

Bhairava and the Goddess

Tradition, Gender and Transgression

by

Elizabeth Chaliar-Visuvalingam

(With the collaboration of Sunthar Visuvalingam)

for the International Symposium on

Wild Goddesses in India and Nepal

Berne and Zurich, 3–4 November 1994

Universität Bern, Institut für Religionswissenschaft

Universität Zürich, Museum für Völkerkunde

Published in

Wild Goddesses in India and Nepal

(Bern: Peter Lang, 1996), pp.253–301

Axel Michaels, Cornelia Vogelsanger, Annette Wilke, eds.

Studia Religiosa Helvetica (StRH) 96

[The article below has not yet been completely copy-edited to match the printed version]

Table of Contents

Abstract

Introduction: the Tamed Goddess and her Wild Guardian

Bhairava in Kāśī, the womb of the Goddess

The Gaṅgā and the Matsyodarī yoga

Baṭuka Bhairava, the son of the goddess Caṇḍī

Kāśī: Goddess and *liṅga* of light

Vaiṣṇo Devī's decapitation of Bhairava

The pilgrimage to Vaiṣṇo Devī

Bhairava, the Goddess and *bhakti*

Bhairava as royal sacrificer: Newar Festivals of the Goddess

Indrayātrā: Taleju, Kumārī and the demon-mother of Indra

Pacali Bhairava Yātrā: Ajimā, Ganeśa and Bhadrakālī

Bhadrakālī in the Bisket Yātrā: the autochthonous goddess and Hindu tradition

Bhairavī Rathayātrā: possession, sacrifice and the legacy of the shaman

Tradition, gender, and transgression: the Goddess as androgyne

References

Abstract

[p.301 >] Nothing could be more opposed, at first sight, to the pre-Aryan wilderness of the bloodthirsty goddess than the purified male-dominated arena of the Brahmanical sacrifice. Nevertheless, the popular pilgrimage cults to her shrines and the communal festivals celebrated in her honor remain structured by the Vedic paradigm. On the other hand, the sacrifice is pervaded by a feminine dimension, rich in embryonic symbolism, whose transgressive centrality is obscured by the outwardly passive role assumed by the wife of the 'Aryan' sacrificer. This article explores the role of the tantric god Bhairava—who is typically coupled with the wild goddess and yet cast in the image of the (preclassical) *dīkṣita*—in drawing these two cultural universes together to form Hinduism as we know it today. Bhairava-Viśvanātha's marriage to the solitary Newar goddess ('Bhadrakālī') not only bequeathed the Vedic mystery of the severed head to the Katmandu Valley; it can still help us decipher the feminine aspect of Kāśī and the otherwise unsuspected implications of the Hindu's perennial love for his sacred city. [< p.301]

Introduction: the Tamed Goddess and her Wild Guardian

[253>] The ‘original’ Goddess was wild (*ugra*) in every sense of the term before her reign in South Asia was usurped by the patriarchal Brahmanical tradition and its pantheon of Vedic gods. The impure Amazon was first suppressed, then gradually domesticated, before she was finally reinstated as the benign (*saumya*) Mother of the Universe. The blood-thirsty virgin of the pre-Aryan tribes became the submissive Hindu bride bound in wedlock to one or the other of the classical trinity. It is above all in folk-religion and in the radical Tantric practices that she reverts back—at least temporarily—to her pristine form, the incarnation of unbridled violence and sexuality. Even then, she has to suffer the ignominy of being accompanied by a chaperon, none other than her consort Śiva disguised specially for the occasion as the terrible Bhairava, to whom her countless other guardians and consorts are generally assimilated. The Hindu tradition ultimately derives even her ‘seats of power’ (*śāktapīṭha*) from the inert body of the hapless wife, who still immolates herself in the combined fire of her father’s sense of honor and of her husband’s indifference. Nevertheless, the solitary Goddess is still everywhere to be found on the margins of the caste-society and just beyond, whether in the cremation-grounds of Tamil Nadu or the jungles of Orissa.

This then is the portrait of the ‘wild Goddess’ commonly held by Indologists, particularly by those among us who have been [<253-254>] trained—as anthropologists—to be wary of the sophisticated textual annexation of this otherwise illiterate woman. In its defiance of the norms of Brahmanical purity and of orthodox renunciation, Tantricism itself would be the codified, systematized and domesticated form given to the gradual resurgence of these pre-Aryan materials by the learned Brahmans and Buddhist monks who inevitably took control of the movement. The Newar cults and festivals dedicated to the great Goddess—who is already assimilated to the various forms of the dark but auspicious (Bhadra-)Kālī even while jealously guarding her role as ‘grandmother’ (Ajimā) within a clan-based social organization—are living testimony to the forcible penetration of this wild, uncharted female territory, to the unrelenting process of ‘colonization’ by the male Aryan, and essentially Hindu, order. In Bhaktapur, for example, this nameless tribal goddess had reigned alone before she was placated, seduced, subdued and domesticated by Kāla-Bhairava alias Kāśī Viśvanātha from Banaras, the seat of

Hindu orthodoxy. The facts would seem indisputable: at best, Bhairava himself, the terrible male guardian, would have originally been her (often subordinated) tribal consort, the generic mold for the countless savage deities that likewise came to be assimilated to the Brahmanical Śiva.

In my previous papers and most recently in my D.Litt. dissertation,¹ I have sought to demonstrate, with a wealth of materials that I cannot reproduce here, that the tantric Bhairava—as we know him in myth and iconography—is a specifically Hindu god who ultimately incarnates and conserves the transgressive values [<254-255>] invested in the consecrated Vedic sacrificer, the preclassical *dīkṣita*. In principle, the Brahmanical sacrificer was the indissociable man-wife couple (*dampatī*); in practice, however, the role of the sacrificer's wife was reduced to that of a necessary but passive presence in an otherwise male-dominated ritual drama. Bhairava's coupling with the tribal goddess (for instance in Orissa with Khambeśvarī or Stambeśvarī)—readily assuming the role of her original consort wherever opportune—was not only a means of transmitting the underlying transgressive values and their symbolic encoding beyond the narrower confines of the Brahmanical tradition. The cult(s) of the Goddess provided the fertile ground and raw material for rendering explicit, and thereby unleashing, the feminine power locked within the womb of the sacrifice. As Shulman (1980:9) observes for Tamil temple traditions:

“It appears that an early ideology of sacrifice which strongly recalls and was perhaps assimilated to the Vedic sacrificial cult, lies at the basis of the tradition of many shrines... Perhaps from very ancient times the idea of

¹ [254 >] My *thèse d'état*, defended on 12 April 95 at the University of Nanterre (Paris-X), before a jury consisting of Charles Malamoud (my supervisor), Gérard Toffin, Olivier Herrenschildt, Michel Hulin and Jan Heesterman, was unanimously accorded the most honorable mention. This paper is also the occasion to respond succinctly to some of the objections raised, especially those by Toffin on the Newar materials. I thank, Sunthar Visuvalingam, my husband, for the underlying theoretical framework of my work and for having helped me rework this paper, in particular the Introduction and Conclusion. [<254]

sacrifice was associated with the worship of the goddess who is closely identified with the sacrifice as the source both of death and of new life...”

Tantricism itself could be better understood as the systematic reworking and exteriorization of this transgressive dimension into an independent and alternate tradition so as to facilitate the assimilation of extra-Brahmanical and pre-Aryan cultures with their distinctive religious practices into the larger fabric of what is called ‘Hinduism’. Thus, the sex partner (*dūtī*), who incarnates the Goddess in the Kula ‘sacrifice’ in order to unite with the adept of Bhairava, is at the same time explicitly identified with the wife of the Brahmanical sacrificer (Chalier-Visuvalingam, 1994b).

“It is clear that originally the victim was killed while bound to the sacrificial stake, the *yūpa*. The rules of the *śrauta* ritual, however, have the animal led up and bound to the *yūpa*, but then prescribe to take it away to a special shed well outside the ritual enclosure to be killed. Moreover, while in the local cults, as in the Durgā festival, the victim is killed by decapitation, its Vedic counterpart is smothered without any spectacular bloodshed. Nevertheless beheading must originally also have been ancient Indian sacrificial practice” (Heesterman 1995).

[<255-256>] The entire sacrificial mechanism is still based on the presupposition of the sacrificer’s own decapitation at the stake.² The striking feature of the Brahmanical sacrifice in its

² [256>] “We must now ask why it is Vanaspati, the sacrificial post, who is asked to convey the animal to the fold of the gods, and why the post is so closely associated with the divine butcher. From the standpoint of the later ritual this is not explicable since the animal is killed in a shed at some distance from the post. In Rigvedic times, however, this was different: The animal was killed by beheading at the post. For this I.162.9 is ample evidence: *yād āsvasya kravīṣo...svārau svādhitau riptām āsti* ‘what of the horse’s flesh is smeared on the post, on the axe...” (Schmidt, 1979 p.37). Biardeau, who laboriously looked up this reference for me, adds: “I know that Heesterman

purified classical form is the minimization, if not complete elimination, of all overt manifestations of conflict, violence, death and—in what especially concerns the Goddess—sexuality. As a result, the true nature of the relationship between the sacrificer’s wife and her husband’s passage through the various acts, stages and symbolic scenes of the ritual drama is all but obscured. The feminine elements in the Vedic sacrifice appeared above all in the form of geometric shapes, ritual implements and inanimate objects: “The *vedi*, arranged in the schematic shape of a woman with broad hips and narrow shoulders, half enclosed the *āhavanīya* hearth between its ‘shoulders’ and the *gārhapatya* between the ‘hips’” (Heesterman 1993:92). “This *vedi* in the feminine symbolized in this manner is, first of all, the wife of the sacrificer” (Biardeau, 1989:40). The Vedic altar (*vedi*) in which the sacrificial fire is kindled is thus assimilated to the vulva, and the sacrificial post (*yūpa*) on its edge is not without phallic notations, so much so that one would be justified in following Biardeau (1989:38-44) in seeing [[256-257](#)] in the later aniconic form of Śiva as the *liṅga*-in-the-*yoni* no more than a subsequent transposition of the Vedic motifs. Often identified as the *liṅga* of Bhairava, the New Year poles of the Newar festivals dedicated to the Goddess continue to drip with the fresh blood of innumerable victims. But it is only at the level of symbolism—through the conjoined reading of myths, paraphernalia and gestures—that any transgressive meanings can be deciphered in the classical sacrifice.³ By

is in agreement with Schmidt’s interpretation because all three of us discussed it one evening” (letter of 24 April 95). Malamoud (see note), who specializes in the rituals described in the Brāhmaṇa texts, objected to my assimilation of the Newar poles to the Vedic *yūpa* as the place of blood sacrifice. Even if the victim was never sacrificed at the *yūpa* in Rgvedic times, I would like to see a successful hermeneutic of its function in the later ritual that would not depend on its continuing to play this symbolic role. “Thus, for instance, the cutting up of the tree and the fashioning of the *yūpa* are moulded so as to parallel as far as possible the standardized scheme of the sacrificial victim’s immolation and cutting up” (Heesterman 1995). [[256](#)]

³ [[257](#)] “The goddess is certainly not unknown to the Vedic scriptures where we also find telling indications of her fierce and fiery warrior persona. Thus, as the rejected *dakṣiṇā* cow—Dakṣiṇā as a goddess is closely related to Aditi—she turns into a devouring lioness standing threateningly between the two parties, the Ādityas and the Angirasas. She is then assuaged by giving her a place in the sacrificial enclosure as the *uttaravedi* earth mound that serves as the oblatinal fire

permitting the reintroduction of the forbidden elements of impurity within the newly emerging context of Tantricism, the Goddess clarifies the true meaning and scope of the feminine in the Brahmanical sacrifice. At the same time, she ensures that the new currents of transgressive sacrality develop within the preexisting symbolic paradigm. Her polarization into a benign (*saumya*) and a savage (*ugra*) aspect could only help control and maintain the vital two-way flow between these opposing yet equally legitimate and complementary images of the feminine in the Hindu tradition.

In Banaras and in the mythology of Vaiṣṇo Devī in Kashmir, Bhairava appears as the guardian of the Goddess. But Bhairava appears also as her father, son, and divine consort. I shall argue that all these relationships are the different faces (phases) of a single identity, that of the consecrated (*dīkṣita*) preclassical Vedic sacrificer who regressed into an embryonic condition (Heesterman 1962, 1985, 1993).⁴ [[<257-258>](#)] Through a Tantrification of Vedic cosmogony, the *dīkṣita*'s return to the womb is symbolically equated with the interiorized death of the Tantric adept as his vital energies are forced up the backbone along the median channel (*sūṣumnā* = *śmaśāna*). The Puranic origin myth expresses this equation of sacrificer and victim by making Bhairava emerge from the fiery cosmic pillar (*jyotir-liṅga*) to lop off the (fifth) head of Brahmā. As the transposition of the *dīkṣita*, Bhairava is associated with the impurity of death; he is identified not only with the murderous sacrificer but also with the sacrificial victim. Through the *dīkṣā*, the sacrificer becomes assimilated to a fetus of indeterminate sex within the womb of his own wife. The embryonic fusion of the *dīkṣita* with the (surrogate) maternal womb permits

stand. That is, she is subjected to the *śrauta* system of ritual and deprived of an active role in her own right" (Heesterman 1995).

⁴ My use of the term "embryonic" is taken from Kuiper (1983:90-137) "Cosmogony and Conception: A Query": "In the light of the current parallelism between myth and ritual, however, it should be noted that in the Vedic ritual of the initiation (*dīkṣā*), the *dīkṣita* must again become an embryo... in order to be reborn. The dangerous and inauspicious character of the *dīkṣita* while being tied (...) must probably be explained from his being in Varuṇa's realm. The same notion of rebirth also underlines the statement of the ritual texts that the sacrificer by sacrificing regenerates his own self" (ibid., p.116). [[<257>](#)]

the projection of traits like chaos, death, evil, impurity, regression, violence, androgyny, etc., onto the mother symbol itself, as we shall see in the case of Vaiṣṇo Devī having spent nine months in her own womb. By their own proclamation, the adepts of the antinomian Bhairava—who include Buddhists, Jainas and, later on, even Muslims—are generally perceived as being outside of, if not directly opposed to, the Brahmanical tradition. However, there is equal evidence to suggest that Bhairava has been instrumental not only in taming the wild goddess, whom he apparently protects, but in drawing her—through seduction, marriage and even rape—into the irresistible orbit of the Vedic sacrifice.

After sharing some field notes from Banaras, Kashmir and the Katmandu Valley,⁵ I shall explore the relation between the Goddess and Bhairava as an illustration of the role of gender within a dialectic of tradition and transgression. The resurgence of the wild goddess was perhaps less of a threat than an opportunity for the Vedic tradition to extend and consolidate the hold of its symbolic universe over the entire South Asian subcontinent. [<258-259>]

Bhairava in Kāśī, the womb of the Goddess

Bhairava, the terrifying aspect of Śiva, is the god of transgression par excellence, for he appears only to cut off the head of Brahmā, brahmanicide being the most heinous crime in the Hindu tradition.⁶ Brahmā refused to recognize the supremacy of Śiva, who therefore created

⁵ [258>] Field-work in Kashmir was done during the summer of 1984; however my main field work was in Banaras and in the Katmandu Valley between 1984 and 1988 supported by intermittent grants from the CNRS and the French Foreign Office. I could however have never sustained this research without the initial and continued support of, first, the Indian Ministry of Education and Culture and, later, the University Grants Commission (UGC) at Delhi. [<258]

⁶ [259>] For a detailed analysis of this myth, see Chaliier-Visuvalingam 1989 and 1994a. The numerous versions of this Brahmaśiraśchedaka myth from the Purāṇas can be found assembled and partly analyzed also in Stietencron 1969, Doniger O'Flaherty 1973 and in Kramrisch 1981. [<259]

Bhairava and ordered him to decapitate Brahmā, promising him in return eternal suzerainty over his city of Kāśī (Vārānāsī, Banaras), the cremation ground of the Hindu universe, where final emancipation is assured to all. However, the skull-bearing Bhairava had to expiate his crime through twelve years of wandering before gaining access to Kāśī. His guilt relentlessly pursues him in the form of a maiden called “Brahmanicide” (Brahmahatyā). Cast in the image of his sex partner (Bhairavī), Brahmahatyā appears in all her ambiguity as both his supreme punishment and his sole means of beatification, and thus imposes a causal connection between the two opposed meanings: it is through his transgressive sacrality (= brahmanicide) that Bhairava becomes the supreme principle of the universe. From the gender perspective, the feminine element indispensable to tantric sexuality is represented here as the ultimate transgression of the Brahmanical tradition. The maiden Brahmahatyā—or rather, the guilt of brahmanicide—is barred access to the holy city. On reaching Banaras, Bhairava plunges into a tank called Kapālamocana (“liberation of the skull”) to be reborn as the Kotwal or District Magistrate of the sacred city, who now chastises and liberates everyone at the moment of death through a metaphysical punishment called *bhairavī-yātanā*. At the same time, Bhairava remains at that spot as a scapegoat (*pāpabhakṣaṇa*) taking upon himself the sins of all pilgrims. [[259-260](#)>]

The Gaṅgā and the Matsyodarī yoga

Instead of flowing from north to south, the Gaṅgā in Banaras flows northwards (*uttaravāhini*), i.e. returns towards her own source, making this the most sacred of cities. Bhairava arrived in Banaras during the Matsyodarī yoga, a rare phenomenon that occurred only during an exceptionally heavy rainy season. The Gaṅgā used to reverse the flow of the Varunā river and of its seasonal tributary the Matsyodarī in such a way that the whole town was encircled within her womb, turning this city of light into the primordial mound of archaic cosmogony.⁷ It was during this rare but exceedingly auspicious “Fish-Womb Conjunction”

⁷ [[260](#)>] This identification of the fertile mound with the very source of the life-giving waters—the “mouth of the cow” (Gaumukh), in the case of Banaras—is expressed in the founding myths of some Nepali tribes rather in terms of a clod of earth flowing downstream from the source to

(Matsyodarī-*yoga*), when the Gaṅgā itself became the Fish-Womb, that Bhairava plunged into the waters of Kapālamocana originally situated at the confluence of the Matsyodarī and the backward-flowing Mother Gaṅgā. The Omkāra temple on its hillock on the banks of the former Kapālamocana at the heart of the sacred city was transformed by this primeval deluge into an island, just like its prototype, the Omkāra *ḥyortirliṅga* of Central India in the middle of the sacred Narmadā River. The (royal) sacrificer too emerged from the amniotic waters of a pool at the end of the *dīkṣā* during the Aśvamedha while discharging the impurity [*<260-261>*] of death and evil onto a scapegoat.⁸ The brahmanicide Bhairava's absolution in Banaras is clearly modeled on the Vedic *dīkṣā*.

Baṭuka Bhairava, the son of the goddess Caṇḍī

Bhairava presides over the holy city in a group of eight called *aṣṭabhairava* paired with a group of eight goddesses called *aṣṭamātrkā*. However, it is no longer possible to reconstitute the spatial organization of the *aṣṭamātrkā* (see however my attempt to do so in Chaliar-

coagulate at the present site of the tribal settlement. In the Bhairavī Rathayātrā it reappears as a stone, discovered by a fisherman in the river-bed and installed at the confluence of Devī Ghāt. Even before the arrival of the Licchavis upon the Nepali stage, Buddhist penetration may have transformed an indigenous cosmogony of the primordial mountain into the worship of Svayambhunātha (Gutschow, talk at Banaras Hindu University, India, 22 February 1987 and Slusser 1982:298-302). Svayambhū, which is ritually connected with a Kotwal Bhairava at the gorge where the Bagmati exits from the valley, was probably the site of a pre-historic cult related to the draining of the Katmandu Valley. A similar acculturation of pre-Aryan cosmogony centered on Banaras may have been eventually incorporated into the sacrificial paradigm of the Bhairava cult. [*<260>*]

⁸ [*<261>*] Hindu kings apparently continued to imitate the example of the Kapālika-Bhairava right up until the final short-lived efflorescence of Vārānasī before the Muslim conquest, for a Gāhadvāla inscription records that in the twelfth century king Govindacandra bathed in the Gaṅgā at Kapālamocana in (during) the Fish-Womb (conjunction) and made a land donation to a Brahman. See Lorenzen 1972:30, Eck 1983:112-120, Sukul 1977:50, Irwin 1982:339-60, Kuiper 1983:90-137. [*<261>*]

Visuvalingam 1994a) as it has been in the Katmandu Valley. Though Kāla Bhairava is the most important and central among them, he is not counted among the eight traditional Bhairavas in the, roughly speaking, eight different directions of the holy city to whom he has relegated his function of Kotwal. Apart from the above eight classical Bhairavas, there are images of Bhairava scattered all about Banaras, either in the open-air or housed in small temples or in a subsidiary position in the temple of some other divinity. Very often Bhairava is represented merely by an amorphous stone heavily bedecked with vermilion. The embryonic implications of Bhairava's entry into Banaras are reflected in the relationship between his "child" (*Baṭuka*) manifestation and one or more forms of the benign goddess.

Baṭuka and Ādi Bhairava occupy separate shrines in the same temple in the Kamacchā area, a temple that is not counted among the traditional eight Bhairavas but has eclipsed them all in popularity due the dynamism of its Mahant. The founding-legend, as recalled by the Mahant, tells of an ascetic *guru* named something like Baṭuk or Śiva-Rām Puri who, having quarreled with his disciple at Allahabad, [[261-262](#)] decided to settle in the district of Kamacchā with his image of Krodha Bhairava in order to continue his spiritual practice (*sādhana*). There his renown grew to the point attracting the attention of the childless Balwant Singh. On receiving a blessed fruit from the *sādhu*, the king of Banaras beget his successor Raja Chet Singh, and rewarded his new-found preceptor with land and properties. When the envious disciple came to rejoin his *guru*, the latter shed his mortal coils in a fit of anger and his final resting place (*samādhi*) is supposed to be beneath the shrine of the present "original-Angry-Bhairava" (Ādi Krodhana Bhairava). The disciple, having assumed ownership of the properties, later rediscovered through a dream the image of Baṭuka Bhairava, which was excavated with the help of king Balwant Singh in the compound of the present temple built by the king in 1733 to commemorate the birth of his son. The present lineage of Mahants, who descended from that rebellious disciple, found peace only after having observed a rigorous *sādhanā* for seven generations before Krodhana Bhairava, who is still worshipped as (the union of?) Ānanda Bhairava and Bhairavī (the coupled form of Bhairava that is generally worshipped during the Kūlayāga). The Mahant recounts the myth of the goddess Candī having discovered Baṭuka Bhairava as a child (*baṭuk*) at the bottom of a lake during the universal dissolution (*pralaya*) and adopting him with compassion. Baṭuka is indeed considered the child of the "fierce" (*candī*)

goddess, whose image is found within his sanctum. (We find the same privileged relation also between Durgā and Canda Bhairava in Banaras.) The original *guru* is implicitly identified with Baṭuka Bhairava, in a scenario of death and rebirth—even the real birth of the king’s progeny does not escape this embryogonic symbolism—that recalls the terrifying Skull-Bearer’s emergence from the watery womb of the goddess Kāśī during the Matsyodari-yoga.

Kāśī: Goddess and *liṅga* of light

In many Mahātmyās, Banaras is identified with the goddess: “In Kashi Khanda 7:66, Banaras is personified as a goddess whose ‘tremulous [[262-263](#)] eyes’ are Lolark and Keshava, and whose arms are the rivers Varana and Asi” (Pathak and Humes 1993:207). Today this goddess is venerated in the Trilocana temple beside the *ghāt* of the same name. This temple shelters also one of the twelve *liṅgas* of light (*vyotir liṅga*) of India. The mythology of the *vyotir liṅga* is very important in Banaras, because it is precisely in Kāśī that this column of fire originally appeared. Kāśī is even identified with this *liṅga* of light. “Kāshī is also the liṅga of light... The entire sacred field included within the Pañcakrosi road is the liṅga of light, the blazing emblem of the Lord” (Eck 1983:109). But the sages ask why Kāśī has a feminine name if it is a *liṅga*? Śiva replies that he is himself both Śiva and Śakti, thus underlining the androgynous character of the holy city. Kāśī has been connected with the worship of the goddess since early times (Eck 1983:75,174 and Tiwari 1985). Recognized from Maurya times, its efflorescence was above all between the eighth and the twelve centuries. Today, the city has many representations of the Goddess. But what is important here is the close relation between Bhairava and the Goddess as identified with the entire sacred city: “for the Kāśī to which Bhairava must go to release Brahmā’s head is also the body of the goddess with whom Śiva longs to reunite, as well as being the *liṅgam* of light that outlasts the Pralaya and in which Śiva and Śakti are one.” (Hiltebeitel, 1988:446).⁹ In Tamil Nadu, for example, the brahmanicide Śiva

⁹ [[263](#)] “Remember that the exiled Shiva’s longing love (viraha) for Kāshī is explicitly likened to that of a lover separated from his beloved. Kāshī, like the River Ganges, is, in a sense, Shiva’s loved one. She is Shakti, Shiva’s consort and his active power, manifest in this world, on ‘this shore’. Kāshī is the Goddess, embodied” (Eck 1983:159). “Aflame with viraha, Shiva cried, ‘If the

has to reunite with the Goddess (Ankālamman), who had assumed the form of the womb-like termite-mound waiting for him in the cremation-ground, in order to form with her the primordial androgyne (*ardhanārīśvara*) before he can be freed forever of the guilt-laden skull.

[<263-264>]

The true form of Kāśī is not only the Śiva *liṅga*, no different from the pillar of light from which Bhairava was born, but also the Goddess Citā (meaning both “funeral pyre” and “Consciousness”). Kāśī, the city of light, is illuminated above all by the fires of death. The perpetual cremation of corpses at Manikarnikā, the navel of Kāśī, transforms this “Great Cremation Ground” into the cosmogonic center transcending the spatio-temporal order of the Hindu sacrificial universe that ceaselessly (re-)emerges from its womb only to (re-) dissolve into this microcosmic *pralaya* modeled on the Vedic fire sacrifice. In Abhinavagupta's description, the whole imagery of the cremation ground is internalized, through a play on the word *citi/citā*:

"Behold within the body itself that *citi*, resplendent like the Fire at the end of Time, wherein everything is dissolved and all the elements are consumed. This cremation ground in the form of the void is the most terrible playground, the resort of the Yoginīs and the perfect ones (*siddha*), where all forms are disintegrated. The chains of obscurity are dispelled by the circle of its own (fiery) rays (the sense-organs) to reveal only the (supreme) state of bliss, free of all mentation (*vikalpa* = doubts). Having entered this receptacle of all the gods, this cremation ground of consciousness, so terrible with its innumerable funeral pyres (*citi*) strewn all around, who indeed would not attain perfection (through performing the *kulayāga*)?" (Tantrāloka 29:182-85).¹⁰

breeze that comes from Kāshī would embrace me, that raging fire would be extinguished... O sweet Kāshī, when will I again feel the happiness of union with your body, by which my own divine body will become cool again in an instant" (Eck 1983:309). [<263]

¹⁰ [<264>] For a complete analysis, see Chaliar-Visuvalingam 1994a and 1994b. [<264]

It is in the context of (transgressive) sexual union that Abhinavagupta, the great Hindu philosopher mystic of eleventh century Kashmir—who was reputed, and believed himself, to be Bhairava incarnate—equates the supreme form of the trident and of the *liṅga-in-the-yoni* (the vagina) to the perfected human body itself. The Goddess Kāśī, not only conserves all the sexual and dangerous connotations of the Vedic altar (especially of the *dakṣhināgni*); she also reveals herself to be the exteriorization of an inner state of consciousness attained by the adepts of Bhairava through tantric practices like the *kulayāga*. It would seem that Brahmahatyā was barred access to the sacred city not so much [[264-265](#)] because she was the impure incarnation of brahmanicide, but rather because brahmanicide itself could no longer be equated to guilt in the fiery womb of the goddess Kāśī.

Vaiṣṇo Devī's decapitation of Bhairava

Defined primarily by a sacred geography and a set of ritual activities, Banaras has scarcely assumed the full-fledged form of the Goddess proper. In this respect, the Hindu sacred city remains closer to the non-anthropomorphic representations of the feminine so characteristic of the Vedic sacrifice. As the bastion of Brahmanical orthodoxy, the goddess-city has hardly any heroic exploits of her own of which to boast, just as the sacrificer's wife hardly took any initiative in the ritual activity unfolding around her. It is rather the exploits of the male Bhairava, the transposed *dīkṣita*, that help us discover the feminine nature of Kāśī. Though she seems to replace Brahmahatyā as the consort of Śiva-Bhairava, there is no way that her Brahmanical purity could be tainted by brahmanicide. It is only through comparison with a scenario of *bhakti* like the pilgrimage to Vaiṣṇo Devī that we begin to glimpse the deeper implications of Bhairava's penetration into the womb of the Goddess at Kāśī.

The pilgrimage to Vaiṣṇo Devī

I was able to personally undertake this extremely popular pilgrimage to the chaste vegetarian benign goddess Vaiṣṇo Devī whose shrine is near the summit of the Trikuta mountain near Jammu in Kashmir. Once while the Goddess was providing a pure vegetarian

feast to guests, including Gorakhnātha and his seniormost disciple Bhairavanātha, the latter demanded meat and wine of her. When she refused, he tried to assault her sexually and pursued the fleeing Goddess up the now sacred mountain. Half-way at Ādikumārī she entered a cave and hid there for nine months literally like an embryo in the womb, but had to flee again, for Bhairava, through [[265-266](#)] his formidable yogic powers, pursued her relentlessly into the cave. Finally, she sought refuge in her present cave-shrine near the summit and, as Bhairava sought to force his way in, emerged suddenly as Candī to cut off his head. His trunk fell at the mouth of the cave but the force of the blow carried his head to the summit, where he is still worshipped at the Kāla Bhairava temple by pilgrims after they have rendered obeisance to the Goddess herself. For the Goddess had pardoned the immediately repentant but disembodied Bhairava and accorded him a part of her own worship. Like Bhairava, in the founding myth, the pilgrims have to literally crawl through the “womb-cave” (*garbh-joon*) midway before being able to approach the Goddess-Mother.¹¹ Another legend, about an exemplary devotee who pleased the Goddess through the supreme sacrifice of his own head, explains why the pilgrims always have to offer a coconut (with red cloth and vermilion), for she had decreed that henceforth she would be satisfied with the mere offering of a coconut as substitute. On emerging from the shrine after inclining before the Goddess, the blood-red cloth is immediately fastened to the head of the pilgrim as proof of his having performed his devotions. When myth and legend are juxtaposed in the light of present-day cult, Bhairava’s decapitation appears rather as the exemplary sacrifice to the terrible blood-thirsty hidden aspect of the benign Vaiṣṇo Devī, for which reason alone he is accorded worship by the pilgrims who imitate his example.¹² If

¹¹ [[266](#)>] The pervasiveness of the embryogonic theme of the “womb-cave” (*grotte-matrice*) throughout Asia, irrespective of differing doctrinal and cultural contexts, has been surveyed by Rolf A. Stein (1988).

¹² Vaiṣṇo Devī is clearly identified with Durgā who kills Mahiṣāsura, here Bhairava. In South India, Bhairava is often identified with the buffalo-demon killed by his fiancée: “A demon *bhakta* takes the place of the god as the exemplar of the sacrifice. The demon is the natural prey of the goddess, who slays him in a revised version of the divine marriage; but in his death the demon achieves all that the sacrifice can offer. The demon is a focus of power and, as such, an attractive model for men; moreover, the Tamil myths do not really obscure his essential identity with the

presented instead as a punishment, this is [[266-267](#)] due to his radically transgressive conduct which, however, is in keeping with the followers of Goraknātha who is not punished and of whom Bhairava is the “seniormost disciple”.¹³ At a deeper level, Bhairava’s decapitation at the hands of the goddess is, in itself, as much a symbolic cipher of transgressive sacrality as Bhairava’s decapitation of the fifth-head of Brahmā: both are figures of the evil *dikṣita*. Moreover, in the mythology and iconography of the goddess Chinnamastā, “the goddess usually holds her own head on a platter, as if about to make an offering of it...” (Kinsley 1986:173). Instead of being a punishment, the self-decapitation—where the executioner and the victim are one—seems to be a cipher revealing the esoteric meaning of the transgression and its relation with sexuality.

Bhairava, the Goddess and *bhakti*

Consistent with Vishnuism, Bhairava is punished on the level of *bhakti*, he is forgiven and becomes the foremost devotee of the Goddess. The pilgrimage to the chaste, vegetarian goddess Vaiṣṇo Devī is undertaken as a pious vow normally presupposing the purity of the pilgrims, who arduously ascend the mountain in order to offer her coconuts and other materials of worship at her cave-shrine at the summit. Yet the founding myth which structures its

god, the consort of the goddess” (Shulman 1980:317). In other variants of the Mahiṣāsura myth, the demon is liberated through [[266-267](#)] decapitation at the hands of the Goddess, just as Bhairava is by Vaiṣṇo Devī / Caṇḍī. This pattern of the demon converted into an exemplary devotee is found everywhere in India (see Hildebeitel 1989).

¹³ The Nāthas, successors of the Kāpālīka, are intimately connected to Bhairava shrines all over North India, where he is popularly called Bhairon. Though not brahmanicides nor extremists like the Kāpālīkas, they practice the “circles of Bhairavī” (Bhairavicakra) which are sex-orgies involving consumption of meat and wine (Briggs 1982:170-4), and are known to have occasionally offered themselves in voluntary sacrifice. They have their ears pierced in order to wear large ear-rings of horn and, considering that the ear is a womb symbol in the brahmanical sacrifice, this practice seems to have the embryonic implications existing in pre-classical *dīkshā*. [[267-268](#)]

successive stations and its actual content is based on the attempt of Bhairava to rape the virgin Goddess when she refused him the meat and wine he [[267-268](#)] had demanded of her during an “adoration of the virgin” (*kumārīpūjā*). The pious devotee, who has no deliberate intention of following Bhairava’s example, nevertheless retraces the entire itinerary, which includes penetrating into her womb-cave midway up the mountain, before symbolically offering up his own head in the form of coconut wrapped in blood-red cloth. Despite his subordinated role, Bhairava functions as a sort of divine consort to the Goddess, and the pilgrim’s symbolic violation of her womb is charged with all the transgressive notations of the *kula yāgā*.¹⁴ The Goddess reveals herself in the paradoxical figure of the Virgin-Mother and the devotee’s violation of the virgin is at the same time an initiatic death and a return to the maternal womb. After all, the *kumārīpūjā* and the *kula yāga* are ritual elaborations of complementary roles accorded to the feminine within the Tantric ideology, and the purity of the virgin and the breaking of the incest-barrier are but the two extreme poles of a single dialectic of transgression. In the final analysis, the blood-thirsty Goddess and her victim Bhairava constitute a single symbolic entity, for it was Vaishno-Devī herself who first hid like an embryo in her own womb, just as Kāśī herself as Matsyodarī was enveloped in the womb of the Gaṅgā. Not only does this maternal river appear as the Bāna- Gaṅgā on the route of the pilgrims on their way up to the womb-cave, the image of Baṭuka Bhairava is also worshipped in the principal shrine with Vaishno-Devī. As the supreme object of *bhakti*, the Goddess is allowed to play the active role denied to Kāśī. However, her thirst for human sacrifice, which is a mode of transgression in the context of the purified cult, is permissible only in the guise of the punishment she inflicts on the transgressor, Bhairava. To contemplate the dark side of her unfathomable nature, we have to extend our pilgrimage and trek all the way to the Katmandu Valley, where this benign Goddess (Vaishnavī) openly reveals herself as Bhadrakālī, the consort of Bhairava. [[268-269](#)]

¹⁴ For the Kulayāgā, see Silburn 1983, Sanderson 1986:190-216 and Chaliier-Visuvalingam 1994b. [[268-269](#)]

Bhairava as royal sacrificer: Newar Festivals of the Goddess

The king, the sacrificer par excellence, appears in the above contexts rather incidentally, as the patron of the Hindu shrine or pilgrimage center. *Bhakti*, in (especially North) India, has brought with it an “individualization” of the devotee’s relationship to the divinity. The communal aspect of worship, the manner in which it systematically articulates the complexity of a segmented and hierarchical society, has however been very well conserved in Newar religion. More than a munificent patron, the king, through various symbolic intermediaries and also in his very person, is the central focus of the New Year festivals celebrated in the Katmandu Valley.¹⁵ These royal festivals revolve around the annual renewal of the Newar community through the raising and felling of a pole representing the *axis mundi*. The Vedic-Tantric continuity is most evident in the assimilation of the wooden pole both to the “flag pole” (*dhvaja*) of the archaic festival dedicated to the king of the gods, Indra, and also to Bhairava in the form of the cosmic *liṅga*. The role of the goddess--whether as virgin child (Kumārī), tutelary deity (Taleju), the mother of Indra or lowly demoness--is pronounced in this professedly Aryan festival of Indra. On the other hand, the Bisket festival of the autochthonous goddess at Bhaktapur, now identified with Bhadrakālī, is recognizably modeled on the Rigvedic cosmogony. The role of the tantric Bhairava, who has encroached upon both these royal festivals--as the transgressive *alter ego* of the Vedic Indra and as the consort of the bloodthirsty Bhadrakālī--provides the ideal vantage point for understanding the how and why of this superimposition of [[269-270](#)] Brahmanical paradigms upon the socio-religious infrastructures of a once tribal society. In the Katmandu festival of Pacali Bhairava, the king of Nepal still rejuvenates the whole kingdom and renews his own power by exchanging his royal

¹⁵ For a detailed description of these festivals, see Chaliar-Visuvalingam 1994a. I give here only a brief and carefully edited summary in order that my interpretations may be better understood. In order to restore to the Goddess the space and prominence she deserves, I have had to economize by deliberately neglecting the crucial role of Buddhism within the acculturation model of Hinduism developed here. The Buddhist elements in these festivals, and their theoretical implications for the model, are systematically analyzed (to the detriment of the Goddess) in Chaliar-Visuvalingam and Visuvalingam (1995). [[269](#)]

sword every twelve years with a low caste Buddhist gardener who alternately represents Bhairava or Bhadrakālī. In the “chariot-festival” (Ratha-Yātrā) of the goddess Bhairavī at Nuwakot, the Dhamī, decked with the royal insignia and accompanied by his wife cast in the passive role of the sacrificer’s wife, undergoes a symbolic *dīkṣā* in order to accomplish the cosmogonic feat on behalf of the Nepali king. The terrible divinity that possesses him in order to drink the living blood of countless sacrificial animals is no longer clearly male or female. Bhairava and the Goddess seem to constitute an androgynous unity.

Indrayātrā: Taleju, Kumārī and the demon-mother of Indra

The Indra festival, as celebrated in Katmandu, would suggest that the Rigvedic cosmogony must have been a mythico-ritual projection of the embryogonic process of death and rebirth that came to be systematically encoded through the public drama of the Brahmanical sacrifice. The initiatic death undergone during the *dīkṣā* has been translated into a separate festival for the dead celebrated in the course of the royal festival. Likewise, the feminine dimension of this regression *ad uterum* has been reworked into the mythical and ritual roles assumed by the queen-mother, and into the chariot procession of the pre-pubertal Newar girl incarnating the virgin-goddess. This articulation of death, sexuality and renewal is evident when the various scenarios of what is in reality a single festival are interpreted in the light of the founding myth.

Indra’s mother sent her son to steal the *pārijāta* flowers growing abundantly in the Katmandu Valley so as to successfully complete her fast (Tij or *vaishnava vrata*). Caught in the act by the inhabitants of Katmandu, who do not recognize him, Indra is pilloried like any common thief, his arms outstretched and tied to a pole. It is in this condition, akin to that of the evil *dīksita* bound in Varuna’s [[270-271](#)] noose, that (the statuette of) Indra is depicted all over the Valley during this festival. When his mother interceded on his behalf, the inhabitants of Katmandu agreed to release the king of the gods provided his mother took back into heaven the souls of all their relatives who had died during the previous year. Having secured the release of her son, she was leading the dead back to heaven, when the chain of the procession broke and the souls fell into the lake called Indra Daha. That is why during the Indrayātrā, a

farmer impersonates Indra's mother as a "demoness" (Dagini = *dākinī*),¹⁶ and leads such an unbroken chain of mourning women towards the west of Katmandu to the "pond of Indra" (Indra-Daha). This funerary procession begins from the precise place, Maru Hiti, where Indra is believed to have been imprisoned. Having gone around Katmandu with lighted lamps in search of the fallen souls, hundreds subsequently make the eight mile pilgrimage to bathe on the dawn of the full moon in the Indra lake, believing that they are accompanied by Indra himself. Though nowhere explicitly stated, the whole festival revolves around the sacrificial death of Indra, the king.

The Indrayātrā starts on the twelfth day of the waxing moon of Bhādra (September-October) with the erection of the Indra pole, and ends on the fourth of the waning fortnight of the month of Āśvina (October-November) when it is felled. The pole is erected by the Mānandhar in front of the temple of Indra at Hanuman Dhoka before the old palace. The next day, devotees of Bhairava place before their houses the images of Bhairava that they normally keep inside. The same afternoon, the Nepali king witnesses Ākāśa Bhairava's slaughter of a buffalo released into the large inner courtyard of the ancient Malla palace. Bhairava, dressed in blue and wielding a sword, is accompanied by two other dancers impersonating the goddesses Candī and Kumārī. The Sawa Baku dancers, as they are [<271-272>] called, keep wounding the buffalo so as to enrage it. The cruel buffalo-fight culminates in Bhairava's decapitation of the victim with a single blow. The blood dripping from the sword is used for the auspicious vermilion mark (*tikā*) which the king receives at the hands of Ākāśa Bhairava. The Kumārī Yātrā begins on the third day: three chariots, bearing the Virgin Goddess (Kumārī), Ganeśa and Bhairava respectively, tour the southern part of Katmandu. The same evening, Indra's "demon-mother" leads a funerary procession still haunted by the presence of her son. The following day, the day of the full-moon, the chariot tour is repeated, this time through the northern or upper half of Katmandu where the Kumārī chariot has to stop in front of Ākāśa Bhairava for some

¹⁶ [<271>] "The word *Dākinī* is explained in Tantric Buddhist texts as 'Female Skygoer' (*ākāśagāminī*)" (Hermann-Pfandt 1991:46). This definition corresponds to the depiction of Indra's mother in the founding myth. I thank Adelheid for our lively discussion, beside the lake at Zurich, on Bhairava and the Dākinī. [<271>]

rituals to be performed. On the last day, the eighth, the three chariots converge towards Hanuman Dhoka at the center of Katmandu, where the king receives the legitimizing vermilion smear (*tīkā*) on his forehead from the Kumārī. The blood of the Sawa Baku dance suggests that it is the king himself (earlier substituted by the buffalo) who is symbolically decapitated through receiving the *tīkā*. Thereafter, the whole populace eagerly enter the house of the Kumārī to reemerge with the same *tīkā*, just like the devotees of the virgin goddess at Vaiṣṇo Devī who emerge with the red headband around their forehead. Among the details indicative of Indra's death (many of which are left unmentioned here), is his ritual execution at the end of the festival in Bhaktapur at the hands of a buffoon-like mock-king wearing the crown of Vishnu. Moreover, Indra's elephant leads a funerary procession (the *pula kisi* dance) to search in vain for his master. On the last day, the Manandhars fell the Indra-pole and carry it in a funerary procession to the cremation ground in the south of Katmandu beside the open-air (*pītha*) temple of Pacali-Bhairava. The wood is hacked and used to fuel the perpetual fire of Bhairava at the shrine.

"We cannot trace the Kumārī institution in the Katmandu Valley with certainty before the thirteenth century... The Wright chronicle tells us that Gunakāmadeva, most likely the twelfth-century ruler, instituted the Indra Jātrā by erecting images of Kumārī... The connection of Jayaprakāśa Malla with the Kumārī institution is certain, for in A.D. 1757 he did indeed construct the [[272-273](#)] Kumārī ghar for the state Kumārī, and instituted or perhaps only resuscitated or elaborated her annual chariot procession" (Slusser 1982:312).

The simultaneous emergence of the virgin goddess and of Indra's demonized mother precisely in the context of the royal death becomes immediately intelligible if we remember the single figure of the virgin Mother in Vaiṣṇo Devī. The origin myth of the Kumārī Yātrā clearly recognizes in the virgin the spirit of Taleju, the tutelary mother-goddess who possesses the king's wife:

"It is generally believed that the ceremonies in their present form were inaugurated in mid-eighteenth century by Jaya Prakash Malla, the last of the 'Newar' Kings. It seems that during his reign a young Newari girl of Katmandu became possessed by the spirit of Taleju, the mother goddess who has been patron deity of Nepal and her royal families. The king thought she was a fraud, and banished her from the city. But after sometime the queen becomes possessed by the same spirit of the goddess. The king realized his mistake and called back the girl and instituted an annual *jātrā*... There is another legend saying that this same king was playing for hours dice and other gambling games with the Goddess Taleju whose temple still stands inside the old palace ground in Hanuman Dhoka. One day the King, overcome by her beauty, looked upon her lustfully-thoughts which the Goddess perceived-and she immediately vanished from his sight. That night Taleju appeared to the fearful ruler in a dream saying, 'O wretched King, your days are numbered and the fall of your dynasty is near. You shall no longer be blest with the sight of me. Select a girl-child from a Newar caste and I shall dwell in her body. Worship her as Goddess Kumārī, for to worship her is to worship me.' Her prophecy was fulfilled" (Anderson 1975:132).

The criterion for selecting the pre-pubertal virgin is indeed her impassivity and impertubility while passing the night of Dasain alone in the midst of a bloody circle of decapitated buffalo heads within the inner sanctum of the Taleju temple. The queen herself is the virgin-mother with whom the king fatally unites and from whose womb he is reborn for a fresh lease of power. Indra's true crime, suggested above by the lapse of the Newar king, was not so much the theft of the flower but rather the sexual transgression it signifies.¹⁷ The king's [[273-274](#)] impregnation of the Kumārī is barely hinted at in the gold coin he throws onto her

¹⁷ [[273](#)>] Compare Visuvalingam's interpretation (1989) of this motif in the Tamil story of the trickster Kāttavarāyan who guards his mother's flower-garden. [[273](#)]

lap in exchange for her legitimizing *tikā*. So closely is her violation associated with capital punishment that, even in real post-pubertal life, the ex-Kumārī has a hard time finding a suitor: it is believed that her husband will die an untimely death. The incestuous connotations of the Vedic *dikṣā* have been enshrined in (Prajāpati-)Brahmā's violation of his virgin daughter, the crime for which this mythical counterpart of the brahmanized sacrificer was (pierced by Rudra or) decapitated by Bhairava.

Pacali Bhairava Yātrā: Ajimā, Ganeśa and Bhadrakālī

As the consecrated *alter ego* of the royal sacrificer, Bhairava appears as both identical with and opposed to the Aryan Indra. The images of Bhairava placed before the Newar houses were part of the reenactment of the battle between the invading Āryan tribes and the indigenous people led by their king Yalambara, who is even said to have succeeded in capturing their leader, Indra. The Ākāśa-Bhairava worshipped at the Indra "square" (Chowk) is none other than the decapitated head of this Yalambara. Though Vedic and later mythology constantly depicts him as a delinquent, and despite all the intimations of his criminal execution in the Katmandu festival, the figure of Indra remains too closely bound to the public image of the king as sacrificer. The extra-Vedic Bhairava, with his pre-Āryan tribal affiliations, is on the contrary ideally suited to assume the role of the evil *dikṣita*, the darker self that the sacrificer offers up in the form of the substituted victim. The apparent discrepancies, as in the case of (the) Ākāśa-Bhairava (dancer) decapitating the buffalo, are rather part of the wide variety of symbolic stratagems used, here as elsewhere, to equate the sacrificer and his victim. The oppositional identity of these two deities, who exemplify the Vedic and the Tantric traditions, is best expressed in the cremation of the Indra pole in the perpetual fire of Pacali Bhairava.

Whereas the key events of the Indra festival are centrally located in and around the royal palace at Hanuman Dhoka, the mythology [[274-275](#)] of Pacali Bhairava makes the favorite haunt of the king the southern cremation ground, the site of the open-air temple where the annual festival of Bhairava is celebrated. Here, Bhairava had assumed the form of a handsome youth to seduce a girl of the butcher caste. When this god of transgression revealed to her his true form, the low-caste girl fled in terror at the grotesque sight and gave birth abortively to

Ganeśa. As it was dawning, Bhairava sought to hide his real nature from his subjects by wrapping around himself a cremation mat that had just been used to bring a dead body. The present shrine is his petrified body with only the buttocks protruding above the ground. In complementary versions, it is Bhairava's own queen who flees in terror and stumbles to become the dangerous Bhadrakālī at the very site that the shrine to that goddess is now located. The themes of sexual union, death and (re-) birth that were implicit in the Indra festival are made fully explicit through the figure of Bhairava. Whereas Indra is represented by the upright pole, Pacali Bhairava is especially represented by a large pot (of beer) that is a conventional symbol of the womb. Once, every twelve years in separate festivals, (a dancer representing) Bhairava or Bhadrakālī exchanges swords with the king of Nepal in order to renew his power. The deity does so while standing on a stone near the palace representing Bhairava as the "lord of ghosts" (*bhūteśvara*). In either case, it is apparent that the king is deriving his power from his initiatic passage through death as played out by Bhairava in the cremation ground.¹⁸

Indra's ascent to heaven and the king's reception of the *tika* are generalized to the populace at large through a process of imitation: [[<275-276>](#)] the funerary procession and the visit to the Kumārī's house respectively. Bhairava, on the contrary, is intimately identified with the commoners most of whom are farmers. In yet another (and equally valid) version, Bhairava and Bhadrakālī are not a royal couple but rather a farmer (Jyāpū) and his wife. It is a farmer who assumes the role of the wife possessed by the goddess (Ajimā) in their annual festival. This lowly couple is however juxtaposed to their counterparts in the royal Indra festival, during which Bhairava parades with his daughter Kumārī and his son Ganeśa. Bhairava's farmer-wife, Ajimā, is jealous because she is not accorded the same privilege, and asks Bhairava to stroll with

¹⁸ [[275>](#)] During my D.Litt. defense (see note), Toffin objected to my assimilation of the king to the sacrificial victim in these Bhairava festivals, something that he was willing to concede—albeit reluctantly—for the Indra festival. The pot (*kasi*), which formerly bore the human victim, still circumambulates this Bhuteśvara stone thrice before being rushed to the cremation-ground for the annual sacrifice at the Pacali Bhairava *piṭha*. The symbolic notations of Bhairava's royal death are far too many to be ignored. Heesterman intervened to point out that in the Rājasūya—to which Toffin himself has compared the *khadgasiddhi*—the king is undoubtedly the victim. [[<275](#)]

her around Katmandu in like manner. He agrees, but not during the Indrayātrā. That is why during the Pacali festival, Bhairava accompanies Ajimā in procession through the streets of Katmandu. During the Indrayātrā, the procession of the Kumārī or Virgin-Goddess is, in fact, accompanied by Ganeśa and Bhairava, but in this context, Bhairava (like Ganeśa) is a small boy.

Pacali Bhairava's temple¹⁹ is especially frequented by the farmers and oil-pressers living in the southern part of Katmandu. The annual festival celebrated during the Dasain (Durgāpūjā) is based on a local variant of the Hindu sacrificial schema. Centered on the personage of the *juju* ("king") who has ritual jurisdiction only over the southern half of Katmandu, it is a symbolic reenactment of the embryonic regression, death and rebirth of the (royal) sacrificer. The Pacali Bhairava jar that is kept in the home of a Jyāpu family is temporarily moved to the open temple, where it is carefully positioned on the shrine (Bhairava's "buttocks"), before being transferred at the end of the festival to the home of another Jyāpu family, where it will remain for the following year. In the course of its transfer to the cremation-ground temple, the jar-womb is temporarily stationed in the house of the *juju* (from where the [[276-277](#)] farmers steal it). The *juju*'s return to the womb is rendered explicit through the now discontinued practice of placing a deformed Joshi (from the astrologer cast) in a large copper vessel. After circumambulating the Bhūteśvara stone that represents the deathly aspect of Bhairava, it is even nowadays rushed to the temple where it is hurled with its ritual contents upon the supine human figure (*vetāla*) where animal sacrifices are regularly offered. Everything indicates that, like the *juju*, the king of Nepal who sponsors the festival and participates indirectly through various intermediaries, especially his ceremonial sword, also undergoes this sacrificial scenario. After the festivities at the shrine, the Bhairava-jar has to pass before the door of the royal palace at Hanuman Dhoka in a (post-) midnight procession before returning to be installed in the home of the next farmer family in the south of Katmandu. A young buffalo is brusquely thrown out on behalf of the king from behind the palace gate, only to be immediately decapitated so that its blood spouts upon

¹⁹ [[276](#)>] In the Newar tradition the gods or goddesses have two temples: one is situated outside the town, and the god is venerated there in the open-air temple called a *pīṭha*. The other is inside the town, and the god is venerated in a closed temple called a *dyahche* in Newari (Slusser 1982:326). [[276](#)]

the face of (the farmer in trance impersonating) Ajimā, the whole scene being calmly witnessed by the royal Kumārī who has emerged for this very purpose. Bhairava would then represent the consecrated sacrificer—whether the head of the involved farmer family (Thakali), the *juju* or the real king occupying the central roles in the daily, the annual and the twelve-yearly festivals respectively—who offers himself to the Goddess.

The sacrificial drama is ultimately the exteriorization and symbolic codification of an inner lived experience that has its roots in a trance-like condition like that of this farmer clad in black who impersonates Ajimā while clutching against his breast the silver skull-vessel that represents the goddess Kālī. The butcher representing Ganeśa, who had been sacrificing the victims at the shrine, likewise accompanies this procession in a state of trance. Earlier, the arrival or rather the birth of Ganeśa at the shrine had been underlined by the violent shaking of the jar, as if it were Bhairava himself who was undergoing the labor pains. In fact, there is some “confusion” as to whether the butcher, dressed in white, represents the pot-bellied Ganeśa or rather Naī Ajimā, the forbidden concubine of the Kasai myth. There is even a ritual enactment of jealousy between the rival [[277-278](#)] wives, with the farmer Ajimā refusing to come out to greet Ganeśa/Naī Ajimā. Ultimately, it is Bhairava who, by assuming the form of the pot-womb, is taking the place of the (Mother-) Goddess in order to give (re-) birth to himself. During the twelve-yearly Khadgasiddhi, it is (the low-caste gardener impersonating) Pacali Bhairava who becomes possessed and thereby incorporates this complex sacrificial process. Standing on the Bhūteśvara stone, he transfers through the exchange of swords the regenerative power of the *dikṣā* to the king of Nepal. Through the following months, Bhairava leads his Navadurgā troupe of “living goddesses” in their dances at various strategic sites throughout Katmandu and the Valley. Through this impure gardener, his *alter ego*, it is the king who is replenishing both himself and the entire kingdom.

The Khadgasiddhi takes place just after the annual festival, on the day of Vijayadaśamī specially consecrated to the Goddess and which traditionally marked the resumption of military campaigns even in India. Indeed, in a different year, the same dancers enact another twelve-yearly Khadgasiddhi the primary distinction being that it is no longer Bhairava but the fearsome Bhadrakālī who renews the king’s power in this very manner. The Khadgasiddhi of

Bhadrakālī is older than that of Bhairava, who would have simply usurped the primordial role of some unknown autochthonous goddess, transforming her in the process into his “auspicious” (*bhadra*) tantric consort. So much so that the male Navadurgā dancer, who usually wears red to impersonate this goddess, now dons the dark blue costume of Bhairava in order to play the role of Bhadrakālī during her own Khadgasiddhi. Not only are all the active female roles (as opposed to the passive Kumārī) played by males, even the ritual persona of Goddess has taken on an androgynous nature. In the Indra festival, Bhairava appeared rather as the tribal chieftain opposing the invading king of the Vedic pantheon, so much so that one has the impression of witnessing two (even three) separate festivals simply juxtaposed in space and time. As Pacali Bhairava, the tantric deity reveals himself to be rather the accomplice of the Hindu king in assimilating that aboriginal substratum to the male Āryan order. [[278-279](#)]

Bhadrakālī in the Bisket Yātrā: the autochthonous goddess and Hindu tradition

In the Bisket festival celebrated annually in the sister city of Bhaktapur, the priority and former supremacy of the Śakti is affirmed on both the mythical and the ritual levels. The three chief events are the erection of a huge wooden pole in a mound of earth, the collision between the temple chariots of Bhadrakālī and of Bhairava, the two main protagonists of the festival, and the ritual battle between the two halves of Bhaktapur to appropriate (the chariot of) Bhairava. Though this New Year festival, based on the solar rather than the usual lunar calendar, takes place at the vernal equinox, it is clearly derived from the same underlying symbolic paradigm as the Indra festival of Katmandu. The frankly sexual interpretation given to the erection of the wooden pole has been facilitated by the tantricization of the cosmogonic event. So much so that the New Year pole is now identified purely and simply with the extra-Vedic Bhairava, who has taken over the role of Indra. Conversely, at the price of her apparent subordination to Bhairava, the goddess has assumed a central role in the royal cosmogony that is otherwise still denied to her in the Vedic prototype still celebrated in Katmandu. For unlike the festival of Pacali Bhairava, which is restricted to the southern half of Katmandu and is primarily the concern of the farmers, the tumultuous union of Bhairava and Bhadrakālī that constitutes the main act of the annual drama of Bisket is celebrated by all the inhabitants of the city of Bhaktapur.

The festival is said to derive its name from the Newari words “*bi*” for “snake”, and “*syako*” for “slaughter”, forming the term which eventually became Bisket, a celebration to commemorate the death of two serpent demons. Every night, the insatiable daughter of a king needed a new lover, who was always found dead the following morning. Moved by the lamentations of a mother, an unknown foreign prince took the place of the next victim, her son. Having satisfied the princess, the prince hid himself, only to see two snakes emerging from her nostrils and assuming frightful proportions. Due to his alertness, he was able to kill the snakes. The next morning, [[279-280](#)] the surprised father of the princess decided to parade the snakes before the whole population. Today the two banners fluttering from the pole represent the two vanquished snakes. In another version, Bisket would celebrate the marriage of this Bhaktapur princess to Prince Bhadra Malla, the first of many royal suitors to remain alive after spending the night in her room. So much so that on Bhadra’s ascension to the throne of Bhaktapur, his descendants became known as the Nāga or “Snake” Mallas. The bedroom scenario serves as a qualifying test for royal legitimacy, and the festival itself is a public reenactment and affirmation of the nature of true kingship.

At the same time, the festival also celebrates the union of Bhairava and Bhadrakālī. The whole city shows up with great festivity in order to witness the raising of the tall pole of Bhairava. After strenuous and repeated efforts, full of suspense and cheering, the upright pole is securely lodged within the hollow mound beside an octagonal pavilion, called the Cyasilum Mandapa. The two long cloth banners fluttering from the cross-bar at the top represent not only the slain serpents, from which the festival derives its name, but also the sun and the moon. This would already assimilate the snakes to the lateral “sun” and “moon” breaths--*prāna* and *apāna* respectively--and the cosmic pillar itself to the spinal column or, rather, the central channel (*sushumnā*). Some lemon (*tasi*) leaves symbolizing semen are fastened to the *liṅga* of Bhairava before it is erected, and there is a mad scramble especially by the women to secure their procreative powers when the pole is felled on the final day. This sexual symbolism is reinforced by the arrival of the chariots of Bhairava and Bhadrakālī in order to be present at the erection of the *liṅga* (phallus) and celebrate the slaying of the snakes. The following day, the inhabitants of Bhaktapur bathe in the nearby Hanumante river and a constant stream of offerings and blood-sacrifices are made at the Cyasilum Mandapa. The New Year begins when the pole is felled the

same evening. On their way back towards Taumadhi square, the two chariots are made to collide three times with great gusto as if to reenact the copulation between the *liṅga* and the mound of mother-earth. Bhadrakālī's chariot is hurried away to her [<280-281>] temple, for she is believed to become enraged, and Bhairava has to send presents in order to appease her anger. The enraged Bhadrakālī shares the insatiable appetite of the deadly princess for the lives of her royal suitors. Killing the snakes to escape or overcome death has clearly something to do with the neutralization of the opposing breaths--of all duality--during the sexual union as practiced in esoteric tantric rituals like the *kulayāga*.

Prior to the festival, the goddess Bhadrakālī is taken from the inner room of her god-house (*dyañche*) and brought to a front room where non-initiates may enter. The same temple also houses the benign goddess Vaishnavī: for during this festival Vaishnavī becomes the blood-thirsty Bhadrakālī, just as she became Candī in order to decapitate Bhaironāth at Vaiṣṇo Devī. Originally, the Bisket festival was consecrated to the Goddess alone, but Bhairava later came from Banaras because he was curious to see the festival. The tall handsome stranger was quickly recognized by the Tantric priests. Before he could escape back to Banaras by disappearing through an underground route, his head, which was still above the ground, was cut off. The Newars still claim possession of the "real" head of Kāla Bhairava which, they affirm, is no longer at his present day temple in Banaras. They even point out the exact spot beside the erect pole where he would have been decapitated. A goat was released in the forest, and the tree it rubs its head against was selected for the Bhairava *liṅga*. Like the Vedic *yūpa*, the pole is indissociably bound to (human) sacrifice: the goat is sacrificed to the tree which is then cut down. The trunk is cleared, except for selected branches at the top that will represent the hair of the *Yasin* (=pole) God (Levy 1990:467). Throughout the festival, a person from a part of town adjacent to the Bhairava temple carries a small mysterious box, shrouded in secrecy, which is believed to contain the severed head of Bhairava. Everything suggests that the god's final means of appeasing the insatiable appetite of his enraged consort was by offering his own head.

The Rājopādhyāya accompanied by the royal chaplain (*guru purohita*), approaches the chariot of Bhairava, and issues the order for the image of Bhairava to be brought from his temple into the [<281-282>] chariot. The Rajopadhyāya seats himself within the chariot to the

right of the Bhairava image while the Guru-Purohita takes his place to its left. This priest and the sword represent the king for the remainder of the festival. In the past, when the Mallas still reigned, it was the king himself who rode in the Bhairava chariot during Bisket Yātrā. Not only is the Hindu king's identification with the tantric god Bhairava obvious: as in the Indrayātrā, his cosmogonic act is identified with his self-sacrifice at the *yūpa* in the form of the world pillar. Whereas the royal suitor of the founding myth survives to be crowned as the legitimate ruler of Bhaktapur, Bhairava is decapitated even before he is officially integrated into the goddess festival. Like the foreign prince, however, this "Lord of the Universe" (Viśvanātha) from Hindu Banaras continues to mate with and eventually tame the erstwhile Amazon. On the other hand, there is more than enough evidence in the ritual proceedings to show that not only prince Bhadra Malla but all his successors continued to annually offer their royal heads to the autochthonous goddess who has become Bhadrakālī.²⁰

On the last day of the year (*Caitra masant*), the untouchables (Pore) sacrifice a buffalo at the *pītha* of Bhadra Kālī and bring its head up to the Taumadhi square—at the city center where the temple of Ākāśa Bhairava stands—so as to destroy it as soon as the *liṅga* is erected beside the Cyasilum Mandapa. From there, late the same night, a "death-procession" consisting of a traditional bier carrying a pot instead of a real corpse returns to the *liṅga*. The pot is called "*bhājākhahca*" in Newari, the first term "*bhājā*" meaning not only "pot" but also the big "head" of a thin person: the same semantic field as the Sanskrit word *kapāla*, which signifies both "skull" and "potsherd" (this also explains the *kapāla* as Bhairava's skull-bowl). The bier, which was formerly used to collect from the palace the suitors killed [[282-283](#)] by the twin snakes, comes in vain for the corpse of the victorious prince, and returns instead with the substituted "pot-head" to the Bhadrakālī *pītha* beside the cremation *ghāt*. After being left at the *pītha*, which is just across the Hanumant river from the erect *liṅga* of Bhairava, the bier is then brought back

²⁰ [[282](#)>] Even otherwise, how does one explain the imbrication of their roles in what is after all a single festival? Toffin objected during my thesis defense (see note) to what he seemed to consider an arbitrary identification of the princess with Bhadrakālī. I owe the following description entirely to Dr. Niels Gutschow, who has so unstintingly offered his knowledge and resources. [[282](#)]

to Taumadhi, when the pole is pulled down on the evening of the first day of Vaiśākha. The marriage of the prince, inheritor in this way of the throne of **Bhaktapur**, is inextricably merged with the decapitation of Bhairava for the pleasure of Bhadrakālī.

The bundle that accompanies Ākāśa Bhairava when he annually goes to unite with his demanding consort, still conserves the Vedic mystery of the severed head. The “pot-head” would correspond to the substitution of a termite mound, another womb symbol, for the severed head of the Agnicayana ritual (Heesterman 1957:19). The initiatic death of the Tantric adept, like that of the Vedic *dīkṣita*, is assimilated to a return to the womb. The key to understanding “the festival of slaying the serpents” (Bisket) is the sacrificial identity of the decapitated Bhairava, arriving from **Benares**, and of the victorious prince, inheritor of the throne of **Bhaktapur**. The elevation of the “serpent-pole” would thus signify the neutralization and even annihilation of the opposed vital breaths (*prāna/apāna*) resulting from the ascent of the serpentine *kundalinī* along the median canal (*sushumnā*) in the very act of sexual (and even incestuous) union (Chaliier-Visuvalingam 1994b). It is lived through as a form of death that is often anguished and violent: like Mahākāla, the *sushumnā* is said to devour death (= time, Kāla) represented by the alternation of the lateral breaths: the initiatic death opens the door to veritable and eternal life. The sacrificed buffalo ritually actualizes the death not only of the royal lover but also of Kāla Bhairava. This neutralization, at all levels, of the psycho-physical dualism is typically conceived as a process of friction (*sanghatta*) in the tantric texts consecrated to Bhairava which designate it precisely by the term “equinox” (*vishuvat*). During Bisket Yātrā, the ritual opposition between upper and lower halves of the town becomes a veritable battle as inhabitants of the two halves engage in a hair-raising tug-of-war to drag the chariot of Bhairava and its occupants—with all their sacred regalia—into their [~~283-284~~] respective halves of this ancient capital. Like the other Newar New Year festivals, Bisket Yātrā is the translation, on the social and cosmic planes, of a fundamental metaphysical dualism. And Bisket proposes, in its own symbolic manner, the means of escaping therefrom: the figure of king Bhairava seated in his chariot and pulled in two opposing directions. The massive three-tiered chariot of Bhairava, so intricately sculpted, whose four wheels are identified with the four Vedas, is designed in the form of the Śrī Yantra, which represents the union of Śiva (-Bhairava) and his Śakti (Anderson 1975:44).

Is Bisket the local transformation of a Vedic cosmogony exemplified by the Indra festival of Katmandu, or is it rather an autochthonous festival that has been simply annexed by the male intruder from Benares? It is the shift of focus from Indra, on the one hand, and the Goddess, on the other, to the tantric Bhairava that allows this ambiguity which constitutes the very essence of Hinduism. On the one hand, Bhairava has not only usurped the role of Indra but also proposes an interiorized rereading of the Brahmanical sacrifice. On the other hand, through his royal seduction of the reigning goddess the whole of Bhaktapur had been penetrated through and through by a Vedic frame of reference. So much so that this caste-bound city is more staunchly Hindu than Katmandu itself, where the worship of Pacali Bhairava has a powerful Buddhist component that I have systematically ignored for the purposes of this article. Elevated to the consort of Bhairava, the Goddess is not so much another virgin territory to be conquered but rather the indispensable guarantor of the king's legitimacy and of the Hindu socio-cosmic order he upholds. In fact, in Nuwakot, where the leading role is again played by (a Newar farmer impersonating) Bhairava, the "chariot festival" (*Rathayātrā*) is still dedicated to the goddess Bhairavī to whom Prithivi Narayan Shah, the Gorkha founder of modern Nepal, attributed his successful conquest of the Katmandu Valley. Just as the wife was indispensable for the proper enactment of the Vedic sacrifice, Bhairava cannot perform his role without the constant presence at his side of Bhairavī, in the form of the farmer's wife. [[284-285](#)]

Bhairavī Rathayātrā: possession, sacrifice and the legacy of the shaman

A central feature of the Newar cult of Bhairava and of the Nava Durgā is possession by the deity, whether god or goddess, that manifests itself in trembling, swooning and other characteristic symptoms. Thus, the first Newar Kumārī (and subsequently the king's wife) was possessed by the tutelary goddess Taleju. Both Ajimā and Ganeśa swoon in a state of trance and have to be practically carried along during the Pacali Bhairava procession. King Pacali Bhairava himself was unable to shed his grotesque appearance, his true form, because his wife forgot to throw grains of rice on him, which is the regular procedure used in real life to exorcise the possessed. The gardener who represents the god or his consort Bhadrakālī during the Khadgasiddhi is supposed to be in a trance while exchanging swords with the king. The

Buddhist gardeners who impersonate the Nava Durgā troupe, to which this divine couple belongs, are instructed in these methods by a high-ranking Vajrācārya priest. Though often visibly reduced in its institutionalized public form to a mere imitation, the trance-like condition is clearly an exteriorization of an authentic possession by Bhairava (*bhairavāveśa*) or a similar (even Buddhist) divinity undergone in closed tantric circles devoted to extreme left-hand practices. Hence, on this very day of Vijayadaśamī, there are processions (Khadga Yātrā) led by Vajrācārya priests who brandish their swords while in a state of trance and attack the spectators fleeing for cover. Ultimately, the king himself, the sacrificer *par excellence*, is reappropriating, through this empowering exchange of swords, the primal fury that he must unleash in the military campaigns to follow.

In principle, the trance triggers an inner psycho-physical process whose nature is expressed in and conditioned by the symbolic framework of its sacrificial context, the meaning and dynamics of which we have been systematically deciphering through the various festivals of Bhairava. Nowhere is the equation of possession and sacrifice, condensed here into the act of killing and consuming, more explicitly affirmed than in the origin myth of the Chariot Festival (*Rathayātrā*) of Bhairavī at Nuwakot, a village situated at the [~~285-286~~] summit of a lofty hill just beyond the north-eastern rim of the Katmandu Valley. A farmer (Jyāpu) from Kirtipur came to Nuwakot to sell vegetables. On his way back he passed the night at Devī Ghāt at the confluence of the Trisuli (identified with the Gaṅgā) and Tadi rivers to the west of Nuwakot. There, he met a very beautiful lady, who was in reality the incarnation of Bhairavī. She was in possession of all the materials necessary for a ritual, including a very foul-smelling goat. Bhairavī asked the man to sacrifice the goat for her. On doing so, he immediately became possessed by Bhairava who impelled him to drink the blood from the decapitated head. He thus became the first Dhāmi, the ancestor of the present one, who indeed hails from the Dangol sub-caste of the Jyāpūs. His ancestors are from Kirtipur, which is a town to the south of Katmandu. Another variant speaks of a fisherman of the Rai caste who used to fish in the Tadi river near Devī Ghāt. He always ended up retrieving a mere stone. One night, the goddess Jalpa Devī appeared to him with instructions to install the stone in a temple as a manifestation of herself. To recall this origin, a fisherman offers a fish to the Dhāmi during the festival when he is at Devī Ghāt. On his way back to Kirtipur, the farmer, seeing the on-going worship of this stone at

the confluence of the two rivers, decided to offer a goat to the goddess: again he was immediately possessed by Bhairava and drank its blood. What is particularly striking in these origin-myths is the attempt to (re-) inscribe acts of possession within a sacrificial context and to reinterpret the sacrifice itself in terms of possession.

The reigning Shah dynasty has institutionalized the Newar Dhāmi into the religious guarantor of Nepalese royalty. Prithivi Narayan Shah, the Gorkha founder of modern Nepal, attributed his conquest of the Katmandu Valley from the Malla kings to the divine intervention of the Bhairavī of Nuwakot from where he undertook his “unification” of Nepal. Nuwakot was the capital of his kingdom until his conquest of Katmandu. Possessed by Bhairava for the welfare of the whole community, the Dhāmi participates in bloody rites which culminate in oracles that he pronounces before the representatives of the king. The Dhāmi’s function is hereditary: [<286-287>] the eldest son normally succeeds the father. If there is a problem, the grandson or, if that is not possible, the second son of the Dhāmi and so on succeeds him. I was told that this mode of succession is similar to—and perhaps modeled upon—that of the royal family. The Dhāmī, a farmer, wears royal emblems that he receives personally from the king in Katmandu. Vajrācārya priests, who come all the way from Katmandu to direct the festival on the king’s behalf, administer the bath that qualifies the Dhāmī to assume his divine role. It is after this “royal consecration” (*rājābhishheka*) that the Dhāmī dons the dark blue costume of Bhairava, bearing the auspicious emblems that he wears only during this festival and when he visits the king once every twelve years in Katmandu. All the indices converge to identify this farmer, like the lowly gardener also clad in dark-blue and possessed by (Pacali) Bhairava, with the royal *dikṣita*. The inalienable though hidden ritual identity of the king, engrossed with the day-to-day politics of the state, has been simply delegated to the drama of life, reunion, death and rebirth played out annually by the Dhāmī and his wife, the Dhamini, as Bhairavī.

Despite the active role of the Goddess in the origin myth and the subsequent dedication of the festival to Bhairavī, despite the indispensable presence of the Dhamini and the absence of any major temple to Bhairava in the itinerary of the divine couple, it is the Dhāmī who is the ritual focus of the festival. On the full moon (*pūrnimā*), the Dhāmī has to take a bath in water given by the Kumārī of Nuwakot, who is his brother’s daughter. After his “royal unction”

(*rājābhisheka*), the Vajrācāryas not only hand him the dark-blue costume but also communicate the necessary mantras to facilitate his possession by Bhairava. He then runs to the house of the Dvāre, the permanent representative of the Shah king. There he partakes of an immense bowl of rice (*mahābali*) prepared and offered by the *guthi* of the Taleju temple. In reality, it is before the house of the Dvāre that the Dhāmi begins to tremble in the manner of the possessed and of the shaman. This *mahābali*—which has all the sinister connotations of the enormous quantities of rice (and goats) that king Pacali Bhairava used to consume—is then carried to the temple of Bhairavī. The first pole is erected in front of the temple of [<287-288>] Maitī Devī, also called Būdhi Mā, who is considered the mother of Bhairavī. The Dhāmi should remain there, outside the ritual boundary of the town, until the pole is erected: completely covered with a white cloth, he lies down like a dead man on the ground beside the pit that will support the pole. Once it is erected, the Dhāmi is nourished with balls of rice as if he were a new-born. Then, playing on a *damaru*—the same hour-glass shaped drum once used by the Kāpālikas—he visits all the sanctuaries of the village, stopping before the houses to receive offerings from the ordinary villagers. He then proceeds to the place where the second pole has been raised upright before the temple of Bhairavī. He performs two rituals, one for the pole and the other for the *aṣṭamātrkā* in the Bhairavī temple. Behind the effacement of the Dhamini, it is still the Goddess who is empowering the Dhāmi.

The next morning, there is a ritual in the Taleju temple and her offerings are put into the palanquin of the “eight mother goddesses” (*aṣṭamātrkā*). The singular feature that differentiates the Bhairavī *Rathayātrā* from all the other Bhairava festivals we have examined so far, is the procession of the divine couple and their attendants, followed by a large number of villagers from the surrounding area, down from summit of Nuwakot to the confluence at Devī Ghāt where the other shrine sacred to the Goddess is located. Followed by the Dhāmi, the Dhamini, Ganeśa and Kumār, the palanquin leads the way downhill towards Devī Ghāt. The Dvāre has entrusted the “Brahmanical” Ganeśa with the sword of the Shāh dynasty (just as the Rājopādhyāya bears the royal Malla sword during the Bisket festival). A long carpet is rolled out in front of the Dhāmi and the Dhamini, whose feet cannot come into direct contact with the earth for the whole duration of this long journey. The Dhāmi is so closely identified with the local territory that he is normally not permitted to go beyond the boundary formed by the two

rivers. Special permission is granted by the king for him to make the annual trip to Devī Ghāt. On reaching the confluence, the Dhāmi and the Dhamini take a bath in the Trisulī (-Gaṅgā) river, before proceeding to the open-air shrine of Jalpa Devī where the *aṣṭamātrkā* palanquin has been deposited. Sixteen goats and four buffaloes [~~288-289~~] given by the king are offered along with the fish to the Dhāmi. As soon as the animals are sacrificed, the Dhāmi has to drink the blood of his still writhing victims. Then the Dhāmi and the Dhamini go into a small hut where the Buddhist priests, who have come all the way from Katmandu, give him some mantras which put him into a deep trance. In this state he delivers oracles which are written down and conveyed to the present king of Nepal by his representative, the Dvāre. The next morning, while the Dhāmi and the Dhamini are resting, small girls before the age of puberty undergo their marriage (*ihī*) with the royal god, the solar Vishnu. Later on, all the ritual participants leave Devī Ghāt. The Dhāmi must be the last to leave and should be absolutely alone: the inhabitants of Devī Ghāt dare not go out at this time for they will die if they see him. The end of the Dhāmi's solitary vigil is finally signaled by a gun-shot, after which everybody can go out. Like the *dīkṣita*, the Dhāmī is clearly being assimilated, once again, to a dead man.

The *sindūrayātrā* or "Festival of Crimson" breaks out when the procession, having reascended to the summit of Nuwakot, finally reaches the house of the Dhāmi: everyone has a good time hurling blood-red vermilion on the Dhāmi and on each other. The villagers venerate the divine couple—the Dhāmi and the Dhamini—as they pass. The next day, the festival ends with the felling of the poles. Before that, there is another significant round of animal sacrifices. Beside the pole in front of the Bhairavī temple and in the vicinity of a platform where the *aṣṭamātrkā* palanquin has now been deposited, the Dhāmi decapitates black and white goats and two buffaloes. He bites twice into the raw palpitating flesh of the decapitated buffaloes and drinks their living blood in the same manner as he did at Devī Ghāt. Finally, there is a secret ritual, without any animal sacrifices, for the peace of the kingdom before the erect pole: the "secret" is symbolically represented by a length of cloth that surrounds the Dhāmi, the Dhamini, and the Vajrācāryas. Then, the poles are felled. The *sindūrayātrā* is, no doubt, the symbolic means of generalizing, to the entire community, the meaning of these blood sacrifices that the Dhāmi had performed at Devī Ghāt, and which had accompanied him at every step of

his way back to Nuwakot. [<289-290>] The animals sacrificed (on the king's behalf) to the Goddess all represent the (royal) victim substituted for the entire community.

The procession of the Dhāmi-Dhamini couple from the summit of the Nuwakot hill down to the confluence of rivers at Devī Ghāt is clearly modeled on the symbolic return of the Vedic sacrificer into the virgin womb of his wife, whose presence was indispensable for the accomplishment of the sacrifice.²¹ Hence, the representation of Jalpa Devī by a stone assimilated to a fish (see note): we have seen that it was during the “Fish-Womb” (Matsyodarī-yoga) conjunction that the brahmanicide Bhairava—the mythical projection of the transgressive *dīkṣita*—plunged into the Gaṅgā and the Varuna at Benares. During the Bhairavī *Rathayātrā* all the rules of purity are suspended. Thus the Dhāmi is no longer affected by any death in his family, and the Dhamini is no longer sullied by her (possible) menstruation. When the founding myth underlines the foul odor of the goat that his ancestor sacrificed at Jalpa Devī, it is playing upon the ritual identity of the sacrificer and his victim. Playing his *damaru*, the Dhāmi, who so curiously resembles the stinking Kāpālīka ascetic, assumes the role of the impure *dīkṣita*. The *regressus ad uterum* is at the same time a mystical marriage. This explains the celebration the next morning of the marriage (*ihī*) of the virgin girls with Vishnu at the precise moment when the “royal” couple are “resting” in the hut, which is itself assimilated to the womb in the Vedic sacrifice. After all, it is from the Kumārī of Nuwakot that the Dhāmi had received the (amniotic) water for his “royal consecration” (*rājābhisheka*). The initiatic death of the Dhāmi—now isolated and charged with a “dangerous sacrality”—is represented not only by the innumerable sacrifices at Devī Ghāt, but also by the throwing of blood-red powder on him during his return to Nuwakot. The equation of sexual union with death at the confluence of these two rivers—where a third and invisible river is said to emerge—is illustrated by this ritual rule: whereas the other villagers of Nuwakot are cremated elsewhere, the [<290-291>] Dhāmi and his consort are cremated at Devī Ghāt itself. The ritual nature of this death is further underlined by the fact that, every twelve years, the Bhairava-costume of the Dhāmi is replaced and the old costume is burnt at Devī Ghāt. Although no pole is erected at Devī Ghāt to represent the surmounting of

²¹ [<290>] On the relationship between the Vedic sacrificer's wife and the symbolism of sexual union in tantricism, see Chaliier-Visuvalingam 1994b. [<290-291>]

the dual breaths, the ascent up the slope to the Nuwakot summit so as to accomplish the last sacrifices at the pole before the Bhairavī temple, may be compared to the mounting of the cosmic pillar by the tribal shaman.

“In general, Dhāmis are the exclusive servants of a Hindu divinity whom they incarnate during certain rituals of possession under the control of other religious specialists... [The Dhāmi] appears as the pale successor of the shaman.”²² This change of character—rather than of nature—would reflect the incorporation of tribal religious practices into the world of Hindu sacrifice. Tantricism, as we know it today, is certainly an integral component of Hinduism. But the evidence of the Newar festivals—and also of the Indian data—suggests that the cult of Bhairava, the ancestral god or “grand-father” (*āju-dyah*) of the Newars, was instrumental in assimilating the pole festivals also celebrated by the non-Aryan tribes. One of the characteristics of their religion is the shaman’s ascent and descent of the tree-pillar in order to communicate with the gods above and the dead below. “Climbing the tree” represents the crucial act of the shamanic consecration (De Sales, *ibid.*). Like the Vedic *yūpa*, the Newar New Year poles are identified with this tree of shamanic origin. The Kham Nagar shaman, for example, is seen biting into the bleeding heart of a goat as he climbs up the tribal pole (De Sales 1989). In the tantric context, the ecstatic trance of the shaman has been translated into a possession by Bhairava or Kālī. Of course, the vocation of the tribal shaman and the authenticity of his trance, during which he often abandons his body to communicate with invisible powers, cannot be simply [[291-292](#)] assimilated to the institutionalized role of the Newar who lets himself be possessed by Bhairava (or at least tries to live up to that expectation). Their socio-religious roles are entirely different. The present Dhāmi of Nuwakot insists that he assumes this role only once each year; thereafter he is just an ordinary man like his legendary ancestor from Kirtipur. He never heals the sick, and it does not seem that the villagers come to consult him when they find themselves in difficult situations. Ultimately, he is only a glorified instrument in the hands of the tantric specialists who manipulate his trance for the social good. The shaman, on the

²² “Les Dhāmi sont en général les serviteurs exclusifs d’une divinité hindoue, qu’ils incarnent lors de certains rituels de possession sous le contrôle d’autres spécialistes religieux. [Le Dhāmi] apparaît comme un pâle succédané du chamane” (De Salles 1989:122 note 7). [[291-292](#)]

contrary, is at the center of the tribal universe; however passively he may have originally received his calling, he has since become the master of his own spiritual destiny. Nevertheless, the shaman's inner experience is as much embedded in the cosmo-ritual universe of his tribe as is the human incarnation of Bhairava in the Hindu sacrificial universe. What matters from our semiotic perspective is that both these universes seem to derive from a foundational psychophysical experience with the same configuration of themes: transgression, death, embryonic regression, sexual union, rebirth and the alteration of consciousness.²³ Whether, in any particular instance, the reconciliation of these once disparate universes came about through the induction and "hinduization" of native shamans, or rather through the local adoption/imitation by Hindus of pre-existing popular cults strongly influenced by neighboring tribal practices (as would seem more probable in the case of the Dhāmi), matters little for our purposes. Neither shaman nor sacrificer in the full and concrete sense of either designation, the Dhāmī nevertheless remains the bridge between these two forgotten worlds.²⁴ The ease [[292-293](#)] with which Newar religion has drawn from its twin resources of the public Vedic sacrifice and the inner Tantric soteriology in order to encompass and assimilate the ecstatic experience of the tribal shaman can help us better understand Hinduism—even in India—as a symbolic process of acculturation.

From a synchronic perspective, the ritual complementarity of husband and wife appears to be a compromise structured, on the one hand, by the recognition of the female as the source of all power and, on the other hand, by the social necessity of the male being the prime mover within the human community. The feminine component is indispensable for, if the wife dies, the Dhāmī must immediately remarry. But as a particular social actor, the wife is wholly

²³ Hence the astonishing similarity of motifs, right down to the sharing of often identical symbols, between the Vedic and the Amerindian mythological traditions.

²⁴ Toffin objected (see note above) to my apparently abusive assimilation of the Dhāmi to a tribal shaman. As you can see, what really concerns us here are the various modalities whereby one passes from one institution to the other within a processual approach to religious culture. [[292-293](#)]

dispensable for, if the husband dies, even in the midst of the festival, she loses her right to be Dhamini—as in the case of the mother of the present Dhāmi—and must never return to Devī Ghāt except to be cremated there on her own death. The festival is merely postponed if the Dhāmi dies, his successor is immediately initiated by the Buddhist priests from **Katmandu**. The striking contrast between the primacy of the Goddess at the divine level and the centrality of the male Dhāmi to the human drama, is enough to render the role of Bhairava suspect: the god is otherwise conspicuously absent from a festival whose entire topography is determined by shrines sacred to the Goddess. Every year (the image of) Bhairavī is taken to the “house of her mother,” Maiti Devī, the open sanctuary beyond the boundary of the human settlement where the goddess freely receives blood offerings. Animals may also be sacrificed within the Bhairavī temple, but the relatively impure butcher caste (Kāsai) may do so only outside the temple. Further down the social hierarchy, the Kusle, descendants of the Kāpālikas whom the Dhāmi imitates, are not even allowed to enter the Bhairavī temple. Everything points to the conclusion that it was the solitary mother-goddess, still represented by the “savage” Maiti Devī, who appeared to the first Newar Dhāmi, before her functions were transferred to the domesticated consort of Bhairava. Her purification is the inevitable concomitant of her marriage which constitutes a masculinization of sorts: the sex of the principal image within the [**<293-294>**] Bhairavī temple at **Nuwakot** is confused and the divinity itself seems androgynous. According to the Dhāmi, the image is in fact that of Unmatta-Bhairava, the god of divine madness who seizes the soul of the possessed.²⁵ But great importance is still accorded to Bhairavī as his female power or Śakti. That is why during the procession to Devī Ghāt, the Dhamini is placed before the Dhāmi. The Dhamini is indispensable to the festival which is named after the goddess Bhairavī, but it is her husband, the Dhāmi, who is possessed by the divinity. Was it indeed Bhairava, as the story now goes, who possessed the first Dhāmi? Or was it rather the Goddess herself? Or is the divinity that possesses the inseparable couple intrinsically androgynous? By taking the solitary goddess as his lawful wife, Bhairava, the king’s accomplice, opens her

²⁵ [**<294>**] Unmatta-Bhairava to whom I consecrated my Ph.D. thesis is one of the most virile forms of the terrible god; at the Paśupatināth temple in Katmandu this manifestation of Bhairava is represented by a strikingly ithyphallic image. [**<294>**]

territory to the male Hindu order even while promoting her status to that of religious guarantor for the entire kingdom. Otherwise cast in the passive role that belonged to the sacrificer's wife, the Dhamini nevertheless (re-) introduces the living experience of the Goddess into the heart of the Vedic tradition.

Tradition, gender, and transgression: the Goddess as androgyne

Feminists, who seek to find in the Indian worship of the great Goddess some irrefutable evidence of the primacy of the female still lingering at the outskirts of an otherwise male-oriented Brahmanical tradition, are sure to be disappointed. Except for the wholly passive ones like that of the Kumārī or the Dhāmini, the roles accorded to the feminine—where not simply robbed of all concrete personhood as in the case of the Gaṅgā or Kāśī—have been usurped by male actors. Even the ritual persona of the goddess, like that of Bhadrakālī clad in dark blue instead of her usual red for the Khadgasiddhi, or [[294-295](#)] the confused sex of the Bhairavī image at Nuwakot, has been sometimes annexed by Bhairava, her husband and guardian. Androgyny reveals itself to be above all a socio-religious stratagem, a stepping-stone in the cultural process of subordinating the autochthonous goddess and masculinizing her cult. After all, we have yet to encounter the active role of a male divinity played by a woman actor. Taking over her wild independence, Bhairava has tamed the native goddess, adapted the structure of her cult, and firmly circumscribed her role within the patriarchal imperatives of the great tradition. Raised to the Brahmanical pedestal of the Great Goddess, a status perhaps never enjoyed by any of the local goddesses each confined to her specific community, she has even become the willing and active accomplice of her own domestication.

At the same time, for the Hindu male and even more so for the Brahman, there is no greater figure of transgression than the (menstruating) woman polluted by blood and the process of birth. Hence the predilection for untouchable and forbidden women in the practices and imagery of radical tantricism, and the casting of brahmanicide in the figure of the female partner of the classical Bhairava. Fusion with the feminine becomes more than a matter of sexual union; the male adept dons the red robes of the goddess in order to identify completely

with her. Toffin (1981) likewise emphasizes how the Newar king drew his magico-religious power by identifying himself with his Śakti. In fact, the sexual liaison between the tantric king and the goddess Taleju fits perfectly into the paradigm of the sacrificer returning to the womb to form the primordial androgyne. This embryogonic process implies becoming one with the Mother, taking her place in order to give birth to oneself. Thus Pacali Bhairava, the virile king, is simply represented by a pot-womb. Hence also the “irrational” identification of the virgin-mother with the androgynous sacrificer himself. More than an attempt at justification or legitimization of a transgressive sexuality, the insistent tantric assimilation of the female partner (*dūtī*) of the *kulayāga*—who is often an immediate next-of-kin—to the wife of the Brahmanical sacrificer, clarifies the inner meaning and true intent of the otherwise innocuous public drama of the sacrificial ritual. [[295-296](#)]

Yet this valorization of the feminine is always from the perspective, and for the benefit, of the male. In what way, if any, can the intimate contact with the male be considered transgressive for the female whom we have characterized above as the bearer of impurity? Transgressive sacrality, defined in the Indian context as a dialectical movement from the pure to the impure, would appear always to be a movement of the male towards the female. The anthropological evidence reveals this to be equally true of the primitive societies of the Americas, Africa and Oceania. The highly sought for honey (or maple syrup) in Amerindian mythology, for example, is a metaphor for menstrual blood. Is there any reason to believe that things were otherwise in those hypothetical pre-Āryan communities where the goddess once reigned supreme? Is the relegation of femininity to the realm of the impure a mere cultural construction, albeit a universal one so powerful that it has taken on a quasi-physiological nature? Or is the dialectic of transgressive sacrality, and its supposed psycho-physical effects, really anchored in the differing constitutions of the male and female bodies? Does the woman too undergo the *regressus ad uterum* on her own, as the founding myth of Vaiṣṇo Devī would seem to indicate, or must she always rely on the male in order to participate indirectly in the process of rebirth, as in the case of the Brahmanical sacrifice? The role of the maternal womb, as both the primeval chaos from which the (male) ego individuates and the reservoir of primal energies into which it must periodically dissolve, would indicate that there is no simple symmetry between the status of man and woman in relation to this embryogony.

A transgressive sacrality that would do justice to the empirical data of the avowedly male-centered tradition of goddess worship that we have been analyzing and interpreting till now, and yet be operative from the perspective of both the sexes, would necessarily have to focus on the theme and goal of androgyny and bisexuality. In traditional societies, whether Brahmanical or tribal, where there is a clear demarcation and even opposition between the socio-religious roles and psycho-physical characteristics attributed to the male and the female, such 'gender confusion' is a mode of transgression that is equally applicable to either and both of the sexes. [[296-297](#)] However, this return to an inner often invisible androgyny seems far removed from the increasing trend towards the blurring of the (roles of the) sexes so visible in contemporary (Western) culture. The androgynous ideal (*ardhanārīśvara*) in such traditional societies is not achieved through a simple loss of masculine (or feminine) traits but rather presupposes their exaggeration and subsequent negation. It is the tantric "hero" (*vīra*), exemplified above by the virile Hindu king, and not the ordinary male devotee, who seeks to identify himself with the Goddess. Likewise, the *dūti* of the *kulayāga* who enables and facilitates his goal by identifying herself wholly with her partner, as the incarnation of Bhairava, is portrayed by the tantric texts as the very flower of womanhood. Bisexuality constitutes a separation and maximization of both the male and the female poles, with a view to their eventual reunification and ultimate transcendence.

It cannot be denied, however, that it is the same leveling trend in contemporary culture—in particular, the rise of the feminist movement—that has facilitated the appreciation of this hidden dimension of the feminine not just in archaic and primitive religions but also in the even more exclusively male-centered traditions of monotheism. The resurgence of the Goddess in our midst—as the repository of the ultimate secret of not just female but also of male identity—could well result in the emergence of a new understanding and experience of gender that will be tainted neither by the religio-cultural biases of tradition nor by the sweeping and often exaggerated claims of a feminist activism dictated solely by the socio-political needs of the moment. As her public guardian, Bhairava may well have served as the instrument of the Goddess' domestication and subordination; but as her partner in transgression, he still offers us the secret of their mutual liberation. [[297](#)]

Elizabeth Chaliè-Visuvalingam Bhairava and the Goddess: Tradition, Gender and Transgression

Elizabeth Chaliè-Visuvalingam

(Docteur d'Etat ès Lettres et Sciences Humaines, Paris-X)

Wild Goddesses in India and Nepal (1996)

References

[<297-298>]

Abhinavagupta

1918-1938 *Tantrâloka*. Chapter 29. Bombay: Kashmir Series of Texts and Studies.

Allen, M.

1975 *The cult of Kumârî*. Katmandu: INAS, Tribhuvan University.

Anderson, M.

1975 *The festivals of Nepal*. London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd.

Biardeau, M.

1981a *L'hindouisme, anthropologie d'une civilisation*. Paris: Champs, Flammarion.

Biardeau, M.

1981b "L'arbre *çami* et le buffle sacrificiel", in: M. Biardeau (ed.), *Autour de la Déesse Hindoue*, Purushârtha. Paris: Editions de l'École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales.

Biardeau, M.

1989 *Histoires de poteaux. Variations védiques autour de la Déesse hindoue*. Paris: École Française d'Extrême-Orient.

Briggs, G.W.

1982 *Gorakhnâtha and the Kânphatâ Yogîs*. Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass.

Chalier-Visuvalingam, E.

1986a "Bhairava Kotvâl of Vârânasi", in: T.P. Verma (ed.), *Vârânasi through the ages*. Varanasi: Varanasi Bharatiya Itihasa Sankalan Samiti, Publication 4, 241-260.

Chalier-Visuvalingam, E.

1986b *Étude des fêtes d'Indra (Kathmandou), de Pacali Bhairava (Kathmandou), de Bisket (Bhaktatpur) et de Bhairavî Ratha (Nuwakot), Liste des manuscrits sélectionnés concernant les rituels de Bhairava*, Archives Nationales de Kathmandou. Paris: Rapport de Mission CNRS, 1-65.

Chalier-Visuvalingam, E.

1989 "Bhairava's royal brahmanicide: The problem of the Mahâbrâhmana", in: Alf Hiltebeitel (ed.), *Criminal Gods and Demon Devotees. Essays on the Guardians of Popular Hinduism*. New-York: Albany, State University of New York Press, 157-230.

Chalier-Visuvalingam, E.

1994a *Terreur et Protection. Le culte de Bhairava à Bénarès et à Kathmandou. Étude des mythes, des rites et des fêtes*. Paris: Thèse de Doctorat d'État ès Lettres et Sciences Humaines, Université de Paris X.

Chalier-Visuvalingam, E.

1994b "Union and Unity in Hindu Tantrism", in: Hananya Goodman (ed.) *Between Banaras and Jerusalem*. New-York: Albany, State University of New-York Press, 195-222.

- Chalier-Visuvalingam, E. and Visuvalingam, S.
1995 *Between Veda and Tantra: Pacali Bhairava of Kathmandu (Towards an Acculturation-Model of Hindu-Buddhist Relations)*. *The Roots of Tantra*, ed. by Robert Brown and Katherine Harper. New York: Mellen Press.
- Coburn, T.B.
1991 *Encountering the Goddess. A translation of the Devî-Mâhâtmya and a Study of Its Interpretation*. New-York: Albany, State University of New-York Press.
- Doniger O'Flaherty, W.
1973 *Asceticism and Eroticism in the Mythology of Çiva*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Eck, D.
1983 *Banaras the sacred city of light*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Erndl, K.M.
1989 "Rapist or Bodyguard, Demon or Devotee? Images of Bhairava in the Mythology and Cult of Vaiṣṇo Devî", in: Alf Hiltebeitel (ed.), *Criminal Gods and Demon Devotees. Essays on the Guardians of Popular Hinduism*. New-York: Albany, State University of New York Press, pp. 239-250. [[<298-299>](#)]
- Gutschow, N. and Kolver, B.
1975 *Bhaktapur, ordered space concepts and functions in a town of Nepal*. Wiesbaden: Nepal Research Centre Publications, Franz Steiner GMBH.
- Gutschow, N. and Michaels, A. (ed.)
1987 *Heritage of the Katmandu Valley*. Sankt Augustin: VGH Wissenschaftsverlag.
- Gutschow, N.
1994 "Vārāṇasī/Benares: The centre of Hinduism? A discussion of the meaning of 'place' and 'space'", *Archiv für Wissenschaftliche geographie*, Band 48, Erdkunde, Bonn, FRG.
- Hawley, J.S. and Wulff, D.M. (ed.)
1984 *The Divine Consort. Radhâ and the Goddesses of India*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- Heesterman, J.C.
1957 *The Ancient Indian Royal Consecration. The Râjasûya described according to the Yajus texts and annotated*. La Haye: Mouton.
- Heesterman, J.C.
1962 "Vrâtya and Sacrifice", *Indo Iranian Journal*, 1-37.
- Heesterman, J.C.
1985 *The Inner Conflict of Tradition. Essays in Indian Ritual, Kingship and Society*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Heesterman, J.C.
1993 *The Broken World of Sacrifice. An Essay in Ancient Indian Ritual*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Heesterman, J.C.
1995 "Vedism and Hinduism" (manuscript awaiting publication).

- Hermann-Pfandt, Adelheid.
1991 "Dakīnīs in Indo-Tibetan Tantric Buddhism: Some results of Recent Research", *Studies in Central and East Asian Religions*, The Seminar for Buddhist Studies, 45-63.
- Hertel, R.B. and Humes, C.A. (ed.)
1993 *Living Banaras. Hindu Religion in Cultural Context*. New-York: Albany, State University of New-York.
- Hiltebeitel, A.
1988 *The cult of Draupadī. I. Mythologies: From Gīngee to Kuruksetra*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Hiltebeitel, A. (ed.)
1989 *Criminal Gods and Demon Devotees. Essays on the Guardians of Popular Hinduism*. New-York: Albany, State University of New-York Press.
- Irwin, J.
1982 The Sacred Anthill and the Cult of the Primordial Mound, *History of Religions*, 21, 330-360.
- Kinsley, D.
1986 *Hindu Goddesses, Visions of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Tradition*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- Kramrisch, S.
1981 *The presence of Ćiva*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Kuiper, F.B.J.
1983 *Ancient Indian Cosmogony. Essays selected and introduced by John Irwin*. Delhi: Vikas, Publishing House.
- Marglin, A. F.
1984 "Types of sexual Union and their Implicit Meanings", in: John Stratton Hawley and Donna Marie Wulff (eds.), *The Divine Consort. Rādhā and The Goddesses of India*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 298-315.
- Nepali, G.S.
1988 *The Newars: an ethnosociological study of a himalayan community*. Bombay: United Asia Publication (first edition 1965).
- Parry, J.
1981 "Death and Cosmogony in Kāśī", *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 15, 337-365.
- Pathak, R.K. and, Humes, C.A.
1993 "Sun and Shiva worship in the city of light", in Hertel and Humes 1993, 205-245.
- Sanderson, A.
1988 "Saivism and the Tantric Traditions", in: Stewart Sutherland, Leslie Houden, P. Clarke and Fr. Hardy (eds.), *The World's Religions*. London: Routledge. [[<299-300>](#)]
- Hans-Peter, Schmidt.
1979 "Vedic *Pāthas*" in *Indo-Iranian Journal*, volume XV, no. 1.

- Shulman, D.D.
1980 *Tamil Temple Myths. Sacrifice and Divine Marriage in the South Indian Saiva Tradition*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Silburn, L.
1975 *Hymnes aux Kālī, la roue des énergies divines*. Paris: Institut de Civilisation Indienne, Éditions de Boccard.
- Silburn, L.
1983 *La Kundalini. L'énergie des Profondeurs*. Paris: Les Deux Océans.
- Stein, R.A.
1988 *Grottes matrices et lieux saints de la Déesse en Asie Orientale*. Paris: École Française d'Extrême Orient, Volume CLI.
- Stevenson, S.
1971 *The rites of the Twice-Born*. New-Delhi: Oriental Books Reprint Corporation.
- Stietencron, H.V.
1969 "Bhairava", *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, supplementa I, t.3.
- Singha, H.
[no date] *Śrī Vaiṣṇo Devī Darśana aur Devīyon Kī Kathā*, Haridvāra (in Hindi).
- Slusser, M.
1982 *Nepal Mandala. A cultural study of the Katmandu Valley*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2 volumes.
- Sukul, K.
1977 *Vārānasī Vaibhava*. Patna: Bihar Rastrabhasa Parisad, (in Hindi).
- Tiwari, J.N.
1985 *Goddess Cults in Ancient India (with special reference to the first seven centuries A.D.)*. Delhi: Sundeep Prakashan.
- Toffin, G.
1981 "Culte des déesses et fête du Dasai chez les Néwar (Népal)", in: M. Biardeau (ed.), *Autour de la Déesse hindoue*, collection Purushārtha 5. Paris: Éditions de l'École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, p. 55-81.
- Toffin, G.
1984 *Société et Religion chez les Néwar du Népal*. Paris: Éditions du CNRS.
- Toffin, G.
1986 "Dieux souverains et rois dévots dans l'ancienne royauté de la Vallée du Népal", *L'Homme* XXVI, n.99, p. 71-95.
- Unbescheid, G.
1980 *Kānphatā. Untersuchungen zu kult, mythologie und geschichte sivaistischer tantriker in Nepal*. Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag.

Vergati, A.

1990 "Le meurtre des serpents ou la fondation de la ville de Bhaktapur (Népal)", in: Marcel Detienne, *Tracés de Fondation*. Paris: Bibliothèque de l'École des Hautes Études Sciences Religieuses Volume CXIII, Peeters, Louvain-Paris, 233-248.

Visuvalingam, S.

1989 "The Transgressive Sacrality of the *Dikshita*: Sacrifice, Criminality and Bhakti in the Hindu Tradition", in: Alf Hiltebeitel (ed.), *Criminal Gods and Demon Devotees. Essays on the Guardians of Popular Hinduism*. New-York: Albany, State University of New-York Press, 427-462.

Visuvalingam, S.

1993 "Between Mecca and Banaras: Towards an acculturation-model of Muslim-Hindu Relations", *Islam and the Modern Age*. New-Delhi: Zahir Husain Institute of Islamic Studies, p. 20-69 (with the collaboration of Chaliier-Visuvalingam, E.) [[<300](#)]