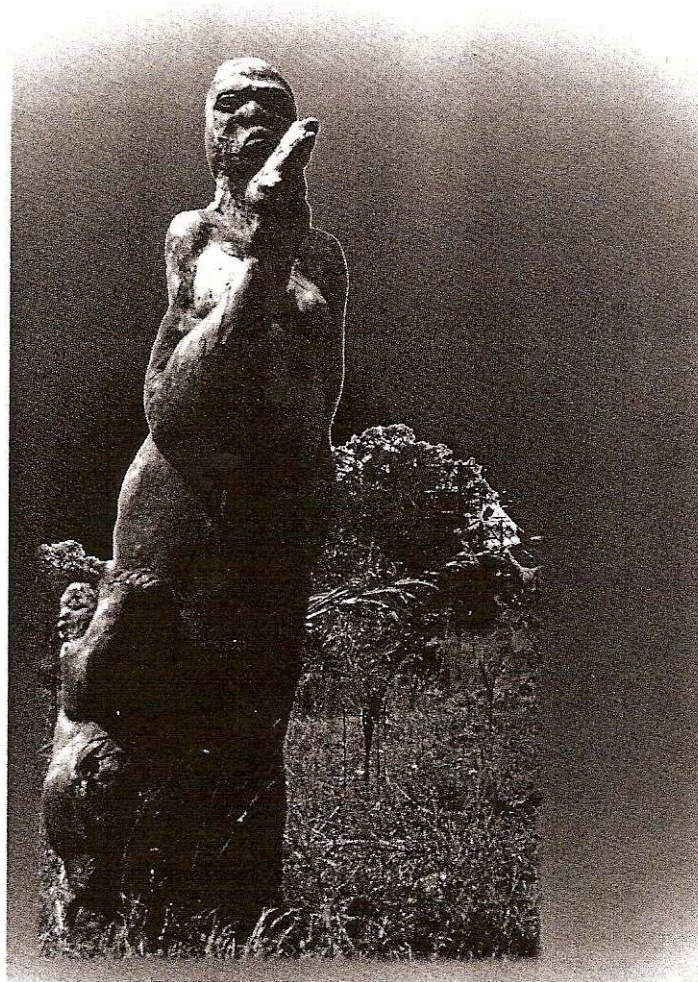


SHE IS EVERYWHERE!

AN ANTHOLOGY OF WRITING IN
WOMANIST/FEMINIST SPIRITUALITY

VOL. 2



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Exploring a Cross-Cultural Women's Spirituality: Inspirations from India

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Introduction

One counter-force to manipulative patriarchal identity branding and hierarchical control is the relatively recent development in the modern west of an articulated and engaged Goddess-centered spirituality. Within "Women's Spirituality," as the movement is sometimes called, are contained subversive tactics and stances that define spiritual, womanist/feminist, and woman-honoring spaces from inside as well as outside the mainstream. Many are subversive (if not antinomian) because they serve to undermine pathological systems and/or move experience or consciousness beyond specific patriarchal, national, political and religio-cultural boundaries.

Women's Spirituality as we know it in the west is therefore a paradigm-shifting force. We witness and also participate in the mystery as the face of God changes and She becomes one of us, acting, speaking and being from places more deeply and powerfully connected to our truth, beauty and embodied wisdom. In fact, the Divine Female so central to Women's Spirituality has never been contained by geographic borders or other boundaries—She has only been suppressed and repressed. Today, she is enlivened through art, music, scholarship, ritual and the simple fact of women's breath upon her ancient names. Names such as Isis, Hecate, Lilith, Cerridwen, Macha, and Asherah (to name just a few), join alongside the living and re-claimed or newly-created traditions honoring Mary, Oya, Tara, and Kali (among others) to find deep resonance within individuals regardless of demographic particulars.

Syncretism East & West: An Ecofeminism of Tantra

Whether a movement for (r)evolution toward psycho-spiritual wholeness, healing of the planet, social justice or simply a practice in accordance with ancient as well as living traditions that honor God in Her female form, Women's Spirituality embraces many different hearts and minds. Adherents find empowerment through the resacralization of matter and the acknowledgement of women's process, not as analogous to that of the hero touted in western myth, but rather rooted in the phases of life, death and rebirth/initiation extant in creation at all levels: individual, collective, planetary, and cosmic.

Like Women's Spirituality, Indian philosophy and theology has long embraced *prakṛti*—the Feminine principle. Defined as the entirety of nature, inclusive of the ability to create, sustain, and destroy, understanding *prakṛti* can help achieve a more balanced worldview while promoting environmental sustainability and the well being of diverse, autonomous communities.¹

Because the living, goddess-centered, embodied spirituality of India, known as Śākta Tantra, embraces the fullness of *prakṛti*, it can also be employed to depotentiate patriarchal toxicity and create new spaces for life-affirming and fuller expressions of humanity within physical, emotional and psycho-spiritual realms. Śākta Tantra provides ritualized as well as lived practices in which the body acts as, and becomes substance for, the divine. It considers Female/Feminine energy to be fundamental and activating—the source of all creation without which gods and humanity would perish. There are distinct paths within Tantra; however, it is Devī as pre-eminent, fundamental reality who engages the heart, mind and soul of Śākta devotees.²

Garnering impetus for a shift out of the patriarchal paradigm benefits not only from an ecofeminist deconstruction of pathological western worldviews, but also from a Śākta Tantrick embodied spirituality that reinforces the articulated assertions of contemporary Women's Spirituality with extant goddess traditions and their millennia-old rituals, practices and traditions of veneration, devotion, honor and respect for the Divine Female (and in some instances, actual women). Sensing the importance of this alliance, academic writers have already produced an ecofeminism of Tantra.³

Empowering for women and woman-occupied spaces, an ecofeminism of Tantra: i) engages feminism across divides; ii) demystifies Devī (as the goddess is called in Sanskrit) for westerners, especially bringing an

understanding of Devī worship and the roles of women in such worship to light; and iii) deepens a conversation about women and goddesses. Both generally and within Hinduism specifically, an ecofeminism of Tantra helps to articulate some of the ways in which Śakta Tantrick worship poses a real understanding of the relatedness of women's and goddesses' power (even given that in societies the world over, there is no inherent correlation between the worship of a goddess and a favorable status for women). Articulating an ecofeminism of Tantra can potentiate new paradigms.

Yet, do the innovations of Women's Spirituality appropriate spiritual traditions and deities? Is there contextual understanding and reciprocity when working with divine energies and inspirations across cultures? Can Women's Spirituality open a space within itself to include all women, all continents and all genders? If so, what does that inclusiveness look like, particularly for peoples across differences of race, age, ethnicity, class, religion, culture and other distinctions when Goddess is said to embrace all, yet patriarchy knows marginalization even within its sites of resistance?

Striving for a cross-cultural Women's Spirituality, I argue that a globalized ecofeminist position can be endeavored—one that includes sensitivity to the particulars while also allowing for universal truth claims to ultimately serve in the fight for an emancipatory discourse. Working within a global Women's Spirituality, I believe that a developed ecofeminism of Tantra can heal peoples and the planet, in part because it brings together embodied and cosmological consciousness within a framework of interrelatedness that is mindful of individuals (especially those previously voiceless), heeding of the past, respectful of differences and intent upon sustainability.

The nature of this paper is not only to further a general conversation, but also to enact viable approaches to a cross-cultural embodied spirituality—a cross-cultural Women's Spirituality—that utilizes an ecofeminism of Tantra as methodology to consciously alter systems and practices while maintaining a self-reflective stance. Here, I seek a deepening of theory and ask for a promise of engagement in the issues of today by those committed to Women's Spirituality. Finally, my hope is that this paper offers inspiration and calls readers to action.

Women and Goddesses

Goddesses are helping us reclaim the power of womanhood and the Feminine. However, often in academic literature as well as in actual life, the relationship between women and goddesses is conflated—either ignored or glorified to an extreme—usually to the detriment of actual women.

Indeed, women and goddesses are often simultaneously feared, revered, honored, and expunged, with many of the roles assigned to women by societal dictates, codified laws, or superstitious beliefs—and to goddesses by the scriptures—determined by patriarchal controls that arise particularly out of male fears of essential femaleness; i.e., H/her biology.

It is the fundamental organ of womanhood, the *yoni* (womb/vulva), that is the original site of instigation for patriarchal control; for men can neither bleed fertile blood in accord with the natural cycles nor bear children (though they often attempt to replicate these processes through symbolic and literal means). Of course, the controls arising from male fears may be maintained through any number of patriarchal agencies and agents, including women themselves.

Fear-based responses to women and goddesses have particular context-specific manifestations. In India where *Devī* is a living, active agent in both religion and popular culture, it is still the case that having powerful goddesses does not necessarily mean acknowledging, promoting, or providing spaces for the creation of powerful women. The establishment of women's identity, largely defined through relationships to men (as wife, mother, or consort), translates equally well to the celestial sphere where myths and stories of the goddesses teach particularly about proper behavior, duty and honor. Within the bounds of H/her roles and with relatively few exceptions, woman/goddess is subservient to gods and men (or both).

The purity or impurity of women, for example, is deemed important, judged by patriarchal means, validated through the written word, manipulated by sanctioned interpreters (usually men), and reinforced with laws as well as religio-cultural structures. The reality of women's marginal status within Hindu society is codified within the *Manu Sambita* (Laws of Manu), a document utilized since the 7th century BCE to validate and reinforce the subjugation of women in addition to defining their societal roles. The categories of subjugation under which women are placed and the related socio-cultural controls have generated, *et alia*, the patriarchal practices of suttee, dowry, and child marriage—all of which are still in force in many parts of India despite efforts (including legal measures) to abolish them.

Interestingly, while most of the systems and structures put in place according to patriarchal mandates are certainly an effort to perpetuate male dominance, some are nevertheless believed to be protection against the *śakti*, or inherent power of woman nature. However, despite myriad methods for, on the one hand, subjugating women or defending against them on the other, there are some spheres (as will be discussed), in which *śakti* as the feminine principle contained within *Devī* and/or women is

honored. (Who does this honoring and who benefits from it are important points to consider.)

Because of a greater global awareness created through the strides of feminism, activism and communication networks, the impact of Goddess today is not only more discernable, but also more powerful. In both economically and spiritually poor countries, the extent to which those in various positions of power control the relationship of women to the Divine is slowly beginning to crumble or at least be drawn into question. Women are increasingly becoming *svatantrya* (independent or free) because they are empowered to break the bonds and limits of patriarchal imaginings. No amount of religio-cultural sweetening can hide or control the raw potency Goddess can offer, and many women are, in many spheres (work, home, place of worship), demanding as well as radiating the fullest expression of their human natures.

Chandra Mohanty's critique of Northern (First World) feminists who totalize Southern (Third World) women and ignore the differences among them is relevant in a conversation where women, feminism and spirit come together.⁴ And a beginning point for discussion is suggested by one western feminist, Carol Lee Flinders, by asking western women to enter into dialogue with Indian feminists so that each can learn from the other, particularly given the living goddess traditions of Hindu India and the ways in which these traditions inform some Indian feminisms.⁵ For Hindus as well as for Indian women generally, such a discussion can help facilitate understanding of Devī as an empowering force (rather than relegating Her to the dustbin of patriarchal religion); for westerners it can help bring to light the position of women in contemporary India, as well as their particular concerns and spiritual traditions.

Women and Śākta Tantra

Based upon my own experience and research in the west, many are finding that the Śākta Tantrick path can help strengthen an understanding of the Divine Feminine (or Divine Female). Working with some of Hinduism's most fierce goddesses (e.g., Kali, Chamunda, Durga, Tara) can also lead to an appreciation of the context in which Devī and her human sisters in India live today. If engaging cross-cultural dialogue under the rubric of Women's Spirituality (or within a conversation dedicated to furthering an ecofeminism of Tantra), looking at feminist concerns about the treatment and status of women within contexts of the sacred is necessary. Within Śākta Tantra, for example, the literal position of women tends to pale in comparison to the status afforded the goddess relative

to Her male counterparts; i.e., the gods. While women may occupy a metaphysically high position in Śākta Tantra (they may, in some cases, be said to be a small part of Devī's śakti and thereby have some occasional real-world benefits), they are still generally treated as marginal. On the one hand, the Śākta tradition has been said to be:

suited to all constitutions and to all stations of life. It is for the prince as for the peasant, for the poor as for the rich, for the man of business as for the man of leisure. It makes no distinction of caste, colour, creed, or nationality, welcoming one and all who will bow to the lotus-feet of the Divine Mother.⁶

Yet, it is still a tradition where many interpreters and practitioners often avoid discussing the role and status of women. For example, Barada Kanta Majumdar just quoted, seems to have left at least one distinction off his list—gender. And on the other hand, as David Gordon White notes:

...it would be hasty to conclude, on the basis of the general Tantric exaltation of feminine energy, that female practitioners have ever dominated the religious or political Tantric sphere. Even in her transformative initiatory role, the Tantric consort has remained instrumental to the requirements of the male practitioners she transforms.⁷

Other recent attempts to discuss women's place in Śākta Tantra have, while not exhaustive or entirely feminist, at least opened a door to this critical conversation. Some scholars, in agreement with White, recognize that in many interpretations of Tantra, women within the Śākta tradition have not generally served as anything other than the ritual instruments of men's *sādhana* (spiritual practice). But other writers, perhaps attempting to legitimate a feminist Śākta Tantra, are claiming women to have a significant role to play in the formal worship rites, primarily as initiators.⁸

Taken with a feminist critique in mind, Śākta Tantra can provide a welcome model, I believe, not only to help facilitate the elevation of women's status in Hindu society generally, but also to further the reclamation of goddesses and women's empowerment the world over. The timing could not be better; for combined with women in actual positions of power, the decline of male initiators in the Śākta tradition (many of whom are refusing to continue the lineage because of a lack of sustainable livelihood therein, as well as a commonplace desire for a more typically western and economically successful adulthood for their sons, i.e., an "office job"),⁹ is opening doors to the goddess in new and increasingly meaningful ways for women in both east and west. Women are now fulfilling multiple levels of engagement and the taking on of increased responsibility in affirmed positions of power within Śākta Tantra as practiced in both India and

abroad. My own experience working in the United States as a priestess of Kālī and initiate of the Śākta tradition (I received *diksha* in India in 1998 and again in 2002) offers one example of what is possible.¹⁰

While for some Indian feminists (as is true for many western feminists) spirituality is not an important focus, for others it is tremendously important. Particularly given some of the more antinomian practices and devotional traditions associated with Devī and Her worship, utilizing the convergence of ecofeminism and Tantra as an east-west platform for continuing the unfoldment of Women's Spirituality, She may evolve in unison with women the world over into a much more readily embraced agent of change—even for those feminists loathe to embrace spirituality because of the ways in which religion has particularly kept women as subordinated objects in many contexts.

With the acceptance of the Goddess across cultures, and with Her followers taking on roles of leadership, I firmly believe that a more fully integrated ecofeminism of Tantra, in which theory and praxis come together for both participatory discourse and action, will facilitate a new paradigm. Such work will help not only to create a cross-cultural Women's Spirituality, but also it will develop practical approaches to implementing and sustaining new procedures and practices that will catalyze the attainment of health, wholeness, and peace on multiple levels of reality.

Introduction to Kāmākhyā

Kāmākhyā is a famous pilgrimage site located outside of Guwahati in Assam, in the northeast region of India. Primarily important to Hindu Śāktas, or believers in the preeminence of Devī, the site is “regarded as a living center of her [the goddess'] immeasurable power”¹¹ and functions as the most important Śākta *pītha*, or sacred “seat” of the goddess for devotees. Fifty-one sacred pilgrimage sites exist on the Indian sub-continent; the most sacred for Śāktas is Kāmākhyā.

The *mandir*, or sacred temple, to which pilgrims and devotees come to worship, is situated on a beautiful hill overlooking the Brahmaputra river and the green lushness of Assam's tea plantations and jungles. It is here, the purāṇas tell us, that the yoni of Devī fell to Earth. The story goes that in ancient times, one of Her manifestations, Satī, killed herself in shame over her husband Śiva's not being invited to a great *yagna* (ritual sacrifice) offered by Satī's father. In Śiva's grief over her death, he began his *tandava*, or cosmic dance of destruction, with her body upon his shoulders. It was left to Viṣṇu to stop the tirade and thus save the world by cutting up Satī's body with his *chakra* (discus). These pieces then fell to Earth, giving

Śāktas their most holy pilgrimage sites.

Today, as has been true for millennia, Her presence is deeply felt; for She is everywhere, honored as the sexual, procreative, maternal and devouring force. As noted by N.N. Bhattacharyya, the *Kālikā Purāṇa* describes Devī as a supreme being, “as the supramental Prakṛti, the material cause of the phenomenal world, and the embodiment of all energy, consciousness and bliss. The world owes its origin to her, while she does not owe her origin to anything.”¹² She is made immanently manifest through matter in the bodies of the earth and all beings; and She is made apparent as transcendent Divine through devotees’ direct experience.

Worship at Kāmākhyā is deeply connected with esoteric Śākta Tantrick rites and practices, some of which involve the honoring of women as embodiments of the goddess, the worship of the *yoni*, and, at least for the ritual’s duration, the actual veneration of a particular woman. By contrast within the Indian context, worship of the god Śiva’s *lingam* (phallus) is common and exoteric, generally not translating to an honoring of male sexuality or to the worship of the phallus as sacred in actual men.¹³ Perhaps this is because patriarchal tradition is phallicentric already—and for the west, the fact that the Abrahamic God is not portrayed, nor generally understood, as a sexual being has ramifications of its own, including a suppression of the richness of the male life force, which might otherwise have many life-affirming manifestations. This, however, is beyond the scope of the present discussion.

Nevertheless, most worshippers disconnect the lingam they honor from the sexual organ of men and God, more specifically regarding it as the symbolic essence of God.¹⁴ And as Wendy Doniger notes (although allowing that there are some extant ambiguities), the depictions of Śiva as ithyphallic are in themselves “accepted as representative of chastity.”¹⁵

This is not at all the case with the rites of the goddess; and it is important to note not only that Śākta Tantra explicitly resonates with the wisdom that validates the mysteries of the body, but also that it does so particularly in relationship to women’s bodies and menstruation, for these are recognized as natural expressions of the sacred within this tradition. Most generally, the conception of Goddess defined by the literature of Women’s Spirituality also asserts the sacred nature of bodies and sexuality (in direct contrast to mainstream Christianity of both the Catholic and Protestant varieties), often providing examples from European and Near Eastern pre-Christian traditions to do so.¹⁶ Working with Devī, therefore, easily resonates with some western women; yet also it helps to expand western women’s relatedness to cross-cultural

expressions of the Divine.

Menstruation is specifically central to understanding Devī and women in Śākta Tantra because it plays an instrumental part in the formation of Śākta Tantrick psycho-cosmic reality:

the menstrual cycle in the female body corresponds to, and represents, the cyclical change of the seasons, and the orderliness in the universe...[further, it serves to] interrelate humans to their environment and to the socio-cultural reality in which their rites and rituals attain fruition...[it is an] episode that provides us with a choreography in which collective acts and events of theological/philosophical and cosmological significance attain fruition.¹⁷

The menstrual rhythms tap into an ontological, universal ebb and flow resonant at individual, planetary and cosmic/divine levels. At Kāmākhyā, this reality is magnified and its truth heightened for devotees by the actual presence of the goddess' yoni on Earth. Her yoni is believed to share menstrual blood once during the equivalent of our solar calendar year, during the dark moon phase *mela* (festival) known as *Ambubāchī*, a festival at which the forces of life and death co-join and Her blood coincides with the transitional time of the soil, when monsoon rains release the tension in the air and help in turn to realize the coming bounty of Earth's harvest.

Annually drawing over 40,000 devotees primarily from eastern India, *Ambubāchī*, is at once a spiritual gathering and a celebration highlighting not only people's devotion to the goddess but the potential, I believe, for universal empowerment through Devī and connection to the fundamental life mysteries. At this auspicious time, no pilgrims are allowed to enter Her temple sanctuary for three days; but orthodox dictates are of no relevance to Her ardent devotees. Her potency is so wild and intense that one only has to follow the throngs of red-wrapped *tāntrikas* (female Tantrick practitioners) around the outside of the main shrine to absorb the energy issuing from within it, as well as within each individual enraptured in self-induced trance in Her name.

At Kāmākhyā during *Ambubāchī*, despite the prevalence of Tantrick practitioners, orthodox practice is observed at the temples. This means that all of Her sacred sites upon the hillside (there are temples dedicated to each of the ten Mahāvidyas at Kāmākhyā) are closed for the three days that make up the duration of Maa Kāmākhyā's menses. (Mā Kāmākhyā is the local name for Mahādevī, the Great Goddess.) In India specifically, it is understood by Śākta Tantricks that women hold within their own individual bodies intimate knowledge of Devī's power through ties to menstruation. Women, especially during their moon time, are considered auspicious.¹⁸ In this there lies a disparity between orthodox and Tantrick

traditions—a belief in the power of menstrual blood is directly antithetical to normative Hindu teachings, which hold menstrual blood as a polluting substance.

Thus, during this time and according to Brahmanical dictates, the goddess' presence—her yoni is a cleft in the rock situated in a natural spring within the temple sanctum sanctorum—is bathed by blindfolded priests. She is never looked upon directly, thus maintaining the honor and dignity befitting a deity and especially a female. On the fourth day, the temple doors are opened to the throngs of devotees who wish to receive *darśan* (blessings through viewing—Her form is seen only through draped red cloth), *prasād* (blessed food), and if lucky or somehow deemed particularly worthy on that day, a piece of the red cloth from her sari, which symbolizes fecundity and the bounty of Her creation.

Whether regarded as taboo or celebrated, feared or revered, women's menstruation is nevertheless a site of power. As Ajit Mookerjee describes the meaning of women's blood for the Śākta Tantricks specifically:

The monthly efflorescence of woman in her cycle in rhythm with the lunar cycle creates a body-consciousness which is related to the processes of the universe. Since, according to tantra, the body is the link between the terrestrial world and the cosmos, the body is, as it were, the theatre in which the psycho-drama is enacted... Woman's body is both a unity and an organism directed towards oneness, wholeness.¹⁹

It is for this reason that pilgrims during Ambubāchī will drink the *rtu* (menstrual blood) of the goddess with great humility and belief in its healing powers. It is through menstrual blood that women may be equated with the power of the transpersonal Divine Female who infuses matter with spirit in all the worlds, She whose blood is holy, reality-altering, wish-fulfilling and supremely powerful. By utilizing the Śākta Tantrick worldview, it is easy to come to an understanding of women as physical agents of the Goddess who heal through their actual bodies and blood the split between the realms of matter and spirit, ultimately fostering a shift out of patriarchy from both consciousness and engaged perspectives.

Theory in Action

How then to begin implementing an ecofeminism of Tantra across divides of difference, doing work that is both spiritually-based and an effective agent of woman-affirming change? How then to effectuate a cross-cultural Women's Spirituality that takes responsibility for maintaining the integrity of those who claim to be empowered by it? Working at the grass-

roots level, I believe, is one way to be effective and to also come to greater compassion and understanding across divides of difference.

Because I argue that society and its constructs, along with religious spheres, need to take heed of indigenous traditions, rites, rituals and practices that honor women and nature as sacred—that honor the symbols of our power, such as menstruation—Kāmākhya provides an answer as to where to begin: we can start by acknowledging the essential fact of menstruation and by finding ways to honor the important transition that takes a girl into womanhood. Penelope Washbourn writes regarding the importance of marking menarche:

The ritual marks an understanding that the girl needs a symbolic, interpretive framework as she negotiates her first life crisis and redefines herself as a mature female. These rituals also express an understanding that discovering our identity as women is not to be a solitary struggle but is to be worked out within the context of the community. In each primitive ritual a form of self-transformation is expressed through trials, symbolic acts, and words which promote healing and integrate the forces at play. The girls and the community move into a new identity *through* the crisis.²⁰

Cultures where there is such a recognition of connectedness to the fullness of the natural world, to its cycles and to the quest for wholeness marked through initiatory rites, possess something we in the west have long forgotten or generally ignored—our immediate tie to the sacredness of our bodies and the Earth.

The realities of women's lives in both east and west show that when no sacred or communal space in which to learn about and honor the mysteries and realities inherent in the transformative process of becoming an adult woman is to be found; or when the rite of passage experienced is a psychologically painful or physically brutal process, girls on the verge of inheriting the responsibilities as well as the blessings of womanhood are often thrust into crisis—the kind of crisis from which many never emerge:

To emerge enriched from the life crisis of menstruation implies finally trusting and liking one's body...It gives pride and status rather than shame and mistrust...It can be creative for [the woman] and the community. Her trust of her body depends on her seeing it in context of the whole. In that sense, it is part of the very goodness of life and of the creative structures of all living organisms.²¹

The ideas and beliefs that surround women's blood, whether social, political or religious, shape not only the individual woman's sense of

self, but also the relationships in which she finds herself throughout life. Women are not naturally ashamed of their monthly course—they are taught to be so by patriarchal constructs in society and within many of the world's religions.

When extant, rites of passage in many parts of the globe are often only brutal reinforcements of patriarchal biases and attitudes that promote girls' self-hatred and the denigration of women's power. Within eastern as well as western contexts, girls are most often taught by cultural, societal, and religious norms (as well as by the dictates of advertising and peer pressure), to be ashamed of their monthly cycle and to associate women's status with subjugation. This of course, translates to easily-controlled and malleable women. Therefore, re-thinking and re-teaching menstruation as a natural, special, and powerful aspect of women's unique culture can mean that women move into a greater sense of empowerment in all areas of their lives.

Integration of a vibrant and respected womanhood into once patriarchal systems would transform those systems completely. Engaging a powerful understanding of womanhood in the world on larger levels will require tremendous effort. Yet it is exactly the coming together of eastern and western disciplines and worldviews that can effectuate change via this understanding. Imagine the global consequences of operating centers that, for example, provide educational materials and help younger women deal with the socio-cultural realities of becoming a woman in today's world, perhaps by providing elder guidance and mentorship in conjunction with rites of passage ceremonies at menarche. This vision offers a vehicle for the transformation of related issues and concerns affecting women and girls, such as the onset of eating disorders which, as is the case with anorexia nervosa, often have a direct correlation to the onset of menstruation.

Conclusion

Specifically of interest to me in furthering Women's Spirituality and with it developing what might be called an integral ecofeminism of Tantra are the contexts in which women, Hindu spirituality, and feminism exist and overlap. Both ecofeminist and Śākta Tantrick philosophies and practices foster the unfolding and dynamic spiraling of life, and these systems are paradigm-altering partners.

A spiritually-articulated and engaged ecofeminism of Tantra within a cross-cultural Women's Spirituality can foster the development of a community supportive of life-affirming struggles rather than those of continuing domination. It can become a rooted category of challenge to

the dominant culture—what catalyzes the (r)evolution of change upon our planet through life-affirming radical action in which women, men and nature co-create positive and flexibly sustainable outcomes. Through the Female Divine and Her agents empowered, subordinated communities and individuals will find ways to reclaim marginalized ideological and literal spaces, including those of women's bodies. No matter where in the world, the creation and reclamation of such spaces can act on multiple counts to empower people and institutions in new ways—in ways that ultimately mean the health of our planet's people and resources. It can: i) help build self-worth and positive identity frameworks; ii) foster the development of an "earth family"; iii) foster a participatory and sustainable environment; and iv) develop an ethic where exploitation is not conceivable in any context.

Lastly, such a spirituality can help promote specific action and provide the tools for the unpathologizing or healing of relationships—between men and women, God and Goddess, between a dominant and subordinate, and between our human species and the rest of the planet. Much of the work is already being done. Let us continue to be creative and find empowerment with and through each other and our various visions of the Divine in order to effectuate the kinds of lasting change we wish to achieve for future generations.