CHAPTER IX

THE FEMALE DEITIES AS MOTHER GODDESS IN THE VEDAS
The female deities as mother in the Vedas

The present chapter deals with the concept of the female deities as mothers in the Vedas.

A study of the attributes of the important mother-goddesses and their relations with one another and with male deities suggests that different types of mother-goddesses were known in the Vedic period. The Rigvedic religion shows the finally developed form of the conception of the mother goddess in example of the abstract deities which pre-supposes earlier stages of the process of development of the mother-goddess conception.

A point of considerable importance in the study of mother-goddess conception is to remember that mother goddess worship is not merely an external fact indicating the worship of a number of female deities as mothers but it is their firm belief which encourages the conception of female divinity as mother. The concept of mother goddess in relation to the abstract deities is only in the final stage of the development in the Vedic thought. The concept of mother goddess in the process of development is based on the female deities presiding over the natural phenomena and objects and abstract faculties.

The personification of the female deities in the Vedas representing natural phenomena and objects, abstract
qualities, good and evil spirits. It shows that the number of female deities in the Rgveda is quite large. The mother goddesses out of these female deities may, however, be placed in three categories:

i. The first category of the mother goddess is based on their beneficial nature and the power of productivity viz. Prithvi, Aditi, Práni etc.

ii. The second category consists of the goddesses who are mothers of one god at a time or many gods simultaneously viz. Prithvi etc.

iii. The third category is of the goddess who are mothers of men, objects and gods viz. vāk.

The categorial attitude towards the mother goddess was very popular among the vedic people. The final development of this conception follows precisely the same path as the development of this conception has followed in other ancient religions. Next, from different mother-goddesses there arises one pre-eminent mother in whom is embodied the conception of the All Mother, who is not only the mother of men, gods and all created beings but also the cause of everything, past, present and future, from whom springs all life and to whom it returns on death.

Some of the mother-goddesses are destructive and harm-doing. Some are bountiful, granting wealth, food and
progeny and supporters of creatures. Some have the positions of wife, sister, etc. as can be seen in the case of uṣas who has threefold relation with Sūrya as mother, daughter, and wife.

A similar approach towards the god was also prevalent in the ancient religions of other countries. For example, Horos, the Egyptian Sun-god is spoken of as the husband of his mother (Is-is) Hathor, sometimes identified Isis, who was called the mother and nurse of Horos and at the same time his wife. Chem and Egyptian ithyphallic god was also called the husband of his mother.

Thus we finally distinguish the three types of the mother goddesses in the Rgveda.

i. The beneficient, forgiving, kind and gentle mothers are represented by Prati, Prthivi and Aditi.

ii. The virgin mother-goddess of voluptuous beauty represented by Uṣas.

iii. The third type of mother-goddess is the tutelary and the guardian deity. She is represented by Sarasvatī and other river deities. A tutelary deity of this type is held to preside over the most valuable things and she protects her worshippers. In the case of Sarasvatī

2. Ibid, p. 59
3. Ibid, p. 80
The following female deities have been considered as the mothers and they have played an important role in the evolution of the concept of mother goddess.

**Aditi**

Aditi has often been called as the mother of Adityas and other gods. The concept of Aditi as the mother of the gods is continued up to the epics and the purāṇas. But in the religious history of Indian thought she is approached by the seers for protection against sins and immoral acts in a reproachful manner yet she could never establish herself as a popular mother goddess. It may be due to her being an abstract female deity. She was considered as the mother of the gods but not mother of the people. Subsequently, she could not win the hearts of the people; even then we cannot deny her part in the development of the mother goddess conception totally.

**Prthivi.**

From the point of the evolution of Mother worship, the most important goddess seems to be Prthivi, who has been invoked as the great Mother. It is true that the Mother Earth is almost inseparably related to Father Heaven (Dyaus) and always jointly invoked, still she commands more greatness and grandeur, and reverential praises from
her sons. This fact establishes her superiority to Dyaus.
The vedic poet exclaims the greatness of Mother Earth. (Rgveda I.168.33).
This popularity of Earth as a mother-goddess may be due to her earthly qualities of fondling and providing people with all sorts of things for their maintenance and giving them shelter protection etc.

The following three examples of Rgveda sufficiently prove the fertile earth as a mother:

(1) ॐ ताद वितरता आ विकाजपीतयायाः सति सर्वस ।
वा कीषरर्गेर्षानु निविका
नाचरणस्तु ह्यवाम्यायामस्तुः।

The mother gave the sire his share of Order, with thought, at first, she weeded him in spirit.
She, the coy Dane, was filled with dew prolific with adoration men approached to praise her.


(2) ॐ ताद उत्कायं वितिरिणाः वतिरहुयं गृहवेच्चुः।
संगीते वर्तमानं अतो गधपालित विकिस्नयं विरिपुः विरिपुः विरिपुः।

Yoked was the Mother to the book Cow’s car-pole in the dank rows the cloud the jugent rested
Then the calf lowed, and looked upon the Mother, the Cow who wears all shapes in three directions.

Bearing three Mothers and three Fathers, single he stood erect, they never make him weary. There on the pitch of heaven they speak together in speech all knowing but not all impelling.


The idea of the Heaven as Father and the Earth as Mother was a common feature of all the ancient religions. It was the common belief from the earliest documents that the Earth is fertilized by the Heaven through the rains.

Attention is further drawn to the fact that the belief and worship of this Mother earth was a dominating feature of the religions of most of the aboriginal tribes of India.

In the Ramayana, Sita, the most exquisite and suggestive symbol for agriculture, is depicted as the daughter of the Mother Earth. In the Pauranic literature the earth has frequently been described as an aspect of Sakti.

Sarasvati

Sarasvati is another mother goddess in the form of the tutelary deity. As the river goddess and the goddess of
speech she was later on regarded as the goddess of learning and fine arts. In the age of the Purānas the tendency was to combine the concept of Paurānika sakti with the vedic female deities. As a result Sarasvatī was conceived as an aspect of Śakti.

Vāk

The Hymn of Rgveda, X.125. has been noted for the origin of the Mother Cult in India and is known as the vāk Sukta which represents vāk as a mother goddess.

Ambikā

In Sukla yajurveda, we find the mention of the goddess Ambikā who is addressed as the sister of Rudra and is invoked to partake of her share in the sacrifice along with Rudra. The invocation is repeated in the Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa (I.6.10-4). In the Kaitrāyanī Saṃhitā (I.104.20) Ambikā has been said to be the sister as well as the yoni(mother) of Rudra. In the Kāthaka and the Maitrāyanī Saṃhitās, she is identified with the autumn.

We find a reference to Goddess Durgā, later on regarded as also a form of mother goddess, of the colour of fire in an appendix to the Rgveda, and in the Taittirīya Āranyaka.

4. Sukla Yajurveda, III.57.
5. R.V.Khila Sukta, 10.127.
6. Taittirīya Āranyaka, 10.12.
In the Atharvaveda, there is a hymn addressed to the great Mother goddess (Devi). Two things may be especially noted in the hymn, (i) The great goddess is the underlying brilliance and power of all the brilliant and powerful objects (ii) She is the mother of Indra, and the power of the mightiest of the gods.

Besides, there are also a few other female deities who have attained the position of the mother-goddess.

Even today Earth as mother goddess is worshipped by many Indians. As in North India, after the crops are harvested, people worship the distribute food among the girls. They propitiate the mother Earth. Even in Bengal, the annual worship of the mother goddess earth in her various aspects begins in autumn when the harvest season begins in Bengal.

According to S.B. Dasgupta belief in some form of the mother goddess is found in the good old days of the races Semitic, Hellenic, Toutanic and Nordic. But what singles the hoary past dawn to themodern times, and the way in which the religious consciousness, developing and deepening round this Mother concept, has influenced the thoughts and ideas of the

whole nation through the ages. Mother worship with ceremonies and ritualistic practices, according to them, developed as a religious function under a particular social environment based on a predominantly matriarchal social system, where the mother was the central figure or the nucleus of the social structure.

As regards the history of the mother worship Woodroff states that when we throw our minds back upon the history of this worship we see stretching away into the remote and fading past the figure of the mighty mother of nature, most ancient among the ancients, the Ādyā Śakti, the Dusk Divinity, many breasted, crowned with towers, whose veil is never lifted, Isis (as mentioned previously) the one who is all that has been, is and will be kali, Haltor, cybele, the cow mother Goddess Inda, Tripura- Sundari, the Ionic Mother, Tef the spouse of Shu by whom he effects the birth of all things, Aphrodite, Astarte in whose graves the Bealim were set, Babylonian Mylitta, Buddhist Tārā, the Mexican Ish, Hellenic Ogen, the consecrated; the free and pure, African Selambo, who like Parvati roamed the mountains, Roman Juno, Egyptian Bast the flaming mistress of life, of Thought of Love, whose festival was celebrated with wanton joy, the Assyrian Mother succoth Bendth, Northern Eṣṭia, Mula-Prakṛti Semele, Maya, Ishtar, Ṣātic Neith-Mother of the Gods,

eternal deepest ground of all things, kundali, Gurhya-mahabairavi and all the rest.

Some scholars have tried to prove that the conception of Mother goddess in the vedas is the influence of the religious practices of the aborigines and pre-vedic culture. A.P.Karkarkar observes that she was the goddess of the Bharabaras, Pulindas, Sabaras, Kiratas and other wild tribes. Even so she commanded respect and adoration from the higher classes including the nobles and kings.

Coming to the question of the evolution of Mother worship in India, it has been pointed out by a school of anthropologists and sociologists that the whole cult with all its heterogeneous and theological fabrications may be regarded as a contribution to the complex texture of the Hindu religion and culture mainly if not solely, by the pre Aryans, or the non-Aryan aborigines. They hold that the major portion of what is known today as the Sakti cult or the Mother cult of India developed when the social, cultural and religious admixture among the Aryans and the aboriginal non-Aryans was almost complete through a long process in invoking contact, conflict and compromise. The prominence of male gods over female gods is mainly due to the

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10. a. A.P. Karkarkar, the Religions of India Vol.I.pp.92.177.
then prevailing patriarchal system in the Indo-Aryan Society. Some again have held that traces of the mother goddess as a consort of the father god are found in the indus civilization, by which is meant the probable pre-Aryan civilization hypothetically constructed on the finds of Mohenjo Daro and Harappa. Accepting this working hypothesis that there existed at least in some parts of India a rich pre-Aryan civilization, it has been suggested that the nucleus of the mother goddess is to be found in female figurines, some supposed to be images of the Earth Goddess, and some of the protector of the later direful goddess Mother Kali.

It is also well known that female statuettes akin to those from the Indus valley and Balucistan have been found in large numbers and over a wide range of countries between Persia and the Aegean, notably in Elam, Mesopotamia, Transcaspia, Asia Minor, Syria and Palestine, Cyprus, Greece, the Cyclades, the Balkans and Egypt.

The above view has been thoroughly refuted by S.B. Dasgupta who does not agree to assign to that hypothetical non-Aryan Civilization the origin of the Mother Cult of the Indo-Aryans. There is no gainsaying the fact that the

matriarchal structure of society had a great deal to do with the development of the religious consciousness and practises gathering round the Mother cult. No body, will be so orthodox to refuse to recognize the contribution of the aboriginal and other pre-Aryan races in the development of the mother cult of the Hindu religion.

Thus I agree with S.B. Dasgupta that the vedic concept of Mother-Goddess was its own and not borrowed from any other Non-Aryan source. We do not come across any evidence in support of the Non Aryan origin of the concept of mother goddess in the Rgveda Saśhitā, which deliberately describes the various mother goddesses in a comprehensive way. It is certainly true that the evolution of the concept of mother goddess was not completely free from the non-vedic influence.

Aurobindo also believes mother as the supreme poser and discusses the four aspects of the mother, also believing in the cosmic mother. He believes in the four power of the Mother which are her four outstanding personalities, portions and embodiments of her divinity through whom she acts on her creatures, orders and harmonises her creations in the words and directs the working out of her thousand forces.

For the Mother is one but she comes before us with differing aspects; powers, personalities, amanations and vibhūtis that do her work in the universe. The one whom we adore as the mother is the divine conscious force that dominates all existence. He regards the four aspects of mother. Four great Aspects of the Mother, four of her leading powers and personalities have stood in front in her guidance of this Universe and in her dealings with the terrestrial play. They are:-

i. Māheśvarī
ii. Māhākālī
iii. Māhalakṣmī
iv. Māhāsarasvatī.

Māheśvarī is her personality of comprehending wisdom, tranquil benignity, inexhaustible compassion, sovereign and surpassing majesty and all-ruling greatness.

Māhākālī embodies her power of splendid strength, irresistible passion, liking for battle, overwhelming will, impetuous swiftness and world shaking force.

Māhalakṣmī is sweet and beautiful, representing harmony and fine rhythm, intricate and subtle epulence, reaction and captivating grace.

15. Sri Aurobindo, The Mother, p. 35.
Mahasarasvati is equipped with close and profound capacity of intimate knowledge and careful flawless work and quiet and exact perfection in all things.

This outlook is also influenced by the vedic concept of mother worship. It is, of course, presented in a more systematic way. Aurobindo believes in the various powers of the mother, which we find in the Vedas in the form of various male and female deities. In the Vedas the phenomena are represented by male and female deities but according to him there is only a female divine reality. The originally vedic concept of Sarasvati has been expanded by him as Mahāsarasvati.

Śrīmāna points out to the identification of Aditi of the Vedas with the earth goddess of the Indus valley, Kālī and Śaṣṭhi of Bengal. In the Tantras the mother earth has been designated as the Mother Kālī.

The goddess Śaṣṭhi of Bengal is the guardian mother of the infants and the pregnant women. As a guardian mother Śaṣṭhi is worshipped on her favourite tree. Beneath this tree offerings are given to the goddess by the mothers. As Sasthi daily gives rise to the sun after his diurnal sleep similarly may their children awaken from the sleep fresh everyday. The barren women also pray for fertility.

Thus we find that Aditi of the vedas, the earth goddess of the Indus valley and Kali are identical. Their common characteristics suffice to provedic but the identification of Sasthi with Aditi, cannot be justified because the vedic Aditi is a deity of universal nature whereas Sasthi is a goddess of a particular function. Further, the prayers to Aditi in the vedas are to be free from the sins or to seek protection, but Sasthi is worshipped only for getting children and their welfare.

Dr. Vasudeva Saran Agrawala, while criticizing the view of A.R.Keith that vedic expressions as Aditeḥputrāḥ originally meant simply sons of freedom and from the subsequently may have sprung up a goddess Aditi, on the analogy of Śacī from the term Śacīpati, brings out the real character of Aditi as a Great Mother in the following lines:-

Happily the evidence of the Rgveda, yajurveda and the later Brāhmanas contains passages which have no doubt as to the real character of Aditi:-
In gain of wealth we celebrate with praises her, Aditi by name, the Great Mother.
One whom this universe of life hath settled. Thereupon God Savitar Promote our dwelling.

Yajurveda, XVIII.30; IX.5.

We call to our succour the Mighty mother of those whose sway is just, the queen of order, strong ruler, for-extending, never-decaying, Aditi, gracious guide and good protectress.

Yajurveda, XXI.5.

Sinless may be ascend, for weal, this vessel slowed with good oards, divine that never leaketh.
Earth our strong guard, incomparable Heaven. Aditi, gracious guide and good protectress.

Yajurveda, XXI.6.
The function of motherhood is most emphatically associated with Aditi, and being severally spoken of as the Great Mother, Mother and Goddess, we are left in no doubt as to her identity with the Great Mother Goddess. (Magna Mater Deorum) whose endless celebration we find in the later Brahmanical and Paurānic literature.

It leads us to conclude that the mother cult was not an imported one and it had its origin in the vedic traditions.

The Greek Mother Goddess

A striking similarity is available in the concept of the mother goddess in the Greek tales. Three goddesses for the creation, play the role of Mother of the world viz. the sea goddess Tethys, the goddess Night, and the Mother goddess Earth. They constitute a Trinity. Besides the trinity of Greek goddess there are many other groups of goddesses. To start with many goddesses are praised as (The goddess of Fate). Some are known as the goddess of Strength. Kurbia, is a goddess of wide force. The word 'Bia' means force and is ia synonym of "kratos" "strength". Styx is associated with stygein to hale. It is the river which nine times encircles the inner world. The goddess styse is the mightiest of the oldest daughters of Keanos and Tethys (Hesiod's, Theogony p.361). The goddess Hakate, linked with Apollon and Artanis, is of the same family origin. She is also considered as one of the daughters of Night.

17. VS.Agrawal.Aditi and Great goddess,Indian culture,pp.401-409
18. Swami Sankarananda,The Rgvedic culture,pp.137-140
The greek mother goddesses are generally known as great goddesses. The word great is used in the sense of Mother, or Mother of Gods. Dhes, who led the gods Zeus, Poseidon and Hades, and the goddesses Hera, Demeter and Hestia to the tree, was one of the daughter of Haia and Auranes who combined in her both the aspects of the great Mother of the greek tradition. Selene is the noon-goddess from salas "Light". The children of the Titan couple Hyperion and Theia constituted a Trinity. Besides Selene, Helios had another sister Eos, the goddess of Morning (Teogony, 372). Eos means "Redness of morning". Her arms and fingers are rosy, and her attire is saffron yellow. She herself was something more than simply a coloured phenomenon in the sky. She, as the new day, is also named as Hamara, (Day). Tito, a feminine form of Titan also means "Day".

This greek goddess is more mythological in her character in comparison to the vedic goddess Uṣas.

A comparative study of the vedic and Greek goddess declares a surprising similarity in their nature, approach, function and treatment. The characteristics of the greek goddesses are fundamentally based on the powers represented by them. For instance Selene is the deity of

moon. Similar is the case with the vedic female deities. The only difference is, however, distinctly observed in their complicated relations.

**The Female Tutelary Deity**

In most of the Indian villages and towns people worship a tutelary deity. Besides their belief in some form of a god or a goddess, they worship some deities who look after their needs. Special attention is given to the day and time in connection with the worship of these tutelary deities. The concept of these tutelary deities appears like the vedic deities.

The village godling, (Grama-devata) in the male or female form is regarded as a tutelary deity of the village. This godling, properly propitiated, is well disposed towards the inhabitants of the village but being neglected becomes ill-disposed. Every village is supposed to have its own godling, with a separate name. Their local jurisdiction does not go beyond the village boundaries. It may be illustrated by the practices prevalent in Orissa, where the devotees of Visnu, at the same time regularly pay homage to the village goddesses.

To ascertain the wishes of the village goddess resort is had, especially during epidemics to a medium, who may be
either male or female. In south India, we find a host of female village deities. Invariably their names and in amma e.g. Ellamma (mother). The female village deities may be placed under the category of the vedic mother goddesses. Some of them are the guardian deities of villages, others are disease godlings who protect their votaries from epidemics and illnesses.

On Bombay side they are worshipped as matr (mother goddesses). Some of these matrs are believed to preside over the villages and streets, while others are the goddesses of disease.

In many other parts of India like Punjab, Uttar Pradesh etc. we find the concept of the tutelary deities. The modes of worship of these village goddesses differ from province to province. In some places the images are worshipped with the unguents and other articles, while in other places animal sacrifices are performed for them.

The tutelary deity does not simply include the Gramā-devata but also the diseases, and trees. When anybody suffers from small pox, the goddess Sitalā, is propitiated. This disease is considered as the anger of this goddess. After the recovery of the patient, offerings of food and fruits are given to her. Under this category we find the deities of other diseases like cholera etc. The trees and plants are also worshipped.
In the Rgveda we do not come across many female deities of this nature. Only in Sarasvati, the goddess of river, other river goddesses and Dvaro Devi we find some resemblance to a tutelary deity. The goddess Sarasvatī has been regarded in the Rgveda as the deity presiding over the area near the river sarasvati. Similar is the case, with other river goddesses. The Ausadhis, medicinal herbs, are also considered, though rarely as the female deities in the Rgveda. In the Atharvaveda, the conception of deities of herbs and other objects like Mitatani of the diseases, and of certain other harmful abstracts ideas are mentioned. But the most important tutelary deity of Atharvaveda is the deity Šāla, who is the deified form of 'Śāla; the chamber in the true sense of the world, she is the 'Grha-devatā'.

The Atharvavedic conception of deities of herbs and other such objects is probably the effect of the Dravidian religion. The religion of their daily life, always has been, as it is at the present day, that of their forefathers, namely, worship of local deities and of parton gods and goddesses with propitiation of demons; praying to the former for temporal blessings, and averting the anger of the later by sacrifices and offerings.

1. This question has been thoroughly dealt with in the Chapter of the present thesis.
2. 'O' Malley, Popular Hinduism p.130.
The results of the thesis of 'O' Malley are only partly correct. In the Rgveda, the rivers were worshipped as the local deities of the particular area, represented by them. It reasonably appears to the reader that on the analogical basis of this example other tutelary deities of villages, and mountains might have come into existence, which we find today is thousands in number. As regards the origin of the herbal goddesses and disease goddesses, whom we meet for the first time in the Atharvaveda, our investigation leads us to trace it out in the influence of the aborigines and Dravidians.

The following are the main results of the present thesis:-

i. The first four chapters have thrown ample light on the vedic Mythology wherein there was a lacuna in the absence of the comprehensive study of the characteristics of the female deities in the vedas.

ii. The concept of Mother goddess and Tutelary deity in relation to vedic female deities has been thoroughly studied.

iii. An attempt has also been made to trace the influence of the vedic female deities on the Epics, Purāṇas and Tantras. I would like to make a detailed study of the female deities in the Epics, Purāṇas and Tantras for my future researches.