

## From *Mātṛ* to *Yoginī*

### Continuity and Transformation in the South Asian Cults of the Mother Goddesses<sup>1</sup>

SHAMAN HATLEY

Maternal imagery features prominently in the identities of South Asian goddesses, even in the presence of potentially conflicting images. Though any number of goddesses may hence be addressed as “mother” (*mātṛ*, *mātā*, *mā*, *ammaṇ*, etc.), this article concerns a category of deity defined specifically by motherhood and named accordingly “the Mothers” or “Mother goddesses”—Sanskrit *mātṛ* or *mātṛkā*. Much like *yakṣas* and *yakṣīs*/*yakṣiṇīs*, divinities intimately connected with the natural world, *mātṛs* were popular deities in ancient India whose identities and worship were not initially circumscribed by a single religious tradition, whether Buddhism or the emergent theistic sects of the early common era. However, by the fifth century CE there had coalesced an heptad of Mother goddesses with Brahmanical identities known as the “Seven Mothers” (*saptamātṛ*, *saptamātṛkā*), though they are often joined by an eighth goddess. In this form, *mātṛs* became the focus of a pan-Indian temple cult linked closely to Śiva which attracted considerable elite patronage. Shrines of the Seven Mothers feature in some of the most magnificent temple complexes of the fifth to eighth centuries CE, such as those of Ellora, Aihole, and Elephanta. In addition to their temple cult, the Seven Mothers also became important goddesses within Tantric or “esoteric” Śaivism in early medieval India, and had historically significant roles within Tantric Buddhism as well.

---

<sup>1</sup> Much of the material in this essay has been drawn from chapters 2 and 3 of the present author’s doctoral dissertation: “The *Brahmayāmalatantra* and Early Śaiva Cult of Yoginīs” (University of Pennsylvania, 2007). I would hence like to express gratitude to Harunaga Isaacson, my thesis advisor and esteemed mentor; to Michael Meister and Guy Welbon, who, besides providing invaluable feedback on the thesis, shepherded me through graduate school; to Leslie Orr, Tamara Sears, and Paul Younger, who provided excellent suggestions for improving this essay; and to István Keul, for inviting my contribution to this publication.

This essay investigates historical transformations in conceptions of the Mother goddesses. The first section outlines the Gupta-era coalescence of the Seven Mothers and their relationship to the multitudinous *mātr̥s* venerated in ancient India. In the subsequent section, I analyze a second major transformation: the emergence of the *yoginī* (“female yogi”) or *yogeśvarī* (“female master of yoga”) in Śaivism around the seventh century CE—a reconfiguration of the Mother-goddess typology which, within Tantric Śaivism, increasingly supplants it. After this, I address the roles of *mātr̥s* in the development of a cult of *yoginīs* or *ḍākinīs* within early medieval Tantric Buddhism. This essay places particular emphasis on the roles of *mātr̥s* in the tantric traditions, especially in connection with *yoginīs*, for this dimension of their history has been comparatively neglected. The architectural and sculptural evidence for early *mātr̥s* and the Seven Mothers has been the subject of several significant studies (Joshi 1986, Meister 1986, Misra 1989, Harper 1989, Pannikar 1997), while Dehejia (1986) has produced a fine survey of the extant *yoginī* temples and statuary. Some of these scholars and a number of others have also analyzed the textual record for *mātr̥s*, especially the Sanskrit narrative literature—the *Mahābhārata* and/or *Purāṇas* (e.g. Tiwari 1985, White 2003, Mann 2003, Yokochi 2004, Serbaeva 2006). However, literary evidence for the Mothers as tantric deities has received considerably less scrutiny.<sup>2</sup> As this essay seeks to illustrate, the examination of early medieval tantric literature, much of which remains unpublished, allows for considerable elaboration of the links between the ancient *mātr̥s*, the Brahmanical Seven Mothers, and *yoginīs*.

### From “Skanda’s Seizers” (*skandagrahāḥ*) to the Seven Mothers (*saptamātarāḥ*)

Mother goddesses are of considerable antiquity in India and have non-elite, probably non-Āryan roots. However, claims linking them to early terracotta female votive images and even to the Indus Valley civilization (e.g. Misra 1989, 7) remain speculative. The earliest firm material evidence for female deities resembling what contemporaneous texts call *mātr̥s* comes from the Kuṣāṇa era (c. 1–3rd cent. CE). A substantial corpus of Mother-goddess sculpture of this period, on which Joshi (1986) has written an excellent study, survives from the Mathura region in north-central India. The early textual evidence is also extensive, with the *Mahābhārata* being foremost among period sources.

The Mathura-region Mother goddesses are diverse, comprising small-scale images both anthropomorphic and theriomorphic whose common iconographic features include carrying infants, displaying the gesture of

---

<sup>2</sup> Exceptions are Dehejia (1986) and White (2003), who draw upon the tantric literature available in printed editions, as well as some manuscripts.

deliverance from danger (*abhayamudrā*), and occurrence in groups of variable size alongside a male guardian figure, such as the youthful, spear-bearing god Skanda (Joshi 1986, 1–14). In most cases it is difficult to ascertain their individual identities. Typologies of Mother goddesses in the *Mahābhārata* match in important respects to this sculptural evidence. In both cases, as well as in early medical literature, there are strong associations between the Mother goddesses and the deity Skanda, in the context of whose myths the Mothers appear in the *Mahābhārata*. There is, however, a discrepancy in one significant respect: while the *Mahābhārata* links the Mothers almost exclusively with Skanda, the extant statuary preserves an association with Kubera as well, god of wealth and lord of the *yakṣas* (Joshi 1986, 14). This parallel and possibly more archaic convention illustrates the Mothers' close links to the *yakṣa* and *yakṣī/yakṣiṇī*, popular non-Brahmanical deities connected to the natural world.

Early textual and sculptural representations of *mātr̥s* suggest an open-ended deity typology capable of encompassing a wide range of goddesses. Some Mothers appear to have been particularly prominent individually, such as Ṣaṣṭhī (Joshi 1986, 11), who in Kuṣāṇa sculpture is depicted alongside “high” deities such as Śiva and Kṛṣṇa, besides Skanda. Hārītī is in fact the goddess most frequently depicted in stone statuary of the period (Singh 2004, table 3). As is true of the goddess Lakṣmī, and *yakṣas* and *yakṣīs*, there is evidence for fluidity and competition concerning the sectarian identities of Mother goddesses: Joshi (1986, 15) notes that *mātr̥* sculpture has been recovered from Brahmanical, Jain, and Buddhist architectural contexts. The dynamics of their incorporation by these assimilative traditions are illustrated by narratives of Hārītī's conversion in early Buddhist literature (Peri 1917, 2–43), and by myths of the Mothers' conflict with and assimilation by Skanda in the Brahmanical *Mahābhārata*. There is also architectural evidence suggesting *mātr̥s* were worshipped as cult deities in their own temples in this period (Singh 2004, 390–92).

The *Mahābhārata* accounts of the mythology of *mātr̥s* place them in association with Skanda and his retinue of *grahas* or “seizers” (White 2003, 35–63; Mann 2003, 33–43)—a diverse lot, including male and female deities and spirits of every conceivable shape and hue.<sup>3</sup> These myths are numerous and historically layered, as illustrated by the complex claims made concerning Skanda's parentage (*Āraṇyakaparvan*, chapters 215–21; *Anuśāsanaparvan* 84, 86; *Śalyaparvan* 43–45). Most directly, he is the child of the Vedic fire god, Agni, seduced by Svāhā. Yet Skanda is also the child of Śiva and Pārvatī, who entered into Agni and Svāhā, respectively, and used them as proxies for producing a son. Skanda is, in addition, reared by the Kṛttikās, the six stars

---

3 A variety of terms are used to speak of the entourage of Skanda, with *gaṇa* (“[member of the] group/entourage”) and *graha* (“seizer”) being the most inclusive. In *Āraṇyakaparvan* 219.42, for instance, both the Mothers and male retinue of Skanda are included under the category *skandagraha*, “Skanda's seizers.”

of the Pleiades, while the *Śalyaparvan* adds the river-goddess Gaṅgā to the mix. Alongside much that is probably ancient, such as Skanda's association with the Kṛttikās, these layered myths appear to preserve competing sectarian claims: a legend asserting Skanda's origins from Agni and the wives of the sages, which brings him within the orbit of Vedic tradition; and a Śaiva layer asserting Skanda's parentage from Śiva and Umā. By the time of Kālidāsa's *Kumārasambhava* ("The Birth of Kumāra/Skanda"), a work of court poetry probably of the fifth century, the Śaiva identity of Skanda as son of Śiva and Pārvatī would dominate; and in the old *Skandapurāṇa*, a text of the subsequent centuries, the cult of the warrior-child and the Mother goddesses is fully assimilated into Śaivism.

In the *Mahābhārata*, there is no evidence for the emergence of the Brahmanical Seven Mothers, nor of a Mother-goddess cult tantric in character. Descriptions of *graha*-worship suggest a shrine or temple image-worship context (e.g. *Āraṇyakaparvan* 219.43–44), while worship of the associated "high" deities—Rudra, Agni, Umā, and Svāhā—is linked to the desire for progeny, an important theme in later accounts of the Mother cult. There is in general a strong apotropaic dimension, as is particularly evident in *Āraṇyakaparvan* 218 and the early medical literature (Mann 2001, 5–7). Skanda and his subsidiary deities afflict children with disease if not propitiated, and the Mothers are intimately associated with fertility and sickness, life and death.

By the fifth century, a particular heptad of Mother goddesses coalesces with identities mirroring those of a series of major Brahmanical gods—Brahmā, Śiva, Skanda, Viṣṇu, Varāha (or Yama), and Indra. As do their iconic forms, the names of the Mothers mirror those of their male counterparts: Brāhmī, Māheśvarī, Kaumārī, Vaiṣṇavī, Vārāhī (or Yāmī), and Aindrī, each name having several variants. Exceptional is the seventh goddess, Cāmuṇḍā, the fierce and skeletal hag who is "leader of the Mothers" (*mātrīnāyikā*) and the counterpart of no male deity. Her identity appears closely linked to that of the warrior goddess Caṇḍī or Caṇḍikā,<sup>4</sup> one of the principle ciphers for emergent conceptions of the singular Mahādevī, "Great Goddess." As a set, they become known as the "Seven Mothers"—*saptamātr* (plural *saptamātarah*) or *saptamātrkā*.<sup>5</sup> It should be emphasized that the Seven Mothers are not "wives" of the gods they mirror, but counterparts; the *Devīmāhātmya*, for instance, describes them as the *śaktis* or "powers" of the gods, marking the entry of tantric Śaiva conceptions of *śakti* into the purāṇic theology of goddesses (*Mārkaṇḍeyapu-*

4 Note, for instance, that the *Brahmayāmala* (c. 7–8th century) uses the names Caṇḍikā, Carcīkā (or Carcā), and Cāmuṇḍā interchangeably (Hatley 2007, 376).

5 The expression *saptamātr* occurs frequently in purāṇic and tantric texts, and in a number of inscriptions, such as the Navsari plates of Yuvarāja Śryāśrayaśīlāditya (published in *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, vol. IV). In contrast, the collocation *saptamātrkā* occurs seldom in early Sanskrit sources, though common today.

*rāṇa* 88.11–22). While sculpture attests comparatively little variation in the identities of the Seven, textual accounts often substitute the goddess Yāmī, iconic mirror of the death-god Yama, in place of Vārāhī, female counterpart of Viṣṇu’s boar-*avatāra*, Varāha.<sup>6</sup> By the sixth century, the Seven Mothers came to be depicted conventionally in the company of two male guardian deities (see figure 1): the elephant-headed Gaṇeśa/Vināyaka, and either the martial Vīrabhadra (“Auspicious Hero”) or a figure usually referred to as Viṇādhara (“Bearer of the *Vīṇā*-lute”). Scholars have generally referred to both of the latter as forms of Śīva, but Vīrabhadra is in period sources actually a *rudra* or one of Śīva’s prominent *gaṇas* (“followers”),<sup>7</sup> as indeed is Vināyaka/Gaṇeśa. Though the lute-bearing figure could represent Śīva, one iconographic treatise, the *Mayamata* (36.213), considers this an alternative form of Vīrabhadra, while the *Agnipurāṇa* refers to him as Tumburu (50.17cd). In many cases, however, Śīva too does join the Mothers, particularly as Naṭeśa, “Lord of Dance” (see Meister 1986, charts A & B).

Figure 1: *Saptamātṛ* Panel, with Vīrabhadra (left) and Gaṇeśa (right). State Museum, Ashapuri, Madhya Pradesh. American Institute of Indian Studies Photo Archive.

As Meister argues (1986, 239, 244–245), this new configuration of Mother goddesses simultaneously asserts Śīva’s dominance over rival deities, such as Viṣṇu, while assimilating and containing popular Mother-goddess veneration. Later purāṇic texts, such as the *Devīmāhātmya* of the *Mārkaṇḍeya-purāṇa*,<sup>8</sup> sometimes provide ambiguous sectarian identities to the Seven (or eight) through the addition of *mātṛs* such as Nārasimhī (female counterpart of Viṣṇu’s Man-lion *avatāra*, Nārasimha) or, more typically, Mahālakṣmī. However, early evidence for the heptad intimates a close association with Skanda shifting toward a more decidedly Śaiva orientation, as evidenced by the fifth-century sites of Udayagiri and Badoh-Pathari (Harper 1989, 75–87).

Though no clear sculptural evidence of a pre-Gupta *mātṛ*-heptad survives,<sup>9</sup> the number seven does have old associations with Mother

<sup>6</sup> *Mālinīvijayottaraṅtra* 3.14 lists a set of eight Mothers that includes Yāmyā, headed by Yogeśī, while *Netraṅtra* 19.56, for instance, instead includes Vārāhī among the seven. The *Brahmayamala* attests both conventions (Hatley 2007, 33, 376).

<sup>7</sup> Note, e.g., that Sadyojyotis (*Mokṣakārikā* 79) refers to the hundred *rudras* as “headed by Vīrabhadra” (*śatarudrāṅś ca vīrabhadrapurāḥsarān* [em; °*purastarān* Ed.]). The *Mataṅga-pārameśvara*, which refers to him as one of the *lokanāyakas*, “world lords” (*vīrabhadradayaś caiva brahmāntā lokanāyakāḥ*, 23.26cd), also describes the *gaṇas* as “headed by Vīrabhadra” (*vīrabhadrapurāḥsara*, 23.47b). His role as a *gaṇa*-lord is prominent in the early *Skandapurāṇa*.

<sup>8</sup> Given the central position the *Devīmāhātmya* is often assigned in discussions of textual evidence for Mother goddesses, it is important to note Yokochi’s cogent argument that it was not composed as early as has often been assumed (2004, 21–23).

<sup>9</sup> From the Kuṣāṇa-era Mathura environs survives what appears to be a set of seven Mothers with Skanda; but this unique panel is broken on the right and might hence have contained additional images (Bautze 1987, 25).

goddesses.<sup>10</sup> The *Mahābhārata* (*Āraṇyakaparvan* 217.9) speaks of deities known as “Mothers of the Infant[s]” (*śiśumātṛs*), comprising Kākī, Halimā, Rudrā, Bṛhaī, Āryā, Palālā, and Mitrā, among whom Āryā appears to have been prominent (White 2003, 39–40). It seems possible that the Brahmanical Seven Mothers directly supplant these *śiśumātṛs*, who might have been popular deities in the pre-Gupta period.<sup>11</sup> The *Mahābhārata* also intimates the later connection between Mother goddesses and Brahmanical gods: *Śalyaparvan* 45 presents an account of numerous, diverse Mother goddesses, in the course of which it describes them variously as *yāmyah*, *raudryah*, *saumyāh*, *kauberyah*, *vāruṇyah*, *māhendryah*, *āgneyyah*, *vāyavyah*, *kaumāryah*, and *brāhmyah* (vv. 35–36ab). These are abstract nouns in the plural formed from the names of the male guardians of the ten directions (the *dikpālas* or *dikpatis*): Yama, Rudra, Soma, Kubera, Varuṇa, Mahendra/Indra, Agni, Vāyu, Kumāra/Skanda, and Brahmā.<sup>12</sup> In this *mātṛ* taxonomy we find a direct precedent for the goddesses later sources refer to as *diṅmātṛs* or *digdevīs*, “Mother-goddesses of the Directions.” Though not now well-known, this set of eight or ten *mātṛs* (one for each direction) features in tantric Śaiva ritual and is attested in temple sculpture.<sup>13</sup> Several of the *diṅmātṛs* also belong to the group of Seven Mothers. In classifying innumerable Mother-goddesses according to Brahmanical gods, the *Śalyaparvan* intimates ancient precedents for both the Seven Mothers themselves and, in Tantric Śaivism, for the organization of groups of *yoginīs* into clans of the Mothers.

In the elite traditions represented in sculpture and inscriptions of the Gupta- and early post-Gupta period, the Seven Mothers come to eclipse the diverse Mothers popular in the Kuṣāṇa era. Royal patronage of the cult of the Mothers finds attestation in Gupta-era inscriptions,<sup>14</sup> copper plates,<sup>15</sup> and

10 See the discussions of Harper (1989, 56), Meister (1986, 240), Pannikar (1997, 55–58), White (2003, 39), and Mann 2003, 37–38).

11 Note also the *Śalyaparvan*'s reference to *saptamātṛgaṇāh*, probably meaning “the groups of Seven Mothers,” the plural suggesting multiple groups of seven (*saptamātṛgaṇāś caiva samājagmur viśāṃ pate*, 43.29ab). The context is a list of divinities who come to see Skanda. As Harunaga Isaacson draws to my attention (personal communication, May 2009), in the vulgate *Mahābhārata*, this is printed as two words, *sapta mātṛgaṇāh* (“the seven groups of Mothers”; *Śalyaparvan* 44.27).

12 Not accepted in the critical edition are, in addition, the epithets *vaiṣṇavyah*, *sauryah*, and *vārāhyah*, in a verse that would follow 45.36ab. This might have been interpolated to harmonize the passage with later conceptions of the Mothers; the absence of Vaiṣṇavī and Vārāhī, in particular, might have been inexplicable to a Gupta-era or later audience familiar with the Seven Mothers (cf. Yokochi 2004, 101).

13 On the tantric *diṅmātṛaḥ*, see Hatley (*forthcoming*). Statuary of the Mother-goddesses of the Directions features, for instance, on the outer walls of Orissan temples from the thirteenth century (Donaldson 2002, 817–20).

14 Inscriptions associate the Udayagiri Śaiva cave complex of the early fifth century with the emperor Candragupta II, a site having multiple sets of the Seven Mothers. Another royal Gupta inscription, that of the mid fifth-century Bihar Stone Pillar erected by Skandagupta, also

numerous cave shrines and stone temples from the fifth century onward. While the surviving shrines suggest that the heptad had a Śaiva orientation, they were significant deities in their own right as well; indeed, the *circa* mid sixth-century *Bṛhatsaṃhitā* of Varāhamihira speaks of the temple cult of Mothers alongside major sectarian denominations of the period, including Buddhism, Jainism, and Vaiṣṇavism (*Bṛhatsaṃhitā* 59.19).<sup>16</sup> A number of Cālukya monarchs would link their descent to the ancient Mother goddess Hārītī, claiming also to have enjoyed the protection of Skanda and been “made prosperous by the Seven Mothers, who are the mothers of the seven worlds (*saptalokamātrī*).”<sup>17</sup> Some of the most magnificent *saptamātrī* sites include the cave shrines of Elephanta, near Mumbai, and Aihole and Ellora of the western Deccan plateau; these and the other sixth and seventh-century sites have been ably surveyed by Harper (1989) and Pannikar (1997). The Seven Mothers appear to decline in cult status by the ninth century, increasingly relegated to depiction in decorative panels over temple doors (Meister 1986), to peripheral shrines in Śaiva temple complexes, as occurs in Tamilnadu (Orr 2005, 30), or, e.g., the *balipīṭhas* of temples in Kerala (Jayashanker 1999, 82–86). In this process they also acquire a trans-sectarian identity akin to such deities as the Nine Planets (*navagraha*). In Orissa, however, new temples of the Mothers are attested through the thirteenth century (Donaldson 1995, 170).

While the rise of the Seven Mothers has been studied in relation to myth, sectarian dynamics, and iconography, the social and historical contexts remain poorly understood. Pannikar (1997, 155–177) advances a rather speculative interpretation in terms of the “subsumptive acculturation” of the “producer classes” and women by an emergent, neo-Brahmanical hegemony. Harper (2002) instead draws attention to the political role of

---

appears to include a profession of devotion to the Mothers and Skanda. See *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, vol. III, inscription nos. 7, 11, and 49.

15 See Ramesh and Tewari (1990, 4–6, 21–23 [plate nos. II and XI]). Scholars who have discussed these include Yokochi (2004, 110), Chattopadhyay (2005, 257–58), and Sanderson (*forthcoming*).

16 While this passage does not specify the Mothers’ identities, elsewhere the *Bṛhatsaṃhitā* speaks of constructing the images of Mothers in accordance with the appearances of the deities they are named after (*mātrgaṇaḥ kartavyaḥ svanāmadevānūrūpakṛtaciḥnaḥ*, 57.56ab). It therefore seems likely that Varāhamihira knows of and refers to the Brahmanical Seven Mothers. His terminology for describing specialists in the cult of Mothers, “knowers of the *maṇḍala*-sequence” (*maṇḍalakramavidāḥ*) or “knowers of the Mother-*maṇḍala*” (*mātrmaṇḍalavidāḥ*, edition of H. Kern), has been taken by Harper (1989, 122) as an indication of a tantric cultic orientation. However, the mere occurrence of the term *maṇḍala* does not warrant this; here it probably means “the group/set [of Mothers].” Note the same terminology in the inscription of the contemporaneous *saptamātaraḥ* shrine at Deogarh, which in its benedictory verse refers to the enshrined deities as a *maṇḍala* of Mothers (*Epigraphia Indica* XXX.15, 125–27).

17 Navsari plates of Yuvarājaśryāśrayaśīlāditya, found in the Surat district of modern Gujarat. *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, vol. IV.

the cult of Mothers, as entourage of the war-god Skanda, in the legitimation of Gupta imperial conquest. Future attempts at historical contextualization will undoubtedly benefit from recent advances in the study of period literature (e.g. the old *Skandapurāna*) and early Tantric Śaivism (see especially the works of Alexis Sanderson).

Despite the success of the Brahmanical heptad, alternative configurations of more ancient *mātr̥s* persist into the medieval period and beyond. Several ancient Mother goddesses remained individually significant; examples include Śaṣṭhī, a goddess of childbirth still prominent in Bengal, and Hārītī, a *mātr̥* or *yakṣī* who, enshrined in monasteries, traveled with Buddhism well beyond South Asia (Peri 1917, 45–57). The medical tradition retained the conception of *mātr̥s* as potentially dangerous “seizers” (*grahas*; see Mann 2001, 5–7), while the *Rāvaṇakumāratantra* focuses its exorcistic rites upon a group of twelve *mātr̥s* that includes Śakunī, an avian Mother goddess of ancient pedigree. Alongside monumental shrines to the Seven Mothers must also have persisted more humble forms of Mother-goddess worship; tantric literature speaks of Mother shrines in isolated places as though, like the crossroads, jungles, and cremation grounds they are mentioned with, they were an integral part of the landscape.<sup>18</sup>

### From *Mātr̥* to *Yoginī*: Mother Goddesses in Tantric Śaivism

The temple cult of the Mothers bears an uncertain relationship to the tantric or “esoteric” forms of Śaivism flourishing in the second half of the first millennium. It appears that the Seven Mothers were among the earlier goddesses worshipped in the tantric traditions, in the context of secret rites for the initiated rather than temple liturgy. Śaiva sources often place significance on an octad of Mother goddesses rather than the earlier and more widely attested Brahmanical heptad. The eighth, additional Mother is frequently Mahālakṣmī, but in some contexts the supreme Goddess herself—Bhairavī, consort of Bhairava, in this role also referred to as Yogeśī (a synonym of *yoginī*).<sup>19</sup>

The significance of the Mothers in Tantric Śaivism extends beyond chronology, for *mātr̥*-veneration appears to underlie, in part, the medieval cult of the flying, shapeshifting goddesses or female spirits known as *yoginīs*. Representations of *yoginīs* in tantric Śaiva literature are extremely diverse, but some of the most common characteristics of this deity typology include occurrence in groups (sextets, initially, with configurations of sixty-four

<sup>18</sup> *Mātr̥* shrines (*veśman*, etc.) are often mentioned in lists of locales appropriate for the practice of *sādhana*, examples of which include *Brahmayāmala* 14.11cd–13ab and *Siddhayogeśvarīmata* 6.2–4.

<sup>19</sup> For Yogeśī as the name of the eighth Mother, see *Brahmayāmala* 46.32b, *Tantrasadbhāva* 14.155b, *Tantraloka* 29.52d, and the *Brhatkalottara* (on which see Sanderson 2004, 267).



becoming typical by the tenth century), organization into “clans” (*kula*, *gotra*), theriomorphism and shapeshifting, the ability to fly, association with guarding and/or transmitting tantric teachings, and potency as sources of both grave danger and immense power (Hatley 2007, 11–17; cf. White 2003, 27). In addition, *yoginīs* often blur the boundaries between human and divine, for through perfection in tantric ritual, it was held that female practitioners could join the ranks of these sky-traveling (*khecarī*) goddesses. Originally esoteric deities, by the tenth century *yoginīs* became prominent in the wider Indic religious landscape, as attested by their entry into purāṇic literature and the unique circular, open-air temples enshrining them across the subcontinent (Dehejia 1986).

The close connection between the Mother goddesses and emergent conceptions of *yoginīs* is evident in numerous ways. Early Tantric Śaiva treatises on “the characteristics of *yoginīs*” (*yoginīlakṣaṇa*)<sup>20</sup> classify these goddesses according to clans (*kula*, *gotra*) that have the Seven or Eight Mothers as matriarchs, clan mothers in whose natures the *yoginīs* partake as *aṃśas*, “portions” or “partial manifestations.” Tantric practitioners too establish kinship with the Mothers, leaving behind their conventional clan and caste identities and entering during initiation into what one might call “initiatory kinship” with the deities.<sup>21</sup> It is possible that the most fundamental initiation maṇḍala of the Śaiva *yoginī* cult comprised Bhairava in a circle of the Eight Mothers. In the *Brahmayāmala*, while deities called the Four Devīs and Four Consorts (Dūtī) form the primary maṇḍala’s inner circuit of goddesses, the initiatory clans remain nonetheless those of the Eight Mothers and Bhairava.<sup>22</sup> This scenario’s historical plausibility is corroborated by

<sup>20</sup> *Siddhayaogēśvarīmata* 29, *Brahmayāmala* 74, and *Tantrasadbhāva* 16.

<sup>21</sup> A *yoginī* of the clan of Brāhmī/Brahmānī is said to be *brahmāṇyaṃśā*, “possessing a portion of Brahmānī.” Cf., e.g., *Tantrasadbhāva* 16.253cd. An initiate too is said to be “connected to” or “possess” (*yukta*) an *aṃśa* of a Mother goddess. Cf., e.g., *Brahmayāmala* 74.47cd: *brahmāṇīkulajā devī svāṃśasiddhipradāyikā* (“[She is] a *yoginī* of the clan of Brahmānī, O Goddess, who bestows *siddhi* upon those [*sādhakas*] of her own [Mother-goddess] *aṃśa*”).

<sup>22</sup> *Brahmayāmala* 4.888–898, especially 890cd–894ab:

*raktāyās tu yadā pāto gotrā māheśvarā hitam //890//*  
*karālayā yadā pāto brahmagotraḥ sa ucyate /*  
*karālyāyā yadā pāto vaiṣṇaviḡotrako hi saḥ //891//*  
*danturāyā yadā pātaḥ kaumārīgotrasambhava /*  
*caṇḍākṣyāyā yadā pāto vaivasvatikulodbhava //892//*  
*bhīmaṡvakraḡraprāpātena māhendragotra ucyate /*  
*mahocchuṡmāprapāte tu carcikāgotrako hi saḥ //893//*  
*mahābalā yadā pātaḥ pūranīgotra ucyate /*

891b °*gotraḥ*] corr.; °*gotras* Cod. 892c *caṇḍākṣyāyā*] em.; *caṇḍākṣyā* Cod.

“When the [flower cast into the maṇḍala during initiation] lands on Raktā, the clan of Māheśvarī is enjoined. When it lands upon Karālā, he is said to be of the *brahma*-clan [i.e. the clan of Brahmānī]. When it lands on Karālī, he is of the clan of Vaiṣṇavī. When it lands on Danturā, she is born of the clan of Kaumārī. When it lands on Caṇḍākṣī,

Törzsök (2000, 142–143), who finds evidence in the *Siddhayogeshvarimata* for a cult of the Eight Mothers underlying the Trika system. In the light of this emphasis in the early sources on the Seven/Eight Mothers, it is difficult to concur fully with White in viewing the Śaiva *yoginī* cult as “based on the Kushan-age cults of multiple disease-bearing Mother goddesses,” as opposed to the Seven Mothers of “Śākta devotionalism and high Hindu Tantra” (2003, 59–60, 188; quotation on p. 59). Important continuities are evidenced with both strands of *mātrī*-veneration, and the gulf between the two is perhaps not so pronounced.

Though connected intimately to the Seven or Eight Mothers, *yoginīs* do indeed demonstrate remarkable continuity with more ancient Mother-goddess conceptions. According to *Mahābhārata*, *Śalyaparvan* 45.29–40, some Mothers have long claws, fangs, or beaks; some are youthful maidens, while others are fleshless or pot-bellied. Having various hues, changing shape at will, and speaking many languages, the Mothers rival celestial nymphs (*apsaras*) in beauty, Indra in power, Agni in radiance, and so forth. They dwell in liminal places such as crossroads and cremation grounds—the same environs enjoined for performing the radical rituals of the tantric cult of *yoginīs*. The *yoginīs*’ theriomorphism, shapeshifting, multiplicity, extraordinarily variegated appearances, bellicosity, independence, and simultaneous beauty and danger all find precedent in these early Mother goddesses, as does, suggests White (2003, 39, 205), their connection with flight. The continuity is readily visible in sculpture: though *yoginīs* shed the Mothers’ maternal associations to a large degree, there are still numerous examples of their representation with infants (figure 3). While taking on the powerful iconography of tantric deities, the *yoginīs* reflect in visual terms clear continuity with the Kuṣāṇa-era Mother-goddess typology (compare figures 2–3).

Figure 2: Bird-headed Mother goddess carrying an infant in her likeness. Kuṣāṇa-era Mathura. State museum, Mathura. American Institute of Indian Studies Photo Archive.

Figure 3: Horse-headed *yoginī* from Lokhari, Uttar Pradesh, with like infant. Photograph by Vidya Dehejia, published in Dehejia (1986, 159)

Although the genealogy of the *yoginīs* lies most immediately in the Mother goddesses, other ancient feminine deities also figure in their formation. This has been demonstrated in some detail by White (2003, 27–66), who highlights continuities with the *apsaras* (“celestial maiden”) and the *yakṣī* or *yakṣiṇī* (“dryad”), in addition to early Mother goddesses and other *grahas*

---

she is born of the clan of Vaivasvatī [i.e. Yāmī]. By landing on Bhīmavaktrā, the clan of the great Indra [i.e. the clan of Indrāṇī] is enjoined. If it lands on Mahocchuṣmā, he has the clan of Carcikā [i.e. Cāmuṇḍā]. If its fall [indicates] Mahābalā, the clan of She Who Completes [the Mothers] is enjoined [i.e. the clan of Bhairavī].”

Subsequent verses provide a concordance of Mother-goddess clans and the Six Yoginīs of the maṇḍala. The confusion of grammatical gender in this passage is remarkable, and probably to a large degree original.

(“seizers”). Other significant sources for conceptions of *yoginīs* include *vidyādhārīs* (flying, semi-divine sorceresses), and in particular, Śiva’s *gaṇas*: male deities whose theriomorphic or otherwise bizarre forms, multiplicity, variety, and engagement in activities such as warfare are highly suggestive of *yoginīs*. Serbaeva (2006, 71) also points out that *gaṇas* and *yoginīs* share an important similarity in representing states of being that Śaiva practitioners sought to attain. Another notable continuity concerns the supreme male deity with whom *yoginīs* are associated: much as there is continuity between *yoginīs* and the early *mātrīs*, some qualities of the early Skanda resurface in Bhairava, the skull-bearing lord of *yoginīs*, who takes on imagery of the ancient Rudra as well. For although a playful, handsome young warrior dominates the later image of Skanda, in the *Mahābhārata* lie clear traces of an ambiguous and potentially dangerous deity, in this respect resembling the *mātrīs* he heads (Mann 2003).

That Mother goddesses have old connections with tantric ritual and female spirits is evident from the fifth-century inscription of Gaṅgdhār, in western Mālwa district.<sup>23</sup> Dated 423/24 or 424/25 CE, this mentions (v. 23, on lines 35–37) the construction of an “extremely terrible temple of the Mothers” (*mātrīnām...veśmātyugraṇi*) “filled with *dākinīs*” (*dākinīsaṃprakīrṇanam*)—a variety of female spirit prominent in tantric taxonomies of *yoginīs*. The inscription speaks of the Mothers as deities “who make the oceans tumultuous through powerful winds arising from *tantras*” (*tantrodbhūtaprabalapavanodvarttitāmbhonidhīnām*). This description of *mātrīs* uses imagery suggestive of powerful, “unfettered” tantric goddesses,<sup>24</sup> not at all in the image of the protective World Mothers (*lokamātarāḥ*) mentioned in other Gupta-era inscriptions. Of unspecified number and identity, *mātrīs* are here associated with hordes of female spirits (*dākinīs*), a temple cult, and occult spells (*tantra*) and powers, suggesting that some key elements of the cult of *yoginīs* had come together by the early fifth century. Unfortunately, this inscription is exceptional: we have no other firmly dated evidence for a cult of Mother goddesses in the company of female spirits in the fifth century, which makes the inscription difficult to contextualize.

Significant information concerning transformations in conceptions of the Mothers, and their connections with Tantric Śaivism, emerges in the old *Skandapurāṇa* (c. 6–7th century).<sup>25</sup> As Yokochi points out (2004, 99–113), this preserves the pre-Gupta conception of countless diverse Mother goddesses alongside the “Hinduized” or Brahmanical Seven Mothers. It also attests a process by which important local goddesses were given Śaiva identities

<sup>23</sup> This inscription was first published by John F. Fleet in *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, vol. III (72–78), and subsequently by Sircar (1965, vol. 1, 399–405).

<sup>24</sup> Borrowing an expression from the title of an article of Chitgopekar (2002).

<sup>25</sup> The “early” or “old” *Skandapurāṇa* should not be confused with the better-known published text by this name; the latter was in fact somewhat artificially assembled by paṇḍits in the colonial period from various medieval tracts having the *Skandapurāṇa* as locus of ascription (Adriaensen et al. 1998, 3–4, 24–25).

through incorporation as Mothers. On the level of myth, the *Skandapurāṇa* hence provides a transitional link between the myth-cycles of Skanda and the Mothers in the *Mahābhārata*, and myths of the Seven or Eight Mothers inscribed in later texts, such as the *Devīmāhātmya* of the *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa*. Furthermore, the *Skandapurāṇa*'s account of the sacred site of Koṭivarṣa (chapter 171) provides important early evidence for a Tantric Śaiva cult of the Mothers, in association with a temple, and even names specific works of tantric Śaiva literature (Sanderson 2001, 6–7). A key passage describes a “mundane” (*laukika*) or non-tantric cult of the Mothers, the rituals associated with which involve pilgrimage, worship of the images of Śiva (as Hetukeśvara) and the Mothers (led by the goddess Bahumāṃsā, “Very Fleshy”), partaking of the sacred waters, and perhaps animal sacrifice. The aims are of the variety advanced in Śaiva *purāṇas*: deliverance from harmful spirits, going to heaven, and joining Śiva’s entourage (the *gaṇas*) after death.<sup>26</sup> Subsequent verses describe, however, a tantric cult of the Mothers involving rites taught in “Tantras of the Mother Goddesses” (*mātrtantras*), with the aim, for men, of obtaining magical powers or *siddhi*. For women, the secret rites promise more: the possibility of becoming powerful and beautiful *yoginīs*. Significantly, the *Skandapurāṇa* identifies the “Tantras of the Mother Goddesses” with a list of Śaiva *yāmala*s or “Union Tantras;” this list includes the extant *Brahmayāmala*, a fundamental text of the Śaiva *yoginī* cult preserved in Nepalese manuscripts (Sanderson 2001, 6–7; Hatley 2007).<sup>27</sup> In

<sup>26</sup> *Skandapurāṇa* 171.118–120ab, 123 (Bhaṭṭarāi edition):

*jaḡato mātaro yūyaṃ mātrbhūta bhaviṣyathaḥ //118//*  
*yuṣmakaṃ ye bhaviṣyanti bhaktāḥ puruṣapuṅgavāḥ /*  
*striyo vāpi mahābhāgā na tān hiṃsanti hiṃsakāḥ //119//*  
*mṛtā mama gaṇās cāpi bhaviṣyanty ajarāmarāḥ /*

...

*yaṣ tu yuṣmān mayā sārḍhaṃ vidhivat pūjayiṣyati /*  
*sarvapāpavimuktātmā sa parāṃ gatim āpsyati //123//*

[Śiva spoke:] “Having become Mother goddesses, you shall be the Mothers of the world. Those who will be devoted to you, whether the best of men or fortunate women, pernicious spirits will not harm; and after death, they shall become my ageless, immortal *gaṇas*... One who will worship you properly, together with me, shall, free of all sin, attain to the highest heavenly destination.”

<sup>27</sup> *Skandapurāṇa* 171.127–132ab (Bhaṭṭarāi edition):

*ahaṃ brahmā ca viṣṇuś ca ṛṣayaś ca tapodhanāḥ /*  
*mātrtantrāṇi divyāni mātryajñavidhiṃ param //127//*  
*puṇyāni prakariṣyāmo yajanaṃ yair avāpsyatha /*  
*brahmaṇi svāyaṃbhavaṃ caiva kaumāraṃ yāmalaṃ tatha //128//*  
*sārasvataṃ saḡāndhāram aiśānaṃ nandiyāmalam /*  
*tantrāṇy etāni yuṣmakaṃ tathānyāni sahasraśaḥ //129//*  
*bhaviṣyanti narā yaiṣ tu yuṣmān yaksyanti bhaktitāḥ /*  
*narāṇāṃ yajamānāṇāṃ varān yūyaṃ pradāsyatha //130//*  
*divyasiddhipradā devyo divyayogā bhaviṣyatha /*  
*yāś ca nāryaḥ sadā yuṣmān yaksyante sarahasyataḥ //131//*

cultic terms, this narrative hence juxtaposes a tantric cult of the Mothers with their worship in temples, suggesting also that these modes of *mātr*-veneration converged in pilgrimage centers such as Koṭṭivarṣa.

Iconographic evidence from shrines of the Seven Mothers is only in a few cases suggestive of developments in Tantric Śaivism. The Rāmeśvara and Rāvaṇ-kā kārī cave temples of Ellora, of the mid- or late-sixth centuries, depart from earlier models by the addition of a skeletal divine couple adjacent to the Mothers. The identity of these deities is problematic, but they might be (Mahā)kāla and Kālī (Harper 1989, 113–14, 116–17). If correct, this identification takes on significance in light of the association between Mahākāla, goddesses, and tantric ritual attested in the early-seventh century works of Bāṇa (Hatley 2007, 82) and *Brahmayāmala*, chapter 55: the *Mahākālamata*, which describes worship of Mahākāla in a maṇḍala of the Eight Mothers. It seems even more likely that the Vaitāl Deul temple of late eighth-century Orissa (Panigrahi 1961, 32–41) is informed by tantric pantheons and iconography. Here we find the Mothers in a cultic context that is clearly *śākta* or goddess-oriented—Cāmuṇḍā, rather than Śiva, presides as supreme deity—in a temple replete with *kāpālīka* iconography. This temple also contains decorative reliefs depicting male Śaiva ascetics bearing skull-staves (*khaṭvāṅga*) and engaging in erotic ritual (Donaldson 2002, vol. 3, fig. 627), a combination which, along with the temple pantheon, suggests the antinomian, *kāpālīka* ritual milieu of the Śaiva Vidyāpīṭha *tantras* (on which see Sanderson 1985, 200–202). One roughly contemporaneous *tantra* of this variety, the *Tantrasadbhāva*, does in fact describe ritual centered upon Cāmuṇḍā performed in temples of the Mothers (*mātrgrha*), in one case with the aim of encountering *yoginīs*.<sup>28</sup>

---

*yogeśvarīyo bhaviṣyanti rāmā divyaparākramāḥ /*

“Myself, Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and sages rich in penance shall create holy Mother Tantras through which you shall receive the highest worship, the rites of sacrifice to the Mothers (*mātryañjīnavidhi*): the *Brahmayāmala*, *Svāyambhuvayāmala*, *Kumārāyāmala*, *Sārasvatayāmala*, *Gāndhārayāmala*, *Īśānayāmala*, and *Nandiyāmala*—these Tantras of yours, and others too by the thousands, through which men shall worship you with devotion. You shall grant boons to the men worshipping. You shall become goddesses who bestow divine *siddhi*, possessing divine yoga. Those women who always worship you, secretly, shall become *yogeśvarīs*, lovely women of divine valour.”

On the interpretation of this passage, see Sanderson (2001, 7).

28 Both of the references identified belong to *Tantrasadbhāva* 21; one has as its context the *vidyā*-mantra and worship of “Red Cāmuṇḍā,” and the other, those of Cāmuṇḍā as Aghoreśī or Caṇḍā Kāpālīnī. In the latter case, the ritual is said to bring about direct encounter with the *yoginīs*. *Tantrasadbhāva* 21.211cd–13ab:

*mātrgrhaṃ praviṣṭvā tu pūjayitvā tu maṇḍalam //211//*  
*japet yogeśvarīm devīm supaṭṭas tadgatekṣanaḥ /*  
*bhramamāṇam ivākāśe tāvat taṃ nadate grham //212 //*  
*āgacchanti tato devīyo yogīnyo vikṛtānanāḥ /*

“After entering a temple of the Mothers and worshipping [their] maṇḍala, one should

As the *Tantrasadbhāva* intimates, the scriptural corpus and exegetical literature of Tantric Śaivism provide considerable evidence for study of the Mother goddesses and *yoginīs*, though often difficult to situate chronologically. In some of the most archaic material, goddesses have little cultic importance. Such is the case in the *Niśvāsātattvasaṃhitā*, which has been identified as one of the earliest surviving texts of Tantric Śaivism; Goodall and Isaacson's preliminary assessment would place "the earlier parts of the text between 450–550 AD" (2007, 6). The roles of goddesses appear largely ancillary in the *Niśvāsātattvasaṃhitā*'s ritual systems, and much of the material concerning Śiva's *śaktis* belongs to the *Guhyasūtra*, a comparatively late stratum of the text.<sup>29</sup> There alone (3.25ab) do we find allusion to a different sort of goddess, the fierce Caṇḍikā, whose identity often intersects with Cāmuṇḍā, leader of the Seven Mothers. The *Niśvāsātattvasaṃhitā* does refer to Mother goddesses, but not as tantric mantra-deities; their sphere is that of public, lay religion (*laukikadharmā*) alone (*Niśvāsamukha* 2.28, 3.33–34ab). The only evidence for their appropriation as tantric deities occurs in the context of cosmology, rather than ritual. Chapter five of the *Guhyasūtra* (5.1–21) lists several varieties of goddess among the lords of a series of seven netherworlds (*pātālas*). In particular, the *kapālamātṛs*, "Skull Mothers," who preside over the fourth netherworld, appear to represent a transformation of the Mothers into Śaiva, tantric goddesses, with mortuary iconography that presages the image of the *yoginī*. Positioned even higher in the series of netherworlds are *yogakanyās*, "yoga maidens" or "daughters of Yoga," deities of the sixth and seventh *pātālas*. Powerful, youthful goddesses, they might have continuity with the deities later referred to as *yogeśvarīs* or *yoginīs*. This connection is drawn much later by a Kashmirian, Kṣemarāja, commenting on a parallel passage (*Svacchandatantra* 10.118).

The record is fragmentary for the tantric Śaiva cults bridging the gap between sources such as the *Niśvāsātattvasaṃhitā* and later scriptures of the *yoginī* cult, such as the *Brahmayāmala*. These include the cult of the Sisters (*bhaginī*) of Tumburu taught in the *Vāma-* or *Bhaginītantras*, mentioned by Dharmakīrti in the first half of the seventh century and represented by the extant *Vīṇāśikhātantra* (Sanderson 2001, 11–12). Dharmakīrti also refers to (apparently lost) "Tantras of the Dākinīs" (*Dākinītantras*)—the deities mentioned in association with *mātṛs* in the Gaṅgdhār inscription. Also pertinent are *Bhūtatantras*, a poorly preserved class of tantric literature concerned

---

incant the [*vidyā*-mantra of the] goddess Yogeśvarī, having a good cloth (?), one's gaze fixed on that—up until the temple resounds, as though roaming through the sky (?). Then come the goddesses, *yoginīs* of grotesque visage."

The interpretation of 212bcd is uncertain, and particularly so *supaṭṭas* in 212b; a cloth inscribed with a ritual diagram (*yantra*)?

<sup>29</sup> Here I follow the working hypothesis on the stratification of the text put forward by Goodall in a presentation entitled, "The Structure of the *Niśvāsa*-corpus," at the "Workshop on Early Śaivism: the Testimony of the *Niśvāsātattvasaṃhitā*," held in Pondicherry, January 2007.

largely with exorcism and magic pertaining to “spirits” (*bhūta*). Though not a *Bhūtatantra*, the *Netratantra* (c. 700–850 CE; Sanderson 2004, 273–94) provides a window into the exorcistic and apotropaic dimensions of the cult of *yoginīs*, which might have had roots in the *bhūtatantras*, as well as in the ancient cult of *mātrīs* as *grahas* of Skanda.<sup>30</sup>

Tantric Śaiva cults of Mother goddesses and *yoginīs* first find detailed exposition in the *Bhairavatantras*, scriptures of the cult of Bhairava and allied goddesses. These are of two primary varieties: *tantras* of the Mantrapīṭha and Vidyāpīṭha, distinguished by whether their pantheons consist predominantly of *mantras*—i.e. male mantra-deities—or *vidyās*: the “lores” which are the female mantra-deities (Sanderson 1988, 668–671; 2001, 19–20). One of the defining characteristics of the tantric traditions is the ontological identity of empowered sonic formulae and deities. Literature of the Vidyāpīṭha, “The Seat of Female Mantras,” is intrinsically concerned with goddesses, and the Vidyāpīṭha/Mantrapīṭha divide itself appears intended, primarily, for distinguishing *Bhairavatantras* focused upon goddesses from those centered upon forms of Bhairava. An additional distinction arises between Vidyāpīṭha scriptures and those of the Kaula: the “[Tradition] of the [Goddess] Clans.” This distinction is at once significant and problematic: much as the Vidyāpīṭha appears to represent a development from the Mantrapīṭha cult of Bhairava, Kaula systems appear to have developed within and had substantial continuity with the Vidyāpīṭha (Sanderson 1988, 679–680), complicating neat divisions. And while the earliest attested literature of the Śaiva *yoginī* cult belongs to the Vidyāpīṭha, the greater portion of the extant Śaiva literature concerned with *yoginīs* identifies itself with Kaula lineages (*āmnāya*).

In the *Svacchandatantra*, the primary representative of the Mantrapīṭha (Sanderson 1988, 670), Mother goddesses have only a marginal presence: although mentioned as prominent attendants of Śiva (1.2cd), they otherwise appear largely in passing, in lists of deities (e.g. 10.214cd–215ab). However, *Svacchandatantra* 10 describes a cosmological sphere (*bhuvana*) called “The Beauteous” (*sucāru*) in which Śiva (Umāpati) presides over a maṇḍala of the Seven Mothers, described in full iconographic detail and apparently joined by an eighth goddess, Mahālakṣmī (10.1017cd–1030). This seems to be an elaboration upon a brief reference to unnamed *mātrīs* in the *Niśvāsataṭṭvasaṃhītā* (*Gulhyasūtra* 5). The *Svacchandatantra*’s Kashmirian recension (1.31cd–36) provides additional evidence for the incorporation of Mother goddesses: the eight letter-groups (*vargas*) of the Sanskrit alphabet are

---

30 Cf., e.g., *Netratantra* 20.50–75; this begins with a list of harmful entities including *bhūtas*, *mātrīs*, and *yoginīs*, and outlines means for their appeasement (*praśamana*). Among many other skills, the practitioner capable of averting the dangers they pose should be versed in the rites of the *bhūtatantras* (*bhūtatantravidhau*, 61a).

correlated with the Eight Mother goddesses,<sup>31</sup> and the alphabet itself is referred to as the Mātrkā, “Mother” in the sense of “Alphabetical Matrix.” The Mātrkā is conceived of as the conjunction of “Matrix Bhairava” (Mātrk-ābhairava), who embodies the vowels, and Bhairavī, comprised of the consonants. Similarly, the archaic *Siddhayogeśvarīmata* of the Vidyāpīṭha attests the deity “Alphabet Bhairava” (Śabdarāśibhairava), whose retinue of the Eight Mothers comprises eight groupings of the Sanskrit consonants (16.17, 41–43; see Torzsok 2000, 142). Such connections between *mātr̥s* and the alphabet and the conception of the alphabet as the Mātrkā/Matrix become commonplace in later Śaiva metaphysics (see e.g. Padoux 1990, 147–162).

In *tantras* of the Vidyāpīṭha,<sup>32</sup> Mother goddesses recede somewhat to the background, with *yoginīs* and other tantric goddesses emerging as cultic foci. Indeed, the entire edifice of tantric ritual appears oriented within the Vidyāpīṭha toward the aim of power-bestowing “union” or encounter (*melaka*, *melāpa*) with the goddesses, a communion through which the *sādhaka* assumes the powers of Bhairava himself. The significance of *mātr̥s* nonetheless remains considerable, for as mentioned, the Seven or Eight Mothers figure as matriarchs of the clans of *yoginīs*. Vidyāpīṭha texts provide elaborate taxonomies of the “characteristics of *yoginīs*” (*yoginīlakṣaṇa*) based upon Mother-goddess clans (*kula*). Note for instance the description of a *yoginī* of the clan of the Mother goddess Brāhmī/Brahmāṇī in *Brahmayāmala* 74.44–46:

A woman who has three lines on her forehead touching the hair’s part, on top; who is fair-complexioned, having the scent of the *campaka* flower, and ever fond of celibacy; always fond of the sound of the Veda, imperturbable, speaking the truth; [she has] a staff, water-pot, antelope skin, yoga-cloth, ritual ladles, *darbha* grass, and a sacred thread; and on her house is drawn a lotus. She should be carefully noted as belonging to the clan of [the Mother goddess] Brahmāṇī, O fair woman.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Sanderson points out that this reference to the Mothers is absent from the recension of the *Svacchandatantra* preserved in Nepalese manuscripts (personal communication, January 2007).

<sup>32</sup> Four Vidyāpīṭha works appear extant: the *Brahmayāmala*, *Siddhayogeśvarīmata*, *Tantrasadbhāva*, and *Jayadrathayāmala*, among which the *Siddhayogeśvarīmata* has been partially edited by Törzsök (1999), while the present author has edited several chapters of the *Brahmayāmala* (Hatley 2007).

<sup>33</sup> *Brahmayāmala* 74.44–46:

*tisro rekhā lalāṭe tu ūrdhvasīmāntam āśritāḥ /*  
*gaurī campakagandhī ca brahmacaryaratā sadā //44//*  
*vedaghoṣapriyā nityam akṣobhyaḥ satyavādini /*  
*daṇḍaṃ kamaṇḍaluṅ caiva ajinaṃ yogapaṭṭakam //45//*  
*srucīdarbhopavītaṃ tu padmañ ca likhitaṃ grhe /*  
*lakṣitavyā prayātnena brahmāṇyaṃśā varānane //46//*

For the critical apparatus and notes, see Hatley (2007, 329, 406–407).



Such taxonomies provide guidelines for the *sādhaka* to recognize *yoginīs*, who when propitiated may bestow *siddhi* upon individuals initiated into their own *mātr*-clans.<sup>34</sup>

Another manner by which *mātr*s retain significance in the Śaiva cult of *yoginīs* is exemplified by chapter thirteen of the *Tantrasadbhāva*, a *tantra* of the Vidyāpīṭha which presents what might be the earliest reference to a pantheon of sixty-four *yoginīs*. This chapter delineates a maṇḍala of sixty-four *bhairavas* distributed in eight lotuses around the central lotus; afterwards (vv. 56–88), it introduces a parallel configuration of sixty-four goddesses called the “Pantheon of Mothers” (*mātryāga*). Their names are feminine-gender mirrors of the *bhairavas*, suggesting a secondary status. These sixty-four *yoginīs* form octads in lotuses circling the central Bhairava, grouped into clans headed by the Seven Mothers and the supreme Goddess, Aghorī.

Kaula scriptures continue to attach considerable significance to *yoginīs*, and in some cases *mātr*s as well. In this literature, notable shifts are evident in the occlusion of mortuary ritual and increasing emphasis upon internalized, yogic conceptions of the presence and manifestation of the goddesses (cf., e.g., *Mālinīvijayottara* 19.18cd–27ab). The *Kubjikāmata*, for instance, teaches a series of bodily *cakras* which are the loci of five groups of female deities: the Goddesses (*devī*), Consorts (*dūtī*), *mātr*s, *yoginīs*, and Sky-travelers (*khecari*). As Heilijgers-Seelen elaborates (1994, 90–118), the Cakra of the Mothers incorporates the Brahmanical Eight (with Mahālakṣmī, and paired with eight *bhairavas*) as well as another octad called the “Great Mothers” (*mahāmātr*), who in turn preside over eight groups of eight (i.e. sixty-four) subordinate *mātr*s. Links between *yoginīs* and *mātr*s become increasingly tenuous, however, with new typologies coming to the fore no longer organized according to clans of the Mother goddesses.<sup>35</sup>

Despite trends toward interiorization in Kaula practice, Kaula conceptions of *yoginīs* appear to inform the monumental temples dedicated to these goddesses beginning, most probably, from the tenth century. It is in the latter literature of the Kaula cult of the goddess Kubjikā that we find the earliest Śaiva textual references to visual representation of sixty-four *yoginīs*, the numerical configuration best attested in temples. In particular, the unpublished fifteenth chapter of the *Ṣaṣṭhasaṣṭhasaṁhitā*, as identified by Alexis Sanderson, provides a detailed account of the iconography of sixty-four *yoginīs*, linked to the Eight Mothers. The context concerns private ritual rather than the temple worship.<sup>36</sup> Significantly, Gudrun Bühnemann (2003)

<sup>34</sup> See, e.g., *Brahmayāmala* 74.47cd, quoted in n. 21 above.

<sup>35</sup> Note, for instance, the four- or fivefold series beginning with the *bhūcari* (“terrestrial *yoginī*”) common in Krama texts (Törzsök, *forthcoming*), or the classification of *yoginīs* as *kṣetrajā* (“born in sacred fields,” etc.), *pīṭhajā* (“born in sacred mounds”) and so forth in the *Kaulajñānanirṇaya* (Hatley 2007, 159–161).

<sup>36</sup> See Serbaeva, who quotes *Ṣaṣṭhasaṣṭhasaṁhitā* 15 from a draft edition of Sanderson (2006, 75 in “Cited Sanskrit Passages” and 56–61 in Appendix 7.6).

has identified three pre-fourteenth-century texts which elaborate the iconography of the same set of *yoginīs*: the *Agnipurāna*, *Mayadīpikā*, and *Pratiṣṭhālakṣaṇasārasamuccaya* (the latter as cited by Hemādri in the *Caturvargacintāmaṇi*). These sources, which belong to the comparatively public domain of the *purāṇas*, point toward the growing prominence of *yoginīs* in the religious landscape of medieval India, beyond the narrow confines of the tantric traditions. At least fifteen *yoginī* temples were erected from Orissa to the Madhya Pradesh-Rājasthān border, and as far south as Tamilnadu.<sup>37</sup> Though the sculptural record is fragmentary, many of these temples incorporate the Brahmanical Mothers within their goddess circles, preserving the connection between *mātrīs* and *yoginīs* evidenced in the textual tradition. In this manner, the Mother goddesses re-emerge from the esoteric tradition into temples in new guises.

### From *Mātrī* to *Vajradākinī*: Mother goddesses in Tantric Buddhism

Though closely linked to Brahmanical deities, the Seven Mothers' significance extended beyond Hindu traditions, much as did that of their ancient *mātrī* predecessors. An early medieval sculpted set of seven Jain *yakṣīs* appears modeled on the Seven Mothers (Cort 1987, 242–43), while there is substantial evidence for their appropriation in Buddhism. One major sculptural example survives: a cave-shrine of the Buddhist temple complex near Aurangabad (6–7th century) depicts the Mothers in the company of two nondescript seated Buddhas (Hatley 2007, 68–69). It is principally within Tantric or Esoteric Buddhism—the Mantranaya (“Method of Mantras”) or Vajrayāna (“Adamantine Vehicle”)—that Brahmanical Mother goddesses acquired Buddhist identities. Part of their historical significance within Buddhism lies in their role in the formation of a Buddhist cult of *yoginīs*: the tradition transmitted in the *Yoginītantras* (“Tantras of the Yoginīs”) or *Yoganiruttaratantras* (“Highest Yoga Tantras”) (Tribe 2000, 202–205, 213–17)—a tradition modeled in significant ways, Sanderson (1994) argues, on analogous forms of Tantric Śaivism.

Mother goddesses figure as minor deities in Tantric Buddhism early in the tradition's development, appearing, for instance, in the *Mahāvairocanaḥisambodhisūtra* (c. 640 CE or somewhat earlier; Hodge 2003, 14–17). In the maṇḍala of the supreme Buddha Mahāvairocana, as delineated in the second chapter, appear an unusual heptad of “wrathful Mothers:” Kālarātri, Raudrī, Brahmī, Kaumārī, Vaiṣṇavī, Cāmuṇḍā, and Kauberī (female counterpart of Kubera) (2.50, 13.89). These form the retinue of Yama, lord of

<sup>37</sup> The extant temples and loose *yoginī* statuary have been documented in colonial-era archaeological reports, and more systematically in studies by Thomsen (1976) and Dehejia (1986). More recently, Donaldson (2002) has studied the two extant temple sites in Orissa.

Death and guardian of the southern direction. Elsewhere in the text, Kālārātri and seven unspecified Mothers figure in the entourage of Śākyamuni (4.11). Chapter six links them to mantras for causing illness, bridging the goddesses' roots in the mythology of Skanda's *grahas* with tantric "magical" practices (6.15). Besides Mother goddesses, this text contains several references to *ḍākinīs*. While in the subsequent *Yoginītantras*, *ḍākinīs* would become prominent deities, and the term *ḍākinī* synonymous with *yoginī*, here they are grouped with minor, potentially pernicious beings such as the *rākṣasa*, *yakṣa*, and *piśāca*. In the *Mahāvairocanābhisaṃbodhisūtra* we hence find evidence for interest in some of the divinities prominent in the cult of *yoginīs*, and in particular, a limited appropriation of the Mothers as tantric goddesses.

The *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa*, part of which existed by the middle of the eighth century (Matsunaga 1985, 882–895), attests a broader range of female deities and spirits. Its opening chapter, enumerating the diverse beings who assemble to hear the Dharma, lists female divinities that include *pūtanās*, *bhaginīs*, *ḍākinīs*, *rūpiṇīs*, *yakṣinīs*, and *ākāśamātṛs*, "Sky Mothers." This list is highly suggestive of the range of female divinities described in literature of the *yoginī* cult. Among these goddesses is a group called the "Great Sky Mothers," comprising the standard *saptamātaraḥ* augmented by Yāmyā, Vāruṇī, Pūtanā, and others, with retinues of innumerable unnamed *mātṛs* (*Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa*, vol. 1, 20–21). Like the *Mahāvairocanābhisaṃbodhisūtra*, the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa* positions the Seven Mothers in the retinue of Yama among the non-Buddhist deities in the outer layers of the maṇḍala. Some attempt to give them a Buddhist identity is suggested by the addition of "Vajracāmuṇḍī" to their ranks (*Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa*, vol. 2, 510). In general, however, the depiction of the Mothers is more consonant with the ancient cult of Skanda's countless *grahas*, with whom they are explicitly connected (vol. 1, p. 223). As for *ḍākinīs*, their characterization is entirely that of pernicious, possessing female spirits, against whom one requires mantras for protection; no indications are present of the positive associations and prominence assigned to them in *Yoginītantras*.

Further incorporation of goddesses is evident in the *Sarvatathāgatattvaśaṅgraha* (hereafter *Tattvaśaṅgraha*), the composition of which had apparently commenced by the last quarter of the seventh century (Hodge 2003, 11–12). This text takes the "conversion" of goddesses considerably further, and its range of female deities even more clearly intimates that of the *Yoginītantras*. Here, for instance, we find reference to Mother goddesses classified under the categories *antarīkṣacārī* ("aetherial"), *khecārī* ("aerial"), *bhūcārī* ("terrestrial"), and *pātālavāsini* ("denizens of the netherworlds")—closely related to categories applied in later classifications of *yoginīs*. Along with a host of other erstwhile hostile deities, headed by Śiva, they receive tantric initiation and initiatory names; thus Jātaḥārīṇī ("Stealer of Newborn") becomes Vajramekhalā, Māraṇī ("Slayer") becomes Vajravilayā,

Kauberī becomes Vajravikaṭā, and Cāmuṇḍā becomes Vajrakālī, to name one from each respective class (*Tattvasaṃgraha* 6, p. 173). Leaving behind their identities as *grahas* of Skanda or as maternal, Brahmanical goddesses, the Mothers here take on identities as goddesses of the Vajrayāna. The *Tattvasaṃgraha* also contains an episode narrating the conversion and accommodation of *ḍākinīs* (*Tattvasaṃgraha* 6, pp. 180–8), while the *Guhyasamājatantra* (chapter 17, p. 130) attests *vajraḍākinīs*—transformations of these hostile beings into wielders of the *vajra* sceptre, marking their entry into the Vajrayāna pantheon.

With the emergence of the literature and ritual of the *Yogītantras* by the ninth century, Mother goddesses recede to the background, supplanted by the wild, transcendent hordes of the sky-traversing *ḍākinīs* or *yoginīs*. In the *Laghucakrasaṃvaratantra*, for instance, the cult deities comprise a fierce *kāpālīka* Buddha, Cakrasaṃvara or Heruka, and a maṇḍala of *ḍākinīs* headed by his consort, Vajravārāhī or Vajrayoginī. This consort-goddess presents a profound instance of the Buddhist incorporation of Mother goddesses, for in her form as Vajravārāhī, she represents a transformation of the sow-faced *mātrī* Vārāhī into a goddess of the Vajrayāna. She assumes prominence as both consort of Cakrasaṃvara and, unusual among Buddhist goddesses, the central deity of her own maṇḍala (English 2002, 43–49).

The maṇḍala presided over by Cakrasaṃvara is comprised principally of goddesses, referred to as *ḍākinīs*, *vajraḍākinīs*, *dūtīs* (“consorts”), etc.<sup>38</sup> Goddesses of the clan of Vajrayoginī/Vajravārāhī, these *ḍākinīs* represent a single class among a broad spectrum of female beings who collectively comprise the “web” or “matrix” (*jāla*) of *ḍākinīs* that pervades the universe. While in the earlier *Yogatantras* deities were organized according to clans (*kula*) of the five Buddhas of the Vajradhātu maṇḍala, the *Laghucakrasaṃvaratantra* and similar systems introduce new, matriarchal deity clans, much as Śaiva *yoginīs* were classified according to clans and subclans of the Seven Mothers. Representations of *ḍākinīs* in sources such as the *Laghucakrasaṃvaratantra* suggest little fundamental distinction with Śaiva conceptions of *yoginīs*, hence being equally rooted in older Indic Mother-goddess traditions.

### *Mātrīs* Past and Present: Continuity and Transformation

Veneration of Mother goddesses has formed a significant strand in South Asian religious history, and, as this essay sought to illustrate, has undergone a number of major transformations over time. Popular in ancient India, *mātrīs* were among the deities both Buddhism and emergent Brahmanical groups sought to accommodate or subsume. In the Gupta era, goddesses of

<sup>38</sup> The maṇḍala *ḍākinīs* have male counterparts designated “heroes” (*vīra*), but the latter have only secondary significance. For a discussion of the maṇḍala, see Gray (2007, 54–76); see also Sanderson (2009, 170).

this typology rose to prominence in the Śaiva-oriented configuration known as the Seven Mothers. Worshipped in temples throughout the subcontinent, the Seven Mothers were also crucial to the formation of the tantric goddess cults which became prominent in the latter centuries of the first millennium. Their historical importance to the tantric traditions is tied closely with their gradual transformation into the figure of the *yoginī*. Originally deities of esoteric cults, from the tenth century *yoginīs* became prominent in the wider Indic religious landscape, providing renewed significance to the ancient Mother-goddess typology.

Despite their decline as the focus of a temple cult, and eclipse by the *yoginī* and other goddesses within tantric traditions, Mother goddesses do retain significance in modern South Asia, with the influence of medieval tantric traditions evident in some cases. Veneration of the Seven or Eight Mothers forms a minor component of numerous “high” liturgies, such as the Durgā Pūjā or Durgotsava (Rodrigues 2003, 200–204), the preparatory rituals associated with orthodox life-cycle rites (*saṃskāra*) (Tachikawa *et al.* 2001, 94, 98), Smārta *pūjā* (Bühnemann 1988, 126–128; Courtright 1985, 42) and maṇḍala practices (Bühnemann 2007, 63–68), and even Smārta fire ritual (Bühnemann 1988, 7). Little attempt has been made to study contemporary regional *mātr* traditions, though some evidently possess considerable vitality. In Kerala, the Seven Mothers may feature as the core retinue of the eminent regional goddess Bhadrakālī/Bhagavatī (Caldwell 1999, 124–126), a tantric pantheon attested in South India as early as the eleventh century (Sanderson 2007, 277–278). In Tamilnadu, the Seven Mothers or “Seven Virgins” (*kaṇṇimār*) are both common village deities (Shulman 1980, 243–267) and enshrined in major temple complexes, even the relatively modern and urban Mundakakkani temple of Mylapore (Waghorne, 153). A Tamil village festival of 1993 in which seven young girls became possessed by the Mothers has been documented in film (Oldham 1995).

In addition, a number of alternative configurations of seven exist in various regional goddess sets which might be modeled on the Seven Mothers or an even older heptad. In southwestern Bengal, the *sāt bouni* or “Seven Sisters” echo the *saptamātarahī* in a decidedly local register, and even have Islamic counterparts in the *sāt bibi* (“Seven Ladies”) (Mukherjee, 67–68). Erndl (1993, 37–38) suggests that the *saptamātarahī* may form the model for the Seven Sisters of northwestern India as well, among whom Vaiṣṇavī (Vaiṣṇo Devī) is especially prominent; the lists also usually include Cāmuṇḍā. A group of Seven Sisters associated with disease are venerated in villages near Mysore, for instance (Filliozat 1937, 119–120), while the *sātī āsarā* (“Seven Nymphs”), river goddesses of the Maharashtrian folk tradition, represent another potentially dangerous group of seven (Feldhaus 1995, 118–141). Harper (1989, 33–45) has compiled references to a number of other village and tribal goddess heptads intimately associated with fertility,

renewal, disease, and death—common themes in the ancient, non-tantric Mother goddess tradition.

It is perhaps in Nepal that Mother goddesses retain their closest links with tantric practices as well as their greatest contemporary significance, configured either in a set of eight—the usual seven plus Mahālakṣmī—or as the Nine Durgās (*navadurgā*) with the addition of a variable ninth, supreme goddess. Worshipped in their own temples and shrines throughout the Kathmandu valley,<sup>39</sup> the Eight Mothers also replace the Brahmanical *dikpālas* (“Guardians of the Directions”) as regents of the sky and of the eight directions (Slusser 1982, vol. 1, 322–323, 344–349). In this role, they guard perimeters, such as those of the city of Bhaktāpur. The Dassain festival or Durgā Pūjā has a day dedicated to each of the Eight, the group of whom are collectively embodied and performed by masked dancers on the ninth day (Lidke 2006, 47). The *ihi* rite of passage for Newari girls provides an example of veneration of an individual Mother goddess: after ceremonial marriage to the *bel*-fruit, the maidens (*kumārī*) are worshipped as embodiments of Kaumārī, the *mātr*-counterpart of Kumāra/Skanda (Gutschow and Michaels 2008, 153–154). Nepal also attests cases of Mother-goddess veneration in Buddhist contexts (e.g. Tachikawa 33, 37–39). These *mātr* traditions deserve closer study, for in addition to their local significance, they attest key themes in the distinctive history of South Asian Mother goddesses. In particular, the manner in which the Nepalese Mothers bridge public worship in temples with esoteric ritual evokes a theme important from as early as the Gupta era, as intimated by the fifth-century Gaṅgdhār inscription and the old *Skandapurāṇa*. Their significance in both Śaivism and Buddhism also evokes a long history of competition over the sectarian identities of Mother goddesses, from the Buddhist conversion of Hārītī to the Islamicized *sāt bibi* of Bengal.

As even this brief vignette of the *mātr*s and related goddess heptads in modern South Asia suggests, the transformations in Mother-goddess conceptions outlined in this essay, however substantial, have not effaced more archaic conceptions. Rather, various configurations of this goddess typology have continued to exist in distinct regional, sectarian, and sociocultural contexts. One may encounter, for instance, vestiges of both the ancient cult of *mātr*s as dangerous *grahas* and the medieval tantric cult of *yoginīs*; and one finds veneration of Kuṣāṇa-era *mātr*s such as Ṣaṣṭhī alongside Brahmanical, folk, and tantric worship of the Seven or Eight Mothers. Moreover, even such historically disparate deities as Kuṣāṇa-era *mātr*s, medieval *yoginīs*, and the *sātī āsarā* of Maharashtra exhibit conceptual continuities, linked polythetically by shared idioms of visual representation, naming, and multiplicity, as well as a nexus of beliefs and values centered upon the natural world and its feminized powers of sustenance, fecundity, contagion, and mortality.

---

<sup>39</sup> Numerous depictions of the Mothers in Nepalese temple sculpture, painting, and line drawings have been published by Tachikawa (2004).

## Bibliography

### Primary Sources: Texts

- Agnipurāna*. Rajendralal Mitra, ed. *Agnipurāna: a Collection of Hindu Mythology and Traditions*. 1870–79. Reprint (3 vols. in 1), Bibliotheca Indica, no. 65. Osnabrück: Biblio Verlag, 1985.
- Guhyasamājatantra*. Benoytosh Bhattacharya, ed. *Guhyasamāja Tantra or Tathāgataguhya*. Gaekwad Oriental Series, no. 53. Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1967.
- Tantrasadbhāva*. Marc Dyczkowski, ed. “Partially and provisionally edited” e-text available from the Digital Library of the Muktabodha Indological Research Institute. [http://www.muktabodhalib.org/digital\\\_library.htm](http://www.muktabodhalib.org/digital\_library.htm).
- Niśvāsattattoasamhitā*. Electronic manuscript collation reporting National Archives of Kathmandu MS. 1–227 (Nepal-German Manuscript Preservation Project reel A41/14), and two apographs: NAK 5–2406 (NGMPP reel A159/18), and Wellcome Institute Sanskrit MS. I.33. Prepared by Dominic Goodall, Peter Bisschop, Diwakar Acharya, and Nirajan Kafle.
- Netratantra*. Madhusūdan Kaul Shāstrī, ed. *The Netra Tantram, with Commentary by Kshemarāja*. 2 vols. Kashmir Series of Texts and Studies, nos. 46, 61. Bombay: the Research Department of Jammu and Kashmir State, 1926, 1939.
- Byhatsamhitā of Varāhamihira*.
1. Hendrik Kern, ed. *The Byhatsamhitā of Varāha-Mihara*. 1864–65. Reprint (7 fascs. in 1), Bibliotheca Indica, v. 48. Osnabrück: Biblio Verlag, 1982.
  2. Avadh Vihari Tripathi, ed. 2 vols. Sarasvatī Bhavan Granthamālā, no. 97. Varanasi: Varanaseya Sanskrit Vishwavidyalaya Research Institute, 1968.
- Brahmayāmala*.
1. NAK MS. 3–370; NGMPP reel A42/6.
  2. See Hatley (2007).
- Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa*. T. Gaṇapati Śāstrī, ed. *The Āryamañjuśrīmūlakalpa*. 3 vols. Trivandrum Sanskrit Series, nos. 70, 76, 84. Trivandrum: Government Press, 1920–1925.
- Mahābhārata*. Vishnu S. Sukthankar, ed., with S. K. Belvalkar, A. B. Gajendragadkar, V. Kane, R. D. Karmarkar, P. L. Vaidya, S. Winternitz, R. Zimmerman, et al. *The Mahābhārata, for the first time critically edited*. 19 vols. Pune: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1927–59.
- Mahāvairocanābhisaṃbodhisūtra*. See Hodge (2003).
- Mārkaṇḍeyapurāna*. K. M. Banerjea, ed. 1855–62. Reprint, Bibliotheca Indica, vol. 29. Osnabrück: Biblio Verlag, 1980.

- Mālinīvijayottaratantra*. Madhusūdan Kaul Śāstrī, ed. Kashmir Series of Texts and Studies, no. 37. Bombay: the Research Department of Jammu and Kashmir State, 1922.
- Mokṣakārikā* of Sadyojyotis. Vrajavallabha Dvivedī, ed. *Aṣṭaprakaraṇam*. Yogatantragranthamālā, vol. 12. Varanasi: Sampurnananda Sanskrit University, 1988.
- Rāvaṇakumāratantra*. Jean Filliozat, ed. *Le Kumāratantra de Rāvaṇa et les textes parallèles indiens, tibétains, chinois, cambodgien et arabe*. Étude de démonologie indienne IV. Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1937.
- Laḡhucakrasaṃvaratantra*. Janardan Shastri Pandey, ed. *Śrīherukābhidhānam Cakrasaṃvaratantram, with the Commentary of Bhavaabhaṭṭa*. 2 vols. Rare Buddhist Texts Series, no. 26. Sarnath, Varanasi: Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies, 2002.
- Vīṇāśikhātantra*. Teun Goudriaan, ed. *The Vīṇāśikhātantra: A Śaiva Tantra of the Left Current*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1985.
- Sarvatathāgatattvasaṃgraha*. Ed. Isshi Yamada. *Sarva-tathāgata-tattvasaṃgraha. A Critical Edition Based on a Sanskrit Manuscript and Chinese and Tibetan Translations*. Śatapiṭakam: Indo-Asian Literature, vol. 262. New Delhi: International Academy of Indian Culture, 1981.
- Siddhayogeśvarīmata*. Ed. Judit Törzsök. " 'The Doctrine of Magic Female Spirits'. A Critical Edition of Selected Chapters of the *Siddhayogeśvarīmata(tantra)* with Annotated Translation and Analysis." Ph.D. dissertation, University of Oxford, 1999.
- Skandapurāṇa*. Kṛṣṇaprasāda Bhaṭṭarāi, ed. *Skandapurāṇasya Ambikākāṇḍaḥ*. Mahendraratnagranthamālā, no. 2. Kathmandu: 1988.
- Svacchandatantra*. Madhusūdan Kaul Shāstrī, ed. *The Svachanda Tantram, with Commentary by Kshemarāja*. 6 vols. Kashmir Series of Texts and Studies, nos. 31, 38, 44, 48, 51 (vol. 5a), 51 (vol. 5b), 56. Bombay: the Research Department of Jammu and Kashmir State, 1921–35.

### Primary Sources: Inscriptions

- Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*. 7 vols. New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 1877–1989.
- Epigraphia Indica*. New Delhi: Archeological Survey of India, 1888–.
- Ramesh, K. V. and S. P. Tewari, eds. 1990. *A Copper-plate Hoard of the Gupta Period from Bagh, Madhya Pradesh*.
- Sircar, D. C., ed. 1965. *Select Inscriptions Bearing on Indian History and Civilization*, vol. I. 2nd edition. Kolkata: University of Calcutta.

### Secondary Sources



- Adriaensen, Rob, Hans T. Bakker, and Harunaga Isaacson. 1998. *The Skandapurāṇa, Vol. I. Adhyāyas 1–25. Critically Edited with Prolegomena and English Synopsis*. Groningen: Egbert Forsten.
- Bautze, J. 1987. "A Note on Two Mātṛkā Panels." In *Investigating Indian Art. Proceedings of a Symposium on the Development of Early Buddhist and Hindu Iconography held at the museum of Indian art Berlin in May 1986*, eds. M. Yaldiz and W. Lobo, 25–30. Berlin: Museum für Indische Kunst.
- Bühnemann, Gudrun. 1988. *Pūjā: A Study in Smārta Ritual*. Vienna: Institut für Indologie der Universität Wien.
- . 2003. *The Hindu Pantheon in Nepalese Line Drawings: Two Manuscripts of the Pratiṣṭhālakṣaṇasārasamuccaya*. Varanasi: Indica Books.
- . 2007. "Maṇḍalas and Yantras in Smārta Ritual." In *Maṇḍalas and Yantras in the Hindu Traditions*, ed. Gudrun Bühnemann, 57–118. Revised Indian edition. New Delhi: D.K. Printworld.
- Bühnemann, Gudrun, ed. 2003. *Maṇḍalas and Yantras in the Hindu Traditions*. Brill's Indological Library, v. 18. Leiden: Brill.
- Caldwell, Sarah. 1999. *Oh Terrifying Mother: Sexuality, Violence and Worship of the Goddess Kālī*. New Delhi; Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Chattopadhyay, B. D. 2005. "'Reappearance' of the Goddess or the Brahmanical Mode of Appropriation: Some Early Epigraphic Evidence Bearing Upon Goddess Cults." In *In the Company of Gods. Essays in Memory of Günther-Dietz Sontheimer*, ed. Aditya Malik et al, 253–72. New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Center for the Arts and Manohar.
- Chitgopekar, Nilima. 2002. "The Unfettered Yoginīs." In *Invoking Goddesses: Gender Politics in Indian Religion*, ed. Nilima Chitgopekar, 82–111. New Delhi: Shakti Books.
- Cort, John. 1987. "Medieval Jaina Goddess Traditions." *Numen: International Review for the History of Religions* 24: 235–55.
- Courtright, Paul B. 1985. "On This Holy Day in May Humble Way: Aspects of Pūjā." In *Gods of Flesh, Gods of Stone: The Embodiment of Divinity in India*, eds. Joanne P. Waghorne and Norman Cutler with Vasudha Narayanan, 33–50. Chambersburg, PA: Anima Publications.
- Dehejia, Vidya. 1986. *Yoginī, Cult and Temples: A Tantric Tradition*. New Delhi: National Museum.
- Donaldson, Thomas E. 1995. "Orissan Images of Vārāhī, Oḍḍiyāna Mārīcī, and Related Sow-Faced Goddesses." *Artibus Asiae* 55: 155–82.
- . 2002. *Tantra and Śākta Art of Orissa*. 3 vols. New Delhi: D. K. Printworld.
- English, Elizabeth. 2002. *Vajrayoginī: Her Visualizations, Rituals and Forms. A Study of the Cult of Vajrayoginī in India*. Boston: Wisdom Publications.

- Feldhaus, Anne. 1995. *Water and Womanhood: Religious Meanings of Rivers in Maharashtra*. New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Filliozat, Jean. 1937. See *Rāvaṇakumāra Tantra*.
- Goodall, Dominic and Harunaga Isaacson. 2007. "Workshop on the *Niśvāsātattovasaṃhitā*: the Earliest Surviving Śaiva Tantra?" *Newsletter of the NGMCP* 3: 4–6.
- Gray, David B. 2007. *The Cakrasaṃvara Tantra (The Discourse of Śrī Heruka). A Study and Annotated Translation*. New York: American Institute of Buddhist Studies, Columbia University.
- Gutschow, Niels and Axel Michaels. 2008. *Growing Up: Hindu and Buddhist Initiation Rituals Among Newar Children in Bhaktapur, Nepal*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.
- Harper, Katherine Anne. 1989. *Seven Hindu Goddesses of Spiritual Transformation: the Iconography of the Saptamatrikas*. Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press.
- . 2002. "The Warring Śaktis: A Paradigm for Gupta Conquests." In *The Roots of Tantra*, eds. Katherine Anne Harper and Robert L. Brown, 115–131. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Hatley, Shaman. 2007. "The *Brahmayāmalatantra* and Early Śaiva Cult of Yogiṇīs." Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania.
- . Forthcoming. "diṇmātarah." In *Tāntrikābhidhānakośa. Dictionnaire des termes techniques de la littérature hindoue tantrique*, eds. Dominic Goodall and Marion Rastelli. Vol. 3. Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften.
- Heilijgers-Seelen, Dory. 1994. *The System of Five Cakras in Kubjikāmata 14–16*. Egbert Forsten: Groningen.
- Hodge, Stephen, trans. 2003. *The Mahā-Vairocana-Abhisambodhi Tantra: With Buddhaguhya's Commentary*. New York; London: Routledge Curzon.
- Jayashanker, S. 1999. *Temples of Kerala*. Census of India Special Studies, published by the Directorate of Census Operations, Kerala.
- Joshi, N. P. 1986. *Mātrkāḥ: Mothers in Kuṣāṇa Art*. New Delhi: Kanak Publications.
- Lidke, Jeffrey S. 2006. "Devī's Dance: the Interweaving of Politics, Mysticism, and Culture in the Kathmandu Valley." *Hindu Studies* 10: 35–57.
- Mann, Richard. 2001. "Parthian and Hellenistic Influences on the Development of Skanda's Cult in North India: Evidence from Kuṣāṇa-Era Art and Coins." *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* 15: 111–28.
- . 2003. "The Early Cult of Skanda in North India: From Demon to Divine Son." Ph.D. dissertation, McMaster University.
- Matsunaga, Yūkei. 1985. "On the Date of the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa*." In *Tantric and Taoist Studies in Honour of R.A. Stein*, ed. Michel Strickmann. *Mélanges chinois et bouddhiques* 22: 882–94.

- Meister, Michael W. 1986. "Regional Variation in Mātrkā Conventions." *Artibus Asiae* 47: 233-62.
- Misra, Om Prakash. 1989. *Iconography of the Saptamātrikās*. Delhi: Agam Kala Prakashan.
- Mukherjee, Soma. 2004. *Folk Deities and Matrika Cult of South West Bengal*. Kolkata: R. N. Bhattacharya.
- Oldham, Kristin. 1995. *Bearing the Heat: Mother Devotion in South India*. VHS. Madison, WI: Center for South Asia, University of Wisconsin.
- Orr, Leslie. 2005. "Identity and Divinity: Boundary-crossing Goddesses in Medieval South India." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 73: 9-43.
- Padoux, André. 1990. *Vāc: The Concept of the Word in Selected Hindu Tantras*. Trans. Jacques Gontier. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Panigrahi, Krishna Chandra. 1961. *Archaeological Remains at Bhuvaneswar*. Bombay, etc.: Orient Longmans.
- Panikkar, Shivaji K. 1997. *Saptamatrka Worship and Sculptures: An Iconological Interpretation of Conflicts and Resolutions in the Storied Brahmanical Icons*. New Delhi: D. K. Printworld.
- Peri, Noël. 1917. "Hārīti, la Mère-de-démons." *Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient* 17: 1-102.
- Ramesh and Tewari 1990. See *Inscriptions*.
- Rodrigues, Hillary Peter. 2003. *Ritual Worship of the Great Goddess: the Liturgy of the Durgā Pūjā with Interpretations*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Sanderson, Alexis. 1985. "Purity and Power among the Brahmins of Kashmir." In *The Category of the Person: Anthropology, Philosophy and History*, eds. Steven Collins, Michael Carrithers, and Steven Lukes, 190-216. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- . 1988. "Śaivism and the Tantric Traditions." In *The World's Religions*, eds. S. Sutherland, L. Houlden, P. Clarke and F. Hardy, 660-704. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- . 1994. "Vajrayāna: Origin and Function." In *Buddhism into the Year 2000. International Conference Proceedings*, 89-102. Bangkok and Los Angeles: Dhammakāya Foundation.
- . 2001. "History through Textual Criticism in the Study of Śaivism, the Pañcarātra and the Buddhist Yogināntras." In *Les sources et le temps. Sources and Time: A Colloquium, Pondicherry, 11-13 January 1997*, ed. François Grimal, 1-47. Pondicherry: Institut Français de Pondichéry / École Française d'Extrême-Orient.
- . 2004. "Religion and the State: Śaiva Officials in the Territory of the Brahmanical Royal Chaplain (with an appendix on the provenance and date of the *Netratāntra*)." *Indo-Iranian Journal* 47: 229-300.
- . 2007. "Atharvavedins in Tantric Territory: the Āṅgirasakalpa Texts of the Oriya Paippalādins and their Connection with the Trika and the

- Kālikula." In *The Atharvaveda and its Paippalāda Śākhā: Historical and Philological Papers on a Vedic Tradition*, ed. Arlo Griffiths and Annette Schmiedchen, 195–311. Aachen: Shaker Verlag.
- . *Forthcoming*. "Religion and the State: Initiating the Monarch in Śaivism and the Buddhist Way of Mantras."
- Serbaeva, Olga. 2006. "Yoginīs in Śaiva Purāṇas and Tantras. Their role in transformative experiences in a historical and comparative perspective." Ph.D. dissertation, Université de Lausanne.
- Shulman, David Dean. 1980. *Tamil Temple Myths: Sacrifice and Divine Marriage in the South Indian Śaiva Tradition*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Singh, Upinder. 2004. "Cults and Shrines in Early Historical Mathura (c. 200 BC–AD 200)." *World Archaeology* 36, 3 (*The Archaeology of Hinduism*): 378–398.
- Sircar 1965. See *Inscriptions*.
- Slusser, Mary Shepherd. 1982. *Nepala Mandala: A Cultural Study of the Kathmandu Valley*. 2 vols. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
- Tachikawa, Musashi. 2004. *Mother-goddesses in Kathmandu*. Delhi: Adroit Publishers.
- Tachikawa, Musashi, Shoun Hino, and Lalita Deodhar. 2001. *Pūjā and Saṃskāra*. New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- Thomsen, Margrit. 1976. "Kult und Ikonographie der 64 Yoginīs." Ph.D. dissertation, Free University of Berlin.
- Tiwari, Jagdish Narain. 1985. *Goddess Cults in Ancient India, with Special Reference to the First Seven Centuries A.D.* Delhi: Sundeep Prakashan, 1985.
- Törzsök, Judit. 1999. See *Siddhayogeshvarimata*.
- . 2000. "Tantric Goddesses and Their Supernatural Powers in the Trika of Kashmir (*Bhedatraya* in the *Siddhayogeshvarimata*)." *Rivista degli Studi Orientali* 73, fasc. 1–4: 131–47.
- . *Forthcoming*. "Dikcarī." In *Tāntrikābhīdhānakośa. Dictionnaire des termes techniques de la littérature hindoue tantrique*, vol. 3, eds. Dominic Goodall and Marion Rastelli. Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften.
- Tribe, Anthony. 2000. "Mantranaya/Vajrayāna: Tantric Buddhism in India." In *Buddhist Thought: A Complete Introduction to the Indian Tradition*, by Paul Williams and Anthony Tribe. London; New York: Routledge.
- Waghorne, Joanne Punzo. 2004. *Diaspora of the Gods: Modern Hindu Temples in an Urban Middle-Class World*. New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- White, David. 2003. *Kiss of the Yoginī: "Tantric Sex" in its South Asian Contexts*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Yokochi, Yuko. 2004. "The Rise of the Warrior Goddess in Ancient India. A Study of the Myth Cycle of Kauśikī-Vindhyavāsīnī in the *Skandapurāna*." Ph.D. dissertation, University of Groningen.