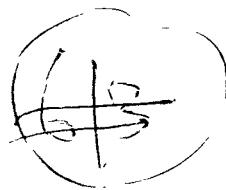


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STUDIES IN THE CULT OF THE MOTHER GODDESS IN ANCIENT INDIA

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I

The mother-principle is the earliest belief which received recognition by the human mind in its very primitive stage. The palaeolithic man recognized in the motherhood the inherent power to procreate which was the root cause for the racial development and regeneration. This principle of motherhood was not confined only to human beings but was extended to cattle, plants and all kinds of life. This act of fertility soon became associated with the waters, the source of all life. The mother-principle was not only confined to the terrestrial sphere, but also came to be recognized as a cosmic force. This principle, at first an abstraction creating an image in the sub-conscious, in the course of the development of civilization projected itself as a visual image emphasizing fertility. At a much later stage this original Mother goddess assumed multiple forms, through maintaining their basic function of fertility. However, the very concept of fertility gave rise to idea of death, fear and dissolution, and therefore, some of the Mother goddesses assumed their awesome and destructive roles.

With the firm establishment and wide acceptance of the mother-principle there arose the language of symbols which utilized not only the sexual parts of the body, but also some forces of nature and animate and inanimate objects which were connected with the phenomenon of fertility. Thus the waters, the earth, the vegetation, the crops and the cattle became closely related with fertility cult and formed appropriate symbols to express the functions inherent in the great Mother goddess.

The study of the Mother goddess cult in India is fraught with many difficulties, not the least being the lack of archaeological material in the Stone Age cultures. Unlike the archaeological finds in the palaeolithic Europe which throw considerable light on the Mother goddess cult, the Indian palaeolithic sites have so far yielded no material which could enlighten us about the Mother goddess cult and practices in India. In the Chalcolithic Age of Indian history, however, the worship of the Mother goddess was widely practised as proved by the terracotta finds from Baluchistan where small agricultural communities existed even before the existence of the Harappan culture. Nothing could be said about the identification of the Mother goddess as the Harappan script has not yet been deciphered, though there is ample evidence available from the seals and terracottas that the goddess was associated with trees and animals and the fertility aspect of her role is em-

phasized by her nudity. All this shows the concept of the Mother goddess in this period was almost the same as the concept of the Mother goddess in Vedic and historical times. However, one thing must be borne in mind that the cult of the Mother goddess was not common to all the sites where the Harappan culture flourished. For instance at Lothal in Gujarat and Kalibangan in Rajasthan, the absence of the terracotta figurines of the Mother goddess shows that her cult did not receive recognition in those parts of the country. Why it so happened it is difficult to surmise, but there is always a possibility that the Harappan culture had a very liberal approach so far as religion was concerned, and in the course of its expansion through cultural and commercial relations, it left the religious beliefs of the people with whom it came in contact severely alone.

What happened to the Mother goddess cult after the decline and disappearance of the Harappan culture is not known, though from painted pot-sherds at Navadatoli near Maheshwar in Madhya Pradesh there seems to have existed a goddess in her terrific form who was perhaps associated with death. The recent find of a headless goddess associated with a bull kept in a terracotta casket from Inamgaon near Poona, datable to c. 1300 B.C. shows that the cult of this goddess prevalent at Catal Hüyük in Anatolia datable between c. 6500 and 5700 B.C. had penetrated the Deccan plateau and survived there at a much later period.

The predominance of any particular goddess in early Vedic literature is disputed by many scholars. They are of the opinion that the goddesses found their rightful place in Vedic pantheon when the Vedic Aryans came in closer contact with the indigenous culture of the land. The others argue that while the gods hold sway in early Vedic texts, the presence of at least some of the important goddesses such as the Great mother Aditi, Prithivi Sinivali, Sarasvati, etc. could not be ignored. The solution of the problem posed by these conflicting opinions lies somewhere midway. In early Vedic literature the important role played by some of the goddesses must be recognized, but in most cases the goddesses are mere abstractions, changing their roles and distinguishing attributes between one another. In the *R V.* and also in the *A V.* the abstract images of the goddesses are in a nebulous and floating state, and it is open to question whether any of these goddesses, apart from their liturgical value and symbolical significance, projected her image in visual art.

In the later Vedic literature, however, the position of the Mother goddesses definitely improves. They partially shed off their hazy character and take definite shapes. For instance Śrī indicating merely abstract virtues in the *Vedas*, in the *SB.* assumes the role of a full-fledged goddess. It is also significant to note that in certain later Vedic texts and particularly the *MB.* it is pointed out that Śrī in the beginning lived with the Asuras and later on when they deflected from the path of virtue that she deserted them. This legend could only mean that Śrī was at first the Mother goddess popular with the non-

Aryans and at a much later date probably in c. 800 B.C. when the *ŚB.* was composed she was received within the Aryan fold. When she was actually represented in art is not known, but in the Mauryan period her cult seems to have been widely patronized. She became associated with various symbols drawn from vegetation, animals both domestic and wild and the waters which directly or indirectly emphasize the role as a goddess of fertility, rain and riches. It may, however, be pointed here that the symbols associated with Śrī are not exclusively devoted to her ; other gods and goddesses more or less with similar functions equally share these with her. Her identification sometimes in early Indian art is also fraught with difficulties. When she is associated with the lotus and elephant it is easy to recognize her. But when nude female figures are associated with the palm and *pipal* trees and animals the identification becomes doubtful. Moreover, she shares her attributes with some Yakshis, river goddesses and Pṛithvī and in their exchange of attributes and symbols make the identification very confounded.

Oldenberg and more recently Gonda have thoroughly discussed the idea expressed by the word Śrī and its derivatives in early Vedic literature and Coomaraswamy has studied at length the iconography of Śrī-Lakshmī and certain symbols associated with her. However, since the days of Coomaraswamy the archaeological material about Śrī-Lakshmī or the Mother goddess, whatever we may choose to call her, has grown considerably and therefore, we have made in the following pages a reappraisal of the problem, supplementing the archaeological material with literary evidences, mostly collected from the later Vedic literature, the epics, the *Purāṇas* and technical texts on iconography. It is not possible to pronounce the final verdict, but it is hoped that the study may enthuse some scholars to study the problems connected with the Mother goddess in greater detail.

II

The personality of Śrī in ancient India is a complex one. She not only represents the ancient Mother goddess of proto-historic times, but also identifies herself as a Yakshī, Pṛithvī, Umā-Durgā and various other goddesses of corn and fertility. She is not only exclusively devoted to Vishnu as in Paurāṇic literature but Indra, Kubera and the Asuras found favour with her. Śrī in early Buddhist sculpture is identified by M. Foucher with Māyā, the mother of Gautama Buddha, and perhaps he is right as Māyā, at least in the early centuries of the Christian era, had assumed the role of the universal Mother as in the *Saundarānanda* ii, 47 the Buddha's mother is called *Māyeva divi devatā*. Prof. Johnston¹ locates this goddess Māyā referred by Aśvaghosha from an unexpected source the *Oxyrhynchus Papyrus* No. 1280 dated to the third century A.D. which contains an invocation to Isis, in the course of which she is equated with all the Mother goddesses known to the Greek world,

¹ E. H. Johnston, "A Terracotta Figure at Oxford", *J.I.S.O.A.*, Vol. X, 1942, pp. 101-102.

Cybele, Atargatis, Astarte, Nanaia and many others among whom is included *Maia* in India. Johnston identifies *Maia* with Māyā of the *Saundarānanda*, though the word may as well stand for Mātā, the mother. Later on the Papyrus defective at this point, informs us what part of India she was worshipped. The translation of lines 221-231 runs: "Thou lady of the land, bringest the flood of rivers, . . . and in Egypt the Nile, in Tripolis the Eleutherus, in India the Ganges; owing to whom the whole and the . . . exists through all rain every spring, all dew and snow, and all things for ever." It is evident from this reference that in the Gangetic valley Māyā who could perhaps be equated with Śrī-Lakshmi was closely associated with the waters and hence vegetation and fertility. As we will see later on that the *makara*, one of the symbols of Śrī-Lakshmi, is also the vehicle of the river goddess Gaṅgā. As a matter of fact in the *MB.I.* 92.26 the Gaṅgā's resplendent body is compared with that of Śrī (*Jājjalyamānāvapushā sākshātpadmāniśriyam*).

That Śrī as Mother goddess belonged to pre-Aryan India and later on assimilated by the Aryans is supported by literary evidences. It is mentioned in the *JB.I.* 1.4.4, that because of a false step in performing a sacrifice the Aryans lost their Śrī. It is mentioned in the *MB.XIII.* 81.6 that abandoned by her the Daityas were destroyed. This statement is further corroborated by a dialogue between Śrī and the Daitya king Prahrāda (*MB.XII.* 124.54-60). It is mentioned that Indra having assumed the form of a Brāhmaṇa approached the Asura Prahrāda and asked him that if he was gratified with him to part with Śrī who resided within him. As soon as Prahrāda agreed to the Brāhmaṇa's request the resplendent goddess Śrī came out from his body. On being questioned by the demon chief where she was going she said "I am Śrī cast off by you, I am leaving you." He also wanted to know from her the identity of the Brāhmaṇa. Prahrāda also addressed her as the goddess of the people (*lokasya paramēśvarī*). She revealed the identity of the Brāhmaṇa as Indra and that he had managed to rob Prahrāda of all worldly prosperity. She further informed him that Prahrāda by his right conduct had conquered all the world, and knowing that Indra had robbed him of his right conduct, religion, wealth and power as Śrī herself was at the root of the right conduct. She appeared with a lotus in each hand on Asura Kubera's car in the form of Gajalakshmi (*Rām.* V. 7.14).

Śrī's contact with the Asuras is further emphasized by her association with Kubera the lord of the Asuras². In Kubera's *sabhā* Śrī was always present. It is also said that Lakshmi proceeded to the gods and Alakshmi to the Asuras (*MB.III.* 92.9). Alakshmi and Kālī destroyed the Asuras (*MB.III.* 92.10-12), a sort of sectarian approach applauding the Devas and denigrating the Asuras. While the Asuras were being destroyed, the Devas goaded by Śrī-Lakshmi visited the oceans, rivers, lakes and holy places. They performed penance and *yajñas* and after doing acts of piety visited the *tīrthas*. Yudhishtira was ad-

² E. W. Hopkins, *Epic Mythology* (Reprint), Delhi, 1968, p. 146.

vised that after taking a holy dip in the *tirtha* Lakshmi was bound to visit him (*MB.* III. 92.13-16). The virtue accruing from bathing in Śrī-*tirtha* is emphasized (*MB.* III. 81.37). Thus the later Paurāṇic character of Śrī-Lakshmi with emphasis on the places of pilgrimage and acts of piety, which, except for her association with the waters had nothing to do with her original character.

Lakshmi is also one of the wives of Dharma (*MB.* I. 63.13) and sister of Dhātā and Vidhātā and her mind-born sons are flying horses (*turaṅgā yomachāriṇah* *MB.* I. 60.50) which is an early reference to her association with horses as exemplified in early carved discs of the Maurya-Śunga period. Śrī is also associated with the *Suparṇas*. They are endowed with Śrī and also marked with Śrī-Vatsa (*MB.* V. 99.5). Perhaps here there is a correct reference to the flying character of Śrī as evidenced by certain terracottas and a carved disc to be discussed later on. She is also associated with Varuṇa (*Rām.* VII. 56.2). She is also Daksha's daughter (*Mār. P. L.* 20-21) from her was born Darpa (*Mār. P. L.* 25).

After leaving the Asuras Śrī apparently became very intimate with Indra. It is mentioned in the *MB.* II. 7.4. that in Indra's *sabhā* both Śrī and Lakshmi were present. A dialogue between Indra and Śrī brings out vividly their relationship into prominence. Questioned by Yudhiṣṭhīra about the state of a man in rising or declining fortune Bhishma referred to the dialogue between Indra and Śrī which took place on the bank of the Gaṅgā. After taking a dip in the river where Indra and Nārada were offering water to the sun, there appeared Śrī in all her effulgence. Preceded by the Apsarases she wore a *nakshatramālā* (a kind of necklace) and a garland, holding a lotus she stood on a lotus pericarp (*padmatalasamsthitām*). After worshipping her Indra enquired from her about the mission which had brought her there, and her final destination. She gave him certain information about herself and her mission. For the prosperity of the mankind she was addressed as Padmāśrī, Padmamālinī, Lakshmi, Bhūti, Śrī, Sraddhā, Medhā, Sannati, Vijiti, Sthitī, Dhriti, Siddhi, Svāhā, Svadhā, Samstuti, Niyati and Kirti. She dwelt in the standards of the victorious kings and the residences of right-minded men. She formerly lived with the Asuras who were then virtuous but she left them when they departed from the path of virtue and had decided to live with Indra (*MB.* XII. 221.1-94). The excerpt proves that Śrī's association with the Asuras had finally snapped and by her acceptance of relationship with Vedic god Indra she was fully admitted within the field of Hindu pantheon.

The *Padma Purāṇa*, I. 9. 117-132, gives some further information about Śrī-Lakshmi which shows her all-pervading nature. She is said to be born of lotus, lotus-eyed, living in the lotuses (*padmālayā*), lotus-headed, lotus-faced and she is the mother of all living beings (*lokānām jananīm*). She is Siddhi, Svadhā, Svāhā, Sudhā, Sandhyā, Rātri, Prabhā, Bhūti, Sraddhā, Sarasvatī, Yajñavidyā, Mahāvidyā, Guhyavidyā, Ātmavidyā and the patron

goddess of all success. She is also called *amṛita*. She bestows on her devotees wives, sons, houses, friends, corn, wealth, good health, property, cattle, etc.

Śrī-Lakshmī's identification with Mahāvidyā and Guhyavidyā shows her association with magical and esoteric rites and fully supports the view of the *Milindapraśna* (p. 101) that her cult was esoteric and therefore the *Brahmajāla Sūtra* (*Dīgha Nikāya*, I. 17.1) prescribes her worship.

Umā-Ambā-Durgā is also equated with Śrī-Lakshmī and credited with almost all her functions. It is mentioned in the *Nārada Purāṇa*, II. 3-6, that the Māyā of Mahāvishṇu is named as creator of the world. That Māyā has various synonyms as Durgā, Bhadrakālī, Chandī, Māheśvari, Lakshmī, Vārāhī, Vaishṇavī, etc. (*Liṅga Purāṇa*, II. 3-13). The *Devī-Māhātmya* (*Mār. P. XVIII.* 39, 40, 47), asserts that the Devī has three manifestations, namely Lakshmī, Mahākālī and Sarasvatī.

The emphasis on the concept of Śrī and Durgā is on their generative and preservative aspects which became clearly formulated in a corn-goddess. Later on the concept expanded to the whole vegetation world. In the *Mār. P. XCI.* 43-44 the Devī says: "I shall support the whole world with the life-sustaining vegetables, which shall grow out of my own body, during a period of heavy rain. I shall gain fame on the earth then as Śākambhari (herb-bearing) . . . ". This reminds us how in the *JB.* I. 1.4.4 Śrī is equated with corn (*anna*).

As Śrī is conceived in the form of the earth so is Durgā.

"Thou alone hast become the support of the world, because thou dost subsist in the form of the earth ! By thee, who existest in the form of water . . . " (*Mār. P. XCI.* 3).

That the iconographic concept of Ambā and Śrī were interchangeable is exemplified by some ancient coins. Dr. Mukherjee has carefully examined the figure of the goddess on Huvishka coins identified as Nanā—Ishtar—Anāhita. The cult of Artemis also seem to have played some part in the evolution of the figure. The goddess on the famous Pushkalāvatī coin holding a lotus in her right hand, who had something to do with Tyche or the Goddess of Fortune and identified as Śrī by Coomaraswamy is identified by Mukherjee on the basis of the Kharoshṭhi inscription on the coin as Ambā the consort of Śiva, as his theriomorphic representation as a bull appears on the reverse. On the Kushāṇa coins the goddess holding a lotus standing by the side of Oesho is described as Ommo or Umā. In some cases Umā is replaced by Nanā. As rightly remarked by Mukherjee³ "It appears that the concept of divine maturity common to Ambā, Umā and Nanā, led to the identification of each with the

³ B. N. Mukherjee, *Nana on Lion*, Calcutta, 1969, pp. 13-14.

others. The process of the syncretism might have begun even before the time of Huvishka". He has described other coins with the figure of other goddesses with a lotus whom he identifies with Ambā. It seems that by the second century B.C. Ambā had also assumed the role of a goddess bestowing fortune.

That the syncretism of Umā-Śrī with some foreign goddesses is not merely a hypothetical conjecture based on the evidence of certain Kushāna coins but also on certain literary references. In the *Aṅgavijjā Prakīrṇaka*⁴, a Prakrit text on prognostication, which seems to have been compiled in the early centuries of the Christian era the list of the goddesses besides the names of Śrī, Lachchhi, Devī, Bhagavatī and Sītā appear foreign goddesses Achāl (Var. pa.) lā, Anāditā, Airānī, Ttimissakesī, Tidhiṇī and Sālimālinī.

Among the foreign goddesses mentioned above Apalā may be identified with the Greek goddess Pallas Athene: Anāditā is the Avestan goddess Anāhita whose cult was later on mixed with the cult of Nanā or Nanaia. Airānī may be the Roman goddess Irene, Ttimissakesī may be the nymph Themis from whom her son Evander learned his letters, or more probably the Greek goddess Artemis. Tidhiṇī cannot be identified. Sālimālinī may be identified with the Moon goddess Selene. From what source this information about the goddesses of Greek and Iran came in the *Aṅgavijjā* is not known, but it must be in fairly early times when the Śaka and Greek influence from North-Western India and Mathura had not been lost.

Anāhita, the ancient goddess of the Asianic people of Iran was worshipped under several names. "Under the name of Nanaia her cult continued down to the Parthian period, and we found many terracotta figurines representing her in the Parthian cemetery at the important site [Susa]. The question arises whether this ancient mother-goddess, symbol of fertility and procreation, had not already by syncretism become the goddess Anahita, and whether it is not she who is to be recognized in certain of these representations. Support is lent to this hypothesis by the borders of some of the votive disks which are decorated with fish and pomegranates, two symbols of this divinity of water and fertility"⁵

That this fish was one of the symbols of Anāhita as all proved by its occurrence on an ossuary from Bishapur on which is carved the figure of Anāhita, identified by the vase she holds and the fish by her side.⁶

As we shall see later on the terracotta figurines of a goddess holding a pair of fish are frequently found from Mathura and Kauśāmbī identified as Vasudhārā seem to be the Indianised version of Anāhita who was perhaps introduced in India in the first century B.C., if not earlier.

⁴ *Aṅgavijjā Prakīrṇaka*, ed. by Muni Punya Vijaya, Banaras, 1957, p. 69, Introduction, p. 42.

⁵ R. Ghirshman, *Iran*, Harmondsworth, 1954, p. 103.

⁶ R. Ghirshman, *Parthians and Sassanians*, London, 1962, p. 166, fig. 210.

The lotus flowers and birds especially doves were favourite of Anāhita or Anaitis. As noted by Dalton, "It is probable that in Persia, as in contemporary Greece, the flower had more general symbolical meaning not connected with the worship of any particular deity"

"In the later centuries of its existence the symbol seems to have had chiefly a ceremonial significance. On certain Indo-Scythian coins of Kanerki and other kings it is held in the hand by a female figure which appears to be Nana-Anat or Nanaia by some regarded as a later form of Anaitis; and its use upon the silver dish (no. 208), though perhaps merely convivial, may yet mark a ceremonial festivity with which religious ideas were associated."⁷

As we will see later on the lotus played a very significant part in Indian art and literature. It was a flower not only as a means of decoration and a symbol of beauty but was closely associated with Śrī-Lakshmi symbolizing her intimate contact with the waters. It seems that in the early centuries of the Christian era at least there was a syncretism of Anāhita and Śrī-Lakshmi, both closely associated with the waters, fertility and procreation. Coomaraswamy has rightly observed 'Thus Ahur Mazda corresponds to Varuṇa; Anāhita and Ashi, his daughters, present a close analogy to Śrī-Lakshmi' (*Yakṣas*, II, p. 17).

Anāhita in common with Śrī-Lakshmi in the Yashts. "As the goddess of the waters let down from heaven to fructify the earth and bring increase to flocks and herds and mankind, easy labour to women and abundant milk, she was endowed with the form of Ishtar, As such she was worshipped as 'the Great Goddess whose name is Lady', the 'all-powerful immaculate one', purifying 'the seed of males and the womb and the milk of females.' Like most fertility goddesses, she was also regarded as engaged in warfare, riding in a chariot drawn by four white horses in which are wind, rain, cloud and hail."⁸

Another Iranian goddess with whom the symbolism of fish and horse is connected is Ashi. In the Yasht the symbol of the goddess is fish (R. Ghirshman, *Persia from the Origins to Alexander the Great*, London, 1964, p. 48). The representation of a horse in the Oxus treasure may probably be associated with a prayer to the goddess of plants and birds. Perhaps the goddess Ashi, of whom in Avesta (Yasht, 17, 12) says: 'Those with whom you go have fearsome horses, swiftly moving in free space' (*Ibid.*, p. 94). It will be seen later on that Śrī was also connected ultimately with the horse, though this fact alone may not prove her connection with Ashi.

Artemis with whom we have suggested the identification of Ttimissakesi of the *Āṅgavijjā* is also mentioned in the *Bhaishajyavastu* of the Gilgit text:⁹

⁷ O. M. Dalton, *The Treasure of the Oxus*, London (Third Edition), 1964, p. 27.

⁸ E. O. James, *The Cult of the Mother Goddess*, London, 1959, pp. 94-95.

⁹ *Gilgit Manuscripts*, Ed. by N. Dutt, Vol. III. Part I. Srinagar. 1947, p. 17.

It is mentioned that the Buddha on his visit to Mathura managed to discipline the Yakṣiṇī Timisikā with four hundred members of her family. Perhaps this Timisikā was the same as Ttimissakesī and represented the Greek goddess Artemis, though what form she adopted in India is not known.

Artemis originally was an Earth-mother and Mistress of the Beasts in the forests and hills in which she roamed, hunted and danced before she became a city-divinity. She also protected young animals. As a goddess of fertility she assisted females of all species to bring forth their young and helped women in the pain of child birth.

In keeping with the common function of the Mother goddesses Artemis and Śrī have certain common interest such as love for animals and fertility. But she is nearer to the Vedic goddess Aranyāni than Śrī. "The forest as a whole appears as a deity under the name of Aranyāni, the jungle goddess, who is invoked in *RV.* 10. 146. Here she is called the mother of beasts, abounding in food without tillage; and various uncanny sounds heard in her dark solitudes are weirdly described."¹⁰

Śrī also bore an intimate relationship with Pṛithivī. As a matter of fact in later iconography Vishnu's two consorts are Bhūdevī and Śrīdevī. The *HI.* III. 12.4 equates Śrī-Lakṣmī (*Padmāsanādevī*) with Pṛithivī. Śrī and Pṛithivī share many common traits which show close association between the two goddesses. The Earth goddess Pṛithivī¹¹ is the same as Aditi the Universal Goddess (*Viśvarūpi*) (*TB.* I. 7.6.7). The *SB.* II. 2.1.19 asserts 'Verily the Earth is Aditi. Elsewhere the *SB.* VII. 4.3.7 observes that 'Aditi is this Earth, the container and supporter of the whole world'. The *AB.* VIII. 5 is explicit in identifying Śrī with Pṛithivī, 'The Earth is Śrī (*iyam Pṛithivī vai Śrīh*).

The Earth as a goddess of fertility is referred to in the *SB.* XII. 4.7. The (Earth) is the womb! (*yonirvā iyam Pṛithivī*). The fertility aspect of the Earth is further stressed in the *SB.* III. 5.2.12 where she is compared as a lioness winning abundant offsprings and wealth.

The maternal aspect of the Earth has been stressed several times. In the *AV.* XII. 1.12 it is proclaimed: 'She is the mother I am her son' (*mātā putro aham pṛithivyāḥ*). The *TB.* II. 8.9.1 says 'The Earth the mother' (*iyam pṛithivī vai mātā*). In *TB.* II. 4.6.8 she is 'Earth the great mother'. In the *SB.* V. 3.1.4 it is said that the Earth like a mother nourished the people.

Pṛithivī is not only the mother of human beings but also of plants and corn which she nourishes. She is addressed in the *AV.* XII. 1.4 as 'She who is Lady of the earth's four regions, in whom our food and corn-lands (*krishṭayah*)

¹⁰ A. A. Macdonell, *Vedic Mythology*, Varanasi, 1963 (Reprint), p. 154.

¹¹ V. S. Agrawala, "Mathura Terracottas," *J.U.P.H.S.*, Vol. IX, Pt. 2, July 1936. pp. 6-38.

had there being.' She is particularly mentioned as the protectress of trees and plants (*AV.* XII. 1.57). She is verily the house of birds, and kine and horses (*gavāmaśrānām vayasascha vishṭhā*), this Pṛithivī vouchsafed luck (*AV.* XII. 1.5). Pṛithivī is also the source of all treasures. She is called the nourisher of the world (*viśvambharā*), store-house of all treasures (*rasudhāni*) and gold-breasted (*hiranyavakshā*) (*AV.* XII. 1.6). This idea of Pṛithivī as the source of all treasures is further expanded in a hymn in the *AV.* XII. 1.44:

"May Earth the Goddess, she who bears her treasure stored up in many a place, gold, gems, and riches,

Giver of opulence, grant great possession to us bestowing them with love and favour."

Pṛithivī, like the goddess Artemis also associated with fierce wild beasts from whose depredations she protects the people. The *AV.* XII. 49 observes:

"All sylvan beasts of thine that love the woodlands, man-eaters, forest-haunting, lions, tigers,

Hyena, wolf, Misfortune, evil spirit, drive from us, chase the demons to a distance."

The poet is in love with Pṛithivī and extols her fragrance which permeates plants and the waters. To quote the *AV.* XII. 1.23:—

"Scent that hath risen from thee, O Earth, the fragrance which growing herbs and plants and waters carry,

Shared by Apsarases, shared by Gandharvas, there-with make thou me sweet: let no man hate me."

The earth's fragrance also entered the lotus (*vaste gandhal pushkaramaviveśa*). *AV.* XII. 1.24 thereby establishing a close contact with the lotus Pṛithivī and Śrī.

Pṛithivī as a goddess appears in *RV.* V. 84. 1-3 where she is called the bearer of the tool that rends the hills thereby meaning that she wields the *vajra* or thunder bolt. She is said to be rich in torrents that fertilize the earth which is designated as *bhūmi* as opposed to the Earth goddess designated as Pṛithivī. Her association with the clouds is emphasized and she is regarded as the mistress of the woods. When the lightning strikes her clouds the rain descends.

Pṛithivī also seems to have been associated with the funeral rites. In his excavations at Lauriya T.B. Bloch found from the mounds M and N along

a small deposit of human bone-mixed up with charcoal two small gold leaves with the naked female figures who are shewn in a strictly frontal and hieratic pose, the legs close together and the feet pointing in opposite directions. The hips are steatopygous and the hands are lowered at the sides and the vulva is prominently rendered.¹²

Bloch is of the opinion and probably he is right that the mounds at Lauriya are funerary mounds. He identifies the goddess as *Prithivī* quoting *RV.* X. 18.10 which says that *Prithivī* is the saviour of the body from *Nirīti*, the goddess of death and decay.

It is significant to note here that the nude goddess on the Lauriya gold leaves is iconographically almost identical with the figure of the Mother goddess prominently identified as *Śrī* depicted on Mauryan carved discs. This feature also should support the view that the iconography of *Śrī* and *Prithivī* was very much mixed up.

As we have pointed out above the concept of *Śrī* contains many elements which project her visual image. We are not concerned here with the abstract concept of *Śrī* and *Lakshmi* in the *Vedas*, as the subject has been amply dealt by Oldenberg,¹³ Coomaraswamy¹⁴ and Gonda.¹⁵ Here we are concerned only with that phase in her development when she actually assumed the role of a goddess. *Śrī* and *Lakshmi* appear together as two heavenly deities in the *U.S.* XXXI. However, interesting information about *Śrī* in the form of a goddess is obtained from the *SB.* XI. 4.3.6-20. The myth points out that *Prajāpati* heated in the act of creation created *Śrī* who, 'stood resplendent, shining and trembling.'

Seeing her form the gods were attracted towards her. Spared by *Prajāpati* from the envy of the gods who wanted to kill her, *Agni* received from her food, *Varuna* his universal sovereignty, *Mitra* his noble rank, *Bṛihaspati* his holy lustre, *Sāvitra* his domain, *Pūshan* his wealth, *Sarasvatī* her prosperity and *Tvashṭṛ* his beautiful form. According to the *SB.* X. 2.1.49 *Śrī* is immortal and effulgent. The sacrifice of the *Aśvamedha* is compared with *Śrī* (*SB.* X. 1.4.14). At the time of the *Rājasūya* sacrifice the lion-skin on which the king sat is called *Śrī* (*SB.* X. 1.4.14).

It is thus evident that *Śrī* assuming the role of a goddess was distinguished by her resplendent figure and she became the dispenser of food, universal sovereignty, noble rank, domain and beautiful form. All these virtues as-

¹² *ASI., Ann. Rep.* 1906-07, pp. 119.

¹³ H. Oldenberg, "Vedic Words for 'Beautiful' and 'Beauty' and the Vedic sense of the Beautiful", *Rupam*, No. 32, Oct. 1927, pp. 98-121.

¹⁴ A. K. Coomaraswamy, "Early Indian Iconography, II. *Śrī-Lakshmi*", *Eastern Art*, Vol. I, 1929; *Eastern Art*, Vol. II, 1930, pp. 240-41.

¹⁵ J. Gonda, *Aspects of Early Vishnuism*, Utrecht, 1954.

sociated with her find full expression in the development of Śrī as expounded in the *Śrī-Sūkta*,¹⁶ a *Khila* of the *RV*. and in the *MB*.

The central point of the *Sūkta* is that it stresses the absolute identity of Śrī with Lakshmī. She is golden hued (*hiranyavarṇām*), she wears a gold and silver necklace (*suvarṇarajatasrajām*), she is moon-faced, radiant as the sun, fawn-eyed (*hariṇīm*), and the bestower of gold, cattle and horses. She rides a chariot yoked with horses and delights in the trumpeting of elephants (*hastinādaprāmodinīm*). She wears a golden *chādar* (*hiranya prāvarām*) she is moist (*ārdrām*), resplendent (*jvalantīm*), satisfied and satisfier (*triptām tarpayantīm*). She is haloed like moon (*chandrām prabhāsām*) and effulgent with glory (*yaśasā jvalantīm*). She stands on a lotus (*padmashitām*), she is lotus hued (*padmavaruṇām*), she holds a lotus flower (*padmanenīm*), and she wears a lotus garland (*padmamālinīm*). Her favourite is *bilva* tree and fruit which are supposed to drive away misfortune from within and without. She is associated with Kubera (*devasakhaḥ*) and Maṇibhadra (*Maṇinā saha*). She is prayed for fame and prosperity (*vriddhim*) and removal of hunger, thirst, Jyeshṭhā-Alakshmī (misfortune), poverty and adversity. She is perceptible through odour (*gandhadvārām*), well supplied (*nityapushtām*),¹⁷ abounding in dung (*karīshinīm*) and the Mistress of all Beings (*īśvarīm sarvabhūtānām*). She is associated with cattle and food. Her excellent progeny is said to be mud (*kardana*) which created life. She is associated with oozing slime (*chiklitā*). She is said to live in lotus pond. She holds the stick decorated with golden necklace (*yaṣṭīm suvarṇām hemamālinīm*).

It is evident from the *Śrī-Sūkta* that Śrī is pictured here as the guardian deity of farmers. The commentary on the *TĀ*. X. 1.43 calls her *mrītikābhīmā-ninīdevatā*, the goddess proud of the soil. The *Rgvidhāna*¹⁸ describes a series of rites requiring *bilva* fruits and lotus flowers intended to invoke the goddess to come into a lotus or into gold.¹⁹ Her designation as 'moist' (*ārdra*) also implies fresh green as a plant, living. Her association with the waters is indicated by the lotus and the mud and slime from which it grew. Her odour reminds the fragrance of the earth which entered the lotus. *AV*. XII. 1.24.

It is evident from the *Śrī-Sūkta* that Lakshmī was only a synonym of Śrī. Lakshmī perhaps originally stands for a separate divinity representing the signs, evidences and prognostication of luck and prosperity is later on conceived as the goddess of gold and wealth. But as a corn goddess her functions are similar to that of Śrī with whom she is equated. She is sometimes associated with a basket of unhusked rice at the time of her festival. She is said to manifest

¹⁶ Fitz-Edward Hall, "The *Śrī-Sūkta* or Litany to Fortune", *JASB*, XXVIII (1859), pp. 25-129; J. Scheftelowitz, *Die Apokryphen des Rg Veda*, Breslau, 1906, pp. 72-73.

¹⁷ The Commentary explains—*nītyām nirantara saśyadibhiḥ pushṭām samūddhām*, meaning ever prosperous by vegetation etc.

¹⁸ The *Rgvidhāna*, tr. by J. Gonda, Utrecht, 1951. 2.17.6.

¹⁹ Gonda, *Aspects of early Visiṇuism*, p. 214.

herself in the shape of seedlings grown in a winnowing basket. According to the *MB*. XIII. 11.14 she lives in maidens, in ornaments, in the rain clouds, in lakes filled with lotus flowers, elephants and kings on the throne.²⁰

Sitā as furrow or cultivated earth appears as a fertility goddess, in *RV*. IV. 57.6-7. She was worshipped with milk to obtain prosperity. In the rites relating to the furrow (*Sītāyajña, Pāraskara Grīhya Sūtra*, 2.17.91) its sacrifices are held in the rice or barley field and Sitā is invoked with Śrī. According to the Jain *Brihat Kalpasūtra Bhāshya* (3647) in this Yajña (*Sitāi janno*) the plough was worshipped.

The Purāṇas mention several legends about the origin of Śrī-Lakshmī. One legend (*MB*. XII. 59. 133-134) establishes her association with Vishnu and Dharma. It says that from Vishnu's forehead sprang a golden lotus from which was born Śrī who was united to Dharma. From this union was born wealth (*artha*). In the Paurāṇic literature, however, Śrī-Lakshmī is treated as the wife of Vishnu. The wife of Vishnu (*Vishṇupatni*) mentioned in the *AV*. VII. 46.3 is not Lakshmī. She is perhaps the same as Sinivalī who is said to be possessed of beautiful limbs and steatopygous (*AV*. VII. 46.2). Sinivalī at one place in *AV*. is also called the wife of Vishnu.²¹ Gonda is of the opinion that Sinivalī could be equated with Pṛithivī and as Pṛithivī and Śrī are also equated Śrī's association with Vishnu could be of a fairly early date.

In the Paurāṇic literature Śrīvatsa became Vishnu's favourite symbol. His various synonyms are Śrīvāhavaksha, Śrīvāsa, Śripatī, Śrimatāmvara, Śrīśa, Śrinivāsa, Śrinidhi, Śrīvibhāvana, Śrīdhara, Śrikara and Śrimān (*MB*. XIII. 135. 77-78).

The legend of the churning of the ocean is of late origin but it throws light on Śrī's close association with the waters and other objects. The *MB* 1.16.34, simply observes that she emerged from the ocean dressed in white and thereafter was followed by Surādevī and the white horse. The *Vishṇu P.* I. 9. 100-105, however, gives a full version of the legend. It is said that in the course of the churning the ocean at first appeared Dhanyantari followed by the resplendent Śrī standing on an expanded lotus and also holding a lotus. The saints assembled there worshipped her by reciting the *Śrī-Sūkta*. There was dancing and music by Gandharvas and Apsarases. The Gaṅgā and other rivers presented themselves for the lustration and the Dīggajas (presiding elephants of the directions) poured water over her from golden pitchers. The milky ocean presented her with a lotus garland and Viśvakarman, the heavenly architect, decorated her person with ornaments. Thus decorated she took her place on the chest of Vishnu. Indra in his prayer to her brings out the outstanding features of her character. (*Vishṇu P.* I. 9. 117-133). The prayer begins "I bow

²⁰ *Ibid*, p. 128.

²¹ Macdonell, *Vedic Mythology*, p. 25

to you, Lady of the Lotus, your eyes are like expanded lotuses. Your stay on Vishṇu's chest your abode is in the lotus (*padmālayam*). You hold lotus.....
.....you are peaceful and terrible, you are the bestower of wife, sons, house, wealth, grain and friends. You are destroyer of the enemy".

It is mentioned in the *Liṅga Purāṇa* that at the time of churning the ocean at first appeared Alakshmī followed by Lakshmī, the former called Jyeshṭhā or Elder.²² The reference finds an echo of Jyeshṭhā-Alakshmī of the *Śrī-Śūkta* (8).

The *Vishṇudharmottara Purāṇa* I. 41. 33-36 gives a different version about the origin of Lakshmī. It is said that in Svāyambhuva Manvantara she appeared as Bhīṣma's daughter, in Svārochisha Manvantara she was born as the daughter of Agni, in Tāmasa Manvantara she appeared as the daughter of Prithivī, in Raivata Manvantara she was born of *bilva*, in Chākshusha Manvantara she sprang from a blossoming lotus and in Vaivasvata Manvantara she appeared from the churning of the ocean.

Thus in a nutshell the *Vishṇudharmottara* establishes the relationship of Śrī with Bhīṣma, Agni, Prithivī, *bilva*, lotus and the ocean.

The iconography of Śrī Lakshmī as described in the *Purāṇas* also conforms to her original concept in the *Śrī-Śūkta*. In the *Matsya P. CCLX.* 40.47 she is represented as youthful, firm breasted and red lipped. Her tresses are decorated with the lotus, Svastika and conches and she wears a long tunic, necklaces, armlets, bracelets and the zone. She holds a lotus in the left hand and *bilva* in the right. On her either side stands a *chauri*-bearer standing on lotus. She is illustrated by an elephant on either side. The Lokeśas, Gandharvas, Yakshas, Siddhas, Asuras, Nāgas, Piśācas, etc. offer prayer to her.

The *Vishṇudharmottara Purāṇa* III. 82. 1-6 ordains that Lakshmī should be two-handed seated on *śimhāsana* on which is placed an expanded lotus. She also holds a lotus. In the four-handed type in the natural right hand she holds a lotus with its stalk touching the armlet, the other hands hold a *pūrnaghata* and *śaṅkha*. Behind her stand two elephants pouring water over her from pitchers. A lotus shades her head. The text further describes the symbolism of the lotus, the *pūrnaghata*, the conch-shell and *bilva*. The conch-shell represents goodluck, *bilva* the whole world, *pūrnaghata* the essence of the waters (*apām saromritam*) and the lotus wealth and prosperity. The two elephants represent the *nidhis*, *śaṅkha* and *padma*. Lakshmī's forms are further expanded into Rājaśrī, Svargalakshmī, Brāhmī and Jayalakshmī.

It may also be noted that though the equation of Śrī and Prithivī is fairly evident, in their iconographical details as well they are fairly close together. The *Vishṇudharmottara* III. 61. 1-4 prescribes that Prithivī should be of very

²² Govind Chandra, *Prāchīna Bhārat men Lakshmī Pratimā* (Hindi), Varanasi, n.d. p. 40.

fair colour and bejewelled and wear white garments. In her four hands she holds a jewel bowl (*ratnapātra*), a grain bowl (*sasyapātra*), a bowl full of vegetation (*ohshadhipātra*) and a lotus. In the background appeared the four Diggajas. The goddess is regarded as the source of vegetation. Her white garment symbolizes Dharma and the lotus the treasures.

As has already pointed out that Śrī in the beginning was the goddess of farmers and fertility and the *ārdra* 'moist', *karishī*, 'abounding in dung', *kardama* 'mud', *chiklī* 'slime' seem to be words adopted from a farmer's vocabulary. Śrī's intimate relation with the cow-dung is peculiarly enough stressed in the *MB*. XIII. 81. Yudhishṭhīra asked Bhīṣma how contact was established between Śrī and the cow-dung. He related the dialogue which ensued between Śrī and the cows. It is said that Śrī assuming a beautiful form (*vapuh kāntam*), entered the cows who were wonderstruck at her resplendent beauty (*trūpasya sampadam*). There at she informed them that she was Śrī the popular goddess (*lokakāntā*). Indra, Vivasvat, Soma, Vishnu, Agni, the *rishi*s and gods gained prosperity through her and that she also wanted to offer a gift to them as well. But the cows instead of being grateful for the offer called her fickle-minded and asked her to leave them alone as they were all healthy. Śrī wondered at their attitude as the gods, the Asuras and Nāgas all sought her protection. Being refused several times by the cows Śrī asked them at least to point out some part of their body where she could reside. Moved by the insignificant request they agreed that she should reside in their dung and urine. Thus her ancient function as abounding in the dung, a necessary aid to agricultural operations is fully supported by the *MB*.

Śrī also seems to have been included among Yakshinis. The *Śrī-Sūkta* mentions her relationship with Kubera and Yaksha Manibhadra.²³ Coomaraswamy²⁴ has rightly pointed out that the general character of the Yaksha type includes universal deities like Kubera, Kāmadeva and Śrī. In keeping with the character of other Yakshas Śrī is also associated with the waters. At Bharhut Sirimā devatā appears in the company of Yakshinis. A Devatā holding a bundle of lotus flowers has been identified by Coomaraswamy as Śrī.²⁵ Another Devatā at Bharhut holding a lamp and standing on a full blown lotus is identified by Coomaraswamy as the prototype of Sarasvatī of late Brahmanical iconography.²⁶ It is significant to note in this connection that in literature often Śrī and Sarasvatī are equated.

The commentary on the *Śrī-Sūkta* on verse 7 (Hall, *loc. cit.*, p. 127) gives some interesting details of Śrī's connection with Kubera and others. It says: *Devasakhalah devo Mahādevastasya sakhā Kuberalah. Kirtiścha kiryahbhimānī Dakshakanyā devatā: Kuberakośāśālā. Sā vācha maṇinā chintāmaṇinā Mayi-*

²³ *Yakṣas*, II, p. 13.

²⁴ A. K. Coomaraswamy, *La Sculpture de Bharhut*, Paris, 1956, p. 61, Pl. XVI, fig. 49.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 63, Pl. XVIII, fig. 45.

bhadreṇa koshādhyakṣheṇa saha sārdhamupaitu upagchchhatu. "Devasakha is Mahādeva's friend, Kirti proud of her form is the daughter of Daksha or Kubera's treasury is Kirti. She with the wishing jewel, Chintāmani, may hold treasurer Maṇibhadra."

It may be noted here that certain symbols such as the *makara*, etc. to be discussed later on, Śrī shares with the river goddesses because these symbols are associated with the waters. As observed by Coomaraswamy, "Iconographically the differentiated form of the river goddesses (in northern India only) is directly derived from the Yakṣi-dryad, and this implies that the latter, despite the vegetal and apparently terrestrial habitat, was still primarily a spirit of the waters."²⁶

The *bilva* tree and fruit were favourite of Śrī as mentioned in the *Śrī-Sūkta* and other sources. It is mentioned in the *AB*. II. 1.6 ff. that those desirous of Śrī were enjoined to raise up the *yūpa* of *bilva* tree with the branches. In the *Manusmṛiti* V. 120 *bilva* is called *Śrīphala*. It is mentioned in the *Vāyu Purāṇa* XXXVII. 9.15 that to the east of Śrīsara was situated an extensive forest of *bilva* (*bilva-vana*) which yielded sweet golden fruits. It was known as *Śrīvana* inhabited by Gandharvas, Kinnaras, Nāgas and Siddhas who assembled there to eat the *bilva* fruit. Śrī resided there. It is mentioned in the *Kādambarī* that in the courtyard of the temple of Chāndī there grew *bilva* trees along with the date and other palm-trees.²⁷

The *bilva* tree and fruit are also sacred to Śiva and Ambā. It is difficult to say as to why it is so, but the possibility is that the *bilva* fruit because of its mass of seed came to be regarded as a fruit symbolizing fertility. A parallel may be drawn to the pomegranate which perhaps because of its seeds became a symbol of the Iranian goddess Anāhita.

Another feature of Śrī on which *Śrī-Sūkta* lays stress is her resplendent beauty, a fact supported by Paurāṇic and iconographical sources. Her golden complexion, the fawn-like eyes²⁸ and the moon face are all praised. The *MB*. often refers to Śrī's beauty as a point of comparison. Thus Girika's great beauty is compared with that of Śrī (*MB*. I. 57. 38; *atīva rūpasampannām sākshāch-chhriyamivaparām*). Śakuntalā is said to be as beautiful as Śrī (*MB*. I. 65.3).

According to the *Śrī-Sūkta* I, Śrī wore a necklace made of gold and silver beads (*suvarṇarajatasrajām*), though *sraja* as suggested by Govind Chandra might have been an ornament attached to the forehead. It is remarkable that even today women while worshipping Lakshmi on the eighth of the black

²⁶ Coomaraswamy, *Yakṣas*, Part II, p. 55.

²⁷ S. K. Dikshit, *The Mother Goddess*, Poona, n.d., p. 78.

²⁸ The Commentary on verse (*Hall, loc. cit.*, p. 125), says that the word *harinīm* may mean green-coloured or doe-shaped. According to the *Devi Purāṇa* Śrī assuming the form of a doe roamed in a forest. The relation of Śrī and the doe will be discussed later on.

half of Āsvina, an ornament made up of barley-shaped silver and gold beads known as *jūtiyā* is put on their heads.²⁹

Another characteristic feature of Śrī is that she was connected with a golden pillar (*yashti*) decorated with a golden necklace (*suvarṇām hemamālāntim*). Whatever may be the explanation of the *suvarṇa yashtinim*, it is evident as in the second century B.C. at least pillars were raised in honour of Śrī.³⁰ V. S. Agrawala sees in the representation of ornamented pillars on the outside of the left pillar of the Northern Gateway of Stūpa I at Sanchi the vestige of Śrī *Yashṭi*. According to him it represents the *Suvarṇa-Yashṭi* with eight pegs for hanging golden necklaces (*hemamālā*), a visible symbol of Śrī Lakṣmī, who resplendent as the sun takes the form of a golden pillar loaded with golden necklaces.

In two necklaces on a pillar in the Northern Gateway, Sanchi appear some symbols which seem to be connected with the cult of Śrī-Lakṣmī. In one necklace appear eleven symbols and in the second thirteen symbols. Among the symbols may be mentioned the sun, wheel, lotus, pond, goad, Indra's banner (*vaijayantī*), the lotus, a pair of fish (*mina-yugala*), battle axe (*paraśu*), mirror (*darpana*), *kalpavriksha*, and garlands (*mālyadāma*) and *śrīvatsa*. Later on the number became fixed in Jain *Āyāgapattas* and this new set of symbols was denoted as *Aṣṭa Maṅgalakamālā* which included *mina mithuna*, *devamānagriha*, *śrīvatsa*, *vardhamāna*, *triratna*, *pushpadāma*, *vaijayantī* and *pūrṇaghaṭa*.

Śrī-Lakṣmī as a goddess of wealth is well known. The 68th chapter of the *Mār. P.*³¹ describes the *Padmī Vidyā* with its Eight *Nidhis* which brought gems, garlands, garments, ornaments, unguent, pots and pans, furnished beds and proficiency in music. As a matter of fact *Padmī Vidyā* is defined as a *Māyā* (*vidyā*) which brought to the devotee all desired objects (*Mār. P.* LXVI. 7). Lakṣmī is named as the presiding deity of *Padmī Vidyā* (*Padmī nāmā yā vidyā Lakshmīstasyādhīdevatā*, *Mār. P.* LXVII. 2). According to the *Mār. P.* LXVIII. 5 the *nidhis* are namely, *Padma*, *Mahāpadma*, *Maṅkara*, *Kachchhapa*, *Mukunda*, *Nandaka*, *Nila* and *Śaṅkha*. Curiously, each *nidhi* is associated with some lucrative profession. The following are the *nidhis*:

1. *Padma*: It indicates the wealth in term of gold, silver and other merchandise. Their dealers were typical shroffs who enjoyed hereditary wealth. They performed *Yajñas*, distributed *dakṣiṇā* and built temples and mansions.

2. *Mahāpadma*: Its possessor dealt in precious stones, pearls and coral.

²⁹ Govind Chandra, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

³⁰ V. S. Agrawala, *Indian Art*, Varanasi, 1965, pp. 158-159.

³¹ V. S. Agrawala, "Padmī Vidyā of the Mārkandeya Purāna," *Purāṇa*, Vol. 1, No. 2, Feb. 1960, pp. 188-197.

Apparently they were jewellers by profession. Their profession was also hereditary.

3. *Makara*: The *nidhi* was associated with a class of merchants who dealt in weapons such as arrows, swords, bows, shields and horses. Their wealth lasted only for one generation. They were friendly to kings and soldiers.

4. *Kachchhapa*: The owner of this *nidhi* was an extremely miserly and self-conceited fellow.

5. *Mukunda*: The *nidhi* was associated with hereditarily rich persons fond of music, dancing, drama and poetry. They gave money to artists for their performances.

6. *Nandaka*: or *Nandyāvarta*: This *nidhi* was associated with landlords, feudal chiefs, etc. They supported their own families, kept big harems and possessed precious stones.

7. *Nila*: It was associated with that class of merchants who dealt with merchandise and building stores such as textile, cotton, grain, fruit, flowers, pearl, coral, shell, timber, etc. They built ponds, tanks, gardens, dykes across the rivers and planted trees. Their fortune lasted for three generations.

8. *Śaṅkha*: The eighth *nidhi* was associated with tight-fisted persons who enjoyed good food and clothing of their own making, made their families miserable and made no gift to their friends and relatives.

It is difficult to say on what basis the above classification of the *nidhis* was made and each *nidhi* assigned to different social groups. It is, however, evident that the majority of the symbols are associated with the water cosmology. The *Padma*, *Mahāpadma*, *Makara*, *Kachchhapa* and *Śaṅkha* are definitely associated with the waters. It is possible that at some early time the *makara* in a secondary sense stood as a symbol of maritime commerce i.e. prosperity, then it became the vehicle of Varuṇa and lastly the vehicle of Gaṅgā. The *Śaṅkha* in the *AV*. IV. 10. 1-4 is said to be gold-born, source of the pearl, born from the sea. As a symbol of Śri-Lakshmi it not only appears in the *Vishnudhar*. *Pur*. III. 82.7, but also on the Besnagar Pillar capital, with which we will deal later on.

The Jainas, both Śvetāmbara and Digambara have eight auspicious symbols. Some of which are common to both Hindu and Jain. It is, however, difficult to say what exact relation the Jain symbols bore to Śri-Lakshmi cult. The traditional auspicious symbols are *svastika*, *śrivatsa*, *nandyāvarta*, *vardhamānaka* (water-flask), *bhadrāsana* (throne), *kalaśa* (the full pitcher), *darpana* (mirror) and *matsya-yugala* (a pair of

fish).³² It may, however, be conceded that the royal seat, the wishing bowl, the full pitcher and the pair of fish are all connected with the complex ideological and iconographical concepts of Śrī.

The Jain auspicious symbols served as a decorative element for architraves, Chaitya tree platforms, *bali-paṭṭas* and the *āyāgapaṭṭas* of the Kushāṇa period. However, in this period some more symbols as *ratnarāśi* (heap of precious stones), *triratna*, etc. also appear. It is therefore, evident that in the Kushāṇa period the set of the Eight Auspicious symbols had not been finally settled.

The true significance of the Jain symbols remain unexplained, though the *Achāradinakara*, a late Jain text tries to interpret them with a religious bias. Thus the *kalāsa* according to the text, represents the Jina as the very 'full-vessel' to his family. The mirror stands for seeing the reflection of one's true self; the *bhadrāsana* signifies the seat by the Jina and the *vardhāmānaka* symbolizes the increase of wealth, fame, merit, etc. by the grace of the Lord. "It is said that the highest knowledge has manifested itself from the heart of the Jina, in the form of *śrivatsa*-mark on his chest. *Svastika*, according to the text, signifies *svasti*, that is, *śānti* or peace, *nandyāvarta* (diagram) with its nine points stands for the nine *nidhis* (treasures). The pair of fish is the symbol of Cupid's banners come to worship the Jina after the defeat of the god of Love."³³

Another set of fourteen symbols appearing in the dreams of Triśalā and Devānandā are closely associated with Śrī as we will see later on. The symbols are:³⁴

(1) An elephant (*gaja*), (2) a bull (*vasaha*), (3) a lion (*siha*) (4) the anointing (*abhisīya*) of Śrī-Lakshmī, (5) a garland (*dāma*), (6) the moon (*sasi*), (7) the sun (*dinayaram*), (8) a flag (*jhayam*), (9) a vase (*kumbham*), (10) a lotus lake (*padmasara*), (11) the ocean (*sāgara*), (12) a celestial abode (*vimānabhāvana*), (13) a heap of jewels (*rayanuchchaya*) and (14) a flame (*sihīm*).

Dr. U. P. Shah basing his information on some commentary of the *Kalpa-sūtra* has given some details about the dream symbols. Thus the elephant is white, the bull is encircled by an aura of light, the lion is white and playful, the four-handed Śrī carries lotuses and the moon is full, the sun is red the banner is tied to a golden staff tipped with a lion, the full vase is filled with water and lotus flowers, the abode of Fortune and the lake are swarming with bees and aquatic birds. The ocean is the Milky Ocean with agitated water and filled with marine creatures and the celestial palace is provided with columns, garlands and sculptures. In the list of dream symbols the Digam-

³² U. P. Shah, *Studies in Jaina Art*, Banaras, 1955, pp. 109-110.

³³ U. P. Shah, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

³⁴ H. Jacobi, *Jaina Sūtras*, Part I, Delhi, 1964 (Reprint), p. 219.

bara tradition include a pair of fish, the aerial car and Nāgendra Bhavana (the abode of the Nāga king).³⁵

We have already referred to Śrī's *yashṭi* or staff and the explanation offered by Dr. Agrawala, though it is another matter to accept or reject his view. However, it is possible that at some remote time wooden *yūpas* might have been raised in honour of Śrī. This surmise is supported by the existence of at least two stone pillars dedicated to Śrī, one of which comes from Vidisha. Cunningham³⁶ recognized in the Besnagar pillar capital Kalpadruma represented by a banyan tree with long pendent roots from which square pieces of money are falling and overflowing the vessels placed below. The upper part of the tree nearly spherical in shape is covered with large leaves and small berries of *Ficus Indica*. Below is the cylindrical neck shooting from which are stems and roots forming eight compartments. "In these are placed alternatively, four vessels full of money and four-skins of wine (?). These last may perhaps be intended for bags of money as each is fastened with a band round the neck. The open vessels are all different. One is a large shell standing on its end; a second is a full-blown lotus flower; a third is a 'lotā', or a common water-vessel" (Cunningham). The conchshell and the lotus flower exuding coins are correctly identified as the two *nidhis* of Kubera. According to Banerjea,³⁷ the eight objects coming down from the banyan tree are four bags and four open vessels all containing money and the earliest representations of eight *nidhis* of Kubera (*Vāyu P.* XLVII, 9-10). However, these *nidhis* did not exclusively belong to Kubera and as shown earlier they were also intimately associated with the cult of Śrī.

The banyan capital at Besnagar (3rd—2nd century B.C.) was probably placed, according to Coomaraswamy on the top of a column standing in front of a shrine of Kubera-Vaiśravana whose special cognizance is a bag or a vase full of coins. However, Banerjea suggests, perhaps rightly, that the column as well might have faced a shrine of Śrī, the Goddess of Fortune, whose association with Kubera as well as his Eight Treasures is well known.³⁸

To strengthen his view further Banerjea identifies the colossal female statue which was found very near to the banyan capital by Cunningham as none other than Śrī herself.

Sirimā of Bharhut and Besnagar both have a similarity of concept. "Both these figures conform to the early Indian concept about female beauty, characterised by a prominent bust and protuberant hips indicative of motherhood

³⁵ U. P. Shah, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

³⁶ A. Cunningham, *A.S.R.*, Vol. X, p. 43; J. N. Banerjea, "Padmī-Vidyā," *J.I.S.O.A.*, Vol. IX, 1941, pp. 141-146.

³⁷ Banerjea, *J.I.S.O.A.*, 1941, p. 142.

³⁸ Coomaraswamy, *Yakṣas*, II.

and fecundity. This is known in comparatively late texts as 'nyagrodhapari-maṇḍalā' type, in which the breasts are firm and prominent, the buttocks spacious and the middle part comparatively narrow. This emphasis on productivity is quite apposite in the case of the goddess Śrī (Sirimā) who is the presiding deity of Padmini-vidyā which brings forth earthly enjoyment (*bhogopādikā*)."³⁹

The physical charm of Śrī as pointed out by Banerjea and the epics. *Purāṇas* and iconographical literature is not only evident from early representations of Śrī in stone, but as we will see later on also in carved stone discs and terracotta figurines as well. As a matter of fact this standard of female beauty was laid down as early as the *ŚB*.⁴⁰ The steatopyga of a woman and her slender waist are praised:

evamiva hi yoshaṁ praśānsanti prithuśroṇih, vimṛishtātñarāṁsū madhye samgrāhyeti. ŚB. I. 2.5.16.

While describing the shape of altar the *ŚB*. III. 5.1.11 says that "it should be broader on the west side, contracted in the middle, and broad again on the east side; for thus shaped they praise a woman: 'broad about the hips, somewhat narrow between the shoulders, and contracted in the middle (or, about the waist).'"

The fact that pillars were being raised in honour of Śrī is further supported by the Lalabhadat pillar.⁴¹ Lalabhadat, a small village in Dehrapur Tehsil of Kanpur District has a broken red sandstone pillar. On one of the octagonal portion relief connected with the Śrī cult appears. At the top are represented a couple of flying geese carrying a box-like object suspended to a pole. The box may indicate a jewel-casket. A little below appears the Sun god seated in his chariot drawn by four horses. A female figure on the right holds an umbrella over his head and the female figure on the left carries a *chaurī*. The horses are trampling over the head of a demon, who according to Vats symbolizes the spirit of darkness. The three female figures representing Ushā, Pratyushā and Chhāyā, the three wives of Sūrya stand on a double row of thirteen dwarfish figures identified by Sivaramamurti as Bālakhilya Rishis. Below the dwarfs is represented a dancing peacock with its tail spread fanwise. Below the peacock appears one elephant facing to the left. The lowermost scene represents Śrī-Lakshmi receiving her lustration from an elephant standing on either side pouring water over her head from upturned pitchers. To her proper right appears a Yaksha carrying on his head the bowl of plenty and a pillar crowned by a cock. It is obvious from this pillar that the large figure of a cock carved in the round found from the site must have served as the crowning feature of the Lalabhadat pillar.

³⁹ *J.I.S.O.A.*, 1941, p. 144-145.

⁴⁰ V. S. Agrawala, *J.U.P.H.S.*, Vol. IX, 1, July 1936, p. 16.

⁴¹ Lalabhadat, *A. S. I.*, *Annual Report*, 1929-30, pp. 132-133, Pl. XXXI, d-g.

It is evident from the scenes represented on the Lalabhadagat pillar that they are intimately associated with the cult of Śrī-Lakshmi. The pair of geese, the peacock, the cock, the lotus and the elephant are as we will see later on depicted on the carved stone discs depicting Śrī-Lakshmi. These symbols on the pillar are, however, somewhat elaborated. For instance, the sun depicted on the carved stone discs is merely a rayonnant circle, but here he is treated with full iconographical details. Śrī-Lakshmi here is accompanied by a Yaksha, but on the carved stone discs she appears singly. The Lalabhadagat pillar is dated to the first century B.C.

III

THE LOTUS

The lotus symbolizing the water cosmology has a unique place in Indian art and literature. It is associated closely with Śrī. She is addressed as seated on a lotus (*padmashthitām*), holding a lotus (*padmanemim*), dwelling in a lotus lake (*pushkarinīm*) and wearing a lotus garland (*padmamālinīm*). The lotus rosette associated with elephants, or a *pūrnaghatā* with lotus over which is seated a divinity often accompanied by an elephant on either side each mounted on a lotus sprinkling water from the vases are favourite motifs of Indian art. M. Foucher considered this motif as the symbol of the Nativity of Buddha. According to him the goddess on the lotus represents Māyā, and the elephants the lustration ceremony. This identification has been rightly challenged by Coomaraswamy on the basis that the goddess appears on non-Buddhist tribal coins as well. The lotus was not only the symbol of Śrī, the goddess Pṛithivī is also connected with it and it was also the cognizance of Ambā and Umā in early times. The lotus rhizomes are closely associated with Yakshas and the *makara* who are shown blowing them and rosettes also form an important decorative element in early Indian art. As a matter of fact according to the *Vishnudharmottara Purāna* III. 45. 1-9 the lotus symbolizes the whole world. A deity who is to be invoked should first be established in a lotus and then worshipped without mixing him with some other deity. The gods to be invoked are Brahmā, Hari, Rudra, Śakra, Sūrya and Śaśin. The goddess Śrī was also invoked through the medium of lotus. This lotus apparently in Yantra form was made of gold, silver, copper and brass.

The *ŚB.* V.4.5. 14, mentions that in the symbolism of lotus the leaves symbolize the sky and stars, its seed-stalks represent air and its suckers the earth. The *ŚB.* VII. 4.1.8 mentions that "the lotus means the waters, and the earth is a leaf thereof; even as the lotus leaf here lies spread the waters". The lotus leaf also symbolizes the womb (*ŚB.* VII. 4.1.7), the source of fertility. In the *TS.* 5.1.4.2 the lotus leaf is called the waters. The idea of creation from the waters is evident from the myth which speaks that from the primeval waters appeared Prajāpati on a lotus-leaf. From the myth probably originated the idea that Brahma created a Brahmā on a lotus-leaf (*GB.* I. 1.16).

Though associated with many gods and goddesses lotus flower and lotus lakes are favourite resorts of Śrī-Lakshmi. According to the *Vāyu P.* XXXVII.

1-8, between the Sītāvana and Kumuda there exists a huge lake filled with crystal clear water, aquatic birds and fragrant lotus flowers inhabited by Nāgas, Devas, Dānavas and Gandharvas. Amidst the clusters of lotus flowers there is a Great Lotus (*mahāpadma*) in which resided Śrī-Lakshmī.

We have already pointed out the close resemblance between the iconographical and functional concepts of Pṛithivī and Śrī. In the *Matsya P.*⁴² however, Pṛithivi is conceived as a gigantic golden lotus symbolizing the cosmos. It is emphasized that from this golden lotus created by Nārāyaṇa from the depth of the ocean was born Brahmā and that the lotus and the earth are synonymous. “Padmā (‘born of lotus’, Śrī-Lakshmi) is the same as Rasā or Pṛithivī and the large pericarp of the lotus stands for mountains”.

It is evident from the ancient texts that the “lotus was primarily understood to represent the Waters; secondarily also, in a much as the flower and still more obviously the leaf rest on the waters, the earth—for the earth is conceived of as resting on the back of the waters, and supported by the waters, which extend on either side of it.”⁴³

Coomaraswamy further explains that the lotus as the symbol of the waters and therefore, life primarily expresses the generative principle of the waters, the lotus standing for purity is a much later development. “These meanings and values do not at all exclude that of the implication of birth in the Waters, conspicuous in the case of Śrī-Lakṣmī, who is the earliest divinity to be constantly represented with *padma-pīṭha* or *padmāsana*, though in the case of other deities not so directly born from the waters, the idea of support seems to be indicated rather than that of “divine birth,” which has hitherto been the usual interpretation; on the other hand, the more edifying symbolism of purity, drawn from the fact that the lotus leaf is not wetted by the water that it rests on, nor is the flower soiled by the mud from which it springs, belong to a later cycle of ideas, and only come in with the sectarian, Buddhist and devotional developments.”⁴⁴

Bosch has analysed further the cosmogonic significance of the lotus with which is intimately connected the Tree of Life. To quote him, “In the later cosmogonic legends the germ of life has three aspects: the grain of seed from which springs the tree of life; a being belonging to the animal kingdom (a cosmic egg, a tortoise); and the navel of a deity. Frequently a combination of these three motifs is to be found.”⁴⁵

The nature of the plant rising from the germ at the beginning of the creation is not known from the early Vedic sources. But according to the *Purāṇas* it is a lotus growing from the navel of Viṣṇu which gave birth to Brahmā.

⁴² V. S. Agrawala, *Matsya Purāṇa-A Study*, Varanasi, 1963, p. 268.

⁴³ Coomaraswamy, *Yakṣas*, Part II, pp. 56-57.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

⁴⁵ F. D. K. Bosch, *The Golden Germ*, Holland, 1960, p. 55.

Bosch has quoted several Buddhist legends of cosmic nature in which lotus appears as the Tree of Life.⁴⁶

Bosch sums up his views on the lotus as the symbol of life thus "If to the results thus obtained we assign their proper place in the Indian conception of the world, conceived as a lotus with cosmic dimensions, in other words if in our imagination we reconstruct the image of these things as it was conceived by the Indian and expressed in his art, then Hiranyagarbha, the germ and womb of all that lives, assumes the shape of the root of the cosmic lotus the padmamūla, and it is filled with the golden elixir of life that unites the essence of the two primordial principles Agni and Soma."

"From this root the sap is sent forth in all directions, it rises through the central stem, spreads through the side-shoots, flows out through the nodes, penetrates into the plant's branches, leaves, flowers and fruits and wherever it appears it engenders Life, the Life that animates animals and men, demons and gods, that makes the fields fertile and the cattle thrive, pours riches and wealth over the earth, just as we see it so vividly pictured on the Bharhut and Sanchi reliefs."⁴⁷

THE PALM, PIPAL AND BANYAN TREES

Besides the lotus and *bel* trees, Śrī, as evinced by some carved stone discs was also associated with the palm, *pipal* and banyan trees and the honeysuckle. In a carved stone disc from Taxila, there appears "a tree with three prongs for branches each one of which is crowned by a blossom below which are shown three drooping leaves, an arrangement suggestive of *asoka* flower."⁴⁸

The *pipal* and banyan trees from very early time were regarded as the abode of Yakshas and Yakshinīs and a host of spirits. In the *RV.* I. 164.20 the tree on which two birds sat eating the *pipal* berries are identified as Soma and Agni; the same also represent the nocturnal sky and the two birds the lunar phases and the stars. The *AV.* mentions it as the seat of the gods, in the sky in the company of Soma, the plant of immortality and its equivalent *kusṭha*. The *asvattha* is also connected with the Aświns, the Maruts, Indra, Gandharvas and Suparṇas. The *asvattha* and *nyagrodha* are particularly associated with the life of Buddha. There is hardly any doubt that these two trees held in veneration by the people were accepted in Buddhism as a matter of compromise and syncretism.⁴⁹

The most important tree associated with Śrī on the carved discs is the palm tree, though it is remarkable that in ancient literature *bilya* and not the palm is Śrī's favourite tree. How in the carved discs the *bilya* was replaced

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 55-57.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 63-64.

⁴⁸ Pramod Chandra, 'The Cult of Śrī Lakṣmī and four carved discs in Bharat Kala Bhawan', *Chhavi-Golden Jubilee Volume*, Banaras, 1972, p. 140.

⁴⁹ O. Viennot, *Le Culte de L'arbre*, Paris, 1954, pp. 25-28.

by the palm is not known but the possibility of the Western Asiatic influence could not be ruled out. That the palm motif must have entered India at a fairly early period is supported by the fact that the palmate became a recognized motif in early Indian art.

Some interesting information is available from literature about the palm tree. The *Vāyu P.* XXXVII. 23-25, mentions that in northern regions there existed a palm tree forest (*tālavana*) inhabited by Indra's elephant Airāvata. This Airāvata according to the *MB.* V. 97.7 for the welfare of mankind draws water, releases it on the clouds and after that Indra causes rain. In other words Airāvata symbolizes the rain clouds and the palm-forest the sky. If this explanation is accepted then the presence of the palm tree and also the elephant only signify rains, a symbol of fertility with which Śrī is so closely associated.

In the Gupta period, however, the palm tree seems to have become a recognized symbol or cognizance. Thus according to the *Vishṇudharmottara* III. 54. 8-9, the *tāla* represents Achyuta, Yama and the Sun.

In early Indian art the palm is represented in a realistic and decorative manner. For at Bharhut palm trees appear within the compound of a pillared structure with a man and woman looking out of the Chaitya windows.⁵⁰ It is difficult to say whether the structure served the purpose of a temple or not. We will see later on that the palm tree is more or less realistically treated on the carved discs of the Mauryan period.

In the Gupta art, however, the palmate is treated decoratively and becomes a part of the decorative scheme of the door-way of the Gupta temple architecture. In this connection one is reminded of the following dictum laid down by the *Brihat Saṁhitā*, LVI. 15, for the decoration the temple doorway in at least the sixth century A.D.

Śesham māṅgalya-vihagaiḥ Śrī-vrikṣaiḥ svastikairghataiḥ mithunaiḥ, patravallibhiḥ pramathaischcpaśobhayet.

The Sloka may be translated as follows:

“The rest (of the door-way) is decorated with auspicious birds (*māṅgalya-vihagaiḥ*), palm trees (*Śrī-vrikṣaiḥ*), svastikas, *pūrṇaghatas*, couples (*mithunaiḥ*), creepers, and Pramathas (*Śiva*'s *gaṇas*) . . .”

In this couplet *Śrīvriksha* has been translated by some as the *bilva* tree following Śrī's association with the *bilva* as pointed out earlier, but on the evidence of the Gupta architectural motif employed in temple doorways,

⁵⁰ B. M. Barua, *Bharhut*, Book III, Calcutta, 1931, Pl. XLIII, 40.

it is certain that by the *Śrīvriksha* of the *Brihat Samhitā* only the palm tree is meant.

For instance the outer frame of the doorway of the early sixth century Vishnu temple at Deogarh is decorated with a series of highly stylized piled up palmates with rosettes and clusters representing flowers or fruits.⁵¹ By no stretch of imagination they could be *dhaturā* leaves as suggested by Vats.⁵² The *pūrnaghata*, the *mithunas*, the creepers also appear there as mentioned by the *Brihat Samhitā*.

The Deogarh temple doorway is not the solitary example in which the palmate has been used as a decorative motif. The outer side of a door joint from Bhumara (5th century) consists of palmates clasped by a floral plaque.⁵³ There is a fragment of a surround from Nagod (5th century A.D.) in the Allahabad Museum⁵⁴ which shows how *Śrīvriksha* is connected with a Nadi Devatā. "In the cross-set formed by a molding, consisting of superimposed palmates interspersed with *asoka* blossoms, is a Vīkṣa-devatā standing on the back of a marine creature with a floriated tail. He raises his torso as though to support the weight of the Goddess above. Her right hand is raised to touch the branch of an *asoka* tree. Iconographically the image belongs to a stage when the river Goddesses—generally depicted on the top portion of a doorway, are indistinguishable from the woman-and-tree motif. They are most often shown standing on a *makara* or turtle, the representation of a half human figure being most unusual."

It seems that like the Besnagar pillar capital depicting the eight *nidhis* raised in honour of Śri or Kubera the palm-leaf pillar capitals were also raised possibly in honour of Śri who was associated with the palm-tree. Two palm-leaf pillar capitals, one from Vidisha and the other from Padmāvatī have been found—the Vidisha capital being the earlier of the two.⁵⁵ Dvivedi following K.P. Jayaswal takes the palm-capitals as the symbol of the Nāgas, but there is every likelihood they represented *Śrī vriksha* and perhaps formed a part of the pillars raised in front of the temples of Śri-Lakshmi. It may, however, also be noted that Balarāma's standard was known as *tāladhvaja*.

IV

THE MAKARA

The appearance of *gharial* or crocodile in Indian art is of very ancient origin. It appears frequently on the amulets of the Indus Valley Culture. Here it is represented with a fish between its jaws and as observed by Mackay "may have been regarded as an emblem of a river-god. As this reptile is associated

⁵¹ M. S. Vats, *The Gupta Temple at Deogarh*, MASI, No. 70, 1952, Pls. VIII-IX.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁵³ Pramod Chandra, *Stone Sculpture in the Allahabad Museum*, Bembay, 1971, Pl. LII, fig. 123.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, Pl. LXXI, fig. 207, p. 92.

⁵⁵ Harihar Niwas Dvivedi, *Gwalior rājamen prāchīna mūrti kalā*, Gwalior, n.d. p. 20, figs. 19-20.

with the sacred animals, it is safe to assume that it, too, was considered sacred, but the deity with whom it may have been associated was perhaps not regarded with special awe."⁵⁶ In the historical period, however, as we shall see later on, the *makara* or crocodile becomes the symbol of the waters and the symbol of the river goddess *Gangā*, certain *Yakshas*, *Śrī-Lakshmi* and *Varuṇa* who are all associated with the waters.

The Water Cosmology has produced a number of symbols associated with the waters. The most important being the lotus and the *makara* which have played an important part in the evolution of Indian art. As observed by Bosch, "waters for a long time retain their original character of a primeval element, obscure, chaotic, unimaginable as a definite shape or person. " "Primitive man", Rönnow rightly observes, "does not visualize a constant personification of water. This is sacred and filled with *mana*, in its own right. Occasionally, now one now another kind of animal or suchlike may appear as representing the innate power of the waters and so by and by a symbol appears that gains in permanence. As a rule it is the aquatic animals like fishes, dolphins, crocodiles, water snakes and so on which incorporate and represent these primitive water demons."⁵⁷

Ocean, the abode of *Varuṇa*, is supposed to be the habitat of the *makara*, (*sāgare makarālaya*, *MB*. IX. 46.8) and naturally, therefore, it stood as a symbol of the waters. The *Vishṇudharmottara*, III. 54.9 equates the *makara* with *Varuṇa* and the ocean. According to the *MB*. V. 97.8 the ocean was inhabited by aquatic animals of various shapes which lived drinking the moonlight (*soma-prabhā*) which is supposed to be endowed with the life-giving property. We have already referred to the relation of the *makara* with *Kubera* and *Śrī* as one of the eight *nidhis*. In the *MB*. III. 281.7, however, *Śrī* is represented as holding the *makara* in her hand. It is the symbol of *Kāmadeva* and *Rukmini* being the mother of *Kāmadeva* in *Dvāpara* also bore this symbol. According to the *Vishṇudharmottara*, III, 54.8, the *makara* is a symbol of *Pradyumna*. In the Gupta period according to the *Pādatālitakam* there was a temple of *Kāmadeva* (*Kāmadevāyatana*) at *Ujjayini*, which had a pillar with the *makara* capital (*makara-yashṭi*) which was circumambulated by courtesans when they visited the temple for worship.⁵⁸

Pradyumna-Kāmadeva who is identified with *Varuṇa* is *Makaradvaja*. This equation of the *Kāmadeva* with the *makara* is appropriate as the *makara* represents the essence of the waters (*rasa* its various equivalents, sap, semen, Water of Life, etc.) and virility (*virya*). Therefore, the association of the *makara* with *Kāmadeva* or any other deity of fertility is quite appropriate.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ E. Mackay, *Early Indus Civilization*, London, 1948, p. 65.

⁵⁷ Bosch, *op. cit.*, p. 52. He quotes Rönnow, *Trita-Āptya, Eine Vedische Gottheit* (1927), p. 6.

⁵⁸ Moti Chandra and V. S. Agrawala, *Śrīgūra-hīṭa* (*Chaturbhūti*, Hindi), Varanasi, 1959, p. 170.

⁵⁹ Coomaraswamy, *Yakṣas*, Part II, p. 55.

That such *makara-yashṭi* existed much earlier than the Gupta period is proved by two *makara* capitals, one from Vidiśā (Besnagar)⁶⁰ and another from Kauśāmbī (Allahabad Museum)⁶¹ both datable to the second century B.C. It is suggested that the *makara* probably crowned a votive column before a temple or site sacred to Pradyumna one of the Pañchavishnis. But the *makara* was not only the cognizance of Pradyumna-Kāmadeva and Varuṇa. In some ancient carved discs datable to the Maurya period depicting the Mother goddess probably Śrī, the *makara* or crocodile appears. The fragment of a carved disc in the Bhārat Kalā Bhavan the goddess is associated with two monkey-like animals with a crocodile or lizard-like creature between them. In another fragment from Kosam in the same Museum in one band appear crocodiles and in the second band the repeat figure of the Mother goddess between the three pronged trees.⁶²

According to Banerjea the association of crocodiles or alligators we prefer to call them with the Mother goddess remind us of the developed Śakti cult in India in which the goddess is associated with a lizard (*godhā*) perhaps confused with the *makara*.

The *makara* in early Indian sculpture is also associated with Yakshīs ✓ whose close association with Śrī-Lakshmī is obvious, and the river goddesses. The Yakshī Sudassanā represented at Bharhut proves that the type presages the Gaṅgā of the later iconography. She is supported by the *makara*.⁶³ Besides her association with the *makara*, the name Sudassana or 'Beautiful' also recalls to mind Śrī-Lakshmī whose resplendent beauty is extolled in literature. The representation at Amaravati of a goddess extracting a pearl from the open mouth of the *makara* may be Śrī-Lakshmī as the *makara* was one of her *nidhis*.⁶⁴ As remarked by Coomaraswamy, "From Bhartihari's *Nitiāstaka*, 4, it is evident that there existed some legendary *makara* with pearls and that to extract pearls from a *makara*'s jaw was considered a proverbial example of courage."⁶⁵

ANIMALS AND BIRDS

The Mother goddesses Śrī and Pṛithivī are closely associated with animals and birds. As a matter of fact a large number of birds and animals are represented on the carved discs found from Murtaziganj, a locality in Patna

⁶⁰ A.S.I.A.R., 1913-14, pp. 188-191; J. N. Banerjea, *The Development of Hindu Iconography*, Calcutta, 1956, p. 104.

⁶¹ Pramod Chandra, *Stone Sculpture in the Allahabad Museum*, pp. 56-57.

⁶² J. N. Banerjea, *Development of Hindu Iconography*, p. 171.

⁶³ A. K. Coomaraswamy, *La Sculpture de Bharhut*, Paris, 1956, p. 63, Pl. XVIII, fig. 46.

⁶⁴ Coomaraswamy, *Yakṣas*, Part II, Pl. 12, fig. 4.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 49-50.

city.⁶⁶ The following animals are represented: the lion, winged lion, elephant, horse, antelope, stag, deer, ram, rhinoceros, bull, boar, dog, goat and cat. Among the birds the following appear: the goose, peacock, parrot, crane, heron, cock and owl. Of the animals many such as the lion, horse, bull and elephant have symbolic significance and these have been used as common symbols both in Buddhist and Hindu religions and have been apparently borrowed from the common stock of Indian symbols. The other animals like the goat, the deer and rhinoceros had also totemic and sacerdotal values. Some birds also find place in Indian symbology. For instance the goose is associated with the waters and the peacock with Skanda. Apparently these animals and birds in some remote past of which history has no record became primarily associated with the power of nature and secondarily, with the deities who symbolized those powers of nature. Thus was born the language of symbols, which through the media of outward semblances expressed the higher meanings attached to those concepts.

It is notable that the four animals, namely, the elephant, the horse, the bull and the lion carved on the Mother goddess discs also appear on the Aśokan pillar capital at Sarnath. The animals here have been interpreted specifically as Buddhist symbols: the elephant standing for his conception, the bull standing for the Zodiacial sign Taurus under which he was born, the horse for the Great Departure and the lion for Śākyā Siṁha, an epithet of the Buddha. But on close examination it is evident that there is nothing specifically Buddhist about them. They belong to the common stock of Indian symbols from which the Hindus, Jains and Buddhists drew interpreting them in their own way. For instance, at the time of Rāma's coronation (*Rām.* II. 14. 26-30) the elephant exuding ichor (*mattavāraṇa*), white humped bull (*kakudmānpāṇi/uravriṣha*), the four-fanged lion (*chaturdamṣṭhrā kesari*) and the powerful horse of superior breed (*mahābala hari-sreshthā*) appear as auspicious animals, though the lion is omitted from the critical edition of the *Rām.* In the Jātaka No. 427, Hastipura in the east, Aśvapura in the south and Siṁhapura in the west are mentioned. In Buddhist literature the auspiciousness of the four animals is emphasized. The *Divyāvadāna* (ed. by Cowell, p. 451) mentions that the four auspicious animals, namely, the *gaja*, *vṛishabha*, *asva* and *siṁha* appeared in procession before the Buddha. These animals were associated with some rivers as well. Yuan Chwang mentions a tradition about the Mount Meru from whose eastern side flows the Gaṅgā from the silver mouth; from the south through the elephant mouth flows the Sindhu; from the west through the horse mouth flows the Oxus, and from the north side through the crystal mouth flows the Sītā.⁶⁷ It is also a well known fact that the Gaṅgā is supposed to flow from Gomukha (bull or cow mouth) in the Gangotri glaciers.

⁶⁶ S. A. Shere. "Stone discs found at Murtaziganj," *J.B.R.S.*, XXXVII, Parts 3-4, 1951, pp. 178-190, Pls. I-IX.

⁶⁷ V. S. Agrawala, *Chakradhvaja*, Varanasi, 1964, pp. 35-36.

In the ancient bas-reliefs of Bharhut and Sanchi as well as the elephant, the horse, the bull and the lion as a part of the architectural ensemble are used symbolically. On the fragment of a *torana* architrave from Kauśāmbī in the Allahabad Museum datable to the first century B.C. appears Gaja-Lakshmi, her nudity emphasized, though she wears a diaphanous lower garment. To the right of the figure was an elephant of which only the forehead and trunk now survive; and to the left is a bull with lyre-shaped horns.⁶⁸ It is thus apparent that even in the first century B.C. at least two animal symbols, namely, the elephant and the bull were associated with Śri-Lakshmi and therefore, there is nothing to support the view that these animals have anything specifically Buddhist about them.

THE ELEPHANT

The elephant appears on the amulets and seals in the Indus Valley Culture. It is one of the animals surrounding the so-called Paśupati. It is not known whether any special symbolical significance attached to it at such early times though it is possible that it was equated as a sacred animal.

Elephant, the animal par excellence of India, was useful in many ways in ancient times. It was not only a favourite animal of the royalty who used it for riding and royal processions but it also served as a terrific war machine whose presence struck terror into the heart of the enemy. It also provided ivory which was an important article of commerce. But in spite of its utilitarian value the elephant, in very early time had assumed certain symbolical significance. In the *RV.* IV. 16.14, Indra assimilated to the sun, is compared to an elephant (and lion) and the *AV.* III. 22.1, speaks of the elephant glory that came out of Aditi's body.⁶⁹ As a matter of fact, as observed by Coomaraswamy, "In all the systems, the Four Great Kings have space elephants (*dig-gajas*) as their vehicles, and possibly these elephants themselves were the original guardians of the quarters; in any case, they are the source of the winds, which they blow through their trunks, and in the *abiṣeka* of Śri-Lakshmi two or four of them pour down the rains from the inverted cask or jar of the clouds, which vessel in *RV.*, V, 85, 3, 4, is specifically Varuṇa's".⁷⁰

The conception of Airāvata as a vehicle of Indra is of later origin, though in the *MB.* V. 97.7 it is already mentioned that Airāvata is synonymous with the rain clouds. As observed by Coomaraswamy it is quite possible that the elephant like the horse was an ancient symbolic element in the Water Cosmology as we find cloud-elephant and water-elephant associated with Śri-Lakshmi, with Yakshas and Yakshis as vehicles and associated in the plant style with lotus vegetation.

⁶⁸ Pramod Chandra, *Stone Sculpture in the Allahabad Museum*, p. 58, fig. 77.

⁶⁹ A. K. Coomaraswamy, "The Conqueror's life in Jain Painting", *J.I.S.O.A.*, VIII, No. 2, 1935, p. 133.

⁷⁰ A. K. Coomaraswamy, *Yakṣas*, Part II, p. 32.

Zimmer has discussed at some length the symbolical significance of the elephant. Discussing the etymology of Airāvata he derives the name from the female Irāvati which is also the name of the river Ravi. *Irā*, furthermore, means water, any drinkable fluid, milk, refreshment, the liquid contained in the cosmic Milky Ocean.⁷¹ Thus Irāvati would stand as an element of the Water Cosmology. She is the daughter of Daksha, partially related to Brahman and she is also related to Kaśyapa the Old Tortoise Man and as such she is the mother of all vegetable life. Airāvata is also related as pointed out by Zimmer to the life-fluid of the cosmos. Thus it is evident that Airāvata designates the rainbow and a certain type of lightning, the two conspicuous luminous manifestations of thunderstorm and rain.

Abhramū, the consort of Airāvata, indicates the magical power of producing clouds, as *mu* means "to fashion" and *abhra* means "cloud" and that has been interpreted by Zimmer as beneficent monsoon. The elephant generally stood as a symbol for royalty, but he is of the opinion that elephants were kept by the king to attract its celestial relative, the clouds, the heavenly elephants.

Zimmer has quoted a ceremony from the *Hastyāyurveda*, IV. 22 which stresses the fertility aspect of a white elephant often associated with Śri-Lakshmi. On that festival day men dressed as women and exchanging bawdy jokes followed the elephant painted white. This female attire symbolized the female principle and the licentious language that dominated sexual energy. Calamity was bound to overtake their people and their king who did not worship the elephant. "Contrariwise, if due worship is paid to the elephant, they will thrive and prosper together with their wives and sons, the country, the army, and the elephants. Crops will sprout in due time; Indra, the rain god, will send rain in due time; there will be no plague, no drought."⁷²

Zimmer summarizes the result about elephant symbolism as follows:⁷³ "Thus the worship of the white elephant, as a divinity not to be disregarded, bestows on man all those earthly blessings which the goddess Lotus, Śri-Lakshmi, Fortune and Prosperity, the Mother Earth, fertile and abundant with water and riches, has in store. The symbolic character and significance of the animal is clearly announced in the two appellations that are used to designate it when it is being honored as a divinity; it is called Śri-gaja, "The Elephant of Śri," and Megha, "Cloud". The elephant, that is to say, is a rain cloud walking on the earth. By its magic presence it conjures the winged fellow clouds of the atmosphere to approach. When the earthly elephant cloud is duly worshipped, its celestial relatives feel gratified and are moved to show forth their gratitude by favouring the country with abundant rain."

⁷¹ H. Zimmer, *Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization*, Washington, 1962, p. 104.

⁷² Zimmer, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 108-09.

THE HORSE

The horse is a favourite animal of the Indo-Aryans. The use of the horse not only speeded up the means of transportation, the cavalry began to play an important part in warfare. The *asvamedha* or Horse Sacrifice symbolized universal sovereignty and the horse became a symbol of power and fertility. The horse is also connected with Vedic gods specially Vishnu. It is on the one hand connected with vegetation and the nether world and on the other hand related or identified with the sun symbolizing fecundity and also fire. In Vedic mythology besides the celestial horses which drew the chariot of the gods, various individual names of the horses occur in the *Vedas*. They are noted for their swiftness and were considered as victorious.⁷⁴

In the *Śri-Sūkta*, as we have pointed out, the horse is associated with Śri. In the *MB*. I. 60.50 the sky-roving horses are said to be the mind-born sons of Lakshmi (*tasyāstu mānasā putrāsturagāḥ vyomachārinah*). It is also significant to note that the horse is also connected with the Water Cosmology as from the Churning of the Ocean there appeared the white horse Uchchaihśravas (*MB*. I. 57.38). This connection of the horse with the waters is not confined to the *MB*. only as the *ŚB*. V. 1. 4.6 addresses the horses to wax by means of the ambrosia within the waters. It was also sacrificed for Varuṇa the lord of the waters (*ŚB*. VI. 2.1.5). It is also designated as a thunderbolt, thus indicating its association with the clouds. The *ŚB*. X. 6.4.1 is emphatic about the origin of the horse from the sea ‘The sea induced its kindred, the sea its birth-place.’

THE BULL

Worship of the bull goes back to very great antiquity. The bull appears in Egyptian, Babylonian, Iranian civilizations as a sacred animal whose sacrifice pleased the gods. In the Indus Valley civilization the bull is engraved on the seals and a large number of terracotta figurines of the bull have been found. There is hardly any doubt that the bull was a sacred animal in the Indus Valley culture. “Two amulets made in the same mould show that the . . . urus,—bull—was carried in a religious procession, for on these amulets a man is seen quite clearly to be carrying the figure of this animal on a stand. Another man behind the first bears the cult object always associated with the beast, while a third carries another stand and object of some kind, perhaps a pennon”.⁷⁵ “Another amulet from the same city [Harappa] shows the cult object invariably associated with the urus—bull, with beside it a figure which may be that of a woman dancing; if this interpretation be correct, the dance must certainly be a ritual one.”⁷⁶

⁷⁴ A. A. Macdonell, *The Vedic Mythology* (reprint), Varanasi, 1963. pp. 148-150.

⁷⁵ Mackay, *op. cit.*, pp. 65-66.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 72-73.

The bull in Vedic and post-Vedic periods and even earlier was extensively, used as a favourite symbol. In the *Vedas* it symbolized Indra (*SB.* II, 5. 3.18), Agni and Rudra. In later literature it became the vehicle of Śiva or the bull itself being his theriomorphic representation. The bull in ancient literature symbolized strength and virility. Closely connected with it, it also symbolized the rain clouds. As a matter of fact in medieval *Kalpasūtra* paintings the sky-bulls are shedding rain from their horns to bathe Mahāvira held in Indra's lap. As we have shown above it appears as one of the animals on Aśoka's pillar capital at Sarnath. Its association with Śri-Lakshmī again emphasizes its character as a symbol of fertility and of the cattle with which Śri was intimately associated. The symbolism of the bull is not specifically Vedic and the appearance of the terracotta bull figurines from many a chalcolithic sites where they seem to have had some relationship with the Mother goddess cult.

THE LION

The lion has played a conspicuous part in Indian art and literature. The *śiṅha* or lion appears in the *Rig Veda* and later on. He wanders and lives in the hills and in clearly the 'dread wild beast that slays,' to which Rudra is compared. Agni who has entered the waters is compared to a lion.⁷⁷ It is said to have flowed from Indra's nose produced by Soma (*SB.* V. 5. 4.10). Symbolically speaking the lion stands for power and royalty. It is also the vehicle of Ambikā, Umā-Pārvatī and Durgā and perhaps symbolizes the origin of these goddesses in mountainous regions inhabited by lions; it also emphasizes the ferocious aspect of the goddess. Its appearance in a stylized form in early bas-reliefs is decorative. The leogryph, the fish-tailed lion and winged lion appear in early Indian art. It may be noted that the *Rāmāyāna*. IV. 42.6 actually mentions winged lions (*śiṅhāḥ pakshagamāḥ*). Its comparison with the submarine fire shows its association with the waters, a fact supported by the fish-tailed lion in early Indian art.

THE RHINOCEROS

As we have pointed out above the rhinoceros is one of the animals accompanying the Mother goddess on one of the Murtaziganj carved stone discs already referred to. A galloping rhinoceros appears on a seal from Bhitā in the Allahabad Museum datable to the third century B.C.⁷⁸

The rhinoceros under the name *khadga* appears in the *Mait. S.* and the *VS.* In the *SSS* a rhinoceros hide is mentioned as the covering of a chariot.⁷⁹ The animal seems to have been sacred to the manes. It is mentioned in the *Vishnu P.* III. 16.3, that the rhinoceros flesh along with the *kālaśāka* and

⁷⁷ *Vedic Index*, Vol. II, p. 448.

⁷⁸ Pramod Chandra, *Stone Sculpture in the Allahabad Museum*, p. 36, Pl. II. 3.

⁷⁹ *Vedic Index*, I, p. 213.

honey gave satisfaction to the manes. The *Manu S.* III. 272, enjoins that the flesh of the rhinoceros is lawful flesh which could be partaken even by the *munis*. According to the *PGS.* (śrāddha, Sū. VIII) rhinoceros flesh was to be eaten at the time of the śrāddha. According to the *GGS.* VII. 2, the rhinoceros flesh gave perfect satisfaction. It is also worthy to note that till recently on a śrāddha day, a Hindu who could afford a cup carved out from a rhinoceros horn, poured the libation of water and milk to please the manes.

Besides the use of its flesh for śrāddha, the rhinoceros horn also served as cornucopia which was used for illustrating a king at some special ceremony. It is said in the *MB.* VIII. 6. 37, that Duryodhana while appointing Karṇa to the titles of the Commander-in-Chief illustrated him with the sacred water filled in the hollowed tusk of an elephant, and the horn of a rhinoceros and a bull. Here the elephant tusk and bull horn filled with water perhaps symbolize the purifying and strength-giving property of the waters. Some such significance also seem to have been attached to the rhinoceros horn.

What connection the animal had with Śrī-Lakshmi it is difficult to say, but it is possible that in pre-Vedic times it had gained its sacred and symbolic character. The famous seal from Mohenjodaro depicting Paśupati, one of the animals surrounding him is a rhinoceros, the other being two deer, or antelopes, an elephant, a tiger and a buffalo.⁸⁰ It was one of the animals probably worshipped.⁸¹ The rhinoceros was also a favourite subject of the Harappan modeller.⁸²

In the Gupta period the rhinoceros appears on the unique Rhinoceros-slayer type of a gold coin of Kumāragupta I (c. 414-455 A.D.). In this type the king is shown hunting the animal from horseback. The Sanskrit legend reads: "Bhartā khadgatrātā Kumāragupta jayatyāniśam", 'Ever victorious is the lord Kumāragupta, who is protector by the sword (khadgatrātā) as well as protector from rhinoceroses (khadgebhyāhtrātā)'. On the reverse the river goddess Gaṅgā holding a lotus is standing on a crocodile. Behind the goddess is standing a female *chhatra*-bearer. The reverse legend reads 'Śrī Mahendra khadgah', 'The rhinoceros (killed by) Mahendra'.⁸³ It is, however, difficult to say whether the representation of the river goddess Gaṅgā whose consanguinity with Śrī-Lakshmi is well known was in some way related symbolically with the rhinoceros.

THE DEER OR ANTELOPE

The deer or antelope had its symbolic significance going much earlier

⁸⁰ E. Mackay, *Early Indus Civilizations*, London, 1948, p. 56.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁸³ A. S. Atlekar, *The Gupta Gold Coins in the Bayana Hoard*, Bombay, 1954, pp. Cvii-cviii, Pl. XXX. 5-8.

than the Vedic period. It appears on the so-called Paśupati seal from Mohenjodaro, copper amulets,⁸⁴ represented as tiny figurines,⁸⁵ and thin heads forming the ends of bronze combs⁸⁶ and it also appears as a decorative pattern on a jar.⁸⁷ The horn of Sambur deer was probably powdered up and used as a medicine.⁸⁸ The medicinal value of antelope horn is emphasized in the *AV*. Amulets were also made from the antelope horn and it was also a symbol of fertility. The antelope skin represented day and night and holy power. It is said that its union with Yajña yielded a good harvest. In some ancient past the antelope horn was used as a hoe for tillage.⁸⁹

The sacred character of the antelope is further emphasized in a legend in the *SB*. I. 1.4.1. It is said that once upon a time the Sacrifice escaping the gods assumed the form of a black buck and roamed alone. The gods having found it stripped it of its skin and brought it away with them. Taking into consideration the sacred nature of the antelope in Vedic literature soon it became a symbol of Āryāvarta. *Manu*, II. 22-23, observes: "That which lies between these two mountains (the Himālaya and the Vindhya), from the western ocean, the wise know as Āryāvarta (the land of the Āryas), where the black antelope naturally roams about, that should be known as the land suitable for sacrifice; what beyond is the country of the Mlechchhas".

THE GOAT

The goat and its horns are considered as a symbol of fertility. In the Harappan culture the gods wear the horns of a goat or a bull. A seal amulet represents a goddess with the horns of a goat.

At Harappa the funerary significance of the goat is specially marked. In one of the jars decorated with horned peacocks and bulls appears a goat of enormous proportion, his horns marked by eight trident-like devices. Vats suggests that the goat was a sort of 'path-finder' and a deified intermediary for leading the soul to the 'Abode of Bliss' after it had passed through the intermediate Hades.⁹⁰ The connection of the goat with funeral customs is further supported by the fact that in one of the graves a small sheep or goat was intentionally sacrificed and its body cut to pieces.⁹¹

In Vedic and later literature the goat is called as *basta*, *chhāga* and *aja*.

⁸⁴ Mackay, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

⁸⁹ Moti Chandra, "Nidhuṇiṅga (Cornucopia): A study in symbolism, *Bulletin of the Prince of Wales Museum*, No. 9, 1964-66, pp. 4 ff.

⁹⁰ M. S. Vats, *Excavations at Harappa*, Vol. I, Delhi, 1940, p. 208.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 221.

The goat as a representative of Pūshan plays an important part in the ritual of burial.⁹² The fertility aspect of the goat and sheep is emphasized in the *SB*. II. 5.3.18 where it says that the goat and sheep are Prajāpati-like as during the year they give birth to two or three young ones thrice. The goat because of its fertility is closely associated with the Mother goddess. The *Brihat Samhitā*, LXV. 9, mentions that the goats Kuṭṭaka, Kutila, Jatila and Vāmana are the sons of Śrī, they do not live with Misfortune (Alakshmī). The association of the goat with Śrī is naturally due to the fertility of the former. The sacrifice of goat to Durgā and Kālī and other goddesses is a very ancient practice. The idea behind this is not only to propitiate the goddess by an animal dear to her but increase the fertility of the land, the people and cattle by a sort of sympathetic magic as the goat symbolized fertility.

THE GOOSE

The goose or *harīsa* often wrongly translated as the swan is perhaps the most popular bird of Indian literature and art. Among the domestic birds and animals kept at the court of Indian kings the goose took a prominent place. Indian literature endows the *harīsa* with the moral virtues of the highest order. In Vedic literature the geese are associated with the Aśvins. In one of the hymns of the *AV*. VIII. 7.24, the geese are supposed to have a special knowledge of healing herbs. The *harīsa* is credited with the power of separating Soma from water (later on milk from water) in the *Yajurveda*. It is mentioned as one of the victims at the Aśvamedha.⁹³ It is not a sacred bird but is closely associated with the gods and the Mother goddesses. In the *HV*. Indra addresses the geese as divine birds and scions of Kaśyapa.⁹⁴ Brahmā is sometimes associated with the goose; it is also the vehicle of the goddess Sarasvatī. It is mentioned in the *MB*. III. 83.29 that one who had taken his bath worshipped the god and offered water to the manes on the bank of the river Venñā was after death destined to be borne to heaven on an aerial car flown to heaven by a goose and a peacock.

Gangā, the divine mother of Bhishma, learning the fate of her son deputed to him *rishis* in the form of geese. It is remarkable to note in this connection that in the ruined Gupta temple at Dah Parbatiya near Tezpur in Assam at the foot of the left door jamb stands Yamunā and at the foot of the right door jamb stands Gaṅgā.⁹⁵ As remarked by Vogel⁹⁶ an unusual feature in the representations of the river goddesses is that there appear a couple of flying geese beside their haloed heads. The appearance of geese on a typical Gupta temple door-jamb reminds us of the dictum of the *Brihat Samhitā*, LVI. 15, which lays down that the door-jambs, besides other decorative patterns, should

⁹² *Vedic Index*, Vol. 1, p. 22. See *aja*.

⁹³ *Vedic Index*, II, 498.

⁹⁴ J. Ph. Vogel, *The goose in Indian literature and art*, Leiden, 1962, p. 13.

⁹⁵ *A.S.I. Annual Report*, 1924-1925, pp. 98-99, Pl. XXXII, a-b.

⁹⁶ Vogel, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

be decorated with auspicious birds (*māngalyavihagaiḥ*) which no doubt stand for the geese.

In early Indian sculpture the geese appear on the cylindrical abacii of three Aśokan pillars. In the Lauriya-Nandangarh pillar abacus the geese are shown in the act of picking their food. In the Sanchi pillar the abacus is adorned with four honeysuckle designs separated from the others by pairs of geese. The other pillar capital from Rampurwa has its abacus decorated with a row of geese twelve in number. The geese also appear on the Vajrāsana at Bodh Gaya. Here the sides are decorated with the figures of geese alternating with palmettes.⁹⁷ At Bharhut and Sanchi the geese are closely connected with the Plant Style. The lotus lakes are shown invariably associated with the geese. In the Begram ivories⁹⁸ the geese appear both as a domestic bird and also in a wild state serving as a decorative ornament.

It is evident both from literary and art sources that geese were intimately associated with the waters. They separated the Soma from water; their divinity was acknowledged by Indra and they were connected with the river goddesses Sarasvatī, Gaṅgā and Yamunā. Their association with the healing herbs is recognized and therefore, their relation with the Plant Style is not to be wondered at.

THE PEACOCK

The peacock is a sacred bird regarded as the vehicle of Skanda. In historical period the Yaudheyas in eastern Panjab had a special regard for it. As a matter of fact at first Skanda-Karttikeya is called holding a peacock standard (*barhiketu, Br. Sam.* LVII. 41) and in this form it appears on the coins of Huvishka representing Mahāsena, Skanda, Kumāra and Viśākha. In the Gupta period the peacock becomes Skanda's recognized vehicle. The *MB.* IX. 45.46, however, observes that a cock and a peacock were presented to Karttikeya by Garuḍa. It is also significant to note that besides the peacock and cock which became his symbols, Lakshmi also got herself attached to Mahāsena by heading his army (*MB.* IX. 45-57).

The peacock appears in Indian art both as a decorative and a symbolical motif. From Harappa comes⁹⁹ a pot which is decorated at the shoulder with three flying peacocks alternating with stars (Vats, *op. cit.*, Pl. LXII, 2). "Placed horizontally in the body of each peacock is a theriomorphic figure probably representing the *sūkshmaśarīra* or the ethereal body of the dead being carried to heaven. From this and also from the frequency of the peacock motif often with horns on other burial pots it is evident that the peacock was regarded with peculiar sanctity in connection with the cult of the deads."

⁹⁷ Vogel, *op. cit.*, pp. 55-57.

⁹⁸ J. Hackin, *Nouvelles recherches archéologiques à Begram*, Paris, 1954, Figs. 22, 32, 208, etc.

⁹⁹ M. S. Vats, *op. cit.*, p. 207.

The peacock, as pointed out earlier appears on the carved discs of the Mauryan period as one of the birds associated with the Mother goddess.¹⁰⁰ It appears frequently at Sanchi and on the Lalabhadagat pillar already referred to where it appears in the context of Śrī-Lakshmi. It may be noted here that in this interesting sculpture the cock also appears along side the peacock both being the symbols of Skanda-Kārttikeya. How they also became associated with Śrī-Lakshmi is not known, but by the early centuries of the Christian era when iconographical and symbolical concepts had not been formulated the symbols used in the contexts of many gods and goddesses were interchangeable.

V

Literary evidences interpreting the symbolism of various plants, animals and birds connected with the Mother goddess cult could be further supplemented by carved stone discs depicting the Mother goddess found from Murtaziganj, Kauśāmbī, Varanasi and other sites, terracotta figurines and plaques and some copper objects. One of the chief interest of some of the carved discs is that they throw some light on the cult aspect of the Mother goddess which literature fails to enlighten. In this respect the fragment of a stone disc in the Bhārat Kalā Bhavan, the fragment of a disc from Rupar and a disc from Murtaziganj are of great importance.

Pramod Chandra¹⁰¹ makes some interesting observations about the fragment of a disc in the Bhārat Kalā Bhavan. To quote him "Here a *makara* or a *godhā* moving in a counter clockwise direction is preceded and followed by two recumbent figures, both of whom wear kilt-like garments and shown in profile. The person behind the *makara* or *godhā* holds a flower and is apparently prostrating himself, face to the ground, while the person ahead of the animal is shown lying to his side, facing the sky and holding what appears to be a ear of grain or a bud on a long stalk." Pramod Chandra has also drawn our attention to the characteristic features of the priests with their sloping foreheads and large noses. He has also noted that while one of the goddesses is nude, the other is clearly clothed and has also pointed out the resemblance between the figures of the priests on the Rajghat disc fragment and the priests on the Rupar fragment and the Murtaziganj discs.

The disc fragment from Rupar excavated by Sharma¹⁰² from Rupar III

¹⁰⁰ Pramod Chandra, *Stone Sculpture in the Allahabad Museum*, Pl. VI, 15.

¹⁰¹ Pramod Chandra, "The Cult of Śrī Lakshmi and Four Carved Discs in Bharat Kala Bhavan", *Chhavi: Golden Jubilee Volume*, Banaras, 1971, pp. 139-148.

See the fragment of a disc in the Allahabad Museum, the nude Mother goddesses are shown standing between the palm trees with the hand on the top carved with a row of *makara* or *godhā*. Pramod Chandra, *Stone Sculptures in the Allahabad Museum*, Pl. V., 13.

¹⁰² Y. D. Sharma, "Past pattern in living as unfolded by excavations at Rupar", *Lalit Kalā*, Nos. 1-2, April 1955—March 1956, p. 125, Pl. XLVI, fig. 13.

level dating between c. 600-200 B.C. is an important antiquity of the Mauryan period giving some important additional information about the Mother goddess cult (Fig. 1). The central point of the composition is a horse-shoe hut made of leaves thatched on a bamboo frame. It is shaded by a *pipal* tree. Outside the hut, on the left, is seated a priest on a low stool clad in a kilt-like garment, his hair tied with a broad ribbon. He is offering a ball-like object which may be a *bel* fruit, which, as we have seen earlier was a favourite fruit of *Sri*, offered to a female devotee desirous of a progeny who had come to worship the goddess. Her hair is plaited, the *sāri* is pleated and she wears bracelets. Her features are rather coarse. It is remarkable that the priest and his dress are exactly the same as that of the priest and his dress on a Murtaziganj disc to be described later on. On the right appears the nude Mother goddess her hands hanging straight lower down and her feet splayed. Her hair is arranged in a wig-like manner with schematic curls and she wears thick peg-like earrings, a zone and bracelets. Facing her appears a man, perhaps a foreigner as he wears a striped and pleated tunic, trousers and full boots. Her right hand is upraised and the left lowered down. Just below the corded arch, appears broken figure of the Mother goddess flanked by lotus plants.

Among the seventy-one carved stone discs found from Murtaziganj within the limit of the Patna City Municipality¹⁰³ one disc is very important as like the Allahabad Museum and Rupar disc fragments it portrays the priest of the Mother goddess and also possibly his consort (Fig. 2). The entire surface of the disc is divided into two parts by introducing a palm tree on dividing points. In the right hand sector central figure of the nude Mother goddess is standing, her hands hanging down straight and her feet splayed. She has coarse features and wears a wig-like hairdress, peg-shaped earrings, the zone, bracelets and amulets. To her right stands a priest wearing a kilt-like garment with crenellated border, his hair tied with a broad ribbon, holding what looks like a lighted torch, in the left hand. Behind him is represented a galloping stag proceeding to the right and a peacock proceeding to the left, pecking at the palm tree as it were. To the left of the goddess appears a goose followed by a nude male figure with a strange animal-like face who could either be a devotee or the consort of the goddess. Following him appears a galloping horse and a cock. Then follows a palm tree. In the second sector appears a galloping elephant to the right with a goose below. The priest holding a goose in his left palm is facing the nude Mother goddess. Then follows the nude devotee or her consort followed by a galloping deer and a peacock facing to the right.

The entire background of the disc is plain, in the centre is a circle with rayonnant decoration which may either indicate a full blown lotus or the sun.

The most striking point about the Rupar and Murtaziganj discs is the

¹⁰³ S. A. Shere, "Stone discs found at Murtaziganj", *J.B.R.S.*, Vol. XXXVII, Parts 3-4, pp. 178-190, Pl. V. fig. 3.

steatopygous nude Mother goddess. Ancient literature hardly make any reference to her nudity. However, in the *Bhaishajyaguru Sūtra*¹⁰⁴ it is mentioned that the presiding deity of Mathura, who was no doubt a Mother goddess, fearing that the Buddha who had entered the city to put some obstacle in her way appeared naked before him. The Buddha, however, rebuked her for this behaviour as it did not behove a woman to do so. Here the nudity of the Mother goddess is clearly emphasized.

Though generally on the discs the nudity of the Mother goddess is emphasized there are instances when she is shown draped. In this category may be placed a carved disc from Vaiśāli.¹⁰⁵ In this votive disc two points may be noted. Firstly, the Mother goddess is associated with the *pipal* tree and not with the palm tree as usual, and secondly, the Mother goddess is represented in a unique way. In one case "she is draped in a heavy skirt, while her head is encircled by a double row of pellets indicating an elaborate headdress. In the other case she has raised curls with delineated flat face and wears *patra-kundalas* and a heavy feathery skirt with a curious projection resembling a bird's wing. In both cases the figures face front with the upper body slim and bare and one of the hands raised." It is notable that in the Sunga terracottas the Mother goddess appears mostly draped perhaps indicating that a sense of propriety had crept in contemporary beliefs.

Before we discuss the problem of the priest and the nude devotees or consorts appearing on the carved discs attention may be drawn to a rectangular steatite plaque of the Mauryan period (Fig. 3).¹⁰⁶ The vertical plaque is divided into three rectangular compartments enclosed by double denticulated borders. In the top compartment a dance is in progress. On the right a male musician, his hair combed back, wearing a heavily pleated *dhoti* hanging upto the heels which he has secured to the waist with a belt is strumming the harp. On the right a danseuse is performing with her right hand upraised and the left hand lowered down. She wears a pleated *sāri* reaching the ankles and big circular earrings. Her hair is arranged in schematic curls. The figures are carved crudely.

In the middle compartment, on the left, a male devotee of the Mother goddess, dressed exactly like the harpist in the top compartment, is holding a tall ringed wine cup which he is apparently offering to a woman devotee standing on the right, who as the attitude of her hands shows, is proceeding to receive the cup. Her chignon is arranged in two plaits with a knot at the end. She wears a *sāri* and bracelets. She has coarse features with a prominent nose, thick lips and almond-shaped eyes. In between the devotees, lying on the floor, is a wine jar.

¹⁰⁴ *Gilgit Manuscripts*, Vol. III, Part I, p. 14.

¹⁰⁵ Krishna Deva and Vijayakanta Mishra, *Vaisali Excavations: 1950*, Vaisali (Bihar), 1961, p. 63, Pl. XXIIIA, fig. 22.

¹⁰⁶ *Indian Archaeology—a Review*, 1962-63, pp. 5-6, Pl. XII (b).

In the bottom compartment on the left appears a nude male holding a cup in his left hand apparently stepping forward to offer it to the nude Mother goddess on the right. She stands with her hands lowered down, the feet splayed and the hair arranged in schematic curls. She wears circular earrings, a torque and a zone.

A circular terracotta plaque from Avara¹⁰⁷ in Madhya Pradesh (Figs. 4-a & 4-b) throws further light on the erotic aspect of the Mother goddess cult. The plaque which is datable to the first century B.C. has a hole on a semicircular projection at the top which indicates that it was meant to be hung in some place of worship. Here the Mother goddess stands on a lotus pod with a stalk springing on either side tipped with an open flower. Flanking the stalks are plants tipped by what appear to be wheat or barley ears. In the background appears a palm tree with its fronds clearly marked. The goddess has her legs slightly flexed. She holds an end of her garment with the left hand and touching the earring with the right hand. She wears a tall triangular headdress with a recurved horn on either end, a necklace hanging between the breasts, armlets, bracelets, anklets and the zone holding in place the transparent *sāri* which reveals her sex. There is hardly any doubt that the goddess could be identified with Śrī.¹⁰⁸

The most important part of the composition, however, is a couple or Mithuna on either side of the goddess fondling the women held in their laps as a preparatory stage for sexual union. In the foreground appears a pitcher on either hand which either contained wine, or as the lotus vegetation around them shows are *pūrnaghaṭa* symbolizing the waters, the source of all life.

The reverse of the plaque is decorated with three concentric circles; the first is decorated with diagonally assorted lozenges; the second with cable pattern and the third with an expanding lotus.

We have seen that in a carved disc from Murtaziganj and the plaque from Rajgir nude male figures appear. The question which poses itself is the identification of these nude male figures and whether they represented the consort of the Mother goddess or they were connected in some way with her cult. That the nude Mother goddess had her consort is proved by the fragment of a plaque from Kauśāmbī in the Allahabad Museum datable to the third century B.C.¹⁰⁹ The male consort stands to the left in the same posture as the Mother goddess with his hands lowered down and the feet splayed. His phallus is clearly marked. In this connection attention may be drawn to one bronze and two copper figures of the nude god in the Prince of Wales

¹⁰⁷ H. V. Trevedi, "Excavation at Āvara," *Journal of the Madhya Pradesh Itihasa Parishad*, No. 4, 1962, p. 25, Pl. IV. Moti Chandra, "Nidhiśrīvīga (Cornucopia): A study in symbolism," *Bulletin of the Prince of Wales Museum*, No. 9, 1964-66, p. 25, fig. 17.

¹⁰⁸ *Bulletin of the Prince of Wales Museum*, No. 6, 1957-59, p. 21.

¹⁰⁹ Pramod Chandra, *Stone Sculpture in the Allahabad Museum*, Pl. III, 7.

Museum all datable to the third century B.C. The nude bronze figure (Ht. 3.8 cm.) (Fig. 5) has an oval face with a big pinched up nose and crenellated beard; both hands are broken; slender torso; the astride legs are also partly broken; a dagger attached to the waist-band. The most important part in the anatomy of the figure is the hanging phallus and the testicles. The second nude copper figure from Kauśāmbī (Ht. 3.3 cm.) (Fig. 6) has a tall ovaloid head, pinched up nose and slit lips giving the face a bird-like appearance. The hands are hanging down the sides; the torso is narrow and the hips broad. The widely separated legs are slightly bowed and the phallus is indicated by a pallet. The third nude figure (Ht. 5.3 cm.) is elongated (Fig. 7). The head is tall and strangely bird-like, the slightly bent hands are hanging at the sides; the torso is long; a hole indicates the navel; the widely separated legs are stumpy; and a lump indicates the phallus. There is hardly any doubt that all these figures, in spite of slight differences represent the same god.

Who was that god there is no clue to suggest, but the figures recall to mind Śiva as Lakuliśa with erect phallus whose iconographic form is well known. As a matter of fact in the *MB.* XIII. 17 Śiva is addressed as Ěrdhvaretas (45), Međhraja (58), Vṛishana (80) and Mahāmeđhra (83)—all signifying the nudity of the god. As the Mother goddess had no fixed form in ancient literature exchanging her role with other goddesses it is possible that when appearing with a nude male figure she may be representing Umā-Ambikā whose role as the consort of Śiva is well known.

The priests appearing on the carved discs seem to be Babylonian both in physiognomy and dress. How these foreigners got attached to the Iridian Mother goddess is still a mystery, but the possibility is that in the third century B.C. or even before there was an intrusion of the Mother goddess cult from Western Asia in this country which though syncretized with the indigenous cult, continued to maintain some of the original features of the cult. The typical kilt-like under-garment worn by the priests is the Babylonian *kaunakēs* made of wool. It might have been so made in India, but *goṇī*, the equivalent of *kaunakēs*, which appears in ancient Buddhist literature, might have been the sack-cloth, as *goṇī* made of hemp is known today.

In Babylonia *kaunakēs* is the symbol of luxuriant vegetation, fecundity and prosperity,¹¹⁰ and in India as well the garment seems to have carried the same symbolical meaning.

The Mother goddess Śrī and others are closely related with the plant life specially the lotus, a symbol of the waters. However, in the carved discs her contact with the palm-tree is emphasized. The ancient literature has little to say about the symbolism of the palm-tree; apparently either it was borrowed

¹¹⁰ Jean Przyluski, "The Great Goddess in India and Iran," *Indian Historical Quarterly*, Vol. X, 1934, pp. 405-430.

from Western Asia or from some indigenous folk religion about which our knowledge is limited. The goddess is also related with the *pipal* tree. In the Avara plaque she is related with the corn, thus justifying one of her designations as Śākambhārī "the nourisher of corn".

The Rupar fragmentary disc throws some interesting light on the cult of the Mother goddess. It is evident from it that the Mother goddess had some sort of sanctuary, howsoever primitive it might have been, dedicated to her worship. This structure was visited by the devotees among whom women must have preponderated and the priest offered them *prasāda* as is customary in the temples of the gods and goddesses today. It seems that in the second century B.C. the temples of the Mother goddess became somewhat more elaborate. We have already referred to the temple of Śrī at Vidiśā which must have existed in the second century B.C. In one of the medallions of Stūpa 2 of Sanchi a woman who could be identified with Śrī, as she is holding a lotus, stands framed in the vaulted doorway with the balustrade in front.¹¹¹ This doorway indicates that the structure perhaps represented a modest temple of Śrī.

The Rajgir plaque and the Avara terracotta disc also throw important light on the esoteric rites of the Mother goddess cult. In common with the later Śaktism dancing, music, drinking and sexual revelry formed a part of the cult. Not only the devotees drank, wine was offered to the goddess. It is because of these practices that early Buddhism proscribed the Śrī cult.

In the Avara disc the *pūrnaghaṭa* probably appears as an auspicious symbol, closely associated with Śrī-Lakshmi who is shown as standing on a lotus and the *pūrnaghaṭa* is also associated with the mass of lotus flowers and leaves. "The three types are apparently equal and synonymous symbols of abundance, and it may be that the vase alone should be regarded as an aniconic symbol of and equivalent to the goddess herself."¹¹²

"The vase of plenty described above is clearly a life symbol, and the formal offering of such a vase can only be the expression of a wish that the recipient, or in general all those present, may enjoy health, wealth, and long life. The representation in art implies similarly a desired instigation by suggestion of all the vegetative energies involved in the current conception of well-being; as a symbol it clearly belongs to the order of ideas characteristic of the ancient life cults of fertility and fruitfulness".¹¹³

It is remarkable that the symbolism of the vase of plenty had already crystallized in the Vedic period. For instance, the *RV.* IX. 62.9 speaks of the overflowing vase. The *soma* entering the vase induced all kind of beauty and

¹¹¹ J. Marshall and A. Foucher, *The Monuments of Sāñchī, Stupa 2*, Pl. LXXVIII 22a.

¹¹² Coomaraswamy, *Yakṣas*, Part II, p. 61.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 62-63.

prosperity (*viśvah śriyah*) in it. The *pūrṇa-kalaśa* is invoked as a witness to enjoyment and blessing (*RV.* X. 32.9). According to the *AV.* XIX. 53.31, the *pūrṇakumbha* symbolizes the substratum of time. The *YV.* XIX. 87 significantly points out that it symbolizes life emanating from the womb. Neumann rightly observes that in the great vessel of the female body the principal symbolic elements are the mouth, the breast and the womb. Thus the womb, a part of the body-vessel or the vessel itself in Vedic terminology is the source of all life. To quote Neumann, "The lowest level of this belly zone in the underworld that is contained in the 'belly' or 'womb' of the earth. To this world belong not only the subterranean darkness as hell and night but also such symbols as clasm, cave, abyss, valley, depths, which in innumerable rites and myths play the part of the earth womb that demands to be fructified."¹¹⁴

We have already discussed the symbolism of the *makara* and its association with some Yakshis, Śrī-Lakṣmī, Gaṅgā, Kāma and Varuṇa and how closely it was associated with fertility, wealth and the waters. Attention may, however, be drawn to two following objects which provide interesting information about the association of the Mother goddess with the *makara*.

The first is a *makara*-shaped copper ritual implement measuring 5.5 cm. lengthwise (Fig. 8-a-b). Unfortunately it is badly corroded. It is recurved in shape and perhaps served as the handle for a ritual staff. The surface of the handle is decorated with a series of nude Mother goddesses with dotted haloes and rosettes indicating the lotus. It has a ring to which is attached the figure of a bird—perhaps a peacock. A question may be posed whether it is a part of the miniature Śrī-Yashṭi referred to in the *Śrī-Sūkta*.

The second object, a circular terracotta plaque in the collection of the State Museum, Lucknow, is of greater importance for the association of the Mother goddess with the fertility aspect of the *makara* (Fig. 9). Unfortunately its provenance is not known but on stylistic ground it could be dated to the first century B.C. On either side of the disc is represented a *makara* with up-raised tail and open snout. The Mother goddess is emanating from their snouts with one leg embedded in the snout of each *makara*. The upper part of the snouts are curled round the arms of the goddess who has raised her lower garment exposing her pudenda. She wears no ornament except a necklace. Her face is round and the mouth and eyes are incised. Her hair locks are horn-shaped.

It is difficult to identify this goddess, as so far my knowledge goes this goddess does not appear in early Indian stone sculpture or terracottas. But it is evident that she is a goddess of fertility, possibly a river goddess or may be one of the forms of the Great Mother who appears on the carved discs.

¹¹⁴ Erich Neumann, *The Great Mother*, London, 1955, p. 44.

For other references See V. S. Agrawala, *Studies in Indian Art*, Varanasi, 1965, pp. 43-46.

One of the forms of the Mother goddess who may be Śrī-Lakshmi in which she is endowed with wings is rather unusual. A winged¹¹⁵ terracotta figure of the Mother goddess has been found from Basarh (Vaiśāli).: The goddess is standing on a lotus with her hands on the hips. She is scantily clad but wears huge earrings and is distinguished by the wings of unusual type in which the Iranian influence is clearly recognizable. The terracotta is datable to the second century B.C. Zimmer has also drawn our attention to this figurine and he has rightly pointed out that except for the winged Garuda, winged figures in ancient Indian art are absent though in ancient Mesopotamian art winged divinities or genii are the rule. "This Indian figure betrays connection with that tradition. That is the sphere from which are derived the wings of our divinities of the West, the Greek victory-goddesses as well as the Christian angels."¹¹⁶

The author has in his collection a fragment of a carved stone disc from Kauśāmbī measuring 5 x 2.5 cm. representing the same winged Śrī-Lakshmi as depicted on the Basarh terracotta. The steatopygous Mother goddess had perhaps splayed feet which hidden by the lotus are not visible and her nudity is prominently emphasized (Fig. 10). The waist is narrow, the breasts are round and well formed and the outstretched hands bent at the elbows, each holding a lotus-stalk springing from a rosette. The face is round; the long slanting eyes remind us the appliquéd technique of early Indian terracottas from Mathura; the mouth is large and narrow and the nose thick and rather snub. The hair is arranged in schematic curls and the earrings are peg-shaped and she wears bracelets. A series of solid circles encircle the body from the breasts downwards, perhaps indicating some kind of a halo. The wings on the shoulders are fan-shaped. On the left there appear two fronds of a palm-tree indicating the association of the goddess with it.

While studying certain aspects of the Mother goddess cult and symbolical elements attached to it based mostly on the carved stone discs of the Maurya-Śuṅga period, we felt that it will not be out of place to refer to some terracotta figurines of the Mother goddess which throw light on the popular attitude towards the cult. Such terracotta figures have been found from almost all important archaeological sites from northern India and their number shows that the Mother goddess was held in great veneration by the people from the third to the first century B.C.

Mathura was an important centre of the cult of the Mother goddess though it is difficult to be positive about her identification. A figure of the Mother goddess from Mathura in the Prince of Wales Museum 21.5 cm. in height is made of unbaked clay in which only the face is moulded but the rest of the body is hand-modelled (Fig. 11). The face with its sloping forehead,

¹¹⁵ A.S.I., *Annual Report*, 1913-14, p. 116, Pl. XLIV, No. 550.

¹¹⁶ Zimmer, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

large but somewhat slanting eyes, snub nose and well-modelled lips, bears a morose expression. The hands are broken, the round breasts are close together and the navel represented by a fairly big depression. The legs are also broken but the steatopygia of the figure is stressed. The chief interest of the figure, however, is in its heavy decoration. She wears heavy circular earrings and her fan-like headdress is decorated with rosettes and leaves in appliqué. The necklace hanging down the navel is made up of a series of round and oblong plaques in appliqué. The zone is made up of two rows of rosettes.

It is interesting to note that the figure of the Mother goddess bears close resemblance with the figure of the winged Śrī-Lakshmi cited above and that only means that in the 3rd to 2nd century B.C. one iconographic type of the Mother goddess had evolved itself. There is, however, one difference. While in the fragmentary disc the Mother goddess wears only the earrings and bracelets the figure under discussion wears elaborate ornaments which may be due to the popular taste which prefers elaboration to simplicity.

An interesting terracotta plaque (size 12 x 8.8 cm.) of the Śunga period from Kauśāmbī in the Prince of Wales Museum depicts, Gaja Lakshmī (Fig. 12) standing in *samabhaṅga* pose. She has narrow waist and broad hips. She wears an elaborate headdress decorated with rosettes, large earrings, a necklace and heavily folded *sārī*, one end of which passes over her left arm. Her Mother goddess aspect is very clear from the child she is holding with her right hand and resting on her waist. The association of a child with Gaja Lakshmi is unusual. An elephant on her either side standing on a lotus with long stalk was perhaps holding a water-pot in its upraised trunk, in the act of lustrating the goddess. The trunks of the elephants are damaged. The background behind the head of Gaja Lakshmī is decorated with palm fronds and the foreground with rosettes. The feet of the goddess are missing. At the bottom right corner the head of an aquatic bird has survived.

We have already pointed out that the Mother goddess holding a pair of fish depicted on a large terracotta plaque from Mathura and Kauśāmbī is not Vasudhārā as contended by Dr. Agrawala, but a variation of the Iranian goddess Anāhita whose symbol was the fish. A moulded terracotta plaque from Mathura in the Allahabad Museum datable to the first century B.C. depicts the Mother goddess holding a pair of fish (Fig. 13). She is standing with her feet joined together and her hands hanging down at her sides. Her face with long eyes, the snub nose and well formed lips conforms to the general facial type of the Mother goddesses of the period. She is fully draped wearing a full-sleeved tunic and transparent *sārī* reaching upto the ankles. Her hair is parted in the middle and decorated with pearl strands and rosettes. An ornament made of rosette plaques stretches down her right side; perhaps it was meant to represent the halo. She wears a circular and a roller-shaped earrings, a necklace, a two-stranded necklace hanging between the breasts, armlets, bracelets and a four-stranded zone. The radiating projections behind her hair

probably represent the stylized version of the top of a palm-tree, with which, as we have already pointed out, the Mother goddesses are closely associated. In her right hand she holds a pair of fish.

There is another type of the same Mother goddess with a pair of fish from Kauśāmbī (Ht.4.13 cm.) datable to the first century B.C. in the Prince of Wales Museum (Fig. 14). Here the standing Mother goddess wears a bicornate headdress decorated with rosettes, heavy spiralled earrings, necklets and a necklace hanging down between the breasts. She is encircled with the halo made of rosettes, traces of which have only survived. In her slightly bent right hand she holds a pair of fish and with the left hand she is touching the girdle. Her legs are partially broken. There is no palm-tree behind her.

As in the case of the carved stone discs of the Maurya-Śunga period depicting the Mother goddess associated with the palm-tree, in the terracottas as well she appears in association with the palm-tree. There are two terracotta plaques from Kauśāmbī both in the Bhārat Kalā Bhavan datable to c. 100 B.C. which show the association of the Mother goddess, probably, Śrī with the palm-tree (Fig. 15). Here the standing goddess is more delicately modelled, which contrasts with the heavy robustness of the Mother goddess holding a pair of fish. She wears an elaborate jewelled headdress, peg-shaped earrings, necklace, armlets and bracelets and a three-stranded zone. In her right hand, bent at the elbow, she holds a full blown lotus; the left is holding a lotus stalk or is resting on the waist. In the background are represented curling fronds of a stylized palm-tree. The legs below the knees are broken.

In the second plaque (Fig. 16) the Mother goddess wears a headdress which is decorated with a series of rosettes. She wears heavy earrings, a necklet and a necklace. Her hands are hanging by her sides. The interspace between the figure and the plaque is filled with rosettes. In the background is represented the top of a palm-tree with fronds. The lower part of the plaque is broken.

ABBREVIATIONS

AB. *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*; *AV.* *Atharva Veda*; *Bri.* *Sāni. Brihat Samhitā*; *GB.* *Goparha Brāhmaṇa*; *GGS.* *Gobhila Gṛhya Sūtra*; *HV.* *Harivāṁśa*; *JB.* *Jaiminiya Brāhmaṇa*; *MB.* *Mahābhārata*; *Mait.* *S. Maitrāyaṇī Samhitā*; *Manu.* *S. Manu Smṛiti*; *Mār.* *P. Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*; *Matsya P.* *Matsya Purāṇa*; *PGS.* *Pāraskara Gṛhya Sūtra*; *Rām.* *Rāmāyaṇa*; *RV.* *Rig. Veda*; *ŚB.* *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*; *ŚŚS.* *Śāṅkhāyana Śrauta Sūtra*; *TĀ.* *Taittiriya Āraṇyaka*; *TB.* *Taittiriya Brāhmaṇa*; *TS.* *Taittiriya Samhitā*; *VS.* *Vājasaneyī Samhitā*; *Vāyu P.* *Vāyu Purāṇa*; *Vishṇu P.* *Vishṇu Purāṇa*; *YV.* *Yajur Veda*.