Shekhinah on the "Plane of Immanence": An Intimation of the Indic Great Mother in the Hebraic Wholly Other

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Introduction

There was a spectacular spruce in our lush green yard in Bangalore, India, where we lived for a couple of years, which in its sublime sapientiality and rooted splendor of arboreal tactility could very well represent the Tree of Life imagined in Kabbalah, the timeless "received" wisdom of the Jewish people; moreover, in the Indic non-dual soil and from a Devi worshipper's perspective, a composite metaphor for the Divine Feminine that envelopes the universe. A close look at this real and touchable green spruce reveals small saplings arising out of the branches in every direction filling the treescape with multiplicity and plural grandeur, its branches looking like wings of a massive bird, and in the mind's eye an image of the Tree of Life, a yantra so to speak of the Divine Mother. Our garden was replete with a serpent and made me often imagine it as a kind of Eden with a twist. In India the serpent has not been the villain as it remains sacred as a symbol of the Mother God in a land where, what I have described as Gynocentric[1] traditions could not be suppressed and serpentine adventures in consciousness are a staple of spiritual practices.

Playing with Gilles Deleuze's ideas, I would like in this article to map my image of the spruce as Shekhinah onto his "plane of immanence" and visualize the ten Sephirot of the Kabbalistic tree emanating from its upside down mystical shape in order to reveal, with a generous dose of ideas from Gershom Scholem and Rafael Patai,[2] my intimations of the Great Mother hidden deeply within the otherwise supremely patriarchal Judaic Father God. Situating Shekhinah on Deleuze's "Plane of Immanence," I am making an argument about the meaning of the Kabbalistic tree that has been commented on by myriad scholars, and according to both Elliot Wolfson and Moshe Idel the tradition is fundamentally "multivocal" and "polychromatic."[3] Wolfson characterizes Kabbalah as having both continuity and a certain kind of "essence,"[4] an idea that lends itself to my understanding of the Great Mother having a fluid essence beyond thought (I use the word essence as liquid flavor[5] or "rasa" in Sanskrit that hints at synesthesia) that manifests in multiple aesthetic forms taking shape in the human imagination. I also take my cue from a more recent work of Daniel Matt, who clearly writes in his introduction to *The Essential Kabbalah*: *The Heart of Jewish Mysticism* that, "The rabbinic concept of Shekhinah, divine immanence, blossoms into the feminine half of God, balancing the patriarchal conception that dominates the Bible and the Talmud" (1).

I argue that perhaps there remained in the broader consciousness of the Hebrew people hints of a double-edged Godhead after all, both masculine and feminine, albeit within the *Nistar* or hidden dimensions. Following my intimations I can say that this deity's feminine face marks the mystery of interiority that can be a source of wholeness in a (post)feminist and hopefully, postnihilist Western world where theologians speak of *After God* and the *Weakness of God*, where "interfaith" dialogue via hidden dimensions of religions maybe a crucial component in the reduction of religious absolutism and violence.

In the Indic milieu, the immanent divinity was not necessarily opposed in a binary struggle against a transcendental Wholly Other; in fact, opposition between transcendence and immanence has been nullified by the very concrete presence of the Great Mother. The cosmic vision of the tantric path recognizes Shakti as the permeating presence of the Divine Feminine with no borders between body and spirit, here and hereafter as it is evident in a hymn like *Saundarya Lahari* that the tradition ascribes to Shamkara, the *Advaita* philosopher. In an article, "Seeing Devi in the *Saundarya Lahari,*" Francis Clooney writes that it is "part of a tradition that prizes the material and the bodily as well as the spiritual and intellectual external beauty..." (34).[6]

The tree too remains a sacred entity in the interconnected realm where the Mother, who presides over a philosophical non-dual unity of everything that is, still reigns supreme. In contrast, Western metaphysics and theology have historically operated under the shadow of the Name of the Father, as the Lord of creation, often distant from his created universe. However, more recently, on the wings of Nietzschean critique, what I may call the Name of the Woman has been appearing in disguises such as the return of pre-Socratic metaphysical flux,[7] emergence of difference and exploration of immanence or "chaosmology" in many thinkers including Gilles Deleuze as the overturning of metaphysics got under way, putting hypermasculine extreme rationalities under erasure via Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Derrida.

Also, Jewish and Christian feminist theologians have been relentlessly questioning an undoubtedly masculine and Wholly Other Lord of creation who remains utterly separate from his created universe. For intriguing historical or cosmic reasons, philosophers of the last century took "the corporeal turn" and that has been continuing with Gilles Deleuze's last proclamation in "Immanence: A Life" that "Pure immanence is A LIFE, and nothing else" (171). Life for once can call itself life without resorting to anything beyond. So now we have the Deleuzian "Plane of immanence," which does not stand in a binary opposition to transcendence but is immanent to itself.

Here we have an approximation of an Indic non-dual world-view that I have described elsewhere within Indic philosophic tradition as the Samkhya, Yoga, Tantra continuum, which is a sort of divine "materialism," a Gynocentric matrix, so to speak. In this view duality has to be posited so that multiplicity has a distinct place within a non-dual non-theist "divinity" where male and female are symbolically and inextricably intermingled with each other in sexual embrace. I ought to declare that this is a personal, spiritual, as well as a scholarly foray into the feminine divine in unsuspected places. It is from the perspective of my Gynocentric, or Mother God centered traditions that I have been searching for the *Absent Mother God of the West*, title of my current book project.

As I began to look at the story of the lost goddess and its implications for both women and men, I was convinced that the Name of the Woman was quite convincingly erased from the space of the divine in the Western world. The controversies surrounding Raphael Patai's book about *The Hebrew Goddess* seem to attest to the implicit idea that monotheism(s) is "monochroamtic" and from the mainstream perspective definitely about a single Father God.[8] Around this time I stumbled upon the figure of Shekhinah and became curious about her, but one can imagine my utter amazement when Frederique Apffel-Marglin, a scholar friend who also is a practitioner of Kabbalah told me that Gershom Scholem, the most famous scholar of Jewish mysticism, has compared Jewish Shekhinah to Hindu Shakti.

Here I quote from Scholem's book *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead: Basic Concepts in the Kabbalah*; when describing the two Shekhinahs, Scholem writes: "One might almost say, to use the terms of Indian religion, that the upper Shekhinah is the Shakti of the latent God; it is entirely active energy, in which what is concealed within God is externalized" (174). Although Scholem was quite clear about the profound differences, the admission of similarities itself can be a profound "affront" to patriarchal traditions as Braj Sinha argues in a sustained development of this idea in "Feminization of the Divine: Sakti and Shekhinah in Tantra and Kabbalah." I am interested in looking at this comparison to explore broader mythopoeic and philosophical implications and to reveal this hidden dimension for my own understanding of the feminine divine in world religions.

"In the beginning was the myth," says Hermann Hesse in the first lines of his first novel *Peter Camenzind*, but it is not just the Hindus, Greeks, and Germans whose souls according to him were "invested with poetic shapes"; rather, all people express their deepest intimations of the divine through mythic shapes although sometime they are hidden deep within religions that outwardly mistrust them. In spite of the Jewish tradition's ambivalent attitude, which is deeply diverse in itself, toward a decidedly feminine divine

figure, Shekhinah, whether she is truly divine or separate or merely a linguistic error, I experientially recognize in this figure intimations of the feminine divine.

From that imaginal perspective the shape of our Indian spruce as an upward pointing triangle could be seen as the masculine principle in both Kabbalah and Indic paths. I imaginatively turn this tree into a downward pointing triangle, and it then signifies the feminine in the Hindu tantra and, as it seems equally so in mystical Judaism. Together they make the interpenetrating double triangles, both the Star of David/Seal of Solomon and a basic Hindu yantra, symbolically signifying the divine unity of the feminine and the masculine principles.

Philosophical Immanence, the Divine Feminine, and Judaic Convergences

Bringing philosophy down to earth/Gaia requires many returns and re-imaginings. I might have just stumbled upon the figure of Shekhinah in Judaism, but as I searched deeper I discovered many cracks within that patriarchal narrative. In his ground-breaking book *The Hebrew Goddess*, Raphael Patai had proposed that the Mother Goddess/es was/were present from the very beginning in the Holy of the Holies. While the internal debate within Judaism about his claims are beyond the pale of this article, I am using Patai's work in conjunction with other arguments that hint at the feminine element within Jewish monotheism. In Jewish thought though the feminine must remain hidden as the story of Rabbi Akiba attests; only the most advanced of mystics can see her and live; others die, go mad, or become apostates. Such is the power of the sacred Shekhinah but what is this "She" doing in a resolutely patriarchal Judaism? To claim that there is a double-edged God in Judaism whose feminine face has always been there for the seekers to seek may construct heresy in the exoteric circles; however, as this seeker discovered mystical traditions bring you face to face with the feminine in inexplicable ways.

While I do recognize that talking about the feminine dimension of the Hebraic God is pretty close to anathema,[9] in this article I bring mythos and logos together to argue that Shekhinah can be mapped on the "Plane of Immanence" to claim that the feminine immanence remains hidden within the transcendental Name of the Father. Although the erasure of the Mother God was quite complete in the exoteric traditions of Judaism, the rich diversity of the tradition curiously retained the feminine dimension in the figure of Shekhinah, which remained seed-like until medieval Kabbalah began to flourish with the mysterious appearance of the Book of Zohar. It is not until the 13th century when Jewish Kabbalah will posit an elaborate Tree of Life, a diagram of the divine, replete with male and female sexual symbolism, quite reminiscent of Hindu/Buddhist tantric yantras/mandalas that will radically re-imagine the divine. Perhaps that feminine dimension is now reemerging as the new axial period is beginning to unfold in our collective consciousness. Although Indic tantric paths have developed the central role of the Divine Mother with more sophistication and nuance, Shekhinah retains the trace of the Great Mother, and Jewish Kabbalah looks strikingly similar to some aspects of the tantric paths that we will elaborate a little later.

Traditionally speaking, the opposition between transcendence and immanence has been the hallmark of both philosophy and religions of the West. There is a direct relationship between the obsession of Western metaphysics with the One over the many, the transcendental over the immanent and the Wholly Other, the Name of the Father of the Hebraic tradition that was often interpreted through the dominant lens of Hellenic Christianity. Philosophy in its Hellenic fear of the flesh created an abstract principle that can be accommodated in religious realms as the unmoved mover away from the reality of flux that pre-Socratics visualized as the prime reality of existence.

The Greek philosophical world itself was constructed to suit the needs of an idealist and imperialist Christian position that privileged a transcendental and universalized but decidedly masculine Other, even as the mythopoeic Greek religions and their goddesses

were erased under Christian homogeneity. In *The Shape of Ancient Thought: Comparative Studies in Greek and Indian Philosophies,* Thomas McEvilley reorients the history of Greek thought as much more complex and fascinatingly "fractal" than the One obsessed readings of the same might suggest.

But in many of these philosophical dialogues the gender implications are missed because erasing the deeply ingrained suspicion of the woman's alterity may be the hardest problem to solve. Bodies are the most troubling to philosophy; actually most philosophy constructs its identity against bodies especially imaged in the female body. Feminist philosophers like Luce Irigaray have shown how without acknowledging the radical alterity of the woman and recognizing the erased divine feminine, the tradition remains hopelessly and dangerously patriarchal. Into this debate, Deleuze and Guattari have brought in their complex, "materialist," but in some ways deeply non-dual perspectives. Although they have made the tree a metaphor for that self-centered metaphysics that is being deconstructed and have introduced the rhizome as the image of multiplicity, we may be able to observe the Tree of Life of Kabbalah from their rhizomatic perspective to deconstruct the transcendental Other of Judaism. A tree does not need to be opposed to the rhizome if the tree is experienced in its fullness in the interconnected realm of human and arboreal interdependence.

Following Bergson, Spinoza, and Nietzsche, Deleuzian immanence is a plane where concepts are woven together in relation to each other without reverting to a transcendent authority or meaning giving prior structure. The Western exoteric traditions have had their sublime deity couched in their philosophical Logos, supremely rational with the fleshy and "material" feminine discarded on the wayside as an obstacle to the masculine path of salvation. Given the hierarchically organized dualities of mind and matter, spirit and flesh, that have always been gendered either graphically through the language of sinful flesh epitomized in women or simply taken for granted convergence of spirituality and masculinity since the biblical God's masculinity was unquestioned, immanence too has generally been suspect.

However, Spinoza had inaugurated the path of immanence within Western thought through his idea of a single substance that is not opposed to transcendence because there is nothing that is beyond. Spinoza, the "prince of philosophers" as Deleuze and Guattari described him, was cursed for apostasy with the *cherem* in a rare example of Jewish highhandedness, for daring to question the absolute transcendence of his God, in his imagining God and Nature as one. Spinoza who opposed Cartesian mind/body dualism was marked as a hated pantheist and in his idea of a divine substance, he might have had touched a raw nerve.

Since then via Nietzsche's pronouncement of the Death of God, immanence has returned to Western philosophy even while feminists have been protesting their fleshy characterization in the dualistic world of pure spirit of masculinity attempting to escape the fleshy claws of femininity. Nature that is generally feminized is immanent to itself according to Spinoza, and in his philosophy he rejects Cartesian dualism as well as the idealist philosophy's prime reliance on the existence of a separate realm of the mind. In Deleuze's thought all dualistic distinctions collapse, and a plane of immanence shines forth in its own light.

In "Immanence: A Life," Deleuze writes:

> Without consciousness the transcendental field would be defined as a pure plane of immanence since it escapes every transcendence of the subject as well as of the object. Absolute immanence is in itself: it is not in something, not *to* something; it does not depend on an object and does not belong to a subject. In Spinoza immanence is not immanence *to* substance, but substance and modes are in immanence....Pure immanence is A LIFE, and nothing else. It is not immanence to life, but immanence which is in nothing is itself a life. (170-171)

Deleuze gives examples of very young children: "They are traversed by an immanent life that is pure power and even beatitude through the sufferings and weaknesses" (172). And he insists on their singularity and describes "A life as an index of a multiplicity: art, event, a singularity, a life" and concludes, "Transcendence is always a product of consciousness" (172).

For me the figure of Shekhinah and the notion of this immanence converge. Immanence is indwelling and Shekhinah in her earliest manifestation is the indwelling presence of God. Scholem insists that she is not separate from God at this stage. Although this presence can be interpreted in an abstract sense, the images such as the cloud point to its embodiment. Now as an opening to the flowing and dynamic Shekhinah, I will quickly refer to Georgio Agamben's commentary on Deleuze who makes the Neoplatonic connection with emanation by making immanence flow in his essay "Absolute Immanence." Referring to "Spinoza's idea of an immanent cause in which agent and patient coincide," Agamben argues that

> Spinoza's immanent cause produces by remaining in itself, just like the emanational cause of the Neoplatonists. But the effects of Spinoza's immanent cause do not leave it, unlike those of the emanational cause. With a striking etymological figure that displaces the origin of the term "immanence" from manere ("to remain") to manare ("to flow out"), Deleuze returns mobility and life to immanence: "A cause is immanent when its effect is "immanate" in the cause, rather emanating from it. (157)

Kabbalah and an "Immanating" Shekhinah

Can we then play with the idea of an "immanating" Shekhinah? Before I look at all those fascinating appearances of the feminine in both essentialized and de-essentialized forms, let me talk about the Kabbalah where she appears supreme. In Kabbalah the most hidden and unknowable aspect of the divine is called En-sof or *Ain* that is nothingness, but at the same time this divine also permeates the universe through its attributes, which are symbolized in the ten Sephiroth. Scholem makes quite clear the crucial point that in *The Zohar*, the Sephiroth are "regarded not as the steps of a ladder between God and the world, but as various phases in the manifestation of the Divinity which proceed from and succeed each other," and he recognizes the problem with the traditional Hebraic Wholly Other and this Zoharic presentation: "The difficulty lies precisely in the fact that the emanations of the Sephiroth is conceived as a process which takes place *in* God and which at the same time enables man to perceive God" (Scholem, *Major,* 209). One can also see the resemblance here with Whitehead's process philosophy that according to Carol Christ, who uses it for feminist "thealogy" purposes, was influenced by Buddhism.[10]

Now to think of the Kabbalistic Tree, my imagined spruce above, in mythopoeic anthropomorphic terms that connects the human and non-human worlds in a cosmic giant, we will then see the body of Adam Kadmon, which is as if "a cosmic tree growing downward from its roots above" (*Zohar*, 33). Estelle Frankel the author of *Sacred Therapy* discusses the tradition of soul healing when the tzaddik is able to identify a particular human soul within Adam Kadmon and she refers to the Jewish legend: "Adam Kadmon was a being of light whose essence stretched from one end of the earth to the other, and whose soul contained all the particular souls, both male and female, who were destined to emerge from the primordial oneness" (132).

Adam Kadmon is also reminiscent of the idea of macranthropy or "the universe as a huge anthropomorphic being" that appears in the idea of Purusha in the Rigveda; Thomas McEvilley who connects Indic and Greek philosophies in *The Shape of Ancient Thought* traces its origin in Mesopotamian sources: "In terms of Mesopotamian cultural history,

macranthropy is an aspect of the idea of a correspondence between macrocosm and microcosm" (26). The appearance of such a corresponding idea in Jewish thought points not so much to diffusion or influences as the human imagination's capacity to map its own existence onto the cosmic plane. Here is a mythic image of embodiment that can be planted on the Deleuzian plane.

Daniel Matt, the translator of the Zohar, argues that it has been influenced by the philosophies of Jewish Neoplatonic and Aristotelian teachings as well as by the thoughts of Avicenna and Maimonides for whom the ultimate reality of God is Ein Sof, which is inaccessible to thought. But the Zohar focuses on the attributes where "God thinks, feels, responds and is affected by the human realm. He and She comprise the Divine androgyne; their romantic and sexual relationship is one of the most striking features of the Zohar" (22). Also, Eitan Fishbane elaborates Moshe Idel's contention that, "The Kabbalists did not consider the divine life of the *sefirot* to be unknowable...they claimed to have detailed knowledge and understanding of the inner depths of the divine realm, and they treated the sefirotic system as a map of the divine domain with which they were intimately familiar" (Fishbane, "Jewish Mystical Hermeneutics," 98).

The Zoharic tree is organized in three triads. Along with Hokhmah/wisdom, the male aspect and Binah/understanding, the female aspect, that are the first two arising out of Keter, the triad, are the highest sefirot. It is interesting that Moses Cordovero, a 16th-century Kabbalist comments: "the Crown itself is comprised of Male and Female, for one part of it is Male, the other Female" (qtd. in Patai, *Hebrew Goddess,* 125), but Scholem explains it more philosophically:

> In the Zohar, as well as in the Hebrew writings of Moses de Leon, the transformation of nothing into Being is frequently explained by the use of one particular, symbol, that of the primordial point.... The primordial point from Nothing is the mystical center around which the theogonical processes crystallize. Itself without dimension and as it were placed between Nothing and Being, the point serves, to illustrate what the Kabbalists of the thirteenth century call "the Origin of Being", that "Beginning" of which the first word of the Bible speaks. (Scholem, *Major,* 218)

This point is called the bindu or the dot within many Indic tantric systems.

From this point then the tree moves toward its inevitable plurality and creates the multiplicity of the universe in splendid metaphors all the way down to "the 'great sea' of Shekhinah, in which God unfolds His totality" (Scholem, *Major,* 220). Ann Williams-Heller who explicates the divine mystery of the Kabbalistic Tree in relation to other mystical traditions of the world in her book *Kabbalah: Your Path to Inner Freedom*, points out the idea of change and movement inherent in the diagram: "As the Tree branches emanate along the Path of Lightening Flash, the first and fundamental Law of Life—the Law of Change or progression—is evident. Simply stated, this law decrees that each manifest thing moves along its own pattern and changes as it moves" (24).

At once then philosophically we are in the pre-Socratic world of a Heraclitus and Empedocles where flux is not yet seen as merely the material nature of the universe diametrically opposed to the stasis of the One. McEvielly points out, "Mediating between the One and the many along lines suggested by Anaximenes' hints of process-monism, Heraclitus developed the position that the permanent element in nature is change; the unity of things is the unity of an ongoing process, not the unity of a static Other" (36). We can see how the Hebrew mystics are making the transcendent Other move from his unmoved space into the universe of dynamic change.

Its complex interpretations are an effort to reconcile the unity of the Divine with the multiplicity of this representation. It is interesting to notice that the direct line in the middle row connects the crown Keter with Malkhut, the last sephirah and the translator writes that

"the last sefirah, Shekhinah, the Divine Presence, includes them all" and he cites this cryptic passage, denoting a clearly feminine image, from *the Zohar* (1:32b):

> Three emerge from one; one stands in three;
> Enters between two; two suckle one;
> One suckles many sides.
> Thus all is one (Matt, 21).

Before the lower Shekhinah who is the opening to the divine from below, Binah must be understood whom Scholem describes as the active upper Shekhinah. But Binah is also called "Who" as she is beyond thought and in most Kabbalists forbid reaching that far into the top. "Deuteronomy 22.7 is cited as the proof text: 'Let the mother go; the children you may take.' The Divine Mother is a cosmic question; Her children, the seven lower sefirot, would seem more attainable" (Matt, 38). Scholem explains that this "who" or "Mi" is a question that cannot be answered and for humans "this knowledge can be no more than an occasional and intuitive flash which illuminates the human heart..." (Scholem, *Major*, 221). Perhaps the Divine Feminine had to be kept secret because her power destabilizes the delusions of grandeur that patriarchy likes to uphold for its men.

The sexual imagery employed to unfold the divine creativity and mystery is quite vivid. Scholem writes, "the ray which emerges from Nothing is, as it were, sown into the 'celestial mother', i.e. into the divine Intellect, out of whose womb the Sefiroth spring forth, as King and Queen, son and daughter." Scholem is quite aware of the problem of such mythic imagination vis-à-vis Jewish exoteric tradition as he says next: "Dimly we perceive behind this mystical images the male and female gods of antiquity, anathema as they were to the pious Kabbalist" (Scholem, *Major*, 227). Scholem's unease with mythic Kabbalah was noted by Patai who unlike Scholem does not consider myth making as a primitive aspect of human creativity, but describes mythopoesis as a supreme activity of the human imagination.[11]

Now the lower Shekhinah is conceived in dual terms in mythic Kabbalah. Although as we will see Shekhinah as the presence of God existed from the very beginning as Scholem explains, "Nowhere is there a dualism, with the Shekhinah, as the feminine, opposed to the 'Holy one, praise be to Him,' as the masculine element in God. The introduction of this idea was one of the most important and lasting innovations of Kabbalism" (Scholem, *Major*, 229). In his later book *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead*, Scholem devotes an entire chapter of more than 50 pages titled "Shekhinah: The Feminine Element in Divinity" where he traces the trajectory of feminine dimension in meticulous detail.

While Scholem acknowledges Wisdom or Sophia of the Book of Proverbs and Job, is the first of created beings, he dismisses her femininity as simply a function of the Hebrew language: "The feminine names for Wisdom, which can be quite simply explained as resulting from the feminine gender of the corresponding nouns in Hebrew and Greek, cannot ultimately be cited as proof of the female character of the figure itself" (Scholem, *Mystical*, 143). But he shows from the time of Philo of Alexandria that Wisdom takes on a decidedly female character. Philo describes Shekhinah as the wife of God!

On the other hand in *The Hebrew Goddess* Raphael Patai establishes the history of the tangible presence of a feminine divine figure as a concrete albeit transformed presence. Although controversial, he points to the continuity of the Canaanite goddesses among the Hebrews and their struggle to abolish them; he demonstrates how from the very beginning the Wholly Other had a split personality and the "presence" or the dwelling of God among his people was indicated in feminine terms. Not only that, Hokhma, later Sophia, as a feminine hypostasis is present at the moment of creation; either as the first created daughter who helps God with the creation or as his female aspect sometime separate,

sometime simply his other self is present in the biblical account. Patai shows her transformation:

> Following the death of the "spirit of idolatry" in the days of Nehemiah, the Hebrew goddess succeeded in surviving. She underwent, to be sure, an astounding metamorphosis, but then that, too, is the mark of a living deity. In one of her manifestations she penetrated—in what period we can only conjecture—the rebuilt sanctuary as a female Cherub, poised in marital embrace with her male partner in the dark cell of the Holy of Holies. In another, she became the manifestation of God's presence, the Shekhinah—a feminine name just as God's is masculine—the loving, rejoicing, motherly, suffering, mourning, and, in general, emotion-charged aspect of the deity. (Patai, *Hebrew Goddess*, 32)

The history of her reemergence as a separate and powerful female deity in the 13th century onwards with a shrunken masculine deity is perhaps the most intriguing aspect of Jewish religious history. In this new incarnation Shekhinah/Matronit goes into exile with her children, and until she is reunited with her beloved neither humanity nor the male aspect of the divine pair can be at peace. Quite characteristically though, the male God in the meantime had embraced Lilith, the evil female personification, as according to Kabbalah, he was unable to exist without female connection![12]

Scholem thinks this feminine divine satisfies a "fundamental and primal need, uncovering one of the perennial religious images latent in Judaism" and describes it as "an eruption of the feminine into the sphere of the Godhead" (Scholem, *Mystical*, 160-161). Shekhinah becomes a midway space between transcendence and immanence, but above all she symbolizes the dynamic movement within the Godhead. Scholem finds "the internal dynamics within the world of the Sephiroth, where the lowest Sephirah can rise up to the highest. Within the godhead, there takes place a secret movement upward no less than downward, and it is the Shekhinah in particular that is the instrument of that motion" (Scholem, *Mystical*, 170).

Once again we have the dynamic aspect of the feminine, which belies the idea that feminine is always passive in the Kabbalah and therefore essentialized and in some ways can be used against feminist arguments. There is no doubt that she does appear as a receptive element in many Kabbalist texts, but unless we mark receptivity as something negative, there is no reason to fight such symbolic representations of female existence in the world of the divine as well as human. We do need to remember unlike Indic Shakti, as Wolfson notices that in this system the female does remain derivative of the male!

One can see that in the upper (Binah) and lower Shekhinah (Malkhut) both active and passive aspects of the divine feminine are concentrated as potencies. It is in this context that Scholem makes the comparison with Indic Shakti mentioned briefly above:

> What is the meaning of this double Shekhinah within the framework of the dynamic unity of divine manifestations and emanations? Two conceptions of the principle of femininity are realized and expressed in these images. As the upper Shekhinah of the Sefirah of Binah, femininity is the full expression of ceaseless creative power—it is receptive, to be sure, but is spontaneously and incessantly transformed into an element that gives birth, as the stream of eternally flowing divine life enters into it. One might almost say, to use the terms of Indian religion, that the upper Shekhinah is the Shakti of the latent God; it is entirely active energy, in which what is concealed within God is externalized. (Scholem, *Mystical,* 174)

It is also important to recognize that Shekhinah is not simply a nurturing mother or an adoring beloved but also a dark and destructive force. While her connection with the Other Side (Sitra Ahra) may appear strange and unacceptable to the exoteric ear, it is entirely

consistent with the mystic and ultimately non-dual concept of the Divine in whose totality the so-called evil also has a clear place. Estelle Frankel shows in her book how "nonmystical Judaism's concern with separating good from evil is turned on its face in the mystical tradition's nondual view of the divine" (160) and she cites Isaiah 45:6-7, "There is nothing outside of me. I am YHVH and there is nothing else. Forming light and creating darkness; making shalom [peace] and creating the evil. I am YHVH (the infinite one) who does all these" (224).

However, Frankel points out how this absolute non-dual pronouncement was "sanitized by the rabbis, who, when editing this verse for the liturgy, replaced the phrase "creating the evil" with the euphemism "creating all things'" (238). Kabbalah's Shekhinah at once belongs to the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge, which is also called the Tree of Death. Scholem explains: "Insofar as the Shekhinah is identified with the Tree of Death, one may speak of it as having a trace of the chthonian element (i.e., pertaining to the underworld) so often displayed by the Great Mother in mythology, and also appropriate to the Shekhinah, seen as a symbol of the esoteric interior of the 'earth'" (Scholem, *Mystical*, 190).

Scholem also points out what for him is an "extremely daring notion" that demonic figures of Lilith and Naamah are born from her.[13] He cites a passage from the Zohar (I, 223b), that reminds him of Indian mythology, where Shekhinah is called the "wisdom of Solomon":

> A thousand mountain 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 [i.e., the *Sitra Ahra*]. How many thousands of potencies of judgment are grasped in her hair.... (Scholem, *Mystical,* 191-192)

Intimations of Tantric Shakti/Indic Great Goddess

As a Kali lover I can sense in the above image a thousand-handed Mahadevi; therefore the affinity of Shekhinah with the Great Mother is clear to me except perhaps vigorous protests from traditional Judaism denying this semblance. Patriarchy does not like such intrusion into its rock solid realms and as Braj Sinha argues, as he traces the development of both Shakti and Shekhinah[14] that they feminize the transcendent within their respective traditions. I would add with Deleuze that they are markers of the "plane of immanence" or non-duality that point to the Divine Feminine beyond the duality of transcendence and immanence.

Also, these are only intimations, and we cannot make clear connections with complex figures like Kali, the fiercest and highly developed form of the Indic Great Goddess. Before we go deeper into these esoteric connections we must acknowledge that bringing India into the dialogue is a risky business, and we ought to remember the history of imperial adventures in India where racism and sexism constructed a totally devalued Other, especially through the figure of Kali.[15] Immanence within a dualistic world was associated with religions that are primitive that remain enmeshed with nature and are unable to recognize or unaware of the transcendental and therefore higher dimensions of consciousness and the divine. India's goddesses along with what were named folk animisms were seen as grotesque remnants of a degenerate religion by both Christian missionaries and rationalists alike, even as glorification of its more abstract advaita illusionism and from my perspective androcentric spiritualism continued in other quarters.

Colonizing Europe's Enlightenment projects had to devalue all that is associated with the feminine to project the superior nature of Western religion and philosophy as the hallmark of masculinist instrumental rationality imposed on ancient spaces like India.