

the Mother Goddess, as Śakti, is engaged. In a significant way all the episodes of cosmic battle involving the Goddess involve this restorative theme, in accordance with the Hindu cosmological pattern of creation, dissolution, and re-creation of the universe, albeit with one important difference: This entire process is under the purview of the Goddess alone.

Notwithstanding the stern monotheistic character of the Jewish tradition, one discerns strong structural affinities between the imagery of the dangerous and destructive Śakti and the Kabbalistic tradition's portrayal of Shekhinah. We have already noted the dialectical connection between the Aditi and Diti as the Vedic sources of Śakti in the Tantric tradition. Such a dialectic is also apparent in the characterization of Shekhinah as the mother of both the angelic figure Metatron and the two females of the demonic region/the underworld, Lilith and Naamah.⁶⁸ This affinity is further accentuated in the Kabbalistic portrayal of Shekhinah that describes her awe-inspiring qualities in language that is instructively reminiscent of the descriptions of Durgā and Kālī (as manifestations of Śakti) in the Hindu tradition. Thus, in a remarkable passage in the *Zohar* we find the following image of Shekhinah, who is called the "moon" and "the cattle upon a thousand hills":

A thousand mountains loom before her, and all are like a puff of wind to her. A thousand mighty streams rush past her, and she swallows them in one swallow. Her nails reach out to a thousand and seventy sides; her hands grasp on to twenty-five thousand sides; nothing eludes her rule on this side or the other. How many thousand of potencies of judgment are grasped in her hair.⁶⁹

The Shekhinah's portrayal in this passage reminds one of the Tantric description of the terrifying Kālī: She of dreadful face and disheveled hair, who wears the crescent moon on her forehead and is like a mountain of collyrium.⁷⁰ Note the clear parallels to the imagery of a tremendous, awe-inspiring Shekhinah, both in its magnificent symbolism of all-encompassing form beyond human measures that extends to all the realms, as well as its idea of the Feminine Divine being the ruler and overseer of this world and the other. Kālī in the Tantra is considered a manifestation of Śakti, the all-encompassing Divinity to whom the gods bow and who unleashes her terrible wrath upon the demonic powers that are wont to destroy or subdue the forces of righteousness. In the Kabbalistic vision, Shekhinah, like Śakti's manifestation as Kālī, is the source of destructive power, so that "her feet go down to death."⁷¹

The Zoharic concern with the demonic side of Shekhinah representing the forces of death and destruction is picturesquely represented in the symbolism of the "Tree of Death." Significantly within the Kabbalistic mode of thinking the "Tree of Death" as a symbol of Shekhinah has two distinct connotations and that both of them have significant correlations with the Kālī imagery of Śakti in the Tantra. First of all, the destructive side of the Shekhinah, like Kālī's blazing, all-devouring anger, is the expression of her infuriated rage, which is aroused by the forces of the other side: demonic forces that, in their arrogant belligerence, are wont to upset the ways of the righteous. Thus, in the words of Tishby, "death signifies the kindling of the fire of Judgment, and the dominant power of anger, in the Shekhinah."⁷² When she is separated from the Sefirothic influence of Yesod (the "good") and when she is in contact with the demonic powers of the "other side," the power of Judgment that is within her becomes dominant and bursts forth in all its strength and fury. Then she acts like a raging and devouring fire, casting terror upon the world and its inhabitants. Such a depiction of Shekhinah is closely akin to the Tantric imagery of Kālī, who is black with death, whose tongue is out to lick up the world, and whose teeth are hideous fangs.⁷³ Hence, the *Zohar* warns: "Keep far away from her and do not go near her; do not get into the raging fiery furnace. And if you do go near her, do so in fear, like

someone who is fearful of death, for the fire is raging and burning the world with its flames."⁷⁴

The Mystic and the Erotic: Patriarchal Appropriation or the Revenge of the Feminine Divine

How can this raging fire of cosmic anger that infests *Śakti* on the one hand and *Shekhinah* on the other, be quenched or subdued? What are its consequences for humanity's existence and survival? Structurally and phenomenologically the answer lies in the reconciliation of the Feminine Divine with the Masculine Divine, for it is precisely their separation that has caused this fiery destruction to come into being. In the case of *Kālī*, *Śakti* separated from *Śiva* is the epitome of that violent upsurge that can only be stilled by arousal in her of the sublime urge of erotic fulfillment.⁷⁵ This accounts for the well-known imagery of *Śiva* and *Śakti* (represented as *Kālī* or one of her other manifestations) engaged in the act of copulation, with *Śiva* lying on the ground and the Feminine Divine presented as the dynamic and active principle in the dominant role, which symbolizes the re-channeling of feminine energy into the creative mode.⁷⁶ This imagery of *Śakti* and *Śiva* reconciled in the erotic/creative act is replicated in the Zoharic understanding of *Shekhinah's* relationship with *Tiferet*, the power of holiness.⁷⁷ The Tree of Death symbolizes the disjunction between *Shekhinah* and the forces of holiness, symbolized in the Kabbalistic tradition by the Sefirah *Tiferet*.⁷⁸ This separation between *Shekhinah* and *Tiferet* is a function of *Shekhinah* having come in contact with "the other side," who by its very nature seeks to act as a force of death and destruction, and who waits at the door of the *Shekhinah* to take hold of her when she is separated from her husband.⁷⁹ Analogous to the Tantric framework of divine copulation of *Śiva* and *Śakti*, what is required here is that *Shekhinah* "be specifically united in intercourse with the *Tiferet*, and to be linked thereby, through the power of the influence that she receives in intercourse, to the forces of the Chariot and the angels that are below it."⁸⁰ Thus, within the Kabbalistic framework, it is precisely the separation of the feminine and masculine in the Divine that has caused the fallen state of humanity. As such, the solution, for the righteous, is to engage in imaginative visionary exercise that visualizes the masculine and the feminine not as two separate realities but as one unified being.⁸¹ The whole thrust of the imagery of Divine copulation in both Tantra and Kabbalah is precisely restoration of the original union of the Supernal Mother and the Supernal Father engaged in cosmic creation and redemption. Hence, the Masculine and the Feminine Divine must be brought together, creatively, symbolically and experientially, in one image that does not see them as two entities with separate ontic status. This is the task of the mystic in both traditions.

Within the Hindu tradition this creative meditative process involves the symbolism of *Liōga* and *Yoni* as one unified image-system, as well meditating upon images of *Śiva* and *Śakti* together as Divine Couple. However, in the Tantra this symbolism is further accentuated by giving *Śakti* a dominant role in Divine copulation and thereby asserting the supremacy of the Feminine Divine. This involves the adept in Tantric *sadhana* engaging in imaginative acts of meditation on at multiple distinct kinds of sexual imagery, all of which affirm the supremacy of the Feminine Divine. As already mentioned, the first involves meditation on *Śakti* in her various forms engaged in copulation with *Śiva* or standing on *Śiva's* corpse-like body.⁸² In these two variant images, *Śakti* is always portrayed in a dominant role while *Śiva* becomes a secondary principle, instrumental in bringing to the fore the higher ontic status of the Feminine Divine. The second involves meditation on various *yantras*: stylized geometric designs in which the sexual union of *Śiva* and *Śakti* is represented by various combinations of triangles, circles, and lotuses, each of them having both symbolic sexual connotations and higher metaphysical implications. The most famous of these *yantras* is the *Śri Cakra Yantra*, which consists of nine overlapping triangles—four

of them upward triangles representing the Śiva principle and five of them downward triangles representing the Śakti principle, with their overlapping nature suggesting the interpenetrative character of sexual engagement.⁸³ What is important to note, however, is that the triangles representing Śakti are shown occupying a position on the top of the triangles representing Śiva, much like the anthropomorphic images of Śakti and Śiva's copulation described above. Further, while there are only four triangles representing Śiva, there are five upper triangles representing Śakti. Both these elements of the Śrī Cakra Yantra convey the supremacy of the Feminine Divine. Finally, the aspirant (*sadhaka*) may meditate on *Yoni*, the feminine generative principle and the womb in which the creation takes place, which is conceived of as the primordial symbol of Śakti. As an aside, the *Yoni* itself can be interpreted as a *yantra*. Several Tantric texts specifically prescribe *yonī pūjā*, the symbolic worship of *Yoni* as the manifestation of the Feminine Divine. Thus, as manifestation of the Feminine Divine, the *Yoni* is considered the proper and suitable object of meditation and ritual worship.⁸⁴ Each one of the *Māhavidyās* (the ten manifestations of Śakti) is specifically identified with different parts of the *Yoni*. Meditation on *Yoni* without *Liōga* is the Tantra's way of asserting the supremacy of the Feminine Divine, where this feminine force is postulated as the ultimate Divine principle whose reverence is the sole and sufficient condition for one's liberation, leading to ultimate bliss and joy.

This imagery of the Feminine Divine represented by the female generative principle as the ultimate source of the power of the masculine member through a representation of an androgynous phallus is not alien to the Śakti Tantra. Heinrich Zimmer in *Philosophies of India* has brought to our attention a startling image in which a *Liōga* opens up on the four sides to reveal the image of the Goddess with ten arms and five heads residing at its very core.⁸⁵ Given that the *Liōga* represents the Divine Phallus (and thus the power of masculine creation), the nestling of *Devī*, the Feminine Divine within it has undeniable symbolic resonances with the Kabbalistic tradition's representation with the *Shekhinah* identified with the corona of the Divine Phallus. It is equally important to note that the well-known icon of the *Liōga* as the symbol of Śiva is always grounded in the *Yoni*. The rootedness of the *Liōga* in the *Yoni* may be interpreted to suggest that the Divine Phallus of Śiva, like all created beings, has emerged from the *Yoni*, which is the ultimate source of all existence, or that the *Liōga* derives its creative power (Śakti) from the *Yoni*, which is a representation of supreme Śakti.

In the context of Kabbalah, the sexual imagery implicated in imaginative meditative visualization also involves a process of reconciling the two sexes in a manner that obliterates their ontic duality. In the Kabbalah, the *Shekhinah*, as the feminine potency of the Divine, is to be visualized not as a separate entity, but, like the *Liōga* and the *Yoni* together, as always being one with the Divine Phallus. Indeed, the Kabbalistic literature visualizes the *Shekhinah* as part of the overall representation of the Divine, in particular as the corona of the Divine Phallus.⁸⁶ In such images, the Feminine aspect of the Divine is being identified with the crown (symbolizing divine power and glory) that empowers the Masculine Divine that wears it. In according *Shekhinah* this empowering function, a certain emasculation of the Divine Phallus has taken place, as the power and the glory does not belong to the Masculine but to the Feminine Divine who is the object of mystic's imaginative visualization. In the complex gender symbolism of theosophical Kabbalah, *Shekhinah's* act of crowning the Divine Phallus must be viewed as feminization of the Divine.

Further, the gender metamorphosis implied in this imagery also has significant soteriological import. In both Tantra and Kabbalah the meditative visualization of this integrative sexual imagery results in the achievement of a state of divine bliss. More specifically, in the case of Tantra the visualization of this integrative sexual imagery leads to a blissful existence in which "the devotee experiences deep trance (*samādhi*)"⁸⁷ and thereby achieves liberation. Similarly, in the case of Kabbalah one finds reference to both

the noneschatological and eschatological depiction of the blissful state of the mystic who is blessed with the union with *Shekhinah*. The eschatological motif of this union involves the mystic being crowned by the diadem that symbolizes Divine Presence, through which the mystic is in constant union with the world to come: "The diadem is a world unto itself, and the Holy One, blessed be He, places a crown of kingship on the head of every righteous person...and the soul of the righteous person is crowned and adorned by the splendor of the Presence and they derive pleasure from Her."⁸⁸ The noneschatological motif involving a prescription for the mystic to visualize the Divine crown in the form of the corona representing the *Shekhinah* and experience the mystical union akin to the sexual union of the masculine and feminine aspects is suggested in several passages of the Zohar.⁸⁹ Thus, the two respective mystical traditions employ explicit erotic imagery to depict both eschatological and noneschatological soteriological motifs to symbolize the ontic unity of the Feminine and the Masculine dimensions of the Divine.

Conclusion

In the Hindu Tantra and Jewish Kabbalah the feminization of the Divine appears to have been construed as an affront to the dominant patriarchal imagery of the Divine. Though acknowledgment of the Feminine as an element of the Divine may be acceptable, according to the Feminine the place of preeminence—to the point that both creative and redemptive role becomes identified with Her—involves the possibility of relativizing patriarchal imagery in a manner that can only dilute the power of patriarchal religious institutions. Understandably then, in both the cases under discussion, though certainly with differences in the degree of severity, there have been efforts to marginalize and assign a liminal status to these aspects of Tantra and Kabbalah by interpreting them in ways that succeeded in re-incorporating the Feminine Divine in the larger framework of the patriarchal religion. Patriarchal imagery of the Divine in the mainstream Hindu and Jewish traditions have tended to see the God primarily in masculine terms. Where feminine categories have entered the conceptual framework, the tendency has been to assign the feminine a secondary and dependent role. In many ways this holds true of both the Hindu and Jewish traditions, including also Tantra and Kabbalah mysticism, which may be seen to be ideologically informed by the patriarchal framework of the respective traditions. However, on closer examination one finds that there is also discernible an intriguing and refreshingly subversive ideological stance of the androgynous Divine in both Tantra and the Kabbalah that constitutes a challenge to the patriarchally informed conceptual framework. Both mystical traditions articulate, in somewhat analogous fashion, an androgynous Divine as a counterpoise to the traditional patriarchal Divine imagery. Their conceptualization of the androgynous Divine involves two related motifs: (1) Both the masculine and the feminine aspects of Divine are derived from one undifferentiated neutral Divinity, which is free from gender nuances, and/or (2) The masculine and the feminine are ontologically located in one androgynous Divinity, which is mythically perceived as bisexual. In either case, the mystical androgynous imagery seeks to challenge the traditional conceptualizations of the Divine, which either excludes the feminine or sees the masculine as a backdrop for either a complementary or a secondary role for the feminine. The androgynous character of the Divine articulated both in the Kabbalah and the Tantra mysticism offers a unique conceptual framework designed to affirm the bisexuality of the Godhead without discernment of either a metaphysical or ontological duality.

Notes

¹ Use of the term "Tantra" within the context of the Hindu tradition has been a matter of immense scholarly debate. The Tantra scholarship, however, does accept three major forms of Tantra, namely Śakti Tantra, Śiva Tantra, and Viśnu Tantra, each with further nuanced subdivisions. In this paper the term "Tantra" is used primarily to connote the Śakti Tantra.

² Gershom Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead* (New York: Schocken Books, 1991), p. 194.

³ See Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), p. 13. On this particular issue of methodological and ideological reserve resulting in a lack of attention to comparative work involving Kabbalah and other expressions of mysticism, the present author echoes the sentiments expressed by Moshe Idel in the aforementioned insightful work. Idel rightly laments that the current scholarship in general and Jewish scholarship in particular has failed to provide a significant and sustained analysis of Jewish mysticism in a comparative perspective. Gershom Scholem is a case in point. Undoubtedly a towering personality in the field of Kabbalah scholarship, Scholem's methodological reserve with regard to his willingness to engage in a systematic study of Jewish mysticism in terms of its relationship to other religious structures of thought has impacted the field tremendously.

One is struck by the conspicuous absence of comparative studies involving Jewish mysticism and any expression of Eastern mysticisms of the stature of Rudolph Otto's *Mysticism: East and West* or R. C. Zaehner's *Hindu and Muslim Mysticism*. Ironically, even Moshe Idel himself, while censuring Gershom Scholem and the school of thought that has become associated with him for their mistake of concentration exclusively on bibliographical, historical, and textual research without paying attention to non-Jewish material including gnostic, Catharic, or Christian sources, fails to give any sustained attention to the comparative treatment of Kabbalah in relation to Eastern religions, specifically Hindu mysticism.

The present work is an attempt to rectify this lack of attention to the conceptual and structural congruencies between elements of Kabbalah and Indian/Hindu mysticism for the purpose of enhancing our understanding of the broader dimensions of mystical phenomena crossing over the boundaries of the East and the West.

⁴ For a detailed discussion of various mythological treatments of *Uśās* in the *Rg Veda*, see Alfred Hildebrandt, *Vedic Mythology*, trans. S. Rajeswara Sarma (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1980), pp. 21-35.

⁵ See *Rg Veda* I.XXX.20; I.48.15; I.89; 92.1-5; 124.4; 62.2; 113.1-2; 113.14.

⁶ See *Rg Veda* I.113.19.

⁷ See *Rg Veda* I.XXX.22.

⁸ See *Rg Veda* I.115.2; VII.75.5.

⁹ *Rg Veda* I.92.9.

¹⁰ See p. 11ff.

¹¹ See Wendell Charles Beane, *Myth, Cult and Symbol in Sakta Hinduism* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1977), pp. 107-109.

¹² See *Rg Veda* X.125, which extols and celebrates the Goddess in most glorious terms. A careful reading of the text of the hymn reveals her to be the constant companion/empowering divinity on whom all the Vedic gods, including the mighty Indra, depend for successful completion of their missions. The hymn is extremely important in conceiving *Vāgdevi* (*Vāc*) as endowed with all the qualities that later on become associated with Śakti (or Devī in her triune manifestation as *Mahāsarasvatī*, *Mahālakṣmī*, and *Mahākālī*). Dispenser of knowledge, she is the teacher of men and gods. The supreme

sovereign of nations, she is the one who bestows on beings the gift of wealth and prosperity. And it is she who engages in battles for the sake of people. All-pervading and endowed with highest glory, she is beyond both the earth and the sky. Following Sayana, the great commentator on *Rg Veda Samhita*, Griffith has identified her to be the Dhīśanā of *Rg Veda Samhita* I.22 and V.41. *Rg Veda* I.22 also speaks of *Bhāratī* (the Holy Speech or Prayer), another name for Sarasvati with which Vác or Vágdevi ultimately became identified in the Puránic phase of Hinduism. See *The Hymns of the Rg Veda*, trans. Ralph T. H. Griffith (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1991), pp. 12, 256.

¹³ See *Rg Veda* X.125.7.

¹⁴ For the paradoxical relationship between Vác and *Prajápati*, more specifically the mythological dimensions of the divine incest as a stage in the cosmogonic process involving *Prajápati* and Vác, see Sukumari Bhattacharji, *The Indian Theogony* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1970), pp. 163-164.

¹⁵ See *Satapatha Brahmana* X.6.5.4; *Panchavimsa Brahmana* X.X.14.2.

¹⁶ See p. 13ff.

¹⁷ *Rg Veda* I. 89.10.

¹⁸ *Rg Veda* X.27.5 declares *Aditi* to be the daughter of *Dakśa*. On the other hand *Rg Veda* II.27.1 includes *Dakśa* as one of the *ádityás* (the sons of *Aditi*). *Rg Veda* VI.50.2 identifies *Dakśa* as the father of the gods, while *Aditi* is mentioned as mother of the gods in numerous places: *Rg Veda* VII.64.2-6 makes *Varuna* and *Mitra* sons of *Dakśa* and the *Aditi*; *Rg Veda* VIII.25.1-5 declares *Aditi* as the mother and *Dakśa* as the father of *Varuna* and *Mitra*; *Rg Veda* X.72.4 makes the unequivocal paradoxical claim that "*Dakśa* was born of *Aditi* and *Aditi* was *Dakśa's* child."

¹⁹ The *Rg Veda* I.113.19 calls *Aditi* the mother of the gods. Moreover, *Aditi*, throughout the *Rg Veda*, is constantly called the mother of the *ádityás*, the sons of *Aditi*: five, six, seven, or more in number. The list of the *ádityás* include the high and mighty *Varuna*, *Indra*, *Dakśa*, *Mitra*, and others prominent Vedic deities. *Rg Veda* II.27.1 mentions six sons of *Aditi*. *Rg Veda* VIII.18.3 lists only five *ádityás*. *Rg Veda* IX.114.3 declares that there are divinities called *ádityás*. *Rg Veda* X.72.8 mentions eight of her of sons; with seven of them, she met the gods while she cast away the eighth, who was allowed to die. While nowhere in the Vedic literature is *Viśnu* identified as an *aditya*, the *smṛti* literature, including the *Mahábhārata* and *Rámáyana*, declare her to be the mother of *Viśnu* as well. This later development is certainly not without significance, as we will see that Tantra literature does declare *Śakti* to be the Divine Mother whose children even include the members of the Hindu Trinity (*Brahmá*, *Viśnu*, and *Śiva*).

²⁰ *Bṛhadáranayaka Upaniśad*. I.2.5b.

²¹ Notion of *Prakṛti* as a transcendent principle of materiality containing entire material Nature as potentiality that is actualized in the manifest world as the constitutive element of all existence is an important part of Hindu metaphysical and cosmological reflections. While the nontheistic system of Sáikhya postulate *Prakṛti* as an independent eternal transcendent metaphysical principle most theistic reflections assign *Prakṛti* a secondary status either as an aspect of God or a creation of God. Within *Śakta* tradition, however, *Prakṛti* is identified with the Supreme Divine (*Devī* or *Śakti*) herself, who is the ultimate source and creatrix of all.

²² See *Rg Veda* I.89.10. Also see Griffith's notes on *Rg Veda* V.62.8. According to Griffith, *Aditi* appears to mean infinite Nature while its dialectical counterpart *Diti*, connected to *Aditi* but without any distinct conception, is only to be seen in contrast with *Aditi* and probably meant the perishable/changing Nature (*The Hymns of the Rg Veda*, p. 272). In a similar vein, Muir describes *Aditi* and *Diti* as follows: "the two together, appear to be put by the poet for the entire aggregate of visible nature." See John Muir, *Original Sanskrit*

Texts (Amsterdam: Oriental Press, 1967), V, pp. 42-43. In later Purānic mythology the two conceptions have distinctly evolved to indicate the dialectical nature of the Feminine Divine as *Aditi* and *Diti* fully personified, where they are now seen as twin daughters of *Dakṣa*, *Aditi* being the mother of *ādityās* (gods) and *Diti* being the mother of *daityas* (demons). See *Mahābhārata*, *Ādi Parvan*, Chapter 65. Also see *Viśnu Purāna*, Part I, Chapter 3; *Harivamsa*, Chapter 3; and *Bhagvata*, Canto I.

²³ Jean Przyluski, "The Great Goddess of India and Iran," *The Indian Historical Quarterly*, X (1934), p. 412ff.

²⁴ *Kena Upaniṣad*, III.11, 12.

²⁵ On the notion of the *Māhavidyā* as forms of the Goddess imbued with creative and liberative power, see *Principles of Tantra* by Śiva Chandra Vidyāranva Bhattacharya, ed. Arthur Avalon (Madras: Ganesh & Co., 1960). On the topic of Tantric iconography and ritual worship involving *Māhavidyās* as forms of the Goddess, characterized as creatrix and redeemer, see David Kinsley, *Tantric Visions of the Divine Feminine* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997).

²⁶ On identification of *Uma* with *Vidyā* or *Brahmavidya* in the Indian philosophical tradition, see Beane, *Myth, Cult and Symbol*, p.120: "Cf. Weber, in Muir, IV, 422ff., who reviews the commentary in Sankara and Sayana on the goddess Uma. The scholar shares Sankara's view that *Uma* is 'Vidyā' (knowledge) or (Weber) 'Brahmavidya' (Divine Knowledge)."

²⁷ See *Tantra Śāstra*, cited in Avalon, *Principles of Tantra*, pp. 292-293, 308.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 306.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 311.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 327-328.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 329.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 331.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 469.

³⁴ Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead*, p. 147.

³⁵ Gershom Scholem has succinctly argued that in the exoteric ancient Talmudic literature *Shekhinah* is used to connote God's presence and glory and that in the ancient aggadah there is no clear evidence of *Shekhinah* being a female personification or hypostasis of God or an aspect of God. He does acknowledge, however, the possibility of certain developments in Jewish linguistic usage during the period that would have opened up the possibility of Jewish Gnostic usage of *Shekhinah* as a separate hypostasis. See Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead*, pp. 147-153. While there is some element of truth in Scholem's claim, one finds it hard to accept it without qualifications. The passage that stands out in its clear identification of *Shekhinah* as a distinct female entity is found in the *Lamentations Rabbah*, where *Shekhinah* is certainly seen as a female figure that leaves the Holy Temple after its destruction. See *Lamentations Rabbati*, *Peikhta*, #25, ed. S. Buber, f.15a. quoted in Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead*, p. 150. For specific ideological reasons based on a desire to see the Kabbalistic notion of *Shekhinah* as a unique innovation without any root in rabbinic Judaism, Scholem goes through significant convulsions to suggest that despite the pronoun "she" being clearly used for the figure of *Shekhinah* in this passage the *Shekhinah* here is nothing but a "bold personification of God's presence" and that the usage here is more of an allegorical nature. See Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead*, p. 150. It is also important to note that Scholem believes that idea of *Shekhinah* having a separate and distinct existence from God in later Midrash may have an oriental source, which would imply that it is not genuinely Jewish.

³⁶ Saadia Gaon is representative of this approach. Thus he writes of *Shekhinah*: "this light would give his prophet the assurance of the authenticity of what has been revealed to him....it is a more sublime form than that of the angels, more enormous in its creation,

bearing splendor and light, and is called "the *Kavod* of God" (in the Bible)...and *Shekhinah* in the rabbinic tradition." See Saadiah Gaon, *Emunot we-Deot*, ed. Ish-Shalom, f.144b quoted in Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead*, p. 154. Even though a distinct entity, *Shekhinah*, for the Jewish philosophical tradition was seen primarily as a creaturely being. This holds true of such distinguished Jewish philosophers as Saadiah Gaon, Judah Halevi, and Moses Maimonides. It is also important to note that the philosophical notions of *Shekhinah* did not have anything to say about the feminine character of *Shekhinah*.

³⁷ See Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead*, p. 126.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 160-161.

³⁹ Gershom Scholem, given his propensities for philological and historical approaches to the Kabbalah scholarship sees the Kabbalistic appropriation of the Mother Goddess imagery incorporated in its notion of *Shekhinah* as a response to an historical situation caused by the Jewish experience of the persecution during the Crusades. At best, the identification of *Kenesseth Yisra'el* with the notion of *Shekhinah* met a historical need of medieval Jewry for a powerful national symbol that enabled them to make sense of that historical experience as acts and suffering of *Shekhinah* herself, whose body the *Kenesseth Yisra'el* constituted. At worst, Kabbalah recovered ancient Near Eastern Mother Goddess imagery by associating the powerful national symbol of *Kenesseth Yisra'el*. This was simply unwanted Gnostic influence on the Jewish spiritual heritage. See *ibid.* Thus, in Scholem's frame of reference there is no room for a phenomenological/structural analysis that sees this development as integral part of human religious consciousness seeking to conceptualize and express in an intentional way a deeper experience of what is perceived as the principle of Godhead that meets the fundamental human need to experience and express the Divine in feminine idiom too.

⁴⁰ See *Sefer ha Bahir*, S # 43; M # 63; S 90; M # 131.

⁴¹ *Sefer ha Bahir*, S #74; M # 104-105.

⁴² *Sefer ha Bahir*, S #74; M # 104-105.

⁴³ *Sefer ha Bahir* had already implied this relationship in identifying Binah, the upper *Shekhinah*, as the "Mother of the Universe." See *Bahir*, S # 74; M # 104-105.

⁴⁴ See for example *Zohar* I.12a, which refers to the mystery of intercourse between *Shekhinah* and her husband, the *Tifereth*. In many places the *Zohar* depicts the feminine quality of *Shekhinah* specifically in terms of her conjugal relationship with *Tifereth* and *Yesod*, the two masculine emanations of the Divine in the Sefirothic scheme of things. The conjugal relationship of the *Tifereth* and lower *Shekhinah* called *Malkhuth* is conceived as the marriage of the holy king and the queen. Their union is considered to be the sacred union of the male and the female within the Godhead. *Shekhinah's* relationship with *Yesod* receives even more precise sexual description in a highly charged erotic imagery. For detailed analysis of sexual metaphor in the depiction of the relationship of *Shekhinah* with the masculine aspect of the Divine, see Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead*, p. 183ff.; Isaiah Tishby, *The Wisdom of the Zohar*, Vol. I (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 371ff.; and, Elliot Wolfson, *Through a Speculum That Shines* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 357ff.

⁴⁵ Zoharic passages that draw upon the conjugal life of the Divine are replete with vivid sexual symbolism. For example *Zohar*, III, 296a-b (*Idra Zutta*) talks about God casting His blessings in the Zion, which is conceived as the womb of the *Shekhinah*. The conjugality of God and the *Shekhinah* is asserted in the *Zohar*, II, 135a where God is clearly identified as the husband of *Shekhinah*, who, despite His immense love for her, lets the children of Israel take her away so that she can dwell among them. *Zohar* III, 214b portrays stages of the Divine union as stages of coupling in a clearly naturalistic manner in its interpretation

of the Song of Songs 2:6. Zohar III, 5a-b and Zohar III, 21 respectively interpret the Psalms 48 and 52 as hymns to the holy marriage (*tushbahta de zivuga*).

⁴⁶ Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead*, p. 161.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 161.

⁴⁸ See *Kena Upaniṣad*, 3.1-4.3 Both Samkara and Sayana, the great commentators on the Upaniṣads, have considered *Uma* to be "Vidyá." On *Uma* being the symbol of knowledge (*vidya*) see Muir, IV, p. 422ff.

⁴⁹ The Puránic phase of Hinduism as the context for the emergence of the notion of Śakti in the Tantra has demonstrated a further conceptual affinity between the Feminine Divine and liberative knowledge, *Vidyá*, of which the Goddess is seen as an embodiment. The Goddess *Durgá* is extolled in the *Mahábhárata* (Bhisma Parvan, App. I.1) as the *Brahmavidyá*. The *Sri Mad Devī Bhágvatam* commences with meditation on the Goddess as the *Vidyá*. In XII.8.11ff. of the text, the Goddess appears as the *Umá Haimvati* of the *Kena*, who instructs the gods in the secret of the Brahman. XII.8.62 goes beyond the *Kena* in identifying the Goddess *Uma* with *Brahman*.

⁵⁰ For detailed analysis of the ten *Máhavidyás*, see David Frawley, *The Tantric Yoga and the Wisdom Goddesses* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1996); and Kinsley, *Tantric Visions*. Also see Narendranath Bhattacharya, *History of Tantric Religion* (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 1982), p. 347ff.

⁵¹ See *Sri Mad Devī Bhágvatam*, I.2.21-25. This is a very significant development in the post-Tantra Puranic literature influenced by the distinctively Tantric conception of the Feminine Divine as the creatrix distinguished from that of the earlier Vedic conceptions. In the *Vedas*, both *Vác* (or *Vágdevī*) and *Aditi*, while conceived as universal mother and source of all existence, needed a father figure, *Prajápati* or the *Dakśa*, to create. As one moves into the Tantric phase of the development the role of the father figure in the cosmogonic process is completely ignored. Even the great Trimurti (Hindu Trinity) conception of *Brahmá* (the creator), *Viśnu* (the preserver), and *Śiva* (the destroyer) are themselves conceived as created by the Feminine Divine and are subjected to her will. For details of this process and various textual references to this effect in the Tantra, see Avalon, *Principles of Tantra*, p. 248ff. On the cosmogonic aspect and the cosmological dimension of the Feminine Divine as the creatrix, see Beane, *Myth, Culture and Symbol*, p.150ff.

⁵² See *Sefer ha Bahir* (S #74; M # 104-105); *Tikkunei Zohar*, # 22, f. 65a; *Zohar*, I, 16b; *Zohar*, III, 296a-b.

⁵³ Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead*, p. 174.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 147.

⁵⁵ *Sefer ha Bahir*, S # 116; M # 171.

⁵⁶ Ibid., S # 97-98; M # 147.

⁵⁷ Ibid., S # 74; M # 104-105.

⁵⁸ See Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead*, p. 176.

⁵⁹ See *Zohar*, I, 223 a-b.

⁶⁰ Ibid., III, 60b.

⁶¹ See Avalon, *Principles of Tantra*, p. 288ff.

⁶² *Zohar*, I, 35b. See also Tishby, *Wisdom of the Zohar*, p. 375.

⁶³ See *Zohar*, III, 74a; I, 12b. On details of Zoharic depiction of the entanglement of the Shekinah with the forces of "the other side," see Tishby, *Wisdom of the Zohar*, p. 375ff.; Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead*, p. 189ff.

⁶⁴ Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead*, p. 176.

⁶⁵ See *Sri Mad Devī Bhágvatam*, XII.8.62-83; also see *Mahánirvana Tantra*, XIII.4.

⁶⁶ The Tantric texts mention ten forms of *Máhavidyás*, the Wisdom Goddesses. These include *Káli*, *Tárá*, *Tripura Sundarī* (*Soḍasi*), *Bhuvaneśwari*, *Chinnamastá*, *Bhairavī*, *Dhúmávatī*, *Bagalámukhī*, *Mátaògī*, and *Kamalá*. In addition to the well-known images of *Káli* and *Durgá* engaged in battles with the demonic powers, one discerns the destructive and dangerous side of the goddess imagery involved in the portrayal of *Tárá*, *Chinnamastá*, *Bhairavī*, *Dhúmávatī*, and *Bagalámukhī*. For details of the discussion of ten forms of *Máhavidyás* see Kinsley, *Tantric Visions*.

⁶⁷ The theme of the Goddess engaged in the cosmic battle on behalf of the people goes back to the *Rg Veda*. See *Rg Veda* X.125. This theme is further appropriated and embellished in the *Smṛti* literature's recovery of the Goddess on the side of the divine in the cosmic battle involving the divine and the demonic. See *Mahábhārata* IV and XXIII.

⁶⁸ Zohar, I, 223a and Zohar, III, 60b.

⁶⁹ Zohar, I, 223b.

⁷⁰ See *Káli Tantra* in Krsnanda Agamvagisa, *Brhad Tantra Sara* (Calcutta: Navebharat Publishers, 1984), p. 461.

⁷¹ Zohar, I, 35b, 221b; II, 48b.

⁷² Tishby, *Wisdom of the Zohar*, p. 373.

⁷³ See *Káli Tantra* in *Brhad Tantra Sara*, pp. 387-388.

⁷⁴ Zohar, III, 110b.

⁷⁵ See *Liòga Purána* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1973), I.106.

⁷⁶ See *Kulárnva Tantra*, pp. 108-109; also see Kinsley, *Tantric Visions*, p. 241ff.

⁷⁷ See Zohar, I, 12a.

⁷⁸ See Tishby, *Tantric Visions*, p. 375.

⁷⁹ See Zohar, II, 186a.

⁸⁰ Tishby, *Tantric Visions*, p. 376.

⁸¹ See Wolfson, *Through a Speculum That Shines*, p. 357ff.

⁸² For various iconic representation of Goddess in these postures, see Kinsley, *Tantric Visions*.

⁸³ For detailed discussion of the importance of *Śri Cakra Yantra*'s symbolism in the Śakta Tantra see Douglas Renfrew Brooks, *The Secret of the Three Cities* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); S. C. Banerjee, *A Brief History of Tantric Literature* (Calcutta: Naya Prakash, 1986); and Ajit Mookerjee and Madhu Khanna, *The Tantric Way: Art, Science, and Ritual* (Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1977).

⁸⁴ See Krsnananda Agamavagisa, *Brht Tantrasara* (Calcutta: Navabharata Publishers, 1984), p. 701; Biswanarayan Shastri, ed., *Yoginī Tantra* (Delhi: Bharatiya Vidyá Prakashan, 1982), Chapter 7; *Kamakhya Tantra*, 36; J. A. Schoterman, ed., *Yoni Tantra* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1980), 6.5.

⁸⁵ Heinrich Zimmer, *Philosophies of India* (New York: World Publishing Company, 1964).

⁸⁶ While it is true that the *Zohar*, like the *Yoni Tantra*, has described in several places graphic details concerning the feminine genitals of the divine persona, the dominant imagery here is the symbol of the *Shekhinah* as the crowning corona worn by the Divine Phallus. On the androgynous character of Divine implicated in this symbolism, see Wolfson, *Through a Speculum That Shines*, p. 336ff. One sees here a significant correlation with the Hindu notion of *Śiva* as *Ardahanárisvara*, God as half female. Ontic unity of the masculine and the feminine in the Divine Phallus that contains within itself the feminine corona symbolizing the *Shekhinah*, may also be seen as analogous to the representation of the *Liòga* in the Hindu tradition, which, though called *Liòga*, is always presented as union of the *Liòga* and the *Yoni*, the Divine masculine and the feminine, namely *Śiva* and *Śakti*. In the Kabbalistic tradition, the androgyny within the Godhead is also suggested by the

depiction of *Shekhinah*, an emanation of the Divine Herself, as both male and female. See *Zohar*, I.232a.

⁸⁷ *Kulārava Tantra*, pp. 108-109.

⁸⁸ Todros Abulafia, *Osar ha-Kavod ha-Shalem* (Jerusalem: Mathor, 1970), 6b. On the eschatological motif of the mystic's union with the Divine Presence, that is, the *Shekhinah*, also see Moses de Leon, *Shushan 'Edut*, ed., Gershom Scholem in *Qoves 'al Yad*, n.s., 8 (1976), pp. 343-344; and *Sheqel ha - Qodesh*, ed., A. W. Greenup (London: 1911), pp. 97-98.

⁸⁹ See *Zohar*, I, 168b-169a; 2:57b - 58a, 205b - 206a, 277b; 3:5a, 96b, 148b.