Introducing Kālī Studies

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A PERSONAL PROLOGUE

Over the weekend of February 26–27, 2000, one of us (Rachel) flew to Hamilton, Ontario, to say good-bye to David Kinsley, who had been diagnosed with inoperable lung cancer a month before. Soon after receiving the diagnosis, David told me on the phone that he wanted to spend his last three months reviewing his life, being grateful for all its gifts, and saying good-bye to those who loved him. His house was a veritable pilgrimage site. Relatives, friends, colleagues, students, representatives of Hindu temples and organizations, local talk show producers, people whom he had touched in Hamilton—they all came. David talked with them, consoled them, cried with them. He was not afraid to speak of death, although he told me that he was afraid of dying; the pain, the decay, and the loneliness of the unknown frightened him. We also talked about the afterlife. What comforted him most, he said, was not some sense of personal immortality but a belief that he was part of the great cosmic cycle. His ashes, mixed with earth and water, would become new life. This view, he said, was primarily inspired by his work on the Hindu goddess Kālī, who represents the totality of life and death.

David's second book, *The Sword and the Flute: Kālī and Kṛṣṇa: Visions of the Terrible and the Sublime in Hindu Mythology*,[1] now continuously in print for

over a quarter of a century, has justly earned him the affectionate appellation "The Father of Kālī Studies." The first accessible account of Kālī's textual and theological history to appear in English, *The Sword and the Flute* has influenced all of us who study the Goddess. David's appealing explanation for the religious attraction of Kālī—"Kālī's boon is freedom, the freedom of the child to revel in the moment, and it is won only after confrontation or acceptance of death"[2]—has drawn many into the study of this richly complex divine figure. And it also changed David; Kālī was a figure to which he returned again and again in his professional and personal life. The last class of his career at McMaster University, taught as scheduled in early April, three weeks before his death, was in his lecture course on "Health, Healing, and Religion." The topic for the day was the transformative effects of fatal illness, and although he did not mention himself as a test case, the three hundred plus students in the class knew of his condition and rose to give him a minutes-long standing ovation at the end. David was a man who was deepened, heartened, by what he studied, and this is what has made him such a powerful model.

Near the end of my February visit, David told me that he viewed me as a representative of younger scholars who found his work helpful and were now coming, in my person, as it were, to wish him well. Accordingly, and in this deeply personal spirit of friendship, collegiality, and hope, *Encountering Kālī* is presented as a tribute on behalf of all of us—scholars young and old—to this extraordinary scholar and human being.

ENCOUNTERING KĀLĪ: THE WESTERN CULTURAL CONTEXT

Since the 1970s, interest in goddesses and goddess-like figures has been on the rise in Western culture on both the popular and scholarly levels. For the past twenty years, for example, trade presses have generated numerous books on "the Goddess," New Age movements and feminist writers have appropriated different Asian and primal goddess figures as their own,[3] and Native Americans and ecological activists, often for very different reasons, have rallied around "Mother Earth." During this same period, scholars have continued to debate the role of culture, history, psychology, and gender in the construction and representation of these same goddess figures.[4] It is a mark of this social discourse that what scholars have had to say about goddesses and their natures has often been either largely ignored or actively challenged by the popular culture. Sam Gill's powerful historical study of Mother Earth in Native American cultures, *Mother Earth: An American Story,* in which he argues that the figure of "Mother Earth" was largely a Euro-American idealization of Amerindian culture, which Native American communities later appropriated and identified with for their own reasons, is a case in point.[5] At other times, this unfortunate "split" between popular

and scholarly understandings of goddess figures has resulted in gross distortions and even demonizing representations. The portrayal of Kālī in the 1984 Hollywood movie *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* comes immediately to mind. Here, Kālī is portrayed as a macabre demonness to whom crazed Indians and possessed priests (reminiscent in their actions of Incan legends rather than of Hindu texts) tear out the hearts of their innocent victims before lowering them into the steaming bowels of a molten pit. Needless to say, such grossly distorting depictions hardly advance the cause of cross-cultural understanding and could be easily avoided, or at least partially remedied, by a more active dialogue between the popular and scholarly levels of Western culture.

Happily, such cross-fertilizations are already taking place. Some scholars have "come out" as devotees of the Goddess or as members of various North American guru traditions, while others enter active and fruitful dialogues with these same American mystical traditions. On other levels, devotees read academic books and engage their authors via e-mail or through traditional correspondence, and nonspecialists and specialists alike "chat" together on Internet news groups. At other times, this cross-fertilization impacts more popular channels and appears in strikingly hybrid forms, not all of them uncontroversial. Hence "Goddess Kali Lunch Boxes," purchased over the Web, appear in college classrooms, beautifully adorned with traditional Indian popular art; the *Wall Street Journal* reports on the emerging market for Tantric sex weekends;[6] and the television serial *Xena, Warrior Princess* evokes angry protests from Hindu viewers, who sometimes gain support for their denunciations, and at other times do not, from scholars of the Hindu tradition.[7] Thus, as Kālī slowly becomes a recognized part of mainstream Western culture, her worlds become less and less bifurcated and her various proponents more conversant with one another's often very different perspectives. Many bridges, however, still remain to be built or at least imagined.

Encountering Kālī seeks to address some of these broad cultural issues by focusing on the complexities, promises, and problems involved in meeting and interpreting a specific Hindu deity, the goddess Kālī, both in her indigenous South Asian settings and in her more recent Western reincarnations. We conceive this volume as a vigorous example of what theoretically focused and historically responsible cultural studies can be, as well as a corrective to what we perceive as "wild borrowing" on the part of certain segments of Western culture. We are not in principle against such cultural borrowings—far from it—but we see it as one of our goals to provide a document that can, if nothing else, awaken people to both the difficulties and the potential benefits inherent in every act of cross-cultural understanding, including and especially a transforming encounter—cultural, intellectual, artistic, or mystical—with Kālī.

KĀLĪ: A HISTORICAL SKETCH

Kālī is a particularly powerful place to begin such a project, since many of the themes that arise in the modern appropriation of goddesses are unusually, almost fantastically, pronounced in her iconography, mythology, and ritual. As is true of most divine figures, Kālī is a deity with a long, multilayered history.[8] Although worshipped throughout South Asia, she has traditionally been most popular in geographically peripheral areas of the subcontinent, such as Bengal, Assam, and Nepal in the northeast, Kashmir, Panjab, and Himachal Pradesh in the northwest, and Kerala, Tamilnadu, and Sri Lanka in the south. While individual myths, rituals, and iconographic traditions may differ somewhat in each of these areas, Kālī is commonly perceived as a goddess who encompasses and transcends the opposites of life. She is, for example, simultaneously understood as a bloodthirsty demon-slayer, an inflictor and curer of diseases, a deity of ritual possession, and an all-loving, compassionate Mother. That Kālī often delights in shocking her viewers into new modes of awareness and emotional intensity is obvious to anyone who has witnessed her Bengali iconographic representations, which often present her wearing fetuses for earrings, decapitating men, sticking out her tongue for all to see, wearing a garland of chopped-off heads and a miniskirt of human arms, and living in cremation grounds. To make matters ever more complex, despite all of this, her devotees still insist upon affectionately addressing her as "Mā," or "Mother."

As far as can be reconstructed from literary and iconographic sources, Kālī's present complexity of character developed slowly during the course of at least two thousand years. Although she was probably originally a tribal goddess, by the epic and early Purāṇic periods (third century B.C.E. to seventh century C.E.), Kālī was absorbed into the Brāhmaṇical, Sanskrit tradition as a dangerous, blood-loving battle queen. Her first major appearance, for example, is in the "Devī-Māhātmya" (ca. sixth century C.E.), where she appears as the goddess Durgā's fury incarnate. Later, in Tantric ritual and philosophy (eighth to sixteenth centuries C.E.), she was elevated to an ontological absolute and identified with the dynamic ground of the universe. More recently, several devotional traditions (seventeenth century C.E. on) have claimed her as the loving Mother of all. Interpretations of Kālī, in other words, have evolved significantly over time. Although a male *mudiyettu* dancer acting the part of Kālī in a Kerala ritual may view her differently from a Banaras woman believed to be an incarnation of the Goddess, both are heir to an impressive composite layering of beliefs about Kālī, incorporating tribal, priestly, Tantric, and popular histories.

One of the most interesting developments in contemporary Western appropriations of this goddess is that she has been lifted out of the specificity of her several geographic, cultural, and literary South Asian contexts and

fashioned into an ahistorical, archetypal, feminist figure. Some feminist writers, for example, have turned to her as an empowering model of female energy to do battle with the oppressive strictures of patriarchal social practices. And, indeed, Kālī seems to confirm their reading with stunning scenes of graphic violence: in one genre of popular poster, for instance, she effortlessly decapitates a male demon and stands on her corpselike husband while her female attendants cut off the limbs and heads of an opposing all-male army. Similarly, it is not difficult to see why New Age authors have seen in Kālī a radical sacralization of sexuality: the full-breasted Goddess is usually depicted naked and is often described as engaging her supine husband in sexual intercourse. Such Western interpretations of Kālī represent the most recent hermeneutical layer in her complex history. All of these layers, however, are tied together by a common social thread: she may be a bloodthirsty tribal deity, a goddess of esoteric Tantric rites, the Mother of devotional poets experiencing the political and social upheavals of eighteenth-century Bengal, or the Terrible Mother of universal female strength and rage, but in all cases, by her very multivalency, Kālī expresses transformative power (*śakti*). Whether marginalized or mainstreamed, apologized for or enthusiastically endorsed, such *śakti* both reflects and influences the aspirations of her votaries. Encountering Kālī, as we seek to do here, is definitely not for the meek.

THE SCHOLARSHIP: EARLY REACTIONS AND PRESENT PATTERNS

Western interest in Kālī has always been strong, if not overly favorable. Kālīghāṭ, for example, a famous Kālī temple situated in the area that is now Calcutta, has been a focus of curiosity from the time British merchants first settled there in the late seventeenth century. Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century diaries and travelogues of civil servants, missionaries, and tourists almost invariably include references to the Kālīghāṭ temple, which came to symbolize for such writers the idolatry, barbarism, and sheer otherness of non-Christian religiosity.[9] Kālī's alleged association with the Thugs, a group of Indian stranglers whose practices were stamped out by the British in the 1830s, also aroused Western censure and righteous indignation.[10] But perhaps most problematic of all was Kālī's association with the Tantric traditions, a family of Indian mystical traditions that variously employ erotic acts and symbols, many of them explicitly antinomian, in their rituals, philosophies, and myths.[11] Some Hindus countered such attacks on their Goddess and her traditions (attacks that, in many ways, mirrored those of earlier indigenous critical voices),[12] while others, influenced by Western values and reactions, either joined the foreign critique[13] or attempted to explain away her rough edges through various philosophical, allegorical, and apologetic strategies.[14] That Kālī needed such defense, justification, muting, and translation is eloquent and ironic testament to her "problematic" nature. Thus

we can debate many of her aspects, but not the historical fact that she has been endlessly debated.

Such Western attitudes persisted well into the twentieth century, although the early decades of the century did witness the attempts of a few Western scholars to defend Kālī and the larger Tantric worlds in which she was ritually worshipped, philosophically understood, and mystically experienced in ecstatic and visionary moments.[15] This positive trend culminated in the many works of Sir John Woodroffe (1865–1936). The son of an advocate-general of Bengal, Woodroffe was an Oxford graduate, Tagore Professor of Law at Calcutta University, and a judge of the High Court of Calcutta. He was also a complex bicultural personality, a Roman Catholic who attempted in his life and writings to synthesize elements of British and Bengali culture. Writing voluminously on Tantric philosophy under the romantic pen name Arthur Avalon (as Kathleen Taylor has shown, almost certainly a code name for Woodroffe's intimate collaboration with Atal Bihari Ghose, who probably did most of the actual translation work), Woodroffe had himself photographed in indigenous dress before the Konarak temple (famous for its erotic sculptures), insisted on drawing out the similarities between Tantric and Catholic ritual sensibilities, and did not hesitate to quote a "European friend" who had experienced the power of an awakening *kuṇḍalinī* energy.[16] In all of this, he powerfully embodied the general doctrinal parameters (Tantra, eroticism, kuṇḍalinī, etc.), syncretic qualities, and discursive practices of much contemporary New Age thought; and indeed, his writings did much to inform and inspire this modern tradition of appropriation (astonishingly, many of his works are still in print after over ninety years). Although Woodroffe's publications are still important for the study of Kālī and Tantra—no Western scholar has even come close to the sheer volume, scope, and influence of his work—his books are difficult waters to chart because of their textual detail, inadequate referencing, and total lack of indices. Moreover, his work is marked by several cultural, moral, and philosophical biases that still color and in many ways restrict academic discourses on the Goddess to this day. For instance, his moralizing censorship of Tantric eroticism, his often forced cross-cultural comparisons, and his tendency to view the West as "scientific" and India as "spiritual" are all extremely problematic by contemporary scholarly standards. In the end, despite his early attempts to defend the Tantric tradition and its worship of goddesses, these difficulties—Tantra's infamous use of sexual metaphor and ritual and Woodroffe's own intellectual prejudices—led to a virtual scholarly neglect of the subject for the half century between Woodroffe's writings and the early 1960s.[17]

Beginning in the 1960s but flowering in the 1970s, Western interest in India, Hinduism, and Tantra grew in tandem with countercultural groups seeking meaning outside of Christian and Jewish norms. An early result of

such interests has been works by Indian and Western authors that concentrate on Indian art. These may be less scholarly than the writings of Woodroffe, but they are no less influential in their attempt to present Tantra favorably to English-speaking audiences. Philip Rawson's *The Art of Tantra* and Ajit Mookerjee's *Kali, the Feminine Force* epitomize the genre;[18] here, Tantra and Kālī, respectively, are interpreted broadly, with almost anything sexual or goddess-related being brought under the scope of study. These works are themselves apologetic, seeking to rescue Indian religiosity both from overbearing moralism and from the perceived Western obsession with sex. Tantra and its goddess, Kālī, are more—are deeper, more complex in their spiritual and symbolic resonances—than a neophyte might think, such works implicitly argue.[19] Mookerjee's text, in particular, stands as a bridge between the scholarly and the popular in the interpretation of Kālī. His wide-ranging inclusion of ancient Indian "goddess" figurines and fertility symbols as part of Kālī's iconographic history is based more on symbolic and psychological association than on textual or art historical evidence, so scholars tend to view the book—valuable though it is for the labeled images of Kālī that Mookerjee collected—with caution.

Woodroffe and Mookerjee embody two different approaches to the rehabilitation of Hindu goddesses such as Kālī—one, elite, based on the translation and interpretation of Sanskrit texts, and the other, popular, deriving its source material from art. A third approach, through historical, textual, and psychological studies of devotees of the Goddess, has become increasingly important over the past decade. Inevitably, what we find in this third approach is a kind of historical revisionism designed to recover and restore the Tantric dimensions of the Goddess through her saints and mystics. Here we might call to mind Malcolm McLean's textual reconstructions of the eighteenth-century Bengali Kālī poet Rāmprasād with McLean's analyses of the singer's Bengali poems as essentially Tantric in doctrinal content,[20] and the several recent studies of perhaps the most famous Kālī devotee of all, the Bengali saint and mystic Ramakrishna Paramahaṁsa (1836–86). (During a recent visit to Boulder, Colorado, one of us [Jeff] walked into a sidewalk store selling South Asian art and religious items; the brass and clay statues of Kālī were arranged around a painted clay image of Ramakrishna seated in a yogic posture, as if to signal Ramakrishna's archetypal status among Kālī devotees, South Asian and Western alike.) As is well known, Ramakrishna has been the focus of numerous Western studies and encomia since his principal disciple, Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902), brought his message of the unity of all religions to the West at the first World Parliament of Religions in 1893. Most of the early English writers, lacking access to the rich fund of Bengali biographies, focused on Ramakrishna's perennialist message that all religious traditions lead to the same mystical goal; interest in his relationship with the goddess Kālī and her Śākta background was

muted, if not actively suppressed.[21] Walter Neevel's 1976 essay "The Transformation of Śrī Rāmakrishna"[22] stands almost alone in its insistence on the Tantric nature of Ramakrishna's religious experiences and teachings until the 1990s, a decade that witnessed a rich spate of no fewer than seven major studies of Ramakrishna by Western and South Asian scholars, all focusing on the saint's remarkable sexuality, and many highlighting through a psychoanalytically informed method[23] the explicitly Tantric dimensions of that same sexuality.[24] It goes without saying that the picture of Kālī that has gradually emerged through such textual and psychological microstudies of historical figures has added an important new dimension to our shared "vision" (*darśana*) of the Goddess.

A fourth approach owes its origins to Cold War policies put in place by Western governments from the late 1960s. Newly funded area studies programs were established to train experts in the understanding of foreign cultures; situated at major universities, they provided vernacular language instruction and sent students to various parts of South Asia so that they could gain firsthand experience and familiarity with the peoples whose customs and beliefs they were studying. David Kinsley, at the time a graduate student at the University of Chicago, was one of the first who availed himself of this opportunity to turn his attention to Kālī. After a year in Calcutta—during which he spoke with Bengali devotees of Kālī and translated a number of Sanskrit and Bengali texts relating to the Goddess's history under the direction of a Bengali mentor—he published *The Sword and the Flute,* the first book in English to explore Kālī's meaning to her indigenous followers through a dispassionate reading of her vernacular and Sanskrit texts. In this reading, Kinsley advanced an interpretive framework in which some of the Goddess's more extreme characteristics, such as her famous violent nature, could be placed in their proper historical setting and understood as genuinely religious. Kinsley thus initiated a fourth method of studying of Kālī—an approach employing a mix of resources from history, texts, and field studies that asks questions concerning the theological and personal import of the Goddess to her South Asian worshippers. Since the publication of *The Sword and the Flute,* Kinsley's writing has become the starting point for all students' work on the Goddess, and many of the contributors to the present volume count him as an inspiration, if not an actual mentor.

As might be expected, however, the opening that Kinsley made into Kālī Studies has been enriched by the new interests, questions, and theoretical approaches of his followers. The overattention to Bengal as a region of study—natural because of the prominence of Calcutta in British history—has given way to the inclusion of all other regions of India, as well as Sri Lanka, Tibet, and Nepal. Thus, Indian vernaculars have been added to Sanskrit as a medium of study, and there are now as many field studies on Kālī worship as there are translations of her texts.[25] Scholars are also asking how

Indian women's relationships with Kālī differ from those of men,[26] or what Kālī devotion looks like when it is transported outside South Asia.[27] Finally, contemporary scholars are using a battery of sophisticated theoretical models, derived variously from feminist theory, psychoanalysis, structuralism, postcolonial theory, and postmodernism, to investigate further the subtleties of Kālī's meaning. Thus, in venturing into the study of Kālī, Tantra, and goddess-centered Hindu religiosity, the contributors to the present volume, by no means alone in their fascination with Kālī, are representative of a wider commitment among scholars of Hinduism to the elucidation and sympathetic investigation of her history and meaning in both South Asian and Western contexts. In this, they all write within a long discursive history richly troubled and amply inspired by a whole host of genres and personalities, from colonial and Christian denunciations to Woodroffe's existentially committed philosophizing to David Kinsley's eloquent phenomenological and historical analyses.

KĀLĪ AND THE HUMANITIES: THE MANY-ARMED DIVERSITY OF CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING

Precisely because we all write within this history—much of it ineluctably marked by the shadow of colonialism—and because we are explicitly approaching Kālī as a goddess of power and even of extremes, it is crucial that we not needlessly exoticize, demonize, or objectify her beyond what the texts and cultures we set out to study warrant. While some eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Orientalist writers, as described in the chapters to follow, may indeed have been guilty of this, projecting their fantasies of a morally corrupt East onto Kālī, such is neither our intent nor, we believe, the result of the work that follows. We are not making Kālī extreme. Rather, we are exploring and reflecting upon what her indigenous South Asian contexts have long acknowledged and even celebrated, the excesses of her power, sexuality, and violence, and the hidden potential of these energies to transform and liberate those who dare approach her. Indeed, every culture has its own category of the exotic; for those in the Hindu mainstream, this includes Kālī's various provenances—Tantra, tribal culture, historical links to social revolution, and a bloody temple cult—all of them both alluring and dangerous. The simple fact that Kālī's devotees frequently encounter her as "extreme" is more than established and supported, if perhaps unintentionally, by the presence of interpretive strategies that the indigenous cultures have adopted to explain away these more troubling aspects of her character and iconography. Several contributors to this volume were persuaded during the course of their fieldwork to admit more of the Goddess's off-putting characteristics than they had initially seen or intended. Sometimes this was because of straightforward claims made by their

informants; at other times, the puissant underbelly of the Goddess emerged through an investigation of their informants' discomfort with the history of the deity for which they were seeking to provide an exegesis.

More recently, this goddess has taken on a life in the West, and here, when Westerners appropriate Kālī, they tend to turn to the very graphic and excessive features that indigenous cultures have rejected or tried to mollify: sexuality, social rage, and associations with battle. To complicate things further, these Western traditions often reinterpret these features in terms that are foreign and even incomprehensible to the Goddess's contemporary South Asian devotees. For example, Kālī is infrequently claimed as a feminist icon in South Asia. Nor is she often understood in her indigenous contexts as a symbol of the liberating powers of female sexuality. The extreme nature of both Kālī's original iconographic and textual history and her later South Asian reinterpretations are thus replaced by yet another extreme strategy, a bold act of cross-cultural borrowing and transformation. The ironic result is this: what traditional Hindu texts relate about Kālī and Tantra is often denied or explained away by different Hindu strategies of interpretation. To put it mildly, what Westerners tend to see in Kālī is not necessarily what Hindus see and appreciate. There are clear dissonances, then, between South Asian textual traditions and modern South Asian understandings, as well as between contemporary Western and South Asian readings. One of the primary goals of this book is to identify these dissonances and attempt to relate them critically to one another. Why, for example, do Westerners tend to emphasize the very characteristics in Kālī that Indians want to explain away or even deny? Should we privilege South Asian Hindu constructions of Kālī over Western constructions of Kālī, or are all of these different Kālīs equally creative imaginings performed within different historical and social contexts? Can scholarship and theoretical discourse shed some light on this moment of cross-cultural understanding? This certainly is our hope.

The essays in *Encountering Kālī* are divided into two geographically distinct parts: Kālī as she is represented and understood in South Asian settings; and Kālī as the Goddess of Western discourse, as perceived and practiced by scholars, psychoanalysts, feminists, and the votaries of goddess spirituality. It is our contention that wherever she resides, this complex goddess invites, and indeed usually demands, interpretive measures that are as radical and revolutionary as her iconographic forms.

Part I is devoted to Kālī's indigenous South Asian iconography, mythology, and symbolism. The six chapters in this section employ a variety of methods and situate themselves in different parts of the Indian subcontinent. We begin the volume by reprinting the chapter on Kālī in David Kinsley's book *Hindu Goddesses: Visions of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Tradition.*[28] This both gives scope to his voice and provides an introduction

to Kālī's basic story for those who are unfamiliar with it, as well as acknowledging our indebtedness to his pioneering work. In this sense, we are like those legendary gods "with Indra at their head."[29] Kinsley surveys Kālī's Sanskrit and Bengali textual history, proposes likely reasons for her growing importance in Tantra during the medieval period and in devotionalism in late-eighteenth-century Bengal, and concludes by explicating her theological significance as a symbol of unconventionality, death, and the possibility of spiritual awakening.

Patricia Dold continues Kinsley's textual emphasis and phenomenological style in her "Kālī the Terrific and Her Tests: The Śākta Devotionalism of the *Mahābhāgavata Purāṇa*" by reporting on a late medieval Śākta text that glorifies the Goddess in her form as Kālī. As Dold demonstrates, the Kālī to emerge from this work is not simply a bloodthirsty, demon-slaying deity but also a magnificent mother, who tests and then lovingly rewards her devotees. Dold sees in this Purāṇa an early prototype of what later happens in the eighteenth-century Śākta *bhakti* poetry of Bengal: the Goddess is sweetened as her rough edges and extremities are increasingly downplayed and muted by devotion, public popularity, and modern sensibilities.

The next four chapters draw almost exclusively upon contemporary fieldwork—the first two providing further evidence of indigenous efforts to contain and mainstream the Goddess's theological and social implications. In "The Domestication of a Goddess: *Caraṇa-tīrtha* Kālīghāṭ, the *Mahāpīṭha* of Kālī," Sanjukta Gupta narrates in fascinating detail how the priests of Kālīghāṭ, Kālī's most famous temple in Bengal, have been systematically Vaiṣṇavizing her, removing as many reminders of her Tantric background as possible in their ritual regimens. Gupta's paper reminds us that public perceptions and elite priestly motivations, even if radically different, can exist alongside one another with little overt tension.

Likewise, Usha Menon and Richard A. Shweder, in "Dominating Kālī: Hindu Family Values and Tantric Power," demonstrate how the icon of Kālī trampling on her husband Śiva with her tongue extended has been almost completely reinterpreted in modern Oriya contexts; no longer a cue to Tantric rituals of sexual hierarchy reversal, this image is now understood by most contemporary devotees as reflecting culturally approved ideals of women's modesty and "shame" (Oriyan Indians stick out their tongues slightly in an act of embarrassed "biting" when they are ashamed). The "shame" the culture feels for its own Goddess is thus displaced and projected onto the Goddess herself in an interpretation that finds little, if any, support in the historical texts.

Patricia Lawrence's chapter, "Kāḷi in a Context of Terror: The Tasks of a Goddess in Sri Lanka's Civil War," is a chilling reminder that this goddess of extremes is not always hidden, masked by embarrassment, or made more "respectable." In war-torn Sri Lanka, Kālī worship is undergoing a dramatic

resurgence, with Tamil devotees flocking to her oracles both for aid in embodying and interpreting the horrible injuries of war and to perform propitiatory acts of self-mutilation. Kālī here is an angry mother goddess who must be both appeased and quite literally inscribed onto the suffering bodies of her devotees in trance and political torture.

Roxanne Kamayani Gupta, in her "Kālī Māyī: Myth and Reality in a Banaras Ghetto," flips the coin and shows us a mysterious, spiritually masterful, and yet vulnerable Kālī in the form of a living incarnation. Kālī Māyī is an old woman, living in poverty, who acts as the priest in a small Kālī temple in Banaras. Although she is the catalyst for several transformative events in Gupta's life, Kālī Māyī is the victim of a local goonda, and it is Gupta herself, in an enraged and sympathetic response, who embodies the Goddess's compassionate revenge. Gupta concludes her chapter with a self-reflexive analysis of the shifting projections, identifications, and role reversals that took place between the Goddess, Kālī Māyī, and herself, and considers what they might teach us about the dissonances between Western and South Asian understandings of Kālī.

If Part I provides evidence for Kālī's associations in South Asia with blood and power, sexuality and Tantra—whether these be utilized or disguised—Part II turns decidedly to the West and investigates the various contours of her different Western representations. We begin with Cynthia Ann Humes and Hugh B. Urban, both of whose essays focus on the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Orientalists and their fascination with, fear of, and religious and political censure of the black Goddess. Humes begins our discussion with "Wrestling with Kālī: South Asian and British Constructions of the Dark Goddess," an eloquent analysis of six different South Asian models of experiencing Kālī (devotional, apologetic, disbelieving, demonizing, dismissive, and sensationalizing or scandalizing), with a particular eye on indigenous South Asian literatures well outside the Śākta fold of the Goddess (e.g., Christian folklore, Jaina morality tales, and Buddhist hagiographies). While setting out the models and discussing in some detail the specifics of their different positions, Humes also relates these discourses to the later constructions of British colonialists, who employed many of these indigenous models for their own, very different ends. By so doing, Humes is able to document that British constructions of Kālī, far from being concoctions called up from nowhere, were in fact deeply reliant upon indigenous self-understandings and discourses, even if, at the same time, they took these prior models in some disturbing and often radically distorting directions (e.g., the infamous Thugee cult legend).

Hugh B. Urban's essay, "'India's Darkest Heart': Kālī in the Colonial Imagination," argues that Kālī was conceived by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century colonialists as the worst example of irrational Indian savagery. Such a reading of Kālī as the quintessential Other and the "extreme Orient" in-

fluenced Britons' dealings with the "Thugs" and led to the creation of a genre of Victorian novels centered on the lurid East. But such imagery always works both ways, and Urban also discusses the strategies of appropriation and subversion used by Indian nationalists, who turned this Orientalist Kālī against her colonial creators in their own literatures and actions. Urban's chapter thus complements that of Humes, for while not denying that British constructions of Kālī had a history, he demonstrates how their use of these histories forged a unique path.

With the next chapter, Jeffrey J. Kripal's "Why the Tāntrika Is a Hero: Kālī in the Psychoanalytic Tradition," we take up Western theory as both an arena for Kālī's descent into Western culture and a battleground for her proper representation and interpretation. Psychoanalysis is the Western hermeneutical tradition that has given the longest and most studied attention to Kālī. Interpreting the Goddess as a striking mythological embodiment of psychological patterns originating in Indian child-rearing practices and Brāhmaṇical social values, psychoanalysis, Kripal argues, can throw considerable light on such questions as why the male Tāntrika is called a "hero" (*vīra*), why Tantric ritual and language tend to "split" woman into a pure Mother and a sexually dangerous but attractive Lover, and why the Tantric traditions insist on their (in)famous synthesis of spiritual and sexual energies. To begin to answer such questions, Kripal outlines the twentieth-century psychoanalytic meditation on the Goddess through a series of mini-studies of prominent theorists and writers, offering, at the end, his own concluding reflections on what it all might mean for future studies of the Goddess.

Next we move to Keith E. McNeal's "Doing the Mother's Caribbean Work: On *Shakti* and Society in Contemporary Trinidad," which explores what he poignantly calls Kālī's "second exile," based on her double marginality in the West Indies. Exiled to Trinidad with her Indian devotees from her native South Asia in the nineteenth century, Kālī has been exiled again within Trinidadian society through a number of different colonial, economic, and Hindu processes of acculturation, sanitation, and religion-building. Even so, the Goddess has proven herself to be amazingly protean and syncretic on the island, capable of drawing on local practices and cultural dynamics in order to continue to meet the ever-changing needs of her devotees. To McNeal, this is a potent reminder of "the flexible and innovative power of *shakti* cosmology as a situated symbolic system," for this remarkable goddess unites in herself several seeming opposites—India and the West, power and oppression, Catholicism and Hinduism, and mysticism and psychiatry.

Sarah Caldwell then picks up this theoretical discourse and shifts it in a feminist direction with her chapter, "Margins at the Center: Tracing Kālī through Time, Space, and Culture." Here she calls for scholars of the Hindu religious tradition not to assume that what the Brāhmaṇical or geographic

mainstream labels "marginal" really is so peripheral to people's lives. In regions and among peoples for whom Kālī is significant, she is central; indeed, it is the marginalized—women and tribals in particular—whose early involvement with Kālī may have given rise to the very conceptions of the Goddess that have informed mainstream, Brāhmaṇical, male thinking. Hers is, in effect, a call to see and recognize the women standing at the historical, ritual, and psychological margins of the Kālī traditions, while affirming that in their own spheres, Kālī is absolutely pivotal. Caldwell, in essence, exhorts a revisioning of the scholarly portrayal of Kālī as a deity of "outsiders."

Finally, we close the volume in the present with Rachel Fell McDermott's chapter, "Kālī's New Frontiers: A Hindu Goddess on the Internet." In two senses, McDermott's essay echoes the earlier contributions of Humes and Urban. First, the authors of her sources—websites, Internet news groups, and electronic magazines—are, like the Orientalist civil servants, missionaries, travelers, and novelists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, not scholars in the traditional sense; mostly engaged in other professions, they imbue Kālī with personal, idiosyncratic meanings. Secondly, feminist and New Age proponents of Kālī have been criticized by Hindus living in the West as representative of a wave of neocolonialists; to some such critics, these Western interpreters and appropriators of the Goddess are every bit as insidious as those of the past two centuries. McDermott summarizes the various venues in which Kālī appears on the Internet and then discusses how the democratization of information media has affected the depiction of the Goddess.

ON THE MANY KĀLĪS

In sum, we might say that there are many Kālīs and many ways to conceive of these goddesses' presence in the religious histories of India and now the West. But is there some common thread, some pattern, a unity to be perceived beneath her many pluralities, be they historically, mythologically, or devotionally construed? It is most likely impossible to identify any such unity if we restrict ourselves to particular periods, cultures, or texts. The modern Bengali devotee of "Kālī Mā" will usually insist on the Goddess's gentle love and the emotional subtleties of *bhakti* and its *bhāvas*, or "moods," as the privileged means of access to her and as the predominant psychic places of her meanings. In a strikingly different way, the early-twentieth-century nationalist revolutionary will emphasize her violence, read her disheveled appearance as a symbol of India's unjust domination under the British, and even preach a sacrifice of "the white goat," that is, of the colonialist, as a means to rejuvenate her. The medieval Tāntrika, in still another hermeneutical move, will perform mortuary rituals in cremation grounds, induce altered states of consciousness with drugs, dance, and meditation, and engage

in erotico-mystical practices to approach the same Goddess as an embodiment of divine consciousness, imploded back onto itself now, in an experience of bliss, being, and infinite freedom. The modern (or rather, postmodern) American devotee, on the other hand, may see in her unrestrained rage and her dominant position atop Śiva, that archetypal male, a potent symbolism for a religiously toned feminist project. In yet another perspective, the psychoanalyst or psychologically inclined anthropologist may see her as a projection of male fears about female sexuality, the devouring mother, and unresolved oedipal issues arising out of the particularities of Indian child-rearing practices. And so on and so on, through discourse after discourse.

It is difficult indeed to see what a devotee, a political revolutionary of the 1920s, a medieval Tāntrika, a postmodern feminist, and a contemporary psychoanalytic thinker might have in common. But not entirely impossible. For all of these figures and all of their Kālīs can be seen to represent together a kind of radical response to those many limit-situations of human experience in which the normal parameters of the world break down, frequently in the hope of something better or more adequate to the rich, often paradoxical textures of our lives (and deaths). Perhaps that is what we are after in the end—a new world to live and think and love in, a world big enough and honest enough to embrace the full scope and depth of human consciousness. Here Kālī beckons us, powerful, dangerous, fascinating, and paradoxical. Appropriately, those who seek to encounter such a Goddess respond to her multi-armed nature in equally diverse and even contradictory ways, through personal devotion, animal sacrifice, ecstasy, suffering, and, perhaps strangest of all, academic scholarship.

NOTES

1. David R. Kinsley, *The Sword and the Flute: Kālī and Kṛṣṇa: Visions of the Terrible and the Sublime in Hindu Mythology* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1975, reprinted 2000).

2. Ibid., p. 145.

3. For a representative sampling of Western writers finding solace and strength in Western and non-Western goddess figures, see Carol Christ, *Rebirth of the Goddess: Finding Meaning in Feminist Spirituality* (New York: Routledge, 1998); Elinor Gadon, *The Once and Future Goddess: A Symbol for Our Time* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989); China Galland, *The Bond between Women: A Journey to Fierce Compassion* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1998); Wendy Griffin, ed., *Daughters of the Goddess: Studies of Healing, Identity, and Empowerment* (Walnut Creek, Calif.: AltaMira Press, 2000); Rita Gross, *Soaring and Settling: Buddhist Perspectives on Contemporary Social and Religious Issues* (New York: Continuum, 1998); Lina Gupta, "Kali, the Savior," in *After Patriarchy: Feminist Transformations of the World Religions,* ed. Paula M. Cooey, William R. Eakin, and Jay B. McDaniel (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1991), pp. 15–38; Alf Hiltebei-

tel and Kathleen Erndl, eds., *Is the Goddess a Feminist? The Politics of South Asian Goddesses* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press; New York: New York University Press, 2000); and Merlin Stone, *When God Was a Woman* (New York: Dial Press, 1976).

4. See Cynthia Eller, *Living in the Lap of the Goddess: The Feminist Spirituality Movement in America* (New York: Crossroad, 1993) and *The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory: Why an Invented Past Won't Give Women a Future* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000); Larry Hurtado, ed., *Goddesses in Religion and Modern Debate* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990); David R. Kinsley, *The Goddesses' Mirror: Visions of the Divine Feminine from East and West* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989); Lote Motz, *The Faces of the Goddess* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Elizabeth Puttick, "Goddess Spirituality: The Feminist Alternative?" in id., *Women in New Religions: In Search of Community, Sexuality, and Spiritual Power* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), pp. 196–231; and Susan Starr Sered, *Priestess, Mother, Sacred Sister: Religions Dominated by Women* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

5. Sam Gill, *Mother Earth: An American Story* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

6. "Naked Ambition: Tantra May Be Old, but It Has Generated a Hot Modern Market," *Wall Street Journal,* December 7, 1998, pp. A1, 6.

7. See discussion on p. 283–84 below.

8. The best general historical and textual surveys of the goddess Kālī include J. N. Banerjea, *Pauranic and Tantric Religion, Early Phase* (Calcutta: Calcutta University, 1966); Śaśibhūṣaṇ Dāśgupta, "Kālī-Debī o Kālī Pūjār Itihās," in his *Bhārater Śakti-Sādhanā o Śākta Sāhitya* (Calcutta: Sāhitya Saṃsad, 1960), pp. 63–89; Kinsley, *Sword and the Flute;* and Pushpendra Kumar, *Śakti Cult in Ancient India* (Varanasi: Bhartiya Publishing House, 1974).

9. See William S. Caine, *Picturesque India: A Handbook for European Travellers* (London: Routledge, 1898), pp. 336–38; Katherine Mayo, *Mother India* (1927; London: Jonathan Cape, 1930), pp. 13–19; J. Campbell Oman, "Kalighat and Hinduism in Bengal," in his *Brahmins, Theists, and Muslims of India* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1907), pp. 3–23; Fanny Parks, *Wanderings of a Pilgrim in Search of the Picturesque,* 2 vols. (1850; Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1975), 2: 104; and William Ward, *The History, Literature, and Mythology of the Hindoos,* 4 vols., 3d ed. (1817–20; Delhi: Low Price Publications, 1990), 4: 154–60.

10. The person principally responsible for identifying and checking Thuggee was Maj.-Gen. Sir William Henry Sleeman. See his *Thugs or Phansigars: Comprising a History of the Rise and Progress of that Extraordinary Fraternity of Assassins; and a description of the system which it pursues, and of the measures which have been adopted by the Supreme Government of India for its suppression* (Philadelphia: Carey & Hart, 1839). For other contemporary, scandalized descriptions, refer to James Hutton, *A Popular Account of the Thugs and Dacoits* (London: William H. Allen, 1857), and Edward Thornton, *Illustrations of the History and Practices of the Thugs and Notices of Some of the Proceedings of the Government of India, for the Suppression of the Crime of Thuggee* (London: William H. Allen, 1837). Cynthia Humes and Hugh Urban discuss the Thugs in more detail below.

11. An excellent introduction to the philosophical concepts, ritual practices, and textual foundations of Tantra may be found in Teun Goudriaan and Sanjukta