Vedic times is called “Ākāśa Gaṅgā.”

The descent of this celestial river to earth and the hitherworld is told in the Rāmāyaṇa and, in a different though less revealing myth, in the Mahābhārata. The myth here and in the Purāṇas establishes the correlation of the sweet waters of heaven and those here on earth. The heroic exploit of the bitch of heaven belongs to the past.

Gaṅgā of the Purāṇic myth is one of the mothers of Kārttikeya, who was nursed by the Kṛttikās, the Pleiades. Many goddesses offered themselves and were accepted by him as his mothers. It is exceptional that a god should have so many mothers (see p. 262). Saramā was one of them. By that time she was considered a demoness and her authentic progeny, the Sarameyas had gone to hell. Another world age was beginning.

Saramā, the bitch of heaven, is not a creative power at the beginning of things. The world already existed when she arrived on its scene to set things right. Evil already had come into existence and exerted its power, having robbed the Light of heaven and of the Aṅgirases, the priests. The light and the dawns, these shining cows and horses of heaven, they kept to themselves, locked up in a dark fastness. Not that they were of much use to them. They had to be liberated so that the world could go on. With this intention, Saramā, relying on her keen sense of hearing, carried out a mission before Indra himself could fulfill the task by which he was to establish himself as the creator of a new age of the gods.

In this cosmic situation Saramā insisted on acting according to the law of the cosmos, Rta. She knew that only by so doing could she find the treasure of the Aṅgirases; only by coming out of the cave prison by the right way could this treasure be restored.

Saramā threw herself into her task, racing, flying across the dark night sky, but encountered a formidable obstacle—a gigantic
turbulent river, the Rasa, the ecliptic, the river of time. Undaunted she crossed it at the critical moment in which by the miracle of cosmic order, a ford had been provided for her by the Rasa. The venture of Saramā was properly timed.

Saramā, the heavenly bitch, is a saviorress. She restored the Light to the world, having shown Indra its hiding place and also the way to it. Being a cosmic canine, Saramā relied on her sense of hearing rather than that of smell when she approached the cave of the Pānis. She heard the bellowing of the cows, the vibrations of their light rays, and knew that she had found the Light. There was no need for her to see the Light. However, being a female, Saramā attracted the attention and blandishments of the Pānis. They did not go very far. All that Saramā, exhausted from her journey, accepted was a drink of milk which the demons offered her.

This act of charity of the evil ones, the Pānis, together with the veracity of Saramā had mythical consequences. It caused enraged Indra to kick the bitch. Thus he became instrumental in bringing about the milky way when Saramā had to throw up the milk given to her by the Pānis.

Saramā acts deliberately. She follows Rta, the law of cosmic order; she acts out straight away not her own will, but her mission, along the arc of heaven. She found the hiding place of cosmic light, she had met the critical moment with confidence, for she had hit upon it according to the law of the heavens.

Saramā, the bitch, restores cosmic order and saves the world at the critical moment. Her actions are consonant with cosmic movement to which she is accurately timed. Savior of the world, obedient to the laws of heaven, her dual progeny the Sarameyas, dogs without any special name of their own, are sun and moon or day and night as they watch over the life of man, life of which in fact they deprive him. Not having the personality of their mother, these four-eyed dogs give effect to the negative necessities of this ordered-time world. They came into existence at the end of the golden age.

Rushing like a clear brook from its source, Saranyū had found her way on this earth in joy and woe and was taken back by the gods. By her ascension she redeemed death which she had brought into the world. She had not planned any of it, but she was driving herself headlong into the experience of life that she could not have known had she not left Tvaṣṭṛ, her father, maker of all things who giving shape to them had prefigured them. Saranyū rushed into
creation. She had no time to lose. It did not exist as yet; it came about as she went on from event to event. She traced the pattern of life which is interwoven with death, and she completed its design by drawing the line from here to there, from earth to heaven where her sons travel—the Aśvins, the celestial Healers. Saraṇyū brought about on earth the condition of mortals. When she was taken back by the gods she left her sons, the Healers to travel between heaven and earth.

Saramā's concern however is the reestablishment of cosmic order. It had been badly damaged. Its great Treasure, the Light of the sun, had been stolen by the Paṇis. Being canine and having very sharp hearing, she succeeded in finding the stolen cattle which the robbers were hiding in a dark, inaccessible mountain cave. The intrepid fleetness and sense of duty of this goddess, the bitch of Indra, accomplished a task which it would have been difficult for the creator god by himself to achieve. Nonetheless he did not treat her with consideration. However it was his ill-tempered cruelty that made Saramā mark for all time the way she had found to the Treasure. On the other hand, it was the sympathy of the river Rasā that helped her at the critical moment to pursue her path from heaven into the netherworld. The milk of the cows of Light, served to the bitch by the robber-demons and thrown up by Saramā as she raced in the darkness of the night across the sky, left its indelible trace in the stars of the milky way.

The critical moment when Saramā had crossed the Rasā is fixed in time, a significant astronomical moment that confirms the resolve of the far-hearing bitch to move along the path of cosmic order. While the myth of Saraṇyū accounts for man's lot, that of Saramā concerns the stars in their wondrous and calculable courses.

SARASVATĪ

The stars, light in motion, form mighty rivers in the ocean of heaven. The Rasā or ecliptic and the milky way which later myth calls the celestial Gaṅgā are the most impressive. Other rivers of heaven have names of those on earth, foremost among them Sarasvatī. She is one of seven sisters, or she has seven sisters (RV. 6.36.10), and their mother is the river Sindhu (RV. 7.36.6). The rivers of heaven shine with stars; their sacred number, which is seven, is that of the planets. Seven is the star number, the seven Rṣis of
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due to a constant constellation, the seven rivers are more fluid numerically and allow for an additional eighth, surpassing by one the seven, of greater importance even than the original group of seven. The eighth may be Sindhu, the mother of the seven, or Sarasvati herself, the mother of rivers and their sister. Inasmuch as these goddesses are known as rivers they are fecundating and maternal powers. Though not all of them have names and none of this group has a myth of her own, the power of Sarasvati, manifest in the cosmos as the daughter of lightning, that is as the voice of thunder, works on and within the mind of man. There her vehemence is felt.

Sarasvati, leader of the sisterhood of seven celestial rivers, extends through the three realms; she dwells in the wide celestial space, in mid air, and on earth (RV. 6.61.10). She is horrendous (RV. 6.61.7) in her vehemence. She broke open with her mighty waves the backs of the mountains where she had been imprisoned. Her impact knows no end; roaring, she moves on (RV. 6.61.8), this daughter of lightning, the voice of thunder (RV. 6.49.7). Of sparkling vitality, the mistress of heroes, she is invoked to bestow intuitive insight (dhiyan). It is she who rules over all intuition (RV. 1.3.12). Overwhelming in her elementary power, it is said that she comes in one chariot with the Fathers (RV. 10.17.9); she comes from the furthest beyond where the Fathers dwell with Yama under the evergreen tree, at the source.

Sarasvati, a flowing onrush of creative power, is a form of the great goddess. She pours out from the source, full fledged. She is the ineluctable impetus of creative intuition, awesome voice of thunder, the voice of Heaven. She is all movement, the vehement river of creative thought.

Sarasvati’s domain is man’s inner world. Her torrents rage, their impact overpowers; her waters well up from a transcendental secrecy, her waters agitate the mind, precipitate creative thought, and clarify its contents. This goddess has no story of her own, she started from beyond time and carries timelessness into each moment of creative thought.

Saranya, daughter of Tvaṣṭṛ, Deus Faber, the Fashioner of all things, rushed into creation at the dawn of the world. Sarama sped across the heavens of the created universe. Sarasvatī precipitates herself with the might of her waves into the creative consciousness of man. The divinity of these goddesses is in their movement. In this respect, Sarasvatī is close to Vāk, the Word, the goddess who is sacred speech.


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vāk

Vāk, the goddess, sings of herself (RV. 10.125.1–8; abbreviated):

I move with the Rudras, Vasus, Ādityas, with the All-Gods
I carry Mitra and Varuṇa, Indra and Agni, the two Aśvins,
I carry Soma, Tvaṣṭr,
I am the mistress who collects treasures—I assume many shapes.

These are the opening verses in which she introduces herself, moving with the host of gods in mighty strides while she carries the great gods. She is their supporting power and the mistress who rules over them. Thus she enters the stage of the world and reveals herself to whom she loves. Her song continues: “Whom I love... him only I make mighty—a seer, a sage. I string the bow for Rudra, I bring about strife amongst people. I give birth to the Father on top of this world, my origin is in the waters, in the ocean. Thence I take my stand in all the worlds and with the crown of my head I touch yonder heaven. I blow like the wind seizing all the worlds, further than heaven, further than earth.”

The Great Goddess has come, striding, carrying with her all the gods, and now she addresses herself to those who can hear her, declaring her love for them and them only. She has come to bring strife for the others, who are not chosen. She is the Word and the Will. She wills to string the bow of Rudra, and the arrow will kill the enemy of sacred speech. Exclusive, commanding and fierce, she is the power who smites deaf ears. By her attack she establishes her domain. Warrior and lover of whom she chooses, she withdraws on top of the world to give birth to the Father whom she conceived. While she proclaims this immaculate conception, she reveals her origin. It is in the luminous waters whose waves moving beyond the firmament are heard in the mind. Then she unfolds her sway over the world and touches yonder heaven with the crown of her head. Now she is the Great Goddess, exceeding axis of the cosmos, creator of the Father in Heaven, her own father, up on high. Wind is her breath, she sways the world in the gale of the spirit. “The heavenly oceans flowed from her and then the Word, the Aksara, the creative syllable” (RV. 1.164.42).

Striding and carrying with her the gods, she halts in her movement when she touches with the crown of her head the transcendentental heavens in the limitless flood, her own birthplace (yoni) where she gives birth to the Father, at the top of the World. Born with the gale of the spirit which is her breath, she stands and lets the heavenly ocean flow from her in sacred speech.

She is the movement of and in the waters of creation, mother of
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the godhead. She is the center of the vortex in which is her stillness, the transmundane axis sending forth, breathing forth waves of worded sound, vibrant in the Aksara, the creative syllable.

Vāk, the Great Goddess born in the flowing waters while she stands still giving birth to the Father on high, moves as she breathes in the gale of the spirit with the power of her will when she chooses those she loves and who hear her sing her own song. By her own will she makes fly Rudra’s arrow of destruction. It strikes fatally. Mermaid of the Ocean of Light, lover and warrior, she chooses seers and poets through whom she speaks. She is power itself, embodied movement of the light waves and mother who creates her own father. No god is named as her consort, she is the absolute mistress of creation.

The Great Goddess, in her form as Vāk, is not a cosmogonic goddess. But—being speech—she gives birth to the Father through whom the cosmos comes into existence.

Saranyū had rushed from the Father into creation of which he had preshaped all forms. They lay ready for actuality when she sped, according to her own momentum, from one to the other determining the place they were to have in the life of mankind. Young and ebullient she traversed the wealth of forms prefigured by her father and activated them. She gave them actuality coming to know them by experience. She made them into forms of experience.

Sarasvatī breaks full fledged out of the mountains of stone which imprisoned but could not hold her. With thunderous vehemence she drives forward with the Fathers, who dwell at the source, having shed their earthly body. With Yama they dwell in the remotest part of the beyond, gathered beneath the well-leafed tree of shed sufferings and unfading wisdom. Like Yama they had been mortal. The chariot on which they travel with Sarasvatī moves on full of her power and their weightless past. It lingers, a scent remembered around her awesome presence.

Vāk is mother of her father. She is the Voice, the Word, she named him. He is the shaper of all forms to be. Nameless they abide in limbo. They arise, when he is born from her. Bathed in the light of her maternal waters, they assume definition of their shapes by the sound of the waves of her flood as these break against them in rhythms that are articulate. The reciprocity of name and form is born together with the Father, the son of Vāk, “on the top of this world,” at the beginning of things. Thence, Vāk will assume the many shapes which speech can name, in heaven and on earth.
Her breath has seized them and their meaning can carry them “further than heaven, further than earth.”

Sarasvati, the daughter of lightning, the voice of thunder, manifests in the tremendousness of intuition. Vāk, born in the flowing waters of transmundane creation, moves in stately procession; she carries with her the gods, in her gait which is so steady that she seems to stand still touching heaven with the crown of her head when she gives birth to her father. The heavenly ocean of light flowed from her. All the worlds were in her breath. The wind carried their names.

**ADITI**

Another and comprehensive form of the Great Goddess is Aditi. She is comprehensive because, as her name reveals, she is Boundless. More even than that she is anything, she altogether is. In that boundless fullness she is the Mother. “In the highest heaven non-being and being are in the lap of Aditi” (*RV*. 10.5.7). Non-being and being, the abyss and life, lie side by side in her transcendent womb. Being unbounded, having no limits, who can discern them? When born, only Aditi knows their identity as she knows her own, for “Aditi is the sky, Aditi is the air, Aditi is the mother, the father, the son, all the gods, the five kinds of beings, Aditi is what is born and what will be born” (*RV*. 1.89.10). Now in the first age of the gods (*RV*. 10.72.3, 9) she does not look back, only the pregnant present counts. Being all mother, the boundless one exceeds sex and gender, she is spoken of as he when she is being addressed as father and as son. Having no limits she extends boundlessly beyond what is born and what will be born. Everything that is born is born from her, in this welter of birth giving there are no bounds; she herself is drawn into it for “Dakṣa is born of Aditi; Aditi of Dakṣa” (*RV*. 10.72.4). On whichever level Dakṣa’s identity is interpreted, it does not affect this reciprocal relation. She carries him, but only when he is born is she born of him as his mother. She comes into existence as mother by his birth only.

Aditi is the transcendent pregnant androgyne, all mother by virtue of her pregnancy and not of her femininity. Being the boundless one, she is mother, father, and son. Everything is born from her. Dakṣa is born of Aditi. Dakṣa means skill, the ability to do things—the sacrificial rites in particular. He carries out conceptions: what is conceived in Aditi becomes reality through Dakṣa. Reciprocally, Aditi is born from Dakṣa. Skill or competence
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is required to bring forth creations without limit. Horror seizes Aditi when at another occasion she gives birth to a child that seems to be dead but revives when she hurls it into the sea, where it arises as the sun only to die again and to rise in aeviternal succession.

This myth of Aditi tells of the fall from boundlessness to a time-bound world. It tells of the flaw, the limitation even within her that caused her to throw her misshapen child from her womb into the revivifying waters of the ocean here on earth.

Aditi is not a “mother goddess.” She is maternity in the godhead and she becomes a cosmogonic power by a slip. Her other sons, the Ādityas, maintain cosmic order while Dakṣa her son is also her father in a progenitive circle beyond time.

One may amplify the words “Dakṣa is born of Aditi,” to *mother Aditi is born of Dakṣa.* “After her the gods were born” (*RV. 10.72.5*).

She is the mother of Indra (8.12.14), of the Rudras (8.90.15), and of the Ādityas. The latter are seven in number for the last born, Mārtanda, a “dead egg,” an abortion, she threw away (10.72.8). The gods found him—the sun—in the ocean (*RV. 10.72.6*). Aditi took him back, now to live and now to die.

Aditi, pregnant in the Highest Heaven that is before creation, with the possibilities of being and non-being (*RV. 10.5.7*), gives birth in the first age of the gods (*RV. 10.72.4*; 1.89.10) to the forms and conditions of life, on and on, but something goes wrong with her last born (*ŚB. 3.1.3.2–4*), the dead egg, Mārtanda, whom she exposes. Thrown into the ocean, life quickens in it—and the gods find the sun hidden in the waters. Being and non-being, unborn twins before the dawn of the world, had lain in the womb of the mother. When she gives birth in the first age of the gods, her last issued child, Mārtanda, is brought forth dead. This is how non-being is born from Aditi and she casts it out. But it revives, and she takes back her last son who will go on being born and dying and being born again in the time-world which she has brought about. She had brought it on herself, the birth of this seemingly dead child, by a slip, by a faulted action. On previous occasions, wishing to get children, she had offered cooked rice to the gods and then eaten of it herself. Three times she bore twin gods, a pair of Ādityas. The fourth time she ate of the food herself and then she offered the remnant to the gods, with the result that the twins in her womb were blighted; the one, Indra, recovered. The other appeared dead when born (*Maitrāyanī S. 1.6.12*).
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Aditi, the great mother, had a bad moment when she saw her issue a seeming paradox, an abortion, Mārtāṇḍa, a “dead egg,” the very shape of life to be yet without it. She lost control of herself and threw away the dead child. When she saw him alive, she brought him back, to live and to die.

Saranyū, the Rushing One, was taken back by the gods from this world when Yama, her son, left his dead body on earth. Aditi, the Boundless, stepped into this world in the first age of the gods at dawn, when her dead child arose as the glowing sun from the ocean. Impetuous Saranyū was not equal to her impulse. She drew back from death, and the gods helped her flight and ascension. Having assumed the shape of a mare, she had then become pregnant, Vivasvat, the Radiant, her husband, having consorted with her in the shape of a horse (Brhad Devatā 7.1–6). The horse is a symbol of the sun, and her twin children of this union were born, one here on earth, the other in heaven. They were the healers of the woes of life which Yama and Yami had brought into the world. Aditi in her boundlessness gave birth to death. But she redeemed her shock and made good the abandonment of this son of hers recognizing his double nature, strung out in time, his life a dying and arising in aeviternal succession.

Aditi is featureless, parturient, birth giving. No image could be made of her based on her evocation in the texts. In the whole of Indian art, however, one vision is frequently given shape of a goddess shown lying or sitting in the birth posture. Her name is not known though the theme persists over more than a millennium and is known in stone and terra cotta reliefs from the Ganges Valley into the Deccan. With all her amplitude of body and limbs widely splayed out, the figure has no face, though it has a head and the head is a lotus flower. In some instances the two-armed image holds lotuses.

MOTHER EARTH

The goddess Lotus or Padmā (RV. Khila, 2.6), Śrī, the auspicious, Lakṣmī, “having wealth,” is extolled as lotus born, lotus eyed, standing on a lotus, abounding in lotuses. As mother of created beings she is called Earth (Kṣamā; HV. 3.12.4). Like a lotus this earth of ours floats on the waters. The lotus flower was predestined to become divinized as woman. The life cycle of the plant completes itself within the flower itself. Its seedpod does not scatter
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the ripe seeds. They are too large to pass across the circular openings. They stay enveloped by the seedpod so that the young plants can grow until they burst it. The flower holds the new seeds, nourishes them by its own sap until they themselves develop into plants in the maternal womb of the lotus flower. No other plant in India was raised to so exalted a status of divinity except Soma, who is sung of as King Soma whereas the lotus is praised as a divine woman. She is as beautiful as the lotus flower, her images whether carved or painted show her glory and that of the flower on which the goddess is seated; or, no human figure is shown but lotuses rise from a capacious vase, a *vas mirabilis*. She is called Mother Śrī, or Sirimā in her inscribed and ponderous image in Bharhut of the second century B.C. She is powerful and enticing, resplendent and exciting. When the gods saw her, the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (11.4.3.1–18) tells they wanted to kill her—for she had so much that they had not. Prajāpati, the lord of progeny, dissuaded them from killing her, for Śrī was a woman and one does not kill a woman. He allowed them to take anything from her but her life. Each god took his share, universal sovereignty, royal power, her beauty, and prosperity. This done, Prajāpati invited the gods to a sacrifice to offer back to her what they had taken. The gods receiving their own oblations, restored what they had taken and departed.

Lakṣmī has much to give, beauty, well-being, power, wealth, all that makes life worthwhile in this world. She satisfies the desire of mankind, even of the gods; her popularity is enormous. Far from being the mistress of the universe she is the goddess of well-being and success. She readily obeys Prajāpati, giving away her assets, for she knows in her heart that they will come back to her. She is bounteous but her gifts are on loan only to those who covet them. This beautiful, tempting goddess excites not lust but possessiveness to the extent even of murder. While Vāk, the goddess sacred speech, would provoke strife among poets, seers, and sages by her love and preference, Lakṣmī arouses murderous feelings of possessiveness. This popular, ever-young, and—in the history of Indian religion—long-lived goddess indeed requires to be bathed by elephants. Thus she is shown as Gajalakṣmī in her standard image to this day. The cloud-elephants assist and keep pure her bloom. She is without ambiguity for her alter ego is her counterplayer, Nirṛti, the lap of perdition (*R.V.* 1.117.5, 1.164.32), who is Mother Earth (*TS.* 4.2.5). In her lap is inexorable decay (*R.V.* 10.36.2), the de-cease

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(AV. 6.29.1) of matter invested with life. In this aspect, Earth (Prthvī) is a goddess of cruel mouth and iron bond (TS. 4.2.5). Nirṛti seen by herself is the negation of Rta, she is decomposition, death herself (RV. 1.117.5). The dissolution of living substances is her power, it seems to go against Rta, the cosmic order and its continuity. In this anguish Prthvī, the Earth, is invoked together with Heaven, with whom she forms the primal couple; may they protect against this calamity “Heaven and Earth the wise encompassing with cosmic order” (RV. 10.36.2).

Mother Earth, conjoint with Heaven, gives the reassurance so badly shaken by her in her own domain. There she opens her gruesome mouth to devour, imprison, and destroy all living beings whom she, together with Father Heaven, had enclosed day and night in aeviternal succession. Prthvī is the great mother (mahī māta Prthvī; ŚB. 13.1.6.1). Dual in her nature she acts destructively, disintegrating in her role as elemental earth. But seen with Father Heaven vaulting over her, she responds under his cosmic presence to the light of the sun and the darkness of night; she is the bounteous Mother. Then her nature as Nirṛti loses its desperate isolation; Prthvī is known under her greater name, she becomes Aditi (ŚB. 2.2.1.19); and she also is known to be Vāk (ŚB. 4.6.9.16; prthvī vai vāk). They are not identical. Where they merge, the one into the other they blend, shading off ever so subtly into the being of the other. Prthvī as the Great Mother is raised in the Brāhmaṇas to the being of Aditi. She is enounced in her. Aditi of the Rg-Veda is boundless, she gives birth to all the suns that ever shone. When she gives birth to Dakṣa she is born from him in an instant as timeless as that when Vāk gives birth to the Father. Aditi and Vāk precede and bring about creation. Prthvī is the Great Mother of created beings. Her realm includes that of Lakṣmī, though Lakṣmī is not a Ṛgvedic goddess.

Lakṣmī, the goddess Lotus, embodies this marvel of a flower. It holds the entire cycle of the life of the plant within its petals. This self-contained continuity of the lotus is of the nature of Padmā, the goddess Lotus, who is also known as Śrī, the goddess Beauty, and Lakṣmī, the goddess Luck. Her antagonist is Nirṛti. While Nirṛti withdraws from theophany after the Vedic Age, she surfaces in the shape of more than one form of the Great Goddess like that of Kālī or of Cāmuṇḍā, or she assumes different shapes while retaining some of her attributes. Nirṛti is one of the names of the dread goddess in her many shapes. Alakṣmī, the

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negation of Lakṣmī, is another. The specter, or rather the fear of physical death, persists in creating the manifold shapes, names, and myths of the lethal power of the Great Mother. Mortality, the luckless lot of living beings, has its figure in Alakṣmī. In Bengal to this day the presence of Alakṣmī, in a crude likeness in clay, is set up and “driven away” before Lakṣmī is worshiped in her autumnal rites, the Lakṣmī Pūjā.

Lakṣmī and her alter ego, Alakṣmī-Nirṛti, are opposite powers within the Great Goddess herself. Nirṛti is Mother Earth (RV. 1.117.5; TS. 4.2.5). She is encompassed by Aditi. Aditi not only gave birth to the gods rescuing her castoff child the sun; she also created life on earth. Indeed, she is one with Earth, with Prthvī (RV. 1.72.9; AV. 13.1.38). The earliest etymological auxiliary work to the Veda, the Nīghanta lists Aditi as synonymous with Prthvī. The relation of Aditi to Prthvī and of Prthvī to Lakṣmī is close. In the Epics, Lakṣmī is the wife of Viṣṇu but earlier than that, in the Yajur Veda, it is Aditi who is the wife of Viṣṇu (VS. 26.90; TS. 7.5.14) either of them filling the role of consort of the god who maintains the universe. Later on, South Indian iconography moreover shows the image of Viṣṇu flanked by his two consorts, Śri Devī and Bhū Devī, the goddess Śrī who is Lakṣmī on the right of the god and Bhū or Bhūmi Devī who is the goddess Earth (bhū), that is, Prthvī, on his left. They are identical figures, companions of the god in their symmetry. Each carries a lotus, but symmetry compels Śrī Devī to hold the flower in her left hand while Bhū Devī carries the lotus flower in her right hand. Both

3 The dread name of Nirṛti is also carried by Jyeṣṭhā, the inauspicious, pot-bellied goddess with an elephant face whose retinue are obstacles. In this respect she prefigures Ganeśa, the lord and remover of obstacles. However, the chariot of Jyeṣṭhā, drawn by lions and followed by tigers, is proper to the Great Goddess (Bodhāyana Grhyā Sūtra 3.9.3,4,10).
4 Lakṣmī, the Lotus goddess, arose from the ocean when gods and antigods churned its waters to find the drink of immortality. Prthvī—the Earth—was rescued from the ocean by Viṣṇu in his boar incarnation. Each goddess in her own right is born at a different moment in cosmogony and has her own myth. Images in terra cotta and stone of a naked female figure, seated or lying in the “birth-giving posture,” synthesize qualities of Lakṣmī, the goddess Lotus, Prthvī, the “Broad one,” mother Earth, and Aditi. In some of these images, ranging from the first century A.D. onward, the head of the goddess is a large, fullblown lotus. Some of these images hold lotuses in their two hands. While the birth-giving mother image is found from the Mediterranean to South East Asia, the lotus-headed variety is her particular Indian form (S. Kramrisch, “An Image of Aditi-Uttanapad, Artibus Asiae 19 [1956]: 259–70; H. D. Sankalia, “The Nude Goddess or ‘Shameless Woman’ in Western Asia, India and South Eastern Asia,” Artibus Asiae 23 [1960]: 111–23). An inscribed image of the second to third century A.D., of which however only the lower portion is preserved in Nagarjunikonda, was the gift of a queen whose husband and children were alive (H. K. Narasimhaswami, “Nagarjunikonda Inscription,” Epigraphia
are guarantors of existence of earth; Bhū Devī, the Earth goddess being soft and loving, Śrī Devī the Lotus goddess by the flower-like quality of her femininity. Was not “Mother Earth wide extended, very dear Prthvi” invoked in the Rg-Veda to protect “from the lap of Nirṛti” (RV. 10.18.10).

DYADIC DEITY

Uśas, Cosmic Dawn, the virgin daughter of heaven, is seen in the morning and evening, in every twilight, and is invoked in the dual: this “bride” or “brides” of the sun (RV. 7.75.5; AV. 8.9.12). She leads into the day and out of it. She leads to the night, is the sister of night (RV. 1.113.2–3); sometimes her darker aspect prevails over her blushing loveliness. Once she had to abandon her chariot (RV. 10.138.5). Frightened, she ran away into the beyond. She was of evil intent because Indra had smashed her wain. It fell into the river Vipas. All this happened because she had been arrogant (RV. 4.30.8–11). Though she is the daughter of heaven, Indra defeated her in her dark and demoniac second nature. The story is told amid victories of Indra over unambiguous demons (RV. 4.30.7; 4.30.13 f.) who threatened his supremacy—or did Indra loathe her voyage into night, she who was born as the daughter of heaven, dawn of the world and bride of the sun? Brhaspati once had to liberate her from the cave of the demons deep down in the abyss (RV. 10.68.9). Had she now been heading for it, back into cosmic night, the realm of demons?

Night, the sister or also alter ego of Uśas, the Dawn, herself has two aspects. “The goddess Night looks out of a thousand eyes. With the light she has driven away the darkness” (RV. 10.127.1–2). She is illumination herself, by her own light she shines in the darkness. When she opens her eyes light is in them a thousandfold. It could not be seen but for the darkness of this goddess studded with stars. But in her other aspect she is impenetrable, cloying darkness (tamas) leaving her stain on whatever she touches (RV. 10.127.2), like sin, like guilt. This is the darkness in the cave in the pit. The night of illumination and the night of stupefying, cosmic darkness are the two natures of Night whom the poet experiences while he invokes the goddess Night, daughter of

Indica, vol. 29 [1951–52].) Among monumental images of this goddess in Alampur in the Deccan, one in lying position is still being worshiped today. Only women are allowed to enter her sanctuary. The officiating priest told me the name of the Goddess—Elamma. This corresponds to Prthvi.
heaven, to protect from wolf and thief all those who sleep (R\textit{V}. 10.127.4–5, 8).

The dual nature of the feminine is doubly conveyed in the hymn to the goddess Night. To those who sleep in their nest like the birds or in their homes in the village she brings rest, while others she illumines or stains with abject darkness. She is both the soothing mother and the fierce goddess of illumination and of occlusion.

Duality is the price of birth not only for the Great Goddess in manifestation but for manifestation itself. Within the goddess in manifestation duality reveals the wholeness of her being in terms of light and dark and other pairs of opposites valued in their diametrical correspondence. Within manifestation the dyad, of necessity, is also biological. The image of cosmogonic deity is shaped on the interplay of male and female. Before the Earth was created she was indistinguishable from Heaven with whom she filled the world egg. Dyāvā-prthvi, Heaven-and-Earth, are a monadic dyad, the parents of the world. Father Heaven, Dyaus, is invoked in the \textit{Rg-Veda} more than ninety times, out of which twenty times the word “Dyaus” is feminine in gender. It would seem that an underlying pervasiveness of the feminine is conveyed. Heaven-and-Earth, on the verge of the dawn of creation, are fused in their contiguity. They had to be separated by force, by the creator god Indra. The manifest world came about by a disruption of their preestablished union. In another version of the beginning of creation, however, it is Dakṣa who is born from Aditi, and Aditi is born from Dakṣa. Their reciprocity, before time had come about, makes them a progenitive pair by filiation, Aditi the mother giving birth to Dakṣa, being evoked first. However we are here before time had come about at the limits of the knowable. The knowable has seven such limits or border signals (R\textit{V}. 10.5.6–7). One of them is Being and Non-Being; another is Dakṣa and Aditi; yet another symbol of the frontier is the Bull-Cow. The Bull-Cow is Agni, the Fire, the firstborn in the beginning of the cosmos. Agni, the Fire, the spark of life, is both bull and cow, male and female, in one. Similarly Prajāpati, the Lord of creatures, is pregnant with all beings (\textit{ŚB}. 8.4.2.1). All these are symbols of the Dyad, free from will, emotions, and gestures. On the threshold of creation-to-be they are potent images of wholeness ripened from their core, ready for transformation. An earlier account (\textit{KS}. 27.1) tells of Prajāpati, who puts forth Vāk and unites with her. She goes away from him, creates the creatures, and again
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enters Prajāpati. Vāk, the Word, in this myth was in the Father. Once uttered, Vāk, the power of speech, creates all creatures—and returns to the father. Though Vāk here is not the omnipotent Great Goddess but rather the wayward child who does her own thing, she is the creatrix, and not herself the beginning of, created creatures.

However Puruṣa, the primordial male, felt alone. “He who is alone has no delight. Puruṣa desired a second. He became as large as a man and woman in close embrace. He caused himself to fall in two. From that arose husband and wife. He united with her. From that human beings were born. She thought how can he embrace me after having produced me? She hid herself. She then became a cow, the other became a bull, united with her and from that cows were born. She then became a mare, an ass, a she goat, a ewe, he became the corresponding male animal, he united with her. From them all the respective animals were born, whatever exists in pairs, down to the ants” (see Br. Ār. Up. 1.4.3–4).

Out of loneliness, desire, and longing, Puruṣa works himself into a state of gestation. He becomes as big as man and woman together; he re-creates himself as cosmic egg, as monad and, falling apart, he embraces the woman. To this primal gesture she responds with social comment and then hides herself, to be found in animal shape by her similarly transformed mate. Their descent into animal nature brings about the animals.

Puruṣa, the primordial male, lacks the wholeness of dyadic deity. This lack fills him with emotion; he is full of loneliness and desire. They drive him to widen his being into wholeness. He fulfills himself, but in order to know and savor this wholeness he has to split himself—and finds himself as man and woman who embrace and unite. Puruṣa, the primordial male in the Brhad Āranyaka Upaniṣad, acts out of need, not spontaneity. He is a projection into the beginning of the human condition from which he is redeemed by being dyadic deity. With the woman he has evoked in him, he unites and procreates.

Cosmogony in Indian myth is an ongoing ontology. It came to a hurdle when created creatures were to make their appearance. The hurdle arises on the way from the dyadic monad to the creation of actual woman. The Purāṇas treat of this at length. The ease of splitting the world egg from outside, as Indra did, was not the general solution in which division sprang from within the egg inasmuch as Brahmā, born from the golden world egg, divided the egg (HV. 1.1.37–39) or himself like Puruṣa into two halves,
one male, the other female (HV. 1.1.51), united himself with her, and produced progeny with her (Vāyu P. 1.10.7 f; Agni P. 17.14–16; Liṅga P. 1.70.269–270). But this did not come about immediately. In anticipation Brahmā had fathered mind-born sons. Conceptual, but unconceived, they did not multiply. Brahmā, deeply dissatisfied, invoked Gāyatrī, the most sacred RgVedic mantra of creative illumination. She appeared as a girl from one half of his body. He thought she was his daughter. When he made love to her his mind-born sons were indignant. This version of the Matsya Purāṇa (3.30–34) voices the censorship of the mind in two directions, that of sexual union as such and that of incest (implied in RV. 10.10.12–14). The latter was valid from the age of the Brāhmaṇas, the former rules over the cosmogony of the Purāṇas. At this phase, Rudra-Śiva arises on the scene as the divine androgyne, the right half male, the left female, the right half white, the left half dark (Vāyu P. 1.9.82–98).

**The Androgyne and the Goddess**

Rudra emerged androgyne from Hiranyagarbha the golden egg (Vāyu P. 1.9.75–77). He acts as Brahmā does and takes Brahmā’s place. This phase in Indian myth is that of the demiurges, Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Śiva. Each was an androgyne and born of himself (HV. 2.125.32). However, in most of the Purāṇas, Rudra does not substitute for Brahmā but springs from him, is born by Brahmā’s frustration and wrath when the mind-born sons of the creator had no interest in sexual intercourse, did not propagate, and went out of creation. They will have to be created afresh, in every new world age. This is the lot of creations of the mind.

There is no contradiction in androgyne Śiva born of himself and his having sprung from the world egg or from Brahmā’s anger. As supreme deity, however, Śiva is self-existent. He enters the myth at a critical moment in which he manifests according to the role he will play in manifestation. As far as a particular situation requires it, he enters it. This is his mythical birth, an event in the myth of Śiva, whereas Śiva is self-born in his nature. In his total identity Rudra-Śiva manifests in any event, in any guise.

Brahmā exerted himself, practiced tapas, but failed to produce procreative issue. From his wrath, from the angry frown of his forehead, androgyne Rudra sprang forth (Viṣṇu P. 7.2–4; Liṅga P. 1.41.7–9; Śiva P. Rudra S. 1.15.15). At Brahmā’s behest, Rudra separated himself into his male and female natures. Other accounts say that androgyne Rudra sprang from infuriated
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Brahmā's mouth (Liṅga P. 1.41.38–43, 3.4.41.37; Kūrma P. 11.1) when infuriated Brahmā expired, for Rudra-Śiva is the Life-breath (prāṇa). When Śiva separated himself the goddess was born, of Śiva's own will. She divided herself into a white and black half (Vāyu P. 1.9.81 f; Liṅga P. 1.70.324). In one version of the Śiva Purāṇa, Śivā the female half of Śiva was given the power to create woman; she created a Śakti like herself from the middle of her brow, the topos of mental birth. This goddess in another world age became the daughter of Dakṣa; she was to be the wife of Śiva.

In one world age after another, Śivā, the female half of Śiva, assumes the shape of Śiva's consort. Her name is Sati, the daughter of Dakṣa who consumed herself in the fire of her tapas. In another world age she is Pārvaṭī. Śiva, entranced by her austerities, by the ardor of her tapas, offers her the left half of his body, hymning her "I am the sea and you the wave. You are Prakṛti and I Puruṣa." But elsewhere (Matsya P. 2.57.1–18) Pārvaṭī is in a suicidal mood because Śiva called her dark. She asks for a golden color, Brahmā rewards her with a golden complexion and with half of Śiva's body. The vision of the androgyne, the state of wholeness, clings to Śiva and to the Goddess as well even though the androgyne had separated himself into Śiva and Pārvaṭī. Yet in name Śivā is but the feminine form of Śiva.

From the beginning Śiva is Ardhanārīśvara, the "Lord whose half is woman"; his body is half male, half female (M.Bh. 13.14.298; Vāyu P. 1.9.75). By his body he shows both the sexes as the cause of creation. "All creatures bear these signs. For the welfare of this world the Goddess becomes Sati" (Liṅga P. 2.70.327) who, from this point of view, paradoxically consumes herself in her inner fire. She has no offspring. But in another aeon as Pārvaṭī she is again united with Śiva, and their love is intense and long lasting. "Śivā is Śiva's Śakti in the form of bliss. Lord Śiva never sports with Śakti in a form different from him" (Śiva P. Śatarudra S. 8.34.35). "That goddess gives pleasure to him" (Skanda P. 3.1.24.24). She is the delight within deity itself. The sexual union of Śiva and Pārvaṭī is within God. It does not bring about the human race nor is any god their bodily child. Kārttikeya was born by other mothers from the seed spilled by Śiva when he cohabited with Pārvaṭī, and Ganeśa was born without sexual contact from Pārvaṭī's skin. The quest of procreation, on account of the unity of Śiva and Pārvaṭī, is unfulfilled by this union. Procreation is not its purpose. In it are acted out polarities latent.
in God. Their ambiguities rest in the double nature of Ardhanāriśvara, the Lord whose half is woman, for from the outset he had rejected sex, torn off his phallus, shot to death Kāma, the god of love, and married Pārvatī for the sake of her extreme austerities, for the burning zeal of her tapas which she practiced in order to win his love. What would appear antonymous on the human level is consistent in deity. Really, Devī the Goddess, is unborn, but she appears to be born from Śiva. The Goddess has assumed the shape of Sātī in one world age and that of Pārvatī, whose other name is Umā, in another. Throughout she is the Great Goddess in essence; her nature is revealed whether she acts under the name of Sātī or of Umā. A vision of Umā is seen in the Kena Upaniṣad (3.3–4). There, the Supreme Brahman appears before the gods. They do not recognize the wondrous apparition, are curious what it might be, and are put to the test. A blade of grass is placed before them; Agni, the Fire fails to burn it, Vāyu, the wind cannot blow it off; and when Indra hastens toward the wondrous apparition it vanishes. In the same region of the sky Indra meets a most beautiful woman, Umā. He asks her what this wondrous sight was. "Brahman" she said.

Umā knows and reveals to the gods Brahman, the Ultimate Reality. Only one merged in Brahman can know Brahman. The wondrous apparition is Īśa, the Lord. His name as symbol of the absolute is Śiva (Śvet. U.p. 1.7–8). When the wondrous apparition vanishes, Umā is there and gives it utterance. She is Vāk, the Word that was in God.

But then again, in bodily terms the male and female which are right and left in God, in Śiva, are timelessly ardent lovers. Once, interrupted in their embrace by Rṣis who had come to see the Lord in his sylvan retreat, Śiva cursed any future intruder of their sacred grove. Thus when Ila, son of Manu, while hunting entered this forest, he found himself transformed into a woman. Her name was Ilā. She had a son from Budha, the planet who lived nearby. Later the curse was taken from her and under the name of Sudyumna she became, alternately, a man for one month a woman for the next. In this way Śiva rules over the world. The story is told in several Purāṇas (Vāyu, Viṣṇu, Bhāgavata, Matsya).

Androgyne projected from a god to a hero or mortal is made to play in time. The curse of the god is turned into a wish fulfillment—maybe—on the human level. This is shown in the Mahābhārata story of childless king Bhangasvana. He performed a sacrifice in order to obtain sons, but to Agni only, which Indra resented.
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The king became the father of many sons. Once when he went hunting in a forest and plunged into a lake, Indra changed him into a woman. The king, ashamed to meet his family, decided to abdicate and went back into the forest where he met an ascetic. From their intercourse a hundred sons were born. The wife of the ascetic with her sons returned to the capital which had been hers as king Bhangasvana. The two sets of sons started fighting, and many were killed. Mollified, Indra granted the woman a boon that her sons would be revived, but she had to choose between those born to her when she was king and those of hers as the wife of an ascetic. She decided for the latter, as the love of a woman is greater than that of a man and also because the sexual pleasure of a woman exceeds that of a man. At her request Indra allowed her to remain a woman.

On the level of the gods, it was Pārvatī who practiced severe austerities in order to win Śiva. Yet, in more than one of her shapes did the Great Goddess, having left the god for her own creative work, return and become absorbed in his androgyne totality.

Umā or Śivā who is Pārvatī is the Śakti or Power of Śiva. At times they seem to play separate roles. Having won Śiva in marriage, Pārvatī is his wife. They act disguised in human terms and situations which are part of the inexhaustible repertory of interactions of their androgyne nature in divinity. Just as right and left interact in the body of man—the right half of the brain being effective in the left half of the person, the left half in the right—and also, as on the human level, the effect of one action releases a corresponding action on whatever has been acted upon, so Pārvatī, in her images as goddess, holds up a mirror to Śiva. But since Śiva is everything there is, her gesture is within his total ambience; she is part of Śiva, but being Pārvatī she is also Māyā (Śvet. Up. 4.10), and if her mirror reflects Śiva, it is only what can be caught in a mirror and not the whole all-round reality which is Śiva, the total androgynous shape around the axis which divides and unites Ardhanārīśvara. A cult image of this kind is no longer called Ardhanārīśvara, the Lord whose half is woman. The name of this image is Umā Mahēśvara, Umā and the Great Lord or the togetherness of Umā with the Great Lord.

In another form of their togetherness, the axial relation of God and Goddess is different. On the horizontal of Śiva lying on the ground, the dancing Goddess rises. His figure is without action, dead. She is active power embodied, Śakti. By the rhythm of her
The Indian Great Goddess

dancing feet she stirs and arouses him, the Ground of being,—the God awakens into life.

As Umā, the Goddess alone knows Śiva. That is, she dwells in Śiva, or she is the left half of his body or, seated on his left she holds up the mirror to him, reflecting their relation as right and left, as Umā Mahēśvara. When as Kāli, the goddess dances as Šakti or Power, Śiva is her ground, the ground itself of her being which he supports.

THE HOSTS OF GODDESSES

The great gods of the Rg-Veda and their Powers—the name of Indrāṇi, the consort of Indra is Šaec or Power which is the same as Šakti—as well as the Great Goddess in her many shapes are set off against hosts and swarms of femininity collectively called “wives of the gods” and “birth giving” (gñāh). Others are Apsarases, water elementals. Unlimited in number, maternal groups and water nymphs float against the fixed number of yet another group of maternal potencies. They are the seven mothers of Soma (RV. 9.102.4) or of Agni (RV. 1.141.2). They are the seven flames of Agni (VS. 17.79; Mund. Up. 1.2.7) of whom Kāli is the first.

Or, the seven are rivers. What all these heptads have in common is their maternity and their movement. Great Mother Rasā (RV. 5.41.15) the celestial river, tosses her waves in heaven; their movements can be traced in the ecliptic on the sky. The celestial rivers are rivers of light, primarily that of the planets. The seven planets have their representatives in other groups of seven which shine in the celestial sphere. The Pleiades, the Kṛttikās are the foster mothers of Skanda, the son of Śiva, though only six out of the heptad nursed Skanda.

The planetary powers are also, in their second nature, female “grahas” or seizers. They come to exercise their baneful powers, they devour children. In the Mahābhārata they are joined by the seven mothers of Agni and other great ancient mothers, including Saramā. These, now named “Great Mothers of the Universe,” offered themselves as mothers of the new savior god, Skanda. Not only that, they demanded that the goddesses Brāhmaśvarī, Mahēśvarī, and the other Šaktis of great gods be dispossessed. Finally, the “Great Mothers of the Universe” are assuaged. They are to preside over the destiny of children up to sixteen years of age.

The swarms of these ancient great mothers, acting out their various often demoniac propensities on children, henceforward
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coexist with the consorts of the great gods. The latter are known henceforward as the Seven Mothers, the Saptamāṭhkās, assembling in a Śaiva conception, under the leadership of Śiva as Viṣādhara or Viṣābhadra. These Śaktis or consorts of great gods maintained the exalted position that Indrāṇi, Varuṇāṇi, and Agnāyī had held in the Rg-Veda (RV. 1.2.1.12), together with further Śaktis of gods (M. Bh. 9.45), hypostases of the power of the respective male god.

Furthermore, all of these are joined by the female spirits of the dead, the “Divine Mothers”—to whom worship was due antecently even before the Fathers, the Pitṛs (Śaṅk. G. S. 4.4.3, 11). Also, the village goddesses accede to their ranks. They threaten life from heaven and on earth. Other “mothers” or better, female fiends, were created by Śiva (Matsya P. 60.155; and other Purāṇas) for the destruction of demons. The evil female power thus, fighting evil, becomes a positive agent in the destruction of evil.

The swarming multitudes of floating female powers, attack from the stars, and arise from the earth. They are born of fear and intensify it. Ultimately the fear is that of death, of disintegration, of Nirṛti. But Nirṛti, the dread ancient goddess Death is none but Mother Earth (ŚB. 7.2.1.11) whose lotus face is that of Lakṣmī. The dread goddess is said to be older than this radiant goddess, she is said to have come out of the ocean before her. She is dark, dead black night (cf. R.V. Rātri Sūkta). But she is also the serpent queen, Sarparājñī (Kauśitaki B. 27.4) who sheds her dead skin and is young again ever anew. Mother Earth is the lap of death, the renewal and the lotus of life.

Her life-giving images prevail, carved in stone, on the temples. Images of Surasundaris, the beautiful women of the gods, Yakṣinīs, Nāginis and Apsarasas are arrayed in the walls of the temples in zones of femininity. They are the messengers (dūti) and attractions (ākarsini) by which deity draws man to its presence.

THE GREAT GODDESS: DEVĪ

While the host of celestial women and the swarms of sevenfold “great mothers of the universe,” of “divine mothers,” and the group of “seven mothers” or Śaktis, that is, powers envisaged as female, float across time and space, rising and falling, the “Great Goddess,” or Devī, is known in innumerable shapes yet remains totally herself. She addresses herself to mankind. She is elegant in the consciousness of her power, whatever her appearance; a woman of fashion, created, like everything else, exclusively

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by herself. She created the universe, she is its very substance, Prakṛti. So vast is her power that she draws into herself all her forms and thus stands alone (MP. 90.5). She exists eternally, embodied as the world (MP. 81.45). She is Mahāmāyā (MP. 81.45,58), the great illusion, the great magic spectacle. She performs it with a purpose, and it is for this that she also draws into herself all her forms, all her powers. She displays them, spends them inexhaustibly, overwhims and thus binds man to her so that he may possess them in her beauty—and be free, liberated from his fascination, from his bondage to the world, to Māyā (MP. 81.62). The great magic of her display is conscious. Mahāmāyā is consciousness herself (cetanā; MP. 85.13). Even more than that, she is Mahāvidyā, transcending knowledge (MP. 81.58). She is gentle and exceedingly beautiful (MP. 81.62). Mahāvidyā is the great dormant power (MP. 81.67). She releases it when as Vāk she strides into creation, across the three worlds, grazing the firmament with her crest (ṚV. 10.125.7; MP. 82.36).

The great Mother as the driving Power of the world is fierce, she is Cāndī, wielding the weapons of all the gods. They cut with the fire that is in the fierceness of the sun when she wields them as the Night of Destruction (MP. 81.59). It is then that Consciousness herself is the Goddess of Darkness (MP. 81.68), but she alone also is the power that awakens from sleep, to action. The terrible goddess (MP. 81.61) surrounded by the cutting splendor or her weapons keeps herself ready, for she herself is the boat for crossing the ocean of existence (MP. 84.10). As Kāli, she is the dark flame of fire, energy so devastating that she consumes the world, her work, and existence.

The Great Goddess in her fierceness is Cāndī. Indeed she is indomitable and difficult of approach. She is Durgā, for she reveals herself only to those she loves (see ṬV. 10.125.5); she is Consciousness and Transcendental Knowledge.

Saranyū had rushed into the world, into creation, but turned away from death which she had engendered and was taken back by the gods. A fugitive from this creation, she transcends it. Durgā, being everything, encompasses all. The Great Goddess takes everything within herself by her ultimate power, that of Consciousness. In this she is alone. She has no consort. In the exercise of her comprehensive power she is not the birth-giving mother, but death-dealing energy. She slays the Buffalo demon, brute power in its ignorance, a kind of death itself. Consciousness triumphs. She is faced by further demons. Being herself all and

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every energy, she herself is the energy of evil and that of goodness (MP. 81.63). She is herself the great Asurí or demoness (MP. 81.58). One demon, Šumbha by name, wanted to marry her. But she replied that she could not marry anyone who did not conquer her in fight and who would not force her pride from her (MP. 85.69). The demon succumbs. She remains unassailable in her power.

Saramā, the intrepid bitch, resisted the blandishment of the demons, the Pānis, when she had found the path to the hidden treasures—the Light captive in darkness, in the beyond, deep down below the earth. They had no hold on her. Sure footed she had faced and crossed the unsurmountable obstacle, the Rasā that heaven had placed in her way, and she left her own luminous trail on the dark sky of the night.

Mahāmāyā, the Great Goddess acts without cease and in many shapes. She knows the magic she creates. She is Consciousness itself (cetana). This is her supreme role in the display of herself wherein she plays every role herself. By her magic, Mahāmāyā, cosmic illusion, keeps man in bondage (MP. 81.44). In her stride the Great Goddess leads him beyond it: as Mahāvidyā, transcendental knowledge, the creatrix of the universe is a bounteous goddess. She who had admitted man to her display and made him part of it becomes his guide to final liberation of which she is the cause (MP. 81.43,44).

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