CHAPTER - VIII

ORIGIN OF MOTHER WORSHIP IN INDIA

Mother worship in India presents a very important but intricate aspect of the history of Indian thought as expressed in her philosophy, religion, general art and literature. A close scrutiny of the course of evolution of this mother worship in India will show a wonderful assimilation of widely heterogeneous elements, which seem to have combined in later ages to give rise to a body of cognate legends and traditions and a similar trend by theological; if not philosophical, argumentation. “Mother worship in India had a chequered history, deriving or developing new colour and tone in the course of its passage through the puranic ages; new ideas of the mother associated with new forms of worship developed and established themselves against the ordered background. Amidst all the diversities of notions and beliefs, the unity of the religious purpose aimed at by the real worshippers of the mother the sadhakas – was maintained. Belief in some form or other in the mother goddess is to be found in the good old days of many of the races, Semitic, Hellenic, Teutonic and Nordic alike. But what singles India out in this matter is the continued history of the cult from the hoary past down to the modern times, and the way in which the religious consciousness, developing and deepening around this Mother concept, has influenced the thoughts and ideas of the whole nation through the ages.”

Whether based on our primitive emotions of wonder and awe, or on our crude or refined value-sense, the element of anthropomorphism has, according to the anthropologists, to be recognized as a motive force behind all religious phenomena. 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. The factors were mainly responsible for this important position of the mother in the primitive society: first the economic role of women, and second, the absence of any rigid law or system of marriage, leaving a wide field for promiscuity. Children, as social entities, had their social description or status mainly with reference to the mother, and inheritance was also in the line of the mother. This dominant position of the mother in society made her a symbol, of power, social and economic. It may therefore be presumed that when men of these matriarchal societies, inspired by their primitive emotion of wonder and awe, began to conceive of any higher supernatural being, they conceived it in the image of the mother.

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 Shakti 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 involving contact, conflict and compromise. The vedic religion, they would contend, is characterized by a predominance of the male gods, where mother goddesses may be said to be almost conspicuous by their absence or unimportance. This, they hold, is mainly due to the 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 (Shiva) are found in the Indus Civilization, by which is meant the probable pre-Aryan civilization hypothetically constructed on the findings of Mohenjo-
daro and Harappa. Accepting this working hypothesis that there existed at least in some part 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 the protoform of the later direful goddess – Mother Kali. (About the supposed Earth-goddess it has been said), Now, it is well known that female statuettes akin to those from the Indus valley and Baluchisthan have been found in large numbers and over a wide range of countries is supposed to be of Earth goddess. The obvious suggestion is that this probable mother goddess of the Indus Valley presents no isolated history of Mother worship, but indicates the existence of a widespread religious belief.

This leads to the opinion that the hypothesis of non-Aryan civilization to be origion of the mother cult of the Indo-Aryans. No body need be so orthodox as to refuse to recognize the contribution of the aboriginal and other so called pre-Aryan races in the development of the mother cult of the Hindu religion. We must not be led to hold superstitiously that the word non-aryan or indigenous is almost synonymous with the word savage or barbaric. We should also carefully note that whatever is non-vedic is not necessarily non-aryan, and the Vedas may not represent the whole of the old Aryan culture alone.2

But now it is not suprising that of late the very theory or hypothesis of Aryan invasion is on the verge of being totally discarded as false, with all the relavent scientific, archiological and anthropological evidences to its credit. Now it is made very clear that objective scientific data totally repudiate the old Aryan invasion theory. Archiology completely fails to support the existence and arrival into India of any supposed Aryan people from outside. On the contrary it strongly suggests that from a cultural point of view the
Harappan civilisation was essentially vedic which means that the Rigveda must be at least 5000 years old.

Another decisive proof now available to disprove this theory of Aryan invasion is the scientific facts about the great river Saraswathi which once flourished extremely well across the present Panjab, Haryan, Rajasthan, Sindh and Gujarat and which nourished and nurtured a very rich vedic culture and civilization which is reflected in a number of hymns in the Rig-veda in prise of this great river. This great river at its hight of flourish was believed to have a width of three to ten kilometers, gradually dried in stages and its final disappearance has been scientifically dated to be around 2000 B.C. Therefore the theory of the supposed Aryan invasion around 1500 B.C. or at least 500 years after the total extinction or disappearance of this great river Saraswathi is rather unbelievable or has no scientific relevance.3

In this respect Swami Vivekananda’s words are highly affirmative. He says “There is not one word in our scriptures, not one, to prove that the Aryans ever came from anywhere out side India.... The whole of India is Aryan, nothing else.”4

But however without going into any details of this so called Aryan, non-Aryan or pre Aryan civilization etc. it can be conclusively said that the then matriarchal structure of the society had a great deal to do with the development of the religious consciousness and practices gathering round the mother cult in India.

To trace the evolution of mother worship in India we shall begin with the Vedas, since they are the earliest written records of the religion, literature and civilization of India. The Vedas are dominated by the male deities, and the female deities who make their appearance are often given but a secondary place.
1) Various Goddesses in Mother Worship

i) Aditi

As one who had a great possibility of becoming a mother goddess of the vedic period, mention may first be made of the goddess Aditi. She is often, if not always, described as the mother of the gods (deva-mata). She is not only the mother of the gods; she is at times described as the Mother of the universe. This tradition of Aditi being the mother of the gods is found continued even in the Puranas; but in the religious history of India, Aditi could not at any period establish herself as a popular mother goddess.

However, Among the Gods and Goddesses of the Rig Veda, Aditi is an outstanding figure of the Godhead, and her pre-eminence is arresting and rich with features. “Thus we see in these Mantras the utmost reverence in which Goddess Aditi is held and worshipped by the Rishi’s of old. In the pantheon of the Vedic Gods each God has his own Shakti; eg. Agni has Agnayi, Indra – Indrani, Varuna – Varunani, but there are Goddess like Bharati, Saraswati, Ila, who are worshipped in their own right. However of all the Goddess as the Mother of all the Gods, Aditi enjoys a position which is solitary in its grandeur.”

ii) Prithvi

From the point of view of the evolution of Mother worship, the most important goddess seems to be the Earth-Goddess, who has been invoked as the ‘Great Mother’. It has to be noted that when Mother Earth is invoked or entreated, she is seldom praised alone, but is almost inseparably related with father heaven (Dyaus); yet it has to be admitted that the greatness and grandeur of Mother Earth commanded reverential praises from her sons, with whom the offering of songs was the real worship. “Great is our mother Earth” (Rig –
veda, 1. 168.33) was the exclamation of the vedic poets. Father
Heaven and Mother Earth were invoked to bestow on men a luxuriant
growth of crops, food and riches; they were invoked to redeem them
from all great sins and also to vouchsafe prosperity, happiness,
valour, progeny and longevity. They were entreated to protect the
people in war, and it was added, “Let not Mother Earth get angry with
us at any time”. All motherly feeling, tender affection, generosity of
heart and forbearance were attributed to mother earth, of whom the
poets were proud to be the children, and the vastness, variety,
resourcefulness and fertility of Mother Earth find innumerable
patterns of expression. We find a further development of this idea of
Mother Earth in the hymn to the earth of the Atharva-Veda (12.1.1-18),
where it is said, “Truth and greatness, the right and the
formidable, concentration, penance, Brahman (Supreme) and sacrifice
sustain the Earth; she (the Earth) bears the herbs of various potency.
Let the Earth be spread out for us, be prosperous for us. On her are
the ocean, the rivers, the waters; on her all plough-fields; on her
flourish those that breathe and stir;... Let that Earth grant us all
prosperity. The immortal heart of this Earth, covered with truth, is in
the highest firmament let that Earth assign to us brilliancy, strength,
in highest royalty. On her the circulating waters flow the same, night
and day, without failure – let that Earth yield us milk; then let her
sprinkle us with splendour ..... Earth is Mother, I am earth’s son....
Thou hast become great, a great station; great is thy trembling,
stirring, quaking; great Indra defends thee unremittingly. Do thou, O
Earth, make us shine forth as in the aspect of gold; let no one so ever
hate us.” In this tone of intimacy and reverence had the sages bowed
down to Mother Earth and paid her homage.

The idea of the Sky-Father and the Earth-Mother may, however,
be said to be a common feature of all the ancient religions. Fertilizing
of the Earth-Mother by the Sky-Father through the rains is a common
belief acquiring a religious significance almost from the dawn of human civilization.

Attention has further been drawn to the belief in and worship of this Mother Earth may be taken as a dominant feature of the religions of most of the aboriginal tribes of India. But having regard to the fact that this belief in Mother Earth even as an article of faith, was almost a common belief with the ancient people, there is no necessity for affiliating the Vedic conception of Mother Earth to a similar conception in Indus Civilization, or the post Vedic development of the idea in Indian religions to the similar belief in the aboriginal tribes.

So far as the Vedic pantheon is concerned, Mother Earth had, indeed, but a minor in it; but in spite of this; she deserves our attention because in the Ramayana, Sita, the most exquisite and at the same time the most suggestive symbol for agriculture, is depicted as the daughter of Mother Earth and coming to man directly from her when man was furrowing the field. In some of the finest poems of Tagore on Mother Earth the same Indian mind manifests itself.

In the Aitareya Brahmana (8.5) the earth is identified with Shri. In some of the later Upanishads also the earth has been regarded as the sovereign goddess and homage has been paid to her. In the Puranic literature the earth has frequently and variously been described as an aspect of the Shakti or the Great Mother. The earth is also described as a power or Shakti associated with Vishnu (of Bhu-Devi) and in the sculpture representations of Lord Vishnu of the Gupta period and a few centuries following it, the goddesses who are found associated with Lord Vishnu on his either side are Shri and Bhu, or sometimes Shri. Bhu and Nila. In these representations of later times Vishnu seems to retain something of the old Vedic Sun-
god, and Shri and Bhu may stand for two aspects of the Earth Goddess, the aspects of prosperity and productivity.

iii) Saraswati

Of the other Vedic goddesses, particular mention may be made of the goddess Saraswathi, who is one of the most important goddesses of India still worshipped in a wide scale. Originally she was an important and sacred river in the Rig-Vedic Age, and then she became a river – goddess. The cool, transparent and tasteful water of the rivers was frequently compared to the milk of the affectionate mother, which nourishes men as their best drink, both being signified by the same word payas. This tendency of holding the rivers as mothers, coupled with the tendency to deify them, seems to have been responsible for the origin and development of the worship of the river-goddesses of India. The river Ganga (Ganges) is ceremoniously worshipped as a mother goddess and in some parts of Bengal her worship forms an essential part of the religious ceremonies that accompany the matrimonial function in an orthodox Hindu family. A series of legends in the Puranic Age has made the Ganga a full fledged mother goddess, associated in one way or another with the trinity-Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, and it is sincerely believed by a large section of the Hindus even today that one will attain eternal peace if one can pass the last few hours of one’s life half-immersed in the waters of the Ganga. We may note here the other Hindu custom of consigning the ashes of the cremated body to the holy water of the Ganga.

The historical development of the river Saraswathi took a different course. The hymns in praise of the river Saraswathi in the Rig-Veda and the homage paid to her often induce one to believe that Saraswathi was not always regarded as a mere river; there was a
latent belief in a presiding deity over the river. In one verse of the Rig-Veda, Saraswathi has been praised as the best among the mothers, best among the rivers and best also among the goddesses, and as such she had a share in the oblations offered in the sacrifices. In the next phase of her evolution we find her identified with vach or word, and that became the turning point in her evolution as the goddess of learning not only in India but also in some other neighbouring or eastern countries like Tibet, Java and Japan, where stone images of the goddess have been discovered. It is philosophically held that the river Saraswathi represents the stream of knowledge of the Eternal One, and as such she is the Logos, the Indian synonym for which is vach, and thus could Saraswathi, the river, be identified with vach. In the Vedic literature the goddess Saraswathi is often associated with two other goddesses, Ida and Bharathi. The commentators have sometimes interpreted the three goddess as three aspects of the same goddess of speech. It is said that at one time both the Gandharvas and the gods tried to win over the Vag-devi by pleasing and propitiating her by songs and by playing on the lyre. These legends will give us the clue as to how Saraswathi began to evolve as the goddess of learning and of all fine arts in later times.

Saraswathi is generally described as a snow-white goddess with white garments, and everything associated with her is white in keeping with her purity. In her most widely accepted icon of the present day she is seated on the white swan as her vehicle (vahana).

In the age of the Puranas the tendency was, as in the case of all other mother goddesses, to have the conception of Saraswathi assimilated with the conception of Shakthi; as a result Saraswathi was conceived as a particular aspect of the one all-pervading power—the Great Mother. The most famous and sacred of all the mantras,
composed is the Gayathri manthra and which is daily recited many times by Brahmins, ‘We meditate on that venerable divine luster of the Lord who is the generator of all-the earth, the intermediate atmosphere and the heaven; may He direct our intelligence!’- became personified later as the goddess Gayathri, as the wife of Brahma (the primordial Creator), and as the mother of the four Vedas; in later days this Gayathri became identified with Saraswathi, the Vag-devi. According to one interpretation, the goddess Gayathri is the luminous emanation (bhargas) of the infinite power of the Original One in three aspects in the three parts of the day, viz., as Gayathri in the morning, as Savithri at noon and as Saraswathi in the evening.

As the goddess of learning she is sometimes said to be the daughter of Brahma-the original creative agent – emanating from his mind (manasa-kanya); she is again described as the wife or the shakthi of Brahma, and as such, she has, like Brahma, the swan as her carrier. Somewhere she is described as emanating from the mouth of Shri Krishna, somewhere as the daughter of Shiva by Durga. In the worship of Mother Durga in Autumn, Lakshmi and Saraswathi accompany the Mother as the two daughters or the three may represent the shakthi of Shiva, Vishnu and Brahma. As Shakti Saraswathi has been associated with each of the trinity-Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva – by turn.8

iv) Shri

It will not be out of place, to make here a brief survey of the evolution of the worship of another mother goddess, Lakshmi or Shri, the goddess of wealth and beauty. Her origin is traced to the fifteen verses, known as the hymn to Shri (Shri-Sukhta), found appended to the regular collection of hymns of the fifth book of the Rig-veda. These verses were referred to in the old texts of the early Pancharathna Vaishnavas and in many of the older Puranas. In the Shri-Sukta the
Goddess Lakshmi or Shri is described as of the colour of a red lotus, seated on a red lotus and wearing a garland of red lotuses, and is herself called the deity of the lotus (Padma). She is approached through the sacrificial fire to bestow on her devotees gold and domestic animals like cows and horses, to vouchsafe health, wealth, a good harvest, beauty, name and fame. The Agni Purana traces four hymns of the goddess in the four Vedas. In the White Yajur-Veda (31.22) Lakshmi and Shri are said to be two wives of Aditya; we find a corroboration of it in the Taittiriya school also. The Shatapatha Brahmana makes Lakshmi emanate from Prajapathi (Brahma). Originally, however, Lakshmi or Shri was most probably a harvest goddess, and as a matter of fact we find her identified with the earth in the Aitareya Brahmana. Reference to the worship of Shri is found in the Dharma-sutra of Bodhayana. She is referred to in a few verses of the Ramayana and the Mahabharatha. Images of Shri or Lakshmi are found in Bharhut and some other Buddhist centers; her image and reference are found in a seal and some inscriptions of the Gupta period. It seems that the worship of Lakshmi as a mother goddess became established during the Gupta period.

The history of the mother goddess Lakshmi seems to have taken a bifurcated course. On the one hand she became associated with Vishnu (as the all-pervading ultimate Lord) as his Shakthi; on the other hand she seems to have come down to us in her original nature as the harvest goddess as associated with Mother Earth.

The philosophic conception of the mother goddess Lakshmi is first found elaborately expounded probably in the literature of the Pancharatra school of the early Vaishnavas. Here Vishnu as Vasudeva (the all-pervading Lord) is the Supreme being who possesses infinite power in the form of knowledge, will and activity. This all-pervading power of the all pervading lord is Lakshmi. Though
ultimately one and the same with the Lord, she presents a semblance of duality in non-duality. In the Puranic literature we have a mass of legends and seculations concerning the origin of the goddess and her exact nature as the power consort of Vishnu. Lakshmi is sometimes seen here as particularly associated with a special aspect of Lord Vishnu, the Narayana aspect, the Lord of the cosmos resting on the Shesha snake in the ocean of causal potency.

This Lakshmi or Shri as the mother goddess played a very important part in some of the Vaishnavite sects of India, particularly in the Vaishnavism of the South. The Shri sects of Vaishnavism, as the name itself will indicate, laid great stress on this mother aspect of the Vishnu Shakti. Just as in our domestic life the mother stands somewhat like an intermediary between the father and the son, so does Lakshmi stand as an intermediary between God and the Jivas (beings), making the former compassionate and merciful to the latter and at the same time the latter being dutiful and devoted to the former.  

v. Devi

Of the Vedic hymns, the hundred and twenty fifth hymn of the tenth mandala (Book) of the Rig-Veda has, in later times, acquired a notability as being the origin of the Mother cult of India, as such it is well known as the Devi-Sukta, or the hymn to the mother goddess. The whole hymn is an ecstatic exclamation of Vach, the daughter of the sage Ambhrina; through self-illumination she realized her complete identity with the Great one (Brahman). In such a state she exclaimed, "It is I (as identical with Brahman), who move in the form of the Rudras, the Vasus, the Adithyas and all the other gods; I support the foe-destroying Soma (Moon). Twashtri, Pushan and Bhaga; I bestow on the institutor of the sacrifice, ready with ablation
and offering homage to the gods, deserving wealth. I am the sovereign power, bestower of all wealth, cognizant (of the Supreme being) and the first among those to whom sacrificial homage is to be offered; the gods in all places worship but me, who am diverse in form and perceive everything. Whoever eats food or sees, or breathes or hears what is spoken, does it through me; those who do not know me thus perish. I should be known through faith and reverence. I myself am telling you of this (the truth), which is respected by gods and men alike; whom I will and make great. I make him the Creator, I make him the seer, I make him the genius. I bend the bow of Rudra for slaying the ferocious enemy of the Brahmanas; I wage war to protect the good, I pervade heaven and earth. I give birth to the infinite expanse overspreading the earth; my birth-place is in waters deep in the sea; there-from do I permeate variously all the worlds, and touch the heaven above with my body. It is I who blow like the wind crating all the worlds; I transcend the heaven above, I transcend the earth below—this is the greatness I have attained."

The 'T' refers to the poetess of the hymn through whom the almighty glory of the Primal Being has been proclaimed, and with which she apparently identifies herself.10

vi. Rathri

Another vedic hymn which is also associated with the mother cult of later days the hymn to the Night, the hundred and twenty seventh hymn in the tenth mandala of the Rig-Veda. Here the night has been invoked as a goddess (devi) who is the daughter of the heaven above, who pervades the worlds, who protects all beings from evils and gives them peaceful shelter in her lap just like the affectionate mother. The Night goddess has been invoked also in the later Sama vidhana Brahmana (3.3.8) where we find some of her
traditional descriptions as the mother goddess. In later Puranic texts the Night is explained as coming forth from the maya (creative power) of Brahman, and she is called Bhuvaneshwari (the sovereign power over the worlds). The feminine conception of ratri (night) is found in the Brahmanas. In Tantrika Philosophy, however, the night or the moon often symbolizes Shakti or the feminine aspect of the one non-dual truth of which the day as the sun represents the male aspects (Shiva).  

vii) Ambika, Uma, Durga:

Coming to the other Vedas, which are generally taken to be later in point of time, we find the mention of the goodness Ambika in the Vajasaneye Samhia (White Yajur – Veda, 3.57). Where Ambika is addressed as the sister of the god Rudra.

There are other points of great historical importance that can be noted. In the first place, is the name of goddess Uma, one of the most famous names of the great goddess of India. Secondly, Uma is qualified by the word Haimavathi, which has been philosophically interpreted as of the golden hue, but which may historically be interpreted as belonging to the mountain Himavat, i.e., the Himalayas. Uma seems to be a word of very obscure origin and the proposed derivations are either arbitrary or esoteric. Thus it has been held that the vowel u means Shiva, and ma means to measure; the goddess who measures Shiva, i.e. the shakthi of Shiva, is called Uma. The epithet Haimavathi used as an adjective most probably had some reference to her association with the Himalayas, either as her father or as her abode. In the Puranic age she is found associated with other mountains or peaks, e.g. the Vindhyas. She is sometimes associated with Mount Mandara or Meru, or Kailasa. The most common epithet Parvathi or (Girija) attached to the great mother goddess of India lends
support to the belief that she was originally a mountain goddess like the ancient Mother Goddess of other countries. Parvathi is also associated with the lion as her vehicle (vahana), as some of the ancient mother goddesses of other countries were.

In the Mahabharatha there is also the mention of the worship of the mother goddess as Katyayani by Pradyumna and also a hymn to the goddess Chandi by Aniruddha. The most important, however, is the hymn to the goddess Durga by King Yudhishtira. The hymn contains some description of the goddess with which we are familiar in the Puranic Age. In some recensions of the text we find another hymn to Durga chanted by Arjuna at the instance of Shri Krishna.

This Uma or Parvathi, the Indian mountain goddess, seems to be the basis with whom most of the other mother goddesses, mostly indigenous in origin were associated, or in whom, we may say, most of them have merged themselves. The evolution of the idea and philosophy of Shakthi greatly helped this process of identification and unification. As the shakthi is fundamentally one, the mother must also be one; the mothers were necessarily intermingled and unified. Uma or Parvathi as the consort or the inseparable counterpart of Lord Shvia seems to have attained wide prominence by the beginning of the Christian era. Uma-Maheshwara or Hara-Parvathi drew almost universal respect in India as the primordial Father and Mother. Kalidasa began his great epic Raghuvamsha with a salute to Parvathi – Parameshwara, the Mother and Father of the universe, who are said to be eternally and inseparably related to each other just as a word and its meaning are.

What seems to be beyond doubt is that roughly between the beginning of the Christian era and the tenth century A.D. many local and indigenous goddesses pushed themselves from the social sub-
strata to find a place in the Hindu Pantheon and by a process of
generalization, both religious and philosophical, were fused together
and treated as aspects of the one universal mother goddess. It is not,
therefore, a fact, as is sometimes wrongly conceived, that the many
mother goddesses are later emanations from the one mother goddess;
on the contrary, the one mother goddess of the Puranic Age seems to
be a consolidation brought about by the philosophy of Shakthi.¹²

2) Mother Worship in Philosophy

From the speculative side it was observed that everything that
existed, existed by virtue of its power or powers. So God, who exists
as the creator, preserver and destroyer of the universe, must possess
infinite power through which He creates, preserves and destroys the
universe. In fact, His very being presupposes infinite power by virtue
of which He Himself exists. This belief in the power of God is a
universal belief; but what lends it a specially Indian colour is the
dominant tendency of the Indians to view this power or universal
energy as something like a female counterpart of the possessor of this
power. This power or shakthi, being conceived as a counterpart of the
possessor of shakthi; came to be recognized frankly as the consort of
the possessor.

A strong belief in this shakthi has brought about a popular
synthesis among contrary philosophies like Samkhya, Vedanta,
Vaishnavism and Tantrikism. Samkhya speaks of Purusha and
Prakriti as two independent and ultimate reals whose interaction is,
in fact, a mere attribution resulting from the accidental contact of
the two. In the Puranas and similar other popular religious literature,
Prakriti is plainly conceived as the female counterpart of Purusha, and
as such the two reals have been practically identified with Shakthi
and Shiva of the Tantras. Just in a similar manner the principle of
Maya (illusion) of Vedanta has been conceived as the Shakthi of Brahman. These pairs have again been identified with Vishnu and his Shakthi; Lakshmi, or Shri, with Rama and Sita, and still later with Krishna and Radha. Thus in the popular religious belief of India, Shiva-Shakthi of the Tantras, Purusha – Prakriti of Samkhya, Brahman – Maya of Vedantha and Vishnu – Lakshmi, Rama – Sita and Krishna – Radha of Vaishnavism all mean the same.

The philosophy of Shakthi is clearly suggested by two passages in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, where it is said that in the beginning was the Cosmic Being as the Atman in human form, who could never feel happy (i.e. enjoy himself through any process of self-realisation) for he was all alone. So he desired a second to him. His being was something like a neutral point where the ultimate principles of the male and the female lay unified in the deep embrace, as it were. This unified being divided himself into two - as the male and the female, which formed the first pair; and all the pairs of the universe are said to be replicas of this original pair. These passages of the Brihadranyaka Upanishad have been extensively made use of in the Puranas, in the Tantras as also in the later Buddhist and Vaishnava Sahajiya schools, in which the idea of Shakthi played an important part. Whatever has been created in this phenomenal process has been created from the union of the two-energy and matter, the consumer and the consumed. They represent the two aspects of the one non-dual truth-one internal and the other external-one illuminating, unchangeable and immortal (Amrita), and other obstructive, gross and perishable; the one the cause-potency and the other the effect-potency. In the Shaiva and Shakta Tantras, prana - rayi of the Prashna Upanishad (1.4) or agni-soma stand for Shiva-Shakthi the primordial male and female.
Distinct mention of the various powers of God is found in the Shwetashwatara Upanishad, in which it is said in one place, “Various powers are heard of this (Brahman). It possesses power as knowledge and power as force or activity by virtue of its very nature (6.8). Again know maya (the unspeakable mysterious power of God) as Prakriti (Nature) and the possessor of maya as the Great Lord (Maheshwara, an epithet, specially used in later times of Shiva)” Again it is said, “He who is one and colourless brings forth various colours through the agency of his various types of powers”. The possessor of Maya (mayin) created the universe, and the beings are fettered by his maya.13

3) Mother Worship as related to Shiva and Shakti

There appears to be Principally three different views on the relation between Shiva and Shakti, profounded in the Puranas and the Tantras.

The first view holds that neither Shiva nor Shakti represents the absolute truth. The absolute reality is a state of neutrality where Shiva and Shakti remain in a state of perfect union (Yamala) this is called the samarasya, where all things become one in a unity of blissful realisation. Shiva and Shakti are two aspects of the same truth – the static and dynamic, the – VE and the +VE, the abstract and the concrete, the male and the female.

The second view, however, holds that Shiva is the Ultimate Being to whom Shakti eternally belongs. Nevertheless, neither shiva nor Shakti is real without the other; as Shakti cannot be conceived of without the possessor of Shakti, so also Shiva becomes shava (dead) without Shakti. The two are therefore eternally and inseparably connected.
The third view makes Shakti the highest truth, and Shiva is conceived of as the best support of Shakti. Shakti is the more important as the contained, while Shiva is the container. Shakti is the all-creating, all preserving and all destroying power of which Shiva is the best container (adhara). In some of the Puranas the male deity as the Shaktimat (the possessor of Shakti) has been described as the male aspect of the ultimate truth which is Shakti. It is from this point of view that the Mother worshippers would give a subsidiary place to Shiva, whereas Shakti as the Mother is taken to be the highest object of adoration.14

To conclude worship of the Mother Goddess is widely practiced throughout India in one form or the other, and in the homes, in temples and Mutts and Mandirs. All agree that it is the One Divine Mother or Shakti to whom they pay their homage and offer themselves to Her, invoking Her blessings. The worship of Mother Goddess is an inseparable aspect of Indian culture and tradition through the ages and is widely practiced.15