INTRODUCTION

Blue lotuses
Flower everywhere
And black *kokilas* sing
King of the seasons,
Spring has come
And wild with longing
The bee goes to his love.
Birds flight in the air
And cowherd girls
Smile face to face
Krishna has entered
The great forest.[1]

Of terrible face and fearful aspect is Kālī the awful. Four-armed, garlanded with skulls, with disheveled hair, she holds a freshly cut human head and a bloodied scimitar in her left hands and makes the signs of fearlessness-assurance and bestowing boons with her right hands. Her neck adorned with a garland of severed human heads dripping blood, her earrings two dangling severed heads, her girdle a string of severed human hands, she is dark and naked. Terrible, fanglike teeth, full, prominent breasts, a smile on her lips glistening with blood, she is Kālī whose laugh is terrifying. Her flowing, disheveled hair streaming over her left side, her three eyes as red and glaring as the rising sun, she lives in the cremation ground, surrounded by screaming jackals. She stands on Śiva, who lies corpselike beneath her.[2]

Man has apprehended the divine in unbelievably varied and contrasting ways. The divine has revealed itself in sublime and terrible forms—in graceful, bounteous, merciful beings and in

[1]Vidyāpati, *Love Songs of Vidyāpati*, ed. W. G. Archer, trans. Deben Bhattacharya (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1963), no. 50, p. 89.

[2] The *dhyāna mantra* of Dakṣiṇa-kālī from Kṛṣṇānanda Āgamavāgīśa's *Tantrasāra* (*Bṛhat Tantrasārah*, 2 vols. [Calcutta: Basumatī Sāhitya Mandir, 1341 B.S. (1934)], 1:310–11). Kṛṣṇānanda is quoting from the *Śyāmā Praharaṇam*.

horrific, punishing, and wrathful deities. It has revealed itself, or been apprehended by man, in male, female, bisexual, androgynous, animal, plant, and geographical forms. The divine as revealed to man, or apprehended by him, has always shown the tendency to surprise, delight, and stun, to overpower man in ecstasy or overwhelm him with fear and trembling.

The Hindu religious tradition presents us with one of the richest and most diverse assemblies of divine beings to be found anywhere in man's religious heritage. The Hindu pantheon confronts us with a host of beings as varied and numerous as any in the world. The gallery of Hindu gods includes soft, beguiling deities, such as Lakṣmī and Pārvatī; withdrawn, ascetic gods, such as Śiva; kingly, active gods who involve themselves in maintaining the balance between good and evil, such as Viṣṇu and his assortment of incarnations; intoxicating and beautiful gods such as Kṛṣṇa; and terrible, frightening deities such as Kālī. There are innumerable regional and local gods and godlings, there are deities who assume theriomorphic disguises, and there are gods and goddesses who are primarily associated with mountains, rivers, cities, and pilgrimage sites.

The Hindu pantheon, because of its size and diversity, has sometimes proven an embarrassment to would-be defenders of the Hindu tradition, who are frequently reluctant to describe Hinduism as "polytheistic." The pantheon has also proven an embarrassment to orderly, scholarly minds who find difficulty in discerning neat, systematic patterns in the Hindu multitude of gods, godlings, and supernatural beings. The embarrassment (not shared by all, to be sure) is totally unwarranted. The very diversity and size of the Hindu pantheon testify eloquently to the fact that for the Hindu the divine cannot be circumscribed. The divine has consistently proven itself in the Hindu context so to transcend the finite world of man that it excites man's imagination to incredible and even extreme lengths in an attempt to apprehend it in its fullness.

This study does not aim to discern an underlying system to the Hindu pantheon; it does not try to refute, affirm, justify, or condemn the term "polytheism" in the Hindu context. It tries, rather, to articulate the visions that underlie the mythologies and cults of two particularly popular Hindu deities, the god Kṛṣṇa and the goddess Kālī. In so doing, this study tries to convey the depth, complexity, and inexhaustible nature of the Hindu apprehension of the divine, the sacred, the holy, or the "other." It tries to emphasize the fact that in the Hindu tradition man has shown himself to be open to a divine dimension of reality that can both intoxicate and terrify him. It also tries to show that whether the divine delights or frightens it is ultimately redeeming to him who perceives it.

Certain methodological presuppositions should be made clear at the beginning. A primary presupposition of this study is the conviction that religious phenomena can best be understood on their own plane of reference. It is of course obvious that there is no such thing as a purely religious fact. Any religious phenomenon is also a social, psychological, and historical fact as well. This is the case because every religious phenomenon is, in the final analysis, also a *human* phenomenon, and the human phenomenon reveals itself in social, psychic, and historic milieus. This is all quite evident. What is not as obvious, perhaps, is that religious phenomena deserve to be interpreted in religious terms. They deserve to be interpreted for what they pretend to be—that is, manifestations (or revelations) of the sacred. Man is clearly a social, economic, and historical being. He is also, however, a religious being—a being who has traditionally demonstrated that he must relate himself to an "other" dimension of reality *in order to be human.* Religious things obviously meet social and psychic needs and fulfill certain social and psychic functions. Religious things clearly are also influenced by historical events. But religion also claims to transcend these "horizontal" factors, indeed, it claims to underlie these dimensions of reality.

Religion, as such, may be taken, and should be taken, as meaningful on its own plane of reference. The study of things religious can be first and foremost a study of *religious* man, a study of that dimension of man that he has consistently proclaimed to be the most ultimately real and the most ultimately human.

But how does one study religious things as religious things? This is not an easy question and does not elicit a simple answer. In the first place one does not study religion on its own plane of reference by ignoring what I have called "horizontal" factors. To understand religious things one must acquaint oneself with their contexts, one must be sensitive to the cultural setting of a given phenomenon. But what is more important one must seek to discern the visionary aspect of a religious phenomenon, that aspect of the phenomenon that legitimates it as a religious thing.[3] This means going beyond, or behind, the sometimes obvious social, psychic, or economic significance or function of a given phenomenon to grasp what the thing reveals to religious man, what the phenomenon reveals to man about that "other" realm of the sacred. This may call for a certain naïveté, a willingness to remain open to possibilities out of the ordinary, a willingness to marvel at and delight in the extraordinary—the willingness, perhaps, to wish that it might be so. One could say, it calls for one to be objective—for it prohibits the temptation to reduce a phenomenon to more easily manageable cause-and-effect interpretations. It does not allow one to foreclose any possibility

[3]The term *vision* is used here in a positive sense to denote man's apprehension of the real. Visions, as used here, are things that enable man to *see*—to see things as they really are. Visions enable men to see beyond the immediately sensed world of bits and pieces; they enable men to have a world, a cosmos. They situate man vis-à-vis an ultimate reality that grounds all else. Visions explode man out of his bound condition as a purely historical, and therefore limited, being and enable him to participate in a transcendent realm of "otherness." Visions impel man out of the ordinary and enable him to discern the extraordinary. Visions are not mere dreams, not hallucinations, but glimpses of something other that is ultimately meaningful to man.

but demands an openness to a dimension of reality that may not be experienced by the interpreter in his own life.

A second presupposition of this study stems from the first. When dealing with Kṛṣṇa and Kālī, with their mythologies and cults, we must seek interpretive directions from the larger religious tradition of which they are a part. Kṛṣṇa and Kālī are Hindu deities, and as such they undoubtedly reveal truths that are in some way related to, if not compatible with, other truths of this tradition. They are also very popular deities, particularly in Bengal. Their popularity suggests, further, that despite appearances (especially in the case of Kālī) they are not aberrations of the tradition but, quite likely, epitomes of or embroiderings on certain fundamental truths of the Hindu religious and philosophic traditions. It is my conviction that both deities do convey, in dramatic ways, central Hindu themes—that they articulate aspects of a primordial vision of the real that the Hindu tradition glimpsed thousands of years ago and that still underlies and orients the tradition today. This study tries to show how Kṛṣṇa and Kālī reveal and participate in that primordial vision.

This study is not historical in the sense of concerning itself primarily with chronicling the development of the Kṛṣṇa and Kālī cults. Particularly in the case of Kṛṣṇa, this task has already been done adequately by others.[4] In the case of Kālī, about whom very little has been done at all, this study is slightly more historical. It is primarily phenomenological, however. It seeks to bracket the phenomena under study in an attempt to apprehend a vision of reality that persists throughout

[4]For the history of Kṛṣṇa and the Kṛṣṇa cult, see William G. Archer, *The Loves of Krishna in Indian Painting and Poetry* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1957); R. G. Bhandarkar, *Vaiṣṇavism, Śaivism and Minor Religious Systems* (Varanasi: Indological Book House, 1966); Suvira Jaiswal, *The Origin and Development of Vaiṣnavism* (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1967); Hemchandra Raychaudhuri, *Materials for the Study of the Early History of the Vaishnava Sect* (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1936); and Charles S. J. White, "Kṛṣṇa as Divine Child," *History of Religions* 10, no. 2 (November 1970): 156-77.

the history of the two deities. This does not mean that the study dismisses the possibility of change resulting from historical developments in the Kṛṣṇa and Kālī cults. It is obvious that such change did take place—that both deities changed quite drastically, particularly in appearance and character. But change is interpreted in the study primarily as a modification, perhaps a clarification, of the primary visions that underlay the two deities. My approach is not to attempt to understand Kālī and Kṛṣṇa by amassing historical data: I seek instead to discern in the "presences" of these two beings, as revealed in history to be sure, hints of the transcendently real in the Hindu spiritual tradition. To put it in very unscholarly terms, my approach is to attempt to understand Kṛṣṇa and Kālī by trying to glimpse Kālī's sword and hear Kṛṣṇa's flute.