



Devī
GODDESSES OF INDIA

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BHĀRAT MĀTĀ Mother India and Her Militant Matriots

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The identity of the patriarchal Indian nation-state and its citizenry has been, and continues to be, expressed in terms of devotion to the goddess Bhārat Mātā, Mother India. This essay presents two examples of how a Hindu nationalist organization, the Vishva Hindu Parishad (World Hindu Council) has propagated this devotional complex: its 1983 All-India Sacrifice for Unity (*Ekātmatā Yajña*) and the temple it has built to Bhārat Mātā. The Sacrifice for Unity involved a six-week nationwide tour of an image of Bhārat Mātā, during which crowds worshiped her and listened to speeches delivered by religious leaders and other public figures. Six months before this event, the VHP had consecrated its eight-story Bhārat Mātā temple in the pilgrimage town of Hardwar (see figure 20). As is well-known, issues of national culture, religious identity, gender, and class are embedded in both past and contemporary formulations of devotion to Bhārat Mātā. And although the destruction of the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya, the campaign to build a Rāma temple there, and the cult of Bhārat Mātā are distinct phenomena, all pertain to the politics of nationalism and to the Hindu nationalist movement of the 1980s and 1990s.

A young woman ascetic, Sadhvi Rithambra, who is a member of the VHP's committee of religious leaders, often invokes Bhārat Mātā when she speaks at rallies.¹ Her speeches explode with rage and hatred, directed primarily against Muslims: they are so inflammatory that the government has banned the sale of cassette recordings of them. She tells her audience that Muslim atrocities against Hindus—which began when they invaded India, desecrated Hindu temples, and raped Hindu women—have neither ceased nor been avenged. Muslim separatists in Kashmir, she claims, are using “red hot irons to burn the slogan ‘Long Live Pakistan’ on the thighs of our Hindu daughters.”² She exhorts the crowd to remember the blood of Hindu martyrs who



Figure 20. Billboard at the Hardwar railway station.

died in 1990 during their attempt to build a Rāma temple in Ayodhya. She insists that the fight to build this temple is tantamount to the fight to preserve their civilization, national consciousness, honor, and self-esteem. References to the need for Hindus to protect themselves from brutal enemies intensify the emotive power of her speeches—a strategy widely used by nationalists and other groups to forge and consolidate a collective identity. The audience simultaneously experiences and affirms this collective identity and imagined community when Sadhvi Rithambra leads a chant that begins and ends with invocations of Bhārat Mātā. The chant links the audience with gods of the past and Hindu martyrs of the present: all are children of Bhārat Mātā.

The historian Partha Chatterjee emphasizes the complementarities between nationalist discourse and the cultural identity of the middle class under British rule.³ Analysts of contemporary Hindu nationalism highlight the interrelations among support for the nationalist movement, global and domestic economic transformations, and changes in middle-class identity and practices.⁴ Work by feminists demonstrates how nationalist discourse, first during British rule and later in the postcolonial nation-state, articulated the “woman question” in terms of the requirements of changing cultural and economic practices of the upper and middle classes.⁵ Under colonial rule, the emergent Hindu patriarchy's differentiation of social space into public and private spheres required a new vision of the ideal woman. This ideal

woman should be a wife and a mother. She should be as frugal and fastidious in her housekeeping as she is devout and knowledgeable about religious traditions. She should be sweetly subordinate to her husband yet sufficiently educated and informed to provide satisfying companionship. The welfare of her family and particularly her husband depended upon her spiritual powers, which were earned through the performance of rituals, scrupulous chastity, and incessant self-sacrifice. This ideal image attributed to virtuous wives and mothers the capacity to inspire their husbands and sons to become heroic nationalists. Sangari and Vaid argue that this particular ideal woman is ideological because from a diverse array of possibilities, specific gender roles have been selected and universalized. Given this process of gender construction, "the formation of desired notions of spirituality and womanhood is thus part of the formation of the middle class itself, wherein hierarchies and patriarchies are sought to be maintained on both material and spiritual grounds." Reminding readers of the importance of caste and class inequalities to the study of gender in India, Sangari and Vaid argue that the current politicization of religious identities "has given a new lease of life to patriarchal practices under 'religious' sanction."⁶ In short, patriarchal projects are embedded in the Hindu nationalist movement.

The discourse and practices of Hindu nationalism create specific subjectivities, while contesting others. The promoted subjectivities are commonly articulated in terms of the duties of Bhārat Mātā's children and are differentiated according to age, gender, and socioeconomic and caste status. "Matriots"—the term is mine—are Bhārat Mātā's devoted and dutiful children who constitute an ideal, loyal citizenry, and militant matriots are those who, ever eager to assert their devotion, readily construe events as offenses against Bhārat Mātā. The narrative of militant "matriotism" might be read as an oedipal drama of the patriarchal nation-state. The nation is figured as a loving Mother surrounded by her devoted children; the secular state and Muslims (as heirs of Muslim invaders) figure as the tyrannical Father. Whether celibate or supported by their devoted wives, Bhārat Mātā's sons are valiant protagonists whose struggle is a righteous patricide, a conquest that simultaneously liberates the nation—the Mother and her children—and enables her sons to enjoy the power and riches they have successfully wrested from the malevolent Father.

This theme of patricide is the subtext of a history of Bengal written by Sarala Devi, a member of the privileged and sophisticated Tagore family.⁷ The history's hero, Pratapaditya, is singular among Bengali landlords for challenging the authority of a Muslim king. When criticized by her uncle, Rabindranath Tagore, for making a known patricide the hero of Bengali history, Sarala Devi defended her choice by saying that she presents Pratapaditya not as an ideal moral being but as a brave and manly Bengali—a defense that conveniently valorizes a code of conduct for militant matriots. In fact, Sarala

Devi organized a group of young Bengali men who pledged to her in front of a map of India that they would sacrifice their lives fighting for independence from British rule. In 1903 Sarala Devi's group instituted an annual festival of heroes, held on the second day of Durgā Pūjā, the great festival in honor of the warrior-goddess Durgā. Included in the third of these celebrations was a dramatic performance of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's anti-British novel *Ānandamath*, "Monastery of Bliss." When the performance ended, the crowd began to chant the song "Bande Mātaram": its lyrics and imagery, which praise the goddess Bhārat Mātā, recur throughout *Ānandamath*. "Bande Mātaram" subsequently became the nationalists' rallying cry.

Bhārat Mātā's apotheosis in her present form dates back clearly to this Bengali novel, in which she inspires her children, under the leadership of the male Hindu ascetic Mahatma Satya, to vanquish the British and restore peace and prosperity. Bankim's novel marks the invention of a tradition—a tradition of "matriotism" that combines European political concepts of the nation-state, progress, order, and patriotism with a complex heritage of the mythological elaboration and ritual worship of Hindu goddesses (*devī*, *śakti*) that is particularly strong in Bengal. However, as the burgeoning literature on nationalist ideologies and national cultures demonstrates, invented traditions are not static. They are continually reinvented in specific contexts to produce and challenge dominant constructions of class, religious and gender identities. In India diverse groups—bourgeois social reformers, Hindu and secular nationalists, peasant leaders, feminists—and even Nehru himself have fashioned for their own purposes this invented tradition of imagining India as a Hindu goddess.

The 1992 English edition of *Ānandamath* includes the dedication made by the translator, B. K. Roy, to Benjamin Franklin and Aurobindo in 1941, together with his seven-page preface. Roy declares that Bankim's "great achievement for India was that he made patriotism a religion and his writings have become the gospel of India's struggle for political independence."⁸ He discusses the song "Bande Mātaram" and explains how it became the nationalists' call to duty. It inspired both Gandhian pacifists, who suffered atrocities in British jails, and Aurobindo-like revolutionaries who were sent to the gallows for "loving their own country" and died with the "sacred mantra of Bande Mataram on their lips."⁹ In Roy's opinion, *Ānandamath* "set forth the principle of unselfish militancy as taught by Krishna in the *Bhagavat Gita*, the Bible of the Hindus."¹⁰ The translator celebrates Bankim for founding a lineage of revolutionaries, a lineage that militant Hindu nationalists have not only kept alive down to the present but also claim as their own.

The literary style of *Ānandamath* more closely approximates the Hindu epic than the British novel. Characters, their relationships, and their actions serve to evoke a range of emotions in the audience: sorrow and anger, fear,

disgust, and the desire for revenge. Bankim's expressive powers reach their greatest intensity in his elaboration of the religious devotion of Bhārat Mātā's children, a devotion so powerful that it purifies and liberates both the mother and her children. The rapacious British have enslaved Bengal; they have brought famine and despair. Under the leadership of the ascetic Mahatma Satya, the Order of the Children protects the good and punishes the wicked British and their collaborators. The audience visualizes Bhārat Mātā when the Mahatma leads Mahendra, a potential disciple, to three rooms, each containing a different form of Bhārat Mātā. In the first room is Bhārat Mātā before the British conquest: "a gigantic, imposing, resplendent, yes, almost a living map of India." In the second room stands a tearful Bhārat Mātā wearing rags, with a sword hanging over her head. The Mahatma explains, "She is in the gloom of famine, disease, death, humiliation and destruction." But if the sword signifies how the British keep India in subjection, it also suggests how Bhārat Mātā will be freed. In the third room a heavenly light radiates from "the map of a golden India—bright, beautiful, full of glory and dignity!" The Mahatma says, "This is our mother as she is destined to be." Excitedly, Mahendra asks when Bhārat Mātā will be so radiant and cheerful again. The Mahatma replies, "Only when all the children of the Motherland shall call her Mother in all sincerity."¹¹

After testing his devotion, the Mahatma initiates Mahendra, whose property and riches are used to build an iron storehouse for the Order's treasury and a factory in which to make weapons. The Mahatma explains that two types of Children join the Order. Those like Mahendra are few; he chooses them himself. They receive a secret, higher initiation that makes them leaders of the Order. They vow to give up wealth, pleasure, and personal attachments until they achieve their goal of purifying Bhārat Mātā from the pollution of alien domination. Death is the penalty for breaking this vow. The second type consists of the householders and beggars who present themselves when summoned for warfare and receive a share of the spoils. The speeches of their leaders quicken their devotion to Bhārat Mātā, which in turn inspires ferocity in battle: "the fire of anger was in their eyes, and the passion of stern determination on their lips, and one could hear brave words of revenge from their mouths."¹² In addition to the main plot, which culminates in the victory of the Order of the Children over the British, there are two important subplots involving two women whose husbands are leaders of the Order. They combine their duties as virtuous wives with active devotion to Bhārat Mātā, inspiring and reinforcing their husbands' heroism. One waits patiently for her husband to return; the other, in the guise of a male ascetic, joins her husband in the Order. The story eventually reveals that only self-sacrificing devotion to Bhārat Mātā can bring the questing heart what it desires: a liberation that is at once political and spiritual.

The Bhārat Mātā cult propagated by contemporary Hindu nationalists combines the devotional and heroic imagery of *Anandamath* with a set of elements defining Hindu-ness (*hindutva*) formulated in 1922 by the archetypal militant Hindu, V. D. Savarkar. He defined as Hindu those who consider India not only their holy land—a land sanctified by the presence of Hindu gods and the blood of its heroic martyrs—but also the land of their ancestors. Hindus are a race and a nation with a common origin and blood, a shared culture and civilization. Savarkar stressed the importance of the struggle against Muslim and British enemies to the formation of the Hindu national identity. The Indian subcontinent may be the holy homeland of *hindutva*, but as Savarkar envisioned it, *hindutva* "is compatible with any conceivable expansion of our Hindu people. . . . The only geographical limit of Hindutva is the limit of our earth."¹³

The VHP brought Savarkar's vision to life in 1983, with its All-India Sacrifice for Unity (*Ekātmata Yajña*). The six-week event required careful planning. Shrines mounted on the backs of trucks took Bhārat Mātā, Gaṅgā Mā (Mother Ganges), and Śiva to the people for mass rituals of public worship. Included as well was a mobile Bhārat Mātā temple. Mounted on a truck, it traveled as part of a cortege modeled on the journeys (*yātrās*) of great temple deities, during which they can be seen and worshiped outside the precincts of sacred enclaves. For such *yātrās*, deities are enshrined on huge wooden carts known as *raths*. The VHP's Sacrifice for Unity sent an updated version of the *rath yātrā* through cities, towns, and villages from Hardwar in the north to the southern tip of India at Kanyakumari.

Bearing a statue of Bhārat Mātā and an enormous ritual vessel containing Ganges water, the procession of vehicles made accessible the promise of power and auspicious abundance associated with Goddess worship. The procession traversed three principal routes, starting and finishing in major Hindu pilgrimage centers and stopping en route in other pilgrimage places as well as various villages, towns, and cities. In the commemorative volume, *Ekātmata Yajña* (see figure 21), VHP officials repeatedly assert that the purpose of the sacrifice is to promote national unity and that the event has no relation to politics. They attribute its success to the "grace of God, blessings of Saints and cooperation of the public" and to the "full cooperation" of the government and bureaucracy.¹⁴ A color photo shows VHP officials meeting with the president of India to discuss the upcoming event. The volume reports that many district magistrates and high-ranking police officials presided over ceremonies. It also recounts the extensive media coverage of the sacrifice: there were more than 150 press conferences before and during the event, as well as radio and television reports.

Describing the Sacrifice for Unity as a ritual sacrifice "in the Vedic sense," the volume declares that "through its medium, young and old, male and female, all of them forgetting their own identities and differences" gathered



Figure 21. Cover of the Vishva Hindu Parishad's "Sacrifice for Unity" souvenir volume.

to worship Bhārat Mātā and Gaṅgā Mā (p. 13). Yet forgetting is not all that is involved. VHP rituals actively fashion social identities and differences, as well as instructing people in the appropriate expression of a specific type of Hindu identity. As the VHP's aristocratic president Maharana Singh Mewar explained to an audience, the Sacrifice of Unity had as its purpose to instill feelings of devotion in the nation. If the sacrifices of freedom fighters liberated Bhārat Mātā from British rule, then this sacrifice would restore the

unity of India and earn for its participants the honor of being called "Children of Bhārat Mātā" (p. 4). Reportedly sixty million people, whom the VHP volume calls Hindu brethren, participated in the sacrifice. Though they belong to different sects and practice different customs, all share the same "pure attitude." "We are one. Our happiness and sufferings are one. There is no inequality, no untouchability, no reservations, no high and low" (p. 4). Christian and Muslim participants "proved that irrespective of their mode of worship all of them are Hindus culturally and nationally" (p. 13). Here, as elsewhere, the VHP attacks "class conflict" as detrimental to national unity. It attributes the success of the *Ekātmata Yajña* to the support not only of diverse religious groups but also of a broad spectrum of economic groups: "The weak and downtrodden depressed classes and the industrialists all had shown their keenness to make their bit of contribution" (p. 14). A discussion of poverty and the efforts of the VHP to ameliorate it closes with a plea for money: "In our society sacrifice is very important, but after the sacrifice one must make a donation" (p. 8). The VHP also raised money by selling small pots of Ganges water.

By conducting ritual ceremonies on the mall at India Gate in New Delhi, the VHP occupied the epicenter of the national capital for one day. Here, hundreds of local processions met up with the main one. A huge crowd filled the expanse adjacent to India Gate, where shrines were set up for worship. After the rituals had been completed, VHP officials and religious leaders delivered speeches from a high stage adorned by a huge backdrop of Bharat Mātā and Mother Ganges. They repeated the claims that the Sacrifice for Unity had no political purpose and that the VHP no connection with politics. Religious leaders then praised the "holy work" of the sacrifice, from which would come the "organization and unity of Hindu society" (p. 85). Thanking Delhi's religious leaders for publicizing the event and encouraging people to attend, the VHP officials called the finale of the sacrifice a new beginning. They also pledged to undertake further projects: the celebration of an annual Unity Month throughout India, the establishment of Centers of Awakening, and the construction of a World Hindu Brotherhood Center in Delhi. Through these and other projects the VHP successfully capitalized on the monetary, institutional, and symbolic profits it earned as organizer and patron of the sacrifice. These profits then enabled the VHP to mount more aggressively and effectively its campaign to destroy the Babri Mosque and build a temple on the supposed site of Rāma's birth in Ayodhya.

SWAMI SATYAMITRANAND GIRI: VHP LEADER AND FOUNDER
OF HARDWAR'S BHĀRAT MĀTĀ TEMPLE

The VHP's Bhārat Mātā temple in Hardwar, like the Sacrifice for Unity, provides a means both to popularize Hindu nationalist ideology and to raise

money for the movement. The temple guidebooks, available in Hindi and English, celebrate the extraordinary devotion of its founder, Swami Satyamitranand Giri, to Bhārat Mātā.¹⁵ The swami's hagiography details his frequent tours in India and overseas, during which he solicited money for the VHP, ostensibly for the temple's construction.¹⁶ The temple's eight stories house pantheons of deities, saints, nationalist heroes, and virtuous women—figures important to the VHP's ideology. The temple is also a site of socioreligious activities, a place where local residents, pilgrims, tourists, religious leaders, and politicians participate in rituals and celebrations sponsored by Satyamitranand and the VHP.

Religious leaders who run establishments in Hardwar and in nearby Rishikesh hold important positions within the VHP. Of the thirty-nine members of the VHP's council of religious leaders, of whom Satyamitranand is one, four have their headquarters in Hardwar and Rishikesh, and many other VHP members have ashrams and temples in these pilgrimage centers as well. Swami Satyamitranand Giri, whose name and photograph can be found on numerous pages of VHP literature, has his headquarters in Hardwar at the Bhārat Mātā temple. Along with the Dalai Lama and the head Ladakhi lama, three Shankaracharyas, and two former vice chancellors of Banaras Hindu University, the VHP names Satyamitranand among those who supported the formation of the VHP.¹⁷ Satyamitranand's name appears on the first page of another VHP booklet, together with the names of ten other VHP founders, and later he is listed as a VHP trustee and member of the Commission on Religion, which is noted as having convened in Hardwar.¹⁸ Like thirteen other religious leaders and two industrialists, Satyamitranand has "adopted" a district—Ajmer, Rajasthan. Adoption involves distributing patronage and establishing institutions, the purpose of which is to "uplift" backward sections of society, promote Sanskrit, prohibit cow slaughter, renovate temples, and build schools. Foremost among the duties of those who adopt districts, however, is to stop the conversion of Hindus to "alien faiths" and "to integrate those returning to their ancestral faith."¹⁹

When I met Satyamitranand at his Hardwar headquarters, he told me of his trips around the world to visit his devotees. He also spoke of having resigned his post as Shankaracharya of Bhanpura Math in Madhya Pradesh because it restricted his activities, particularly his travel abroad. I was not given the opportunity to ask the numerous questions I had about his organization, the Bhārat Mātā temple, and his involvement with the VHP. Instead, after a few minutes Satyamitranand dismissed me, saying that he was busy preparing for another trip abroad. Most of my attempts to engage personnel at his ashram and the Bhārat Mātā temple in conversation were also rebuffed. One lay disciple who was sitting in the temple early one morning, however, was more talkative. He had come for a long visit to Hardwar from Ahmedabad. He said that he had retired, that his children were grown and settled, and

that he only wanted to serve his guru, Satyamitranand. His service entails sitting in the temple for four hours each day, chanting mantras and keeping an eye on visitors. In return he receives food and accommodation at Satyamitranand's ashram, adjacent to the temple. This devotee lamented that even now that he had come to Hardwar, he rarely had a chance to meet with his guru because Satyamitranand was usually away. Rubbing his fingers together, he said that Satyamitranand often travels to the United States and Canada to raise money for the temple, going on to explain that Satyamitranand has a particularly strong following among Gujarati Patels in India and overseas. He also pointed out that Satyamitranand had to give up his post as Shankaracharya in order to "do more *sevā*" (religious service).

Before I learned about Satyamitranand's involvement in the VHP through reading its literature, I had inquired at the local newspaper about the location of the offices of the Hardwar branches of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the most important and long-standing Hindu nationalist organization of the twentieth century, and of the VHP. The editor directed me to Satyamitranand's Bhārat Mātā temple. Later, when visiting the VHP's headquarters in New Delhi, I asked Ashok Singhal, the general secretary, about Satyamitranand and his relation to the VHP. He replied vaguely, saying merely that Satyamitranand had ties with the organization; only later, after studying the VHP literature, did I learn just how extensive these ties are. Singhal's office was adorned with icons of Hindu nationalism: a picture of Durgā inside an outline of India; a picture of the Rani of Jhansi; a statue of Krishna and Arjuna in their war chariot; a photograph of Jayendra Saraswati, the Shankaracharya of Kanchi; and several images of the sacred syllable *om*. The manager of a small ashram near the Bhārat Mātā temple told me that when Satyamitranand's links with the RSS earned him the disfavor of Indira Gandhi's government, he sponsored a big sacrifice (*yajña*) in Hardwar, during which prominent swamis and politicians spoke approvingly of Indira Gandhi. Their relations had become even more cordial by 1983, when Indira Gandhi attended the ceremonies marking the consecration of the Bhārat Mātā temple. And it was Satyamitranand who, also in 1983, conducted the rituals preceding the departure of the Sacrifice for Unity procession from Hardwar.

Rajkumar Sharma, Hardwar's leading publicist for its Brahmin priests and a former Janata party member of the Uttar Pradesh legislative assembly, estimated that the VHP holds assets worth at least fifty million rupees. He also mentioned that he is a member and knows Ashok Singhal, and that in July 1988 he had attended the VHP's Sādhu Sammelan (Ascetics' Convention) in Hardwar. Satyamitranand's ashram helped organize the convention and housed many of its participants. According to Sharma, the principal issues discussed at this VHP gathering included cow protection, the liberation of Rāma's birthplace in Ayodhya, and the conversion of Hindus to

Christianity and Islam. He said that in order to counter foreign influences that threaten the culture of Bhārat (India), the convention decreed that Indians regard Rāma and Krishna as "national heroes" and touch India's sacred ground three times with their head while saying "Bhārat Mātā kī Jai" (Hail, Mother India), then they may belong to "any religion." In short, the participants in the convention urged all Indians to worship the deities sacred to Hindu nationalists.

WE ARE ALL CHILDREN OF BHĀRAT MĀTĀ

Satyamitrānand's hagiography, *Divyalok*, discusses at length his devotion to Bhārat Mātā and how it compelled him to build a temple where Hindus could worship Bhārat Mātā and learn about Bhārat's religious culture. Like Savarkar and other Hindu nationalists, Satyamitrānand teaches that Bhārat has the oldest culture in the world and is the land where God has repeatedly chosen to be incarnated. Sages and saints are born in Bhārat to teach the path of devotion. Although there was already a Bhārat Mātā temple in Banaras, Satyamitrānand wanted to build one in Hardwar to acquaint visitors with Bhārat Mātā's "cultural, spiritual and divine glory."²⁰ Temples to many other gods filled Hardwar, but there was no temple for Bhārat Mātā. Satyamitrānand therefore decided to build a temple where visitors could worship not only Bhārat Mātā but also Bhārat's other gods, great saints, heroes, and *satis*. Having resolved to build such a temple, Satyamitrānand and his worldwide organization, the Samanvaya Parivār (Family of Harmony), began to work to raise money for its construction. According to *Divyalok*, Satyamitrānand was disheartened when funds were not immediately forthcoming. He prayed for help, and soon his devotees in India and abroad as well as the VHP were organizing rallies and *yajñas* to raise money. The book's account of the fund-raising campaign records the various places where Satyamitrānand spoke and how much money he collected. On a previous visit to the Rajasthan city of Bardoli, Satyamitrānand had been installed in a pantheon of nationalist heroes, along with Subas Chandra Bose and Mahatma Gandhi. When he came again during his Bhārat Mātā Temple fund-raising tour, he was presented with nearly four million rupees.²¹ In 1978 he presided over the ground-breaking ceremonies for the monumental eight-story temple in Hardwar, built at an estimated cost of ten million rupees.

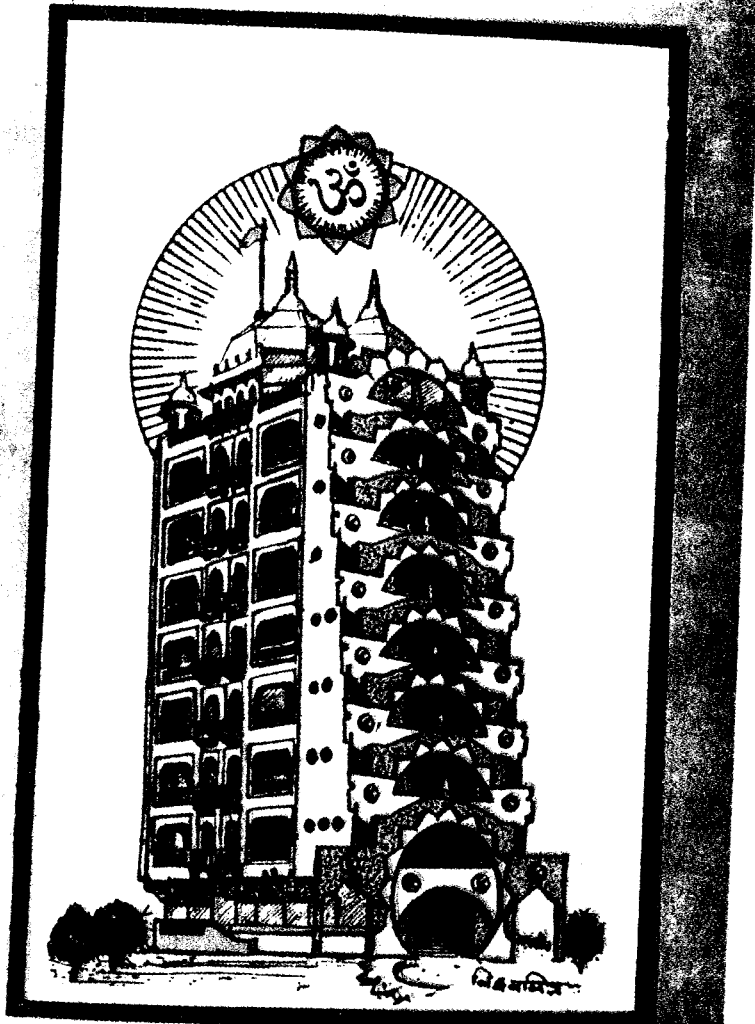
Satyamitrānand chose May 15, 1983, the anniversary of the birth of the first Shankaracharya, as the date for the consecration of the Bhārat Mātā temple. Announcements were published in newspapers throughout India inviting "all citizens" to attend. Invitations were also sent to heads of religious sects and to politicians. People began arriving several days in advance so as not to miss the many events leading up to the consecration. On May 14 Satyamitrānand led a kilometer-long procession through Hardwar to the

temple. One Hardwar resident who witnessed it reportedly commented that he had not seen such a huge and grand procession in fifty years, likening it to Hinduism's largest gathering, the Kumbh Mela.²² Satyamitrānand also brought in five hundred Brahmins trained in Vedic ritual to perform a Viṣṇu *yajña*. The festivities included recitations of sacred texts, a performance by a *Rām Lilā* troupe from Mathura, lectures by religious leaders, banquets for ascetics, and numerous other ritual activities. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi arrived punctually at the time appointed for the consecration. The principal consecration rituals were conducted by the Shankaracharya of Dvaraka; Indira Gandhi participated by performing *ārati* before the statue of Bhārat Mātā. After worshiping Bhārat Mātā, she sat on stage with religious leaders and addressed the audience. Over a hundred thousand people are said to have attended the event.

The following year Satyamitrānand's devotees from India and abroad were invited to Hardwar to attend a five-day spiritual camp. Five hundred people gathered to receive his blessings and be honored for their assistance in building the Bhārat Mātā temple. The camp was inaugurated by Swami Chidananda, a VHP member and the head of Divine Life Society, and several other religious leaders also addressed this select gathering of Bhārat Mātā's devotees and Satyamitrānand's followers. One week after the conclusion of this camp, the procession in connection with the VHP's All-India Sacrifice for Unity arrived in Hardwar. *Divyalok* is silent about Satyamitrānand's involvement, but VHP sources say he figured prominently in ceremonies held in Hardwar and elsewhere in northern India. Materials for the following discussion of the temple and its relation to the Hindu nationalism of Satyamitrānand and the VHP are drawn from my own visits to the temple and from the English and Hindi guidebooks published by Satyamitrānand's organization and sold at the temple.

While the devotional tone is more pronounced in the Hindi guidebook, the English book is printed on better-quality paper and has glossy color photographs of the temple and the statue of Bhārat Mātā on its front and back covers, respectively. The front cover of the Hindi version has a drawing of the temple with the orange Hindu flag flying above it and an *om* above that—insignia of the VHP (see figure 22). On its back cover is a photo of Satyamitrānand, with text below. The first paragraph reads like a précis of Savarkar's "Essentials of Hindutva": "We are all children of Bhārat Mātā. Our country is one, our society is one, our civilization is one, our culture is one, our relations are blood relations."

The English guidebook, *Bharat Mata Mandir: A Candid Appraisal*, opens with a discussion of the reasons why Satyamitrānand decided to build a temple in honor of Bhārat Mātā. His decision is depicted as arising from a "vision," an "almost divine inspiration" that "dawned on Pujya Swami Satyamitrānand Giri Maharaj in an auspicious tranquil moment."²³ After sharing his



भारत माता मन्दिर
 (एक सात्विक अभिव्यक्ति)
 स्वामी सत्यमित्रानन्द गिरि

Figure 22. Cover of the Hindi guidebook to the Bharat Mata temple in Hardwar.

vision with a few close disciples, he began to speak publicly about the need to build a Bhārat Mātā temple in Hardwar. The text draws readers into an intimate, inclusive relation with its arguments by using first-person-plural pronouns: “We may wonder about the basis for the iconic representation of Bharat Mata.” It assures readers that worship of the Divine Mother is universal and normative; it is “as old as civilization” and exists in India as it did in “all ancient cultures.” In India, the Divine Mother as the “Cause off [*sic*] Creation, as the symbol of Primal Energy and the source of Power—Shakti—is well within our comprehension.” As the text points out, Tantric practitioners worship the mother as goddess at “shakti-peeths” (*śakti-pīṭhas*, places of the Goddess’s special power) throughout India. There are “iconic manifestations” of the Divine Mother as the rivers Ganga and Yamuna, and as the *Gītā*—so “why not then Bharat Mata????” (p. i).

Indeed, such a manifestation of Bhārat Mātā is necessary because “to us all Mother-Land is sacred” (p. i). A temple would not only propagate the worship of Bhārat Mātā but would also be a medium through which to enlighten visitors about the power and glory of the holy motherland:

May this beautiful, yet powerful symbol of Mother India entice the hitherto uncommitted passerby, who happens to be a chance visitor, to the glory of Bharat Mata in her manifold facets, to the vastness of her resources and power, to get a glimpse of her history, culture, traditions, and hopefully, be rejuvenated. . . . It is hoped that a visit to the shrine will be a satisfying and lasting spiritual experience that will inspire devotion and dedication to Mother-Land. (pp. i-ii)

The iconic representation of Bhārat Mātā in sculpture is described as both an artistic expression and a devotional act, and the temple serves to promote this devotional attitude toward Bhārat Mātā, something that “historians and mythological story tellers may have missed” (p. 1). Satyamitranand selected Hardwar as the site for the Bhārat Mātā temple because the town is famous for the austerities that ancient sages performed there; it is “the holiest of holy pilgrim centers.” Every year “millions of Indians and others” retreat from “the din and bustle that engulfs our modern world” and come to Hardwar for an atmosphere “sublime, captivating, full of divine vibrations” that can “uplift the human heart.” Thus, the temple gives visitors both aesthetic and spiritual satisfaction by presenting “a unique majestic appearance soothing to the eye and the mind” (p. ii).

In addition, the temple is said to synthesize the best of ancient and modern architecture. This notion of a synthesis of the traditional and the modern also informs ideas concerning Hinduism and Hindu society promoted by the VHP and its affiliated religious leaders, who claim to interpret ancient traditions so as to adapt them to the conditions of modern life. Not everyone, however, concurs with this opinion of the temple’s architecture. Many

Indians told me that the temple is imposing but as ugly as an office or apartment block; it lacks the beauty and grandeur befitting a temple. An Indian architect working in Delhi, who visits Hardwar several times a year, asserted that the Bhārat Mātā temple "is not architecture but it is an important vision of India's unity." When I asked him what he thought the political implications of worshipping India as a Hindu deity might be, he replied, "Villagers like the temple, especially the views of Hardwar which can be seen from the top." The English guidebook, however, does not restrict to villagers the pleasure of this view from the top: "The view of the Himalayas: of the Sapta Dhara [seven streams, said to have been formed so that, during its descent, the Ganges would bypass the ashrams of the seven ancient sages]; of the scenic view of entire campus of the Sapta Sarowar area from the balconies of this floor, is breath-taking and transquilizing [*sic*] to the eye" (p. 18).

The temple's embodiment of the vision of India's unity, of the nation's history and heritage, is a recurrent theme in the guidebook. Even though India "is saturated with temples" and its entire landscape is "an Abode of God," the Bhārat Mātā temple meets the urgent need to "keep our history and heritage alive." This knowledge "about our ancestry, about the founders of our faith, culture and tradition . . . is often sadly lacking." Muslim and Christian youths are said to be more knowledgeable about their heritage than Hindu youths: "Can we afford such gross nescience about our ancestry, about our heritage?" (p. iii). In addition to its purpose of fostering devotion to Bhārat Mātā, the temple is said to commemorate "the persons who have generated the alpha and gamma [*sic*] of our culture" and to offer visitors "a glimpse of our nation's illustrious sons and daughters: saints and seers, philosophers and theologians, the originators of our unique thought; gallant men and women who have sacrificed their lives for the nation." By thus presenting the nation's lineage of illustrious forebears, the Bhārat Mātā temple is said to inspire in visitors "pride, faith and confidence in Bharat, and a resolve for dedication to the cause of our Motherland" (p. iii). Through its presentation of the motherland as an object of devotion and sacrifice, the temple, like the VHP, defines national identity in terms of Hindu piety and activism. Such an identity contributes to the VHP's ability to mobilize large numbers of people for specific Hindu nationalist causes—notably, the All-India Sacrifice for Unity, the demolition of the Babri Mosque at Ayodhya, and the construction of a Rāma temple on the site of the mosque.

The temple guidebook sets forth how the Bhārat Mātā temple explicitly aims to provide for its visitors an emotional experience of religious and national unity. By unifying sectarian diversity "under one umbrella," the temple strives to promote an appreciation for the diversity of religious teachers as "different interpreters of the Same Manifest." This presentation of diversity as encompassed by unity is alleged to be the basis for instilling "the feeling that 'We are one,' 'Bharat Mata is our mother'" (p. iii). The ideology of

Hindu nationalism as expounded by Savarkar and the VHP creates a composite religious and national identity. It figures loyalty to the nation in terms of devotion to and sacrifice for one's sacred motherland. The temple guidebook asserts that "religion and nationhood should be complementary to each other. Religion motivates culture while nationhood evokes sacrifice for one's religious identity. Nothing of lasting value can be achieved without this sense of self-sacrifice and dedication. The welfare of our nation demands sublimation of our individualistic drives and the creation of a true spirit of humanism and brotherhood" (p. iv).

The Bhārat Mātā temple also furnishes a means for teaching a particular conception of Indian history, even though so numerous have been the contributors to the "many millennia of our history" that it is impossible to include all of them in a single temple. Regarding the principles informing the selection of personages who have "created our unique, intransient civilization," the text offers an ambiguous explanation: "to apply a criteria [*sic*] of selection would defeat the aim. Bharat Mata Mandir is just a humble effort at highlighting some important epochs in our social history that may encourage further research" (p. iv). Despite the guidebook's claim, my subsequent research suggests that the figures included in the Bhārat Mātā temple were carefully selected according to specific principles, primarily relating to the themes that structure the Hindu nationalism of the VHP, as prefigured in Savarkar's militant teachings. These principles do not, however, pertain exclusively to Hindu nationalism; there is some overlap with other forms of Indian nationalism.

The deities represented in the temple are the VIPs of the Hindu pantheon. Some are worshiped throughout India; others are the leading deities of particular regions, who are worshiped at major pilgrimage centers. The Hindu nationalist tenet asserting that Sanātānīs, Jains, Buddhists, Ārya Samājīs, and Sikhs are all Hindus is enshrined in the level of the temple that is specifically dedicated to saints and religious teachers. But before examining in detail the contents of the temple, let us look at the next section of the guidebook, where Satyamitranand further explains the temple's purpose. This explanation is framed by a narrative that charts Satyamitranand's entire achievement—from the temple's conception through to its construction and consecration. The narrative also provides an occasion for Satyamitranand to set forth and apply principles of Hindu nationalism.

BHĀRAT MĀHĀTMYA: THE LAND OF DIVINE REVELATIONS AND SPIRITUAL GLORY

Satyamitranand praises the glory of Bhārat Mātā and the holy soil of the motherland. The incarnations in Bhārat of Śiva, Krishna, Rāma, and all the gods of heaven, as well as the presence of saints and religious teachers,

have consecrated the soil of Bharat. The ideals and values they embodied and taught have created the culture and nation of Bhārat; their presence has "divinised this land." Satyamitranand celebrates the preeminence of spirituality in the holy land of Bhārat, holding the most important feature of Bhārat's "matchless and prodigious" soil to be its capacity to nurture the spiritual. "The unique, singular feature of this holy land of India is that it fosters and sustains spiritual life: it is the land leading in the world for yoga and ecstasy. The august tree of spiritualism grows and thrives on this land, through its branches and subbranches and spreads far and wide and bestows gentle peace and sweet transcendence to us all who absorb it." Like Vivekananda, Aurobindo, Tagore, Mahatma Gandhi, and others, Satyamitranand contrasts Bhārat's spirituality with the rampant materialism of Europe and America. Bhārat's reputation is such that "for the quest of the saffron of spiritualism the entire universe is drawn to the sacred soil of Bharat. There is no equal to it" (p. 3).

Bhārat Mātā may be the divine embodiment of Bhārat's holy soil, but like a Hindu woman, her identity is defined in reference to a male: "As I ponder over the format and facet of Bharat Mata I fancy that total aspect of her is symbolized in Lord Shankara." Satyamitranand envisions Śaṅkara (Śiva) as the "Supreme Lord—the Lord of Lords" and as the "characterization of our nationhood" (p. 1). Satyamitranand equates "our nationhood" with Śiva's status as the supreme overlord, an equation that embeds within the concept of nation the ideals of Hindu militancy and ascetic discipline. The menacing trident and the sacred syllable *om*, more recently deployed by the VHP, have long been emblems of Śiva, the "Supreme Lord," whose asceticism augments his already awesome powers. Furthermore, the concept of Śiva as "Lord of Lords" also suggests the political ambitions of militant Hindu nationalists: to gain control of the Indian state. Hindu nationalists use symbol, ritual, and discourse to forge innumerable links among culture, politics, religion, and nation. In his discussion of nation and culture Satyamitranand does not use the term *Hindu*; he uses either *Bhārat* or *India*. However, he not only equates the nation with a Hindu god and goddess but also pronounces that "the culture flowing through her is portrayed in the life of Lord Rama. It is difficult to conceive of a culture in the absence of nationhood while the absence of culture cannot give entity to nationhood. Thus we need both: Lord Shankara as the manifestation of our nationhood and the modesty and adeptness as personified by Lord Rama" (p. 1).

Rāma is widely revered by Hindus as the divine embodiment of dharma—he is duty incarnate. For Satyamitranand, however, Rāma is culture incarnate: he provides the model for proper social and religious conduct. Just as both the VHP and Satyamitranand represent themselves as being concerned with social problems, so is Rāma portrayed. Had he

not been exiled from Ayodhya, "he would have forgone personal experience of the problems of the multitude in India" (p. 8). Even "without rolling in the Indian soil" Rāma could have achieved "his goal of social uplift" (pp. 3–4). However, Rāma chose to "flounder" in Bhārat's soil as a child and to traverse it during his exile in order "to inspire the future generations in the piety of the soil of Mother India" and to "set standards and norms of socio-moral intelligence" (p. 9). The text implies that by emulating Rāma's self-sacrificing adherence to dharma, that is, his deference to all figures of patriarchal authority—his father the king, his Brahmin gurus and priests—Indian society will be able to achieve "social uplift" and solve its problems. Through his exemplary actions and his blessings, Rāma "gives contentment to one and all." While Śiva symbolizes nationhood and Rama is the manifestation of ideal culture, Satyamitranand further names Krishna as the "'persona-grata' of such idealised personality" and proclaims that these three male Hindu deities represent the totality of Indian culture: "Thus, the total panorama of Indian culture would appear to be a synthesis of the personalities of Lord Rama, Lord Krishna, and Lord Shankara" (p. 9).

According to Satyamitranand, Indian culture owes its idealism to Hindu gods and its continuity to saints and ascetics. Through their divinely inspired knowledge and their travels throughout Bhārat and the world, Hindu saints interpret scriptures and propagate the principles of Indian culture. Satyamitranand extols sainthood, which he defines as "piety coupled with strict self-discipline," as constituting the eternal roots of both culture and nation. It has "penetrated the heart-centre of our nation and planted the imperishable Banyan tree (like the one on the River Ganges at Prayag) of our culture" (p. 2). Shankaracharya and Vivekananda receive special attention in Satyamitranand's discussion of saints. They are revered for their teachings on, and achievement of, self-realization and for founding monastic institutions. Satyamitranand belongs to the ascetic order founded by Shankaracharya, and his depiction of him suggests a venerable progenitor for the VHP's mission to unify Hindu society and codify Hindu rituals and beliefs. Shankaracharya's mission was to "synthesize and unite the strands of ethos and logos of our worship"; he traveled throughout India conducting religious discussions and disputations, which enabled him to "scrutinize, collate and authenticate our theology" (p. 9). In order to propagate his teachings, he established four ascetic orders, one each in the north, south, east, and west of India.

Satyamitranand introduces several other religious teachers, devotees, and saints—all of whom are declared to be ubiquitous in the holy land of Bhārat. Whenever dharma grew weak, saints stepped in to strengthen tradition and "thus rejuvenated and rescued our culture in times of peril." When despair

brought desolation to human hearts, the Krishna devotionalism taught by Caitanya brought hope to the masses. On other occasions, when "Indian life was dissipated" on account of "foreign invasions, laxity, indifference and internal quibbles," Gyaneshwara, Namdev, and Shahjobai "rescued our society and re-established its splendour and tradition" (p. 10). Like Savarkar, Satyamitranand reserves a special place for Rāmdās, guru of the Maratha warrior Shivaji. His passage concerning Rāmdās echoes Savarkar's paean to the guru, who, like Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gītā*, inspired his disciple to do battle. It also encodes within it Savarkar's claim that the Hindu nation owes its continued existence to Maratha warriors and that Hindus should emulate Maratha militarism and heroism: "At another time in our history when physical exertion and inaction had demoralised our nationhood, our able Guru Ramdas preached chivalry, competence and confidence to his great disciple Shivaji Maharaj, who rose to the occasion, obtained the blessings of Mother Bhavani and became the saviour of our culture and inspired gallantry among his compatriots" (p. 10).

From among the many saints who have contributed to the continuity of Indian society and culture, however, Satyamitranand singles out Swami Vivekananda as representative of all saints. He highlights the same qualities and achievements of Vivekananda that his own disciples attribute to him, particularly his popularity both in India and abroad for dynamic and persuasive speeches that express a modern approach and pride in his Indian heritage. Satyamitranand praises Vivekananda's message of fearlessness and strength: "India needed 'muscles of iron,' 'nerves of steel' and a 'gigantic will'" (p. 11). This imagery connotes the political goals of Hindu nationalism: militarization, industrialization, and a centralized, authoritarian state.

Having detailed the reasons for building the Bhārat Mātā temple, Satyamitranand summarizes them in the final section, "A Moment of Volition." Readers once again hear Satyamitranand thinking aloud, as he wonders if all these marvelous aspects of Bharat Mātā would remain buried in history books. Next, he asks how they could be "meaningfully projected in some monumental form that can inspire the ordinary [*sic*] man of India and enrich and uplift his life," before concluding on a practical note: "If the total aspect of the excellence of Bharat Mata can be capitalised in one place to enable recapitulation of its glorious past, it could serve as an impartial motivation conducive to the future prosperity of the nation. Is this not obligatory?" (p. 11). Satyamitranand recalls having speculated that Lord Brahmā may have erred in giving him, a poor ascetic, the mission of building the Bhārat Mātā temple. He accepted the responsibility, however, and attributes its fulfillment to divine will. Indeed, he proved himself skillful in raising money for building this monumental structure that provides a means to enshrine and popularize Hindu nationalism. But the Bharat Mātā temple is also a means to solicit monetary do-

nations that fund other organizations and campaigns led by Satyamitranand and his allies in the VHP and elsewhere.

A COVETED STATUS OF NATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE

The guidebook describes the Bhārat Mātā temple as unique, "a pioneer in its field," a "marvel of engineering skill" that has "acquired a coveted status of national significance" because it is a shrine designed to "spread a message of universal harmony and brotherhood" in a country with a variety of religions and languages (p. 13). From its 180-foot summit visitors gaze down on Hardwar and the temple's lofty golden dome can be seen from afar.

Entering the temple, visitors are greeted by a statue of Bhārat Mātā (see figure 23). Thus can "the sons and daughters of Bharat Mata get a glimpse—Darshan—of the Mother whose love flows to her subjects in abundance" (p. 14). The inspiration for the Bhārat Mātā statue is attributed to Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's poem "Bande Mātaram." The guidebook links Bhārat Mātā to the freedom struggle by explaining that Bankim visualized her during the movement for independence from British rule. Although the statue could not include all the nuances and details expressed in "Bande Mātaram," it manifests them in an abbreviated form. Bhārat Mātā holds a milk urn in one hand and sheaves of grain in her other hand and is accordingly described as "signifying the white and green revolution that India needs for progress and prosperity" (p. 13). But the milk urn suggests other chains of significations that the text does not discuss—cows, the cow protection movement, gifts to Brahmins—as well as recalling ritual vessels like the ones filled with Ganga water that were worshiped and sold during the VHP's Sacrifice for Unity. A sign in Hindi and English identifies the statue as Bhārat Mātā. Below that is another sign evocative of the Indian flag: black letters on a white background, with a green and orange border. The Hindi script reads, "Vande Bhārat Mātaram" ("Praise to Mother India"). At the front point of the triangular pedestal is the symbol *om*, in orange. Large brass oil lamps burn on either side of the statue. The shrine also incorporates Tantric elements of goddess worship by including a *yantra*, an abstract geometric icon of the goddess. On the wall behind the statue "the mighty Bharat Mata Yantra is installed to give her power and glory" (p. 13).

Like another *yantra*, a large map of India is mounted on a raised platform located in the center of this ground-floor shrine. On it are marked mountains and rivers, major centers of Hindu pilgrimage, and "all important centres of culture" (p. 13). The map thus represents the political boundaries of the Indian state while inscribing its topographic features in terms of Hindu cosmography. Besides the statue of Bhārat Mātā and the map of India, upon entering the temple visitors also see large color photographs of Satyamitranand, Indira Gandhi, the Shankaracharya of Dvaraka, and others who



Figure 23. Postcard of the Bharat Mātā statue located on the entry level of the Bhārat Mātā temple.

participated in the temple's consecration ceremonies. The next three floors above the entry level contain shrines dedicated to the nation's heroes, *satīs*, and religious teachers:

The stalwarts in any nation can be categorised as: the heroes on the battle front; the noble women of character at home; and the philosophers who have given ideas and set ideals. By the grace of the LORD, our culture is endowed with in-

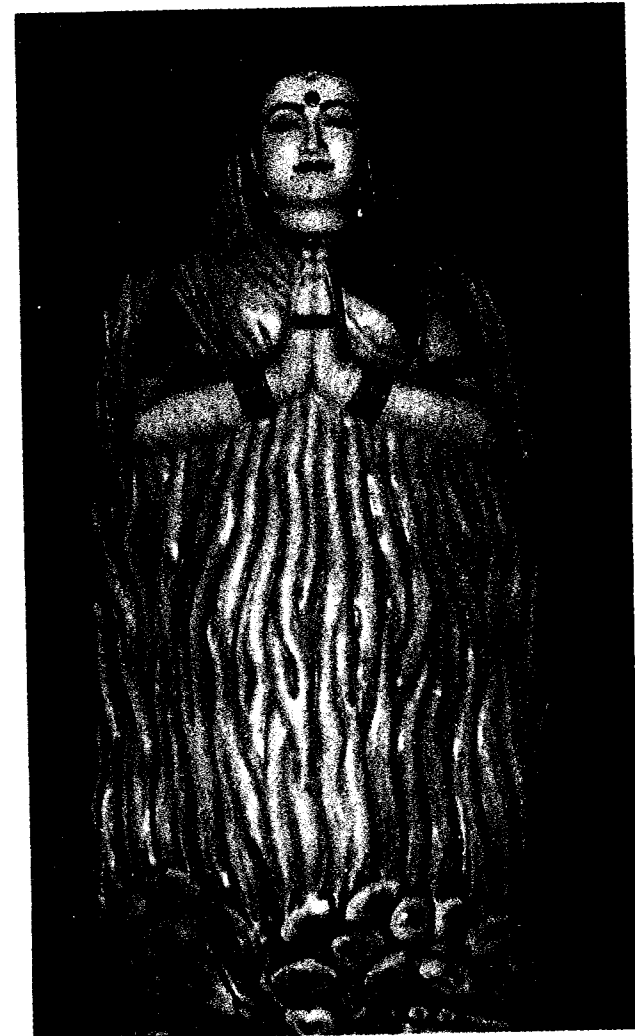


Figure 24. Postcard of Satī Padminī, one of the two statues of women in flames located in the Satī shrine at the Bhārat Mātā temple.

numberable [*sic*] brave gallantry (SHOOR), chaste womanhood (SATEE) and pious Acharyas and pious Saints (SANT). This is true not only for our past history but also for the present generation. It is hoped that the visitors to the Shrine will be able to pay their respects to them under one roof, and get inspiration from them for their own life. (p. 14)

As the guidebook further explains, although it may seem as if the temple includes too many manifestations of deities and heroes, holy men and women,

each floor of the temple was consecrated by the Shankaracharya of Dvaraka and constitutes an autonomous shrine.

The Shrine of Heroes occupies the second level. Like the shrines on four other floors, it consists of a large room with statues in display cases lining three walls. The fourth side opens onto a veranda and views of the Ganges. Signs in Hindi and English identifying the figures are propped against the bases of the statues. Bhārat's forebears are worshiped in this shrine for the sacrifices they made to defend the sacred motherland and the Hindu religion: "The first floor is dedicated to the sacred memory of our valiant ancestors, bold and gallant sons and daughters of Bharat Mata, who sacrificed their lives for the patriotic cause of protecting the Sanatan Dharma and the glory of the Motherland" (p. 14). Satyamitranand and his associates selected a dozen personages to include in this shrine: Madan Mohan Malaviya, Veer Savarkar, Subhas Chandra Bose, Mahatma Gandhi, Maharana Pratap, Chatrapati Shivaji, Guru Govind Singh, the Rani of Jhansi, Shaheed Bhagat Singh, Chandra Shekhar Azad, Hemu Kalani, and Asphak Ulla.

The selection of these figures is consistent with the lineage of Hindu nationalists that Satyamitranand and the VHP have constructed for themselves. This lineage draws upon those whom Savarkar celebrated as defenders of the Hindu nation—Maharana Pratap, Shivaji, Guru Govind Singh, and the Rani of Jhansi. Mounted upon her horse with baby swaddled on her back, the Rani of Jhansi raises her sword with one hand, holding the reins and her shield in the other. Both her clothing and her horse's caparison are green and orange, the colors of the Indian flag. During Satyamitranand's visit to Bardoli, in Rajasthan, local notables described him as combining the qualities of two great men who had previously visited the city: Subhas Chandra Bose and Mahatma Gandhi. These two heroes of the independence movement are installed in the Bhārat Mātā temple as representatives of militarism and nonviolent noncooperation, respectively. Pandit Malaviya—the founder of Banaras Hindu University, a Hindu political leader, and an organizer of Brahmin priests in Hindu pilgrimage centers—is enshrined among these protectors of *sanātan* (eternal) dharma. Savarkar also stands with these national stalwarts, these "heroes on the battle front," whereas Nehru is conspicuously absent in this configuration of India's lineage of freedom fighters.

The floor above the Shrine of Heroes houses the Satī Shrine, which the guidebook describes as "dedicated to the glory of Indian Womenhood from Vedic times to the present era, symbolizing the chastity, loyalty and dedication of Indian wedlock" (p. 15). A Sanskrit verse extolling the virtues of women is presented as evidence of the "sense of respect and reverence shown to our women," the guidebook arguing that such evidence refutes the opinion of those who think women are oppressed in Indian society. This assertion belongs to the discourse upholding the high status of women in tradi-

tional Hindu society. Still pervasive today, this discourse perpetuates the apologetics of conservative, upper-caste Hindu men who were responding to critiques made by the British and by Hindu social reformers, critiques often directed against the practice of *satī*.²¹ The critiques, like the practice and worship of *satī*, continue to this day. Hardwar is believed to be the site where the goddess Satī avenged her father's insult to her husband, Śiva, by jumping into the sacrificial fire, and two of the twelve "beautiful manifestations" in the Satī Shrine show a woman engulfed in flames. Satī Padminī, a Rajput queen, is celebrated for leading the women of Chitor to kill themselves after their husbands were defeated in battle by a Mughal army (see figure 24). With flames rising out of the wood and up to her shoulders, Satī Padminī's half-open eyes and beatific smile make her look as if she is in a blissful trance. Her hands are pressed together in a gesture that suggests she is respectfully fulfilling her duty and politely greeting those who come for her *darśan*. Flames are etched upon her fair forearms, making her glass bangles glow.

Besides its two graphic symbols of the "chastity, loyalty and dedication of Indian wedlock," the Satī Shrine includes wives of sages and other women who are exemplars of wifely virtue. Continuing the clockwise circuit of the statues, the visitor reaches the last *satī*, a figure who looks incongruous amidst the finery and glory of Indian womanhood. In a plain white dress, suggestive of a widow rather than an auspicious Hindu wife, stands Annie Besant. She stares severely and clutches a book in one arm; on her feet are heavy, sensible shoes. Her inclusion in the Satī Shrine can be interpreted in various ways. Annie Besant was a leading figure during the early days of the Congress Party and the independence movement; she supported the campaign for a Hindu University and praised the spiritual riches of Hindu civilization. For visitors less familiar with the specifics of Annie Besant's career in India, however, her presence might signify that even Western women aspire to the status of Hindu *satī*.

Above the Shrines of Heroes and Satis is the Shrine of Saints, which consecrates a national lineage of religious teachers. Discussing this shrine, the guidebook reiterates the belief that sainthood is central to Indian culture:

In a world of luxury, lust and power, Indian culture has upheld the ideals of Sainthood. This floor is dedicated to our great philosophers and Saints, who have infused unity in us, who have rejuvenated us; through love, devotion and knowledge they gave us inspiration, through captivating speeches they enriched our culture, through pious, austere life they set norms for our way of life. (p. 15)

Twenty-four statues crowd the shrine, so as to include the founders and teachers associated with all major Hindu sects and ascetic orders. Figures associated with other religious groups—Sikh, Jain, Buddhist—that are embraced by the VHP's conception of "Hindu" are also displayed here. The



Figure 25. Postcard of Bhagwan Shankar (Śiva) as he appears in the Mount Kailāsa shrine on the top floor of the Bhārat Mātā temple.

saints worshiped in this shrine are: Valmiki and Tulsidas, Rāma's inspired devotees; the Buddha; the Jain saint Mahavir; Nanak, the first guru of the Sikhs; Chaitanya, the Bengali devotee of Krishna; and Ramdas, the guru of Shivaji. Also housed in the Shrine of Saints are the great religious philosophers of the south—the "miniature incarnations" of Indian culture: the original Shankaracharya, along with Ramanujacharya, Nimbarkacharya, Vallabhacharya, and Madhvacharya. Other saintly religious teachers de-

picted are Udasin Acharya Chandraji, Rang Avdoot, Garibdas, Raskhan, Hirjibapa, Narasingh Mehta, Gyaneshvara, and Shirdi Sai Baba (who perhaps doubles as a reference to the currently popular Sathya Sai Baba). Notably, all three members of the triad associated with the Ramakrishna Mission are also present: its founder Vivekananda and his guru Ramakrishna, together with Ramakrishna's wife and disciple, Sharada Ma—who is the only woman included in this assembly of spiritual teachers. Nearby stands the statue of Aurobindo, the anti-British revolutionary who later retired from active participation in politics to devote himself to spiritual pursuits at his ashram in Pondicherry. Finally, the alliance between the Arya Samaj and the VHP earns a place in the Shrine of Saints for Swami Dayananda Saraswati, the man who founded the Arya Samaj and propounded the supremacy of Vedic knowledge.

Although not formally a shrine, the Assembly Hall on the next floor gives visual expression to tenets of Indian and Hindu nationalism that celebrate the unity of all religions and the unified diversity of the peoples and cultures of Bhārat. Painted on the walls are "important Dharma Sutras from all the religions of India: Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Parsee, Sikh, Jain, Buddha." Just as the VHP presents the cooperation of Hindus, Christians, and Muslims in the Sacrifice for Unity as evidence of the unity underlying all religions, so the guidebook describes the quotations inscribed in the Assembly Hall as "illustrating the brotherhood of man in a world of many beliefs and '-isms'" (p. 16). In addition to the passages from scriptures, the Hall is also decorated with a series of paintings, each labeled with the name of an Indian state and depicting landscapes, temples, facial types, and clothing associated with that state. Modern technology is also recruited to the cause of national unity: the guidebook promises the imminent installation of an electronic computer that will answer question of cultural interest—although two years after the guidebook's publication, the computer had not yet arrived.

Above the Assembly Hall is the Śakti Shrine, dedicated to various forms of the goddess. Its thirteen statues of the "divine mother" are described as "the embodiment of spiritual and moral strength, the triumph of Truth over evil" (p. 16). The guidebook refers to the *Markandeya Purāna's* enumeration of Durgā's nine "invincible" manifestations, and each is represented in the Śakti Shrine as a form taken by Durgā in order to slay a particular beastly foe. As noted earlier, the VHP is also partial to Durgā: the cover of *Ekātmātā Yajña* (the commemorative book celebrating the Sacrifice for Unity) shows Durgā leaning on her lion, the orange Hindu flag in her hand. Bhārat Mātā embodies the power of the divine mother to bestow prosperity, whereas the iconography of Durgā emphasizes her power to vanquish enemies. In addition to the nine forms of Durgā, the Śakti Shrine also presents Sarasvati, the goddess of knowledge and music, and Ved Mātā Gayatri, the divine form of the sacred mantra. Two further forms of *śakti* are figured in the shrine,

which the guidebook associates with specific regions of India: Jagadambā of Gujarat and Meenakshi (Mīnākṣī) of South India. Of the many popular regional forms of the goddess, Jagadambā may have been selected because Satyamitranand's Gujarati followers, both in India and abroad, contributed money for the temple's construction, while Meenakshi, the fish-eyed goddess worshiped at the prosperous Madurai temple in Tamil Nadu, may have been included in the shrine as a tribute to Hindus of South India.

Enshrined in the seventh and penultimate level of the Bhārat Mātā temple are nine forms of Viṣṇu. The guidebook describes these incarnations of Viṣṇu as symbolizing "Devotion (Bhakti) with Domination," as well as providing a Sanskrit quote that emphasizes Viṣṇu in his form as "Destruction to Wrongdoers" (p. 17). By highlighting Viṣṇu's punitive powers, the guidebook affirms the duty and moral authority of righteous rulers to subjugate those whom it names as enemies of Hindu dharma. The shrine displays incarnations of Viṣṇu that are popular throughout India: Sītā-Rāma, Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa, Rādhā-Krishna. It also displays incarnations that have important but more regional followings: Dattatreya, Śrī Nāthjī, Ranchod Rājī, Venkateśvara, Akṣara Puruṣottama, and Viṭhala-Rukmiṇī.

Visitors must climb stairs to reach the summit of the Bhārat Mātā temple, where Mount Kailāsa, the abode of Śiva, is depicted. Describing this topmost level, the guidebook states: "The massive Sanctum Sanctorum of this floor presents a wonderful view of Mount Kailas. In the center, under the huge dome, Lord Shiva is seated deep in meditation, a Maha Yogi." With its glittering white plaster crags, the sanctum's mountainous scene resembles a stage set. Several statues of Śiva, representing his different aspects, populate the pinnacle. The central, dominant statue (see figure 25) shows Śiva in solitary meditation, the form in which "he glorifies renunciation and asceticism: the qualities adored and adopted by seekers after Truth in India" (p. 17). He wears, and is seated upon, animal skins. Cobras are entwined around his silver body, while another cobra rises out of the matted locks coiled on top of his head. The glistening cascade of the descending Ganges flows through his hair. Stuck in the ground next to Śiva is his trident, from which hangs the drum on which he beats his terrifying rhythms.

Behind the solitary meditating Śiva, viewers see him in a family portrait, in which he sits with Pāvati and his elephant-headed son, Gaṇeśa. In the wings of the shrine stand two other forms of Śiva, one of which shows him as an androgyne, "an idealization of Puruṣa and Prakṛiti or Shiva and Shakti in one moorti [image]" (p. 18). Satyamitranand had earlier asserted his vision of Śiva, the Supreme Lord, as symbolizing the whole of Bhārat Mātā. Here, Śiva's representation as half woman provides an iconic referent for his capacity to symbolize this totality. The fourth statue of Śiva shows him in his well-known form as Naṭarājā, the Lord of Dance, in which, surrounded by a circle of fire, he dances destruction upon the body of Māyā (il-

lusion). The guidebook extols the statue maker's genius in making a "unique piece of art" that "concur[s] beautifully with the notion of perpetual motion as investigated by modern science" (p. 18).

The guidebook repeatedly assures readers that the statues in the Bhārat Mātā temple have been consecrated and are worshiped with the proper rituals. However, unlike visitors to other temples, who bring food, cloth, and other goods as ritual presentations to the deity, visitors to the Bhārat Mātā temple arrive empty-handed. There is no bell to ring to announce one's presence; no priest awaits devotees to accept their offerings and give them *prasād*. With its statues in glass display cases, all dutifully labeled, the temple seems more like a museum of Hindu nationalism than a living Hindu temple. However, as is common in temples and ashrams, here, too, visitors are encouraged to donate money. A temple attendant ritualizes the act of donating money by marking donors' foreheads with red powder—a practice not only common in many temples but appropriate in other ritual settings—and by issuing receipts.

The guidebook's discussion of how donations to the temple are used echoes the pronouncements of both Satyamitranand and the VHP regarding their support for charitable projects that further national unity:

It is our resolve to utilise all gifts and endowments received at the shrine towards the further service of our Vanavasi Brethren—the forest and hill dwellers, and the Harijans [Untouchables]. Along with this, a portion of this endowment will be utilised for the education of Brahmin youth in proper Vedic rites, rituals and research. We earnestly hope that in this way Bharat Mata Mandir can contribute to the socio-economic needs of our nation. (p. iv)

The training of Brahmins as Vedic ritualists and scholars, like "service" to tribals and untouchables, are heralded as ways in which the Bhārat Mātā temple uses its income to further the cause of strengthening the nation. Such activities are similarly undertaken, and similarly portrayed, by the VHP and by Satyamitranand.

ŚAKTI EX MACHINA

The Bhārat Mātā temple, which houses multiple elements of Hindu nationalism, purveys to its visitors a particular configuration of national identity in accordance with its vision of India's unified culture and religion. The temple encourages visitors to imagine their identities as devoted sons and daughters of Bhārat Mātā, to be edified and inspired by the ideals and the deeds of their heroic and saintly forebears, and to prove their devotion by dedicating themselves as "matriots" to the defense of the holy motherland. Visitors to the Bhārat Mātā temple are enjoined to "depart with the noble concept that we all belong to One Family" (p. iv). The Bhārat Mātā temple,

like the All-India Sacrifice for Unity and the campaign to destroy the Babri Mosque and build the Rāma temple in its place in Ayodhya, are both ends and means. They function as sites for the production and dissemination of national identity and cultural forms. They furnish a means for raising money, as well as for attracting official and popular support for the Hindu nationalist movement. Although movements to establish a Hindu state in India have waxed and waned for nearly a century, events surrounding the destruction of the Babri Mosque suggest that the Hindu nationalist movement's political power, financial backing, and respectability among upper- and middle-class Hindus has never been greater. Its successes relate to complex dynamics associated with domestic and transnational political economy and the religocultural politics of nationalism.

Following the demolition of the Babri Mosque in December, 1992, Muslims in Pakistan and Bangladesh retaliated by attacking Indian consulates, businesses, and Hindu temples. Governments of Arab countries condemned the mosque's destruction, while in Britain news about Ayodhya prompted firebombings of Hindu temples and cultural centers, in addition to a mosque and a Sikh *gurdwārā*. South Asian leaders feared that white racists would use this violent incident as an opportunity for further attacks on people of color. In New York, Black Muslims protested outside the United Nations. In Dakha, twenty thousand people gathered to march to Ayodhya and rebuild the mosque, although the Bangladeshi government announced that it would stop the march at the border. The various international responses to the destruction of the mosque indicate that the politics of Hindu nationalism is not bounded by India's borders. The Bangladeshi government may be able to prohibit protesters from crossing into India, but no single government can halt transnational flows of money and support to Hindu nationalist groups, or to their opponents.

The strategies behind struggles for power involve the use of cultural media to inculcate specific subjectivities and sensibilities; they also involve organizational secrecy and dissimulation. In the case of India, strategic deception makes it difficult for researchers and the public—and perhaps even the government—to obtain information about the Hindu nationalist movement's covert activities and sources of support. The movement's ability to organize networks of leaders and followers at local, national, and international levels is, however, apparent. Related to this ability is the movement's use of diverse media—television and radio, tapes and videocassettes, mass rallies and festivals, pilgrimage, and rituals—to promulgate its ideology, as well as to raise money and attract supporters.²⁵

The most militant members of the Hindu nationalist movement consider their ultimate goal to be the transformation of India into a Hindu state, whereas less militant Hindu nationalists emphasize the "protection" of the

interests of a dominant Hindu majority within the framework of a secular state. It is difficult to know how many Hindu nationalists fit the former description and how many the latter, since to maintain its international respectability the movement's publicists often mask, or even deny, the desire to create a Hindu state. Rather, they define Hindu nationalism in cultural terms and distance it from politics. Yet the range of identities and emotions that the Hindu nationalist movement both constructs and imparts remains inextricable from the ideology propounded by the militants who destroyed the Babri Mosque and who have targeted two thousand other mosques for destruction. The cult of Bhārat Mātā, in combination with militant nationalism, assists the Hindu nationalist movement by posing a dire dilemma. It proposes that Hindus must either fight for the cause of Hindu unity, a fight that should culminate in the establishment of a Hindu nation-state, or else suffer the demise, defeat, and extinction of the Hindu people.

NOTES

1. See Sudhir Kakar, "When Saffron Speaks," *Sunday Times of India*, 19 July 1992.
2. Quoted in *ibid.*
3. See Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986), and "The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question," in *Recasting Women: Essays in Indian Colonial History*, ed. Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1990), pp. 233–53.
4. See Achin Vanaik, *The Painful Transition: Bourgeois Democracy in India* (London: Verso, 1990). For further discussion, see Richard G. Fox, introduction and "Hindu Nationalism in the Making, or the Rise of the Hindian," both in *Nationalist Ideologies and the Production of National Cultures*, ed. Richard G. Fox (Washington, D.C.: American Ethnological Society, 1990), pp. 1–14 and 63–80. See also Lise McKean, *Divine Enterprise: Gurus and the Hindu Nationalist Movement* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).
5. See especially the essays collected in *Recasting Women*, ed. Sangari and Vaid.
6. Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, "Recasting Women: An Introduction," in *ibid.*, pp. 10, 2.
7. See Uma Chakravarti, "Whatever Happened to the Vedic *Dasi*?" in *ibid.*, pp. 27–87, esp. pp. 62–64.
8. Basanta Koomar Roy, translator's introduction, in Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, *Anandamath* (1941; repr. New Delhi: Vision Books, 1992), pp. 13–20, at p. 18.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
10. *Ibid.*
11. Chatterjee, *Anandamath*, trans. Roy, p. 43.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 63.
13. V. D. Savarkar, *Hindu Rashtra Darshan*, vol. 6 of *Samagra Savarkar Wangmaya* (*Writings of Swatantrya Veer V. D. Savarkar*) (Poona: Maharashtra Prantik Hindusabha, 1964), p. 74.

14. Vishva Hindu Parishad, *Ekātmatā Yajña*, ed. Ramashankar Agnihotri and Datatreya Tiwari (New Delhi: Vishva Hindu Parishad, n.d.), pp. 13–14. Page references to this volume will hereafter be given in the text.
15. The English guidebook is Samanvaya Sewa Trust, *Bharat Mata Mandir: A Candid Appraisal* (Hardwar: Samanvaya Publications, 1986); the Hindi is Swami Satyanand Giri, *Bhārat Matā Mandir* (Hardwar: Samanvaya Publications, 1990).
16. See Krishnakant Chaturvedi and Brahmajeet Sharma, *Divyalok: Parivrajak ki Divya Yātrā* (Hardwar: Samanvaya Prakashan, 1986).
17. Vishva Hindu Parishad, *The Hindu Awakening: Retrospect and Promise* (New Delhi: Vishva Hindu Parishad, n.d.), pp. 7–8.
18. Vishva Hindu Parishad, *Vishva Hindu Parishad: Messages and Activities* (New Delhi: Vishva Hindu Parishad, n.d.).
19. Vishva Hindu Parishad, *Hindu Awakening*, p. 37.
20. Chaturvedi and Sharma, *Divyalok*, p. 22.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 26.
23. Samanvaya Sewa Trust, *Bharat Mata Mandir*, p. i. Page references to this volume will hereafter be given in the text.
24. See Chakravarti, "Whatever Happened to the Vedic Dasi?" and Lata Mani, "Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India," both in *Recasting Women*, ed. Sangari and Vaid, pp. 27–28 and 88–126.
25. See Tapan Basu et al., *Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flags* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1993). For a discussion of the use of audiocassettes by Hindu nationalists, see Peter Manuel, *Cassette Culture: Popular Music and Technology in North India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), pp. 236–56.

EPILOGUE

The Western Kālī

Rachel Fell McDermott

This . . . is . . . an invitation to all women to join in the search to find out who we really are, by beginning to know our past heritage as more than a broken and buried fragment of male culture.¹

I believe that Hinduism does indeed contain a model and image that could be used to fit the needs of today's women, and that this model lies at the very heart of Hinduism itself. This image centers on the goddess Kali and her many manifestations. I also believe this image must be extricated from patriarchal interpretations and understandings that have clouded its essential meaning.²

The Hindu goddess Kālī is of great interest among a variety of modern thinkers and writers, who approach her from several perspectives. Ever since the mid-1970s, with the publication of David Kinsley's wonderfully accessible account of her history and interpretation, Kālī has increasingly become a subject of scholarly research among those who study Hindu religion and culture.³ In addition, other writers and scholars have found Kālī an exciting figure for reflection and exploration, notably feminists and participants in New Age spirituality who are attracted to goddess worship. Although these two groups are by no means identical, a significant area of overlap occurs in literature written primarily for and about women's spirituality. Even a cursory investigation of the women's and New Age sections in bookstores reveals an astonishing recent upsurge of interest in goddesses of all types. One can buy books on the history of goddess spirituality, on goddesses from specific geographic regions, and on the empowerment and healing available, especially for women, through the active worship of a female deity. There are also reference works such as *The Concise Lexicon of the Occult* and *The New Age Dictionary* (both of which include entries on Kālī).⁴ Books are not the only items for sale, however; one can also choose from a variety of calendars, almanacs, diaries, posters, greeting cards, bookmarks, Tarot card decks, and cassettes—all of which have the goddess as their main theme. As a spate of recent book reviews and newspaper articles indicates,