

**Upwardly Mobile Mātās:
The Transformation of Village Goddesses in Gujarat, India**

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Abstract

Mātās, Gujarat’s mother goddesses, are traditionally associated with village and non-elite contexts, in which they have typically been worshipped by way of trance-like states, liquor oblations, and animal sacrifice. Since the liberalization of India’s economy in 1991, many *mātās* have become popular at comparably largescale urban and suburban complexes where their worship is undertaken by upwardly mobile and middle-class devotees in a more “mainstream Hindu” mode. Blending textual, historical, and ethnographic approaches, this dissertation charts the *mātās*’ burgeoning ubiquity in urban Gujarat, and the manifold strategies employed to make these goddesses agreeable to upper-caste Hindu, ascendant-class sensibilities, such as vegetarianism and teetotalism.

The study begins by tracing a history of the divine feminine in Gujarat, in the process identifying the *mātā* as a recurrent source of repugnance for colonialists, missionaries, and even Gujarati reformers, but also as a site of internal reform for non-elites. The ensuing chapter re-examines existing scholarship on Bahucarā and Khoḍīyār Mātā through the lens of upward mobility, suggesting that these two goddesses’ transformations over the past centuries—which involve the purging of practices related to liquor, sacrifices, and trances—serve as models for more recent reimaginings of related but understudied *mātās* who form the focus of the chapters to follow.

Perhaps the most representative among the modern-day *mātās* is Melaḍī, a literal “mother of dirt” who has in recent decades been effectively cleaned up to match the image of a Sanskritic goddess, with numerous elaborate urban temples established in her name. Similarly, Jogaṇī Mātā, who bears associations ranging from ghost to goddess in non-elite contexts, has taken on the imagery of the tantric (but relatively mainstream) goddess, Chinnamastā, and has also become central to several upwardly mobile, middle-class shrines. Haḍakṣā Mātā, meanwhile, a goddess of rabies, is more notable for what her decidedly non-elite worshippers from the Devipujak caste insist are her continuities—namely, her unequivocal purity from time immemorial as well as her continued status as a healer of hydrophobia—even as some members of this community make their way toward middle-class identities. In all cases, the non-elite *mātās* have been re-cast as “properly Hindu” goddesses.

Altogether, this dissertation argues that the transformation of these Gujarati *mātās* has been realized through a multiplicity of characteristically South Asian processes for upward mobility working together in varying measure. These include Sanskritization, Vaiṣṇavization, gentrification, and universalization. Mainstream tantric elements amenable to middle-classness also frequently play a part in the *mātās*’ makeovers. As a result, contemporary urban *mātā* shrines teem with symbolic resources for social ascendance, allowing their devotees to interact with and perform upward mobility in the process of worshipping familiar divinities in dynamic guises.

Résumé

Les déesses-mères du Gujarat (ou *mātās*) sont traditionnellement associées à des milieux villageois et n'appartenant pas à l'élite. Elles y sont souvent vénérées par des états de transe, des offrandes d'alcool et des sacrifices d'animaux. Depuis la libéralisation de l'économie indienne en 1991, beaucoup de *mātās* ont été popularisées à l'échelle de plus grands ensembles urbains et suburbains où leur culte est célébré à la manière hindoue plus courante, souvent par des fidèles issus de classes montantes ou de la classe moyenne. Conjuguant des approches textuelles, historiques et ethnographiques, cette thèse cartographie l'omniprésence florissante des *mātās* dans le Gujarat urbain et la variété des stratégies mises en œuvre pour accorder ses déesses aux sensibilités des castes supérieures ou des classes montantes, telles que le végétarisme ou la non consommation d'alcool.

Cette étude commence par retracer l'histoire de la divinité féminine dans le Gujarat, identifiant par-là la *mātā* à la fois comme une source récurrente d'aversion pour les colons, les missionnaires et même les réformateurs gujaratis, et comme lieu de réforme intérieure pour les populations qui n'appartiennent pas à l'élite. Le chapitre suivant examine les travaux existants qui portent sur Bahucarā et Khoḍīyār Mātā en considérant des mouvements d'ascension sociale pour montrer que les transformations qu'ont subies ces deux déesses au fil des siècles – incluant la suppression de l'alcool, des sacrifices mais aussi, bien souvent, des états de transe – ont servi de modèles pour la reconfiguration d'autres déesses. Celles-ci font l'objet des chapitres qui suivent.

Melaḍī est peut-être la plus représentative des *mātās* actuelles. Littéralement « Mère de poussière », elle a été, dans les dernières décennies, épurée pour correspondre à l'image d'une déesse sanskrite, dotée de nombreux temples urbains sophistiqués. De même, Jogaṇī Mātā qui, dans des contextes populaires, peut être associée aussi bien à un fantôme qu'à une déesse, a pris la figure tantrique (mais assez courante) de Chinnamastā. Elle est également devenue centrale dans de nombreux autels des classes moyennes ou montantes. D'un autre côté, Haḍakṣā Mātā, déesse de la rage, se distingue par ce que ses fidèles de la caste défavorisée Devipujak considèrent comme ses traits caractéristiques, autrement dit, sa pureté sans équivoque depuis des temps immémoriaux, ainsi que sa capacité à soigner l'hydrophobie – et ce, même si certains membres de cette communauté évoluent vers la classe moyenne. Dans tous les cas, les *mātās* populaires jouent maintenant le rôle de déesses « vraiment hindoues ».

Cette thèse montre ainsi que les transformations touchant ces déesses *mātās* se sont produites par le biais de divers modes d'ascension sociale et par l'interaction de ces derniers. Ces modes, propres à l'Asie du Sud, comprennent la sanskritisation, la vaiṣṇavisation, la gentrification et l'universalisation. Des éléments tantriques communs susceptibles de plaire à la classe moyenne ont également un rôle à jouer dans la transformation des *mātās*. Les temples urbains dédiés à une *mātā* regorgent ainsi de ressources symboliques pour l'élévation sociale, permettant à leurs fidèles de performer leur mobilité sociale tout en rendant un culte à des divinités familières.

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Note on Transliteration

In the study that follows, I have observed the transliteration standards of V.S. Apte, P.G. Deshpande, and R.S. McGregor, respectively, for Sanskrit, Gujarati, and Hindi terms, as well as for the titles of texts. With regard to the main subject of inquiry, I generally use “*mātā*” to refer to the common noun, while I use “Mātā” when dealing with a particular mother goddess as a proper noun. I use Sanskrit transliteration over Gujarati (and Hindi) when referring to Sanskrit texts, and the same goes for the names of classical figures and deities. I employ diacritics for literary characters, though I do not use them for historical persons, unless those persons have become deified in Sanskrit or vernacular mythologies. With regard to the names of many folk heroes I heard mentioned in the field, accurate renderings often proved difficult, and so I have done my best with the diacritic marks in these cases; any errors are mine. As for shrines and temples, I use diacritics only in the cases where the names were not otherwise romanized within the temple space or in related paraphernalia such as affiliated publications, etc. South Asian origin words attested in standard English-language dictionaries are given without diacritics (e.g., Brahman, mantra, karma, Swaminarayan, etc.). I do not employ diacritics for the names of associations, societies, newspapers, or journals. I have also chosen not to use diacritics for the names of castes and tribes, as more-or-less standardized romanizations have emerged for most of these. Whenever secondary sources are quoted directly, the transliteration conventions utilized by the original author are reproduced in the cited text.

Introduction

The goddesses of Gujarat are characterized by a small but not insignificant crisis of identity. This may not be immediately evident, as the female divinities of Gujarati origin, almost all of which are identifiable by the title *mātā* or *mā* (“exalted mother”), look generic enough at first blush. They may even look familiar. Their lithograph prints, extensively circulated in present-day Gujarat, follow the well-known iconography of Sanskrit goddesses such as Durgā and Sarasvatī, depicting the *mātās* as smiling, pacific young women, each with an identifiable vehicle (*vāhana*). Indeed, the goddess Ambā Mātā rides a tiger, as she is in essence a Gujarati instantiation of Durgā, a pan-Indian martial goddess. More distinctively, Melāḍī Mātā sits upon a goat (Figure 1), Bahucarā Mātā a rooster, Haḍkāī Mā a dog, Momāī Mā a camel, and Khoḍīyār Mātā is accompanied by a crocodile. Jogaṇī Mā, whose iconography follows that of the tantric goddess Chinnamastā, also possesses a unique mount, in that she stands atop the copulating figures of Kāma and Rati (Figure 2).



Figure 1: Popular Melāḍī Mātā lithograph (photo by author)



Figure 2: Lithograph-styled picture of Jogaṇī Mātā (photo by author)

In addition to injecting some novelty into lithograph iconography, these idiosyncratic *vāhanas* provide clues as to the histories and characteristics of the goddesses to which they correspond, most notably their roots in regional and village contexts, as well as the ritual practices of the non-elite groups with which they have been traditionally popular. In the case of Haḍkāī (Figure 3), a goddess of rabies, her canine *vāhana* denotes her role as healer of dog bites, a major problem faced by her principal followers, members of the Devipujak caste who often dwell in slum areas where strays abound. For Momāī and Khoḍīyār, their camel and crocodile *vāhanas* mark their respective origins in desert and coastal regions. In the cases of Melaḍī and Bahucarā, goats and roosters represent animals that ordinarily used to be—and in some cases still are—the goddess’s preferred sacrificial offering. All the Gujarati goddesses mentioned above were at some point in their histories associated with sacrifice or other blood offerings, as well as liquor oblations and possession-like trances, most often undertaken by members of lower castes and Dalit groups (formerly known as “untouchables”).



Figure 3: Haḍkāī Mātā as depicted in popular DVD cover art (photo by author)

Given these pasts, viewed now as somewhat checkered in that they are at odds with contemporary mainstream Hindu attitudes toward sacrifice and other forms of ecstatic religiosity, the identities of the *mātās* have been, and still are, very much contested. Though they each have countless worshippers, the *mātās* are frequently viewed with suspicion by many ascendant-class non-devotees. The only exception is Ambā, who as a lithograph-friendly, Gujarati-styled Durgā reads as a pan-Indian, Sanskritic deity and is widely accepted by upper castes; for this reason, Ambā is not a focus of the present study.¹ Some of the other *mātās*, namely Bahucarā and

¹ For more on Ambā in Gujarat, see David Roche (2000-2001). Roche has recorded the upper-caste acceptance of Ambā, noting that the priests at her major *śakti-pīṭha* in the town of Ambaji are now Brahmins (2000-2001, 86).

Khodiyār, approach the status of Ambā despite being highly localized and associated with villages, as they have become synonymous with major regional or pan-Indian pilgrimage sites and are recognized as goddesses of well-off caste and clan groups. Over the centuries—and particularly in the last fifty years—their rituals have shifted from ecstatic sacrifices and possession-like states toward a comparably Brahmanic, Sanskritic repertoire, or from the “impure” *tāmasik* to the “pure” *sāttvik*, in the local parlance.² This shift is in some ways prototypical of the modern-day transformations of *mātās*. Melaḍī, Jogaṇī, and Haḍkāī, however, are still largely dismissed by Gujarat’s perceived elite—upper-caste Hindus and wealthy Jains among them—as unsophisticated village goddesses, “*lokdevīs*” of the common folk. For this reason, contestation of the character of each of these three goddesses is ongoing as their worshippers—especially the upwardly mobile members of non-elite groups—seek to redefine the *mātā* to whom they are devoted as pure (or *sāttvik*). These reformulations often correspond to devotees’ own efforts to reposition themselves or their caste community as part of India’s middle class. As the divinities whose characters are most dynamic, Melaḍī (Figure 1), Jogaṇī (Figure 2), and Haḍkāī (Figure 3) form the predominant focus of the present study.

Melaḍī, Jogaṇī, and Haḍkāī exemplify the drastic reimaging of Gujarati goddesses over the past century, particularly in the three decades after the liberalization of India’s economy in the early 1990s. While colonial and missionary records situate these female divinities almost exclusively in the village, consign them to lower castes, and associate them with simple, aniconographic depictions such as *triśūls* (tridents), trees, and paint-smearred piles of stones, *mātās* have developed far more complex public identities today. As mentioned above, they have

Moreover, Ambā Mātā in her Durgā-like depictions is a major centrepiece at public Navarātri performances, many of which are held within Brahmin communities. I was able to attend several of these.

² In Gujarati, the adjective *sāttvika* describes that which is “calm,” “tranquil,” or “truthful,” so that *sāttvik* has come to signify “purity.” This derives from the Sanskrit *sattva*, referring to the quality of “goodness” or “harmony,” one of three *guṇas* (“attributes”) alongside *rajas* (“dynamism” or “pain”), and *tamas* (inertia, ignorance). In the Sāṃkhya philosophical tradition (dated to 500 BCE or earlier), these three elements are thought to combine in varying proportions to constitute all physical things. For more on Sāṃkhya and the *guṇas*, see Mikel Burley’s (2007) *Classical Samkhya and Yoga: An Indian Metaphysics of Experience*. In its contemporary usage, *sattva* embodies opposition to *tamas*’ connotation of “sloth” so that the *sāttvik* is perceived as forward-thinking while the *tāmasik* is not. These connotations, particularly as they related to “purity” and “impurity,” are widely heard in modern Gujarati usage. The people with whom I spoke during my fieldwork frequently drew upon this vocabulary, classifying goddesses and practices related to them as “*sāttvik*” when they wanted to assert their purity, or else “*tāmasik*” when referring to “backward” goddesses who still took sacrifices and liquor oblations. The *sāttvik* is not simply a religious idea, however. There is also a general understanding that *sāttvik* lifestyles are associated with established elite social groups such as Brahmins and Baniyas, the latter both Vaiṣṇava and Jain, as we shall see. For a brief treatment of the three *guṇas* in Gujarat, particularly its peninsular region, see Harald Tambs-Lyche (2004, 92-93).

accrued lithographic iconographies mirroring that of Sanskritic deities, their temples are now commonplace in urban settings, and their spaces of worship have grown significantly beyond the small shrines (or *derīs*) that traditionally marked their presence. While the *mātās* still maintain a strong following among non-elite groups, their opulent urban temple complexes also attract devotees from higher castes and economic brackets, including influential Brahmins and Patels. Consequently, their worship has been adapted with an ascendant urban audience in mind. Sacrifices and liquor oblations are not to be found at city temples (due in part to laws against animal cruelty and alcohol consumption), and possession-like states, while still witnessed at some venues, have become less frequent—in some cases, they are actively ignored. As I detail in my research, this specific pattern of change emphasizing restraint and self-control is a recurrent theme at many of the temples and shrines characteristic of contemporary Gujarat. The idealized middle-class lifestyle in India is by and large a *sāttvik* and Sanskritic one, and so in place of these village-styled rituals, urban *mātā* temples have incorporated elaborate *havans* (or fire sacrifices) and Sanskrit mantras, among other Brahminical trappings.³ Hence, the process of becoming *sāttvik*, Sanskritic, and Brahminical appears to be as crucial for goddesses as it is for their upwardly mobile devotees. That said, even with all these interpolations and expurgations, one of the enduring characteristics of the *mātās* is the efficacy with which they can solve this-worldly problems and grant material benefits, a holdover from their village roots.⁴

Socioeconomic shifts for individuals and families in Gujarat's low-caste and non-elite groups are also intricately imbricated with these reimaginings of individual *mātās*. Melaḍī Mātā has gone from a literal “mother of dirt” closely tied with people of the socially maligned Valmiki Samaj (formerly known by the pejorative term “Bhangis”) and other lower castes to a *sāttvik* goddess worshipped in elaborate temples playing host to Sanskritic rituals and lavish

³ This seems to follow a trend occurring throughout contemporary India, wherein Vedic traditions, although thousands of years old, maintain a deep and authoritative significance. Borayin Larios (2017) has traced the ongoing interactions between experts in Vedic rituals and everyday Hindus, including non-elites, in modern-day Maharashtra, noting the association of the Vedas with “correct” or “proper” Hinduism. Larios presents one “curious exchange” in which a group of village farmers sought out urban Vedic experts for guidance in how to “properly perform the rituals” during a Śiva festival (2017, 55). Larios attributes this sort of interaction to the “Brahminization” of devotional Hinduism, going on to note how the Vedas effectively endow non-elite practice with sacerdotal authority.

⁴ Ann Grodzins Gold has explored the notion of efficacy in the context of shrine goddesses in Rajasthan, Gujarat's neighbouring state (2008, 154). Here, goddesses and other deities of small, public shrines help worshippers face their worldly difficulties, such as domestic problems and other exigencies of everyday life. On account of their practical, immediate efficacy, Gold has argued that shrines of this sort are particularly intertwined in the religious lives of women (*Ibid.*).

ceremonies. Jogaṇī Mātā, a goddess of plural identities in Gujarati folklore—perhaps most enduringly that of female ghost—has acquired a distinctive iconography as the self-decapitating Mahāvidyā Chinnamastā, tantric imagery that has not deterred upwardly mobile followers but, on the contrary, has apparently established her as even more readily consumable.⁵ Haḍkāī Mā (also known as Haḍakṣā) is in the midst of what are perhaps the most complex negotiations. Though the majority of her Devipujak devotees live in slums and remain for the most part ostracized by mainstream Hindus, they nonetheless advocate intensively for Haḍkāī's *sāttvik* character, to such an extent that they actively accentuate Brahminic elements of her past. On account of her purity and the efficacious power that comes with it, Haḍkāī has persisted in her role as a goddess of rabies even in the face of biomedical modernity, bucking the trend of other Indian disease goddesses (see Trawick-Egnor 1984; Nicholas 1981; Ferrari 2015). Although she too has undergone a transition toward a resplendent lithographic depiction and has acquired upwardly mobile and middle-class segments among her worshippers, Haḍkāī still bears striking continuities with her past.

This dissertation draws upon historical sources, analyses of devotional texts, and approximately six months of fieldwork conducted between 2014 and 2015 in order to trace the various ways in which Gujarati goddesses have been sweetened and sanitized—that is, Sanskritized, Vaiṣṇavized, universalized, gentrified, and Saffronized—in the past half-century (especially after economic liberalization). Together, these interwoven processes have rendered the *mātās* amenable to the increasingly upwardly mobile sensibilities of their followers in contemporary Gujarat. At one point, the *mātās* of Gujarati villages were a site of shame for colonial writers, missionaries, and Hindu reformers. Now, modern worshippers striving to ascend in the urban sphere have re-envisioned these *mātās* by deploying and manoeuvring a complex tapestry of class, caste, and religious sensibilities to adapt their goddesses to the sensibilities of perceived elites, much as they have adapted themselves. As a further concern, the present work will also chart the role of tantra within this process (or processes), most obviously in the case of Jogaṇī and her homology with Chinnamastā but also with Melaḍī, Haḍkāī, Bahucarā, and Khoḍīyār, all of whom have in some measure acquired Mahāvidyā counterparts from the tantric Śrīvidyā tradition. Tantric apparatuses such as yantras and mantras are deeply

⁵ The Mahāvidyās are a group of ten relatively mainstream tantric goddesses that are worshipped collectively throughout India. These goddesses are typically listed as Kālī, Tārā, Tripurāsundarī, Bhuvaneśvarī, Bhairavī, Chinnamastā, Dhūmāvatī, Bagālamukhī, Mātāṅgī, and Kamalā. For more on the Mahāvidyās, see Kinsley (1997).

interwoven in the worship of Gujarati *mātās*, even as these goddesses adapt to become ever more *sāttvik*. This tantric component is by no means counterintuitive to the *sāttvik* telos; rather, the popularity of the *mātās* helps to illustrate tantra's own rise to the mainstream in contemporary India.

Methodology and Method

The study of Gujarati goddesses to follow will employ an ethnohistorical methodology. Cognizant of the power imbalances in the production of colonial histories, ethnohistory attempts to reconstruct indigenous discourses about the past, providing insight into the ideological uses of these local forms of knowledge (Wagoner 1993; Dirks 1993). Ethnohistory's concern is not so much discerning historical fact from mythical fiction but instead trying to delineate the meaning of historical records in their own cultural terms (Cohn 1981, 247). Ethnohistorians, then, utilize oral traditions both past and present from the cultures under study and read them alongside records of colonial governments and other documents produced by European observers, as well as historical and linguistic investigations (1981, 234). Ethnohistorians also draw upon anthropological models and methods, all in an effort to compose history and ethnography from a standpoint that identifies with those of the insiders (1981, 233-234). While this stands as a somewhat ambitious or nigh impossible task, it nonetheless endeavours to intensify focus upon the emic perspective relative to that of the etic. Moreover, the ultimate aim of this multifaceted methodology is to approach the diverse historical and anthropological materials from a "decolonizing" perspective (Mir 2015).

As is perhaps evident from its constituent morphemes, the term "ethnohistory" blends both history and ethnography, and this is also a goal of this present study. The historical aspect of this work primarily involves analysis of resources from the colonial era, especially from the early nineteenth century onward. Here I engage with publications produced by colonialists and missionaries that make reference to the *mātās*, among them district gazetteers and missionary tracts, as well as archival materials, including the private papers of individuals involved in the construction of these resources. Compiling this sort of social history also involves vernacular print culture and therefore requires the translation and textual analysis of relevant published materials, in this case dealing with the goddesses of Gujarat, both colonial and modern-day. The ethnographic component of the study is grounded in fieldwork I undertook at *mātā* shrines and

temples in central Gujarat and parts of Saurashtra in 2014 and 2015.⁶ This follows after other site-based ethnographies such as Carla Bellamy's study of possession-centred healing at *dargāhs* to Muslim saints in northwestern India (2011). In particular, this ethnography is a multi-site study, following after prior scholarship in this vein, especially Ann Grodzin Gold's (2008) investigations of numerous small shrines to goddesses—some of them *mātās*—throughout Rajasthan and also Nancy M. Martin-Kershaw's (1995) work with North Indian women patterning themselves after the sixteenth-century poet-saint Mīrabāī.

From my fieldwork, I aim to compose what Clifford Geertz referred to as “thick description” (1973). Thick description is a form of ethnographic writing that understands itself not as “fact” but rather as a semiotic interpretation, elucidating what Geertz described as “constructions of other people's constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to” (1973, 9). Such writing, then, is deeply concerned with vividly establishing the context in which the social events, behaviours, and institutions under examination can be described (1973, 14). By necessity, then, thick description is concerned with the “microscopic” (1973, 21) elements of cultural exchanges, drawing broader interpretations from “small, but very densely textured, facts” (1973, 28). Even if it does not yield facts in the positivistic sense, this sort of ethnography works in concert with the historical analyses described above to, at the very least, move toward constructing a map—not dissimilar to the kind suggested by Jonathan Z. Smith (1978, 307)—that charts and appraises a conceptual landscape but can thereafter be revisited and amended through further scholarly treatment.⁷

Translating this ethnographic approach into epistemic terms, this study follows in the footsteps of recent anthropologists working in South Asia who have increasingly sought to accentuate the subjective element of fieldwork. For Meenakshi Thapan, the people with whom

⁶ Saurashtra, also known as Kathiawar, refers to present-day Gujarat's vast peninsular region extending along the coast of the Arabian Sea. After India's Independence, 217 princely states of Kathiawar were merged to form the state of Saurashtra in 1948. In 1956, Saurashtra State joined Bombay State, an entity that was eventually divided on linguistic lines in 1960 to form Maharashtra and Gujarat as they are known today. The Saurashtra/Kathiawar region is culturally distinct from inland Gujarat. For more on Saurashtra, see Tambs-Lyche (2004).

⁷ In his landmark lecture-cum-essay “Map is Not Territory,” Jonathan Z. Smith has spoken to the provisional quality of the “maps” drawn by scholars of religion and mythology. Without assiduous immersion in particular symbol systems, a scholar's diagrams of foreign cultural systems run the risk of not only altering understandings of said systems but also misshaping them. In analyzing a given culture's “maps,” then, “we may have to relax some of our cherished notions of significance and seriousness. We may have to become initiated by the other whom we study and undergo the ordeal of incongruity” (1978, 307). In my reading, Smith speaks generally to the importance of engaging to the fullest possible extent with the emic perspective, and more precisely to identifying and de-emphasizing etic elements—be they Westernized, Judeo-Christian, patriarchal, racial—projected by the researcher into the analysis.

an ethnographer works should not be approached as the “object” of study but instead as “subject” (Thapan 1998, 7-9). So too should researchers be aware of their own subjectivity so as not to over-emphasize their air of objectivity (Madan 1998). In effect, the relationship between the fieldworker and his or her “subject” must become “intersubjective” (Thapan 1998, 8). This awareness must permeate not only the epistemic but also the practical and compositional elements—specifically, the fieldwork itself and the writing thereof—of any ethnography that seeks to nurture intersubjectivity.

Our aforementioned conceptualization of ethnography as an exercise in “mapping” or “fashioning” (the latter is Geertz’s phrasing) is crucial in locating and instantiating the subjectivity of the ethnographer, as it recognizes ethnographic information as a construction inextricably bound in a latticework of contexts rather than simply “scientific knowledge.”⁸ This acknowledgement of participation in the construction of knowledge that is “not transcendental but situated, negotiated and part of an ongoing process” (K. Narayan 1998, 183) is just one means by which an ethnographer can break down the lingering epistemic impediments of “subject” and “object” and move toward developing a shared intersubjectivity between researcher and interlocutor.

On the ground, the construction of this intersubjectivity requires participant-observation and, over and above that, self-reflexive perspective on one’s own participation. Diligent observation of participation challenges the researcher to constantly cultivate what Savyasaachi has called “conscientisation” regarding his or her own presence in the ethnographic encounter (1998, 93). With this in mind, as I participated in the proceedings at *mātā* sites, I continually gauged my gradual facility with routines and ritual, all the while attempting to estimate the impact that my own presence as a Caucasian Canadian male had upon day-to-day proceedings. This, I hope, comes through in my writing as I recount events and provide my commentary upon them. Beyond my participation in rituals and festivals, my fieldwork also encompassed informal socialization with interviewees outside of religious settings chatting about topics not necessarily related to Gujarati *mātās*. This was done in hopes of establishing and nurturing dialogue and friendship, in the process making my own life open to inquiry from the people I was

⁸ Geertz conceptualized anthropological writings as “fictions” in that they are made or “fashioned,” but not in the sense that they are false (1973, 15). Ethnography, in his view, is measured not by its factual content, but rather by the degree to which the ethnographer is able to clarify what goes on in a given context and to reduce puzzlement therein (1973, 16).

interviewing. Saraswati Haider has argued that this sort of interaction bolsters honesty, openness, and good faith in the field, which I certainly found to be the case (1998, 218-219). This conversational approach also potentially shifts the study away from a researcher-dominated unidirectionality in the construction of ethnographic information, instead fostering what T.N. Madan has called a “mutual interpretation of cultures” (1998, 157) between researcher and interviewee, an outcome or trajectory once again intersubjectively oriented.

Finally, in the writing phase, ethnographers can squarely situate themselves in the process of knowledge construction through the use of the autobiographical voice, recursively affirming the presence of their subjectivity in the fieldwork and its representation (Thapan 1998, 16). In writing this dissertation, then, especially the thick descriptions dealing with the ethnographic research, I will not shy away from using the first-person. I do so in an attempt to chip away, in some measure, at the dichotomy between personal and professional identity, not to mention other dichotomies of outsider/insider and observer/observed, ideally moving toward a style Kirin Narayan has referred to as “hybrid” writing, wherein the author speaks from a “multiplex subjectivity,” effectively collapsing a plurality of identities including those aforementioned (1998, 181). These compositional considerations, along with the reflexive practical and epistemic concerns mentioned above, hopefully converge to assist in establishing a sufficient degree of intersubjectivity between myself and the people with whom I conversed.

During the six-plus months I spent in Gujarat cumulatively between research trips in 2014 and 2015, the bulk of the ethnographic data I collected came from interviews. I met most of my initial interviewees at *mātā* sites. Potential participants were given a consent form asking them if they agreed to be interviewed, and whether or not they wished to keep their identity confidential. In cases where potential participants could not give written consent, the form was read to them so they had the option to consent verbally. The interviews were mostly informal and, beyond a few stock preliminary questions about occupation and some pointed inquiries into meaningful experiences regarding goddesses, largely unstructured. In an effort to build rapport and ease the flow of conversation, interviews were conducted without any mechanized recording devices apart from my notepad and pen. Participants in these conversations were mainly *mātā* devotees and *pūjārīs* (or “priests”) at temples. Through these individuals’ social networks, I came to be introduced to other people with experiences and opinions related to the goddesses, as well as other noteworthy temples and shrines where I could further expand my contacts. In addition, I

spent a considerable amount of time at temples in participant-observation. This typically happened on Sundays and Tuesdays—the most active days at goddess sites—as well as festival times. These included the spring and fall Navarātri (“nine night”) festivals that are of paramount importance throughout Gujarat, monthly *pūrṇimā* (“full moon”) celebrations, and also complex-specific *pāṭotsavs* (“anniversaries”) commemorating the founding of a temple or shrine. Just as often, I frequented shrines at more laid-back junctures, as this offered the easiest access to key devotees and *pūjārīs*.

Literature Reviews

The following literature reviews begin by summarizing key scholarship on Gujarati goddesses. Since this study hopes to contribute to ongoing debates concerning transformations among contemporary goddesses in India at large and also tantra in Gujarat specifically, we then survey the existing literature on those topics. Since this study wishes to stay conversant with issues regarding both caste and class in Gujarat, an overview of some general trends in those interrelated areas will complete this section.

GUJARATI GODDESSES

To date, no extended critical studies of Gujarati goddesses have been produced in English. Several authors have made fleeting references to one or more of these goddesses (Varadarajan 1983; Cort 1987; Randeria 1989; Doniger 2009; Jain 1999; White 2003), but few have provided any substantial textual or ethnographic analyses. Shah and Shroff discerned between Sanskritic and non-Sanskritic “levels” of *mātā* worship, noting in passing that the use of wine and flesh has dwindled in both registers, and attributing this change to the influence of Vaiṣṇavism and Jainism (1958, 250). Similarly, in sketching some myths and anecdotes of Śikotar Mātā, a goddess particularly popular with sailors in Cambay, Pushker Chandervaker observed that “[n]owadays animal sacrifices are not offered to Shikotar” (1963, 50). By his estimation, coconuts, boiled milk, and cakes had become Śikotar’s preferred offerings (*Ibid.*). Some introductory ethnographic details on *mātās* have been provided by Joan Erikson (1968). In her study of the connections between ritual cloths (*pachedī*) and local goddesses, Erikson included an account of a sacrifice in which village worshippers, led by an entranced ritual officiant (or

bhūvo), beheaded goats inside a goddess temple (1968, 59).⁹ David Pocock (1973), in his study of beliefs and practices of the Patidars—that is, the high-ranking Patels—of central Gujarat, dedicated a chapter to the myths and rituals of various village goddesses, dealing in some detail with Melaḍī and making reference to Jogaṇī and Haḍkāī. He has also discussed possession and sacrifice, briefly presaging the larger thrust of the present study by noting the upwardly mobile Patidars’ gradual eschewal of these elements (1973, 63-66). Three decades later, Sanskritization vis-à-vis *mātās* worshipped by Dalits in Gujarat would be briefly touched upon by Fernando Franco, Jyotsna Macwan, and Saguna Ramnandan (2004, 275-276).

In her doctoral dissertation on Gujarati pilgrimage sites demarcated as *śakti-pīṭhas* (“seats of the goddess”), archaeologist V. Padmaja (1983) dealt at some length with goddesses, both Sanskritic and village-based, as they appeared in the region over a wide span of history.¹⁰ In her later articles (1985; 1986), Padmaja provided exploratory discussions of the three Gujarati *śakti-pīṭhas* dedicated to the relatively high-ranking (but not always Sanskritic) goddesses Ambā, Kālikā, and Bahucarā. The earlier article focused upon the presence of yantras, complex diagrams that aid in meditation and worship, at each of these sites. On account of these diagrams, Padmaja decisively concluded that “in all the Sakta-centres of Gujarat, *yantra*-worship is common and thus the mode of worship is essentially *tāntric* [sic]” (1985, 178; italics in original).

The most significant contribution to the understanding of the *mātās* as a plurality can be found in the book *Temple Tents for Goddesses in Gujarat, India* by Eberhard Fischer, Jyotindra Jain, and Haku Shah. Originally published in German in 1982, an English translation of the book was made available in 2014. As the *mātās* are often featured on printed and painted canopies (or *candarvos*) created and employed in ritual contexts by underprivileged groups in Gujarat, the

⁹ The Gujarati term *bhūvo* or *bhuvā*, often glossed rather haphazardly as “exorcist” by English-language commentators, refers to a complex category of ritual officiants in village traditions, including those of *mātās*. The person serving in this capacity, most often a male, usually has an established connection with a goddess or god, among other spirits. The *bhūvo/bhuvā* is also able to enter into a state of trance periodically, often through the use of a drum and/or intoxicants, in order to communicate with deities, ancestors, and other entities. On some occasions, this includes casting out malevolent visitants. For this study, I will use the “*bhuvā*” rendering, as it is the phrasing I heard most often in the field.

¹⁰ *Śakti-pīṭhas*, literally “seats of Śakti,” refer to a loosely connected network of 50-100 pilgrimage sites dedicated to goddesses that are located throughout India and other parts of the subcontinent, such as Kamakhya (Assam). These sites have mythological foundations in the *Devī Bhāgavatapurāṇa* and other Śākta Sanskrit texts. When the goddess Satī, as the story goes, could no longer bear the quarreling of her husband Śiva and father Dakṣa at the latter’s *yajña* fire sacrifice, she self-immolated in the sacrificial fire. A mourning Śiva salvaged his wife’s corpse from the fire pit and began to wander the universe in a destructive, grief-stricken vertigo. Viṣṇu eventually intervened, dismembering Satī’s corpse with his discus, sending her body parts to various corners of the earth. The places where these body parts landed became *śakti-pīṭhas*.

mother goddesses are a recurrent subject of discussion throughout the volume. In Part IV of the book, virtually every *mātā*, major or minor (with the notable exception of Jogaṇī Mā), has her own dedicated discussion covering crucial elements of ritual, iconography, and narrative. This includes substantive translations of oral folktales from on-the-ground sources as well as high-quality photographs taken on-site at *mātā* temples and shrines. Though the treatment of each goddess is brief and largely descriptive, the authors anticipated the analytical foci of later studies of the *mātās*—the present included—when they made note of how “during the last hundred years, the goddesses in Gujarat have been deprived of their sanguinary traits, thus becoming rather benign and bloodless expressions of their former grandeur” (Fischer, Jain & Shah 2014, 155). To date, Fischer, Jain, and Shah’s work is the major scholarly source for information on the Gujarati *mātās* as a collective.

The only individual Gujarati *mātās* to receive any detailed scholarly attention in English have been Bahucarā and Khoḍiyār. Serena Nanda (1990) has explored Bahucarā as a patron deity for the transgender Hijra community in Ahmedabad and West India at large. The study only sparingly treats Bahucarā’s broader social and religious roles, however, focusing mostly on an interpretive reading of the goddess’s mythology through a gender studies lens (1990, 24-28). More recently, Samira Sheikh has described how Bahucarā’s *śakti-pīṭha* at Becharaji in Gujarat’s Mehsana District has become popular among a growing variety of pilgrims, and how the goddess has undergone a “domestication” in the process, with animal sacrifice and transgenderism, among other potentially “unseemly” aspects of her worship, having been de-emphasized (2010, 96). As for Khoḍiyār, Harald Tambs-Lyche has labelled her mythology as an expression of resistance by kings and bards—the latter namely the Charans, a caste of pastoral genealogists from which the goddess is said to have originated—against the social hierarchy of the urban mercantile culture that dominated Gujarat’s peninsular Saurashtra region until the dawn of the medieval period (1997, 22-26). Tambs-Lyche went on to chart Khoḍiyār’s gaining popularity in contemporary Saurashtra, where temples have been extensively renovated and expanded into elaborate tourist spots, and the goddess has correspondingly been “rediscovered” as vegetarian (1997, 313-314; 2004, 129-130). As is the case at Becharaji, animal sacrifices have been replaced with symbolic substitutes (2004, 128-129). Neelima Shukla-Bhatt has linked Khoḍiyār’s rising profile with a simultaneous Sanskritization and “vernacularization” undertaken by one particular group of her followers, the Leuva Patels (2014, 177-178). Middle-class Leuva

Patels have adopted practices styled after those of upper castes, rendering Khoḍīyār as an omnipresent Great Goddess while maintaining popular localized forms of religious expression from rural Saurashtra as parts of her worship (2014, 187). The expansion of Khoḍīyār's fame, then, parallels the rise of her Leuva Patel followers up the social ladder. These studies on Bahucarā and Khoḍīyār will be evaluated in greater detail in Chapter Three.

Another *mātā* popular in Gujarat and beyond who has received scholarly attention is Hinglāj, subject of a recent study by Jürgen Schaflechner (2018). Hinglāj Mātā's *śakti-pīṭha* in Baluchistan endures as a popular site of pilgrimage, even post-Partition, having become the epicentre of Pakistani Hinduism. While Hinglāj is linked to a variety of caste groups, including the Charans, Schaflechner has argued that it is the interpretation put forward by the upper-class Lasi Lohana community that has, for the most part, prevailed. This community, members of which form the majority among the temple trustees, has associated their vision of Hinglāj and her site with notions of progress and education, ideals rooted mainly in efforts to refine lower castes, and “elevate” the temple and its goddess to a universalized Hindu norm (2018, 251). Integral to this process has been a ban on animal sacrifice that the temple trust put into place in the valley surrounding the complex in 2004, effectively ending blood offerings that were traditionally made at the Kālī shrine on the Hinglāj pilgrimage route (2018, 280). As animal sacrifice represents what Schaflechner has called a “nodal point” in distinguishing “proper” from “improper” Hinduism, the on-site interpretation of this discontinued practice is that such offerings were never a part of the “original” Hinglāj tradition (2018, 210). Hinglāj Mātā is herself now considered strictly vegetarian, as vegetarianism corresponds with “proper” Hindu behaviour. Animal sacrifice, meanwhile, is consigned to being a “Muslim” practice, and its rejection conjures up “Hindu unity” built on a perceived opposition to Islam (2018, 281-282). This corresponds with renovations wherein parts of the shrine suggesting gravesites of Muslim saintly figures were backgrounded, while other parts that were in line with the prevailing Hinduized interpretation of the site were foregrounded (2018, 224). These core innovations to a long-standing *mātā* tradition from nearby Baluchistan, particularly with regard to sacrifice, parallel many trends that have become commonplace at the Gujarati sites we will visit in the present study. That said, I think Schaflechner's study underestimates the explicitly (middle) class-driven motivations of both the temple trust and modern pilgrims for patronizing Hinglāj. Indeed, many pilgrims go to the shrine

because sacrifice is banned there, which likely has more than a little to do with middle-class sensibilities (2018, 300).

TRANSFORMATIONS AMONG CONTEMPORARY GODDESSES

In our upcoming discussions of processes of upward mobility such as Sanskritization, Vaiṣṇavization, universalization, and gentrification in Chapter One, we will see how goddesses are intricately tied up in diverse forms of transformation. Because so many female divinities emerge from highly localized contexts across India, often rural or non-elite, goddesses frequently undergo drastic alterations in service of upward mobility or broader appeal or both, and so the perpetual adaptation of present-day goddesses has been the subject of many papers and publications of late. And yet just as is the case with “upward mobility,” arriving at a singular term that characterizes the transformations of goddesses has proven elusive, though scholars have not been hesitant in attempting to coin one. This widespread phenomenon has recently been glossed by scholars as “sweetening” or “sanitizing,” one such example being a goddess-themed panel at the 2013 Conference on South Asia in Madison, Wisconsin, entitled “Sweetening, Standardizing, Sanitizing: Caste and Class Concerns in Contemporary Hindu Goddess Worship and Ritual Practices.”¹¹ Employing similar phrasing, Istvan Keul has noted how unorthodox features were “smoothed away” at a 64 Yoginī site in Benares to make its eponymous objects of devotion into “civilized urban dwellers,” ensuring that there were to be no traces of animal sacrifice, alcohol offerings, and the like on the temple grounds (2012, 398-400).

Other commentators have started with the traditional Indian distinction between *saumya* (“benign” or “gentle”) and *ugra* (“ferocious” or “wild”) goddesses.¹² Annette Wilke, for example, has proposed that examples of the latter such as Akhilāṇḍeśvarī and Kāmākṣī often undergo a “taming” by way of marriage to Sanskritic male deities (Wilke 1996, 126).¹³ Comparably, the disheveled cremation-ground goddess, Dhūmāvatī, who, like her fellow Mahāvidyā, Chinnamastā, has been predominantly connected to tantra and identified by her inauspicious traits, has from the late nineteenth century onward been reconfigured as world-

¹¹ “Sweetening, Standardizing, Sanitizing: Caste and Class Concerns in Contemporary Hindu Goddess Worship and Ritual Practices.” 42nd Annual Conference on South Asia, Madison, Wisconsin, October 17-20, 2013. The participants in this panel were Amy Allocco, Deeksha Sivakumar, Meera Kachroo, and myself.

¹² For more on this distinction, see Axel Michaels, Cornelia Vogelsanger, and Annette Wilke (1996, 19).

¹³ Similarly, Lynn Gatwood (1985) has charted the transformation of numerous non-Sanskritic goddesses into Sanskritic deities by way of their marriage to Hindu gods, a process she has labelled as “spousification.” This bears resemblance to the domestication of the goddess, described below.

maintaining and well-wishing (Zeiler 2012, 181). Even though *pūjārīs* at Dhūmāvatī's popular Benares temple are aware of her tantric background, the goddess is depicted at this site solely as a benign manifestation of Durgā or Mahādevī. Xenia Zeiler has labelled Dhūmāvatī's transformation as a "saumyaisation" (2012, 190).

Other scholars have described analogous transformations as "domestication," as is the case in Sanjukta Gupta's study of the Kālīghāt *śakti-pīṭha* in Bengal. Here, Vaiṣṇava influences have rendered the patron goddess Kālī more and more like Lakṣmī while at the same time reducing the number of animal sacrifices made to her at the site (2003, 65–66). As we just saw in the previous subsection, Samira Sheikh has also employed "domestication" (not without quotation marks) to describe the reining in of "questionable practices" at Bahucarā's *śakti-pīṭha* (Sheikh 2010, 96). Similarly, Rachel Fell McDermott has referred to Kālī's "sugar-coating" in Bengal as a domestication, though she would go on to attribute the goddess's elevation and popularization to a multiplicity of additional factors, including Sanskritization, Vaiṣṇavization, urbanization, and class (2001, 294–97). Undoubtedly, all these processes are closely tied together in modern reimaginings of goddesses.

TANTRA IN GUJARAT

There is an Indian saying that goes as follows: "Tantra Vidyā was revealed in Bengal, was strengthened in Mithilā, it flourished here and there in Maharashtra [and] it died in Gujarat" (Khanna 2013, 6-7). Academics have apparently taken this adage to heart, as they have devoted very little attention to tantra in Gujarat. What has been written on the subject exists in scattered scraps. Some studies have identified a tantric presence in the mountainous terrain surrounding Girnar in Junagadh District, where masters belonging to the traditions of Dattātreya and Gorakhnāth—otherwise known as the Nāth Siddhas, who appear recurrently throughout this study—reside in hidden monasteries or *āśrams* (Tigunait 1999, 40). Two peaks of the mountain range were actually named after these semi-legendary figures Dattātreya and Gorakhnāth (White 1997, 89). David Gordon White has argued that these mountains were christened as such not simply because they feature shrines to these Nāth Siddhas, but because they actually *are* these Siddhas (1997, 90; italics in original). White has also enumerated Girnar as one of the mountain ranges where it has been believed, as far back as the composition of the *Mahābhārata*, that human experts could perfect themselves through realization of the various *siddhis*

(“attainments”) that enable *siddha*-hood (1997, 88-89). This marks Girnar as foundational for Kaula (“family”) Tantra, a goddess-centric branch of tantra that developed and thrived in the first millennium CE.

A significant portion of the scholarly work on tantra in Gujarat is connected to Jainism. Umakant Shah has briefly explored the deity Pārśvanātha, who figures prominently in Jain tantra because of his capacity for protecting worshippers from supernatural beings such as *bhūtas*, *pretas*, and so forth (1987, 187). His mantras also cure epidemics and fulfill various desires of the devotee, and so his image is worshipped at a site in Cambay (*Ibid.*). Similarly, John Cort has studied the small but popular shrine of Ghaṇṭākara Mahāvīra at Mahudi in northern Gujarat, where “Bell-ears,” as his first name translates into English, is commemorated with an anthropomorphic image (2000, 417-419).¹⁴ This cult, according to Cort, exemplifies several distinctive features of Jain tantra, in that it emphasizes mantras over other apparatuses such as yantras and aims its practices not at liberation but rather at, once again, attaining powers and curing disease in the realm of rebirth (2000, 418-419). Cort has also taken up the matter of Jain goddesses such as the *yakṣīs*, who preside over holy places throughout various parts of India, including Gujarat (1987, 240-241). One such *yakṣī* is Ambikā at Girnar, who appears to be the Śvetambarā Jain equivalent of Ambā Mātā, as both goddesses have a lion for a vehicle (Cort 2000, 247-248). Like Pārśvanātha and Ghaṇṭākara, Ambikā and other Jain goddesses bear distinct folk tantric valences in their capacity to “meet the non-salvational religious needs of their Jain devotees” (2000, 250). This refers to, in other words, everyday, this-worldly wishes—not unlike those serviced by *mātās*.¹⁵

¹⁴ Ghaṇṭākara bears similarities to Hanumān, and Cort has referred to him as a “Jain analogue” thereof (Cort 1997, cited in Lutgendorf 2007, 374, ff. 44).

¹⁵ Similar patterns of religious expression can be found in Jainism throughout northwestern India. Contemporary Digambara Jains, for instance, employ mantras, *maṇḍalas*, and yantras in congregational rituals that Cort has described as being of an “esoteric and tantric nature” (Cort 2009, 144). These rituals are often very costly, and their desired outcome is typically immediate and sublunary, such as warding off bad luck and guaranteeing success in educational or career-related endeavours (Cort 2009, 145). Such is the goal of the *śānti* or “pacification” rituals, for instance, which seek to eliminate (in markedly tantric fashion) obstacles and enemies in one’s life, while also granting wealth, fame, and sons, among other rewards (Cort 2009, 145-146). Over and above the material outcomes sought, the performance of these elaborate, expensive tantric rituals in itself seems to demonstrate class mobility or ascendancy.

CASTE AND DALITS IN GUJARAT

Too much has been written about the topic of caste in Gujarat to summarize the literature in full, so we will concern ourselves here with a few key scholarly trends involving caste as well as Dalits in the region. While economic factors overlap significantly with caste hierarchy in various regions of India, this is particularly salient in Gujarat. This is because successful merchant Baniyas/Vaniyas and middle- or lower-caste landowning agriculturalist Patidars (the wealthiest of the Patels) are as dominant as Brahmins in the state, if not more so (G. Shah 1994, 232). Even though merchants held lower stature in other regions, the Gujarati Baniyas—whether Hindu or Jain—played a central role in the commercial life of their home region from the sixteenth century onward. Baniya influence spread mainly through networks based on kinship and caste, which provided the social capital required for successful entrepreneurship (Streefkerk 1997, M8). Equally unique to Gujarat was the ascendance of the Patels, which has been documented in a number of studies (Ibrahim 2007; Rajaram 1999). Most notable within the broad Patel grouping are the Patidars, who, despite a caste status that is technically non-*dvijā* (“twice-born”), are not generally treated as a low caste (G. Shah 2002, 296). In fact, Ghanshyam Shah has placed them on par with Baniyas and Brahmins in the social and economic spheres, at least in their own self-perception (2010, 55). Congruently, Paul D’Souza has included Patels (as a whole) along with Brahmins, Baniyas, and also Darbars (or Thakors or Rajputs) as “Upper Caste” groups due to the higher social status they share in as part of Gujarat’s “landed gentry” (2002, 173).¹⁶ The dynamics of development in Gujarat have greatly favoured the Patels (Engineer 1992, 1641), specifically as key beneficiaries of government strategies such as land reform programs and state subsidies (Prakash 2003, 1606). In an effort to make their ritual status more congruent with their economic ascendancy, Patidars have at some points in their history formulated Brahminical caste guidelines mandating dowries, vegetarianism, and Kṛṣṇa worship, among other “pure” practices, as replacements for customs such as bride price, meat-eating, and mother goddesses (Hardiman 1981, 42). Whether or not such Sanskritizing measures have sustained themselves or proven effective beyond the self-perceptions of the Patidar community (and Patels all together), the “upper caste” trio of Brahmins, Baniyas, and Patels has remained

¹⁶ D’Souza’s schema offers valuable insight into the dynamics of caste in Gujarat. Beyond the upper castes of Brahmins, Patels, Vaniyas/Baniyas, and Darbars, he goes on to distinguish the “Upper Backward Castes” (Rabaris, Rawals, Thakardas [Kolis], Vagharies, and Ahirs) and “Most Backward Castes” (Kumbhars, Luhars, Suthars, Darjis, and Prajapatis). Outside of these groups are the Dalits, who include Vankars, Chamars, Shrimanis, Mochis, Shenvas, and Bhangis (D’Souza 2002, 173).

dominant in post-Independence Gujarat (Shani 2005, 893-894), especially in state and district politics (D'Souza 2002, 163).

Meanwhile, Gujarat's lower-caste and Dalit groups have struggled since Independence. It was only after the implementation of reservations and the consequent focus upon the politics of backward caste groups that the upper castes began to lose some grip on their power. These policies alienated the trio of ascendant castes, leading to incidents of violence against lower castes in the 1980s (Shani 2005, 861), specifically the upwardly mobile ones (Bose 1981, 713). Many commentators have linked tendencies toward caste-based conflict in Gujarat to the fact that the state's history never yielded a sustained anti-Brahmin or progressive caste/class movement that rallied low castes and Dalits against the traditional social order (G. Shah 2002, 297; Prakash 2003, 1602; Franco, Macwan & Ramnandan 2004, 7).¹⁷ To the contrary, as per Gandhi's quixotic imagining of India, Gujarati "Harijans" (the Mahatma's preferred term for "untouchables") were mostly to remain in their place in the caste system (Franco et al. 2004, 7). Moreover, "[i]t was, and has been, in the interests of both Patels and Darbars to scotch any caste resistance from the former 'untouchable' castes, for they are thereby ensured cheap (sometimes free) labour under the jajmanji system [in which lower castes performed services for upper castes in exchange for goods]" (*Ibid.*). So it has come to pass that, in spite of its dazzling economic growth, Gujarat sees low human development, as depressed-class groups have not shared in the prosperity. Rather, they have lost access to natural resources and educational facilities in a variety of regions, while experiencing atrocities at the hands of non-Dalits, including the resurgence of untouchability and inappropriate behaviour toward Dalit women (D'Souza 2002, 180). Even so, conservative Hindutva ideals have come to be accepted by some members of depressed classes including Dalits and Adivasi tribes (see D'Souza 2002, 239 and A. Patel 1999, 108, respectively). As we will see, some affluent members of these and other non-elite groups have gone so far as to pick up the saffron flag wholeheartedly (Sarkar 2003, 384).

In theorizing caste at large, A.M. Shah drew heavily upon fieldwork in Gujarat, and while he looked past many of the aforementioned disparities, he provided insight into the conceptual fabric of caste as it functions in the region. Shah concluded that caste is more horizontal than vertical—that is, more about division than hierarchy, at least in Gujarat (A.M. Shah & I.P. Desai

¹⁷ Gujarat is not, however, entirely devoid of social movements initiated by depressed classes, and pockets of resistance have formed in certain areas. Dalits from Junagadh, for instance, have reaped the rewards of an active Ambedkarite organization in order to fight back against discrimination (D'Souza 2002, 192).

1988, 2). While the principle of hierarchy was not insignificant in inter- or intra-caste relations (1988, 29), characteristically Gujarati concepts of caste emphasized distinction and separation rather than defining who was “higher” or “lower” (1988, 25). Shah noted that an emphasis on division was most striking in urban areas, shedding new light on a prevailing bias in anthropological studies of caste, which have so often been based in rural contexts (2007a, 110). While Shah’s ideas were not without criticism, his program of research duly addressed Gujarat’s prominent urban milieu and the principally differentiating nature of caste therein.¹⁸

Taking Gujarati Jain perspectives into account, John Cort has followed A.M. Shah in arguing that horizontal separation is as essential vis-à-vis caste in Gujarat as vertical hierarchy (2004, 77). When hierarchy does crop up in the Gujarati context, Cort has contended, it operates on values of urban residence and, more importantly, economic power (2004, 102). Ritual purity and landholding, the traditional sources of elevated status for Brahmins and Rajputs, respectively, in other regions of the subcontinent, are less crucial in Gujarat on account of the state’s unique history (2004, 80). Given the Gujarati emphasis on socioeconomic standing, wealth, as well as the ability to earn independently without subservience to others, has allowed Jain Vaniyas to attain to the status of a powerful caste (2004, 82). Even the uppermost Gujarati Brahmins, the Nagars, are ranked as such not because of ritual qualifications. Indeed, Nagars did not serve as priests but competed successfully with Vaniyas as merchants and were therefore not in a position of ritual service for (and hence dependent upon) others (2004, 82). Similarly, Gujarati Patels rose in status not so much because they emulated Brahmins or Rajputs, but rather because they followed after the Baniyas (2004, 76-77). Perspectives on caste in Jain communities also emphasize urban lifestyles, as is evident from Jain preferences for rural-to-urban hypergamy over urban-to-rural. Cort has suggested that this pro-urban inclination is based on the perceived likelihood of improving economic standing in the city, which, he claimed, is a greater aid to upward mobility than any sort of Sanskritization based in the adoption of ritually purer lifestyles (2004, 101).

Other scholars have expressed sentiments in congruence with those of Cort. I.P. Desai, A.M. Shah’s collaborator and critic, has insisted that Brahmins never held the foremost social position in Gujarat. While Brahmins were generally respected for the ceremonial role they

¹⁸ For critiques of Shah’s work, see for instance I.P. Desai’s commentaries and criticism in the very volume in which Shah originally put forward his ideas (Shah & Desai 1988, 40-91).

played, they were, in Desai's estimation, just as often enumerated among the impoverished sectors of society (I.P. Desai 1984, 1107). For Vinay Gidwani, who worked among Leuva Patels, social distinction is parsed in Gujarat through the labour process (2000, 145). The principal source of this distinction for any given earner is the ability to withdraw family labour power from the commoditized labour circuit, speaking to a kind of prestigious independence comparable to that which Cort has described in the context of the Jains.

Despite Cort's de-emphasis on purity in caste, Jain ideals on this matter still appear to be informed by a shared Sanskritic culture that continues to connote prestige in Gujarat. Farhana Ibrahim has argued that Jainism has wielded considerable influence within the region, where vegetarianism and the ideology of *ahimsa* carry the same import for Hindus as they do for Jains (2007, 3447). Certainly, Jain values show through in the Swaminarayan (*Svāmīnārāyaṇa*) movement, which we will explore in greater detail in Chapter Two. Established in the early nineteenth century, the Swaminarayan ethos upheld strict nonviolence and a vegetarian diet (Williams 1984).¹⁹ This movement played a major role in the modern-contemporary Sanskritization of Gujarati religious practices, in particular for mid-level and backward castes from which it attracted a large following (Ibrahim 2007, 3447; G. Shah 2002, 298). The movement treated caste with ambivalence: while it did not advocate for the caste system, it still endorsed intra-caste dining and marriage and reaffirmed the basic duties of each caste group as narrowly defined in Brahminical scriptures. Ghanshyam Shah has argued that this further reinforced the caste system and the dominance of the upper castes in Gujarat (2002, 298). Susan Bayly has agreed, conjuring the spectre of Sanskritization when she wrote, "with its visions of milkmaids and sylvan raptures, and its celebration of divine bounty in the form of sweet, milky essences, [Swaminarayan Hinduism] offered an inviting path to 'caste Hindu' life for many people of martial pastoralist background" (1999, 84).

While concern with purity and pollution has declined to some degree among upper castes in Gujarat due to modernization and Westernization, A.M. Shah has observed that it is actually increasing among the lower sectors, including Dalits of the new middle class, due in large part to Sanskritization (2007b, 365). The Dalit social world, in fact, is marked by its own graded

¹⁹ The Swaminarayan *sampradāya* is a sect of Hinduism that emerged in Gujarat in the late eighteenth century. It was founded by Sahajanand Swami (born Ghanshyam Pande, 1781-1830), who championed a vision of Vaiṣṇavism emphasizing teetotalism and strict vegetarianism. Swaminarayan Hinduism will be taken up at length throughout this dissertation, particularly in Chapter Two. For more on the sect, see Raymond Brady Williams (1984), or the volume *Swaminarayan Hinduism: Tradition, Adaptation and Identity* (2016) edited by Williams and Yogi Trivedi.

inequality that replicates the caste hierarchy (Franco et al. 2004, 191; Randeria 1992).²⁰ Adivasis also internally stratify themselves into “big” and “small” ranks with little horizontal solidarity between these status levels (Lobo 2010, 213). What is more, untouchability persists within and between an assortment of these scheduled castes and tribes (Franco et al. 2004, 279). These dynamics suggest that the Sanskritic, whether in its Jain, Brahminical, or Vaiṣṇava iterations, has had—and still has—at least some bearing upon hierarchical sensibilities and social status across a variety of social groups in Gujarat.

For Douglas Haynes, working with materials from colonial-era Surat, high-caste status can also be imagined in terms of “reputation” or “prestige.” The concept encompassing all these qualities is *ābrū*, a Gujarati word that has historically conveyed the economic largesse and perceived social status that were so central in solidifying reputation for Brahmin-Vaniyas of Surat (1991, 56). *Ābrū* was an extremely fragile quality, often stockpiled over a long period of time, and easily compromised by way of indiscretions such as improper marriage, meat-eating, alcohol consumption, or interaction with low-caste persons (*Ibid.*). The key to attaining *ābrū* was adherence to dharma, which, for high-caste Surat families, was variously informed by the vocabularies and principles of Brahminical Hinduism, Jainism, and Vaiṣṇavism. From the Brahminical tradition came concerns of ritual exclusion and social rank based on levels of purity and impurity; from Jainism came the ideals of nonviolence, self-abnegation, and austerity; and from Vaiṣṇavism came an emphasis on devotional service (1991, 57). With this in mind, high caste families established their reputations through enduring patterns of social action such as abstinence from meat and alcohol, observance of pollution strictures, and public displays of devotion at religious festivals (*Ibid.*). For the wealthiest magnates, following dharma could entail charitable giving, often in the form of substantial donations to Hindu or Jain deities (1991, 58-59). To be sure, many of these aspects of reputation-building still inform upward mobility in Gujarat today. While Haynes framed most of his discussion of *ābrū* in relation to “caste,” his treatment of the subject is as much about class, suggesting the extent to which caste bleeds into the conceptual territory of class in studies of Gujarat.

²⁰ Shalini Randeria has indexed parallels between the larger caste system and hierarchy amongst Dalits. In brief, Garos are priests and therefore Brahmin-like, Vankars and Rohits are Kshatriyas and Vaishyas, and Senvas are Shudras. The Bhangis are low-status even among Dalit communities (as cited in Franco, Macwan & Ramanathan 2004, 192).

CLASS IN GUJARAT

Scholarship on class in Gujarat, like that on caste, tends to focus on the ascendance of the state's prosperous mercantile sector. Gujarat's robust middle class had been, up until India's Independence, composed mostly of Brahmins, Baniyas, and Patels along with a few artisan castes (G. Shah 1985, 136; G. Patel 2002, 4836; Jayal 2002, 184). So paramount have been economic interests that some commentators have claimed caste differences to be irrelevant in the conduct of business in the Gujarati urban milieu (Jayal 2002, 184). Brahmins, Baniyas, and Patels have maintained their predominance up to the present day, playing a vital role in economic growth and making Gujarat one of India's most advanced states with reference to industrialization and urbanization (G. Patel 2002, 4836). Members of the landed gentry strive to attain highly Westernized lifestyles and are known for conspicuous consumption habits, developments that have, according to Girish Patel, deeply influenced the social ethos of Gujarat (2002, 4829). The ever-burgeoning public impact of this prosperous entrepreneurial class is readily demonstrated by the proliferation of modern showrooms, hotels, shopping malls, medium-to-large grocery stores, share brokerages, architectural firms, construction companies, electronics boutiques, and jewelry shops in Gujarat, all of which once again speak to the eminence of urban traders in the region (Prakash 2003, 1606). In the face of this prosperity, a sizeable portion of Gujarati backward classes are living below the poverty line, with a swelling disparity between the entrepreneurial upper and middle classes and the poor and labouring classes (G. Patel 2002, 4829; G. Shah & Rutten 2002, 17). Marxist commentators such as Jan Breman have attributed this gap to a spirit of "lumpen capitalism" that has powered Gujarat's decades of development, actualizing a tacit philosophy of social Darwinism that pays no heed to the needs of the working poor (2002, 1487).

Gujarat's middle class is, however, in flux, and talk of a "rising middle class" in the state is commonplace in academic discussions (Lobo & Kumar 2009, 37). Scholars have agreed that since Independence in 1947, and even more so since liberalization in the early 1990s, the Gujarati middle class has grown, becoming more heterogeneous in the process (Shani 2007, 78; G. Shah 1991, 2921). This has occurred on account of the expansion of state activities and industrial development, as well as a new emphasis on higher education (G. Shah 1991, 2921; Yagnik & Sheth 2002, 1010). This new Gujarati middle class is no longer exclusively dominated by upper castes, as members of scheduled castes and tribes are becoming part of the bourgeoisie

as beneficiaries of reservations in educational and governmental institutions (Lobo & Kumar 2009, 37; Yagnik 2002, 23). As a result, “a small but articulate middle class has emerged among the Dalits” (Yagnik 2002, 23). Despite the highly unequal distribution of economic assets between Dalits and non-Dalits, D’Souza found no significant difference in semi-luxury items owned between the two groups across several Gujarati districts (2002, 214-216).

Notwithstanding the rise of some scheduled-caste individuals to middle-class status, the majority of Gujarati Dalits and ex-untouchables have experienced social and economic vulnerability (Wood 1987, 411). Certainly, the violent anti-reservation protests that have been periodically organized by Gujarati upper-caste/class elites have worked to disabuse Dalits—middle-class and otherwise—of the notion that they have fully entered the modern space (Yagnik & Sheth 2002, 1010; Yagnik 2002, 23).

The Gujarati middle class wields formidable political clout, especially as a reactionary force. In the past, the middle class typically looked to political parties with highly conservative, casteist, and communalist values; unsurprisingly, it has in recent times dedicated itself to “Hindutva forces” (G. Patel 2002, 4836). Narendra Modi, then-Chief Minister of the state, unabashedly courted (and would continue to court as Prime Minister) this Gujarati bourgeoisie, openly defending what he referred to as the “neo-middle class” in his state election manifesto and repeatedly tuning his policies toward their preferences (Jaffrelot 2008, 15; Jaffrelot 2013, 83). Accordingly, he put extensive funds into Rapid Transfer systems, housing, and flyovers throughout Gujarat’s urban spaces, amenities that served to gratify the state’s middle class (2013, 83). The bourgeoisie responded favourably to Modi’s style of politics, due in no small measure to lingering doubts about leftist state intervention into the economy, an anxiety that has informed an anti-parliamentarian or “anti-political” sentiment among the middle class (Jaffrelot 2008, 15; G.P.D. 2008, 9). As a case in point, urban middle-class voter turnout has been low in Gujarat elections, as “no one really cares if [governance] goes along with a dose of authoritarianism” (Jaffrelot 2008, 15). Even some upwardly mobile non-elite groups have suppressed their own political activities, as D’Souza found to be the case in the Kheda district, where it appears that jobs outside the agricultural sector and higher levels of consumption may have made Dalits into members of the (lower) middle class who seek to eschew “militant and pejorative connotations attached to the new Dalit identity” (2002, 245).

Beyond politics, the Gujarati middle class looks much like those of other regions of post-liberalization India, particularly in its focus upon consumption. On a public works level, the middle class has spurred a demand for modern lifestyles and amenities, leading to a proliferation of segregated (and protected) sections for elite consumption, the suburbanization of major cities, and massive infrastructure developments such as the Sarkhej-Gandhinagar highway (Ghassem-Fachandi 2012, 221). Parvis Ghassem-Fachandi has referred to this pattern of restructuring as the “New Jersey-fication” of Gujarat (*Ibid.*).²¹ On the level of the individual, conspicuous consumption, a desire for status symbols, and a compulsion for “keeping with the times” have all been gaining among the Gujarati middle class (G. Shah 1991, 2921; van Wessel 2001a, 23). For instance, Mario Rutten observed how, for one community of increasingly affluent landholders, owning stainless steel vessels quickly came to be a status symbol, replacing the less expensive copper and brass vessels that were previously found in middle-class homes (1986, A-21). With these transformations in lifestyle and standard of living, however, have come ubiquitous stressors involved with sustaining status (Shani 2007, 78).

Perhaps the most substantive scholarship concerning on-the-ground middle-class identity in Gujarat is the ethnographic data collected by Margit van Wessel in Baroda. Van Wessel has posited that middle-class life in Gujarat is fundamentally characterized by a “moral ambiguity” in that it involves constant negotiation of a range of diverse and often contradictory ideologies that have to be accommodated simultaneously throughout the experience of modernity (2001a, 11-12). More tangibly, Gujarati middle-class identity is rooted in material possessions such as television sets, refrigerators, sofa-sets, and telephones, in addition to scooters and mopeds, all of which are no longer novel luxuries, but integral components of a middle-class life (2001b, 75). The accumulation of possessions culminates in home ownership (*Ibid.*). With a middle-class lifestyle comes a mindset to go with it, and so the Gujarati language has incorporated English phrases to cultivate a middle-class mentality, bringing terms such as *forward*, *free-mind*, and *broad-mind* into currency, holding them in contradistinction to their negatively-valued, non-bourgeoisie opposites, such as *narrow-mind*, *conservative*, and *rigid* (2001a, 24). At the same time, a notion of “decency” drawing on a moral framework referred to as “*sanskaar*” (*saṃskār*)

²¹ This middle-class influence has not, however, necessarily led to any mass reclamation and gentrification of old urban spaces. In Ahmedabad, for instance, the middle class has migrated away from the old city, as its architectural and cultural heritage has been in large part deemed “Muslim” and therefore undeserving of preservation (Ghassem-Fachandi 2012, 221).

is vital to middle-class identification. Van Wessel has explained the contemporary Gujarati understanding of the term as follows:

Sanskaar stands for the moral uprightness that comes with proper upbringing. Traits considered to be good, like respectful behaviour towards others, hospitality, self-restraint in consumption and expression of negative emotions, and performance of social duty, are ascribed to education and *sanskaar* interchangeably. Members of the higher castes commonly see *sanskaar*, as much as education, as properties of these same higher castes (2001b, 80).

Sanskaar, then, would seem to encompass *sāttvik*, Sanskritic values, and once again illustrates how caste and class exist in a mutually constitutive relationship. But this goes much further than a singular Brahminical Hindu vision of purity, for embedded in these core middle-class principles we can also identify the values of purity and prestige shared between Jainism and Swaminarayan Hinduism, as well as the interconnected elements informing *ābrū*, the uniquely Gujarati notion of prestige straddling both class and caste values.

Prospectus

The first chapter of this dissertation begins by delving deeper into the complexities of caste, class, and other factors tied to the concept of “upward mobility” in Gujarat and India more broadly. Here I examine various theoretical models related to upward mobility in South Asia, including Sanskritization, Vaiṣṇavization, universalization, and gentrification, as well as Saffronization (that is, the influence of right-wing Hindu politics). In similar fashion, I go on to probe “tantra,” another term essential to this study, evaluating and re-evaluating the manifold connotations attached to the term. I pay particularly close attention to the connotations of “transgression” and “social subversion,” suggesting that tantra may not be as peripheral as is often presumed. On account of the vast semantic trajectories of both upward mobility and tantra, I propose that Rodney Needham’s notion of a “polythetic classification” helps to better understand each term.

Chapter Two moves toward a social history of goddesses in Gujarat, arguing that by the nineteenth- and early-twentieth century advent of print culture in South Asia, female spirits and divinities had become pivotal loci of both repugnance and reform. This chapter begins with a brief summary of goddess-related religion in Gujarat’s pre-history, and then focuses in detail on the colonial period, during which female supernatural beings, including *mātās*, became the

subject of intensive scrutiny from Orientalists, missionaries, and Indian reformers. While commentators from these diverse backgrounds expressed varying degrees of skepticism and even revulsion toward female deities, the chapter concludes with a counterexample from the early twentieth century. In this case, *mātās* emerged as a driving force behind self-reform efforts among the Adivasis of Surat.

The third chapter rereads and re-evaluates existing studies on Bahucarā Mātā and Khoḍīyār Mātā through the lens of upward mobility, namely Samira Sheikh’s work on the former and the works of Harald Tambs-Lyche and Neelima Shukla-Bhatt on the latter. In this chapter, I will also draw out tantric elements in the texts, iconographies, and worship of each goddess. In analogous fashion, both Bahucarā and Khoḍīyār gradually came to be distanced from animal sacrifice and other elements of their worship deemed indecorous according to upper-caste tastes, all the while maintaining associations with tantric goddesses and their related symbolism.

The next three chapters are based primarily upon my ethnographic work at temples and shrines dedicated to *mātās*. Chapter Four charts two contrasting sides of Melaḍī Mātā. First, we observe printed and oral narratives related to the goddess that acknowledge her coexisting *tāmasik* and *sāttvik* elements, and then we move into ritual practices dedicated to her in the context of rural and urban depressed caste communities, in which Melaḍī is still a “goddess of dirt” who is sometimes appeased with blood sacrifices and alcohol. This contrasts distinctly with the pristine, Sanskritized image of the goddess (see again Figure 1) upheld and promulgated by several major Melaḍī Mātā temple complexes that I visited in and around Ahmedabad, which persistently and explicitly distance themselves from lingering *tāmasik* associations in public perceptions of the goddess.

Chapter Five takes up Jogaṇī Mā, focusing on her homology with the decidedly tantric, self-decapitating goddess, Chinnamastā. The ensanguined imagery aside, Jogaṇī Mā is a popular goddess for middle classes and the upwardly mobile, helming innumerable sites throughout Gujarat. After tracing her plural connotations, both Sanskritic and folkloric as Chinnamastā and a *yoginī*, this chapter moves into fieldwork data collected at several shrines and temples in Ahmedabad and Gandhinagar that are drawn together by the common de-emphasis or outright denial of Jogaṇī’s tantric associations by their officiants and devotees. We will then examine one temple that provides an important exception to this trend. One factor that unites all these sites is the immediacy with which Jogaṇī Mā solves this-worldly problems, pointing toward the

enduring connection between tantra and the increasingly prevalent desire among many contemporary Indians for “quick-fix” religion.

Chapter Six charts the transformations and continuities in the character of the rabies goddess, Haḍkāī Mā. The chapter begins by exploring emic understandings of the goddess, including historical accounts of ecstatic festival worship that involve possession, intoxication, and possibly even human bloodletting. This, however, is not the image of the goddess conveyed at the sites where I undertook my ethnography. Devipujaks, many of whom live in abject poverty, are highly protective of the goddess’s fundamental and unqualified purity, distancing Haḍkāī from the blood and alcohol associations of other *mātās* and making determined testimonials to her Sanskritic and Brahminic character. The efforts of Haḍkāī’s worshippers to Sanskritize the goddess’s past may have historical roots, given the existence of a storied Brahminical Haḍkāī site in the village of Karadra, which I was also able to visit. By virtue of her *sāttvik* character and the efficacy of her power, Haḍkāī has *not* been divested of her highly-specified role as a goddess of rabies, contra the reimaginings of other Indian disease goddesses such as Māriyamman and Śītalā.

The conclusion draws together common themes in the six chapters, moving from there to speculate as to how *mātā* worship enables groups, families, and individuals to inscribe, articulate, and reformulate their identities. Brimming with resources for social capital, *mātā* temple complexes are spaces where upward mobility and ascendancy can be actively performed in a familiar religious context. The evolving identities of goddesses such as Melaḍī, Jogaṇī, and Haḍkāī exemplify how spiritual and economic transformations go hand-in-hand, not only for devotees but for deities as well. As such, this case study from Gujarat can offer valuable insight into national trends in post-liberalization India more broadly.

Chapter One: Theoretical Foundations—Toward Polythetic Definitions of Upward Mobility and Tantra

Before proceeding with our study of Gujarati goddesses, we must first work toward a fuller understanding of two terms central to this dissertation: upward mobility and tantra. While these two terms are, for all conventional intents and purposes, unrelated (though we may think differently about this by the end of the present study), they share profound conceptual complexities. In their South Asian contexts alone, each term encompasses a sweeping array of component parts and connotations, further compounded by historical and regional considerations, making both “upward mobility” and “tantra” exceedingly difficult to define. Upward mobility refers very generally to methods of betterment spanning the overlapping categories of religion, economics, and social stratifications (namely caste and class). Tantra, meanwhile, refers to an expansive range of texts and traditions that, over the past millennium-plus, have been interpreted as both transgressive and liberating, yet also, in recent decades, as progressively mainstream. If “upward mobility” and “tantra” are so multifarious, how then are we to speak meaningfully and productively about either category?

An answer, I propose, lies in Rodney Needham’s notion of a “polythetic classification” (1975; 1983). Needham, a British social anthropologist, took up the difficulties of defining categories of natural and cultural phenomena that share “family resemblances,” wherein a wide range of characteristics are possessed by a large number of category members. What necessarily emerges for such a phenomenon is a classification that is not singular and unified, or “monothetic.”²² Rather, such a classification has to be “polythetic,” with category members getting grouped together because they share a significant *number* of traits, and not necessarily because they share any *single* trait (1983, 48-49). A given class member, then, does not have to possess all relevant traits to be included in said class; rather, classification therein is available to anything possessing even just a few of the key characteristics.

This chapter moves toward polythetic working models of upward mobility and tantra and, in charting the terms’ manifold meanings, elaborates and problematizes particular connotations contained within these. Upward mobility in South Asia and Gujarat specifically is, for our concerns, constituted by a number of theoretical processes previously proposed by scholars of

²² This brief discussion on “monothetic” and “polythetic” definitions has been aided by elaborations on the topic by Jonathan Z. Smith (1982, 1-8), Douglas Renfrew Brooks (1990, 53-55), and Hugh Urban (2003a, 6). The latter two are concerned specifically with polythetic definitions as they relate to tantra.

South Asia, including Sanskritization, Vaiṣṇavization, universalization, and gentrification, among others. In detailing the class concerns imbricated in gentrification, we will see that contemporary Indian “middle-classness” is, in itself, a polythetic category. Social ascendancy can also involve Hindu nationalist politics, and so “Saffronization” warrants inclusion in our polythetic definition of upward mobility as well. Drawing on the insights of Pierre Bourdieu, I go on to suggest that, by virtue of their perceived prestige, Sanskritic, Vaiṣṇavite, universalized, gentrified, and even Saffronized sensibilities, to some extent, aid in the accumulation of social capital in contemporary Gujarat. With regard to tantra, I build upon Douglas Renfrew Brooks’ (1990) prior efforts to assemble a ten-fold polythetic classification for this category, and propose some possible additions and emendations to his definition. I also take an integral component of this definition—that tantra is transgressive and subversive—as a point of departure for re-evaluating tantra’s supposed positionality on the periphery of the Indian mainstream. Tantra, I suggest, has in the three decades after Brooks become much more socially acceptable and commercially viable in contemporary India. On account of this acceptability and viability, tantra may in itself be a mechanism of upward mobility.

Theorizing Upward Mobility

Many scholars of South Asia have essayed characterizations of upward mobility in the subcontinent, leaving in their wake a spate of terms attempting to encompass the process by which rank-altering changes are effected upon people, practices, and theologies. These terms include Sanskritization, Vaiṣṇavization, universalization, and gentrification, among others. While no one of these processes has prevailed as an explanatory model, each provides valuable insight into social ascendancy. The following subsections move through these terms and their attendant theories one by one, weighing their strengths and weaknesses, and then postulating how they might be integrated in order to better understand upward mobility in Gujarat, and, beyond that, in South Asia at large.

SANSKRITIZATION

Sanskritization was popularized by Indian sociologist M.N. Srinivas.²³ Srinivas used the term to describe a process by which low castes, over a generation or two, “took over, as far as possible, the customs, rites and beliefs of the Brahmins” (2002, 200).²⁴ Srinivas would later go on to expand the idealized, sought-after identity beyond Brahmins so that it included all twice-born castes (2002, 222). The customs of twice-born groups that Srinivas commonly observed lower castes adopting were, among others, vegetarianism and teetotalism, as well as the inclusion of or emphasis upon Sanskritic liturgy such as *havans*, *pūjās*, and the Sanskrit language itself in ritual contexts. Srinivas chose the term “Sanskritization” over alternatives such as “Brahminization” because the emphasis on *ahiṃsā* and abstinence from intoxicants was not necessarily an inherently Brahmin or even “Hindu” ideal. He argued that many Brahmins themselves gave up intoxicants and meat in post-Vedic times to keep pace with other influential Sanskritic groups noted for their stringent *sāttvik* standards such as the Jains and Buddhists (2002, 201).²⁵ This suggests that Brahmins themselves were capable of Sanskritizing. Drawing on terminology from Milton Singer, Srinivas held that these sorts of interpolations and excisions, in their capacity for demonstrating proficiency with the “Great Tradition” of Hinduism, provide the most effective strategy for improving the social standing of low-ranking groups (2002, 202).²⁶ It is by way of the Sanskritization process, then, Srinivas posited, that the lifeways of the topmost castes are progressively transferred to non-elite groups, including customs such as language, cooking, and clothing, but also philosophical concepts such as karma, dharma, and samsara, as well as values relating to sexuality, marriage, and kinship (2002, 204-206).

Sanskritization continues—or has perhaps intensified—in post-Independence India. As one example, Srinivas cited the actions of the Congress party in Mysore State in the 1950s. Over the course of this decade, Congress undertook a campaign against non-vegetarian offerings to village deities, promoting the substitution of fruits and flowers in their place. This movement proceeded

²³ Though “Sanskritization” is synonymous with M.N. Srinivas, it was first coined by S.K. Chatterjee (1950) in an attempt to posit that pre-Aryan and non-Aryan people inherited the culture of Vedic Aryans.

²⁴ Srinivas was not unfamiliar with the Gujarati milieu, as he was employed for a time as professor at the University of Baroda.

²⁵ Indeed, at earlier points in history, Brahmins seem to have drunk the alcoholic soma, eaten beef, and offered blood sacrifices (M.N. Srinivas 2002, 201). Kashmiri and Bengali Brahmins traditionally have not been vegetarian.

²⁶ Anthropologist Milton Singer (1972) posited the mutually constituted categories of “Great Tradition” and “Little Tradition.” In the Indian context, “Great Tradition” refers to religion and mythography related to pan-Indian, Sanskritic rituals and texts, while “Little Tradition” refers to a plurality of localized religious and folkloric expressions.

even though Congress was dominated by members of non-Brahminical castes, the vast majority of which made periodic sacrifices to their deities (2002, 207). Sanskritization also allows Sanskritic Hinduism to absorb localized forms of worship among tribal and low-caste people, reconfiguring related deities as manifestations of overarching Sanskritic theological concepts. For the sake of demonstrating such a process, Srinivas utilized the figure of the local goddess. “Village goddesses in most parts of India,” he wrote, “have been identified with Shakti, who is in turn a manifestation of Parvati, the wife of Shiva” (2002, 225). This is a process we will encounter time and again in the context of Gujarati *mātās*.

Srinivas argued that Sanskritization is virtually inevitable after a lower caste elevates its political or economic standing, as it can serve as a means by which to address the incongruity between their high socioeconomic rank and their low ritual rank. With this in mind, Srinivas noted that “[e]conomic betterment, the acquisition of political power, education, leadership, and a desire to move up in the hierarchy, are all relevant factors in Sanskritization, and each case of Sanskritization may show all or some of these factors mixed up in different measures” (2002, 214). Accordingly, Sanskritization is more usefully treated “as a bundle of concepts than as a single concept” (2002, 218). Thus, from the outset, Srinivas conceded that there is more at work in the process of upward mobility than a simple emulation of the highest castes—rather, this deployment of the Sanskritic is very thoroughly entangled with other means of advancement. To look at upward mobility through the lens of Sanskritization alone would appear to be somewhat unidimensional, as the process is so closely tied to other strategies and processes of ascendance. Srinivas would go on to admit as much himself, noting that disadvantaged groups, in due time, came to realize “that the acquisition of education, as well as economic and political power, were all far more important than Sanskritization in the struggle for upward mobility” (2002, 232).²⁷

²⁷ The criticisms of Sanskritization as a theory have been legion. In many cases, groups undertaking the “purer” customs of higher castes are *not* making any claims to elevated caste status for themselves (Hardiman 1987, 159). Furthermore, in emphasizing only “purification,” the notion of Sanskritization fails to account for inherent challenges to the fundamental assumptions of the caste-based social structure that must take place alongside it in some upwardly mobile movements (1987, 159-160). Beyond that, Sanskritization is largely ahistorical, as it presumes that emulating Brahmins or Jains or twice-born castes has consistently been the paramount goal throughout vast stretches of Indian history (1987, 160). Sanskritization is also based on the assumption that the hierarchical order of caste has stayed fairly uniform no matter the time period or, for that matter, the region of India under question.

VAIṢṆAVIZATION

Historians of India and scholars of Hinduism in particular have articulated another pattern of religious change very similar to (and not unrelated with) Sanskritization. This is “Vaiṣṇavization,” or the process through which a variety of traditions linked to a range of localities throughout India gradually came to adopt iconography, mythology, and ritual related to Viṣṇu or his avatars such as Rāma, Kṛṣṇa, and so forth. As in Sanskritization, these shifts toward Vaiṣṇavism served the function of purifying, sanitizing, or otherwise mainstreaming diverse religious practices. Linda Hess, for instance, has noted how western recensions of the bhakti poetry of fifteenth-century North Indian mystic Kabir contain considerably more references to Kṛṣṇa than those of the east.²⁸ Hess has attributed this to the popularity and institutionalization of Kṛṣṇa bhakti in North India from 1200-1500 CE due to the efforts of Caitanya and Vallabha after Kabir’s death, especially during the time when the bhakti poet’s works were being anthologized (1987, 123). This suggests Kabir’s writings “had to pass through an atmosphere saturated with fervent Kṛṣṇa bhakti” (1987, 124). As a result, Kabir’s rough-hued poetics came to reflect this Vaiṣṇava influence even though the poet was not a worshipper of Kṛṣṇa during his lifetime. Charlotte Vaudeville has labelled this the “Vaiṣṇavization” of Kabir’s original message in the West (1987, 27 ff. 9). This affixes a term to the process Vaudeville herself discerned in two other studies. In the earlier of these, she charted how sixteenth-century Vaiṣṇava Brahmin reformers integrated and supplanted Śaiva and Śākta cults in Braj (1976, 204-208). In the later article, Vaudeville described how Pandharpur’s primary deity Pāṇḍurang, literally the “white god” in a homology with Rudra-Śiva, eventually became Viṭhobā, understood as a *svarūpa* (“appearance”) of Viṣṇu (1996, 203). In both cases, a localized Śaiva tradition evolved into an iteration of comparably mainstream, pan-regional Vaiṣṇavism. Analogous occurrences of “Vaiṣṇavizing” have been charted, if not explicitly labelled as such, by several historians and archaeologists working in both North and South India.²⁹ It seems, then, that Vaiṣṇavization spanned a variety of regions. With this in mind, Philip Lutgendorf has described the process as “characteristic of the evolution of popular Hinduism” (2007, 386-387).

²⁸ For more on Kabir, see Linda Hess’s *Bijak of Kabir* (1983).

²⁹ Peter van der Veer, for instance, has noted the transformation of Śaiva institutions at Ayodhya into Vaiṣṇava temples (1988, 15). Similarly, observing the South Indian imperial city of Vijayanagara, Anila Verghese has mapped out a pronounced shift from Śaivism to Vaiṣṇavism that accompanied the increasing royal patronage of Śrī Vaiṣṇavism during the sixteenth century (1995, 8-9).

In contemplating why this shift toward Vaiṣṇavism has been so common, we encounter Vaiṣṇavization's upwardly mobile vector. Lutgendorf has argued that Vaiṣṇavization is “not simply a matter of changing devotional tastes or of substitution of nomenclature but indicates a preference for the pan-Indic, Sanskritic, and Brahmanical over the local, vernacular, and folk” (2007, 387). Associations with Viṣṇu and his avatars, Kṛṣṇa and Rāma, bring with them values that can be glossed as “dignity” and “self-limitation” (Lutgendorf 2001, 289), alongside an insistence upon vegetarianism, teetotalism, and an overall sense of cosmic order (Hawley 2001, 219). A move toward Viṣṇu, then, can be a tool for social ascendancy, and to establish this, Lutgendorf identifies the ethos of Vaiṣṇavization within a number of late nineteenth-century “caste uplift” movements among some Shudra-level agricultural and artisan castes that incorporated the figures of Rāma, Sītā, and Hanumān into worship (Lutgendorf 2001, 287). Among these groups were the Gujarati Kurmis and the Rāmānandī Sadhus.³⁰ In this sense, Vaiṣṇavization closely resembles Sanskritization. Lutgendorf has noted that this is precisely the sort of terminology he is trying to evoke, in the process pairing it with the American sociological term “gentrification,” which is also crucial given how central Vaiṣṇava elements have proven in keeping deities of Hanumān's ilk amenable to the Indian middle class (293, ff. 22). In a similar vein, Pika Ghosh has posited that Vaiṣṇavization represents “a more specific form of the general umbrella term ‘Sanskritization’” (2005, 20), and this is often how the term is employed in current scholarship (see Pinkney 2015, 36).

Vaiṣṇavization in this sense has been utilized to explain changes witnessed among some goddesses in North India. Kathleen Erndl has identified Vaiṣṇavism, with its prohibition of meat-eating and animal sacrifice, as the chief influence upon the post-sixteenth century abandonment of animal sacrifices among goddess traditions of the Panjab Hills (1993, 71). Many of these goddesses, among them Kāṅgrevālī Devī and Nainā Devī, were rooted in tantra and Śaktism, and their temple spaces had been, to that point, non-vegetarian. However, with the gaining popularity of the strictly vegetarian Vaiṣṇo Devī, the other temples followed suit in proscribing animal sacrifices and replacing them with symbolic substitutes (1993, 70-71). Observing comparable developments in colonial-era Bengal, Rachel Fell McDermott has argued that Vaiṣṇavization is

³⁰ A copious amount of scholarly literature exists concerning the Rāmānandī *sampradāya*. For a discussion of the origins of the group, see especially Richard Burghart (1978). For a study of Rāmānandī monastics and their norms of social equity, see William R. Pinch (1996). Rāmānandīs also form a major focus of Peter van der Veer's *Gods on Earth* (1988).

discernible in the lives and works of Śākta poets writing about Kālī as a function of the regional Vaiṣṇava community's increased prominence (2001, 293). What emerged from this synthesis was a new genre of tantric texts that actively intertwined Śaktism and Vaiṣṇavism, blending the stories and rituals of Kālī with those of Kṛṣṇa, a literary tradition which continues today (*Ibid.*). As a result, Śākta compositions are permeated with language, images, and stylistic conventions from Vaiṣṇava poetry, through which Kālī is rendered as a loving, compassionate, attractive mother (2001, 293-294). The oftentimes ferocious goddess has, on account of Vaiṣṇava conventions, undergone a sweetening or “sugar-coating,” following McDermott’s phrasing (2001, 294). McDermott has not, however, reduced the ongoing transformations of the goddess to Vaiṣṇavization alone. Rather, she has argued that the process is tied into sociopolitical factors such as “a growing class of Western-influenced *bhadralok* [“respectable people”] who were embarrassed by what they perceived to be idolatry, blood-sacrifice, and primitive mythology” (2001, 295). In addition to the considerations of class implicit in these sanitizing efforts of the elite, McDermott tied Kālī’s domestication, elevation, and popularization in Bengal to a multiplicity of factors, including Sanskritization and urbanization (2001, 296-297). Clearly, like the concept of Sanskritization with which it overlaps, Vaiṣṇavization does not operate in isolation from other processes.

UNIVERSALIZATION

Another concept following from the framework of Srinivas, as well as Milton Singer’s notion of “Great Tradition” and “Little Tradition” before it, is that of “universalization.”³¹ Anthropologist McKim Marriott developed this terminology to elucidate the upward movement of cultural contents (1969, 195). Critiquing some of the claims attendant to Sanskritization, Marriott posited that cultural contents do not always move unidirectionally from the so-called “Great” to “Little” tradition (the latter being, in Marriott’s imagining, located in the village). Even when cultural contents do move from “Great” to “Little”, this does not automatically lead to the replacement or wholesale erasure of local customs, as Srinivas would seem to imply (*Ibid.*). Universalization sees the Great Tradition as emerging out of “a carrying-forward of materials which are already present in the little traditions which it encompasses” (1969, 197). On

³¹ “Universalization” was originally employed non-technically by Robert Redfield and Milton Singer (1954) in their essay “The Cultural Role of Cities.”

the grounds of its authority, the so-called “Great Tradition” legitimates and constitutes aspects of a conversely framed “Little Tradition.” Marriott used the Hindu festival of Diwali as an example of this process. He speculated that on this festival day in the rural region of Uttar Pradesh in which he undertook his fieldwork, the Sanskrit deity Lakṣmī served as a “credible literary apotheosis” for the local goddesses, all of which could end up being cast as additional forms of this Great Goddess (1969 197, 215). Correspondingly, Lakṣmī fits as an appropriate figure of worship on a day already held sacred in the Little Tradition for renewing reverence to a multiplicity of gods and spirits (1969, 197). Occurring simultaneously with universalization is the process of “parochialization,” wherein components of the Great(er) Tradition begin to inherit a local character as they spread through the Little Tradition (1969, 199). In this way, universalization and parochialization inform one another in a kind of dialectic relationship Marriot characterized as a “circular flow” (1969, 202).

Working in the context of the goddess Vindhyavāsinī and her popular pilgrimage site at Vindhyachal in the Vindhya mountain range in Uttar Pradesh, Cynthia Humes (1996) has elaborated upon the upwardly mobile connotations of universalization. In her research, Humes traced the development of Vindhyavāsinī from a tribal deity worshipped by the liquor- and sacrifice-offering peoples of the Vindhya Mountains into a singular, transcendent Ādiśakti—the “first goddess” from which other goddesses manifest. Humes posited that, parallel with this theological change, devotees and affiliates of the goddess and her Vindhyachal pilgrimage site came to believe that “the most authentic interpretation of Vindhyavāsinī was as a Vedicized, vegetarian, and universalist goddess, a view pleasing to her increasingly ‘sophisticated’ pilgrim clientele” (1996, 73). This sort of “Sanskritizing” and “sanitizing” de-regionalizes Vindhyavāsinī, effectively “universalizing” her traditionally localized confines (1996, 72). Universalization, then, is characterized by the extension of local deities beyond their originary jurisdictions, through a process of expanding their geographical, mythological, and ritual scope. Universalized gods and goddesses go from regional to pan-Indic, vernacular to Sanskritic, and *tāmasik* to *sāttvik*. Such deities also go from plural and particularized to singular and Advaitic (non-dual), often embodying (or at least becoming interchangeable with) a supreme principle such as Brahman or Devī.³² If Humes’ case study of Vindhyavāsinī is any indication,

³² Advaita Vedānta is a highly influential school of classical Indian philosophy most commonly attributed to the eighth-century CE philosopher-saint Ādi Śaṅkara. Advaita literally means “not-two,” referring to the school’s core

universalization takes on an ascendant trajectory, not only for the goddess but for her devotees as well. Humes presaged the work of William Harman and Joanne Waghorne (to be taken up in the next section) when she identified a proclivity toward universalized understandings of the goddess among Vindhyachal's more educated and more urbanized pilgrims (1996, 74). This intimates that cosmopolitan, upwardly mobile values are at least partially responsible for shaping the universalized image of Vindhyavāsīnī. The transformation of Vindhyavāsīnī at Vindhyachal closely corresponds with the reimaginings of *mātās* at numerous sites in Gujarat.

CLASS AND GENTRIFICATION

Over the past two decades, class in India, particularly the rise of the middle class, has emerged as a significant concern in scholarship and popular media. The liberalization of India's economy in the early 1990s has ensured that it is class, and not necessarily caste, that has become a primary indicator of social stratification in the subcontinent, as well as a vital site of mobility.³³ Accordingly, an overwhelming number of Indians from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds now cultivate or aspire to a lifestyle identified as "middle class." Exact figures as to the size of the Indian middle class are difficult to establish, however, given the range of definitions that exist for middle-class identity. The Indian National Council of Applied Economic Research (INCAER) identifies as "middle class" people earning between \$4,000 and \$21,000 USD per year, and estimates that there are 60 million such persons in India (Ram-Prasad 2007). Other sources base middle-class status on the ownership of at least one commodity, most typically luxury goods such as televisions, smart phones, VCRs, washing machines, and motorized vehicles, all of which convey prestige. Such definitions reckon the middle class to number as high as 200 million (Ram-Prasad 2007; van Wessel 2004, 100-101). While these

idea that the *ātman* (the Self or "soul") and Brahman, the neuter-gendered divine, are not separate, but rather one and the same. Advaita is essentially a monistic system that holds that all reality is reducible to Brahman, which is the substrate of the universe and also the highest manifestation of divinity. Advaita has been perennially fashionable in modern Hinduism, particularly within Neo-Vedāntic movements, to such an extent that it is often overemphasized as being representative of most or all of Hindu theology (see, for instance, A. Sharma 2006). As such, it too can be a marker of so-called "proper Hinduism." Meanwhile, Śākta schools, such as Śrīvidyā, have also put forward similar ideas of non-dualism in which the singular/non-dual Brahman is held to be *feminine*. That is to say, Brahman is Devī. For more on this notion of "Śāktādvaita," see McDaniel (2004, 89-91) and Khanna (2000).

³³ The liberalization of India's economy, beginning in 1991 with the "balance of payments crisis," involved the transformation of the rupee to a convertible currency, alongside an influx of private and foreign investment. One result of liberalization was the wider availability of foreign-manufactured goods. For more on India's economic liberalization, see Arvind Panagariya's *India: The Emerging Giant* (2008) and Jairam Ramesh's *To the Brink and Back: India's 1991 Story* (2015).

figures differ vastly, they illustrate that the Indian middle class has a significant presence. And while these definitions tell us very little about who the middle class is composed of, they say even less about the history and experiences of middle-class people. With that being the case, the goal of this subsection is to establish parameters for what we mean when we refer to the “middle class” in India.

Most contemporary scholars of class in India are hesitant to use narrowly defined positivist and empiricist approaches to measure middle-class consumption and attitudes (Donner & De Neve 2011; Fernandes 2006; Säävälä 2010). Because self-identifying middle-class people are actively striving to keep up appearances, interviews and surveys are often not a very fruitful means of gauging middle-class membership (Säävälä 2010, 3). Nor can class in India be satisfactorily understood by analysing it purely in terms of labour, capital, and the history of class struggles as per a Marxist framework (Donner & De Neve 2011, 5). A consequence of relying on these kinds of formal methodologies and theoretical outlooks is the underestimation of the material implications of complex cultural symbol systems and performances, including self-definitions and everyday practices, which have often been overlooked in studies of class in India (Fernandes 2006, 33; Donner & De Neve 2011, 7-9).

When these symbolic and performative factors are taken into consideration, the contemporary Indian middle class is more adequately characterized by its ambiguity and heterogeneity (Säävälä 2010, 206; Brosius 2010, 2). To wit, India’s new middle class is fluid in nature and is actively constituted by the differentiations and diversities within it (Fernandes 2006, xviii). Persons and communities identifying as middle class differ considerably with regard to economic position as well as consumption practices (Donner & De Neve 2011, 3). For instance, the newly upwardly mobile include rural landowning groups, skilled labourers, and entrepreneurs, often of low-caste background, who are markedly different in attitude from the previously established upper-caste middle classes (Säävälä 2010, 156).³⁴ While the “low fringes” of the Indian middle class share some characteristics with these upper-caste, socioeconomically secure segments, the category of “middle class” unavoidably lumps together people with widely

³⁴ On account of ties to colonial influences, India’s pre-liberalization middle class availed itself of opportunities in the service and literary classes offered through colonial educational policy (Fernandes 2006, 4). Before liberalization, middle-class status was predicated less upon displays of wealth than it was upon English education and respectable family history. The latter was indelibly linked to high-caste status, and so Brahminical notions of purity greatly influenced the notions of cleanliness, order, and civility that typically marked middle-class rhetoric in India (Hansen 2001, 70). For more on the early history of India’s middle class, see Andre Beteille (2001).

divergent social positions on account of caste, religion, and education under a fairly generic label (Säävälä 2010, 206). With this in mind, numerous scholars of South Asia have basically come to agree with Loïc Wacquant in concluding that the middle class—in India as in the Western world—is, by definition, ill-defined (Fernandes 2006, xxxiv).³⁵

Considering the hazards of settling upon a limited, singular definition for the middle class, the preferred noun of choice in studies of class in India has been “middle-classness”—the concept of what pertains to and entails being middle class. Middle-classness attempts to appreciate the plural principles, practices, and imaginings that constitute what the middle class is rather than presumptively attributing it with a static essence (Donner & De Neve 2011, 7; Brosius 2010, 14). Through this terminology, then, we can appreciate how class is not so much about groupings as it is about *who* considers themselves to be middle class (Säävälä 2010, 10; emphasis in original). Middle-classness focuses on the social practices, values, and conceptual divisions that people who deem themselves middle class—or who struggle to become members of that class—use to determine what constitutes and sustains upward social mobility (2010, 10-11). In short, “middle-classness” accounts for *perceptions* of what it means to be middle class.

On the ground, a corollary of the ambiguity of middle-classness is the psychic stress that often arises from a middle-class identity. Upwardly mobile people, by virtue of their ascendant trajectory, necessarily seek to cross social and symbolic boundaries, and are thereby subject to some degree of psychological unrest and social unpredictability (Säävälä 2010, 170). The ongoing production of middle-classness symbolically and materially makes the identities associated therewith elusive, unstable, and subsequently marked by tension (Donner & De Neve 2011, 13). Additionally, Christiane Brosius has averred that the increased freedom of choice associated with class is, for Indians, not uncommonly accompanied by a fear of loss of heritage, generating further psychological pressures (2010, 4). More tangibly, the goal of making ends meet can prove exceedingly stressful, and so there is no shortage of unique anxieties for those who form the Indian middle classes, especially for those approaching the oft-idealized “new rich” status (Fernandes 2006, 103). The newly rich dread losing the hard-won ground they have just recently gained (Brosius 2010, 18-21), and so they live in perpetual anxiety of downward social mobility (Donner & De Neve 2011, 16). A middle-class identity is largely perceived as

³⁵ Wacquant has worked toward characterizing the middle class in his 1991 article “Making Class: The Middle Class(es) in Social Theory and Social Structure.”

dependent upon a person's ability to keep up in the proverbial rat-race, as attaining success is a never-ending process with failure always lurking around the corner (Säävälä 2010, 147). Because of this looming threat of failure there is, ultimately, a sense of fragility among many within the middle class (Fernandes 2006, 224). In her work on middle-class life in Bangalore, Tulasi Srinivas has drawn on the term "precarity" to characterize this variety of uncertainty (2018, 38). Indeed, anxieties and uncertainties are a hallmark of middle-classness throughout India (Donner & De Neve 2011, 15).

Another corollary of this scholarly re-evaluation of middle-classness has been a reassessment of consumption and consumerist behaviour as the primary measure of Indian middle-class identity. In much of the scholarship on class in India, being middle class has become equated with being a consumer, which has effectively reduced the field to the study of consumption practices (Donner & De Neve 2011, 8). Leela Fernandes has led the way in challenging this idea, claiming that previous research on the middle class has overemphasized consumption, which is by itself only a part of what constitutes the new Indian middle-class identity (2006, xvii). Minna Säävälä has also recognized the insufficiency of defining class in terms of consumption, noting that while the Indian middle class has undeniably burgeoned, only a mere five percent of people in India, approximately, can afford a car (2010, 9). While class formation does involve the attainment of commodities, Henrike Donner and Geert De Neve have proposed that middle-class identities are intricately entangled with complex systems well beyond India's turn to consumerism (2011, 8). If our goal is to understand these systems and their multifarious complexities, it appears more advantageous to evaluate consumable goods in India through their newfound symbolic power rather than strictly by their commercial cachet (Fernandes 2006, xv-xvii). To be sure, wealth and possessions serve to signify the affluence required to perform the "adequate dispositions and lifestyles" of middle-classness, as we will soon see (2006, 8). So while consumption remains important in the understanding of class in India, it is by no means the defining aspect of middle-classness.

The shift away from consumption in defining class has led to increasing theoretical emphasis on symbolic performances of prestige, and so a number of commentators on middle-classness have drawn on the oeuvre of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (Fernandes 2006; Säävälä 2010; Brosius 2010; Donner & De Neve 2011). Working in the context of late twentieth-century France, Bourdieu defined class as a hierarchically organized field in which it is not just

economic capital but, even more critically, *symbolic* capital that structures the position occupied by any given individual in that field at any given moment (1993). It is this symbolic capital that enables distinction within a hierarchy (Bourdieu 1990, 22). In short, distinguishing tastes differentiate people. Constellations of tastes and distinctions come to comprise what Bourdieu called *habitus*—an adaptable series of dispositions that generate and organize practices and representations without presupposing an express outcome or mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them. More simply, *habitus* is a “feel for the game” (1993, 189). The social space, then, is a field of production in and through which social agents seek to position themselves. These social agents do so by improving or stabilizing their status, in the process negotiating access to the values and rules of the “game” being played (Brosius 2010, 15). Brosius has argued that in India (as in Bourdieu’s France), upwardly mobile classes came to apprehend that sophisticated taste and its display cannot be possessed like money; rather, it has to be learned (2010, 21). The economy of any given cultural field is based on beliefs and attitudes concerning what constitutes a cultural work and its aesthetic value, and the Indian middle class, of course, has a unique framework for what is valued as culturally and aesthetically prestigious. Thus, several contemporary commentators have endeavoured to apply and rework Bourdieu’s ideas to interpret distinctively Indian understandings of what constitutes social capital for the middle class in India. In demarcating our own parameters for middle-classness, this present study will follow this precedent.

The sources of social capital for the new Indian middle classes are legion. This capital comes, for example, from obvious hallmarks of socioeconomic status such as education, cosmopolitanism, and consumption. With respect to education, upwardly mobile modern Indian youths have sought out opportunities to pursue higher learning in science and technology, as well as through credentialing via certificate-training programs. These credentialing programs provide instruction not only related to employable skills but also in the acquisition of manners, taste, and style—the key elements of the *habitus* essential for fashioning a middle-class individual (Fernandes 2006, 96). Among the most fundamental credentials is fluency in English, not just because it represents a highly employable skill, but also because it is a major constituent of the new middle-class identity, denoting broader aspirations to become a cosmopolitan “global Indian” (Brosius 2010, 7). Cosmopolitan images of a globally-connected India kindle the middle-class imagination, and so provide another source of social capital. Consider one example

provided by Fernandes that comes from Gujarat. Here, a local company's advertisement displayed a panorama of New York, London, and Paris, the overlaid lettering boasting of the "view from our Ahmedabad office" (Fernandes 2006, 52). In addition, consumption, though overdetermined in studies of class, continues to be a critical component of Indian middle-class capital. That is, the purchasing of prized commodities and brands has become a strategic indicator of upward mobility. In a liberalized India awash with imported products, foreign-origin goods further attest to individuals' globally-situated sensibilities, strongly conveying middle- or upper-class aspirations (Fernandes 2006, xviii). This "consumer-citizen" is an iconic figure of post-liberalization India, embodying the new "common man" (2006, 184).

The influx of Western ideas and commodities does not, however, affect the core of middle-class propriety, at least not ideally. This propriety is bound up in kin and gender relations, as well as adherence to religious conventions, which allows us to see how values viewed as "traditional" are utilized as sources of social capital for India's new middle class. For that reason, international connectedness, not to mention consumption and credentialing, among other aspects of capital, must all be contextualized within locally valorized ways of life in order to yield prestige optimally (Säävälä 2010, 93). Moral propriety, mainly framed in terms of Hindu and Sanskritic mores, as per our earlier discussion of Sanskritization, has become indispensable in the formation of class status (Säävälä 2010, 6). A person's moral obligations, especially toward kin, are also entangled with the Indian discourse of middle-classness (2010, 61). Marriage alliances, for instance, are still diligently managed by families so as to ensure that caste-based notions of purity and prestige of lineage are protected, making women central to the process of generating and maintaining class (2010, 59). Women are also implicated in the middle-class preoccupation with cleanliness that ensures female homemakers spend countless hours every day struggling against dirt in all its manifestations, thereby performing and reiterating received gendered roles (2010, 178). Hiring domestic help can also signify social capital and middle-class identity, though the servants, regardless of their station as removers of filth, simultaneously embody the dirt and disease of the outside world in the perceptions of their ascendant-class employers, again pointing to the symbolic ambivalence and vulnerability of the domestic space (Dickey 2000, 481). These examples suggest the extent to which religious ideas of gender and caste have become imbricated in the understanding of middle-classness and moral decorum in contemporary India, an idea we will take up again momentarily.

Middle-class modernity in India has most certainly not been accompanied by secularization. Religion endures as an integral part of the Indian middle-class lifestyle, both for the established, upper-caste middle class and for the new middle and ascending classes (Säävälä 2010, 164). For these new middle classes, religion stands in opposition to the putatively irreligious Western world, thereby working against the threat of Westernization presumed by some Indians to ineludibly accompany modernization (2010, 149). At a readily observable level, religion has also proven to be a veritable coping mechanism for dealing with the aforementioned status anxieties of middle-class life. Philip Lutgendorf, for example, has explored the role of tantra-infused Hanumān devotion in meeting a middle-class demand for “quick-fix” solutions in a hectic modern world (2001, 287). Similarly, the emergence of contemporary interpretations of *vāstu śāstra* (“architecture”) gives some idea of how the middle class draws on metaphysical means to assuage the imminent precariousness of future material outcomes (Säävälä 2010, 197).³⁶

Religion is also a primary source of social capital (Fernandes 2006, 212). The inequalities it has perpetuated, such as those related to gender and caste, still inform Indian middle-classness to some degree (2006, 28). Being middle class in India has come to be equated with *savarna* or “twice-born” caste Hindu identity, not only because much of the new middle class is largely comprised of Hindus, but also as a holdover from the historical prominence of higher castes, above all Brahmins, in India’s older middle classes (Säävälä 2010, 158; Fernandes 2006, 8). In a nod to Sanskritization, those who are from non-elite, stigmatized *jātīs* often adopt practices of caste Hindus, as these make it easier to obscure their caste background in urban society (Säävälä 2010, 158). With formats such as DVD, VCD, and more recently YouTube enabling the dissemination of “proper” *pūjā* performance throughout every region of India, upper-caste ritual and religiosity has become available to far more people from a far greater variety of castes than ever before (Säävälä 2010, 162). Not only does this potentially accelerate the Sanskritization of ritual, but it also bespeaks of a gentrifying element, as complicated and expensive rituals can be adapted as a form of conspicuous consumption to emulate those of higher religious and

³⁶ *Vāstu śāstra* refers to ideas about architecture traditionally popular on the Indian subcontinent that may inform the design and layout, among other aspects, of buildings and rooms. More recently, these ideas have been applied to interior design in an attempt to align buildings with “cosmic energy,” and so *vāstu* consultants have become common in present-day India. Some commentators have condemned *vāstu* as pseudoscience, including Meera Nanda (2003, 74-75; 156). Tulasi Srinivas, by contrast, has identified *vāstu* as a means by which urban Hindus manage the “precarity” tied to the uncertainties that come with aspirational, neoliberal lives (2018, 55).

economic status (2010, 174-175). Thus, for important sectors of the rising middle class—among them rural landowners, skilled labourers, and entrepreneurs from low-caste backgrounds—identification with “proper” Hinduism and its “correct,” Sanskritized practice is a way of forging and sustaining a type of belonging that has not been self-evident for previous generations of family members due to low-caste status (2010, 170).

With our discussion of the religious capital that Hinduism offers, then, we have once again moved toward the territory of caste. If it is the struggle of the middle and ascendant classes to hone their social capital in order to create distinction from other social segments deemed “above” and “below” them, then caste would quite intuitively represent a resource for asserting such a hierarchy (Brosius 2010, 17). This is borne out in day-to-day life in contemporary India, in which caste is still deeply tied up with class.

When queried on the matter of caste, middle-class Indian people often repudiate the possibility of its existence (Säävälä 2010, 189). Nevertheless, caste plays a significant role in articulating layers of stratification within socioeconomic groups such as the middle classes, and intersecting hierarchical notions of caste and class bear substantial influence on social interaction (Sheth 1999, 2508-2509; Säävälä 2010, 190). Although distinct on the grounds that caste is generally understood to be a mostly closed, endogamous system while class is exogamous and, further to that, allows individual social agents to accumulate different kinds of capital to create belonging, Brosius has argued that caste and class are nonetheless “two sides of the same coin” (2010, 17). For Fernandes, caste is an additional wellspring of symbolic assets, as it “has continued to provide segments of the middle class with a vital source of capital, which has shaped the upper-caste character of the emerging identity of a new liberalizing middle class” (2006, xxxiii). In this way, the abovementioned preference of middle-class Hindus for so-called high-caste, Sanskritic, and *sāttvik* rituals relates to what Säävälä calls a “cultural re-interpretation of respectability” (2010, 294). In view of the respect they command, upper-caste values and lifestyles can still denote upper- or ascendant-class identity. As a result, appropriation of high-caste Hindu practices, whether in terms of rituals or everyday customs, has proven to be a key strategy among upwardly mobile individuals and families in the process of accumulating cultural capital and presenting themselves as “competent” custodians of high Hindu culture (Brosius 2010, 18). But caste stereotypes can and do impede access to middle-classness as easily as they enable participation (Fernandes 2006, 106). Supposed markers of low-caste status such as dark

skin and lack of “cultivation” still raise questions about caste background in the minds of established middle-class Indians (Säävälä 2010, 185). This being the case, middle-class landlords commonly discriminate against people whose *habitus* hints at a low-caste upbringing (2010, 186). Thus, the notion of class should by no means displace considerations of caste; rather, the two are inextricably linked, as caste sensibilities provide resources for building the social capital that constitutes middle-classness.

Returning to our main topic of inquiry, Hindu goddesses are also crucial sites, figuratively speaking, for evolving notions of middle-classness in contemporary India. In South India, Joanne Waghorne has catalogued the dramatic changes that have taken place in recent decades for Māriyamman, a popular smallpox goddess well-known in the village context for her capricious character and her appetite for blood sacrifices. Waghorne has termed Māriyamman’s modern reworking as a “gentrification of the goddess” (2004, 129-170). In contrast to her simple village shrines, Māriyamman’s urban temples now feature elaborate *maṇḍapas* and *gōpuras* (pillared halls and entrance towers, respectively), hallmarks of “proper” South Indian Brahminic temple construction (2004, 132). The scope of this gentrification goes beyond architecture to encompass what amounts to a “cleaning up and ordering [of] all elements of religious life” so that they correspond with middle-class sensibilities (2004, 131). These sensibilities include (but are not limited to) a constellation of upwardly mobile values we have already touched upon, including orderliness, tidiness, and prosperity, along with others such as comfort, community involvement, and some degree of democratic egalitarianism.³⁷ This process of gentrification affected worship, as well, which itself has come to include more and more overtly upper-caste, Sanskritic components. Rituals in urban Māriyamman temples, for instance, incorporate characteristically South Indian forms of devotion such as the chanting of Tamil hymns alongside more

³⁷ By the term “egalitarianism,” I am invoking Waghorne’s discussions of democracy in the context of village goddesses, which (at least in my reading) refers to a general (and not apolitical) inclusiveness that can be found at many middle-class temples in India (2004, 135). Waghorne has written that “[d]emocratic processes from the political realm are now in the heart of contemporary temples to the goddesses” (*Ibid.*). It may, understandably, seem paradoxical to characterize individuals or groups as “democratic” or “egalitarian” when they are knowingly trying to cultivate higher (middle-) class status in a stratified system as this kind of class distinction is definitely nurtured at goddess temples in South and North India. At the same time, however, temples strive to accept people from “all castes,” as we will see repeatedly in the following chapters. The egalitarianism characterizing the middle class, then, in my estimation, is born out of an urge to spurn any vestiges of the clannishness that at one point ensured the separation of castes and *jātis* and, in its place, attempts to include all people regardless of caste status. This displays an open-minded, democratic attitude worthy of the middle class. All the while, the *aesthetics* of upper-caste customs and rituals—particularly the Sanskritic or, more pointedly, the Brahminical—still provide social capital for middle-class aspirations, no matter the caste context.

conservative and Brahminical forms of worship such as Sanskrit mantras from the Āgamas. Waghorne has referred to this juxtaposition of local and classical as a “Vedic vernacular” style (2004, 168).³⁸ These Sanskritic elements evidently possess religious capital, and perhaps class capital as well. As a result, many village aspects are “now set in a very proper temple context” (2004, 153). For this reason, staples of village worship such as ecstatic trances are now downplayed in these urban temples (2004, 166-168).

William Harman (2004) has also evoked “gentrification” when looking at Māriyamman temples in the area surrounding Chennai. At Māriyamman’s Samayapuram site, for instance, Harman has observed that, “her worship has developed an increasingly respectable, high-caste, Sanskritic character” (2004, 6). This involves a newfound sense of ritual decorum, doing away with blood sacrifices and, again, ecstatic trances (2004, 3-4). Harman has reported that goats and chickens are still offered at Samayapuram but are no longer sacrificed, instead being resold as “consecrated livestock” (2004, 7). Māriyamman herself, meanwhile, has been reimagined as benign and generous and as “concerned profoundly with the health and welfare of those devoted to her” (2004, 6). Devotees come to Samayapuram with this generosity in mind, depositing offerings quickly and efficiently in hopes of fulfilling very specific requests. Harman has attributed these adaptations to a desire among members of the middle class to reestablish connections with “traditional sources of security” as they relocate from village contexts to urban centres (2004, 12). This has involved a tidying up, in some sense, of Māriyamman.

Taking these broad-ranging considerations together, what can we say in sum about class in contemporary India before we apply it to Gujarati goddess sites and supporters? As a function of the sprawling conceptual range of “middle-classness” in India, we are well-served to recall the previously introduced polythetic classification of Rodney Needham (1975; 1983). This refers to a classification or definition wherein class (that is, in the sense of “category”) members are grouped together because they share a *significant amount* of traits, and not necessarily because they share any *particular* trait (1983, 48-49; emphasis mine).

With this in mind, we can identify eight key properties that middle-classness can involve and be signified by in India, which will guide the remainder of this work: (1) the middle class

³⁸ The Āgamas are collections of Hindu scriptures from Śaiva, Śākta, and Vaiṣṇava devotional schools that were likely compiled in the mid-first millennium CE. Composed in Sanskrit and Tamil, these texts contain discussions of philosophical and religious topics ranging from cosmology to meditation practices to devotional worship. The Āgamas are also typically concerned with temple architecture and construction. For more on the Āgamas, particularly those of the Śaiva variety, see Richard H. Davis (1991).

puts considerable stock in education and credentials, with English literacy standing out among these; (2) middle-class people cultivate cosmopolitanism while at the same time seeking to maintain “tradition”; (3) middle-classness is marked by (but by no means limited to) consumption, with commodities indicating the possession of disposable income and hence prosperity; (4) middle-class people are deeply concerned with propriety and respectability, which informs sensibilities of cleanliness, orderliness, and comfort, oftentimes as they relate to women and domesticity; (5) class remains interlinked with caste, with upper-caste practices still being considered socially ascendant; for this reason, (6) the middle class frequently draws on Sanskrit religiousity, which can encompass Brahmin, Vaiṣṇava, and Jain norms, including ritual purity and vegetarianism; (7) middle-class membership involves an anxiety stemming from the precarity of the identity and the immediate need to keep up with perceived competition, which informs an expectation of efficiency in various areas of life, including religious activities. (8) Finally, middle-classness also entails community involvement and, perhaps counterintuitively, a sense of democratic egalitarianism.

Any of these elements in combination with others can connote middle-classness and upward mobility in contemporary India. An individual or family does not have to possess all of these traits to possess middle-classness; rather, “middle-classness” is an adequate label for any individual or family possessing or cultivating just a few of these characteristics. With all this having been said, we must acknowledge that our definition of middle-classness is far from complete and, even more vexingly, riddled with its fair share of paradox. Why is this? Because middle-classness draws heavily on contemporary interpretations and appropriations of “tradition” while also being forward-looking; because it is hierarchical yet promotes egalitarianism; and because it is fraught with trepidation even though it is fundamentally based on accumulating comforts.

A NOTE ON SAFFRONIZATION

The various forms of upward mobility from Sanskritization through to gentrification do not occur in a political vacuum. Political factors, particularly the religiously charged ideologies of the Hindu right, have also shaped what is upwardly mobile. This has intensified in recent decades with the upsurge of Hindutva toward sociopolitical dominance in India, which has manifested not only through the recent 2014 and 2019 election victories of the BJP but also with

the activities of their affiliated organizations, especially the RSS and the VHP.³⁹ Gujarat has been at the forefront of the Hindu right's rapid ascension via the "saffron wave," exemplified by the rise of the Mehsana-born Narendra Modi from Gujarat's Chief Minister to Prime Minister of India, all as a member of the BJP. Because Gujarat has been so integral to the BJP's experimentations with various forms of politicized extremism, it has been referred to as a "laboratory of Hindutva" (Spodek 2010, 374). We must therefore consider the role of "Saffronization"—the policies of right-wing Hindu nationalists trying to resurrect an imagined Hindu golden age—in the transformations of Gujarati goddesses and the individuals and communities who worship them, as right-wing ideologies have frequently been interfused with strategies for upward mobility in India and also Gujarat.

Hindutva ideology can, for example, be tied in with Sanskritization, as the Hindu right has consistently emphasized an all-encompassing vision of Hinduism that is Sanskritic and *sāttvik*. The concomitant ideas of propriety can be applied to "Hinduize" politically influential vote blocs including backwards castes, Dalits, and Adivasis (Scheduled Tribes). *Sāttvik* values are conveyed, for instance, through notions such as "Samskaar" (*saṃskār*), a term with currency throughout India, previously introduced in our discussion of middle-classness in Gujarat (van Wessel 2001a). For the RSS, *saṃskār* connotes good character and self-discipline inculcated through drills and training (Froerer 2007, 1065). For example, at the Saraswati Shishu Mandir Primary Schools, educational institutions run by the RSS with the goal of instilling values of Hindu superiority, *saṃskār* is fostered through *sadācar*, translated as "moral education" or

³⁹ The Bharatiya Janata Party (or BJP) is a right-wing political party that was founded in the late 1970s. Riding a religio-nationalist agenda, the party has won success at both national and state levels, unseating the formerly hegemonic Indian National Congress. The BJP's most pronounced victory was a landslide win in the 2014 general elections with Narendra Modi as its Prime Ministerial candidate. For more on the BJP, see Christophe Jaffrelot (2001). The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) is a Hindu nationalist organization closely affiliated with the Bharatiya Janata Party. Founded by Keshav Baliram Hedgewar (1889-1940), a contemporary of Hindutva prime mover Vinayak Savarkar (1883-1966), the organization was designed to uphold narrowly defined "Indian" cultural values while at the same time mobilizing and strengthening the majority Hindu community. This latter task was to be achieved in large degree through mental and physical discipline, as seen at RSS *śākhā* or "branch" organizations where key volunteers known as *pracāraks* have their recruits participate in exercises both recreational (such as yoga) and paramilitary. The organization has been criticized for associations with fascist ideas and practices. For more on the RSS, see Jaffrelot (1996). The Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) is another right-wing Hindu nationalist organization based on the ideology of Hindutva. Founded by RSS ideologue M.S. Golwalkar in the 1960s, the group identifies the protection of "Hindu Dharma" as its stated goal. In consonance with the ultra-conservative values of Hindutva, the VHP has been implicated in such political agitations as mob "justice" against alleged incidents of cow slaughter and anti-Islamic mobilizations. The latter agitations include, for instance, the destruction of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya in 1992 (see below). Moreover, the VHP has extended considerable efforts toward developing conservative Hindu organizations in the diaspora. For more on the VHP, see Manjari Katju's *Vishva Hindu Parishad and Indian Politics* (2010).

“moral improvement” (2007, 1035). Peggy Froerer undertook fieldwork at one of these schools located in central India and found that of the children in attendance, the vast majority of whom hailed from Other Backward Caste (OBC) and Adivasi groups, nearly all identified as Hindu (2007, 1036). Several children reported that the school opened their eyes to the havoc that so-called non-*sāttvik* habits such as tobacco-use could wreak upon their future (2007, 1058). Similarly, two boys boasted about how their families had become “nearly vegetarian” after they succeeded in convincing their parents of the spiritual and physical benefits of such a diet (2007, 1063). This suggests the RSS’s goal involves the indoctrination of *sāttvik* values through changes in lifestyle, apparently toward the ends of Hinduization or Sanskritization, within a framework of Saffronization.

Indeed, vegetarianism has been one of the chief political metonyms of this overarching notion of the *sāttvik* or *saṃskār*, and the cultivation thereof has been the focus of various conservative agitations throughout India. The BJP considers the cow an especially charged symbol for “protection,” and has made vegetarianism and cattle worship a central part of its Hindu nationalist agenda (M. Sharma 2012, 45). This ethos has been promulgated by the World Wildlife Fund’s India affiliate, which, at one point, in the context of conservation of the storied Vrindavan region in Uttar Pradesh, endorsed a “total ban on non-vegetarian food” as well as *tāmasik* substances such as liquor, cigarettes, and tea. Conservation clearly drifts toward outright conservatism here, as these abstinences were recommended alongside overlapping values such as “pure married life” and the separation of “lust from love making” (2012, 176-177). Earlier on in the 1990s, the BJP had already discovered pan-Indian political capital in promoting vegetarianism, making election plans promising the complete ban of cow-slaughter, in essence using dietary restrictions to impose Hindu culture on minorities such as Muslims and scheduled castes and tribes (Ilaiah 1996, 1444). The Hinduization of these latter two groups are especially politically significant, for if Dalits and tribals can be made to live and identify as Hindus they are likely to vote as Hindus as well, at least in the right-wing imagination.

In Gujarat, the state’s political culture places intensive emphasis upon vegetarianism and cow protection, in line with its high-caste political dominance (Ghassem-Fachandi 2012, 16). Gujarat tendered the Cow Slaughter Act in the mid-2000s, which banned the butchery of not only cows but also buffalo, upholding a right-wing Hindu agenda and clearly aligning with the orthodox Hindu lobby (Ahmad 2005, 4990). Imtiaz Ahmad has read the Gujarat Cow Slaughter

Act as a sort of state-backed decree of Sanskritization on account of its aim to prohibit certain segments of society from eating beef (2005, 4989). In Ghassem-Fachandi's estimation, "[p]roper Gujarati-ness in the present is defined by the inheritance of an unambiguous vegetarian ethos from a Hindu past" (2012, 16). The root sources for this vegetarian ethos can be traced back to Gandhi and the hyper-*sāttvik* worldview of the Swaminarayan sect (Williams 1984).

Vegetarianism remains a reservoir of political capital in Gujarat. Narendra Modi himself exploits the prestige of vegetarianism, evoking it in his speeches to stir up his audiences (Ghassem-Fachandi 2012, 182). The esteem that comes with vegetarianism is readily palpable to members of lower castes. Ghassem-Fachandi has provided a telling example from Gujarat in which a villager from a disadvantaged group, himself a proponent of Hindutva, had adopted vegetarianism as a means for social advancement, since this diet marked him as a "*pakka*" or "staunch" Hindu (2012, 162).⁴⁰ This example is an individualized illustration of how the adoption of Hindutva ideals is seen as favourable to the upward-mobilization of lower castes and Dalits.

While some Dalits have actively tried to assimilate themselves within the structure of the caste system, many of these sorts of integration efforts at "upliftment" have been spearheaded by the BJP and affiliated groups (Franco, Macwan & Ramanathan 2004, 17). The strategy here for Hindutva ideologues involves incorporating different communities and castes under one common formula of nationalism and one abiding hierarchy—if not equal, then at least harmonious—that will eventually render caste obsolete (Hansen 1999, 121). While Hindutva organizations such as the RSS have welcomed Dalit and tribal recruits for many years, their approach is based in a condescending view that offers "Sanskritization" and its "cultured habits" to these "uncultured" non-Brahmin groups (1999, 126). One example of such a group is the Valmiki Samaj. Once considered highly untouchable, the Valmiki relatively recently dropped their pejorative moniker "Bhangi" in favour of the name of the *Rāmāyaṇa*'s author, Vālmīki. Valmiki have in past decades been deployed by the Hindu right in communal clashes with Muslims, as was the case in the conflict surrounding Rāma's supposed birthplace in Ayodhya in 1992 (Basu et al. 1993,

⁴⁰ Nationalist organizations such as the RSS and the VHP present themselves not simply as protectors of the Hindu nation, but also as knowledgeable about "culture." That is to say, the worldview these organizations put forward is nothing short of a "manner of living." The RSS and VHP themselves represent, therefore, a means to advancement, with upward mobility tied up in the bodily practices they mandate. From this perspective, a person's choices as to what they eat and drink become all-important in negotiating their social position (Ghassem-Fachandi 2012, 175).

91).⁴¹ The Hindu right's ulterior motive in mobilizing the Valmiki appears to be the Hinduization of sections of the population with room for upward mobility. In the case of the Ayodhya conflict, for example, Valmiki were given the opportunity to fight for the Sanskrit, Vaiṣṇavic Rāma, a privilege that would incorporate them within a spiritual brotherhood without upsetting the material status quo. The mythic epic poet Vālmīki is himself frequently co-opted as a "Hindu" leader, and his association with Rāma through the *Rāmāyaṇa* is often emphasized by right-wing ideologues (1993, 91-92), effectively Vaiṣṇavizing, Sanskritizing, and ultimately Hinduizing the Valmiki Samaj.⁴²

Adivasis have experienced comparable Hinduization, which has been accelerated by what Lancy Lobo has astutely referred to as "Hindutvization" (2010, 221). As a result of this process, there has been a mounting Brahminic presence in Adivasi communities that has often been framed as a sign of "progress." In these communities it is not uncommon to find tribals celebrating Hindu festivals and incorporating Sanskritic ceremonies such as *yajñas* in their traditional religious performances (A. Patel 1999, 112). In much the same vein, Swaminarayan groups in Gujarat have brought their own uniquely Vaiṣṇavizing form of Hinduization to Adivasi areas, as was the case with the intensive religious and developmental work initiated by Sadhu Parushotam Prakashdash (S.S.P.) Swami in Gujarat's heavily-forested Dangs district around the turn of the new millennium (Kanungo & Joshi 2009, 283-284). With its staunchly anti-proselytization, counter-Christian telos, S.P.P. Swami's project is consonant with right-wing Hindu aims, and may represent Hindutvization in its own right.

In this spirit, it is not just depressed-class individuals and groups who have been "uplifted" or "sanitized" by the Sanskritizing effects of Saffronization, but also deities as well.⁴³ Gujarat

⁴¹ This conflict, which came to a head in December of 1992, concerns a long-disputed plot of land in the city of Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh. The particular plot of land is held by some Hindus to be Rāma's birthplace (or "Rām Janmabhūmi") as per the *Rāmāyaṇa*, though from 1528 until the incidents in question, it was the location of a mosque, known as the Babri Masjid. On December 6, 1992, in the culmination of decades of agitation from BJP and VHP ideologues, a mob of militant Hindus destroyed the mosque, claiming the land rightfully belonged to Rāma and his devotees. Soon after, riots broke out in many major Indian cities, leading to several thousand deaths. Eventually, a temporary Rāma temple was erected on the plot to function as a site for possible worship. The site remains a political flashpoint. This is evidenced by the legal battle unfolding in the courts as this dissertation was being completed, which centred upon the question of erecting the full, formal Rāma temple desired by certain Hindu groups. For more on the Ayodhya conflict, see Paola Bacchetta (2000).

⁴² Ravidās, a sixteenth-century bhakti saint said to have been born into an untouchable leather-working caste, has been similarly appropriated by right-wing ideologues as a "Hindu" religious leader (Basu et al. 1993, 91-92).

⁴³ One such example is Salhes, a folk-hero of the Dalit Dusadhs of Bihar. Badri Narayan has argued that right-wing forces have actively encouraged the worship of Salhes as a Hindu god in an effort to move the Dusadhs into the Hindutva fold (2009, 173).

has seen Hindutva-driven transformations of revered figures, with Adivasi female heroines among the reimagined. In Śabarī, a figure popular in Adivasi folklore noted for her meeting with Rāma in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the Sangh Parivar saw an opportunity for Hinduization. When an RSS affiliate by the name of Swami Aseemanand was shown around the village of Subir in the Dangs region by resident Adivasis, he was struck by an arrangement of three stones where it was believed by locals that Śabarī had sat with Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa (Kanungo & Joshi 2009, 286). Drawing on both the Sanskritic and folkloric traditions, Aseemanand initiated a reinvention of Śabarī, a process that culminated in the construction of an opulent temple at the site of the three stones (2009, 288). Here Śabarī was installed in the form of a white marble *mūrti* (“icon”) alongside an image of Rāma. This placement next to the divine hero of the Sanskrit Epic afforded Śabarī Sanskritic legitimacy, transforming her into a full-fledged goddess by making a space for her in the Hindu pantheon. In reinventing Śabarī in this way, the Sangh’s primary objective was quite transparently one of Hinduizing Adivasis while at the same time mobilizing them against conversion to Christianity (2009, 290). Indeed, Aseemanand openly admitted as much (2009, 285). The project’s right-wing political capital was significant, and the temple’s massive consecration ceremony drew Chief Minister Narendra Modi as an orator (2009, 290). This ceremony, reportedly attended by hundreds of thousands of people, legitimized the temple as a new centre of Hindu pilgrimage in the Dangs (2009, 293). Much like at mainstream Hindu temples, twice-daily *ārati* (flame offering) became customary at the Śabarī Mātā site, though the performer of this rite has typically been an Adivasi youth rather than a Brahmin priest (2009, 294). Swami Aseemanand, meanwhile, took up residence on the temple grounds as the guru (*Ibid.*). The temple has even become a site of Hindu nationalist activism, which has, in some cases, allegedly involved violence (2009, 295).

Thus, Saffronization strives to shift non-elite groups and their divinities into congruence with *sāttvik*, Sanskritic, and Brahminical ideals so as to make them “properly” Hindu. It is safe to hypothesize that Saffronization and the enhanced social status that ostensibly comes with it has wielded at least some influence on Gujarati *mātās* as well as their worshippers.

INTEGRATING PERSPECTIVES ON UPWARD MOBILITY

As we have seen, there is an overabundance of terminology describing upward mobility in India in whole or in part. Having considered Sanskritization, Vaiṣṇavization, universalization,

gentrification, and Saffronization, the question remains: which lens, if any, is most useful for this present research? Sanskritization amounts to an ahistorical oversimplification disproportionately fixated on caste, and Vaiṣṇavization, its more specific subsidiary, just might put too much emphasis on one particular kind of religion. While gentrification has clearly been fashionable in current scholarship on Hinduism and goddess religion, the term is steeped in Westernized connotations related to urban planning and largescale renovation of neighbourhoods, all the aforementioned qualifications of class in India notwithstanding. Further, gentrification is so deeply invested in economic factors that it may undervalue cultural and theological considerations—namely caste and “universalization.” On top of that, all of the above terms are characterized by a dizzying degree of overlap, and to discard one at the expense of the others would be to potentially throw out the baby (or babies) with the bathwater.

For this reason, we find ourselves in need of a polythetic definition of upward mobility in South Asia. While no one of the above-mentioned processes seems able to provide a complete description of the transformations taking place at modern *mātā* temples, they all prove useful in varying measure when applied to the ethnographic contexts encountered in this dissertation. The ideals toward which they strive—Sanskritic, Vaiṣṇavic, pan-Indian, middle-class, and often Hindutva-influenced—all factor heavily into elite-ness, or at least in the *perceptions* among the upwardly mobile as to what putative elites such as Brahmins, Vaiṣṇavas, and wealthy Jains do in their religious and non-religious lives.⁴⁴ There is a prevailing understanding in Gujarat (and western India more broadly) that *sāttvik*, Sanskritic lifestyles are the province of presumed elites such as Brahmins and Baniyas, the latter both Vaiṣṇava and Jain. In the Hindu context, consider again how the shunning of *tāmasik* rites (most notably animal sacrifice) represents, in

⁴⁴ On the ground, the religious activities of these groups held to be “elite” do not necessarily differ drastically from those observed at *mātā* temples. It is not unheard of that higher-caste Hindus would attend *mātā* temples in both the present and the past. Writing in the 1880s, Forbes reported that Brahmins and Baniyas worshipped Bahucarā Mātā at the Becharaji site under the cover of night, sometimes even offering sacrifices (Forbes [1878] 1973, 427). Writing almost a century later, Pocock has similarly suggested that Brahmins would offer blood-sacrifices to a *mātā* if the goddess herself made such a request (Pocock 1973, 66). In my own fieldwork, I spoke to a number of Brahmins who had gone to a *mātā* site or had a family member who did as much, more often the latter scenario. Compellingly enough, the Brahmins with whom I spoke often framed visits to *mātā* sites, whether involving themselves or others, as desperate measures for particularly desperate times in life. Jains from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds also engage with a diverse array of religious practices, including tantra and goddess worship. John Cort, for example, has noted the longstanding importance of goddesses in the Jain tantric tradition, one such example being Ambikā, who has been widely worshipped by Śvetambarās of Gujarat (1987, 247). In *mātā*-like fashion, popular Jain goddesses are especially revered for their ability to aid in worldly affairs and to bestow tangible rewards on worshippers (Cort 1987, 248). Moreover, it was a *mātā*, namely Śītalā, that Jain Baniyas, like so many others, relied upon during smallpox epidemics (Hardiman 1996, 137).

Schaflechner’s estimation, a “nodal point” in distinguishing “proper” from “improper” Hinduism, especially for ascendant communities such as the Baluchistani Lasi Lohanas, a group that also has a presence in Gujarat (2018, 210). More broadly, consider again the Gujarati notion of *ābrū*, in which prestige and social status is informed by Brahminical notions of purity, Vaiṣṇava devotionism, and Jain nonviolence and renunciation (Haynes 1991, 57). Brahmins, Baniyas, and Jains are all widely reputed to be vegetarian, non-alcoholic, and therefore strictly *sāttvik*, in line with exacting Sanskritized or Vaiṣṇava sensibilities.⁴⁵ Moreover, the Hindu side of these elite groups is associated with pan-Indian theological, mythological, and iconographic modalities, such as those of the Purāṇas and various forms of Vedānta, themselves touchstones of “proper Hinduism” in their capacity for embodying universalized, Sanskritic, and Vaiṣṇavic values. The link between these groups’ lifestyles and economic ascendancy has marked the Gujarati (and Indian) social imaginary, perhaps as a holdover from notions such as *ābrū*, and so the idealized middle-class lifestyle is largely conceived as a *sāttvik* one.⁴⁶

By virtue of their perceived prestige, all of these aforementioned sensibilities aid in the accumulation of social capital. In this way, we are still very much in the domain of Bourdieu. As I theorize upward mobility here, all of these elements constitute a vast pool of resources from which an agent draws freely in an attempt to cultivate status. These resources include, and are certainly not limited to, components of Sanskritic and Vaiṣṇava culture such as Vedic and classical Sanskrit texts, as well as restrained, respectable *sāttvik* lifestyles such as vegetarianism and abstemiousness. Relatedly, these resources also arise from universalist, translocal Hinduism, as worshipping deities imagined by way of Vedāntic theological models and pan-Indian iconographies and mythologies may convey a more comprehensive religious receptivity that is not strictly rooted in the local. These resources also include aspects of class ascendancy, which can involve architectural and ritual elaborations in temples and shrines, but also more general signifiers in and around religious life, such as outward prosperity, generosity, tidiness, and healthy consumption, all of which inform middle-classness in India. The right-wing politics of the “saffron wave” can also serve as a beneficial source of social capital.

⁴⁵ For a comparable framing of the importance of the *sāttvik* in determining social rank in Saurashtra, see Tambs-Lyche (2004, 90-93). In this region, and in Gujarat at large, vegetarianism and a closely associated *sāttvik* “nature” play key roles in ranking merchants higher than warriors (2004, 93).

⁴⁶ Curiously enough, the concept of *ābrū* was not often mentioned by the conversationalists I met over the course of my fieldwork.

It is worth noting that because individual change can happen more rapidly than group change, upward mobility is arguably more feasible in terms of class advancement. However, class advancement is not necessarily the axis upon which upward mobility is best or most critically registered. Rather, in the field, upward mobility and its constituent markers are often deployed to display prestige and worldliness among one's family, friends, and caste affiliates within the immediate community or living space. Sahab Lal Srivastava tendered this idea much earlier on when he averred that the "progressive family"—a kin group or household considered by other members of their community to be comparatively advanced—may be a more helpful concept for estimating religious, cultural, and social change in India than caste, or even class, for that matter (1969, 695-697). All that being said, the changes wrought by upward mobility are sometimes most obvious not on account of their effects upon individual people or within their families, but instead upon the deities they worship, with goddesses being key beneficiaries, as is the case in this study.

The Troubles with Tantra

Tantra may also be a source of social capital, and it plays a recurrent role in our discussion of Gujarati goddesses. Before we take this under consideration, however, it is essential that we establish what we are talking about when we make reference to "tantra." Few categories in the study of South Asian religion have proven as conceptually mystifying as tantra. With that in mind, this section seeks to delineate a working definition of tantra and re-evaluate the scholarly tendency to characterize tantra as a transgressive and/or subversive phenomenon.

DEFINING TANTRA

Considering tantra first as it is used in Indic languages, we realize almost immediately that the term does not lend itself to singular, comprehensive definition. Etymologically, tantra (*tantra*) derives from the Sanskrit verbal root *tan*, "to stretch," "to spread," or "to weave," in reference to the "threads" of rhetoric and practice that tantra brought together.⁴⁷ While tantra may have origins in goddess worship dating well before the Common Era, the term only gained currency from the ninth century onward, when vast bodies of texts referred to as "tantras" began

⁴⁷ For a detailed history of the linguistic as well as historical development of the term "tantra," see Urban (2003a, 25-41).

to be composed all over India, though none of the authors thereof linked themselves with a specific school of thought called “tantra” (Urban 2003a, 32).⁴⁸ Tantra also represented a broad, generic category of writings and activities defined as non- or extra-Vedic or “*tāntrika*,” in opposition to *vaidika*, or “pertaining to the Vedas” (Urban 2003a, 27). While these tantric texts, sects, and endeavours are set apart from the Vedic norm, often because of associations with members of lower castes, they are not always described as expressly deviant or scandalous (*Ibid.*).⁴⁹ Jumping ahead to the present, tantra has for many among the Indian mainstream become synonymous with forms of sorcery and “black magic” thought to be commonplace amongst rural and non-elite people.

When we add to these connotations the etic formulations of tantra put forward by Orientalists and modern scholars from the West, as well as Indian interpreters, both colonial and modern, the definition becomes even more complex. It was under the label “Tantrism” that early Christian missionaries culled together various aspects of Indian religious practices they considered darkest and most irrational (Urban 2003a, 71-72). By the late nineteenth century, Sanskritist Monier Monier-Williams (1819-1899) was defining tantra as a category of religious expression unto itself (2003a, 26). John Woodroffe (1865-1936), another Orientalist, offered a highly symbolic reading of tantric texts (which we take up in the following subsection), presenting tantra more like a philosophical system (Urban 2003a, 140).⁵⁰ Deeply influenced by these earlier colonial tendencies to become spellbound by tantra and then to sanitize it, twentieth-century scholars and subsequent New Age appropriators have often defined tantra by its ostensible affirmations of the human body and sexuality as legitimate means to spiritual realization (Urban 1999, 138).⁵¹

In view of tantra’s definitional range in both Sanskrit and English, alongside its relatively recent emergence as a fixed category of religion after the onset of colonialism, we may well ask:

⁴⁸ Accordingly, Mādhava does not list tantra among the 15 schools of worship he identifies in his *Sarvadarśanasamgraha*, a text that emerged during the purported height of tantric religious activity in the fourteenth century (Padoux 2002, 17-18).

⁴⁹ In the *Padma Purāṇa*, for instance, it is claimed that *vaidika* forms of worship are for Brahmins, while *tāntrika* worship is best suited for the Shudra (Deshpande 1990, 2087). These distinctions, then, are operating well within traditional Brahminic societal organization.

⁵⁰ For a scholarly biography of John Woodroffe, see Kathleen Taylor (2001). For an analysis of Woodroffe’s contribution to the construction of “tantrism,” see Urban (1999, 135-137).

⁵¹ Mircea Eliade, for instance, has connected tantra back to pre-Aryan worship of the Mother Goddess, claiming it works against patriarchy and repression enforced by the Vedic tradition (Eliade 1958, 200-207). It was precisely this idea that modern New Age interpreters seized upon as they appropriated tantra as a means of liberating Western sexuality from its supposedly repressed puritan roots.

is tantra really a meaningful category of religion at all? In this very light, Andre Padoux has argued that tantra is entirely a Western creation (2002, 17). But if we look beneath all of the academic, religious, and New Age formulations of tantra both Indian and European, there do appear to be many religious activities in India that may be aptly conceived of as “tantric,” many of which have identifiable pre-colonial roots. A prime example of this is the Śrīvidyā lineage popular in Tamil Nadu and present in many other parts of India (Gujarat included), which employs tantric texts dating back to the eleventh and twelfth centuries (Brooks 1990, 47). The existence of such traditions has led some scholars to conclude that tantra cannot simply be passed off as a colonial construction (Ti Nijenhuis, Diksita & Gupta 1987, 10).⁵²

As such, the term “tantra” serves as a useful heuristic framework for organizing and interpreting various interrelated religious expressions. To most fully appreciate the multifarious and often contradictory nature of these phenomena commonly classified as “tantric,” it is necessary for us to once again make use of a polythetic definition. For purposes of this study, we will refer to the definition provided by Douglas Renfrew Brooks (1990), which attempts to integrate tantra’s many disparate components. Brooks’ ten “tantric” properties are as follows: (1) tantric texts are extra-Vedic and thus outside the conventional Hindu canon; (2) tantric traditions involve special forms of spiritual discipline, namely techniques such as *kunḍalinī* yoga; (3) they are theistic yet non-dualistic; (4) they utilize mantras and the auspiciousness of sound; (5) they involve the worship of symbolic diagrams such as yantras or *maṇḍalas*; (6) they place special importance on the guru; (7) they draw upon the symbolism of the god and goddess and the indissoluble link between them; (8) they are secretive in the sense that teachings are made available only to a restricted few, often by a guru; (9) they employ in a ritual context elements prohibited by Brahminic norms, none more infamous than the *pañcamakāras* (meat, fish, wine, parched grain, and sexual intercourse); and (10) they require special initiation in which the criteria of caste and gender are not necessarily prerequisites for qualification (1990, 55-72).

The foremost strength of Brooks’ polythetic definition is that a given tradition does not have to possess all of these traits to be tantric; rather, tantra is an adequate label for any tradition having a “significant number” of these above-mentioned characteristics (Brooks 1990, 53). That

⁵² Others, including N.N. Bhattacharyya (1982), have posited much earlier origins for tantra, citing as evidence traditions dedicated to the worship of the female principle that came to flourish by the sixth and seventh centuries CE. These traditions, it has been somewhat tenuously suggested, may have evolved into the tantric literary expressions that crystallized around 1000 CE (Bhattacharyya 1982, 161).

being the case, any particular text or tradition does not need to explicitly refer to itself as tantric to be considered as such so long as it possesses some of these traits. Knowingly or unknowingly, not all practitioners of tantra would outwardly identify as tantric, as we will see at several sites in Gujarat, especially in Chapter Five.

Thoroughgoing as it is, Brooks' model is not without lacunae. I would suggest that an eleventh element ought to be added to this definition: namely "power," which is an overarching concern of tantra emphasized by more than a few prominent authors in the field, and often rendered by the Sanskrit term *śakti*, itself synonymous with the feminine divine (Urban 2010, 21). In tantra, as Madeleine Biardeau has phrased it, "the quest for liberation is fundamentally nothing but a tapping, a using, or even manipulating of power" (as quoted in Padoux 1981, 351).⁵³ In this tantric vision, anything worldly can be used toward the attainment of power, since the goal of the tantric practitioner (or *tāntrika*) is, as Biardeau has explained it: "not to sacrifice this world to deliverance, but to integrate it in one way or another within the perspective of salvation" (*Ibid.*). While "power" is not so much a specific feature of tantra, it provides an acceptable (if not complete) attempt to summarize the overall purview of the category. This concern with readily accessible power—referred to specifically as *śakti*—will come up over and over again in the discourse of devotees at *mātā* temples in Gujarat.

TANTRA AS TRANSGRESSIVE AND SUBVERSIVE

Perhaps the most frequently cited feature of scholarly and popular definitions of tantra is the notion that it transgresses or subverts the established order of any given society within which it manifests. The idea is not entirely misguided, as tantra has been transgressive from time to time in certain contexts: for instance, the very first literary reference to tantric texts (in the *Kādambarī*, circa the seventh century CE) underscores their extra-Vedic status, tying them to the patently peripheral figure of an insane holy man (Urban 2010, 18). Fast forwarding to the early nineteenth century, missionary and colonial writers demarcated tantra as the nadir of Hinduism on account of aspects considered polluting by Brahminical Hindu standards and scandalous to Victorian sensibilities, such as the ritual use of alcohol and sex. Indeed, for William Ward, a colonial Baptist missionary, the content of the tantras was "too abominable to enter the ears of man" (as quoted in Urban 2003a, 50). Later on, the influential Hindu reformer Swami

⁵³ For the original source, see Biardeau (1972, 209).

Vivekananda (1863-1902) would correspondingly urge his followers to “[g]ive up this filthy Vamachara [left-hand tantra] that is killing your country” (1984, vol. 3, 340). These kinds of disparaging conceptualizations of tantra—both etic and emic—circulated throughout India and eventually the Western world during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, going mostly unchallenged.

The notion that tantra is transgressive endures in modern scholarly treatments of the topic. June McDaniel, among others, has observed the tendency of tantra to occupy socially marginal spaces such as graveyards and cremation grounds, as Bengali *tāntrikas* consider these sites to be replete with the spiritual entities essential to tantric ritual (McDaniel 2000, 29). Others have taken up a less measured vision of this “transgressive” angle, luxuriating in evocative visions of tantra in the tradition of the earliest Orientalist writers. One recent commentator has, fairly reductively, concluded the following of tantra: “[b]y celebrating [...] bodily excreta as well as sexual intercourse with menstruating, esoterically incestuous, out-of-caste women, Tantra confounds—whether genuinely or counterphobically—the results of those social-psychological studies that document a widespread, robust animal-nature disgust” (Ellis 2011, 906-907).⁵⁴ Hugh Urban has also centred numerous articles upon references to blood sacrifice, sex, and scatological offerings.⁵⁵ And as we have just seen, Douglas Renfrew Brooks listed contradistinction to the Vedas first among tantric traits, and he would also go on to enumerate “prohibited substances” as one of the definitive elements of tantric practice (1990, 69).

Following from these persistent notions that tantra is sensational, “transgressive,” and sexually liberal is the idea that it is also socially subversive. The assumption by an overwhelming number of popular and scholarly commentators is that tantra’s utilization of various societal taboos has made it a vehicle for social upheaval (see Eliade 1958; Garrison 1964; Chattopadhyaya 1978). Many on the scholarly side have been subsequently tempted to argue that since tantric rites seem to have often been open to all castes and genders, and since they so regularly break taboos tied to Brahminical norms of purity, they must reflect some sort of egalitarian, anti-caste sentiment (Saran 1998, 4; Brooks 1990, 25).

⁵⁴ Similarly, Banikanta Kakati, in the process of correlating the political downfall of medieval Assam with the presence of tantric practitioners, channeled antiquated Victorian visions when he explained that “the land was infested with teachers of Vāmacāra Tantra with their philosophy of sex and plate. Among the most spectacular were bloody sacrifices [...] night vigils in virgin worship and lewd dances of temple women” (Kakati 1989, 79).

⁵⁵ See for example Urban’s comparison between the tantric Kāpālikā sect and the “extreme and offensive” writings of Georges Bataille, such as *Erotism* and *The Accursed Share* (1995, 84).

But is tantra fundamentally destabilizing and antinomian? Historically speaking, tantra has not operated exclusively in these marginal positions of transgression and subversion. To the contrary, Vedic and tantric traditions came to permeate each other with respect to ritual, concepts, and scriptural references over time (Padoux 2002, 18). Moreover, tantric texts frequently upheld mainstream Vedic norms. One such example is the *Bṛhat Tantrasāra*, a sixteenth-century compendium of tantric practice. While the text prescribes the use of the *pañcamakāras* during tantric practice, the meat and wine are only to be consumed by members of the twice-born castes; further, the text insists that when it comes to the rite of *maithuna*, sexual intercourse, Brahmins should only pair with other Brahmins (Urban 2003b, 278-279). This suggests that while some notions of purity are inverted during the course of a tantric rite, others remain rigidly fixed. Consider also that tantric texts such as the *Bṛhat Tantrasāra* and innumerable others were invariably composed in Sanskrit by men, without even so much as a tradition of female commentary upon them, and so they hardly overturn societal norms of male dominance and caste-based elitism.

Mainstream expressions of tantra also appeared in the colonial era. The late eighteenth century saw the publication of the famous *Mahānirvāṇa Tantra* by the Adi Brahma Samaj, a Hindu reform group that claimed to have discovered the text, though they may very well have fabricated it (Urban 2003a, 64). This text does not fulfill many tantric stereotypes, as its author or authors do not devalue the Vedas, nor do they dwell on explications of the *pañcamakāras*. Rather, promoted in the *Mahānirvāṇa Tantra* is an Advaitic monotheism that would have been acceptable to colonial Westerners and Anglicized Indians; meanwhile, affiliations with tantric goddesses such as Śakti or Kālī are downplayed (2003a, 65-66). Throughout much of the text, a case is actually made for the importance of mainstream Sanskrit values in matters such as caste, social interaction, and domestic life. The only deviation from Brahminical norms involves the considerable allowances that are made for women.⁵⁶ Even if the *Mahānirvāṇa Tantra* were forged, its circulation in the late eighteenth century illustrates the lengths to which some parties were willing to go in order to make tantra palatable to Indians and colonialists alike.

The *Mahānirvāṇa Tantra* was particularly inspiring for the aforementioned John

⁵⁶ Proponents of the forgery theory have emphasized the *Mahānirvāṇa Tantra*'s intensive focus upon women. The fact that issues of women's rights were advanced under British authority around the time when the text surfaced has led some to conclude that the text was actually forged, at least in part, during that period of time as a response to colonial intervention (Derrett 1977, 224).

Woodroffe, one of the first Westerners to approach tantra as a redeeming aspect of Indian religion. In the process of explicating this text as well as a number of other tantras, Woodroffe effectively “deodorized” tantra for both a Western audience and also Westernized Hindus, reinterpreting potentially disagreeable elements of tantric doctrine through metaphor and allegory as well as outright censorship (Urban 2003a, 143). The *pañcamakāras* are not, in Woodroffe’s interpretation, the forbidden substances they literally refer to, but instead signify higher metaphysical truths. The wine, for example, is the intoxicating knowledge of yoga, and the apparent intercourse is actually the union of Śakti and Śiva in the body of the worshipper (Urban 2003a, 142). What emerged from Woodroffe’s work with this relatively tame tantric document was a vision of tantra not unacceptable to Victorian observers, and no longer an inherent source of embarrassment for India’s urban elite.

Tantra’s relationship with the contemporary Indian mainstream is far from unambiguous. With help from late twentieth-century ideologues and gurus such as Gopinath Kaviraj, Ajit Mookerjee, and Bhagawan Shree Rajneesh (better known as Osho), all of whom popularized tantric ideas and imagery beyond India’s borders, tantra has come to gain cachet in the subcontinent of its origin.⁵⁷ In the North Indian context, Madhu Khanna has observed how tantric practices have steadily gained a more overt public visibility, especially in Indian marketplaces or “bazaars.” The popularity of “*bazaari* [*bāzārī*] tantra,” she has argued, largely stems from the access it provides to powers that even Brahmin priests lack, which can be promptly applied for alleviating day-to-day problems. Through the proliferation of mass-mediated cultural products that display yantras and mantras in icons, images, and TV serials, Khanna has suggested that *bāzārī* tantra is actively engaged in shaping popular culture (Khanna n.d., 2). Accordingly, many Indian politicians, movie stars, and businesspeople have actively courted tantric affiliations (Lutgendorf 2001, 287).⁵⁸ By virtue of this pop culture prestige, it is common to hear middle-

⁵⁷ The Bengali scholar Gopinath Kaviraj (1887-1976) integrated a variety of tantric texts into one cohesive system, stressing the similarity between the Vedas and tantra. Writing in the 1960s, he identified tantra yoga as the key for liberating not just Hindus but all of humankind collectively (Urban 2003, 188). Such a universalized vision of tantra would have been politically and societally incendiary a half-century earlier. Kaviraj Ajit Mookerjee (1887-1976) was a famed practitioner and scholar of tantra. He saw tantra as the “innermost heart of Indian religion, the integration of sensuality and spirituality” and went so far as to declare that it was “a path desperately needed in the modern world” (1971, 35). Bhagawan Shree Rajneesh (1931-1990) was a popular guru best known for exporting his sexually liberal, hyper-capitalist vision of tantra westward to America (see Feuerstein 2006).

⁵⁸ The former Congress party Prime Minister, P.V. Narsimha Rao, was rumored to have appointed a Tantric guru as his personal advisor; likewise Lalu Prasad Yadav, the charismatic Bihar politico, is also said to have employed *tāntrikas* in an advisory capacity (Khanna n.d., 13).

and upper-class Indians making reference to their tantric gurus, or to the acquisition of various mental and physical *siddhis* (supernatural attainments, typically thought to be eight in number).⁵⁹ While Khanna's work is unnecessarily scathing and polemical and passes troubling value judgements on *bāzārī* tantra, it has pointed toward the existence of a form of tantra amenable to the Indian middle class's consumerist tastes and aspirations.⁶⁰ The accoutrements and attainments of *bāzārī* tantra may be sufficiently mainstream such that this kind of tantric activity may actually be capable of aiding in the process of *becoming* mainstream or, better yet, middle-class. Participation in tantric worship deemed to be satisfactorily Sanskritic, universal, and bourgeoisie-friendly may mark for devotees a performance of upward mobility even more pronouncedly than the tangible material benefits (e.g., consumer goods) they often hope to gain from such pursuits. Though many Westernized urban middle-class elites might not self-associate with the label "tantra," many of these same Hindus participate nonetheless in contemporary tantric traditions (Brooks 1997, 405-407). Śrīvidyā organizations in post-liberalization Chennai, for example, consist mainly of Smārta Brahmins who employ the *pañcamakāras* in their rituals while at the same time enforcing caste rules rigorously (1997, 411-415). Although they practice tantra, these elite Hindus would by no means relish being labelled as "*tāntrikas*." Instead, these Śrīvidyā practitioners have simply "renamed" the tantric as Vedic (1997, 428).⁶¹ Tantra is far from transgressive or subversive here—if anything, it functions as a conservative force.

Citing these sorts of tensions between the tantric and the Vedic in the context of Bengal, June McDaniel has posited a distinction between "classical" tantra, which seeks knowledge of what is very much a Vedāntic ultimate, and "folk" tantra, which is more focused upon obtaining immediate powers, such as the magical *siddhis*. The folk branch persists apart from Brahminical

⁵⁹ While sources vary as to what each of these powers entails, the *siddhis* were first enumerated as: *aṇimā* (atomization), *laghimā* (levitation), *mahimā* (magnification), *garimā* (greatness), *prāpti* (power of getting anything), *prākāmya* (non-obstruction of desire), *vaśīṭva* (power of charming), and *īśīṭva* (sovereignty over all things) (Bhattacharyya 2002, 152). The *siddhis* have sometimes been characterized by scholars as secondary goals of tantric practice, though not all agree with this notion. Hugh Urban, writing on tantric models of kingship in the context of the *Kālikā Purāṇa*, has suggested that "these sorts of occult powers cannot be dismissed so easily. Rather than mere accretions, they are an integral part of Śākta Tantra and a critical element in Tantra's very *this-worldly* notion of power" (Urban 2001, 804; emphasis in original).

⁶⁰ Khanna has quite plainly posited a hierarchy in which classical tantra is superior to *bāzārī* tantra. In the study to follow, I will aim to be more diplomatic than Khanna in my treatment of popular tantra. The term "*bāzārī*" will be used in a value-neutral sense akin to that in which Projit Mukharji deploys it in the context of Ayurveda with regard to localized rejuvenation techniques and products (see Mukharji 2009, 63; 2016, 198).

⁶¹ Thus, Śrīvidyā's tantric ritual "was not a means of breaking through or breaking down caste boundaries. Rather, Śrīvidyā was a tradition around which the community could reaffirm its position of religious leadership and gain access to divine power" (Brooks 1997, 423).

learning and is more inclusive of women as well as members of low castes (McDaniel 2004, 74-76). While these two categories help to nuance the differences between peripheral and mainstream tantras, McDaniel has also noted that the folk and classical are not absolutely separate, with both branches often employing the very same texts and practices (2004, 97-98).

These examples from past and present suggest that tantric traditions, both pre- and post-colonial, cannot be said to consistently subvert barriers erected by the mainstream Brahminical, Sanskritic worldview, nor can it be said that tantra has been or necessarily is always “transgressive.” If anything, as it stands at present, tantra has made its way through the valley of the shadow that colonial commentators once cast upon it and has emerged somewhat resplendent, at least in the perception of the Indian consuming classes. Not only is tantra easily accessed and endorsed by public figures, but it has also been able to retain aspects of Vedic, Sanskritic, and Brahminical religion. Prominent tantric texts were mostly, after all, Sanskrit texts and so, in that sense, tantra has offered a potential avenue for Sanskritization.⁶² This reputation, in concert with the efforts of commentators from both East and West to deterge and deodorize this category of religion so fastidiously by way of metaphor, allegory, and intellectualization, has assured tantra a well-scrubbed—if not still somewhat abstruse—identity for modernity. Apart from some enduring “black magic” associations, I contend that the present-day image of tantra has been scoured to the extent that it can itself serve as a cleaning agent facilitating upward mobilization. Indeed, tantra seems to function as such for several of the Gujarati goddesses discussed in the following chapters.

Conclusion

With help from Rodney Needham’s notion of polythetic classification, we now have working models to guide our understanding of “upward mobility” and “tantra” in this study. Upward mobility involves Sanskritization, Vaiṣṇavization, universalization, gentrification, and Saffronization, as the sensibilities involved in each of these processes are implicated in the accumulation of social capital in South Asia and contemporary Gujarat. Tantra encompasses an almost boundless array of texts, traditions, and practices ranging from yantras to mantras to the

⁶² Tantra appears to have participated in the sweetening or Sanskritizing of goddesses in the past. Stories have long circulated in the Śrīvidyā tradition about the ninth-century CE Advaita philosopher Śaṅkara transforming fierce goddesses into benign ones by way of the *Śrī-cakra* yantra, thereby superimposing a relatively mild tantric theology and ritual system atop folk traditions (Wilke 1996, 124-25).

transgressive *pañcamakāras*; it also involves, more generally, immediate access to power. Tantra's powerful accoutrements and rapid rewards have proven commercially popular for consumers in modern-day India, including members of the middle-class. Tantra and upward mobility, then, may not be such strange bedfellows after all, linked only by their polythetic complexity. Rather, a safe, *sāttvik* tantra seems to be a potential source of social capital itself, and may very well intersect with the assorted processes involved in upward mobility.

Chapter Two: Flight of the “Night Bird”—A Brief History of Goddesses in Gujarat

Apart from the actual litterateurs of Gujarat themselves, few did more toward elevating the status of Gujarati literature than Alexander Kinloch Forbes (1821-1865).⁶³ Forbes, a colonial administrator, founded the Gujarat Vernacular Society (GVS) in the year 1848 with the mandate of preserving Gujarati on the grounds that it was one of the major regional languages of India (K. Jhaveri 1924, 13). By doing so, he helped to popularize Gujarati writers, perhaps most notably Dalpatram Daya (1820-1898), a poet who worked as Forbes’ assistant in Ahmedabad (1924, 23). Dalpatram would go on to considerable fame in the Gujarati literary world, bridging the transition between the “medieval” and the “modern” poets of the region, and it was Forbes who helped put many of his works into print and into the public eye.⁶⁴ When Dalpatram, for instance, won an 1848 essay contest spearheaded by Forbes with a piece on spirit worship in Gujarat entitled “Bhūt Nibandh,” Forbes not only produced an English translation, but also furnished it with a laudatory preface. Moving beyond the merits of its composition, Forbes claimed in his introduction that the essay was chosen over its competition on account of its broad appeal: “care was taken that [the essay] should be one of interest to the natives of Gujarat generally,” Forbes wrote, adding that “[i]t would be almost enough to justify our choice that the enquiry which we decided upon pursuing was one very much in agitation at the time among the people of [Gujarat]” (Daya 1849, xii). Forbes glossed the topic he was referring to as “superstition.” And while Forbes would not want to frame the ultimate aim of the essay contest—and for that matter English education as a whole—as anything less than “increased intellectual activity” for the inhabitants of India (1849, ix), he nevertheless took time to address the worldwide ubiquity of superstitious belief. He noted, for instance, the widespread belief in ghosts and hobgoblins in Great Britain, namely in Scotland as recently as a century previous. While in Britain these superstitions lingered as a remnant of bygone eras, in Forbes’ estimation, “[i]n Guzerat the evil is in actual daily operation. We have a house full of such filthy night birds as Baliá and Meládi, and

⁶³ Alexander Kinloch Forbes was the foremost colonial-era scholar of Gujarati language and literature. He was able to pursue this interest while working for the British colonial administration, in which he served in a variety of departments. The literary and folkloric materials he collected were eventually published in a compendious volume entitled *Ras Mala: Hindoo Annals of the Province of Goozerat*. As a testament to his legacy, the Gujarati archive in Mumbai is named in his honour.

⁶⁴ For a brief discussion of Dalpatram’s pivotal role in modern Gujarati literature, see Rachel Dwyer’s *The Poetics of Devotion* (2001, 54-58). Dalpatram was among the first Gujarati poets to have his works published quickly after they were composed, appearing in periodicals and monographs (2001, 57). Stylistically, Dalpatram introduced new subjects to Gujarati poetry, as can be seen in his topical poem “The Invasion of Lord Industry” (2001, 58).

the attempt to rid ourselves of these nauseous associates cannot be considered an unnecessary one” (1849, xiv).

The message here is straightforward. Although Forbes worked tirelessly to imbue the language and culture of Gujarat with the esteem it deserved, he appears to have reserved particularly severe disapproval for rural spirits and deities—most importantly for our purposes, Melaḍī Mātā. “Baliá,” meanwhile, would appear to refer to Baḷiyā Devī or Baḷiyā Mātā, Gujarati epithets for the North Indian smallpox goddess Śītalā Mātā (Bisht & Coutinho 2000, 702), or else her husband Baḷiyā Kākā (“powerful uncle”), a local god also worshipped when poxes are present (Wadley 1980, 42).⁶⁵ In pairing Melaḍī with disease deities and other “nauseous associates,” Forbes was expressing condemnation in no uncertain terms. Baḷiyā Kākā, also known as Baḷiyā Bāpji or Baḷiyā Dev, enjoys a checkered reputation in Gujarat to this day due to associations with Dalits, tribals, and animal sacrifice, and Śītalā/Baḷiyā shares in this to a considerable degree. Forbes would record this sentiment very viscerally in his later tome on West Indian history and literature entitled *Ras Mala*. Here Forbes included the story of a mother and father whose child was afflicted with smallpox by Śītalā, who is frequently referred to here as “Baḷiyā Devī” ([1878] 1973, 606-608). To eliminate the virus, the family performed a whole host of vows to a number of different deities, with a pointed focus on Baḷiyā Devī. The family pleaded with the goddess as follows: “O Buleeā! If at any time wittingly or unwittingly I have derided you, pardon me. I have committed a fault. I have done wrong. I have eaten your dung. Be merciful, and preserve my daughter” ([1878] 1973, 608). Here Baḷiyā Devī, consort of Baḷiyā Kākā and undoubtedly one among the “nauseous associates,” is connected with scatological acts, an image that would surely pique the imagination of colonial and reformist readers. As a fellow “filthy night bird,” Melaḍī no doubt inherits comparable connotations, at least from the perspective of Forbes and his sympathetic readership.

⁶⁵ “Baliá,” alternatively transliterated as “Buleea,” as we see in other citations from Forbes such as the *Ras Mala*, or standardized as Baḷiyā, is most likely gendered feminine here. It is difficult to be certain about grammatical gender in this case, as the term Baḷiyā ends in the long vowel “ā,” which can be both a masculine and feminine ending in Gujarati—indeed, the Baḷiyā in Baḷiyā Kākā/Bāpji referring to the smallpox god, is masculine. Widely worshipped in rural areas of Gujarat today, Baḷiyā Babji is considered the consort of Śītalā. Hence, that “Baḷiyā” or “Baḷiyā Devī,” a feminization of the male small pox deity, is one of Śītalā’s Gujarati epithets, follows intuitively. Unfortunately, Forbes has not in this passage from the preface of “Bhūt Nibandh” provided an indicator of “Dev” or “Devī” to make clear the particular entity to which he refers. Nonetheless, we can conclude that he was indeed referencing a deity related to smallpox, the “nauseous associates” no doubt including both the god and goddess thereof.

Forbes' negative characterization of Melaḍī reflects much of the Orientalist opinion on the *mātās*, the totality of which served as a powerful signifier of the backwardness and superstition of the native Gujarati populace. Western Christian missionaries put forward similar sentiments for the mother goddesses, seeing the *mātās* in many cases as metonymic for what they deemed to be idolatry of the local Hindu "heathen" as a whole. Even though goddesses both pan-Indian and local had a lengthy historical presence in Gujarat, upper-caste Gujarati Hindu reformers would thoroughly condemn the *mātās* and rebuke their lower-caste followers for worshipping them, recapitulating and probably even inspiring many of the ideas that circulated in colonial and missionary discourses. No critics were more prominent than those involved with the Swaminarayan movement, who actively drew converts away from supposedly sanguinary goddess traditions. But while colonialists, missionaries, and upper-caste reformers all criticized the worship of *mātās* ostensibly to spur social uplift, the figure of the Goddess was also able to provide a means for reforms initiated by low-caste and tribal groups themselves. The Devī movement of the 1920s, for instance, saw the village goddess take on a pivotal role in demanding and even implementing drastic lifestyle alterations within Adivasi groups in southern Gujarat, as we will see in this chapter's penultimate section. Similar goddess-centric reforms also occurred in other non-elite communities in the decades to follow.

This chapter will move toward a history of goddesses in Gujarat, briefly surveying their ancient and pre-colonial presence and then moving into a more in-depth analysis of their significance for colonialists, missionaries, and Hindu reformers, as well as their role in internal self-reforms. This is undertaken in hopes of demonstrating how Śakti (and more often than not the Mātā) has been, at least since the advent of colonialism, a crucial site of repugnance but also reform. This helps us to understand the historical genealogy of the ambivalent, perpetually under-negotiation positionality that *mātās* still embody at present.

Pre-Colonial Goddess Religion in Gujarat: A Survey

Goddess worship in Gujarat is, by some reckonings, very ancient. V. Padmaja, an archaeologist trained at the Oriental Institute in Baroda, for instance, has advocated for the presence of the goddess in the region as far back in time as the Indus Valley Civilization. Though her work is largely speculative, Padmaja has submitted some compelling hypotheses about feminine imagery, quite possibly divine, traceable to the dawn of city settlements in northwest

India and Pakistan. This includes sites in present-day Gujarat. At least one stray terracotta figure has been unearthed at Lothal, a principal Indus Valley site located in the modern-day Bhal region of Gujarat. The figure's prominent breasts and the cup-like projection around its head prompted Padmaja to posit a remote resemblance to the feminine divine as imagined at other Indus Valley locations (1983, 23).⁶⁶ The presence of agriculture in Chalcolithic Lothal (around the third millennium BCE) led Padmaja to propose that these kinds of feminine reproductive symbols are by no means a surprising development, and so the mother goddess may have had some currency in this area (1983, 24). Skipping ahead several millennia, Padmaja proposed that outright Śakti worship rose to prominence in what is now Gujarat in the Mauryan period (322 BCE to 187 BCE) based on the discovery of maternal images found at Timbarva in the central part of the state.⁶⁷ Also dating to this period are feminine terracotta figures and female statuettes with prominent breasts and pudenda from Nagra in the modern-day Kaira district (1983, 24-25). Padmaja has interpreted these images as “*mātrkāś*” or “mothers,” and takes their presence as sufficient evidence to establish that there was Śakti worship in Mauryan Gujarat (*Ibid.*).⁶⁸

Moving into the Common Era, we can declare with greater certainty that goddesses began to flourish in Gujarat. Archaeological excavations from Padri near Bhavnagar District have uncovered terracotta plaques featuring disembodied pudenda and females with legs spread apart that date back as early as the first century BCE (Shinde 1994, 485). Vasant Shinde has interpreted this as indication of the worship of Lajjā Gaurī, a label given to a constellation of images of a female figure about which little is known.⁶⁹ Lajjā Gaurī worship was evidently already established during the reign of the Western Kshatrapas (*Ibid.*).⁷⁰ Śakti imagery appears to

⁶⁶ There is, to my knowledge, only one bound copy of V. Padmaja's doctoral dissertation in existence, filed away in the tiny library affiliated with the archaeology department at M.S. University in Baroda. The pagination on this document is contested, with new page numbers having been pencilled in over the original typewritten page numbers. I have chosen, however, to use the original typewritten page numbers in my citations, as they are considerably easier to identify when consulting the physical document. For those interested in Padmaja's work who are not able to access the physical copy in Baroda, see Padmaja (1985, 1986).

⁶⁷ The massive Mauryan Empire was founded by Chandragupta (r. 321-298 BCE) and reached its zenith under his grandson Ashoka (r. 268-232), who spread the dynasty throughout the majority of the Indian subcontinent (Kulke & Rothermund 2004, 83-87).

⁶⁸ For more on the group of goddesses collectively known as the *mātrkāś*, see Kinsley (1986, 151-160).

⁶⁹ In addition to “Lajjā Gaurī,” this figure is referred to by at least 25 names, including “nude squatting goddess” or “the mother goddess.” Her depictions appear throughout India, though she is most commonly found in the south, particularly in the Karnataka, Andhra, and Maharashtra regions. For further details, see Carol Radcliffe Bolon's (1992) study.

⁷⁰ The Western Kshatrapas were rulers of Indo-Scythian origin who prevailed over western and central India, including parts of modern Saurashtra and Gujarat, from 35-405 CE. A number of military defeats helped along the

have also been present in the Gupta period (240 to 590 CE), as is evidenced by a number of archaeological finds.⁷¹ These discoveries include two fifth-century CE images of *mātrkās* that were unearthed near the Buddhist archaeological site at Devnimori, just two kilometres from the town of Shamalji in Aravalli district in northern Gujarat (Padmaja 1983, 26). This region has proven fecund for mother goddess images, as Shamalji has yielded no less than seventeen mother goddess sculptures, which also date back to the fifth century CE and seem to form a “homogenous” group (Dehejia 1986, 70). Vidya Dehejia has speculated that these multiplicities of mother goddesses may be a precursor from which the 64 *yoginīs* evolved (*Ibid.*).

Throughout the Maitraka period (470-788 CE), goddess worship appears to have proliferated in Gujarat, likely due to the Maitrakas’ patronage of Śaivism, in which Śakti played an indispensable role (Padmaja 1983, 28).⁷² *Devī* icons dated to this era have been found throughout the region (*Ibid.*). The temple of the goddess Koṭammahikā at Trisaṅgamika, for instance, may have been built during or prior to the times of King Dronasinha (499-519 CE), the first Maitraka ruler to bestow the title of *mahārāja* (“great king”) upon himself (Nanavati & Dhaky 1969, 12). Inscriptions at Vallabhi, capital of the Maitraka dynasty, mention female deities during this period and, as early as the fifth century, goddess temples emerged in Hastaparva (modern day Hathab in Saurashtra) under Dronasinha (Padmaja 1983, 27). Temples were also constructed for goddesses such as Vindhyavāsini, Cāmuṇḍā, and the Saptamātrkās at Srinagar, Porbandar, and Dhransavel, respectively, to name just a few (1983, 29). From the sixth to seventh centuries, we also find images of Pārvatī, Ambikā, Durgā, and Cāmuṇḍā, as well as sculptured groups of *mātrkās* (1983, 28-29). Included among icons discovered in the Banaskantha district, for example, are the seven mother goddesses (1983, 29). Moreover, a spate of production of Lajjā Gaurī images is datable to this same period when the Maitrikas of Valabhi were at their peak (Shinde 1994, 485). The ostensible increase in Śakti worship was no doubt

Western Kshatrapas’ slow decline from the second century CE onward, until they were finally annihilated by Chandragupta II of the Gupta Empire (Sen 2013, 187-188).

⁷¹ In the fourth and fifth centuries CE, the Gupta Empire ruled over a considerable portion of the Indian subcontinent, and was particularly influential in the development of literature and political administration in South Asia. Chandragupta II (380-415 CE), under whom the empire reached its apogee, expanded Gupta territory into Saurashtra and Gujarat early in the fifth century. The Guptas reigned here for about 70 years (Kulke & Rothermund 2004, 85-96).

⁷² With the decline of the Gupta Empire in the later part of the fifth century CE, the Maitraka dynasty emerged to rule over an area of northwestern India roughly corresponding with modern day Gujarat. Their capital was based in the city of Vallabhi on the Saurashtra Peninsula in close proximity to Bhavnagar. Maitraka rulers were predominantly Śaiva (Tambs-Lyche 1997).

correlated with Maitrika patronage (Padmaja 1983, 29). The Saindhavas, meanwhile, who maintained small kingdoms in western Saurashtra from the eighth to tenth centuries and were probably allied with the Maitrakas, also appear to have been patrons of Śakti (1983, 30).⁷³ There are references, for instance, to *mātrkā* icons having been constructed under the Saindhava dominion (1983, 30-31).

Saurashtra's courtly culture incorporated the figure of the goddess at this time period, at least according to local chroniclers. As we will see in Chapter Three, this particular branch of local emic historiography holds Khoḍīyār, the goddess named for her limp, responsible for the fall of the capital city, Vallabhi, in 766 CE (Tambs-Lyche 1997, 23-24). When King Shiladitya denied Khoḍīyār and her six sisters—their seven-fold grouping presumably a nod to the Saptamātrkās—the flesh of the bull for which they hungered, the limping girl cursed the king with sterility and ensured the extinction of the Maitrika's royal line (1997, 24-25). Khoḍīyār was also an integral goddess for the Chudasama dynasty, which assumed power in Saurashtra in the ninth century (1997, 33).⁷⁴ During their rule, a special relationship between the sitting king and the goddess developed, and many stories tell of how Khoḍīyār's blessing repeatedly ensured the continuation of the Chudasama lineage, even bankrolling armies on occasion (*Ibid.*).

The Chalukyas' loss of much of west and central India to the Rashtrakutas in the eighth century seems to have only benefitted Śaktism within regions that would become parts of Gujarat (Padmaja 1983, 30).⁷⁵ In Cambay, for instance, a copper plate of Govinda IV (r. 930-935 CE) displays in its upper-left corner the figure of a female seated on an animal, which Padmaja has taken to represent a goddess with her *vāhana*. Iconography of Śiva's consort, Pārvatī, and her variations abound in ninth-century images from Rashtrakuta territories, as do icons of other Sanskrit goddesses such as Kaumārī and Māheśvarī, as well as more village-styled goddesses

⁷³ The Saindhavas, also referred to as the Jayadratha dynasty, appear to have originated in the Sindh region of what is now Pakistan and ruled over western Saurashtra from 740 to 920 CE (Tambs-Lyche 1997, 30-31).

⁷⁴ Starting in the ninth century, the Chudasama dynasty ruled over portions of Saurashtra, with one of its main centres firmly established in Junagadh. Long after the dynasty's fifteenth-century decline, Rajput clans would continue to classify themselves as Chudasamas (Tambs-Lyche 1997).

⁷⁵ The "Chalukyas" (not to be confused with the later Gujarati Chaulukyas of the tenth to thirteenth centuries CE) is a collective designation for three related dynasties that ruled over much of west and central India, as well as parts of the south, between the sixth and twelfth centuries. This area included what is now the southernmost tip of mainland Gujarat. Goddess worship was not especially prominent during the Chalukya period though the Badamis, the earliest of the three dynasties bearing the Chalukya name, built temples to Durgā and other goddesses (Tartakov 1997). The Badamis were supplanted in the western Deccan by the rise of the Rashtrakutas (Kulke & Rothermund 2004, 119-120).

such as Cāmuṇḍā and the *yoginīs*.⁷⁶ Icons of this vintage depicting all of these female divinities can be found, for instance, at the village of Karvan near Baroda (*Ibid.*).

This would set a trend for Śaiva royals in Gujarat to follow, such as the Chaulukyas, better known as the Solankis, who were centred in Patan and ruled parts of northwestern India between the tenth and thirteenth centuries CE.⁷⁷ All of the Chaulukya monarchs paid reverent heed to Śiva's consort and other goddesses (Padmaja 1983, 31-32). The Chaulukya king Bhima I (1022-1064 CE), for example, constructed a temple to the goddess Limbojī Mātā in Delmal, which still stands in remarkably good condition today (1983, 32).⁷⁸ Later on, Bhima I's descendant Jayasimha Siddharaj (1092-1142 CE) was said to have rendezvoused with the *yoginīs*, who came as a group from the Himalayas to the Chaulukya capital in Anahilwad to test the skills of the sitting king, who was literally the "Lord of Magic" (Saletore 1981, 118). Siddharaj fashioned a dagger with a sugar blade and bejewelled steel handle, and, upon meeting with his challengers, he ate the sweetener off the blade and challenged the *yoginīs* to do the same. The *yoginīs* were publicly humiliated when they could not follow through with the task, and the king's fame as an expert conjurer further burgeoned (*Ibid.*). This story can be taken to suggest that Jayasimha Siddharaj's kingship bore a tantric undercurrent, his mastery indexed by his control over female divinities. According to the chronicler Hemachandra and his commentators, the courts of Jayasimha and other Solanki kings played host to animal sacrifices for the mother goddess (Padmaja 1983, 37). Jayasimha's successor Kumarapala (1144-1174 CE) also dealt with sacrifices and capricious divinities, and was, according to inscriptions, known to offer blood to Caṇḍī, who was recognized as a war-goddess (1983, 33). Other temples to Caṇḍī, as well as to Gaurī and Hinglāj Mātā, can all be dated to the time of Kumarapala's reign (*Ibid.*). During the reign of Bhima II (1178-1240 CE), a temple to Harsiddhī Mātā was constructed at Miyani near

⁷⁶ The Rashtrakuta dynasty (753-982 CE) assumed rule over much of west and central India after overcoming the Badami Chalukyas. The Rashtrakutas and their relatives forged several kingdoms that ruled during the reign of the parent empire and sometimes even after its end, and included among these are the Rashtrakutas of Gujarat (757-888 CE) (Kulke & Rothermund 2004, 114-115).

⁷⁷ The Chaulukyas/Solankis controlled portions of what are at present Gujarat and Rajasthan from 944 to 1244 CE. The Chaulukyas/Solankis should not be confused with the earlier Chalukyas, even though some scholars link the two groups (see for instance Sen 2013, 28). By virtue of this connection, the Chaulukyas/Solankis are sometimes referred to as the Chalukyas of Gujarat. "Solanki" persists today as the caste title of a Rajput group prominent in Gujarat (Majumdar 1956).

⁷⁸ Limbojī Mātā, also known as Limbāryā or Limbārjī, counts among her primary worshippers the Jyeshthimalla Brahmins, colloquially referred to as the Jetty or Jethi. The Jethi are known for their military and combat proficiency, particularly their expertise involving wrestling and weapons that can deal out fatal blows in hand-to-hand combat (Mishra 2012, 109).

Porbandar (1983, 34). Mahiṣāsūramardini images abound throughout Gujarat from the tenth to twelfth centuries, as do icons of Cāmuṇḍā, which have been found at Miragate at Dabhoi, as well as at sites in Kheda and Baroda (1983, 35). Durgā/Pārvatī also played a major role in the Solanki courtly culture, in which rulers were addressed as Umāpati (“husband of Umā”) (1983, 40).

Durgā was also an important object of veneration for the Vaghelas, who ruled briefly in Gujarat after displacing the Chaulukyas in 1244 (Padmaja 1983, 37).⁷⁹ The goddess Bhavānī held comparably high standing in these courts, and the royal poet Somesvara dedicated several cantos of propitiation to this goddess (*Ibid.*). The thirteenth century saw the construction of a number of *devī* temples, among them the Brahmānī Mātā temple of Decavad and the Saptamātrkā temple of Ahmedabad district (1983, 35). It was also during this time that Gujarat’s eventual *śakti-pīṭhas*—the Bahucarā temple of Chunval in Mehsana, the Mahākālī temple of Pavagadh near Baroda, and the Ambā temple (affectionately known as “Ambājī”) at Arasur in Banaskantha—first emerged (*Ibid.*). We will turn considerable attention to these sites later on.

Even after Muslim forces moved through Anahilwad at the dawn of the fourteenth century, expelling the Vaghelas and putting the region under the Delhi Sultanate, Śakti worship remained strong in Gujarat.⁸⁰ Inscriptions made throughout the fourteenth century reference Śītalā Mātā of Kalavad, Brahmānī of Halvad, and Mahālakṣmī of Vankaner, as well as Ambājī at Arasur (Padmaja 1983, 38). A book-length Magdhi-language composition dated to the fourteenth century entitled “Sirivalkaha” contains a narrative in which Śikotar gives advice to sailors, marking one of the earliest-known textual references to a Gujarat-based *mātā* (Chandervaker 1963, 45).⁸¹ When the Gujarat Sultanate (1407-1573 CE) was established in the following century, goddess worship continued unabated in the region.⁸² It was during the Sultanate period

⁷⁹ The Vaghela family originally served the Chaulukyas before usurping the throne in 1244 CE. The ensuing Vaghela dynasty ruled from their capital in Dholka until 1304 CE, when they were ousted by Turkish invaders (see Tambs-Lyche 1997, 78).

⁸⁰ The Delhi Sultanate (1206-1526 CE) was a Muslim political administration that involved a succession of five dynasties and extended over a large part of the Indian subcontinent. As its name would suggest, it was based for most of its history in Delhi. Gujarat was a governorate of the Delhi Sultanate from 1297 to 1407. When the famed Turco-Mongol warlord Timur (a.k.a. Tamerlane) sacked Delhi in 1398, the Delhi Sultanate faltered, leading Zafar Khan, the last governor of the then-ruling Tughluq dynasty (1320-1414 CE), to declare himself independent in 1407 and inaugurate the Gujarat Sultanate (Eraly 2015; Jackson 2003).

⁸¹ Chandervaker has gone on to suggest that such references to Śikotar may date back as early as the thirteenth century. He also noted that in Sanskrit, however, there are “hardly any references to Shikotar” (1963, 46).

⁸² The Gujarat Sultanate was established in the early fifteenth century by Zafar Khan, final governor of the Delhi Sultanate’s Tughluq dynasty (1320-1414 CE). When the Delhi Sultanate grew weak due to Timur’s invasion of Delhi, Zafar Khan took the opportunity to declare independence and eventually came to be known as Muzaffar Shah I. His grandson Ahmed Shah I (1411-1442 CE) founded Ahmedabad, the new capital, in 1411. The Gujarat

that this Ambājī site, as well as Pavagadh and Becharaji, all came to be recognized as *śakti-pīṭhas* (Padmaja 1983, 38). Meanwhile in Saurashtra, when the Chudasama dynasty met its end in 1472 with the fall of Junagadh to the unparalleled Sultan Mahmud Begada, the Gohils, a Rajput clan centred in Bhavnagar, adopted Khoḍiyār as their guardian (Tambs-Lyche 1997, 60-61).⁸³ Thereafter, Khoḍiyār became the *kuldevī* (“family goddess”) of the future Gohil kings of Sihor and Bhavnagar, and emic narratives repeatedly highlight the mutual respect shared between goddess and ruler in this courtly tradition (1997, 80-82). Similarly, in the Kacch region, the lineage of the newly installed Jadeja kings (1540-1948) was constituted by the *śakti* of the goddess Āśāpūrā, a *devī* who, as in other nearby regions, regenerated and reproduced the symbolic power of the king through buffalo sacrifice (Basu 2005, 85-86).⁸⁴

Gujarat’s early Muslim rulers appear to have had no major issues with Śakti worship. These included the Mughals, who entered Gujarat in 1573 CE and ruled there for nearly two centuries afterward (Padmaja 1983, 39). Śakti sites such as those to Harsiddhī Mātā at Porbandar, Śītalā at Kalavad, Khoḍiyār at Bhavnagar, and Becharaji all thrived under Mughal rule, with Pavagadh and Ambājī doing especially well and reaching the apogee of their pre-eminence (*Ibid.*). By this point, Pavagadh, Ambājī, and Becharaji had all come to incorporate yantra worship, with the Kālī-yantra, Viśo-yantra, and Bālātripurā-yantra featuring respectively at the sites (Padmaja 1986, 243). At the Kālī temple at Pavagadh, for instance, the yantra is said to have been placed at the uppermost tip of the hill, as it was believed that it deserved the highest place at the site (Modi 2008, 14). The Śrī-yantra, a representation of the goddess constructed from a complex pattern of overlapping upward- and downward-facing triangles that is central to Śrīvidyā tantra, has also been generally ubiquitous at all three major *pīṭhas* (Padmaja 1985, 178). Padmaja has interpreted this as evidence for the fundamentally tantric character of goddess

Sultanate peaked under Mahmud Begada (r. 1458-1511 CE) and lasted until 1573, when the Mughal Emperor Akbar defeated Muzaffar Shah III to claim Gujarat (Yagnik & Sheth 2005, 9-11).

⁸³ Mahmud Begada stands as the most powerful and accomplished sultan of the Gujarat Sultanate, which he ruled from 1458 to 1511 CE. One of his foremost successes was the 1484 capture of Pavagadh Hill, location of the famous Kālī *śakti-pīṭha* (Sen 2013, 114-115). The Gohils, another classical Rajput clan, ruled over sections of the Saurashtra peninsula from the twelfth century CE onward. They are attributed with the founding of Bhavnagar State. For more on the Gohils, especially their relationship with Khoḍiyār, see Tambs-Lyche (1997, 77-84).

⁸⁴ The Jadeja dynasty ruled the princely state of Kacch in northwestern Gujarat from the sixteenth century until just after India’s Independence. A Rajput clan claiming descent from these rulers persists today (Tambs-Lyche 1997, 44-46).

worship at these locations, which would influence other *upapīṭhas* (*pīṭhas* of lesser importance) throughout the state (*Ibid.*).⁸⁵

It was during the Mughal period in Gujarat that popular poetry dedicated to the goddess began to proliferate. Sanskrit texts, for instance, were rendered in the vernacular for the benefit of common devotees. One such example was the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, which was translated into Gujarati by the seventeenth-century poet Premanand (1636-1684 CE) and would soon become a mainstay at goddess sites (Padmaja 1983, 39). Also in the seventeenth century, a poet by the name of Natha Bhavana supposedly composed songs by the grace of the goddess alone, and also translated indispensable Śakti-related sections of the *Sūtrasaṃhitā* (L.M. Joshi 2000-2001, 323; Padmaja 1983, 39). Original devotional works dedicated to the goddess also came to abound in Gujarat. Particularly popular among poets was the goddess Ambā, a *mātā* who came to signify not only a divine mother but also a relentless avenger with a tendency toward carnage and bloodshed. As Krishnanlal Jhaveri has explained it, Ambā is imagined as being “appeased by means of sacrifices only, as the representative of nature ‘red in tooth and claw’” (1914, 149). This aspect is offset by Ambā’s tenderness, which has been predominantly expressed in Gujarati poetics through mother-child imagery and sentiments (*Ibid.*).

No Mughal period poet is more prominent than Vallabh Bhatt (1640-1751), who composed some of the most enduring Gujarati Śākta songs, more popularly known as *garbas*. Vallabh was a Mewara Brahmin by birth, though he was poorly educated. Five years and 25 days repetition of the *Navārṇamantra*, a high-powered mantra to Cāmuṇḍā/Durgā, endowed him with the ability to visualize Bālā, the goddess Tripurāsundarī in her youthful form (L.M. Joshi 2000-2001, 323). With this vision gained via mantric recitation, Vallabh was able to produce various devotional works dedicated to Bahucarā Mātā, the earliest datable compositions to this goddess (Sheikh 2010, 96). His most famous is the *Ānand-no Garbo* (“bliss *garba*”), a poem that still carries enormous symbolic and performative value today, as we will soon see. Vallabh Bhatt, along with his brothers, is considered among the greatest devotees of Bahucarā, and is attributed with making the *mātā* and her *pīṭha* famous (Fischer, Jain & Shah 2014, 165). Even so, Vallabh has at the same time been dismissed by many, as he was rumoured to have practiced *vāmācāra* or “left-hand” tantra (L.M. Joshi 2000-2001, 323). This *vāmācāra* label may relate back to some of the

⁸⁵ In addition to the *śakti-pīṭhas*, there are also numerous minor *upapīṭhas* to various goddesses located throughout India. These are sites where the goddess’s limbs of lesser importance are said to have fallen. One estimate places the number of *upapīṭhas* at 26 (see Sircar [1973] 2004, 39).

tāmasik rituals that seem to have been formerly undertaken for Bahucarā, including animal sacrifices, on the whole speaking to the ambivalence this *mātā* has long occasioned in the Gujarati public imagination.

This trend toward tantric-styled, Bālā-based imaginings of goddesses has persisted in Gujarati literature. Among his many other original works and translations, the poet Mithu Maharaj (1750-1791) provided a Gujarati translation of Śaṅkara's *Saundaryalaharī* (Padmaja 1983, 40). The *Saundaryalaharī* provides instructions on the Śrī-yantra and the notion of *kuṇḍalinī*, among other related topics, and is for that reason a key Śrīvidyā text. Mithu Maharaj is said to have been a student of the 64 tantras as well as the text *Śrīcakraṃmalavidyā*, which aided him in producing several other patently Śākta-tantric works including the *Śaktivilāsalaharī*, *Śivaśaktirasānukrama*, and the *Śrīrasa* (L.M. Joshi 2000-2001, 323). Mithu's follower Janibai (late seventeenth century CE) was also well-acquainted with tantric ideas, as is evident from her major poem *Navanāyikāvarṇana*, which shows familiarity with Śrīvidyā principles (*Ibid.*). Much later, Balashankara (1858-1898) continued this trend, composing erotic poems dedicated to the goddess and also providing another Gujarati translation of the *Saundaryalaharī*, this one in metred form (2000-2001, 324).

The impact of Śrīvidyā on the works of Mithu Maharaj, Janibai, and Balashankara, among other contemporaneous Gujarati poets, should not be underestimated. The Śrīvidyā school appears to have been very influential in Gujarat. Śrīvidyā (literally “auspicious wisdom”) is a Śākta religious system that spans North and South India, its roots dating back to the sixth century CE (Brooks 1992, xiii). The object of worship in Śrīvidyā is the munificent mother goddess Lalitā Tripurāsundarī, who is known by several epithets conveying various aspects of her all-encompassing character, such as the aforementioned Bālā (“youthful”) Tripurāsundarī, Rājārājeśvarī (“Queen of Kings”), or simply Śrī (1992, 61). This tradition is intensely tantric, based in the heretofore referenced Śrīvidyā yantra (also known as the *Śrī-cakra*) and its companionate Śrīvidyā mantra, as well as secretive guru-based initiation. At the same time, it is also highly Sanskritic and steeped in what Douglas Renfrew Brooks has called a “brāhmaṇic legacy” (1992, xiii). This is not the tantra of black magic and sex; according to Brooks, “[n]ot a single historical Śrīvidyā thinker finds a conflict of interests in being both Vaidika and Tantrikā” (Brooks 1992, xiv). Śrīvidyā's most distinguished intellectual figure, Bhaskararaya Makhin (1690-1785 CE), was himself associated with *vāmācāra*. Originally from Maharashtra,

Bhaskararaya breathed new life into the Śrīvidyā tradition and then, with the patronage of Serfoji of Thanjavur, brought it to Tamil Nadu in the mid-nineteenth century, where it has thrived ever since (1992, xv). On account of his time in northern India, Bhaskararaya's influence collapses a wide range of regional boundaries, effectively bridging north and south (1992, 41). Bhaskararaya also appears to have had some ties to Gujarat, as he was initiated into Śrīvidyā by Shivadatta Shukla, a scholar from Surat (L.M. Joshi 2000-2001, 325). As such, it is probable that Śrīvidyā had an early presence in Gujarat. Beyond the repeated references to Śrī in the oeuvre of Mithu Maharaj and his disciples, Bhaskararaya's own works continue to appear in Gujarati up to the present day. One such example is his commentary, *Saubhāghya Bhāskara*, which was recently translated by Nina Bhavnagari of Surat and published in the year 2000 (2000-2001, 324). Śrīvidyā practices are also thriving in Gujarat today, with affiliated sites in Baroda, Ahmedabad, and Kadi (*Ibid.*). The most prominent of these is the small but flourishing Shri Rajrajeshwari Pitham in the small city of Kadi, less than two hours from Ahmedabad by car. The extent of Śrīvidyā's resonance with various *mātās* will be conjectured in the chapters to follow.

Alongside these esoteric tantric associations, a more outward form of goddess worship maintained a prominent place in Gujarati public life even after the onset of the colonial period and the shifts in public moralities that accompanied it. Celebrations of Navarātri, the “nine nights” festival that is the principal goddess event in Gujarat, remained major undertakings in Surat, Baroda, Ahmedabad, and Bombay as well as other sites throughout the region such as the *pīṭhas*. The image of women dancing in a circle late into the night, their hands clapping in time, was (and is) a scene common to Gujarati streets at Navarātri time (K. Jhaveri 1914, 150). Throughout Navarātri, women have traditionally made use of small earthen pots with lit wicks inside as representations of the goddess, processing them through public streets (M. Jhaveri 1978, 248). These pots are known as *garbo*, a fitting name given their indelible relation to the similarly named *garba* songs (*Ibid.*). At present, throughout Navarātri, people sing *garbas* by Vallabh and others in praise of the goddess, though modern lyrics have also been incorporated in these performances.

Colonialism brought new print technologies to South Asia and, as print culture began to flourish in Gujarat, collections of *garbas* to goddesses proliferated among early Gujarati-language publications. Throughout the nineteenth century, a number of vernacular pamphlets were published containing *garbas* dedicated to Bahucarā and Ambā. Among the earliest is

Uttamarama Umedchand's *Bhagavatī-Kāvya-Saṃgraha* ("Songs in Praise of the Goddess Bhagavatī"), published in Ahmedabad in 1867.⁸⁶ Umedchand's text is a collection of goddess poetry comprised of *garbas* and *stutis* (praise poems) to Kālī and Ambā, among other female divinities. Featuring prominently is Bahucarā, who is the subject of a "Bahucarājīmahinā" or "Verses in Praise of Bahucarājī." The first *pada* of this song lauds Bahucarā, and then goes on to invoke a number of goddess forms. The first of these is Sarasvatī (Śāradā): "*paratham samaruṇ chuṃ mātā sārādāre*" ("first I bring to mind Mother Śāradā").⁸⁷ The song then goes on to praise the grace of the goddess Ambā before addressing "the one who protects Sankhalpur" (Bahucarā). Bahucarā is also attributed with the epithet "Tripurā," apparently linking her with Śrīvidyā's standout deity, Tripurāsundarī (1867, 78-79). All told, in the *Bhagavatī-Kāvya-Saṃgraha*, Bahucarā and Ambā are portrayed as naturally homologous with the most esteemed of Sanskrit goddesses.

In *Solankī-no Garbo*, a tiny handwritten pamphlet of unknown authorship from 1870 featuring a poem dedicated to a Solanki sovereign, Bahucarā Mātā and her relationship with landholding Solanki Rajputs are highlighted from the outset.⁸⁸ "Sweet Bahucarā is my proprietress" (*māre śīr bahucarā*), offers the composer early on, marking the integral place of the goddess in the lives of the Solankis (1870, 3). Much as in the *Bhagavatī-Kāvya-Saṃgraha*, repeated reference is made in *Solankī-no Garbo*'s songs to a "Tripure," which appears to be the name of the goddess Tripurā in the vocative case. This is clear right in the very first line of *pada* 1, where the goddess is praised for the benevolence she bestows upon her faithful: "*tripure nā samaraṇ thī sukh thāy*" ("happiness results from remembering Tripurā") (1870, 5). Here again, there seems to be an identification of Bahucarā with Tripurā—that is, the Sanskrit, tantric Tripurāsundarī.

Garbas to Bahucarā, Kālī, and Ambā, the three goddesses of Gujarat's *śakti-pīṭhas*, are at the forefront of Prabhasankara Samalaji's *Ambājī Garbo*, another tiny pamphlet printed in 1870.⁸⁹ The anonymous author of the *Ambājī Mahinā* ("Verses in Praise of the Goddess Ambā")

⁸⁶ Uttamarama Umedchand, 1867. *Bhagavatī-Kāvya-Saṃgraha* (Songs in praise of the goddess Bhagavatī). Ahmedabad.

⁸⁷ This is my translation from the original Gujarati, as are all the passages to follow in this section.

⁸⁸ *Solankī-no Garbo* (The Story of King Solanki; a poem in 183 verses). 1870. Ahmedabad.

⁸⁹ Prabhasankara Samalaji, 1870. *Ambājī Garbo* (Hymns of praise to Amba and other Hindu deities). Ahmedabad. Samalaji appears to have been a prolific composer of devotional hymns between 1868 and 1874, with records surviving of at least six recorded publications in which he is sole author or collaborator during this time period. These works generally involve songs dedicated to festivals or specific deities.

of 1871 continues a trend of making Bahucarā contiguous with Ambā (1871, 9).⁹⁰ Like Umedchand's *Bhagavatī-Kāvya-Saṃgraha*, the *Ambājī Mahinā* also contains another "Bahucarājīmahinā" in praise of the rooster-mounted *mātā* (1871, 11-13). The 1879 *Kīrtanāvalī* by Balabhai Bhagavanji Dave is most concerned with presenting *garbas* offering praise of the deity Hātakeśvarā of Ahmedabad, though the author also sets aside ample space for poems doing the same for feminine divinities.⁹¹ This includes appreciations for a litany of Sanskrit goddess theonyms as well as those of *mātās*, namely Bahucarā and Kālī (1879, 16), and even Śrīvidyā *devīs* such as Bālātripurāsundarī (1879, 46-47). All the aforementioned early print devotional texts were published in Ahmedabad, but goddess-related publications were also produced in Surat, such as 1877's *Ambājī Cānd Chopḍī* by Amichand Motichand.⁹² *Ambājī Cānd Chopḍī* marks yet another publication dedicating considerable praise to Bahucarā and Ambā, who are again addressed together in various verses (1877, 24). Evidently, goddesses showed up with some frequency in early vernacular print materials produced in Gujarati cities of the mid- to late nineteenth century, and among these female divinities were more regionally-popular *mātās* such as Bahucarā. Moreover, many of the poets from this time period prominently evoked the tantric Tripurāsundarī in some form.

In addition, performances of *bhavāī*, an improvisational ritual folk drama carried out by the Bhavaya caste as a devotional act for Bahucarā and Ambā, similarly captivated the imagination of pre-colonial and colonial-era Gujarati publics, and continue to do so (K. Jhaveri 1924, 181-182). The three major Śākta sites of Pavagadh, Arasur, and Becharaji have been continuously popular since the turn of the twentieth century, chiefly among lower castes, or so Krishnanlal Jhaveri reported (1914, 149-150). Also seeing many devout *mātā* worshippers around this time were the Unhai hot-springs near Bansda in the Surat District, Tuljā Bhavānī in the Nizam's territory, and the shrine to Hinglāj Mātā on the Baluchistan frontier (Kirparam 1901, 549).

While not comprehensive, this precis of goddesses in Gujarat attests to the sustained historical presence of Śakti worship in the region. In the first millennium of the Common Era, images of the *mātrīkās* and Sanskritic goddesses can be found in various parts of Gujarat and Saurashtra. In these areas, the goddess was crucial in a regal context, with multiple dynasties

⁹⁰ *Ambājī Mahinā (Verses in praise of the goddess Amba)*. 1871. Ahmedabad.

⁹¹ Balabhai Bhagavanji Dave, 1879. *Kīrtanāvalī. (Songs in praise of the God Hatakesvara of Ahmedabad, of Ambika and other deities, and of sacred places at Benares)*. Ahmedabad.

⁹² Amichand Motichand, 1877. *Ambājī Cānd Chopḍī (Verses in praise of the goddess Amba)*. Surat.

depending upon Devīs for their legitimacy and maintenance, especially in Saurashtra. The early part of the second millennium saw the development of Gujarat’s three prominent *śakti-pīṭha* pilgrimage sites, suggesting the significance of goddesses on a grassroots level, as well. These sites endured under Muslim rule as did goddess worship overall. In fact, the Mughal period saw a wellspring of Śākta poetics, embodied in the emergence of *garba* as a poetic form. Several goddesses maintained their presence under colonial occupation, as well. With the arrival of print culture, vernacular publications kept *mātās* in currency, especially Bahucarā and Ambā, proliferating their *garbas* for wider consumption. Throughout this span of history, Gujarati goddess worship betrays a persistent tantric undercurrent that spans both traditionally recognized tantric “families” of Śrīkula and Kālīkula (L.M. Joshi 2000-2001, 322). The latter is represented by Kālī at Pavagadh. The popularity of the Śrī-yantra, meanwhile, marks the influence of the Śrīkula, as do the links between Bahucarā and the Bālātripurā-yantra of Bālātripurāsundarī, the girlish form of Tripurāsundarī, Śrīvidyā goddess *par excellence*.

Colonial Perspectives on Mātās

Alexander Kinloch Forbes seems to have been well aware of the prominence of the *mātās* in colonial Gujarat, and for the most part gave them their due. His derisive 1848 dismissal of Melaḍī Mātā notwithstanding, Forbes dedicated a considerable amount of space in his *Ras Mala: Hindoo Annals of Western India* to goddesses such as Khoḍīyār, Ambā, and Bahucarā Mātā, who are apparently not among the “nauseous associates.”⁹³ Originally published in 1856 and based on observations made in the 1840s and 1850s, *Ras Mala* provides a treasure trove of historical data on Bahucarā and her headquarters at Becharaji, as we will observe in the next chapter. While we find little in the way of disparagement directed toward the *mātās* under discussion, Forbes did concern himself with some elements of Gujarati goddess religion that would become hallmarks of later colonial scholarship in the region. Forbes had, for instance, a proclivity toward emphasizing the comparatively dramatic elements of divination, in the process casting *bhuvās* (or, alternatively, *bhūvos*), the ritual officiants often glossed in colonial materials as “exorcists,” as religious frauds. In the context of rain divination, Forbes wrote:

Another mode of inducing the rain to fall, is to send for one of the persons called Bhoowos, who are supposed to be inspired by a local Devee. The

⁹³ For his take on Khoḍīyār, see Forbes ([1878] 1973, 243). For his description of Ambā, see Forbes ([1878] 1973, 325-328). For his chapter on Bahucarā, see Forbes ([1878] 1973, 426-429 & 692).

man arrives, and, after certain preliminaries, begins to counterfeit inspiration. The Hindoos then address him as the goddess and say, “Mâtâjee, why is it that the rain does not fall?” The Bhoowo, flinging his limbs about, and rolling his eyes, makes answer, “Why should it fall? You make me no offerings.” “We were wrong, Mâtâjee!” they say, “we are your children, we will bring offerings whenever you please.” He then orders them to present certain kinds of food, which he describes, on the next day which is sacred to the Deveen. The offerings must be put in broken earthen vessels, which represent the human skulls out of which the Yogeenee delights to eat; they must be carried outside the eastern door of the city, and then set down in a circle which has been previously sprinkled with water [...] The dogs, or the Dhers, eat the food, and if the rain fall [sic] it is believed that the Deveen has sent it ([1878] 1973, 605).

Forbes’ description is prototypical of contemporary accounts of goddess-related rituals recorded by English writers in Gujarat. It portrays the performance of the *bhuvā* as aberrant in its physicality and “counterfeit,” the onlookers as gullible, and the status of the parties involved as low-caste. Moreover, it emphasizes a decidedly macabre interpretation of certain elements of the ritual (in this case, taking the earthen vessels to be skull-bowls of the *yoginīs*).

Later on in *Ras Mala*, Forbes took up *bhuvās* and *mātās* again, this time as they relate to the exorcism of malevolent spirits or *bhūts*:

In cases where the possessing Bhoot is supposed to be of low caste the most successful exorcists are persons called Bhoowos, who are considered to be favourites of some one or other of the “Shoodra Deveen”—the local goddesses, such as Boucherâjee, Khodeeâr, Gudeychee, Sheekotur, Melâdee, and others. The Bhoowo is of all castes, from the Brahmin downwards. The Deveen to whom he is devoted has an altar in his house, at which her pleasure is consulted before he ventures on an act of exorcism. If the answer be in the affirmative, the Bhoowo proceeds to the residence of the patient attended by drummers [...] The Bhoowo, who has seated himself opposite to the possessed person, as soon as he hears the music, assumes the character of one inspired by the Deveen, and begins to employ different means of terrifying the Bhoot. The operation lasts sometimes for five or six days; at length the possessed cries out (in the character of the Bhoot), “I’m off! I’m off!” and having been duly sworn to expend a certain sum of money in the Deveen’s service is admitted to be convalescent ([1878] 1973, 664).

Forbes plainly framed the chasing away of the low-caste *bhūt* by the *bhuvā* (said here to be from “all castes,” including Brahmins, curiously enough) as an “exorcism,” and thereby set a trend for subsequent Western commentators. Forbes finished this account with a footnote that musingly

ventured upon connecting the event to a Biblical passage: “[t]he ‘damsel possessed with a spirit of divination’ or ‘of Python’ mentioned in Acts xvi. 16, seems to have some points of resemblance to the Devee-possessed person we are describing” ([1878] 1973, 665 ff. 3). Here Forbes has referenced Paul’s casting out of an ill-mannered spirit that had possessed a female slave and was predicting the future, earning money for the slave-owners. Though not a missionary himself, Forbes was, in a markedly Judeo-Christian mode, willing to associate Gujarati female divinities with false prophets and demonology, if not casting them as demons in their own right.

The depiction of this dramatized process of “terrifying” or “scaring” a spirit with support of (or sometimes in direct opposition to) a *mātā* would become a trope throughout colonial works on Gujarati village religion. The attendant “*bhuvā* scene,” a lavish description of the interfacing between *mātās* and *bhuvās*, with its profit-driven exorcism and divination, proved consistently enticing to the colonial gaze, and so it features repeatedly within colonial and Orientalist publications from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Replete with elements variously characterized as “bloodletting,” “fetishism,” “exorcism,” and “possession,” the “*bhuvā* scene” was the subject of considerable spectacle for the contemplation of a “civilized” Western readership. Accordingly, the *mātās* or female spirits—the two categories not necessarily being mutually exclusive—central to such displays became a site of intense colonial scrutiny, and often occasioned distaste from Orientalist observers. By way of a citationary history wherein statements gained factuality by sheer force of repetition (and often wholesale plagiarism) between sources, the *mātā* came to be, in the estimation of colonial writers, a capricious species of ghost worshipped mostly by lower classes through inherently uncivilized means.

It was the sheer number of Gujarati mother goddesses that captured the attention of Monier Monier-Williams (1819-1899), one of the most prominent Orientalist Sanskritists. In his 1883 work *Religious Life and Thought in India*, he claimed “[t]here are about one hundred and forty distinct Mothers in Gujarat, besides numerous varieties of more popular forms” (1883, 225). While he noted that Brahmins explain away this plurality as “separate forms” of Kālī, Monier-Williams thought better of this pseudo-Vedāntic gloss, speculating that each *mātā* “is really the representative of some local deity.” These deities are often aniconic, though in cases when they were depicted, Monier-Williams wanted to accentuate their tumbledown minimalism: “[s]ome are represented by rudely carved images, others by simple symbols, and others are remarkable

for preferring empty shrines and the absence of all visible representations” (*Ibid.*). Monier-Williams came upon his first shrine to a Gujarati *mātā*—namely Khoḍīyār—in 1875, and was immediately struck by the quaintness of the confines:

Her shrine when I visited it was of a very rough and ready character, little better than a mere mud shed, open to all the winds of heaven and accessible to all comers—even to unbelievers like myself, quite as much as her faithful votaries. Her image too was by no means attractive in its contour and accompaniments. It was carved in the rudest manner, and might have done duty for an African fetish (1883, 226).

Identifying as Christian and therefore an “unbeliever,” Monier-Williams was situating himself above what he viewed to be the roughshod “superstition” of the colonized. This positionality allowed him the opportunity to indulge in some transcultural racism, disparagingly linking the *mātā* to African fetishism. He seems almost as amused by the “mere mud shed” as he is off-put by the goddess it houses. Like Forbes, he too suspected the *mātā*’s communicants of acquisitive motives. He went on to write of finding “no offerings near her image; if any had been placed there before my arrival they had disappeared. Most probably the few that had been offered had been already appropriated by the village priest, who was nowhere to be seen” (*Ibid.*). Here, absence of evidence is evidence of thievery.

Monier-Williams also directed his attention toward the interconnections between *mātās*, possession, and disease. He wrote: “[n]ot a few [*mātās*] are worshipped either as causing or protecting from demoniacal possession as a form of bodily disease. The offering of goats’ blood to some of these Mothers is supposed to be very effectual” (1883, 227). The wording here is telling: *mātās* can protect from demon possession, but they can also *cause* it, making them hardly better than the demons, in effect. They too embody diseases, but in a dual role, both protecting against and causing specific ailments. Monier-Williams followed up with a narrative conveying as much, apparently from the same locale:

A story is told of a Hindu doctor who cured a whole village of an outbreak of virulent influenza, attributed to the malignant influences of an angry goddess, by simply assembling the inhabitants, muttering some cabalistic texts, and solemnly letting loose a pair of scape-goats into a neighbouring wood as an offering to the offended deity (1883, 227).

This marks the goddess as the primary cause of the disease. Moreover, the image of the “cabalistic” muttering in service of a capricious female divinity further entrenched the *mātās*

within the categories of superstitious fetishism and demonology. Monier-Williams connected sickness and healing specifically to his original encounter with the village goddess Khoḍīyār and, in doing so, took the opportunity to provide an evocative description of animal sacrifice—a hallmark of the “*bhuvā* scene”—so that he could juxtapose the Gujarati village remedy with modern Western medicine:

[A]n outbreak of sickness in the village was attributed entirely to a little temporary slackness in supplying [Khoḍīyār] with her daily nutriment. Extraordinary offerings, therefore—some of them accompanied by the killing of animals and pouring out of blood—had to be made till the disease had abated. When no sickness remained it was believed that the Mother’s anger was appeased [...] Had any native of the district who happened to have been educated at the Bombay Presidency College suggested a little attention to sanitary rules as a more effective remedy against cholera or small-pox, he would have been laughed to scorn by his fellow-villagers (1883, 226-227).

The violent rites that sustain the goddess, then, underscored for Monier-Williams and his reader the incorrigibly superstitious and unhygienic nature of village Hinduism in Gujarat and the need for a Western medical alternative. In imagining the district “native” in the hypothetical role of Bombay Presidency College pupil, Monier-Williams demarcated the idealized endpoint for the colonized—a Western education, scientific and sanitary. His brief vignette on village goddesses was, at root, an affirmation of his assumption of the civilizing potential of the colonial project in Gujarat.

British administrator James McNabb Campbell would cast Gujarati goddesses in a similar light in his 1885 volume, *Notes on the Spirit Basis of Belief and Custom*, a manuscript that circulated unfinished in typeset rough draft format.⁹⁴ The contents are by no means limited to Gujarat or even to India but rather focus on a variety of cultural backgrounds. Vast though their scope may be, the materials are united by the tone of revulsion Campbell took toward them. Indeed, the author seemed generally dismayed by Hindu goddess worship. Referring to Navarātri, for instance, Campbell waxed Victorian: “[f]or the most part, women are worshipped by the *Shāktas* either on the eighth or some other day between the first and eighth of the month of *A’shvin* (October-November). The details of the worship are so obscene that they cannot be

⁹⁴ James McNabb Campbell (1846–1903) was a Scottish-born administrator with the Indian Civil Service in Bombay. His ethnographic work would eventually win him an editorship with the massive *Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency*, with which we will concern ourselves momentarily.

given here” (1885, 303). One can anticipate, then, Campbell’s attitude toward Gujarati *mātās*. On this subject he was less hesitant to spare details, particularly in his emphasis on sacrifice. Campbell treated the sacrifice at the culmination of Navarātri, presumably in relation to Khoḍiyār or other pastoralist goddesses, as follows: “[i]n the north of Gujarāt on the *Dasara* holiday among the Chārāns, women meet together, worship a buffalo, and then kill it, one of the women drinking the blood” (1885, 284). Even the more pacific *mātā* rituals were hypothesized as having had gory roots. Campbell speculated: “[a]s the respect for animal life increased, paste or paper images and fruits, flower, and red paints took the place of the live victims” (1885, 353). He then went on to provide the example of Gujarāt Shrāvaks who “before a wedding lay a razor of wheat flour or of sugar before the goddess. This is probably a survival of some old blood-offering” (*Ibid.*). While Campbell may have ascertained an early sweetening of the goddess or ritual movement toward the *sāttvik* not unlike that encompassed in Sanskritization or Vaiṣṇavization, he uses it here to speak to the violence he presumed to be fundamental to primordial *mātā* religion.

In the same way that Forbes and Monier-Williams characterized Gujarati goddesses as intruding entities, Campbell also described them much like ghosts or *bhūts*, an idea that would resurface in numerous Orientalist works to follow. For instance, Campbell traced the origin of some female divinities in western India to the veneration of deceased women:

Women who are uneasy for any reason, who have sacrificed themselves with the object of bullying the person who forced them to die, women who leave their husband behind, or the child behind, or who die in pregnancy—all these women seem to have been turned into house goddesses or *kul devtās* [*kuldevīs*], and worshipped; and the fact that most of the *kul devtās* or household deities of the high caste Hindus in Western India were females, may be taken as strengthening this supposition (1885, 310).

Thus, the family goddess—a role often filled by *mātās*—is, as Campbell would have it, a discontented woman who, after a violent death, becomes a sort of deified ghost. While this perspective is reflective of some emic imaginings of certain female spirits and divinities (e.g., Bahucarā and Khoḍiyār, as we will see in Chapter Three), it was just as likely an extension of the Judeo-Christian inflected “demonology”—or literal demonization—of the *mātās* already put forward by Forbes and Monier-Williams. Such a reading emphasizes the fearsome, macabre origins of the *mātās*, their nature reduced to or conflated with that of female visitants. It was, in

fact, through thinking about deceased Charan girls in Saurashtra that Campbell went on to develop this malignant interpretation further:

Of the primitive customs which remain in Káthiáwár [Saurashtra] few are more noteworthy than the number of Cháran women who are worshipped as goddesses or mothers. The Cháran women, who are worshipped, seem to have been the spirits of Cháran women who were forced to kill themselves to avoid their being plundered and dishonoured by Kolis and other freebooters. These women after death were supposed to cherish a hatred against their murderers, and, moreover, it was believed that, if they were revered and pleased with offerings, they would be too glad to help the villagers against the attacks of their old enemies. So the villagers called them *mátās* or mothers, worshipped them in the houses, and put a stone for them at the village gate as a guardian or *pália* to keep off attacks [...] All these *mátās* or mothers, either as house deities, village deities, or local deities is more strong in Gujarat than in any other part of the Bombay Presidency (1885, 310-311).

This ghost-as-goddess phenomenon, then, is in some ways characteristically Gujarati. As per this assessment of the “primitive customs” of the locals, Gujarati *mātās* are angry, vengeful, and violent. Seeking to appease these brutal ghosts-cum-goddesses, their worshippers answer them in kind, or so goes the imagining of Campbell.

After the above passage in *Notes on the Spirit Basis of Belief and Custom*, Campbell proceeded to reiterate Monier-Williams’ *Religious Life and Thought in India* with a degree of overlap that is nothing short of plagiaristic. Campbell appropriated virtually word-for-word Monier-Williams’ speculations about how Gujaratis *mātās* are, to Brahmin sensibilities, variations of Kālī, and then skipped ahead to the previously cited discussion of Khoḍīyār and the story of the Hindu doctor (1885, 311). Campbell even repeated verbatim Monier-William’s passage about the cabalistic “muttering.” This baldly exemplifies the citationary historiography that proliferated in Orientalist scholarship, where a single, tenuous observation could appear increasingly truthful with each restatement or outright duplication. Keeping with the spirit of Monier-Williams, if not the letter-for-letter replication, Campbell was also preoccupied with the sheer multiplicity of goddesses and gods that could be found in the Bombay Presidency. In a rhetorical move that would appear with greater frequency in Campbell’s later projects (such as the *Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency*), he provided within the text an italicized list of theonyms of village deities, including key *mātās* such as Ambā, Śītalā, and Cāmuṇḍā (1885, 312). In its apparent thoroughgoingness, the list might be thought of as visually aiding the reader

in contemplating the extent of heathen polytheism through sheer volume of text. Surely, these modes of repetition and restatement seek to establish the goddess as not only the product of the ignoble superstition of the colonized, but also as ineradicably non-monotheistic and, hence, condemnable.

It was Campbell who oversaw the publication of the massive *Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency* (1901), which dedicated considerable attention to the religion of the region in which Gujarat was included before it achieved independent statehood in 1960. Most notable is Volume IX, part 1 of this series, a 700-page tome on Hindus in Gujarat that was compiled by Bhimbai Kirparam, Talukdari Settlement Officer and Head Accountant in the Kaira treasury. Kirparam was an educated local well-situated in the colonial administration. The volume he assembled is a valuable repository of on-the-ground data from colonial-era villages in Gujarat, as well it should have been, for the gazetteers in general were conceived as reference handbooks for colonial administrators. In their capacity for summarizing entire regions in digestible form, gazetteers “give a new collector a comprehensive, and, at the same time, a distinct idea of the district which he has been sent to administer,” in the phrasing of William Hunter, Director General of Statistics to the Government of India (as quoted in Campbell 1896, vii). As such, gazetteers embodied a vital technology of colonial governance. In this spirit, Kirparam’s volume facilitated a summary understanding of Hinduism in Gujarat and provided no shortage of helpful information on *mātās* and their worshippers on the cusp of the twentieth century. It is in the *Gazetteer*, for instance, that we learn, quite crucially, about the shared aniconography of Gujarati village goddesses:

[A] stone marked with a redlead [lead tetroxide] cross or a heap of stones is the dwelling of the goddess Meladi, Shikotar, Yerai, Khodiyar, Devli, or Bhavani. A cross or sometimes a redlead trident is painted on the trunk of a *nim* or a *pipal* Indian fig tree, and a heap of stones is piled at its root. For fear of offending the spirit or the goddess, passers, especially women, add a stone or two to the heap, considering the place to be the dwelling of some spirit or of some goddess (1901, 363).

Enumerated among these goddesses with aniconic roots are prominent modern-day *mātās* including Melaḍī and Khoḍīyār, who seem to have originally been represented in minimalistic fashion by paint-smearred objects. We are also reminded here that these goddesses are capricious and readily affronted. Not surprisingly, by that token, they are given to violence. Stones, in particular, are linked with animal sacrifice, the recurrent Orientalist obsession: “[o]n special occasions *moha* or palm-juice liquor is poured on the stone, a cock or a goat is offered to it, and

all members of the family sit round the stone and dine” (1901, 363). Kirparam characterized a wide range of groups as none too discriminating with regard to choosing a stone for these rituals:

Vághris, Rabáris, Bharváds, Áhirs, Kolis, Bhils, Dublás, Dhánkás, and other wild tribes have not elaborate rites for making a stone fit to be the house of a guardian. With them any stone rubbed with redlead is an object of reverence, or rather with them the mere rubbing of a stone with redlead makes it fit to be the dwelling of a guardian spirit. The stones worshipped by these classes may be brought under two heads, the dwellings of gods and goddesses and the dwellings of the dead (1901, 363).

Here again we see the Orientalist’s penchant for the exhaustive list. In spite of the air of scientific detachment and thoroughness and the relatively nuanced differentiation between deities and ghosts in this passage, the *Gazetteer* author (under Campbell’s watch) still put forward *mātā* worship as part of a fetishism realized through acts as simple as rubbing red lead pigment on rock. In that sense, the *Gazetteer* helped perpetuate many of the same ideas about *mātā* worship that Campbell and other Orientalists had submitted in earlier treatments—namely, that it was inherently crude and indiscriminate.

Indeed, as per Campbell’s *Notes on the Spirit Belief and Custom*, Kirparam was eager to list goddesses and associate them with particular castes, in the process demonstrating the sheer plurality of divinities.⁹⁵ These *mātā*-heeding castes are, for the most part, non-Brahminic. While Kirparam established early on the prominence of female divinities for Brahmins, reporting that “[a]lmost every Bráhmanical Hindu Householder keeps his family gods [...] and a picture or metal image of Śakti, Bhaváni or Mátá, as the goddess or mother, typifying divine energy” (1901, xxxv), he subsequently qualified this statement. In the context of weddings, he observed in the *Gazetteer* that “though to some extent all Bráhmans worship mothers, since under any system of marriage their impulsiveness and their devotedness make women worshipful, a Bráhman will refer to the exclusive Mátá worship of the Bharváds and other un-Bráhmanic castes as part of a system alien to his own” (1901, 285). Brahmins, then, betray ambivalence

⁹⁵ For example, Kirparam explained in the *Gazetteer* that Rajputs, while mostly focusing on Viṣṇu, “worship all Hindu gods and goddesses and their house-shrines contain the images of Shiva, Vishnu, Ganapati, and of the tutelary goddess of the clan. The Jádejás worship the northern Ashápuri, the hope-fulfiller, whose principal shrine is in Kachh. The Jhálás enjoy a goddess named Ádya whose shrine is at Halvad. The Gohils worship the Khodiád [Khoḍīyār] Mátá whose chief shrine is at Rájapara near Sihor. The goddess of the Jethvas is Vindhyavásini whose original shrine is on the Nágmáta river close to Navánagar and whose chief temple is at Chháya near Porbandar. The Parmárs worship the goddess Mandavri whose temple is at Muli. Chavadas and Vághelás worship Chámunda” (Kirparam 1901, 136).

with respect to *mātā* worship due in large part to the goddess's strong link with lower castes and *tāmasik* practices.

Reporting on the marriage ceremony of the pastoralist Bharwad caste, Kirparam was able to further catalogue the caprice of the *mātā* and the raucous nature of her worship: "If one of the leading Bharváds is complimented on the orderliness of the [wedding] feast, he looks reverently upwards and with a quaver in his voice replies 'Any success is the favour of Mátá'" (1901, 276). To be certain, "the whole ceremony is under the special guidance of an easily-angered Mátá" (*Ibid.*), for she is considered present by way of the possession-like trance that takes hold of the host and the guests:

This explanation finds support in the strange dazed air of the Leader and his elder wife, an air of solemn of almost tearful responsibility, the anxiety and strain of the preparations acting on their minds with a result which both themselves and their friends take to be possession by Mátá. In the case of the other leading Bharvads their unsteadiness of gait and thickness of speech are perhaps due less to Mátá than to over-draughts of *ghi* helped in some cases by friendly nips of opium (1901, 276).

Keeping with colonial perspectives on such matters, Kirparam took the state to be illusory, attributable to the acute stress of the wedding event and the use of intoxicants. Spirit possession, alcohol, and drugs, then, go hand-in-hand with *mātā* worship. The same is the case with sacrifice. Still speaking of the Bharwad wedding, Kirparam reported how the transgender Pavaiyas with "huge ungainly forms" (1901, 277) serve as vessels of the Mātā—presumably Bahucarā—in taking on offerings of ghee on her behalf, since this "to a large extent appeases the Mátá's craving for brides and bridegrooms" (1901, 284). Apparently, there was a grislier valence underlying the wedding ritual—that is, its theoretical roots in human sacrifice—at least according to Kirparam (*Ibid.*). The author continued with the explanation as such:

With the mother thus partially appeased the sacrifice of a human bride and bridegroom at the beginning of the gathering has ceased to be urgent. Sufficient practical safety is secured by centring ill-luck on one couple and by branding one bride-groom on the brow, devoting him to Mátá, leaving it to the mother to choose her own time and place to claim her victim (1901, 284).

The grim sacrificial rite imagined to be primordially integral to the wedding, then, is circumvented. Nonetheless, in the colonial commentator's view, the Mātā's hunger remains insatiable, and has to be displaced onto another future victim.

Sacrifice to the *mātās* went beyond this symbolic or metaphorical sense, as colonial writers have made us well aware, and Kirparam elaborated these rites in detail on several occasions in the *Gazetteer*. Kirparam provided a general description of sacrifices made to the goddess as follows:

The animals offered are male-goats [sic] buffaloes and cocks. The particular animal to be sacrificed is determined by the nature of the vow, by the taste of the goddess, and by the opinion expressed by the holy man or *bhagat* while possessed by the goddess. The mode of making the offering is not uniform. [The animal's] forehead is marked with redlead, some *bel* leaves, red *karena* or oleander flowers, and a pinch of cleaned rice are laid on its head, a flower garland taken from the body of the goddess is put round its neck, some water or *moha* or palm-juice liquor is poured on its body, and white cloth is thrown over its back. It is fed on some preparation of wheat and *adad* and stands with its face turned to the east within a circle drawn by a mixture of *moha* liquor and palm-juice. Exorcists sing the praises of the goddess, play on musical instruments, and with loosened hair shake their body to and fro. If the animal moves out of the circle it is unsuited for an offering and is let loose; if it keeps within the circle the moment it shakes its head or body it is thrown on its side and its head is cut off with a single sword-stroke (Kirparam 1901, 406-407).

With the description of bodily spasms and the repeated references to liquor, we can readily identify in this passage the trademarks of the “*bhuvā* scene.” In another account from the *Gazetteer*, which involves members of the Vaghri (modern-day Devipujak) caste, the author dwelled upon the gory sacrificial offering of a sheep to Rakhwāl Mātā (“Watcher Mother”):

As the goddess stirs in them they wave their arms and toss their heads, sometimes standing [sic] sometimes sitting. They move in a circle without shouting or other noise, sometimes with a stiff jerkiness [sic] sometimes with a graceful flowing step [...] The sheep shakes its head violently, a sign that is accepted by the Mother. ‘Mátá ki Jay’ ‘May the Mother win’ shout the whole company of Vághris. A loud roll of the temple drum gives the signal for the sacrifice. The second of the managers steps forward, sickle in hand. He draws the sheep into open space a yard or two from the small shrine and with two cuts across the neck and some sawing of the throat severs the head from the trunk. He at once lays the bleeding head at the mouth of the Rakhwāl Mátā or Mother Watcher’s shrine. While the headless body struggles on the ground, the other master presses it, and as the blood gushes out, he catches the flow in his hollow hands and pours the blood over the round red-painted stone where lives the Devi (1901, 516-517).

As per previous colonial observers, the gruesome undertaking of the actual sacrifice was again closely tied to lower castes. Similarly, in the *Gazetteer*, the non-Brahminic nature of the sacrifices was emphasized, as in the following description from the Kacch region:

Most high caste Hindus do not sacrifice goats. When they want to offer a goat to their family goddess the animal, which is generally black, is taken to the temple and let loose, or its ears or the fleshy part which hangs from its neck are thrown into a fire lighted for the occasion. On the days sacred to their family goddess or to their dead ancestors, or during an epidemic blood offering Hindus propitiate the goddess and the spirits of dead ancestors with the flesh of a goat killed for the purpose. During an epidemic in some Bhil and Koli villages the main street is festooned with bits of goats' legs (1901, 377).

The preference for the black-coloured animal is likely due to the *tāmasik* or “dark” nature of the rite, which Kirparam encapsulated with the culminating imagery of goat limbs lining the roadways. Once again we see animal sacrifice used in celebration, propitiation, or else as a curative measure in the face of an epidemic, viewed as assuaging the anger of the goddess.⁹⁶

Later on, Kirparam outlined the outcomes sought from—as well as misfortunes averted by—these sorts of blood offerings for an extensive range of caste groups:

Blood offerings are made to goddesses by Áhirs, Bharváds, Bháts, Bhils, Bhois, Chárans, Dhánkás, Dhedás, Dhárálás, Dublás, Khavás, Khálpás, Káthis, Kolis, Ods, Rabáris, Rajputs, Rávaliás, Vághris, and sometimes by Pársis and Musalmáns. [...] Blood offerings are made even by high caste Hindus, sometimes at regular intervals on pain of incurring divine wrath and sometimes in fulfillment of a vow taken to avert or to cure family sickness or cattle plague or to secure the favour of some goddess. Blood offerings are also made for general good health and agricultural prosperity by villagers as a body or by some wealthy or respected villager. The offerings are made on the days or periods sacred to the goddess who is worshipped on the bright and dark fourteenth of Bhádarvo (September), on the dark fourteenth of A'so (October), and during the whole of the Navrátri or Nine Night festival, but chiefly on the bright eighth and the *Dasara* (Kirparam 1901, 406).

High castes, then, also partook in sacrifices, which were not, as it turns out, limited to lower castes and other non-elite groups. That said, Kirparam went on to explain that these upper-caste

⁹⁶ Elsewhere in the *Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency*, this anger was referenced explicitly with regard to sacrifices involving outbreaks of disease. Kirparam explained that these “epidemics are believed to be caused by a goddess or Mátá, that is mother, whose wrath requires to be appeased by offerings” (Kirparam 1901, 413). This is followed by a description of a ritual more common among lower castes by which the plague is transferred into a goat and then processed beyond the outer limits of the infected village (1901, 413-415). This sometimes culminates in the sacrifice of a goat or chicken (1901, 415).

groups employed less violent means to conciliate the goddess. In cases of epidemics, for instance, “high and middle-class Hindus” favour the “*shānti*” or “quieting rite” to appease the *mātā* who brought the disease (1901, 413). This rite did not necessarily involve sacrifice: “[w]hen no animals are sacrificed, the leader pours into the fire a few drops of blood drawn from the ear of a goat, or cuts with a sword a pumpkin rubbed with redlead and laid near a wet flour saucer with a wick burning at each of its four sides” (1901, 414). For ascendant groups, then, bloodletting has either been reduced to a very minor incision, or else eliminated entirely through symbolic substitutions.

The goddesses who prefer *tāmasik* offerings were also listed comprehensively in the *Gazetteer*. According to Kirparam, “[t]he goddesses to whom blood offerings are made are Amba, Avad, Bahuchara, Bhavāni, Bhut, Chāmunda, Chond, Devli Māta, Gel, Govāldevi, Jhāmpdi, Jogni, Kāli, Khubad, Khodiyār, Kumāni Māta, Matri, Meladi, Pādardevi, Posri, Radhli, Shikotari, Verāi, and Visot” (1901, 406). Thus, a significant number of goddesses and female spirits were recognized in the *Gazetteer* as accepting sacrifices. These include all the *mātās* that form the foci of the present study, with the exception of Haḍakṣā/Haḍkāi Mā. Haḍkāi’s absence from this list is noteworthy, as it supports her devotees’ present-day claims that the goddess never took sacrifices, which we will explore in Chapter Six.

Included in the *Gazetteer* were other comparable scenes of frenzied, ritualized killing of animals for the benefit of the goddess, adding further unsavoury connotations. Consider this description of a ritual undertaken by the tribal Bhils in the case of drought:

Only when the rains hold off for long and threaten scarcity, Bhil women go to the temple of the village goddess with bows and arrows, and there they abuse the goddess, smear her idol with cowdung, and sing [sic] dance and jump as if preparing to commit a dacoity or *darora* by stealing the buffalo from the herd grazing in the neighbouring village. Generally when women come in this way to steal a buffalo the cowherd in charge of the cattle offers no resistance. The buffalo is led in triumph to the shrine of the goddess and killed with clubs and sticks. Round the dead animal the women dance for a long time and then distribute the food among themselves. The Bhils say that the women perform this buffalo-killing rite to shame the gods into pity and to convince them how badly off they must be when women have to take up arms (Kirparam 1901, 356).

Thus, the bludgeoning to death of the buffalo has been not only framed in the idiom of idolatry to the goddess but has also been deemed tantamount to the nefarious activities of dacoits, a broad

term used to refer to a class of organized bandits and murderers in North India.⁹⁷

Correspondingly, the Bhil women “steal” the buffalo and then, in some sense, murder it, at least to the colonial eye.

In the *Gazetteer*, Kirparam carried on Campbell’s earlier tendency to conflate *mātās* with spirits or ghosts. In providing lists of both male and female “outside spirits,” Kirparam included among the latter “Chudel, Jhāmpdi, Jogni, Meladi, Pari, Shikotari, Vantri, and Visot. Of these female spirits Jhāmpdi, Meladi, and Shikotari are the favourite goddesses of most low caste Hindus who avert their evil influence by offerings” (1901, 417). Here again it should be noted that the overlap between ghosts and goddesses does have discernible emic provenance, especially for the female entities listed above. The terms *cudēl* and Jhāmpḍī and even Jogaṇī are perennial Gujarati designations for a ghost, though Jogaṇī has a variety of additional valences that will be taken up in Chapter Five. Meanwhile, figures such as Melaḍī and Śikotar alongside Jhāmpḍī, set apart as they are in the above passage, would appear to bridge the gap between ghost and goddess. All told, the designation of ghost or goddess seems to depend largely on the perspective of whomever is doing the defining. The colonial perspective favoured the “ghost” interpretation, as key British sources including the *Gazetteer* were quick to portray the abovementioned entities in an unfavourable light. To be sure, they were thought to wield an “evil influence”; moreover:

All these spirits live on phlegm, food-leavings, human excrement, urine, and human entrails and brains. Their favorite haunts are empty and tumbledown houses, cesspools, burning grounds, *pipal* or *bābul* trees, wells, and other places for drawing water, the crossing of four roads, the roofs and thresholds of houses, and hills. They enter the bodies of those who annoy them by visiting their haunts with their hair hanging loose; by committing a nuisance in or otherwise defiling their abodes; by uprooting or otherwise destroying a *pipal* tree; by swearing falsely in their name; by leaping over a circle within which offerings are laid for them at the crossing of four roads, and by working with an exorcist for their discomfort or ruin (Kirparam 1901, 417).

These “outside spirits” then, as a group, favour macabre haunts and, like Forbes’ “filthy night birds,” subsist on offal, including scatological matter. They also have a proclivity for possession.

⁹⁷ “Dacoit” is a term used for “bandit” in a number of Indian languages. Dacoits occasioned intense scrutiny from colonial administrators, and so the East India Company established the Thuggee and Dacoity Department in 1830 as well as the Thuggee and Dacoity Suppression Acts, 1836–1848, to monitor and suppress the activities of such groups. For more on Dacoits, see Suranjan Das (2007).

In view of that, these spirits, among which certain widely-worshipped *mātās* such as Melaḍī and Śikotar were included, were flagged as a subject of aversion and even abhorrence for the compilers of the *Gazetteer* and their audience of administrators. And while the above description follows the emic connotation of spirits classified as Jhāmpḍī or, to a lesser extent, *cuḍels*, it has overdetermined Melaḍī and Śikotar as being minor, malevolent entities.⁹⁸

Interspersed within the *Gazetteer*'s discussion of goddesses and female spirits was the almost requisite treatment of possession and exorcism, or “spirit-scaring” as the colonial cataloguers would frame the latter. Female divinities were once again implicated in the processes of both possessing and exorcizing. According to the *Gazetteer*, times most significant to the goddess were also peak intervals for possession:

The days most favourable for spirits entering human bodies are the Navrátri festival which lasts for nine days in October, the dark fourteenth of *A'so* (October), and all Tuesdays and Sundays; the hours of the day when they are most likely to enter are sunset and midnight. For fear of spirit attacks some parents do not take out handsome children during the Navrátri holidays as this is the busy season of the Vághri and Bhoi exorcists (Kirparam 1901, 417).

Despite their proclivity for possessions during festivals such as Navarātri, *mātās* could also aid in casting out intruding entities. Alongside various ritual apparatuses including spoken “charms,” which may have a folk tantric significance, *mātās* were said to be of great assistance to *bhuvās*, for instance:

The low caste Hindu exorcist is believed to be the favourite of one of the local goddesses, Bahucharáji, Khodiyár, Ghadachi, Shikotar, or Meladi in whose honour he keeps an altar furnished in his house. Before he ventures on a spirit-scaring performance he consults his patron goddess by throwing dice or by counting grain in front of her altar. Among Bhils anyone who has learnt to repeat certain charms can become an exorcist (Kirparam 1901, 418).

⁹⁸ *Cuḍels* are generally held to be a less threatening subclass of *jhāmpḍīs*, at least in present-day imaginings, as they are usually thought to be the ghosts of women who died young, recently married, and/or without children. Valmiki, for instance, believe that the *cuḍel* has more potential to do good on account of being younger and stronger (Franco et al. 2004, 269). Indeed, the *cuḍel* has been elevated to the status of a Great Goddess at certain sites, such as Kungher in Patan, where she is worshipped by a middle-class and even elite crowd as Cuḍel Mātā (see Dinnell 2015). Alongside the youthful *cuḍels* in some reckonings are the *śikotars*, which, as a category, generally refers to women over 40 at the time of death. While this may mark a *śikotar* negatively, the present-day Śikotar Mātā is nonetheless replete with positive aspects much like other *mātās* dealt with in this study.

True to their liminal identity as ghost and goddess, Melaḍī and Śikotar, among other *mātās*, were characterized in the *Gazetteer* as both possessing entities and agents of exorcism. In this latter capacity, they were enumerated along with what seem to have been, at this point in history, more patently goddess-like *mātās* such as Bahucarā and Khoḍīyār.

Throughout the *Gazetteer*, Kirparam provided several lengthy depictions of “spirit-scaring,” which involves both the *bhuvā* and their client entering into possession-like trances. In one such account, the *bhuvā* went with a Devipujak assistant in tow to the home of a person ailing with the occupying spirit, setting up assorted ritual paraphernalia (Kirparam 1901, 421). Under the influence of alcohol and palm juice, the *bhuvā* sang “in a loud voice songs composed in honour of his patron goddess” while the Devipujak drummed a bell-metal plate with a wooden roller (*Ibid.*). The alcohol and the drumming put the *bhuvā* into an intense, entranced state:

When much excited the exorcist still sitting opposite the sick man begins to shake his body to and fro to produce the like effect on the sick man. The exorcist continues to wave his body to and fro till the desired effect, which is sometimes long of coming, is produced. Sometimes a whole night passes without any result; and as the night is best time for spirit-scaring the same process has to be repeated on the next night (1901, 421).

Describing the procedures for more serious cases, Kirparam revisited the typical “*bhuvā* scene” that so thoroughly fascinated colonial observers:

To impress the sick man with his superhuman power the exorcist beats his own back with an iron chain. Sometimes he prepares a torch, dips it in oil, lights it, sucks it while burning, and allows a few drops of burning oil to fall on his hand. Sometimes, especially among Bhils, an old broomstick dipped in oil is lighted and is held so near the sick man that a mouthful of water poured over the broomstick throws out a number of sparks which burn the uncovered parts of the sick man’s body. When the sick man is thus teased and annoyed he begins to speak with an accompaniment of spirit-like nods (1901, 422).

Acting as such, the *bhuvā* channeled power derived from his patron goddess, in the name of whom he self-flagellated and even burned both himself and his client. After these possession-like rites, the occupying spirit was eventually trapped in a bottle or, alternatively, in a lemon, and buried outside the village limits. Of the spirit’s capture, Kirparam wrote:

Sometimes the exorcist orders the spirit to pass into a lemon which the exorcist, by a horse-hair fastened to a stick, makes to hop about the room. When the sick man sees the lemon moving he leaves off trembling, being satisfied that the spirit has left his body and gone into the lemon. The

exorcist makes the lemon turn out of the house by the eastern door, and whenever it goes off the road puts it right with his stick (1901, 422).

In this way, the description of the exorcism, caused and/or cured by a female spirit or *mātā*, culminates in the colonial commentator boiling the undertaking down to a deft act of chicanery. This is a fairly foreseeable telos, bearing in mind the efforts taken by Kirparam, his editor James McNabb Campbell, and other colonial commentators before them to reduce all the intensive physical and ritual interactions involved in matters of *mātās* and *bhuvās* to intoxication, trickery, and financial opportunism.

By 1914, with the publication of the first monograph in the multivolume series, *Folklore Notes*, deception, intemperance, and mammon had become the hallmarks of *mātā* worship. The monograph is attributed to Reginald Edward (R.E.) Enthoven (1869-1952), who was not so much the author but rather the arranger of the project, as the various volumes in the series were constructed from materials originally compiled by the British Indologist Arthur Mason Tippetts Jackson (1866-1909) of the Indian Civil Service, who carried out ethnographies in various parts of India. Judging by the footnotes in this first volume, which concerns itself with Gujarat, Jackson's data was, in large part, culled from conversations he had with schoolmasters of various villages and towns. After Jackson's premature death, Enthoven assembled his various ethnographic findings into publishable form. Enthoven, an administrator in the Indian Civil Service, modelled the Gujarat volume of *Folklore Notes* in the Orientalist mould, reiterating many of the standard fixations of colonial observers vis-à-vis village religion in the region.

From the very first paragraph *mātās* were shown to be intricately bound up with malicious forces:

The latent dread of receiving injuries from these evil spirits results in the worship by the low-class people of a number of *devas* and *mātās*, as they are called. The poor villager, surrounded on all sides by hosts of hovering spirits, ready to take offence, or even to possess him, on the smallest pretext, requires some tangible protector to save him from such malign influences. He sets up and enshrines the spirit that he believes to have been beneficent to him, and so deserving of worship, and makes vows in its honour, often becoming himself the officiating priest ([1914] 1989, 1).

The "low-class" religiosity of *mātās* and evil spirits is constituted, none too subtly, by a deep-seated terror and superstition that inheres within the colonized, especially the lower sectors thereof. The *mātās* themselves are akin to the evil entities, as all are apparently bound up in the

same cluttered spirit-scape, their positive or negative influences mainly determined from the experiences of individual villagers. In an interpretation that resonates with that of Campbell before him, Enthoven collectively portrayed the *mātās* as a species of ghosts who can possess or do even worse: “*Mātās* and *Shankhinis* [“witches”] also haunt wells, springs, and tanks and either drown, or enter the persons of those who go near their resorts” ([1914] 1989, 40). In keeping with the colonial penchant for lists, Enthoven provided a roll-call of 46 types of evil spirits and “witches,” naturally including Jogaṇī and Melaḍī ([1914] 1989, 115). Melaḍī in particular was considered here to be, like a Jhāmpḍī, a living *ḍākaṇ* or “witch” who is capable of causing illness or death by way of the evil eye (*Ibid.*). Later on, in a discussion of local methods for vanquishing malevolent entities, *mātās* such as Melaḍī were shown to be even more explicitly nefarious. Here Enthoven wrote that “[s]ilence and secrecy are also essential in the ceremonies which are performed for subjugating such *evil spirits as Meldi and Shikotar and Mātās*” ([1914] 1989, 155; emphasis mine). By this point, it would seem that *mātās* were, as a whole, understood to be wicked by colonial commentators such as Jackson and Enthoven, if not just by the schoolmasters from whom they received the information they published.

Sticking closely to precedent, Enthoven also recapitulated the “*bhuvā* scene” in the course of describing *tāvo*, the act of removing flatbreads from boiling oil by hand:

Meanwhile *bhuvas*, believed to be interpreters of the wills of evil spirits, undergo self-torture, with the firm conviction that the spirits have entered their persons. Sometimes they lash themselves with iron chains or cotton braided scourges. At times a *bhuva* places a pan-full of sweet oil over a fire till it boils. He then fries cakes in it, and takes them out with his unprotected hands, sprinkling the boiling oil over his hair ([1914] 1989, 3).

Here again we see how self-flagellation and the risk of burns, in this case involving bodily contact with boiling oil, enthralled the colonial commentator visualizing the ritual. Further on, *bhuvās* and *mātās* were once again linked to rites of illness and disease, including those befalling animals. Enthoven described how, when other measures fail to curb a number of livestock diseases ranging from hoof irritations to stomach pain, consultation is sought with a goddess named “Mungi Mātā,” or “mute mother” (from the Gujarati *mūṃgī*, meaning “mute woman”). This involved bringing in *bhuvās* from pastoralist castes: “[f]or this purpose the *bhuvās* of the Mātā, who are Bharvāds, are invited to the stalls of the affected cattle, where they recite magic incantations amidst tumultuous shouts and yells” ([1914] 1989, 70). These kinds of ritual

ulations and other comparable performances afforded the *bhuvā* social cachet, as they showcased his ability to interface with the goddess. Enthoven explained as follows:

The *bhuva* holds a high position in the society of his caste-fellows. He believes himself to be possessed by the *devi* or *mātā* whose attendant he is, and declares, while possessed by her, the will of the *mātā*, replying for her to such questions as may be put to him. The *devis* are supposed to appear in specially favoured *bhuvās* and to endow them with prophetic powers ([1914] 1989, 3-4).

That being said, Enthoven qualified the *bhuvā*'s eminence by noting that "[t]he respect which a *bhuvā* commands in this way is sometimes increased by the performance of such tricks as his putting lighted torches into his mouth, placing his hand in boiling oil [*tāvo*], and similar performances" ([1914] 1989, 84). Yet again, the *bhuvā*'s ritual activities get reduced to sleight-of-hand and, as could be expected, Enthoven seems unconvinced by their "performance." To this effect he wrote: "[o]ne good qualification for becoming a *bhuvā* is to possess the habit of throwing one's self into convulsive fits followed by a state of trance, especially on hearing the beating of a *dānklān* (drum). At such a time the *mātā* or *devi* is supposed to possess the person of the *bhuvā* and to speak out her wishes on being questioned" ([1914] 1989, 84). For Enthoven, all of these theatrics were inevitably profit-driven. He did, however, explain somewhat patronizingly that not all *bhuvās* are corrupt:

But although there may be some *bhuvās* who profit by imposing upon the credulity of the villagers, there are many *bhuvās* who do not work with the expectation of any reward, and are only actuated by benevolent motives. Many of them honestly believe that at the time when they are thrown into a state of trance, the *mātās* or deities actually enter their bodies and speak their wishes through them as a medium ([1914] 1989, 84).

Ultimately, Enthoven allowed himself a charitable tone toward the *bhuvās* and their followers, the customs of whom, at least according to his colonial assessment, were not wholly misguided.

And again, following in the footsteps of colonial commentators who wrote about Gujarati *mātās* before him, Enthoven included several accounts of animal sacrifice. He furnished the following description of a ritual appeasing Mahāmāri Devī, a cholera goddess of the outcaste Valmikis, formerly known as Bhangis:

The *bhuvās* go around playing upon the harsh, unpleasant *danklan*. A goat is then taken to the temple of the *Mātā*, and the *bhuvās*, after cutting out its tongue, dip their hands in its blood and strike them against the doors of the temple. The goat is then killed and Similar [sic] bloodmarks are made upon

every door in the village as well as on the village-gates, where an iron nail is driven into the ground with an incantation. A lime is then cut, and an oblation is offered to the Mātā. Such a process is believed to stop the progress of the epidemic ([1914] 1989, 75).

This evocative imagery effectively exoticizes the Mātā and her rituals. To the colonial gaze, then, the Mātā impresses herself once again as a bloodthirsty visitant who is, at best, capricious in her capacity to heal.

Taking up Enthoven's Gujarat volume, Svati Joshi has agreed, detecting that the monograph, "in spite of sharing the source material of more official British accounts, falls clearly within the nineteenth-century Western studies of folklore as it sets out to record the so-called bizarre observances and rituals of the so-called irrational and superstitious, poor, illiterate village people who worship minor deities, as opposed to the higher deities of the *Shastras* and *Puranas*" (2009, 361). I think Joshi's assessment can also be extended to the earlier colonial treatments of Gujarati goddess worship we have read, as can her assertion that Enthoven's work puts forth little effort to situate these practices and beliefs "in the context of actual social relations between people" (*Ibid.*). As such, these customs are "dehistoricized and desecularized and transformed into rigid, eccentric religious practices" (*Ibid.*).

This synthesizes one lasting consequence of these colonial assessments of Gujarati *mātā* traditions that endures among some of Gujarat's elites today—and with good cause, as many of these colonial assessments were often constructed out of information gleaned uncritically from educated elites of the past. What we are left with from these colonial accounts is an imagining of a vast polytheistic pantheon of female divinities that are part goddess and part ghost—perhaps even part demon. They are indelibly linked to bloody sacrifices, demonic possession, and the putative legerdemain of the *bhuvās* who conjure a relationship with them in the interest of profit. Through the mid-nineteenth to early twentieth centuries, these elements picked up a citationary momentum in the scholarship of British colonialists and Orientalists. As a result, the Gujarati *mātās*, as an apparent source of horror for the colonized, became a source of considerable repugnance for the colonizers as well. In effect, they embodied the most dangerous, untamed elements of Gujarati religion and custom and, as such, provided another avenue of justification for sustained colonial intervention in the region.

Missionaries and Mātās

Christianity has had a presence in Gujarat since the fourteenth century with the arrival of Nestorian Christians at Broach, though there was little in the way of sustained missionary activity in the area until the arrival of the French Capuchin fathers in the mid-seventeenth century (Boyd 1981, 11).⁹⁹ It was not until the nineteenth century that Protestantism made serious inroads in Gujarat.¹⁰⁰ The London Missionary Society (LMS) was established in Surat in September 1815 with the arrival of English missionary Rev. James Skinner, who subsequently opened up its mission press in 1820 (1981, 30-31). One of the LMS's more successful endeavours was the Mahikantha Mission based in northeast Gujarat.¹⁰¹ In Ahmedabad, the first missionary organization to set up shop was the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG) in 1830 (1981, 33). It was the Irish Presbyterian (IP) Mission, representatives of which first landed at the port of Gogha in 1841, that proved to be the most influential of the early Christian proselytizing organizations (1981, 36). With the respective withdrawals of the SPG and the LMS from Gujarat in 1851 and 1860, the IP Mission became the sole missionary organization in Gujarat, a privilege it would enjoy for over a decade to follow (Boyd 1981, 47).

From the very beginning, colonial-period Protestant missionaries from each of the various missions were struck by what they deemed to be the unbridled idolatry of the Gujarati populace. Rev. William Clarkson, an LMS missionary originally based in Surat and the eventual founding force behind the Mahikantha Mission, reported that Gujaratis luxuriated in “public idolatrous festivals” and that “the people of Surat were a ‘wicked and adulterous generation’” (1850, 4), apparently repeating the received opinion of missionaries preceding him. By Clarkson's estimation, the tent in which he was preaching was enough to stir local Hindus into an idolatrous thrall and hold them there, such that he had to remind his would-be converts it was not the tent itself that should be worshipped.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ For more on Catholicism in Gujarat, see Carlos Suria's *History of the Catholic Church in Gujarat* (1990).

¹⁰⁰ For more on the history of Protestantism in Gujarat, see Robin Boyd's *Church History of Gujarat* (1981).

¹⁰¹ The Mahikantha Mission developed as a result of Clarkson's intensive missionary work on the banks of the Mahi river in the 1840s (Boyd 1981, 42-43). Boyd has referred to this as a “turning point” in the history of Christianity in Gujarat, as the religion gained a robust following in the Mahikantha region (1981, 42).

¹⁰² On this development, Clarkson wrote: “the appearance of the tent itself was to them marvellous. Often has that tent proved the expressive text of my discourse. I have said, – ‘You see this tent and all its several parts arranged together. You do not come to worship the tent, or offer prayers to it; but you come to converse with and hear *me*, the inmate of the tent. Now this universe is like a tent which the Lord has pitched: do not then worship it, but that God of wisdom and power by whom it was created’” (1850, 24-25).

The *mātās* are often mentioned in analogous discussions of idolatry and heathenism in the extant mission reports and personal documents from missionaries involved with the IP, Mahikantha Mission, and other organizations operating in Gujarat. Indeed, the missionary materials are reminiscent of colonial observations in their fixation upon the apparent excesses carried out in the name of the goddess, though they are far more theologically charged. In these writings, the village goddess often serves as a powerful signifier of the idolatry, demonolatry, and heathenism that missionaries sought to remedy in rural and lower caste Gujarati religious practice. In this way, the goddess helped to motivate and justify not only foreign intervention but also missionary efforts encouraging conversion of the Gujarati populace to Christianity.

Very early on, Christian missionaries were well aware of—and somewhat astounded by—the popularity of Gujarati *mātās*. In the *Fourth Report of the Mahi Kantha Mission* of 1852, a document likely steered by Rev. Clarkson, a dispatch from the town of Bahluj painted a disreputable picture of the goddess.¹⁰³ The report remarked upon the Mātā's appeals not only within the Hindu community but also beyond it:

The Mussulmans who form a considerable portion of the population here, are more degraded than any I have ever seen. They were with Hindus, listening to me, when one of them spoke in favour of Mátá the popular goddess. Surprized at such a defence from a Mussulman, I pursued the inquiry and found that the class generally were worshippers of the goddess, offering sacrifices of goats to it, and making vows as the Hindus. They were evidently ashamed of the fact, which they were forced directly and indirectly to acknowledge. What a melancholy view of the downward tendency of human nature! The Mussulman is always, night and day, muttering that there is none but one God, and yet with this truth on their lips, were these people belying their own faith by invocations to a Hindu goddess, or rather female *demon*, for the Mátá of Gujarat is undoubtedly a Bhúttá, and as such, her worshippers perform the ceremony called *dhún*, and utter pythonic oracles, under her inspiration. The people here had never heard the truth before. They came freely to hear us, but they were greatly inclined to contend against what we said. Mussulmans and Hindus mutually helped each other, in defence of monstrous lies (1852, 14-15; italics in original).

From the perspective of this mid-nineteenth century missionary, then, the *mātās* were “undoubtedly” demons or ghosts (*bhūts*, or “Bhúttá,” as per the passage), making explicit a

¹⁰³ The missionaries listed on the title page of the report are Rev. William Clarkson, as well as Rev. Jos. Taylor and Rev. A. Corbold. Also credited are persons by the names of Gungaram and Desai, so-called “native teachers” (1852, 3).

persistent subtext that would be reiterated in future missionary publications, not to mention colonial gazetteers, for decades to come.¹⁰⁴ Presaging Forbe's *Ras Mala* footnote published in 1856, Clarkson et al. also made the connection between spirit possession—described here as “*dhūn*,” from the Gujarati *dhūṇvum*, a verb meaning “to be possessed”—and the “pythonic oracle” from the Christian Bible verse (Acts 16:16). Not only does this malevolent *Mātā* necessitate blood sacrifice, but she has also won over Muslims, a development that proved interminably confounding for the Christian missionary observers. For the missionaries, then, the *mātās* encapsulated the violent folly and demonolatry of not just a debased Oriental religion but also a declining Abrahamic rival as well. The commentator projected shame onto the *Mātā*-worshipping Muslims for having fecklessly followed this “downward tendency of human nature” toward idolatry. The fact that Muslims, whom the missionaries apparently held to an elevated standard vis-à-vis iconoclasm, had lapsed into worshipping *mātās* further underscored the idolatrousness the demonic goddess was wont to enable. By the Christian missionary standard, the idolatry she personified had brought two variations of non-believers into league with one another.

The excerpt above also shows how missionaries made it their goal to reorient the “heathen,” whether Hindu or Muslim, toward “truth” and in the process relieve them of the “monstrous lies” personified by demonic deities such as the *mātās*. In fact, the absence of *mātā*-related accoutrements in any particular area could serve as something of a gauge for the success of a mission, at least in the estimation of the authors of *The Report of the Irish Presbyterian Mission in Gujarat and Kattiawar for 1885*. Writing of the situation in Wallacepur, a Christian settlement in Gogo (Ghogha) on the Cambay Gulf, Reverend R. Boyd explained that “for at least a mile, in every direction from the village, there is not a red-painted stone, or idol of any other sort to be seen” (1886, 21). Given the association of piles of stones or bricks marked in red lead with shrines to *mātās* and female spirits, we can safely infer that the disappearing idols referenced here were at least in part goddess-related.

¹⁰⁴ In describing the religion of the Adivasi Bhils, for instance, the author or authors of the *Sixth Report of the Mahi Kantha Mission* (1856) displayed an early suspicion of Śiva and Śakti as demonic obstacles in the way of conversion. It is explained that “[t]hese people hardly have any notions of religion. They offer a kind of worship to Matta and Mahadave [sic], who are probably aboriginal deities, or rather demons, they live in constant fear of magic and magical charms” (1856, 5). Accordingly, “the unhealthy character of the localities in which they dwell or wander, precludes the hope of bringing them under any extensive and continued system of Christian instruction, at least with the limited resources under our command” (*Ibid.*).

Giving up the goddess was also a critical marker of successful conversion on an individual level. In the 1889 IP Mission report from the Rajkot area, Reverend H.R. Scott recounted a dramatic display of iconoclasm carried out by a recent convert to Christianity:

Jemal, the convert, belongs to the village from which last year's convert Dorcas Kunvaji came, and he is a Koli farmer. From the time he heard the Gospel from Kunvarji's lips he has consistently endeavoured to live up to it. His first act was boldly to give up idol-worship and cast his idol out of the house. He had hardly ever done so till his wife was laid up with a strong fever. The superstitious neighbours gathered round, and assured him that his wife's illness was a consequence of the insult offered to the goddess, and advised him to make amends or worse would follow. Jemal, instead of yielding, sought guidance and strength from God in prayer, and when the fever suddenly left his wife, he saw God's hand manifest in her recovery, and seeking out the disgraced idol completed its destruction by casting it down a well! (1890, 13-14).

Curiously enough, the goddess was sent plummeting down into the depths of what might very well have been her place of origin, considering the abiding association in Gujarat between *mātās* and wells (or *vāvs*) that Enthoven, among others, has recorded ([1914] 1989, 40). Here, successful conversion centres upon rejection of the capricious goddess, metonym of Hindu idolatry and superstition, thereby demonstrating full acceptance of the Christian Gospel. In the healing of Jemal's wife's fever, the Christian God enacts a genuine *camatkār* ("miracle"). From here, it is explained how, in spite of criticisms, Jemal eventually won over some of his friends to Christian observances, though all but one of these would-be converts ended up lapsing back to the goddess on Dasara day (the culmination of Navarātri), as they could not resist the "meat offered to idols" on this occasion (1890, 14). Again, the bloody rites of the Mātā prove irresistible to the heathen palate, or so the missionaries imagined.

Medical dispensaries became another means through which missionaries attempted to disabuse *mātā* worshippers of their beliefs, as part of a mission strategy to provide healthcare and medicine to local people in exchange for religious instruction.¹⁰⁵ In some cases, this method proved successful. The 1893 IP Mission report from Borsad included a section written by a Ms. Roberts who operated the dispensary there and told of a young woman from a goddess-worshipping section of the Hindu community who became interested in Christianity (1894, 97).

¹⁰⁵ As Ms. Roberts of the Borsad mission explained in the *Report of the Irish Presbyterian Mission in Gujarat and Kattiawar for 1893*, "[t]he chief purpose of the dispensary, namely the religious instruction of the patients, has been kept well in view, and I have reduced the number of women attending in order that I might have time to give them an address and also to speak a few words to them when they come in for their medicine" (1894, 96).

Ms. Roberts provided the following account of the young woman's arrival before the Christian God:

The day before her death she came to me to ask to be taught a hymn she liked very much, but could not remember as she could not read. I was very busy but she waited till all the patients were gone and then I taught it to her; she looked so bright and happy that morning. The next day I was called to her, she was said to be dying of cholera, it was too true, but she knew me and seemed pleased I had come. There was a great crowd in the room telling the girl to call on "Mata" the name of the goddess, but as I bent over her I heard her say "There is no salvation but in Jesus," this was the refrain of the hymn she was so fond of (1894, 97).

Here again the Mātā has been taken to represent one of the chief deities of the Hindu villagers, especially in relation to sickness, and again the missionary has targeted her in hopes of proving the goddess an ineffectual heathen fantasy that can be reduced to nothing by the power of Christ. Once more, the missionary ascertained success by showing the goddess's feebleness—and outright absence—in the face of disease.

In the 1890s, after a 40-plus year presence of Christianity in Gujarat, missionaries were still piqued with repulsion at the idea of *mātā* rituals. The figure of the Mātā would become a lightning rod of scorn for the "Jungle Tribes Mission," which was originally founded in 1889 by the Presbyterian Church in Ireland in order to open up missionary work among tribal people in the Panch Mahals and Rewa Kantha regions (Boyd 1981, 70). At the forefront of this mission was J.H. McNeill, a Scotsman who arrived in the area in 1893 (*Ibid.*). McNeill had undertaken two years of medical training in his homeland, and he applied these skills in the field so as to draw patients-*cum*-converts to his dispensary in Dohad (*Ibid.*). During his time in the Panch Mahals, McNeill kept a handwritten diary.¹⁰⁶ Here he recorded various impressions of life among tribal people, particularly the Adivasi Bhils.¹⁰⁷ Recurrent among his concerns was the idolatry that he felt ran rampant among such groups. Looking at tantric teachings, for instance, McNeill speculated that:

¹⁰⁶ McNeill's diary, entitled "Notes on Life in Panch Mahals," can be found in the Church of North India Gujarat Archives, a collection held at the Gujarat United School of Theology. It has also been archived on microfilm and digitally through the Yale University Library.

¹⁰⁷ The Bhils, an Adivasi group found in Gujarat and other parts of western India, represent one of the largest tribal groups in the subcontinent. The Bhils prompted considerable missionary and colonial fascination and have been the subject of a number of contemporary scholarly studies as well. For a recent study of the Bhil's encounter with missionaries and medicine, see Hardiman (2008).

These Cults are all the offspring of Hindu Pantheism, as it affects different minds. In the early days Hinduism absorbed large numbers of the aboriginal tribes, so that popular Hinduism today especially in the jungle districts is largely tinged with the old demonolatri of the aborigines because these tribes brought in with them their demon gods and goddesses to swell the numbers of the already crowded Hindu Pantheon (n.d., 6).

Here it is goddesses, among other spirits, who are again treated as no more than demons and are implicated in the seemingly incorrigible “demonolatri” of Gujarati tribes. McNeill also dedicated several pages of his journal to providing a very vivid recollection of sacrifices to Kālī Mātā he and several other missionaries witnessed at a “famed” temple to the goddess—presumably Pavagadh—earlier on during his time in the Panch Mahals. He wrote:

When at last we came in front of the temple a hideous sight presented itself in our view. The image was besprinkled with blood of her victims and the courtyard was a sea of blood. We looked round to see some sign of service, or prayer or praise, we waited in vain, for there was no prayer or praise, no instruction or exhortation. In fact it seemed to me the worshippers [sic] one aim was to arrange as quickly as possible for their sacrifice to be presented, and then hurry away to see the priest at riverside. I noticed the people came in small groups. Every group had its offerings. When the fee had been paid to the officials, the goat was handed over to a set of men who had a guillotine arrangement into which the head of the goat was fixed then the man brought down the knife which quickly did the work severing the head from the body. The body was handed back to the owners to be eaten at home, the knifeman kept the head for his services. These heads I am told are sold to the poor who crowd round to get them. The wild struggle to be first with the sacrifice was both fierce and dangerous. Then when the goat head was cut off the mad rush to catch some of the blood in a small vessel is something one never wants to see again. When the sacrifice was finished and the offerings moved away some-one threw scarlet flowers over them. We had seen enough and turned almost sick with the stench of blood, and the smell of the oil with which the people had anointed themselves (n.d., 1-2).

The revulsion is readily apprehensible in McNeill’s heavy-handed prose, which constructs a horrific spectacle like unto that of the “*bhuvā* scene” but with missionary inflections. The ritual to Kālī reads as empty, frenzied violence, devoid of even a patina of religious significance or structure on account of its lack of liturgy, at least to the sensibilities of the Christian gaze. Any authentic sentiment on the part of the worshipper or officiant is taken as purely transactional, as is suggested by the perceived emphasis on speeding up the sacrifice. McNeill likely included this account in his journal to underline, for himself at the very least, the immediate need for the

missionary project. Soon after jotting down this description, he added that “the above will show you how the devil has blinded the mind of those who do not believe and know our Lord Jesus Christ. Shall we not be more earnest in our prayers and endeavour to send the gospel to those benighted heathen in India” (n.d., 3). Accordingly, in the pages that follow, McNeill went on to contrast the sacrificial spectacle of Kālī Mātā worshippers with the Christian religious expression he held so dear—that is, the restrained, orderly services of the Dohad Mission Compound on Christmas Day, where well-dressed families of converts congregated to sing hymns and listen to scripture. “They all seem so happy as they go into the church,” McNeill observes (*Ibid.*).

Publications of the Jungle Tribes Mission also heaped harsh criticism upon the Mātā and the Bhils who worshipped her, right up into the early twentieth century. G.W. Blair, one of the initial IP missionaries in the Panch Mahals, also characterized *mātā* iconography and worship with palpable distaste:

The Bheels are idolators, and their religion is a kind of fetichism [sic], but their chief deity is *Mata* (i.e., mother) or *Devi*. This goddess is generally represented by a bit of rough, uncarved stone, erected in a grove or beneath a tree, and daubed over with red paint. Each village has its own *Mata*, and to it offerings of buffaloes, goats, fowl, *ghee* (clarified butter), clay horses, toy carts, water pots, etc., are made. In times of epidemic, such as smallpox, the people resort to these sacred spots, and costly offerings of cattle are presented to the goddess, in the hope (alas! a vain one) that by so doing the ravages of the disease may be stayed. Vows are also taken at the shrine of the *Mata* for favours asked, the person taking the vow promising to give a buffalo or a goat, according to the magnitude of the request made [...] If it should happen to turn out as the petitioner desired, when the day for paying the vow arrives, the villagers proceed to the shrine of their goddess, taking with them the goat or buffalo as promised. The animal is killed, and while the assembled villages make merry in drinking liquor and feasting on the flesh, *Mata*’s share is—the blood! (1906, 38).

This sort of visceral imagery again reduces *mātā* worship to orgiastic savagery. From the outset, in a description resonating with that of Monier-Williams two decades earlier, the Mātā is once again described as a fetish object. The inherent ineffectiveness of the Mātā’s ramshackle physical idol itself and the variety of blood offerings that are made to it feature prominently in what is the by-now standard inventorying of tribal idolatry, and its remedy is the monotheism that missionaries offer. Again, worshipping the Mātā gives the impression of being basely transactional; the fact that fruitlessness is the only possible outcome of the endeavour further impugns the rationale of the Bhil religion.

In this spirit, Blair also recounted an incident of spirit possession in which he intervened, supplanting a *bhuvā* in the process of illustrating the irrationality of relying on the Mātā:

Like most jungle tribes all the world over, Bheels are very superstitious, believing in witches, ghosts, spirit possession, the evil eye, etc. The ghosts are said to inhabit certain trees, such as the Tamarind, in the jungle. Some time ago I was called to see a Bheel woman, said to be suffering from spirit possession. The usual remedy, consisting of offerings of hens and goats to the goddess *Mata*, had been tried; the *Badwa* [*bhuvā*], or witch doctor had also been consulted, but all in vain: the spirit refused to be exorcised, and as I happened to be camping just then at the village, the people, as a last resource, came to me. I found the poor woman suffering from a bad attack of epilepsy, and her body frightfully burned in two or three places by her falling into the fire at times. A few doses of bromide of potassium proved sufficient to expel the evil spirit! The woman recovered, and the missionary has now a more potent influence in that village than their own witch doctor (1906, 39-40).

The Western allopathic medicine of the missionary, then, encapsulated by the anticonvulsant potassium bromide, supposedly displaces in short order the irrational beliefs of the tribal Bhils in both the Mātā and the *bhuvā*. It is because of these superstitions that the worshippers of the Mātā are lumped into a pan-global conceptualization of savages by way of the phrase “all the world over.” This phrasing conjures up the image of an intercontinental state of jungle tribalism that only the civilizing force of Christianity can remedy, as demonstrated here.

The Great Famine struck Gujarat on the cusp of the twentieth century, and by the time it took hold, starvation spread beyond control, as did cholera and dysentery (Boyd 1981, 83). These developments led to thousands of deaths among the local population, as well as some among the missionaries (1981, 84). Looking back upon the famine, Blair took another opportunity to traduce the inert Mātā idol. Quite audaciously, he wrote:

Another direct result of the late famine is, [sic] that the faith of the Bheels in their false gods has been rudely shaken. The famine was the means God used to shatter and destroy some of their old beliefs. Many have told me that since the famine they do not worship, or believe in, the goddess *Mata* (1906, 106).

The famine was, at least from the perspective of Blair’s off-the-cuff theologizing, in part a divinely sanctioned expression of iconoclasm with the goal of proving the worthlessness of the Mātā, apparently the pinnacle of the heathen pantheon in this part of Gujarat.

For missionaries in Gujarat, the demon-*cum*-divinity that was the Mātā came to be a consummate symbol of a primitive heathen theology. That is to say, she epitomized the idolatry, demonolatry, and superstition that kept rural, tribal, and lower-caste Gujaratis in an abject state of irrationality, poverty, and hunger. Considering all she represented that ran contrary to Christian theology and morality, the goddess became a site of unequivocal revulsion for missionaries. Recurrent graphic depictions of sacrifices made to *mātās*, often far more dramatic than those provided by colonial scholars, catalogue for modern readers this missionary disgust. The ubiquitous presence of *mātās* seems to have served as a constant reminder to missionaries of how imperative it was to furnish rural Gujarat with Christianity and the civilizing force that was assumed to come with it.

Gujarati Reformers and the Mātās

Colonial and Christian commentators were not the only disparagers of *devīs*. Hindu reformers and religious figures based in Gujarat also directed scathing critiques at what they interpreted to be decadent, superstitious, or backward elements of local religion. Among the most roundly condemned was Śāktism, including village and low-caste customs related thereto, with *mātās* implicitly or explicitly labelled as part of the problem by a number of prominent reform-minded commentators. These anti-Śākta sentiments proliferated as Gujarati-language print materials emerged in the nineteenth century and were similar to those concurrently being published by colonial and missionary writers. Such an overlap in discourse may be partially attributed to the influence of the reformers' missionary and/or English education. It was not the case, however, that Western discourses simply influenced Gujarati reformers; in many instances, the reformer's harsh appraisals, particularly those produced by adherents of the Swaminarayan movement, predated the publication of important colonial and missionary writings we have already observed. Indeed, some Western commentators lifted unflattering descriptions of Śākta rituals directly from reformers' works. Gujarati-language appraisals of the *mātās*, then, can be said to have influenced British Christians and Orientalists, as these internal and external condemnations of goddess worship appear to have co-evolved, mutually informing one another during the nineteenth century and beyond.

Foremost among the Gujarati detractors of the *mātās* were members of the Swaminarayan movement. The Swaminarayan *sampradāya* was a product of Gujarat, having been set in motion

by the reform-minded charismatic figure Sahajanand Swami (1781-1830) at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The religious sect that developed out of Sahajanand's teachings bore substantial inflection from its region and its historical period (Williams 1984, xi). As a result of the decline of the Maratha rulers, Gujarat, during Sahajanand's early life, was emerging from a period of political upheaval and social discord that persisted until the establishment of British control around 1820 (1984, 3).¹⁰⁸ The Swaminarayan movement was a source of peace and order in this difficult time. In Sahajanand's teachings, his initial followers no doubt found a reassuring synthesis of time-honoured Gujarati ideals that could help in positively transforming the region (1984, 8). For instance, Sahajanand laid down strict ethical precepts for initiates that included vegetarianism, abstinence from alcohol, and, in an expressly conservative turn, aspects of casteism—specifically the practice of not receiving food from persons belonging to lower castes (1984, 14). While all castes were accepted into the fold, caste affiliation nonetheless remained important, as did upper-caste values. This has led Harald Tambs-Lyche to characterize the Swaminarayan movement as an “agent of Sanskritization” since it mandates vegetarianism, “teetotalitarianism,” and abstinence from tobacco for its followers (2004, 152). Along with these Brahminic, upper-caste values, the intensive emphasis on nonviolence and stringent vegetarianism was discernibly influenced by Gujarat's Jain community (Williams 1984, xiii; 140). In his 212-verse *Śikṣāpatrī*, a Sanskrit composition produced in 1826 that lays down the core Swaminarayan principles, Sahajanand recommends a level of *ahimsā* reminiscent of Jain ideals, forbidding harm to all creatures large and small: “[m]y followers shall never kill any living being under any circumstances, knowingly, not even small insects like lice, bugs, etc.” (v.11).¹⁰⁹ A commitment to nonviolence motivated many of Sahajanand's reforms, and it was in this spirit that he declared practices such as *satī* (widow immolation) and infanticide to be illegitimate aspects of Hinduism (Williams 1984, 7).

Unsurprisingly on account of the emphasis Sahajanand placed upon vegetarianism and sobriety, animal sacrifices were another target of pointed criticism from the Swaminarayan sect.

¹⁰⁸ The Marathas were a Marathi warrior group from what is now Maharashtra. They rose to prominence in the late seventeenth century and established Hindu rule throughout much of the north and western subcontinent, by and large supplanting the Mughals. Under the reign of Shahu I (1708-1749), grandson of the much-feted original Maratha monarch, Shivaji (1630-1680), the Maratha Empire expanded westward into Gujarat, over which it assumed firm control by the mid-eighteenth century. By the early nineteenth century, however, poor showings in the Anglo-Maratha wars saw the Marathas cede control of most of India to the British (Gordon 1993).

¹⁰⁹ All citations from the *Śikṣāpatrī* are taken from the Swaminarayan Movement's online English translation of the text available at <http://www.swaminarayan.nu/sampraday/shiksha.shtml>.

Sahajanand writes in the *Śikṣāpatrī*: “(My followers) shall never kill goats and/or other living beings in sacrifice performed for the propitiation of deities and Pitris (ancestors), for non-violence is declared (by the Shastras) as the highest Dharma of all the Dharmas” (v.12). It hardly seems coincidental that Sahajanand chose goats, the preferred offering for *mātās* such as Melaḍī and Kālī, as the representative sacrificial animal. These goddesses also took alcohol oblations, and Sahajanand condemned that, too. Two verses later, he prohibits alcohol and meat in these ritual contexts: “[n]one shall ever eat meat, even if it be an offering in a sacrifice or shall ever drink liquor or wine even if it be offered to a deity” (v.14).

It is likely goddess worship that provided the inspiration for these verses, and this is affirmed in the *Vacanāmṛt*, purportedly a transcription of Sahajanand’s discourses and the foundational scripture of Swaminarayan Hinduism. In this text, the founder’s disregard for Śākta rites is even more straightforwardly averred. In verse 48.6, Sahajanand explains: “[i]f a person associates with *śakti-panthis*, he will be forced to consume meat and alcohol, which will deflect him from following his *svadharma*” (Sahajanand 2010, 124). Swaminarayan disapproval of goddess rites did not end with textual injunctions. In a Gujarati-language book on the Swaminarayan sect published in 1936, M.C. Parekh documented a historical scene conveying Sahajanand’s public disapproval of animal sacrifice, and the potentially subversive political stakes of taking such a position:

Once while Swami Narayana was in Bhuj in the province of Cutch, the Prime minister there was performing a big sacrifice...Such bloody sacrifices seem to be very common in those days all over India, and they were usually performed by the Princes or big people such as Ministers, etc. To do this was considered a meritorious act, and to not do it... as a sin of omission [...] Therefore to protest against such sacrifices was like throwing a challenge to the vested interests of both Princes and Brahmans...(Parekh 1936, as quoted in Tambs-Lyche 1997, 299).

Tambs-Lyche has identified the incident in question as the great buffalo sacrifice, usually dedicated to royal *devīs* such as Khoḍīyār and Āśāpūrā “to offer the goddess her due” (Tambs-Lyche 1997, 300). In view of his aversion to blood sacrifices, Sahajanand attempted to change the character of these kinds of rituals involving the slaughter of animals, teaching that they were not an aspect of true Vedic religion (Williams 1984, 18). Sahajanand turned his repulsion into reform and replaced animal killing with public bloodless offerings, as was the case in 1808 when he staged large sacrifices in Ahmedabad and Jetalpur that did not involve the use of animals

(*Ibid.*). These exertions against sacrifice and other ecstatic elements of religion were, in Raymond Brady Williams' estimation, intended to be critiques of female divinities and their worshippers:

[Sahajanand's] chief adversaries were followers of the left-handed Shakti cult, known as Vama-Marga, which was popular in the province at the time. Its ritual included animal sacrifices, meat-eating, drinking of intoxicants, and sexual license. Sahajanand's puritanism was *a reaction against the cult of the mother* and other disreputable practices associated with village and tribal deities (1984, 21; emphasis mine).

Plainly, Sahajanand reserved a certain measure of aversion for the *mātās*, mostly on account of the offerings of live animals and liquor they craved, as well as the rural contexts in which they thrived, which undoubtedly implicated lower-caste and non-elite groups in their worship. Upon their conversion, Sahajanand forbade his followers from worshipping deities—more often than not goddesses—associated with animal sacrifices, and by way of changes in diet and ritual in accordance with the previously cited textual injunctions, distanced his lower-caste followers from some of the various “defiling practices of their castes” (1984, 137). The strict separation of males and females during temple worship, long presumed to be an effort to distinguish Swaminarayan followers from the alleged licentiousness of Puṣṭimārg Vaiṣṇavism, may also have been a response to goddess traditions.¹¹⁰ In theory, gender segregation prevented converts from lapsing back into the indulgent rituals supposedly enjoined upon Śākta-tantra practitioners (Mallison 2016, 53).

Swaminarayan adherents, then, could enact reform through conversions, and for this reason Śākta groups, especially those of the non-elite variety, became a primary target for their proselytization efforts. If we follow after Tambs-Lyche and think of Swaminarayan Hinduism as a sort of “low-church” puritan movement intent on winning over the “common people,” then competition with the non-elite Śākta religion for adherents was inevitable (1997, 296). One of

¹¹⁰ Puṣṭimārg (literally “the Path of Grace”) is a Vaiṣṇava sect that was founded by the philosopher Vallabhācārya around 1500 AD. Puṣṭimārg is based upon the ideal of unremitting *sevā* (or “service”) to Śrīnāthjī, a localized form of Kṛṣṇa enshrined in the sect's main pilgrimage centre in the town of Nathdwara, Rajasthan. The sect has historically enjoyed a dedicated following in Gujarat that persists today. However, the sect came under fire in the mid-nineteenth century on account of the infamous “Mahārāj Libel Case.” Here the *Gosvāmīs*, custodians of Puṣṭimārg temples, were the subject of public criticism for their indulgent lifestyles. Most damningly, these criticisms included allegations of sexual exploitation of female devotees (S. Sharma 2013, 4-5). For more on the Mahārāj Libel Case, see Shital Sharma's 2013 dissertation “A Prestigious Path to Grace: Class, Modernity, and Female Religiosity in Puṣṭimārg Vaiṣṇavism.” For more on the history of Puṣṭimārg in general, see Shandip Saha's 2004 dissertation “Creating a Community of Grace: A History of Puṣṭimārga in Northern and Western India (1479-1905).”

the most famous of all Swaminarayan conversions was that of the Charan poet Ladu Barot in 1805 at the outset of the sect's development. The bardic Charans were through-and-through goddess worshippers, dedicated to many *mātās*, perhaps most notably their consanguine Khoḍiyār, and their compositions played an essential role in the Śākta cult that buttressed the traditional kingly order of Saurashtra. For this reason, Ladu Barot's conversion to the Swaminarayan fold marked a deeply symbolic victory for the fledgling sect against its adversaries (Tambs-Lyche 1997, 296; 2004, 152). According to the received narrative, it was Sahajanand himself who orchestrated the conversion. When Ladu Barot garnered a reward for a poem he wrote to a prince, he attempted to convert the prize into ornaments. The celebrated goldsmiths whose services he sought were Swaminarayan followers, and so Ladu approached Sahajanand himself, asking for a letter of recommendation to help along his request. In a note to the goldsmiths, Sahajanand insisted that they play host to Ladu Barot for six months, feeding him at their own expense, so as to "cast the mould"—that is, to recast the bard as a Swaminarayan adherent (Tambs-Lyche 1997, 297). The plan worked, and Ladu Barot joined the sect, giving up his original caste-inflected name for the new Sanskrit moniker Brahmanand. Sahajanand's close involvement in the conversion conveys just how crucial winning over Śāktas was for the future success of the sect.

Not all the famous formerly Śākta Swaminarayan converts were, however, from non-elite groups. Some, in fact, were Brahmins, as was the case with Magniram, an itinerant follower of Kālī Mātā who had gained notoriety for his supernatural powers (Tambs-Lyche 1997, 297). Magniram travelled with a cadre of semi-militant sadhus, extracting money from various religious and secular bodies to survive. Venturing into Kathiawar, he met up with Sahajanand, who rejected his request for cash. Magniram promptly summoned Kālī to punish Sahajanand's rebuff, but the goddess did not comply with the request, claiming that neither she nor Magniram himself could overcome Sahajanand. This impressed the nomadic Śākta extortionist, and he offered his services to the Swami. Sahajanand accepted Magniram into the Swaminarayan fold, but only after getting him to cut his long hair (*Ibid.*). Here again, the superiority of Sahajanand and the Swaminarayan *sampradāya* over the Śākta cult is so pronounced that a goddess no less sanguinary than Kālī Mātā herself shrinks away from the newfound Vaiṣṇava revivalist. Her devotee, meanwhile, who once doubled as both criminal and magician, leaves behind the

goddess and is effectively domesticated by way of his conversion. This story indexes another major symbolic victory for the Swaminarayan movement over the goddess cult.

In this same vein, favouring the Sanskritic and Vaiṣṇavic over folk and magical traditions, Sahajanand also spoke out against the superstitious practices that circulated in village and tribal contexts, firmly rejecting the placation of various spiteful spirits and minor deities (Williams 1984, 18). Following in the spirit of the Magniram story, there are numerous accounts involving people who, upon joining the Swaminarayan sect and worshipping putatively more esteemed divinities such as Viṣṇu, Śiva, Gaṇeśa, and Pārvatī, threw away images of their previous deities, goddesses included (1984, 18-19). “In this regard,” Williams has written, “as in the prohibition of meat-eating, liquor consumption and the emphasis upon Vedic and Sanskrit religious texts, his [Sahajanand’s] teachings can be identified as a movement toward Sanskritization of the religious practices in Gujarat, which M.N. Srinivas indicated was facilitated by British rule” (Williams 1984, 19).

Certainly, Sahajanand and his followers caught the attention of British missionaries and colonialists in the 1820s and 1830s. In a time when Gujarat had a reputation for “lawlessness,” East India company officials and Anglican clergymen alike respected the Swaminarayan fold, as Sahajanand’s teachings gave every indication of contributing to social order (Paramtattvadas, Williams & Amrutavijaydas 2016, 58). William Hodge Mill (1792-1853), the first Principal of Bishop’s College, Calcutta, kept a detailed diary about his travels in Gujarat, and in it he recorded his interactions with both local adherents and British admirers of Swaminarayan Hinduism. After talking to one such admirer, the district collector John Andrew Dunlop, in Ahmedabad in June of 1822, Mill noted how the “reformer” Sahajanand railed against “several Hindu superstitions” (as quoted in Paramtattvadas et al. 2016, 60). While Mill did not specify these superstitions, Sadhu Paramtattvadas, Raymond Brady Williams, and Sadhu Amrutavijaydas have suggested he was referring to the common Gujarati folk custom of attributing death, disease, and disaster to evil spirits (2016, 60). These “evil spirits” would, more than likely, include capricious female divinities. In a diary entry dated soon after, Mill summarized several Swaminarayan doctrines based on materials received from Dunlop, marking some of the earliest surviving British records of Sahajanand’s thought. From these notes, Mill drew an encouraging conclusion about the sect: “[i]t augurs a favourable change in the public, and [...] is a clear & useful handmaid to Xtianity” (as quoted in Paramtattvadas et al. 2016, 62).

Evidently, the Anglican clergyman saw Swaminarayan ideas as having a positive influence on the morality of people of all ranks, making efforts to curb superstitions that were similarly objectionable to a Christian perspective. It is not hard to imagine the *mātās* being among these “superstitions.”

On the colonialist side, Mill’s informant Dunlop also promoted this pro-Swaminarayan sentiment himself, publicly praising what he called the “righteousness of Swaminarayan’s followers” (Paramtattvadas et al. 2016, 71). More tangibly, he and other British officials permitted and granted land for the Kalupur Nar-Narayan Temple, the first Swaminarayan temple in Ahmedabad (2016, 66). It was unquestionably a like-minded British official—if not Dunlop himself—who penned an anonymous “Memorandum” that appeared in the *Bombay Courier* and the *Asiatic Journal* in August 1822 regarding this temple’s dedication. This dispatch testified that “[Sahajanand’s] preaching has produced great effect in improving the morals of the people; and my own intercourse with natives leads me to form the same opinion” (as quoted in Paramtattvadas et al. 2016, 68). It was high praise of this order that led some of Sahajanand’s contemporaries to label Swaminarayan Hinduism an “Ingrazi Dharma”—that is, “English Dharma” or, better yet, “British religion” (Mallison 2016, 50).

Indeed, Sahajanand’s reforms were harmonious with the sensibilities of the British to such an extent that the Swaminarayan founder was able to hobnob with both colonialists and Christians. For instance, Sahajanand won the admiration of John Malcolm, Governor of Bombay from 1827 to 1830, who desired to bring about social and moral reform by utilizing respected and enlightened Indian leaders rather than by resorting to force and, to that end, saw ample possibility in Sahajanand (Williams 1984, 6-7). By 1830, Sahajanand was one of the most influential social leaders in Gujarat, the positive effects of his reforms upon moral conduct already being well-known to company officials, and it was for these reasons that Malcolm met with the Swaminarayan founder in Rajkot by invitation in February of that year (Williams 1984, 8; Paramtattvadas et al. 2016, 71). The two men already shared common concerns vis-à-vis social reform, including an abhorrence for infanticide and widow immolation (Williams 1984, 21). They conceivably shared a mutual detestation for animal sacrifice associated with royal and village Śākta cults, too. And though the specifics of their 1830 conversation are vague, the optics are not, as the meeting “symbolize[d] the conjunction of the political changes and the religious

reforms in Gujarat” (Williams 1984, 24). By the same token, the meeting also affirmed the compatibility of colonial and Swaminarayan viewpoints on reform.¹¹¹

Sahajanand was also in conversation with Christian contemporaries. In March of 1825, Reginald Heber, Lord Bishop of Calcutta, met with Sahajanand while carrying out a tour of the Bombay Presidency. Bishop Heber had learned from sources connected to William Hodge Mill that Sahajanand’s “morality was said to be far better than any which could be learned from the Shaster [Shastra]” and that he also “condemned theft and bloodshed” (as quoted in Paramtattvadas et al. 2016, 73). The “bloodshed” referenced here quite likely refers to violence perpetrated by dacoits and other lawbreakers, though it could just as aptly apply to animal sacrifices in Śākta-tantra and village *mātā* contexts. Heber went on to record his observation that “those villages and districts which had received him [Sahajanand], from being among the worst, were now among the best and most orderly in the provinces” (*Ibid.*). Again, Sahajanand and his teachings are associated with establishing order in a troubled area, and so the movement represented a source of abundant hope for Heber, to the extent that he wrote in his journal that Sahajanand might be “an appointed instrument to prepare the way for the gospel” (2016, 74). Bishop Heber’s goal in his meeting with Sahajanand was to introduce the Swami to Christianity and to bring him into contact with the Church Missionary Society (CMS) in Bombay (Williams 1984, 58).¹¹² While this did not come to pass, Heber was by all accounts impressed with Sahajanand, specifically with regard to his ethical teachings. To this end, Heber, like Mill, referred to Sahajanand in his journals as a “Hindu reformer” (Hatcher 2016, 12). So taken was the Bishop with Sahajanand that he decided on the grounds of that one meeting, somewhat remarkably, that it was not necessary at that time for Christian missionaries to visit Gujarat

¹¹¹ This symbolism has not been lost on Sahajanand’s followers, many of whom subsequently looked upon British rule as “providential” for Gujarat (Williams 1984, 24). The colonial governors, after all, brought a vision of stability in the region that was in consonance with the reforms that drove Sahajanand’s emerging religious movement. This is likely part of the reason that, right up to the present day, some Swaminarayan temples feature depictions of Malcolm and Sahajanand’s meeting (1984, 1).

¹¹² Founded in 1799 as The Society for Missions to Africa and the East, the Christian Missionary Society was an Anglican organization that began sending missionaries to India in 1814, establishing mission stations in Chennai and Bengal. It expanded in the years that followed, adding a Bombay mission in 1820 and a Calcutta mission in 1822. Reginald Heber, the Bishop of Calcutta from 1823 to 1826, led the latter mission. The CMS did not end up moving into the Gujarat area until 1880, when Reverend C.S. Thompson began work in Kherwara, a village in Rajasthan near the Gujarat border. By 1887 the CMS had expanded into Sabarkantha. For more on the Church Missionary Society, see Boyd (1981, 62-64).

(Williams 1984, 85). Though Heber felt that Sahajanand fell short on some theological points,¹¹³ the meeting between the two figures would further aid in formulating the deep regard the British clearly felt toward the Swaminarayan sect (Tambs-Lyche 1997, 301).¹¹⁴

I make mention of these meetings to suggest that these interfaith conversations grew out of a larger conceptual conversation going on in nineteenth-century Gujarat in which Swaminarayan Hindus, Christians, and colonialists shared key interests. The amicable meetings between the Swaminarayan founder and the Western Protestant colonizers, represented in the persons of the Governor and the Bishop, were possible in part because all parties involved shared in and contributed to intersecting anti-ecstatic discourses. On all fronts, the concerns articulated in these discourses reserved pronounced disapproval for goddesses, an issue that would prove to be of recurrent moment in Gujarat throughout the nineteenth century and beyond. Based on the fact that Sahajanand's recorded teachings against goddesses predate the major Christian and missionary goddess-negative sources we have looked at above, it may have actually been Swaminarayan Hinduism that bore influence on British commentators, religious and secular, on the topic. We may even speculate that the Swaminarayan movement played a part in drawing the attention of colonialists and missionaries to the *mātās* and the aspects of their worship that so similarly disconcerted all three sectors.

We do not have to speculate to such effect when we encounter the writings of Dalpatram Daya (1820-1898), a Shrimali Brahmin by birth and himself a Swaminarayan follower. As was mentioned at the outset of this chapter, so struck was Alexander Kinloch Forbes by Dalpatram's

¹¹³ Heber's response to Sahajanand and his movement was, on the whole, somewhat tepid. Even though Sahajanand's doctrine had demonstrable positive influences upon the volatile Gujarat region, it was not as advanced (at least from a Christian perspective) as the Bishop had anticipated (Paramtattvadas, Williams & Amrutavijaydas 2016, 78). Heber praised Sahajanand for his monotheism, though he would later learn that while the Swaminarayan founder did express belief in one supreme reality, he insisted on referring to this highest divinity (naturally) using the name Kṛṣṇa, which was a "stumbling block" for the Bishop (Hatcher 2016, 12). Moreover, Heber had difficulties with the Swaminarayan sect's use of images in worship (Paramtattvadas et al. 2016, 78). Heber's doubts about Swaminarayan Hinduism would manifest more tangibly later on after he received a petition signed by Sahajanand that requested the Bishop use his influence to help obtain an endowment for a Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa temple, as well as an affiliated hospital and place of reception for pilgrims (2016, 79). This made an unfavourable impression on Heber, and in his reply he explained that he could not help with the request on the grounds that he did not have government authority, nor could he as a Christian encourage image worship (*Ibid.*).

¹¹⁴ Brian A. Hatcher (2016) has further detailed the ways in which Sahajanand's principles fit (or did not quite fit) into larger ideas about Hindu reform as they were constructed by Malcolm, Heber, and other colonial and/or Christian commentators. "Reform" in this sense is overwhelmingly linked to colonial commentators' ideas about their own (Christian) modernity, in which genuine, modern reform for Hinduism could only be meaningfully charted after the arrival of the British (2016, 26). Hatcher has argued that Swaminarayan Hinduism is left out of many surveys of Hindu reform movements precisely because the movement shows few if any indicators of an encounter with Christianity (2016, 27).

nascent poetic talent that he took the fledgling litterateur on as an assistant and entrusted him with the responsibility of collecting information about Gujarat (M. Jhaveri 1978, 72-73). Forbes was also instrumental in getting Dalpatram a job in government service and would later advise him to give up that role to become Assistant Secretary of the Gujarat Vernacular Society. This gave Dalpatram a forum for his poetry and essays, and established him not only as a writer, but also as a reformer (1978, 73). It was Dalpatram's "Bhūt Nibandh" ("Ghost Composition") that especially captivated Forbes. This work, which criticizes superstitions involving *bhūts* and other malevolent spirits in Gujarat, won first prize in an essay contest put on by the GVS. In its admonishing tone, the essay fits with the Swaminarayan sect's reformist outlook, particularly in its goal of eradicating supernaturalism. To wit, Dalpatram credited Swaminarayan Hinduism with helping him abandon such a charmed worldview, replacing it with rationality. Of his own experience with these sorts of superstitions, Dalpatram explained that his family was at one point caught up in charms and mantras. "We [his family] used to do things which are not fit to be spoken of," he wrote, "much less written down. Afterwards, from associating with Swamee Narayan's teachers, I lost all faith in charms, and then I abandoned all trouble about working them out [...] I speak from experience, having tried the whole, but found not one of any effect" (1849, 2-3). With that established, he would go on to demolish one by one the Gujarati superstitions regarding spirits, imparting the Swaminarayan movement's anti-demonolatry stance upon the reader.

Inevitably, Dalpatram encountered the *mātās*. Dalpatram first mentioned them in a story of a man staying at a guesthouse who awoke with a start one night to find two shadowy women clad in saris standing near him (1849, 41-42). The mysterious women were presumably thought by the man to be *cudels*, or malicious female *bhūts*. "The man," Dalpatram explained, "called upon Hanumān, and several other Devs, and adjured the apparitions to depart by the thirty-three crores of gods, by Mátá Boucheráji, by Meládi, by Kálbheirav, &c. Still they departed not" (1849, 42). Neighbours hurried over to see the commotion, as did a watchman, only to observe the two ghosts holding steady in their position. The watchman shot arrows at the apparitions, but they did not move. "At last one man brought a light, when it was discovered that some counterpanes had been piled upon a bench and that a Sari thrown over them received the light of the moon in two points, and that this was all" (1849, 42). As is the theme in Dalpatram's essay, a rational explanation ultimately prevails. The recourse to the *mātās* by the haunted man was only

a corollary of his initial superstition, and naturally, these goddesses prove useless in driving out the ostensible ghosts, the one type of baseless delusion informing the other. Following in the mould cast by Sahajanand's teaching, Dalpatram intimates that both spirits and the deities that exorcize them must be discarded together.

Dalpatram also brought up the *mātās* in the context of remedying a *bhūt* possession. He described a congregation of low-caste drummers, probably Devipujaks, who sat opposite to the possessed, singing songs in praise of *devīs* (1849, 53-54). He listed Bahucarā, Khoḍīyār, Śikotar, and Melaḍī as representative *bhūt*-expelling goddesses and then described the dialogue between the drummer and the possessed (1849, 54). This culminated in the throwing of seeds, a method of divination sometimes referred to as *pāṭlā* whereby the responses of the goddess are determined by counting the number of grains in any given toss; odd and even numbers correspond to “yes” or “no” answers. Of the whole scene, Dalpatram commented: “[s]illy people then credit the tale, though they who have more sense laugh” (1849, 55). When the *bhūt* ignored the drum-player, Dalpatram explained, a *bhuvā* is sent for. Dalpatram described *bhuvās* as “persons who are inspired by any of the Devis whose names I have mentioned above” (*Ibid.*). At this point, Dalpatram recorded a typical “*bhuvā* scene,” and I do not use the term “typical” here lightly, because the account contains many of the elements that were to become standard fare in later missionary and colonial reports we have already looked at, including self-flagellation and fire-eating. To be sure, it is a paraphrase of this scene of Dalpatram's that Forbes provided in *Ras Mala*.¹¹⁵ Clearly, then, with Dalpatram we have evidence that Gujarati goddess detractors were in conversation with British critics, to the extent that the former were being appropriated by the latter. While not exactly taken aback in disgust, Dalpatram nonetheless saw the *mātās* as part of a matrix of *bhūt*-related religious practices that were irrational and, in the end, “silly.” Moreover,

¹¹⁵ Here I include both passages so that the reader may appraise their similarities. Dalpatram wrote: “[t]he Bhuwo, when he arrives, seats himself and causes the possessed to sit down opposite to him. Then he turns to the drum-player and says, ‘Play one of my Devi’s songs.’ Now affecting to be inspired, he raises his hands as high as he can and strikes them violently on the earth, throwing loose also his long hair. Now he strikes himself on the back with an iron chain, producing a loud clatter. He now takes a little roll of cloth in each hand, which he dips in oil and lights, and keeps thrusting into his mouth and drawing out again without extinguishing the flame. He tries many other such modes of frightening, until at last the possessed person, terrified, cries out ‘I’m off! I’m off!’ The Bhuwo now swears the Bhut not to return, and expels him. This done, he administers to the possessed a vow to expend so much money in the service of his Devi” (1849, 56). Compare with the quote from Forbes from earlier on in this chapter: “[t]he Bhoowo, who has seated himself opposite to the possessed person, as soon as he hears the music, assumes the character of one inspired by the Devee, and begins to employ different means of terrifying the Bhoot. The operation lasts sometimes for five or six days; at length the possessed cries out (in the character of the Bhoot), ‘I’m off! I’m off!’ and having been duly sworn to expend a certain sum of money in the Devee’s service is admitted to be convalescent” ([1878] 1973, 664).

with Dalpatram we see that the critiques he provided in Gujarati bore direct influence on British accounts.

Intersecting British and Swaminarayan influences can also be found in the *Āgama Prakāśā*, a Gujarati-language tract published in 1874 that, in the reformist spirit, took aim at tantric religious elements, including goddesses. Though the *Āgama Prakāśā*'s author is anonymous, he has been connected to a text published that same year, the *Nigama Prakāśā*, which championed decidedly Vaiṣṇava elements of Hinduism (Rinehart & Stewart 2000, 267).¹¹⁶ More specifically, the *Āgama Prakāśā* was written in a distinctly Swaminarayan tone, and even cites Sahajanand's *Śikṣāpatrī* (2000, 268). The *Śikṣāpatrī* may be characterized as pro-Vaiṣṇava, anti-tantra, and anti-Advaita, laying all the same criticisms upon Brahmin priests that it does on *tāntrikas* since both rely on obfuscation and secrecy for profit. The *Āgama Prakāśā* took a matching perspective, shunning the very same texts branded as unreliable by the *Śikṣāpatrī*, suggesting that its author was a Swaminarayan follower (2000, 268-269). In full-on orthodox Vaiṣṇava fashion, the *Āgama Prakāśā*'s author equated liquor, meat, and sex with ignorance and lack of discipline, lumping these together under the category of "left-hand" tantra. He found an example of this "left-hand" tantric lifestyle in Śākta Tantra, which in Gujarat inevitably implicates the *mātās*. He wrote:

About two or four hundred men are connected with the *Śākta-mārga* in Ahmadabad and in the same way there are many in Nadiyad, Baroda, Broach, Surat, Puna, Satara and Karbir [...] wherever there is a temple of the Devi, there this system is in vogue and liquor and meats are offered to the various goddesses, viz. Bechrājī, Ambājī, Kalaka, Hīnglāj, Tuljāpura, Vindhyavāsinī, Kāmākṣī, Mātāpura and Kālī of Calcutta. The Vaiṣṇavas despised all liquors and meats and they therefore do not go to such places, but the Gosāvīs, Atītas, and the Nātha sectarians go there. It is clearly mentioned in the *Śikṣāpatrī* of the Svāminarāyaṇa that no one should salute a god to whom liquors and meats are offered; the followers of this sect do not make a bow to such a god but many of them have faith (in these gods) in order to serve their purpose (Rinehart & Stewart 2000, 275).

Here we see several popular Gujarati *mātās* enumerated amongst regionally and nationally popular *tāmasik*, tantric goddesses offensive to Vaiṣṇava sensibilities. So strong is the sway of the goddess that even some Swaminarayan followers cannot combat lapsing into her worship,

¹¹⁶ Robin Rinehart and Tony K. Stewart have suggested that the probable author of *Āgama Prakāśā* is one Gopal Rao Hari Devmukh, whose name appears on the title page of the translation of the text in a handwritten manuscript (2000, 268). Hence, I use the pronoun "he" to refer to the author.

which is portrayed here as strictly transactional, much as was (and would be) the case in colonial and missionary accounts before and after.

In the assessment of Robin Rinehart and Tony K. Stewart, the *Āgama Prakāśā*'s overall critique reflects the climate of British rule, with more and more religious commentators incorporating colonial social issues directly in their platforms to show either solidarity with their governors' policies or else to demonstrate how their tradition could implement change on its own (2000, 269-270). Such concerns developed out of these commentators' education in schools run by Christian missionaries, a luxury no doubt enjoyed by sections of their readership as well (2000, 270). Moreover, these commentators were able to reach an ever-expanding audience by way of new technologies such as the printing press, as vernacular publications provided powerful input into the increasingly vocal public arena (*Ibid.*). For that matter, the *Āgama Prakāśā* may have been in part conceived to counter vernacular Śākta devotional publications, such as the aforementioned goddess pamphlets to Ambā and Bahucarā, among others, which were proliferating contemporaneously in the 1860s and 1870s.

Similar indictments of goddess worship can be found later on outside the Swaminarayan fold as well. One such example was put into print by Krishnalal Jhaveri, an English-educated lawyer and Gujarati literary historian who emerged from a well-educated family, his grandfather R.G. Jhaveri having been a pioneer in the field of education in the state, and his father, M.R. Jhaveri, having founded several primary schools in Surat. In his *Further Milestones of Gujarati Literature* (1924), Jhaveri dedicated his fourth chapter to dramatic forms that flourished in Gujarat. Early on, he took aim at *bhavāī* and the Bhavayas who act it out. In describing how *bhavāīs* weave together many elements of dramatic expression, including farce, skit, and satire, Krishnalal Jhaveri added somewhat diplomatically that such performances include "every possible representation of human action and emotion" (1924, 181). The author's diplomacy soon faltered, however. Of *bhavāī* he went on to write that "[i]ts distinguishing features are gross vulgarity, open indecency, public obscenity, now and then tempered by some home truths" (*Ibid.*). The source of these licentious expressions is, in no small measure, the goddess:

It probably owes its origin to the sinister side of the cult of the Devi [...] which rejoices in the drinking of wine, eating of flesh, using of foul language and deriving pleasure from lewdness. The caste of the Bhavayas considers it their hereditary function to perform Bhavaīs before the goddesses Bahucharaji and Ambaji, and if they fail to do so on particular days, they are afraid of the goddesses' wrath (1924, 181).

Goddesses, then, specifically *mātās* such as Bahucarā and Ambā, are at the root of the indulgence and obscenity that apparently characterized *bhavāī*. Yet again, these indulgences have been framed in terms of the “sinister side” of goddess worship—that is, the lumped-together “left hand” tantric practices including elements of the *pañcamakāras* such as meat and alcohol. Once more, the *mātā* is linked with the lowbrow for the Gujarati literary elite. In this way, Jhaveri went about recapitulating a strain of ascendant-class disapproval regarding *bhavāī* that had appeared much earlier in Gujarat. In the past, members of the literate classes in Gujarat made concerted efforts to reform *bhavāī*. This, for instance, was the goal of Rao Saheb Mahipatram Rupram (1829-1891), a writer affiliated with the Prarthana Samaj, a Maharashtra-born reform movement, as well as Forbes’ GVS. Rupram published a book entitled *Bhavāī Samgraha* that contained a collection of *bhavāīs*, each of which had been redacted so as to eliminate aspects objectionable to sophisticated, literate sensibilities (1924, 183 ff. 1). These reform efforts proved fruitless, however, by Jhaveri’s reckoning, as “the drama did not improve” (*Ibid.*). Later on in the 1930s, another reformer by the name of Rammohanray Desai was so revolted by the unwholesomeness of *bhavāī* performed at Becharaji that he campaigned to have such exhibitions barred from the grounds (Sheikh 2010, 93-94).

Thus we see that Gujarati-language reform activities of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, principally those emerging from and swayed by the Swaminarayan tradition, expressed caution and contempt toward Śāktism. Bloody rites, spectral superstitions, and lascivious performances came to be synonymous with goddesses such as the *mātās*, at least for the literary and religious elite, many of whom benefitted from the intellectual opportunities afforded to them by colonial connections and Western-styled education. These disdainful imaginings of goddess religion overlap considerably with those put forward in the writings of contemporaneous colonialists and missionaries. By virtue of the many intersections between Swaminarayan intellectuals, British colonialists, and Christian missionaries, especially within the education system, it is fitting that there are resonances in their respective treatments of Gujarati goddesses. With Dalpatram’s “Bhūt Nibandh,” we see how indigenous reform opinion in Gujarati directly inspired colonial perspectives vis-à-vis *mātās* and possession, namely the fevered scenes and scathing dismissals the author’s mentor, Alexander Forbes, would publish soon thereafter. Thus, it seems counterproductive to posit that indigenous Gujarati reform discourses on *devīs* are

unidirectionally derivative from Western perspectives thereupon, or even vice-versa. Rather, these groups' ongoing commentaries on the *mātās* seem to have mutually informed one another to some extent during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as they shared in an “interconnected world of circulatory forces,” to borrow a phrase from J. Barton Scott (2016, 155). The resultant indigenous reform criticisms of *mātās*, whether they were tendered by Swaminarayan affiliates or other Gujarati elites later on, also appear to have been conceived in part for the benefit of lower castes and untouchables and had the effect of galvanizing efforts to purge the apparent irrationality and obscenity that surrounded a matrix of religious and performative practices related to the goddess in that non-elite milieu. In the vernacular press, these reformers evidently saw a medium through which they could steer public opinion against Śākta practices by demonstrating their excesses and inefficacies, all in hopes of drawing *mātā* devotees toward more Sanskritic and Vaiṣṇavic religious expressions.

The Mātās as a Locus of Internal Reform

Colonialists, missionaries, and indigenous Gujarati reformers alike were all, to some degree, suspicious of the figure of the Mātā and the practices surrounding her, especially among lower castes and within villages. All these external calls for reform aside, the Mātā was also capable of generating an impetus for change *within* communities in Gujarat. The foremost example is that of the Devī movement, which swept through southern Gujarat in the early 1920s and profoundly affected Adivasis, or “tribal” populations, therein.

The Adivasis of southern Gujarat, as in other regions of India, live on the periphery of mainstream Hindu society, not only physically but also in terms of lifestyle. In sharp contrast to many caste Hindus, they eat meat, consume alcohol, and worship their own unique gods and goddesses, their community consciousness persistently reinforced by a firm refusal to allow these beliefs and practices to be influenced by those of non-Adivasis (Hardiman 1987, 81). Despite their remove from conventional Gujarati society, Adivasis were still variously exploited by a number of groups in the state. These included the money-lenders from Patel castes and also Parsis, Zoroastrians who belong to the mainstream Gujarati middle class and were the traditional purveyors of alcohol in southern Gujarat (1987, 99). In the early twentieth century, the colonial state also manipulated the Adivasis through legal systems and taxation (*Ibid.*).

By the early 1920s, however, Adivasis began to make systematic changes to their way of life, in the process working against the exploitative relationships in which they were bound, on account of the will of *mātās*. It was at this point in time that the Devī, in a variety of village contexts, began expressing a specific set of demands through spirit mediums called *bhagats* (Hardiman 1987, 1). In their customary capacity for banishing spirits, *bhagats* are virtually interchangeable with *bhuvās*. When inhabited by the Devī, *bhagats* typically shook their heads in the possession-like manner known as *dhūṇvum* or, alternatively, as “*pavan*” of the Devī. *Pavan* refers to a “wind” or “breeze”—that of a god or goddess overtaking a person in a trance-like state—and can also carry the connotation of an “air” or “ruling fashion” (1987, 65).¹¹⁷ Both *dhūṇvum* and *pavan* denote a mode of behaviour similar to that which was being described by colonialists and missionaries in their “*bhuvā* scenes” and interrelated accounts of “spirit-scaring.” Regardless of the terminology used, the *bhagat* was able to speak in the voice of the goddess so as to make detailed requests. Foremost among these commands were admonitions that the particular Adivasi group in question stop drinking liquor and toddy and to similarly eliminate meat and fish from their diet. In due time, the warning to give up liquor turned into an order to boycott Parsis entirely. While other reform movements focusing upon sobriety had arisen among Adivasi communities in the past, the Devī movement was interpreted by many as a call for the Adivasis to make permanent, wide-ranging changes to their existing way of life (1987, 67).¹¹⁸ Sometimes these requests addressed issues of hygiene, with the Devī requesting that Adivasis begin taking regular baths (1987, 28). In some cases, the Devī’s entreaties confronted spiritualism, with women in a given village being made to assemble so as to undergo tests to establish whether or not they were *dākaṇs* (Skaria 1997, 140-141). Those who were deemed to be witches were then exorcized (1997, 141). This suggests that, contra colonial and missionary conceptualizations, the Devī was quite firmly established as a goddess and not a witch, as per Enthoven’s account, or any other malevolent supernatural entity, for that matter. In fact, she was often complicit in eliminating supernaturalism and superstition as a whole, for in some areas the collaborative mission of the Devī and her *bhagats* was not just the usual goal of

¹¹⁷ Kathleen Erndl (1993) has explored in great depth the use of the term “*pavan*” as it relates to possession in her study of goddess worship in Punjab. For a painstakingly thorough treatment of possession terminology in Indic languages, see Frederick M. Smith’s *The Self Possessed: Deity and Spirit Possession in South Asian Literature and Civilization* (2006, 15-23; 35-39).

¹¹⁸ One such example is the reform movement that took place among Gujarati Adivasis in 1905, which also focused on the renunciation of alcohol. Unlike the Devī movement, the 1905 movement was formally started by Amarsinh Gamit, a leading Adivasi social reformer (Hardiman 1987, 143).

driving away *bhūts* from the villages, but rather to exorcize belief in such entities entirely (Hardiman 1987, 38). After making some variation of the aforementioned commands, the goddess would eventually be passed on to the next village, where the undertaking was repeated. In this manner, the goddess drifted through a number of Adivasi communities such as the Machis, the Dhodiyas, the Dublas, as well as various groups in the Dangs region, the movement stretching as far northward as Surat.

The main Devī around which the eponymous movement became established was largely known as Salabāī, whom David Hardiman links to other “un-Brahmanized” *mātās* already popular in Gujarat, with reference to some of the goddesses we have already encountered (1987, 55-56 ff. 1). Salabāī had to be worshipped attentively, her devotees cultivating a strong self-discipline, for it was believed that, in typical *mātā* fashion, she bore unimaginable power in her caprice and could bring rapid misfortune and suffering to those who failed to obey her wishes (1987, 57). Various localized versions of Salabāī arose during this short period of time, the goddess taking on the names Sellabāī or Salaibāī in coastal regions (1987, 33). Some Devī-mediums even linked Salabāī to Kālī at Pavagadh in order to afford her some pan-regional legitimacy (1987, 58-59).

Toward this end of gaining broader legitimacy, many of these variations of Salabāī and their attendant mythologies came to incorporate nationalistic motifs. It was said, for instance, that Salabāī had “climbed Gandhi’s hill” with great difficulty (Hardiman 1987, 34). This seemed to insinuate that the goddess was somehow generated by Gandhi, an association apparently founded on an understanding that both the Mātā and the Mahatma’s programs of abstinence from meat and liquor were interconnected (*Ibid.*). Patidar/Patel mediums tended to stress this connection between the Devī and Gandhi (1987, 50). That Gandhi would free the Adivasis was also stated very plainly by the Devī mediums of Bardoli and Valod (1987, 171). In these milieux and others, the name of Gandhi was frequently evoked alongside the name of Salabāī (1987, 172). On occasion, the image of Gandhi was alleged to have been spotted in community wells (or *vāvs*), likely in hopes of winning Adivasi support for the nationalist cause (1987, 51). This motif of Gandhi in the *vāv* caught on rapidly, and throughout southern Gujarat, it became commonplace for people to peer into wells in hopes that they might receive a vision of Gandhi (*Ibid.*). This seems to follow from a longstanding folkloric trope in Gujarat in which *mātās* appear in *vāvs*, either as malignant *cuḍels* or as benign *camatkārs* (Enthoven [1914] 1989, 40;

Jain-Neubauer 1999, 77). Indeed, sightings of Gandhi were commonly reported in this context, and on some occasions, the goddess Salabāī was said to have been seen sitting next to him in wells (Hardiman 1987, 51). For this reason, Adivasis came to understand Gandhi in relation to their own religious imaginary, in no small part based in the character of the goddess. Discernible in Salabai, the foremost *mātā* of the Devī movement, then, is a uniquely Gujarati goddess-inflected impetus toward reform, also integrating facets of nationalist sentiment—both Indian and Gujarati—in the person of the Rajkot-raised Gandhi. The Mātā made Gandhi even more palpably local, while Gandhi simultaneously rendered the Mātā national.

The foremost practical effect of the Devī movement was that, in promoting the refusal to drink, it effectively cut the economic cord binding Adivasis to the Parsi liquor-providers (Hardiman 1987, 140). Further, as the movement became progressively more Gandhian, with the Devī additionally advocating the boycott of foreign cloth and government schools in 1922, it engendered feelings of unease in the authorities due to the fact Adivasis were suddenly standing up for themselves and sustaining a resistance (1987, 184-188). Accordingly, colonial decrees, seemingly taking a page from the colonial gazetteers and missionary accounts earlier on, once again evoked the imagery of Devī as demonic, painting her as an evil spirit purposely misleading the people via “wicked actions” (1987, 187).

More broadly, though, the Devī movement inculcated in Adivasis what Hardiman has called a “spirit of assertion” (1987, 151). This grew out of the fact that while the Devī movement was in full swing, it was not educated reformers who took the initiative as per previous uplift programs that attempted to transform the lives of Adivasis (Hardiman 1987, 151). In this case, rather, the majority of those inspired by the Devī were in fact non-literate and rather obscure Adivasis (*Ibid.*). The Adivasis at the forefront of the movement were individuals who usually had no personal history of spirit-possession, and for a time, these persons came to be invested with considerable authority (1987, 152). By virtue of this new spirit of self-assertion, colonial officials and other exploiting parties soon found that the supply of free goods, services, and labour was not as forthcoming from Adivasis as it had been before (1987, 177). And while most Adivasis reverted to their old ways after the departure of the Devī, with almost the entire population once again drinking liquor and eating meat within a year, this newfound spirit of assertion persisted (1987, 28).

Accompanying this spirit of assertion articulated and invigorated by the Devī was also a readily apparent sense of upward mobility. Hardiman has entertained the possibility that the movement involved a type of Sanskritization, given that the temperance, cleanliness, and vegetarianism urged by the Devī upon Adivasis in southern Gujarat were all involved in advancing a claim to be accepted with “clean” castes (1987, 158). The goddess reiterated much of what high-caste teachers in boarding schools and superior-quality village schools had been trying to impart upon Adivasi youths so as to move them away from older superstitions toward the more esteemed doctrines of ideologues such as Dayanand Sarasvati or systems such as Gujarati Vaiṣṇavism (1987, 139).¹¹⁹ In this latter trajectory, we might also link the Devī’s commands to Vaiṣṇavization. Whatever the case, these high-caste teachers had not only stressed devotion to Hindu deities and worship through devotional songs in place of obeisance to idols, but they also championed what would come to be the trademark demands of the Devī—that is, ritual cleanliness, abstention from liquor drinking and meat-eating, and by extension, sacrifice, as well (*Ibid.*). Hardiman, however, has insisted that in the Devī program almost nothing was said about religious beliefs, and no demand was made to worship Kṛṣṇa, Rāma, or Hanumān (1987, 164). This enables Hardiman to ultimately reject Sanskritization and to persevere with a Marxist-driven explanatory model. In his view, the best explanation of the Devī movement relates to power, above all the Adivasis’ rejection of the values of their most direct exploiters, the Parsis, and their endorsement of values related to groups that possessed political capital, namely the Brahmins as well as Jain and Vaiṣṇava Baniyas (1987, 163). Adivasis participating in the movement inherited *sāttvik* sensibilities including vegetarianism, abstinence, notions of pollution, as well as, more generally, simplicity and self-restraint, all of which were associated with the regionally dominant high-caste Hindus and Jains. We may be able to read the movement, then, as an early form of gentrification by way of the goddess, as the commands of the Devī aimed at instilling the then-prevailing Jain and Vaiṣṇava/Brahmin-dominated ideals that helped encode and constitute middle- and upper-class status. Even if we accept Hardiman’s Marxist power-based analysis, the upwardly mobile elements of the Devī movement still incorporate the kinds of transformations involved in Sanskritization or Vaiṣṇavization alongside

¹¹⁹ Dayanand Saraswati (1824–1883), a Brahmin by birth, was the Saurashtra-born founder of the Arya Samaj reform movement, which sought to reclaim elements of the Vedic tradition. The Arya Samaj condemned practices such as idol worship, meat-eating, and temple offerings, including animal sacrifices, and generally championed skepticism, common sense, and the authority of the Vedas over priest-craft and superstitious beliefs. For more on Dayanand Saraswati, see Scott (2016, 150-178).

this gentrification. For example, whereas old-school *bhagats* in southern Gujarat had requested liquor and chickens as payment for their services, after the Devī movement many healers told those who were sick that they should be strict in their abstinence from meat and liquor, and they should offer a coconut, rather than an animal, for sacrifice (1987, 189). Theoretical frameworks notwithstanding, we can identify in the Devī movement an earlier relationship between the goddess and upward mobility for non-elite groups.

The articulation of self-assertion through the goddess for purposes of upward mobility has manifested in later religious expressions in Gujarat as well. One such case can be found in the Kacch region in northwest Gujarat, where a Charan woman dubbed Āī Śrī Sonal Mātājī came to be recognized as a goddess, fully embodying the divinity so commonly attributed to women of her caste (Basu 2005, 90). Born in 1920 in Gandhi's birthplace of Porbandar, the young Āī Śrī Sonal Mātājī rejected marriage and professed a new kind of asceticism that stressed personal manual labour alongside established modes of penance and meditation (2005, 83). Āī Śrī Sonal Mātājī's influence helped shift Charans away from their customary cattle-raising toward settled agriculture, but this was not the only major upheaval she advocated for the group. In her tours around Kacch, Saurashtra, and southern Rajasthan that continued until her death in 1975, she also preached vegetarianism and teetotalism while railing against blood sacrifice and possession rituals, a constellation of changes that Helene Basu has labelled as Sanskritization (2005, 90). All the while, Āī Śrī Sonal Mātājī promoted better education for children within her caste. These reforms have, according to Basu, left "a distinct mark in the contemporary social life of the caste" (*Ibid.*), and so Āī Śrī Sonal Mātājī is posthumously commemorated as a goddess, with annual celebrations instituted by the Charan caste council in her honour. At these events, speeches made by caste leaders, particularly present-day Mātājīs, provide a public forum for identifying and decrying persisting vices in the Charan lifestyle that run counter to what Āī Śrī Sonal Mātājī taught. These include card-playing, alcohol consumption, domestic violence, and gossip (2005, 98). On the strength of this sustained deification after her death, following from the Charan convention that James McNabb Campbell much earlier dismissed as a "primitive custom," Āī Śrī Sonal Mātājī's call for asceticism and forward-thinking lifestyles lives on within the caste up to the present. In Basu's assessment, Āī Śrī Sonal Mātājī still "plays a pivotal role in the self-definition of the Chāraṇ caste of [Kacch]" (2005, 84). Indeed, as an embodiment of the Mātā, she allows the caste to preserve an idealized image of itself that may have otherwise been

lost in the post-colonial context with the demise of royal lineages and the Charan's bardic connections thereto (2005, 83). In effect, Āī Śrī Sonal Mātājī helps Charans recurrently reclaim the status of their courtly past. Āī Śrī Sonal Mātājī's enduring message follows the pattern of *sāttvik* reforms laid out by the Devī movement, again showing how the goddess, working through living *mātā* mediums in the community, can prompt and sustain an upwardly mobile *habitus* within non-elite groups.

The Devī movement of the early 1920s and the teachings of Āī Śrī Sonal Mātājī illustrate how not all *mātā*-related reform has been unilaterally top-down. Just as village variations of the goddess represented charged sites of revulsion for educated elites, be they Gujarati or colonial or missionary, so too could *devīs* such as Salabāī and later on, Āī Śrī Sonal Mātājī, spur internal reform and resistance within subaltern communities. This allowed non-elite groups, among them the Adivasis of southern Gujarat and the Charans from Kacch, a measure of self-assertion that aided in articulating visions for upward mobility that were as much a product of their own construction as they were born of a Sanskritic or Vaiṣṇava ideal. While inflected by upper-caste and nationalist values, the reforms proposed by the Devī movement came from a locus that, for Adivasis, was uniquely their own. This internal self-assertion is also identifiable in the case of Āī Śrī Sonal Mātājī, who powerfully exemplifies the fundamental Charan belief that their women are goddesses, a notion that continues to inform the caste's self-image as well as its collective spirit of self-improvement. In the goddess, then, whether we call her "Devī" or "Mātā," sectors of Gujarati society have variously perceived a category to be reformed, but also a category through which reform can happen.

Conclusion

Female divinities clearly had some prevalence in pre-colonial Gujarat and Saurashtra, with Sanskritic goddesses and more localized *mātās* appearing with increasing frequency from the middle of the first millennium CE onward, chiefly in the royal context. In the next millennium, Bahucarā, Kālī, and Ambā Mātā all came to be associated with specific *śakti-pīṭhas*, each of which grew steadily in popularity through the Mughal period. Devotional poetry developed around these and other *mātās* with the efforts of composers such as Vallabh Bhatt and Mithu Maharaj, whose works paved the way for early print vernacular publications of *garbas* in the late nineteenth century. The tantric Śrīvidyā school, named for the goddess Tripurāsundarī, also

seems to have persisted in Gujarat, its influence readily detectable in devotional poetics, as well as in the iconography of the Śrī-yantra at various aforementioned *śakti-pīṭhas*.

With the arrival of Western colonialists and missionaries, discourses were published that depicted the *mātās* in a darker light. British Orientalists found elements of goddess worship off-putting, especially those that were dedicated to female spirits popular in village and rural areas. Revelling in accounts of blood sacrifices and spirit possession, colonial commentators imagined entities such as Melaḍī and Jogaṇī as being ghosts as much as goddesses, frontrunners amongst a host of “nauseous associates.” Christian missionaries also fixated on these ecstatic ritual elements of Devī worship in villages, figuring the Mātā less as a goddess or a ghost and more pointedly as a demonic entity, the worship of which epitomized the “downward tendency of human nature.” As such, in the Mātā (or *mātās*), colonialists and missionaries saw justifications for programs of civilization and conversion, respectively. Gujarati reformers appear to have been in conversation with Western opinion on goddess worship and may have had a hand in shaping its formation. Sahajanand likely had rural goddesses in his targets when he formulated his stringently abstemious, Vaiṣṇavizing Swaminarayan movement. Later Swaminarayan converts such as Dalpatram Daya would perpetuate this skepticism of village *mātās*, as would some commentators from outside the movement.

Thus, Daya’s mentor, Alexander Kinloch Forbes, succinctly synopsisized the opinion on rural goddesses that was circulating among colonial and indigenous elites in Gujarat in 1848 (and for decades to come) when he dismissed Melaḍī as one among the “filthy night birds.” For Orientalists, missionaries, and educated, elite Gujaratis alike, Melaḍī and other *mātās* were an aspect of religion that had to be viewed with suspicion, reformed, and even abolished. Variations of this outlook persist in Gujarat today. Tambs-Lyche, for instance, noted the marked absence of upper-caste persons at a public possession-like performance involving the Mātājī he observed in modern-day Saurashtra, and went on to conclude that “no Brahmin or Vania, in general, would like to be associated with such unorthodox, non-Sanskritic, or popular ritual” (2004, 252). Time and again my own fieldwork confirmed this sentiment, which was perhaps most neatly summarized by the wealthy, English-speaking hotelier I met in Bhavnagar who dismissed *mātā* worship as “mass hysteria.”

Although *mātās* were (and are) maligned by many foreign and indigenous reform-minded commentators, they were just as capable of providing the impetus for reform within subaltern

communities. Such was the case during the Devī movement that swept through southern Gujarat in the early 1920s, during which the goddess Salabāī demanded abstentions from drinking and meat that would seemingly elevate her Adivasi worshippers toward the strata of Jain, Vaiṣṇava, and Brahmin cultural elites. Thus, as much as the goddess could spur calls to reform from revolted outsiders, so too could she foster a “spirit of assertion” and thereby initiate upwardly mobile transformations within non-elite communities as well. This marks the figure of the goddess in Gujarat as an inherently contested yet powerful figurative site, characterized by an ambivalence that, for many *mātās*, continues to be negotiated right up to the present.

Chapter Three: Upwardly Mobile Prototypes—Khoḍīyār and Bahucarā Mātā

Khoḍīyār and Bahucarā stand out among Gujarati *mātās*, not only by way of their ubiquitous public presence but also because of their striking commonalities. Both goddesses have folkloric origins in the bardic Charan caste, the members of which traditionally served as genealogists and record-keepers for royals in Gujarat, Saurashtra, and Rajasthan (Tambs-Lyche 2004, 124).¹²⁰ Indeed, both *mātās* feature in well-known origin narratives tracing their emergence back to the deification of a deceased Charan woman. Each rose to some degree of mainstream prominence well before the colonial period, Khoḍīyār being tied in the public imagination with several ruling dynasties and the popular *upapīṭha* at Rajpara, and Bahucarā being linked from the thirteenth century onward to the *śakti-pīṭha* at Becharaji that remains a popular pilgrimage site today. Together, Khoḍīyār and Bahucarā belong to a category of female divinities all its own—that is, patron goddesses for specific caste and clan groups. Khoḍīyār is the *kuldevī* (or lineage goddess) of the Chudasamas, among other Rajput clans, while one of the many roles Bahucarā serves is that of guardian for the Koli caste (Tambs-Lyche 2004, 123-124).¹²¹

Despite the established mainstream identities that these links with specific groups and sites have afforded Khoḍīyār and Bahucarā, their reputations are not entirely pristine as per those of non-regional goddesses such as Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī. Both Khoḍīyār and Bahucarā embody in some measure the capriciousness that is characteristic of village *mātās*. While benign, they can also be fierce, and they are regarded by their enemies as dreadful, bearing considerable resemblance to the hot-tempered Durgā (Tambs-Lyche 2004, 124). As a goddess of one-time Saurashtra royals, Khoḍīyār has been associated with animal sacrifice, particularly that of the buffalo, which, as we have seen, could function to instantiate and sustain the power of a king or a chief (2004, 123). Bahucarā, with her own well-established connections to the Rajputs, namely the Solankis, is also associated with sacrifices, which were at one time commonplace at her *śakti-pīṭha* (Sheikh 2010, 91-92). Solankis are not Bahucarā's only patron group, however, and she has been associated with communities more suspect to elite or Sanskritic sensibilities. These

¹²⁰ It has been commonly believed throughout Gujarat, particularly in the north and in Saurashtra, that Charan women who sacrificed themselves became *mātās* (Shah & Shroff 1958, 250).

¹²¹ The Kolis are an ethnic group that lives mostly in northwestern India. During the colonial period, they were classified as a criminal tribe, even though some Kolis held small princely states at this time. Many Kolis ended up marrying Rajputs, and were closely tied to these martial castes and their deities. For more on the Kolis, see Jaffrelot (2003, 180-182) and A.M. Shah (2010, 167-170).

include the Pavaiyas, a group of transgender performers more widely known throughout India as Hijras whose patron deity is Bahucarā, and the Kamalias, a localized Muslim population at Becharaji. Given these sorts of associations, worshippers of both Bahucarā and Khoḍīyār have had to negotiate these goddesses' identities recurrently over the centuries, a process that has intensified in the past hundred years, and is still ongoing today.

This chapter draws heavily upon existing scholarship on Bahucarā and Khoḍīyār Mātā and re-reads this small but compelling body of work through the multiple lenses of upward mobility in hopes of determining the strategies through which these goddesses' identities have been (and continue to be) negotiated throughout their history. With Samira Sheikh's lone chapter marking the sole focused study of Bahucarā and the works of Neelima Shukla-Bhatt and Harald Tambs-Lyche providing the only in-depth treatments of Khoḍīyār, sources on these deities are limited, though they are nonetheless rich in content. As we re-examine these studies through the vocabulary of Sanskritization, Vaiṣṇavization, universalization, and gentrification, we will also explore in greater depth the tantric elements—most notably connections with Tripurāsundarī/Rājarājeśvarī—that permeate each goddess to some degree. Mass-produced iconography and contemporary vernacular print materials prove especially helpful in discerning these tantric resonances. This chapter will also provide a foretaste of my ethnography, a portion of which involved several contemporary Gujarati sites dedicated to Bahucarā and Khoḍīyār. Altogether, these resources will help to establish that both Bahucarā and Khoḍīyār have slowly but surely become *sāttvik*, making them amenable to the middle-class and upwardly mobile followers that patronize so many of their sites today. This process is still ongoing at present. In this way, Bahucarā and Khoḍīyār can be seen as early exemplars for *mātās* such as Melaḍī, Jogaṇī, and Haḍkāī, whose reimagining began much more recently.

Bahucarā Mātā

One of the most broadly circulated goddesses in contemporary Gujarat is Bahucarā Mātā, partly on account of the diverse groups that claim allegiances with her. Her image is distinctive, featuring a bejewelled young woman seated upon a disproportionately large rooster (Figure 4). This image is as pervasive outside her temples as inside, having gained visibility on public billboards, trucks, and auto rickshaws (Sheikh 2010, 84). Framed posters, films, and devotional songs dedicated to the goddess are on sale in virtually any Gujarati town, and music videos

featuring Bahucarā-themed myths and *bhajans* (religious songs) are widely available on the internet. In short, Bahucarā Mātā is ubiquitous in Gujarat. Some sources connect her name to this sort of ubiquity, as it can be parsed into the component parts “*bahu*,” or “many,” and *cara*, or “movement,” roughly rendering the goddess “she who can move many places” (Fischer, Jain & Shah 2014, 162). Her name just as likely derived from the image itself, possibly evolving from the moniker Barhicharī, “she who moves upon a rooster” (*Ibid.*). In addition, vernacular print materials, both early and contemporary, often refer to Bahucarā as the tantric Mahāvidyā Bālātripurāsundarī, whose Śrīvidyā influences show through, for example, in the Bālātripurā-yantras and Śrī-yantras at Becharaji.



Figure 4: Popular Bahucarā Mātā lithograph (photo by Damian N. Boodram)

Despite her widespread acceptance, Bahucarā has not always aligned with elite sensibilities, and to some degree still does not. Owing to these associations with non-elite or subversive castes, clans, and communities designated by Samira Sheikh as “liminal groupings,” Bahucarā has been variously related to “animal sacrifice, Muslims and gender-bending,” each of

which has caused unease amongst her more Brahminic-minded faithful (2010, 92). This discomfort played a role in periodic efforts by a variety of interested parties to Sanskritize and Vaiṣṇavize Bahucarā throughout her history. In a comparable spirit, Bahucarā has more recently been gentrified at her main site at Becharaji so as to appeal to a wider, transregional audience. Her tantric elements do not seem to have impeded these sanitization processes; in fact, they may very well play a pivotal role in helping them along.

ORIGINS

Bahucarā origin stories are legion, reflecting the varied interests of the multiple communities who have stakes in her Becharaji temple. The most common—or at least the most commonly cited by scholars—is that which identifies her as a girl from the Charan caste. Alexander Forbes provides one of the earliest published records of this story, no doubt a telling he heard from the Charans themselves, as he had an immense admiration for the group and counted many informants from among their ranks (Sheikh 2010, 89; Kapadia 2018, 156). In this story, a group including three Charan sisters—Būt, Balāl, and Bahucarā by name—was journeying from Sulkhanpur to a village nearby (Forbes [1878] 1973, 426). On their way, the group was intercepted by brigands from the Koli tribe. Bahucarā promptly grabbed a sword from a boy in her group and cut off her own breasts, perishing on the spot (Fischer et al. 2014, 166). Her sisters also killed themselves, and as a result all three young women became goddesses.¹²² The spot where they died was marked by memorial stone slabs, and built upon these were small temples that developed into the present-day Becharaji site to Bahucarā (Fischer et al. 2014, 166).

Other accounts of Bahucarā's origin centre upon motifs of gender, particularly emasculation and gender-switching. A variation of the aforementioned story, for instance, has Bahucarā as a member of the Maru Charan community of Marwar, Rajasthan, bordering Gujarat. In this version, the assault took place as Bahucarā made her way from Rajasthan to Saurashtra. Before she killed herself, Bahucarā put a curse on the bandits, telling them that their masculinity would be compromised, much like that of Hijras (Fischer et al. 2014, 166). She then ordered that a temple be built in her honour underneath a *varakhadī* tree, a species of tree recurrent in *mātā* stories that can grow in all terrain and can bear leaves year-round over a lifespan of several

¹²² In addition to Bahucarā's temple at Becharaji (Chunval), Būt has a temple in Arnej near Koth in the Botad region of Saurashtra, and Balāl has a temple in Bakhalka near Sihor in the Bhavnagar region of Saurashtra (Fischer, Jain & Shah 2014, 166).

centuries. At this new temple, Bahucarā would watch over all Hijras if they worshipped her in women's clothing. The leader of the bandits promptly turned into a Hijra and became Bahucarā's first worshipper (*Ibid.*).

Another of Bahucarā's gendered origin stories involves the Solanki ruler, Vajeshih, of Chanasma where the Becharaji temple is located today. Vajeshih and his wife were unable to have children, let alone the all-important son. When they did manage to have a child, it was a girl (*Ibid.*). In their desperation, the parents gave their daughter the masculine name "Tejpal" and introduced the child to the court as a boy, thereafter raising "him" in this gender configuration. The ostensible son was in due course arranged to be married to the daughter of the king of Patan. Soon after the wedding, Tejpal's virility came into question, and he had to flee Patan on horseback, paying little if any heed to a female dog that followed close behind him as he left. After safely escaping, Tejpal stopped at a small pond under a *varakhadī* tree to get some much-needed rest (Fischer et al. 2014, 166-168). This pond was none other than the Mānsarovar, or "lake of desire," so-called because its waters are said to fulfill the wishes of any bather (Kirparam 1901, 366; Enthoven [1914] 1989, 39). This Mānsarovar parallels the lake of the same name that is often mentioned in Sanskrit texts such as the *Mahābhārata* and that is typically sited at Mount Kailash in Tibet.¹²³ The dog, also seeking refreshment, took a dip in the water (Fischer et al. 2014, 168). Miraculously, it emerged as a male. Seeing this, Tejpal got the urge to experiment, and had the horse—a mare—bathe in the water. Surely enough, the mare emerged as a stallion. Tejpal wasted little time in diving into the pond, and he resurfaced as a man. Tejpal rode back happily to Patan, eager to reunite with his bride. As an expression of his thankfulness, he made the gender-switching pond into a sacred site.¹²⁴

¹²³ Mānsarovar has been placed at a number of locations throughout the subcontinent, with the most prominent situated in the modern-day Tibetan Autonomous Region in China. This site has preserved its pan-Indian significance, and it endures as a pilgrimage spot for Hindus, Buddhists, and Jains, among others.

¹²⁴ Yet another well-known origin story linking Bahucarā to transgendered identities appears in Serena Nanda's study of the Hijras, *Neither Man nor Woman* (1990, 25-26). In this tale, there was a prince whose parents wanted him to wed, despite the fact he was uninterested in the prospect of married life. His parents persisted, eventually selecting the goddess to be his bride. The marriage took place, but was never consummated. On their wedding night, the prince rode away into the forest, leaving the goddess unaccompanied in their marital bed. This continued night after night for several months, and the goddess became more and more agitated. Seeking answers, she decided to follow her husband as he went off on one of his nightly sojourns. She found him in a forest clearing, carrying on "like the Hijras" (1990, 25). Puzzled, she made her way home. When her husband returned, she confronted him with what she had seen. He promptly professed his urge to eschew the life of marriage and children, claiming he was "neither man nor woman" (1990, 26). The wellspring of the goddess's anger all at once burst, and she accused her husband of ruining her life on account of hiding the facts of his sexuality. She then took her revenge by cutting off

The recurrent links between Bahucarā and gender ambiguity reflect her status as a patron goddess of transgender communities throughout India, namely the Pavaiyas as well as, more broadly, the Hijras throughout North India and the Tirunankais of Tamil Nadu.¹²⁵ The Pavaiya community at Becharaji, like other Hijra groups, consists mainly of non-procreative or non-heteronormative males who dress as women. Many have undergone a ritual castration of both penis and testicles in order to consolidate their identity in the group. It is Bahucarā herself who summons forth would-be Hijras living throughout North India, appearing in the dreams of impotent men and ordering them to go through with the emasculation operation (Nanda 1990, 25). This idea is established by another foundational tale wherein a long-childless king from the Champaner area in the Panch Mahals was finally granted a son by virtue of Bahucarā's blessing (Fischer et al. 2014, 168). The son, Jeto, was commanded by his father to serve the goddess in order to demonstrate the family's gratitude. Bahucarā would eventually materialize in Jeto's dreams and instruct him to cut off his genitals and dress like a woman. He obeyed the goddess's order and, in due time, other castrated men began to gather around him; as such, Jeto is thought by some to be the founder of the Hijra community (*Ibid.*).

At present, those who refuse the goddess's emasculation order are thought to be punished with seven additional lifetimes of impotence (Nanda 1990, 25). The goddess is also said to oversee the emasculation procedure. Prior to the operation, the *dai mā* (or midwife) performing the emasculation invokes Bahucarā's blessing via *pūjā*. During the operation itself, the man undergoing the procedure looks at a picture of Bahucarā and constantly repeats her name (1990, 27). After recovering from the operation, the initiate enters into a life of collecting alms and performing at weddings and birth celebrations. In this latter capacity, Hijras confer blessings on newborns in the name of Bahucarā Mātā, calling on her to bring fertility, prosperity, and long-life for the baby (Nanda 1990, 2). Indeed, Hijras are considered mediums of the Mātā because of the power with which their emasculation procedure invests them (Shah 1961, 1327; Nanda 1990, 67). Nanda claims that virtually every Hijra household has a small shrine dedicated to the

his genitals. She referred to this process of emasculation as "nirvana" or "liberation"; after this, the prince took the form of a woman (*Ibid.*).

¹²⁵ Tirunankais are male-to-female transgender individuals about whom little has been written. Elaine Craddock (2012) has argued that Tamil Tirunankais have worked against marginalization by engaging in distinctive social, kinship, and ritual spheres, thereby negotiating a more tenable status. Integral to this relationship is the Tirunankais' special relationship with goddesses, Bahucarā included, from which they channel divine power by performing divination and healing rituals at temples.

goddess, and every Hijra seeks to visit her temple at least once in their lives (Nanda 1990, 24). Despite their solid affiliation with Bahucarā, Hijras occasion more than a little apprehension among Gujarat's elites due to their gender ambiguity as well as more recent associations with prostitution, which members of the community turned to as demand declined for their traditional services (1990, 53). To wit, Hijras have often been the subject of derisive jokes (Shah 1961, 1329). I frequently heard these jokes over the course of my fieldwork, as well as specious conflation between the terms "Hijra" and "homosexual."

A BRIEF HISTORY OF BECHARAJI

Becharaji, the best-known Bahucarā site in Gujarat, can be traced back to 1152 CE when the original shrine, or *ādya-sthān*, was reportedly built at its present-day location by a sovereign known as Shankhal Raj, for whom the neighbouring village of Sankhalpur is named (Elliot 1883, 610). The earliest extant inscription related to the shrine is from 1280 and mentions its accompanying village, Vahichara (Sheikh 2010, 86). Major expansions to the shrine were made in the eighteenth century under operatives of the Maratha Empire. For instance, a Maratha named Fadnis (or Fadnavis) set the construction of the *madhya-sthān*, or "intermediate place" in motion as another small shrine adjoining the original temple (Elliot 1883, 610). Although Fadnis is a person "of whom and whose date no record exists" by the reckoning of the author of the Baroda *Gazetteer* (*Ibid.*), the intermediate shrine is believed to have been built in the eighteenth century (Sheikh 2010, 87). It was under the supervision of the Gaekwars, a martial clan that enjoyed ruling power in Gujarat under the Maratha Empire, that the shrine was fortified in brick (*Ibid.*).¹²⁶ The Gaekwars would go on to further enlarge the site. In the mid-eighteenth century, Damajirao Gaekwar (r. 1732-1768) granted three villages for the temple's maintenance and, in 1779, Manaji Rav Gaekwar (r. 1789-1793) built the largest of the temples on the grounds, the *mukhya-sthān* (or "large temple"), which remains the principal place of worship today (Sheikh 2010, 85; Elliot 1883, 610). By the 1880s, the temple had accumulated substantial wealth, exemplified by its wells, tanks, public gardens, charitable dispensary, and lodgings for pilgrims (*dharmaśālās*), among other features (Sheikh 2010, 86). This marks it as something of a prototype for later Gujarati pilgrimage spots. Evidently, Becharaji saw no short supply of

¹²⁶ The Gaekwars, also known as the Gaekwads, were a dynasty that presided over the princely state of Baroda from the early eighteenth century until Indian Independence in 1947.

pilgrims by this point in the nineteenth century. Though Bahucarā was most often called upon to remedy irregularities of the spine and of speech and to grant the birth of children, particularly sons, she could fulfill practically any wish (Sheikh 2010, 85). Accordingly, pilgrims would stay seated by the wish-fulfilling waters of the “Mānsarovar”—a pond on the temple grounds—fasting until they heard the Mātā’s voice promising to grant them their desires, such as cures for blindness, paralysis, stammering, and barrenness, among other physical impairments (Forbes [1878] 1973, 428; Kirparam 1901, 366).

On account of the prosperity garnered by this devoted following, the temple profited numerous communities, all of whom competed with one another for a share of its resources. As per the Gaekwar administration, portions of the temple revenues were paid out to three principal groups who worshipped and performed duties at the temple (Sheikh 2010, 87-88). These were the Solanki Rajputs of the nearby Kalri village, the Pavaiyas, and the Kamalias, a community whose Muslim identity includes worshipping Bahucarā (2010, 88). It has been speculated that the Kamalias were originally sweepers, forming a subgroup of the untouchable Bhangi community (Fischer et al. 2014, 169). After Alauddin Khalji (r. 1296-1316), ruler of the Delhi Sultanate, captured the temple around the turn of the fourteenth century, the Kamalias appear to have converted to Islam (Padmaja 1986, 246).¹²⁷ They would serve as musicians and servants to the goddess, and formerly shared control of the temple with the Solanki Rajputs (Padmaja 1986, 245; Fischer et al. 2014, 169). The Kamalias and Solankis also shared temple offerings, an arrangement that occasionally led to violent conflict as both groups vied to claim the full portion for themselves.¹²⁸ The Pavaiyas, meanwhile, were left to live on the alms begged from pilgrims. Some Pavaiyas apparently amassed impressive fortunes in this way, though their wealth was just

¹²⁷ The Kamalias’ relationship with Alauddin is recorded in a folktale documented by Fischer, Jain, and Shah. After Alauddin had taken the temple, one of his soldiers supposedly stole a rooster that had been gifted to Bahucarā. He cooked the fowl and served it to his platoon. After the soldiers had consumed the meat, the rooster began to scream the name of the goddess from within the soldiers’ stomachs. They promptly begged the goddess for forgiveness, and a man named Kamal promised to stay at this site with his Muslim wife so that they could serve the goddess (Fischer, Jain & Shah 2014, 169). Hence, the Kamalias, as their name would suggest, descended from this man Kamal. A more visceral version of this story has the Muslim conquerors capturing and eating all but one of the chickens from the plundered temple. In the night, the escaped rooster began to call the name of Bahucarā and all the consumed fowls came back from the dead, bursting out of the stomachs of the Muslim soldiers (Sheikh 2010, 92).

¹²⁸ In one case from the 1850s, the Kamalias reportedly mocked a group of Solanki women. The Solankis attacked the Kamalias and captured some of them, claiming their income from Bahucarā. To resolve the conflict, it was decreed that if the Kamalias could carry a fire-heated cannonball from a nearby well to the temple, all rights would be given to them. The Kamalias carried out the Herculean task but the conflict still continued and judicial officials had to decide upon a proportional split in the temple’s income (Sheik 2010, 88). The dispute was later taken up by Khanderao Gaekwar (r. 1856-1870) who similarly divided the temple earnings among the Kamalias and Solankis (*Ibid.*).

as often linked to “unnatural practices” (Forbes [1878] 1973, 428-429).¹²⁹ In spite of the occasional clashes at the Becharaji site, its three principal constituents—particularly the Kamalia Muslims and the ambiguously gendered Pavaiyas—shared a decidedly non-Brahmin identity in common.

This non-Brahmin influence was reflected in the non-vegetarian rituals that often took place at the Becharaji site. Animal sacrifices to Bahucarā were commonplace throughout a large span of the temple’s history, as well as within its mythology. In yet another folktale, documented by colonial compiler F.A.H. Elliot, the construction of the temple was set in motion when some children of the area took a break from grazing buffalo to play, and in the process fashioned a niche to Bahucarā (1883, 611). Later on, they brought rice from their homes and offered it to the goddess. They also brought a buffalo from their herd and cut its neck with a branch from the *varakhadī* tree. The goddess accepted the offering of the buffalo’s head. When a king passing by heard of these happenings, he begged Bahucarā to prove her presence by filling a pot he held in his hand with rice. The contents of the pot proved limitless (*Ibid.*). This story suggests sacrifice was foundational to the temple, and numerous sources have recorded the occurrence of animal offerings here. Enthoven reports that male buffaloes were offered to Bahucarā on the fifteenth day of the bright half of every month ([1914] 1989, 60). It was a member of the Koli caste from the surrounding villages who undertook the killing, ideally with one sword-stroke (Elliot 1883, 614). The blood issuing forth was thought to bring prosperity and protection against natural and preternatural ailments, and so it was sopped up with cloths and saved (*Ibid.*). Navarātri and other festival days were also high times for sacrifices, as Kolis and members of other castes would present goats or buffalo calves to the goddess at these junctures ([1878] 1973, 427). Taking place in the open air on the pyramidal sacrificial altar called the *cācar* (or “crossroads”), these kinds of offerings were also carried out when people feared that the lives of family or friends were in danger ([1878] 1973, 427-428). At other times, sacrifices of liquor and flesh were offered to Bahucarā publicly by Rajputs, Kolis, and others. Forbes even reports a rumour that similar sacrifices were done by Brahmins and Vaniyas, albeit in secret and under the cover of night (*Ibid.*).

¹²⁹ On the topic of this latter speculation, Forbes wrote that Pavaiyas, “if universal beliefs be true, prostitute themselves to unnatural practices” ([1878] 1973, 428).

The tendency toward non-vegetarian practices and engagement with non-Brahmins, including but not limited to the ambiguously gendered, sexually unconventional Pavaiyas and the Muslim Kamalias, gave Becharaji something of a questionable reputation. Becharaji's Sanskritic, Brahminical aspects were the result of gradual cultivation, and by no means a consistent fixture on the grounds. It was not until 1859 that a Brahmin would join the temple staff, when the reigning Gaekwar installed Narayanrao Madhav to preside over temple rituals, along with six other Brahmins to attend the goddess in place of Rajputs (Sheikh 2010, 88; Elliot 1883, 612). This appears to be the first time on record that Brahmins officiated activity at the temple (*Ibid.*). Nevertheless, the evidence suggests that non-Sanskritic practices persisted at Becharaji after the Brahmin presence appeared. Non-Brahmin priests were supposedly appointed after 1859 to conduct offerings of flesh and liquor (Padmaja 1986, 245). In accordance, Forbes, writing in the late 1850s, described animal sacrifices and liquor oblations as current practices at the site ([1878] 1973, 427). Just a few years later, the author of the *Gazetteer* noted that while "Brahmanical influence" tried to ensure that no animal should be killed within the fort walls, there were exceptions to this rule for certain buffaloes on ceremonial days (Elliot 1883, 614). Later writers would report that such activities continued into the twentieth century, possibly as late as the 1930s.¹³⁰

Somewhere between the Sanskritic and the non-Sanskritic—or perhaps straddling both—is tantra, which has also enjoyed a long and often underestimated presence at Becharaji. While the goddess's icons usually represent her riding a rooster, the actual object of worship at Becharaji is a Bālātripurā-yantra (Sheikh 2010, 87).¹³¹ The centrality of this tantric accoutrement seems fitting when bearing in mind Bahucarā's homology with Bālātripurāsundarī so often detailed in early print materials dedicated to the goddess. Moreover, the yantra resonates with the aniconographic spirit of other *mātās*, depicted as they were (and still are) in village contexts by way of stones smeared in red lead.¹³² The *mukhya-sthān* built by Manjirao in the late eighteenth

¹³⁰ Attributing blood offerings to the influence of "Left-hand" Śaktism, Shah and Shroff have estimated that these rituals took place commonly at Becharaji and the other major Gujarati *śakti-pīṭhas* as recently as 50 years prior to their 1958 article, which would date the downturn of animal sacrifice to the early 1900s (1958, 250). Padmaja, writing in the 1980s, also reported that sacrifices happened on the fourteenth day of Āśvin "fifty years back," effectively dating these practices as recently as the 1930s (1986, 245).

¹³¹ The Bālātripurā-yantra consists of three triangles, one pointed upward and two pointed downward. These triangles are termed *nāvayonīs*, as they represent vulvas. Around the triangles is a circle bearing eight petals. These petals are set inside another circle (Padmaja 1985, 176).

¹³² Very curiously, Samira Sheikh has noted that the priest and the Rajput informant at Becharaji were adamant that it was the yantra and not the image that was worshipped. In fact, informants claimed that Bahucarā is actually not

century has housed the yantra right up to the present day (Fischer et al. 2014, 165). The yantra under worship, however, has traditionally been hidden from view and still is today, covered by a frame fixed to the niche in which the object of worship is inset. The frame itself bears an engraving of the rooster-riding Bahucarā, as reported in the Baroda *Gazetteer* of 1883, suggesting the present-day depiction had currency at least as far back as the colonial period (Elliott 1883, 610-611). According to Samira Sheikh, the yantra presumably dates to the main, eighteenth-century Maratha-period temple in which it is housed, as it would have otherwise been installed in the adjacent *ādya-sthān* or “original” temple, though there are no historical sources by which to confirm this conjecture.¹³³ Nonetheless, the yantra and the homology with Bālātripurāsundarī that it embodies would play a key role in placing Bahucarā in a timeless, Sanskritic past.

EARLY NEGOTIATIONS WITH BAHUCARĀ’S IMAGE

Given the non-elite castes, non-heteronormative sexualities, and non-vegetarian practices with which she was associated, Bahucarā became part of a devotional religiosity that Samira Sheikh has referred to as “ideologically suspect” (2010, 85), at least to mainstream Gujarati sensibilities with their Brahminic, Jain, and Vaiṣṇava inflections. For this reason, Bahucarā has been a recurrent site of renegotiation, even very early on in the history of the Becharaji temple. The earliest literary reference to the shrine appears in a poem by the seventeenth-century Jain writer Gunavijaya, relating the story of a fifteenth-century merchant named Kochar (Sheikh 2010, 91). The poem describes the anguish Kochar experienced as a result of the blood sacrifices that members of the Bhil caste were performing at the Becharaji shrine (2010, 91-92). Kochar complained to the Governor of Cambay about the violence and was rewarded for his efforts with the governorship of twelve villages in the vicinity of the temple (2010, 92). Not only did Kochar decree that violence had to be stopped at the Bahucarā shrine, but he even went so far as to mandate the protection of the fish in the pond (*Ibid.*). Whether historically factual or not, this story indexes early Sanskritizing sentiments at Becharaji.

The activities of the Pavaiyas also came under the scrutiny of elites. While the emasculation operation that marked initiation into the group was performed at Becharaji well

supposed to have an image, which marks an undercurrent of iconoclasm at Becharaji (Samira Sheikh, personal communication, 2015).

¹³³ Samira Sheikh, personal communication, 2015.

into the colonial period, it was outlawed in 1880 by the Gaekwar ruler of Baroda (Kirparam 1901, 507). Despite intensive protests by Pavaiyas, the law stuck, and castration remains illegal in Gujarat and throughout India to this very day. For that reason, the initiation ritual takes place surreptitiously at present.

With the flourishing of print culture in the twentieth century, more and more Gujarati-language textual accounts related to Becharaji appeared. However, it was not Bahucarā's usual non-Brahmin faithful who composed the majority of these works, but rather Brahmins and members of other elite groups. These elites expressed "profound unease" with Bahucarā and her shrine, while still acknowledging the goddess's considerable power (Sheikh 2010, 91). A bookseller from Mehsana by the name of Bhudralal Gangaji, for instance, published a text on Bahucarā in 1919 that provides poems, myths, and ritual verses relating to the goddess, as well as the author's own version of her history. Gangaji tied the goddess back to the story of Kṛṣṇa, citing a verse from the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* that he interpreted as suggesting that Bahucarā was the infant born to Yaśodā and then exchanged for the newborn avatar of Viṣṇu (*Ibid.*). Gangaji then went on to link the goddess to other Sanskrit texts, such as the *Devī Bhāgavatam* and the Vedas. As for the origin of the temple in Becharaji, Gangaji painted the picture of a modest shrine, humbly founded by pastoralists (*Ibid.*). This imagining of Bahucarā was, on the whole, constructed in such a way as to be inoffensive to Sanskritic, Brahminical sensibilities and, with its links to Kṛṣṇa and a pastoral setting, it also resonated with closely-related Vaiṣṇava values.

One of the foremost contributors to the Sanskritization, Vaiṣṇavization, and also universalization of Bahucarā was the famed Brahmin poet Vallabh Bhatt (c. 1700 CE). According to Sheikh, it was Bhatt's oeuvre that did the most to reinvent the goddess as "a respectable, Puranic manifestation of trans-regional Shakti" (2010, 95). This kind of universalization effectively distanced Bahucarā from her Rajput, Muslim, and Hijra faithful, in some measure. Vallabh Bhatt was particularly instrumental in tailoring the goddess to Vaiṣṇava tastes, as Kṛṣṇa bhakti gained popularity in late-Mughal Gujarat (*Ibid.*). Puṣṭimārg Vaiṣṇavism, a sect dedicated to the intensive devotional worship (or *sevā*) of a localized form of Kṛṣṇa known as Śrīnāthjī, was especially influential in the region, receiving generous support from the Mughal rulers as well as merchant patrons (*Ibid.*). Sheikh has argued that the Vaiṣṇava and Bahucarā cults were in conversation, citing as evidence a story in which the goddess feeds Vallabh Bhatt inside the main Puṣṭimārg temple to Śrīnāthjī, and then places her nose ring on the main icon

(*Ibid.*). Thus, Vallabh Bhatt offered what Sheikh has called a “new synthesis of Vaishnavism and goddess worship,” which would have conceivably allowed some vegetarian Viṣṇu-worshipping groups to visit the goddess and incorporate her site into their pilgrimage networks (*Ibid.*).

Sheikh has detailed how the most fiercely disputed contestation of Bahucarā’s “true identity” played out in the Gujarati press in the 1930s. Sparking the debate was a booklet composed by Gadhavi Samarthadan Mahiya, a Charan, who claimed that Bahucarā was fundamentally a deity of his caste-group (Sheikh 2010, 88). Mahiya built his arguments for Bahucarā’s origins around the manuscript literature of his community, though perhaps most crucially he cited the story of the young Charan girl Bahucarā mutilating herself when faced with the possibility of assault at the hands of bandits (2010, 89). While the assertions of this booklet helped Charans stake a claim to Bahucarā and her temple, they also posed a boldfaced challenge to the elite supposition that the goddess was an ancient deity from the Vedas and Purāṇas, as Gangaji had contended earlier on (2010, 88-89). Mahiya’s claims were taken to task by Brahminic-minded elites, most notably Rammohanray Jasvantaray Desai, who was off-put by the “impure” claims of the Charans (2010, 90). In addition to dismissing the Charans with casteist ad-hominems (among others, the accusation that they were the spawn of unwed Rajput mothers) Desai also attacked Mahiya’s argument as unhistorical, relying as it did on the Charan-girl legend provided by Forbes. All told, Mahiya’s claims were, in Sheikh’s view, offensive to “Sanatani”—that is to say, “tradition-seeking”—Hindus. Like Vallabh and Gangaji before him, Desai also hearkened back to Bahucarā’s Sankritic stock, in this case emphasizing her connection with Bālātripurāsundarī, the girl form of Tripurāsundarī, in order to defend her status as a pure, *sāttvik* deity (Sheikh 2010, 90).

Playing up Bahucarā’s Bālātripurāsundarī homology (which we have seen in the context of the Solankis), and thusly evoking the various tantric resonances that come with it, may seem like a curious strategy for Desai to draw upon in defending the purity of the goddess. However, as was discussed in the previous chapter, Bālātripurāsundarī is linked with the Śrīvidyā cult, which represents an unambiguously right-handed tantra—theologically sophisticated and Sanskritic. Furthermore, Tripurāsundarī is one among the Mahāvidyās, ten tantric goddesses who are commonly depicted together in temples across India. As a whole, the Mahāvidyās epitomize another putatively inoffensive form of tantra that is, for the most part, harmonious with mainstream, Sanskritic Hinduism. For example, in concordance with a decidedly Advaitic-

flavoured Śāktism, each of the ten goddesses is reducible to a monistic, Brahmin-like essence. The Mahāvidyās are described by a variety of different sources ranging from priests to scholars to devotees as “all one,” embodying “different expressions of the same goddess” (Kinsley 1997, 2). That is, they can all be reduced to a universalized, pan-Indic, and ultimately Sanskritic idea of a “Great Goddess,” or Mahādevī (1997, 20). Thus, Desai’s association of Bahucarā Mātā with Bālātripurāsundarī furthered the cause of defending the goddess’s Brahminic, mainline image for “Sanatani” (“tradition-seeking”) Hindus (Sheikh 2010, 89). Both Śrīvidyā and the Mahāvidyās represent relatively anodyne aspects of tantra, and so the emphasis placed on Bahucarā’s longstanding homology with Bālātripurāsundarī could aid Desai in countering the claims made by “impure” Charans about the Mātā. Tantra, then, can participate in the recurring sanitization or “domestication,” as Samira Sheikh refers to it, of Bahucarā at Becharaji (2010, 96).

BAHUCARĀ TODAY

The present-day site at Becharaji maintains some noticeable continuities with its past. Hens and roosters cluck and peck around the various temples, including the old shrine under the *varakhadī* tree and the large shrine housing the aniconic yantra, which is still a major spot of worship. Pavaiyas continue to circulate around the grounds, offering blessings to visitors in exchange for alms. At present, however, the temple buildings bear an unprecedented polish, having been recently reconstructed in sparkling white marble (Figure 5). In addition, there is now a room dedicated to housing hundreds of figurines of children, donated by those hoping to have sons. This room was inaugurated in 2007 by a pre-prime-ministerial Narendra Modi, who was still chief minister of Gujarat at the time (Sheikh 2010, 86-87). The changes to Becharaji are not merely cosmetic, though, for the goddess has also, like the temple, been comprehensively revamped.

In accordance with the temple’s ever-gaining profile, which attracts not only out-of-state pilgrims but also prominent politicians, the ritual repertoire has become almost entirely Brahminic. Worship has been *sāttvik* for decades, and symbolic substitutes such as coconuts and cash are offered in place of the animal sacrifices of previous eras (Padmaja 1986, 245; Sheikh 2010, 96). Non-Brahmin priests are no longer employed at the site (Padmaja 1986, 245). Rather, the ceremonies are carried out exclusively by Audichya Brahmins and funded by a temple trust installed by the government (Fischer et al. 2014, 169). On the temple website, the would-be

pilgrim has been assured that the roster of Brahmins is only growing: “Brahmins who has [sic] mastered the knowledge of Sanskrit language and can perform yagna rituals are being recruited so that devotees can get it performed at nominal rates decided by Temple Trust” (“Restoration,” Bahucharjimata 2011).¹³⁴ Thus, religious consumers whose first line of contact with the temple is the website will find an opportunity to interface with the Sanskritic at a competitive price. These considerations regarding staffing and symbolism illustrate how fastidiously the present-day site (and website) has been managed over the past decade by its trusteeship, and index just a few of the axes upon which Bahucarā’s imagining has shifted.



Figure 5: The refurbished Bahucarā temple complex at Becharaji (Photo by author)

Popular Gujarati-language booklets and pamphlets on Bahucarā, widely available at the temple stalls at Becharaji as well as at bookshops throughout the state, also situate the goddess in a decidedly Sanskritic milieu. Following after Vallabh Bhatt, Gangaji, and Desai, the authors of these devotional publications have been eager to link Bahucarā and her associated sites back to

¹³⁴ The links to this page and others from this version of the Becharaji temple website are, as of 2019, dead. However, I was able to salvage text from the site’s 2011 iteration, and that is what is cited here and henceforward.

the Purāṇas, the Epics, and other Sanskrit texts. In one such text, entitled *Śrī Bahucarā Ārāadhanā* (“adoration of Bahucarā”), the editor Sri Balvant Bhaskar connects the goddess with a diverse body of Sanskritic texts. Among these are the *Adbhuta Rāmāyaṇa*,¹³⁵ a fourteenth-century North Indian version of the Rāma epic composed in Sanskrit, as well as the *Tantra Cuḍāmaṇi*,¹³⁶ and several Purāṇas, including the *Skandha* and *Sarasvatī* (Bhaskar n.d., 17).¹³⁷ These links are typically established on circumstantial evidence, such as folk etymologies based on phonological resemblances. For instance, when analyzing the 108 names of Devī given in the *Sarasvatī Purāṇa*, the editor Bhaskar points out that one among them is “Bahusṛṇ,” a word sounding similar enough to Bahucarā to assert a connection (*Ibid.*). Likewise, Bahucarā is apparently being referred to when the name “Bahulā” is introduced in the *Tantra Cuḍāmaṇi* (*Ibid.*). The goddess is purportedly called the very similar “Bahulā” in the *Adbhuta Rāmāyaṇa*, as well as the name “Bahūchuḍā,” leading Bhaskar to hypothesize that “the Apabhraṃsa¹³⁸ of Bahūchuḍā thus became Bahucarā, it seems” (*Ibid.*).¹³⁹ Soon after in the *Śrī Bahucarā Ārāadhanā*, Bahucarā’s connections to characters from the *Mahābhārata* are drawn out, with particular focus on the Epic’s familiar episodes involving gender-switching:

Arjuna, having become a *napuṃsaka* from a curse of the Apsarā, took a bath in the Mānsarovar and regained his manliness. Śikhaṇḍī, the son of Drupad who was also a *napuṃsaka*, similarly obtained manliness [*puruṣatva*] on account of taking a bath in the Mānsarovar, according to the narrative. Thus it becomes clear that the *śakti-pīṭha* of Bahucharaji is a *śakti-pīṭha* from very ancient Vedic times [*vedkāl vakhat*] (Bhaskar n.d., 18).

In the *Mahābhārata* story, Arjuna spent the thirteenth and final year of the exile enjoined upon himself and his Pandava brothers in the guise of a woman; additionally, his brother-in-law,

¹³⁵ The *Adbhuta Rāmāyaṇa* (literally the “marvellous” or wondrous” *Rāmāyaṇa*) is a version of the Rāma narrative that originated in North India around the fourteenth century CE. Composed in Sanskrit, it has strong Vaiṣṇava and Śākta influences. It is unique in that its author pays particularly close attention to Sītā, to such an extent that Ruth Vanita has characterized the text as containing a “virtual Sītā Gītā” (2006, 32). For more on the *Adbhuta Rāmāyaṇa*, see Vanita (2006). For more on the various recensions and tellings of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, see Paula Richman’s edited volume *Many Rāmāyaṇas* (1991).

¹³⁶ *Tantra Cuḍāmaṇi* is a tantric text known for its listing of the various *śakti-pīṭhas*. It appears to date to the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century (Bysack 1891, 316).

¹³⁷ The *Sarasvatī Purāṇa* was composed in Gujarat, its origins dating somewhere between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries CE. In concordance with these earlier dates, the text contains a reference to Jayasingh Siddharaj (1092-1142 CE), who would have been the Solanki ruler in Patan during that period of time. For more on the *Sarasvatī Purāṇa*, see Elizabeth Rohlman (2011).

¹³⁸ Apabhraṃsa is an umbrella term used to refer to a number of pre-modern dialects that mark a transition between the late-Middle and the early-Modern Indo-Aryan languages. These dialects are usually accepted as having spanned the period between the sixth and thirteenth centuries CE.

¹³⁹ This translation is mine, as are those of the passages from the *Śrī Bahucarā Ārāadhanā* that follow.

Śikhaṇḍī, became a man after having been born female.¹⁴⁰ These two unconventionally gendered figures, lumped together here as *napuṃsakas* (or “neuter” in gender), have been superimposed by the editor onto the Becharaji site, itself known for its Pavaia presence. In what is perhaps a conservative turn, it is hardly ambiguous gendering that is being celebrated here, but rather the reinvigoration of manliness that Becharaji’s Mānsarovar can provide. Just as crucially, the passage shifts the location of the Mānsarovar from Kailash to Becharaji, locating the *śakti-pīṭha* within the *mise-en-scène* of the *Mahābhārata*. These sorts of links to the Sanskritic, “Vedic” past no doubt help to further solidify Bahucarā’s antiquity by asserting that Becharaji’s status as a *śakti-pīṭha* is long-established and demonstrably rooted in a pan-Indian milieu.

These Sanskritic resonances are expanded in the *Śrī Bahucarā Ārādhana*, with Bhaskar providing yet another origin story for Bahucarā, this one steeped in a pan-regional, Purāṇic framework. Early on in the narrative, a despairing *ṛṣi* alludes to famous accounts of goddesses slaying demons such as those recounted in the *Devī Māhātmya* in order to sow a seed of doubt in a conquering demon king by foreshadowing the peril that awaits if he continues on his imperious path (Bhaskar n.d., 19-20). This demon king, known as Daṇḍhāsura (“Demon-and-a-half,” the name based on a boon in which he could take half of his opponent’s power), proceeds heedlessly, and eventually takes over the underworld, earth, and heaven. Upon witnessing this, even Śiva himself is reluctant to get involved, so he sends Bahucarā in his stead. She manifests under a *varakhadī* tree in the form of a young girl. When Daṇḍhāsura asks for her name, she says “Bālā Tripurāsundarī,” drawing an explicit connection with the tantric Śrīvidyā goddess (n.d., 22). Daṇḍhāsura adopts the child as his own. When the gods dry up the earth in retribution for his misdeeds, Daṇḍhāsura is advised by his demonic underlings to use the blood of slaughtered animals as a thirst-quencher in lieu of water. Daṇḍhāsura thinks better of this and, pleased with this decision, Bālātripurāsundarī/Bahucarā hurls her trident into the ground, creating a torrent of water that floods the world and also forges the Mānsarovar. Later on, when Bahucarā reaches marriageable age, Daṇḍhāsura wishes to take her as his wife so that she may fully appreciate his wicked power. Enraged at the idea, she promptly assumes her *ugra* (ferocious) form and decimates the demon armies with help from her rooster mount, who uses his beak and claws to destroy Daṇḍhāsura. Bahucarā pronounces Chunval to be her *śakti-pīṭha* and takes up residence in

¹⁴⁰ Arjuna spends a year living under a woman’s identity because of a curse put on him by Urvaśī, a heavenly maiden (or *apsarā*) whose sexual advances he spurned. Dressing in feminine attire, Arjuna takes on the name Bṛhannalā and dwells in King Virāṭa’s court, teaching performing arts to a princess.

the nearby forest (n.d., 25-26). By including this story in the *Śrī Bahucarā Ārādhana*, the editor Bhaskar has, in the process of establishing the provenance of Bahucarā's local site, once again inscribed the goddess in a Purāṇic past, underscoring her equivalency to established Sanskritic goddesses and tantric ones as well.

Other comparable texts contain further extrapolation upon Bahucarā's tantric elements. Indeed, numerous pamphlets featuring her yantras and mantras are for sale at the Becharaji marketplace.¹⁴¹ In one such text, titled *Ānandno Garbo* in an obvious reference to the famous poem of Vallabh Bhatt, the anonymous author prefaces the various *stutis*, *dhyāns* (meditations), and mantras to both Bahucarā and Vallabh with an explication of the tantric and yogic trajectories hidden in the goddess's epithet, Bālātripurāsundarī:

Bahucarājī is said to be Bālātripurāsundarī. In a book by the name of *Tripurārṇava* [*Tantra*] is the true knowledge of the meaning of this word “*tripurā*” (the three cities): *suṣumṇa*, *piṅgala* and *iḍā*—these three channels (*nāḍīs*) and *mana* [mind], *buddhi*, and *citta* are the cities. That which is always dwelling in these (breath-form and soul-form) spreads in the *ātmārūpa* (form of the soul); the name of this is Tripurā (*Ānandno Garbo* n.d., 4).¹⁴²

In drawing upon the *Tripurārṇava Tantra*, a pivotal Śrīvidyā text, the compiler (or compilers) of *Ānandno Garbo* have recapitulated Bhaskararaya's interpretation of the work. In his 1728 commentary on the *Lalitāsahasranāma* (n. 6260), Bhaskararaya cited the *Tripurārṇava Tantra* so that he could parallel Tripurā with the three basic *nāḍīs* or subtle channels that, in Kuṇḍalinī Yoga theory, control the passage of the breaths (Brooks 1992, 79).¹⁴³ These channels map on to the *Śrī-cakra* and thereby relate the microcosm of the body to the macrocosm of the universe (*Ibid.*). Thus, Bahucarā's tantric correspondences run much deeper than just an epithet; in fact, in a classical, Sanskritic tantric turn, her alternate appellation contains the whole cosmos.

At the same time, the author(s) of *Ānandno Garbo* also keeps Bahucarā in the folk tantric milieu. The very next paragraph jumps abruptly into praise for the bhakti of Vallabh Bhatt, who is referred to as a “great miracle” (*mahācamatkār*) (n.d., 4). It is promised that anyone doing continual daily recitation (*nitya pāṭ*) of Vallabh's poems and related materials will see their “fear

¹⁴¹ In typical tantric fashion, Bahucarā's Bālātripurā-yantra is worshipped by a specific Sanskrit mantra, in this case “*aiṃ klīm sauḥ bālātripurāyai svāhā*” (Padmaja 1985, 176).

¹⁴² This translation is mine, as are those of the passages from the *Ānandno Garbo* to follow.

¹⁴³ The *Lalitāsahasranāma* is a section of the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, a text that emerged between the fourth and sixth centuries CE. By way of hymns, it contains 1,000 epithets of the goddess Lalitā.

of enemies [*śatrubhay*] become distant.” Recitation will also do away with the bothers (*naḍtar*) of demonic entities such as *bhūts* and *prets*. Reading these materials will also cure sickness, remove obstacles, and grant prosperity, ultimately giving the devotee *rddhi-siddhi* or “attainments”. Given these very immediate, this-worldly results, the fruits (*phal*) of reading Vallabh Bhatt, among others, are not unlike those often advertised by folk and *bāzārī tāntrikas*. In this way, the author or authors of *Ānandno Garbo* place esoteric tantric and yogic ideas alongside the exemplary Vaiṣṇava-flavoured bhakti of Vallabh Bhatt. Whether tempered or augmented by the Vaiṣṇava elements, these tantric approaches, both folk and classical, are not at odds with Bahucarā’s ongoing Sanskritization. Moreover, the esoteric concepts they explore and the immediate results they offer range from health to wealth and coincide with the interests of literate, middle-class visitors with a few rupees to spare.

Esoteric, tantric elements are integral to the Becharaji complex as well. Even though the yantra may be out of view to the visitor, it remains a centrepiece of Becharaji’s physical and virtual sites. Adoring depictions of the yantra have been featured prominently on the temple website. In 2011, on the heels of the temple restoration, one could find the yantra lovingly described as having been wrought from crystal and studded with gold (“Importance,” Bahucharjimata 2011). The bejeweled crystal yantra, then, much like the recent refurbishment in white marble, serves to indicate just one aspect of the renovated temple’s largesse, the details of which the administrators were not hesitant to luxuriate upon throughout the website. These features (and the descriptions thereof) appear to have been aimed at a well-heeled audience—after all, would-be pilgrims first encountering the temple through luxury commodities such as personal computers or iPhones presumably have realized or else aspire to middle-classness. The trustees behind the website also seem to have had this economic bracket in mind when providing descriptions of an ongoing development project at Becharaji. It was claimed that “[b]y this project the approximately 15 Lacs pilgrims will get direct benefits and Local Merchant [sic], Local people of ‘Bahucharaji’ [Becharaji], and villagers of all around will get indirect benefits” (“Restoration,” Bahucharjimata 2011). This kind of development was apparently designed to stimulate the prosperity of not just the temple, but also that of the surrounding community as well. Following through with this narrative of economic growth, it was concluded that “[b]y this project, with development of infrastructure, the pilgrims coming to Bahucharji shall increase leading to increase [sic] in the donations to the temple thereby increasing its income”

(“Restoration,” Bahucharjimata 2011). Hence, the economic statuses of both temple and town benefit mutually. Temple expenditures have also been dedicated to cleaning up the surrounding area. In October 2010, the *Times of India* reported that a large sum of money that had been donated to the temple by the Gujarat State Tourism Development Corporation was designated for the refurbishment of the entrance of the Medosav (that is, the Mānsarovar) lake. “The aim,” the article’s author explained, “is to conserve and beautify the Bahucharaji temple complex and its surrounding areas and to provide clean, efficient and affordable facilities to pilgrims” (“GSTDC Sanctions Rs 20 Cr for Bahucharaji Development,” 2010).

These architectural and atmospheric elaborations are reminiscent of those catalogued by Joanne Waghorne (2004) at Māriyamman temples in Chennai. This tidying-up of the temple surroundings, alongside the focus on commodities and excess wealth, as well as the commitment to distribute this wealth within the community, I contend, are all attuned to the *habitus* of the middle-class devotee. If these beautification projects were aimed at attracting an upwardly mobile audience, they seem to have succeeded. During my visits to the site in 2014 and 2015, the temple and its grounds were pristine and orderly, and teemed with affluent patrons. Expensive saris were in abundance among the upper-caste and ascendant-class women who had come from the city with their families to undertake their children’s first tonsure (a ritual customarily undertaken at the site), and to receive blessings from the Pavaiyas.

And how do the Pavaiyas fit into the gentrified, Brahminized Becharaji? Writing in 2010, Sheikh suggested that upper-caste stakeholders, ostensibly reformist in their tendencies and therefore uneasy with the Pavaiyas’ own claims to the temple, have chipped away at their customary rights (2010, 91). It may be the confluence of Sanskritic and middle-class values that has helped along the disenfranchisement of the Pavaiyas at Becharaji. That said, the Pavaiyas are still omnipresent on the temple grounds. At present, the ethnography of the Pavaiyas at the post-renovation site has yet to be written. In the meantime, devotional pamphlets may give us some indication of the majoritarian attitude among pilgrims toward Pavaiyas and other transgender groups. We already saw how the on-site Mānsarovar’s capacity for restoring manliness is celebrated in the *Śrī Bahucarā Ārāadhanā*, and the editor Bhaskar doubles down on this notion later on in the text. After the Daṇḍhāsura story wraps up, the postlude tells of a Śakti-*yajña* fire-sacrifice that various esteemed *ṛṣis* (sages) performed on the site:

The very place upon which the Śakti-Yajña was done,—a pit, following the custom of the Śāstras—having been filled from water of the underworld, is the “Mānsarovar” of today. From bathing here, one can destroy inclinations against the laws of nature [*vikāro*], and in that way they are put at ease (Bhaskar n.d., 27).

The Mānsarovar, then, actually restores the “natural” masculine gendering and reproductive capabilities that have been countervailed in people such as the Pavaiyas by desires “unnatural” to male-sexed bodies. The author’s use of the term *vikāro*, translatable as “inclinations against the laws of nature” or, alternatively, “moral deterioration,” marks a bold endorsement of the prevailing heteronormative and procreative imperatives of mainstream Indian gender and sexuality. Presumably, the editor is attempting to accord with the expected moral discriminations of Becharaji’s increasingly middle-class pilgrims. This depiction of the Mānsarovar may be reflective of a rise in transphobic attitudes at Becharaji, conforming to fundamental assumptions about heteronormative moral propriety that underpin contemporary Indian middle-classness.

Taking stock of the negotiations that have taken place over the centuries at Becharaji, Samira Sheikh has referred to the modifications made to Bahucarā Mātā as a “domestication,” a curious phrasing given the goddess’s unspousified status (2010, 96). Rather than hazarding a singular term, I think the tempering of Bahucarā that Sheikh has referenced has been the result of recurrent Sanskritization and Vaiṣṇavization over a long period of history, as well as, most recently, gentrification. Numerous commentators past and present have attempted to establish Bahucarā’s Purāṇic and Vedic roots, as well as her Vaiṣṇava resonances. In spite of “unclean” sacrifices and liquor oblations that, at one point, took place for her benefit, Shah and Shroff have labelled Bahucarā as a “Sanskritic” goddess, and tenably so (1958, 250). Bahucarā has, after all, long been homologized with Tripurāsundarī, and the tantric, no matter the unseemly connotations it may have for some, is still Sanskritic. In fact, an abstracted, right-hand Śrīvidyā-styled tantra may be able to function at present as part of Bahucarā’s continuing Sanskritization, with the authors and editors of cheap, widely-available devotional pamphlets such as *Ānandno Garbo* and *Śrī Bahucarā Ārādhana* deploying the tantric milieu as just one among the various Sanskritic contexts in which the goddess can subsist. These tantric correspondences certainly have not alienated middle-class patrons, and on account of the speedy material benefits they can both connote and deliver, they may actually attract devotees, in consonance with the apparent goal of the modern day Becharaji temple. Meanwhile, gentrifying measures such as the

magnificent marble temple and assorted tidying-up projects on the grounds also cultivate the clean, sleek, and prosperous aesthetic eminently agreeable to the upwardly mobile. Altogether, these Sanskritic, *sāttvik* emphases in Bahucarā's ritual and mythology, alongside the elaborations and enhancements of the environs at her Becharaji site, have transformed a *mātā* of non-vegetarian Rajputs, Muslim Kamalias, and gender-ambiguous Pavaiyas into a benign, pan-regional Devī. As a result, the rooster-riding goddess is to be found everywhere in Gujarat and, increasingly, even beyond its borders, as her legacy expands outward from the famed centre that is her *pīṭha*.

Khoḍīyār Mātā

Khoḍīyār Mātā is, like Bahucarā, worshipped by wide swathes of the population in contemporary Gujarat. Her popularity is particularly marked in the Saurashtra peninsula, where she is the most important goddess (Tambs-Lyche 2004, 313). While her name derives from the Gujarati *khoḍ*, to be “lame,” “damaged,” “invalid,” or “limping,” the spread of her renown has been anything but impaired, especially in the past four decades (Fischer et al. 2014, 171). Her religious sites, both small and large, abound in urban, suburban, and rural areas, though her name and image are by no means limited to these spaces. Posters, stickers, and billboards bearing the distinctive image of a woman dressed in traditional Saurashtrian vestments—a dark hooded blouse and ankle-length skirt—and flanked by her crocodile *vāhana* can be found virtually everywhere (see Figure 7). Motorbikes and automobiles bear her press-on decals, and it is not uncommon to see the theonym “Khoḍīyār” or one of her other affectionate soubriquets—among them “Khoḍī,” “Khoḍal,” and “Khoḍīālā”—in the name of a business or shop. Tambs-Lyche has characterized Khoḍīyār as a “cross-caste” goddess, and fittingly so, as a large part of her prominence is attributable to her appeal among diverse groups of people, from former untouchables and Charans to Rajputs and royal families (2004, 28). Her special connections to princely clans, though they have waned ritually speaking, endure in the title of Rājarājeśvarī, “goddess who is the queen of kings,” with which she is still endowed. This title also likely bespeaks some tantric resonances. In her capacities as a goddess of low castes and rulers, Khoḍīyār has been doubly connected to sacrifices in both contexts. For this reason, Shah and Shroff categorize her as a “non-Sanskritic” goddess (1958, 249). Her encounter with mainstream religion in Gujarat has accordingly involved a gradual negotiation of her character, steadily

shifting Khoḍīyār toward the *sāttvik*. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, this negotiation involved Sanskritization and Vaiṣṇavization, which led to an eschewal of certain elements of her worship, most pronouncedly animal sacrifice, and has left an indelible mark on her present-day imagining. More recently, gentrification and universalization have also begun to shape Khoḍīyār as her sites and scope grow progressively larger.

ORIGINS

Khoḍīyār, just like Bahucarā, is the subject of countless folktales offering insights into her origins, history, and iconography. Like Bahucarā, Khoḍīyār's origin narratives identify her as a Charan girl, specifically the daughter of a bard by the name of Momadiyo Gadhvi who lived near the ancient Maitraka capital city of Vallabhi in Saurashtra. By virtue of his compositions, Mamadiyo was held in high acclaim by king Shiladitya of the Vallabha dynasty, who often invited the bard into the court to engage in merriment (Fischer et al. 2014, 172; Tambs-Lyche 1997, 22). A wealthy merchant named Padarsha, however, grew envious of Mamadiyo's relationship with the king, and hatched a casteist scheme to sabotage the bard.¹⁴⁴ There was at the time an ongoing famine in the kingdom, and Padarsha gave word to the king that it was taking place because of the high status given to the low-caste Charan in the court. Mamadiyo, the merchant implied, was inauspicious not only due to the impurity that persons of the Charan caste embodied, but also due to the fact that he was childless (Fischer et al. 2014, 172). Barren people, after all, were considered morally disreputable (Tambs-Lyche 1997, 23). Convinced, the king told Mamadiyo he could never appear again in the court. Mamadiyo left the town dejected, and sought refuge in a Śiva temple. Here, he prayed for a child, threatening suicide if his request was not granted (Fischer et al. 2014, 172). Śiva materialized and promised him not just one child, but eight, seven of which were to be daughters. Mamadiyo proceeded home and very soon his wife gave birth to all eight children, the youngest of whom was Khoḍīyār, originally named Jānbāi (Tambs-Lyche 1997, 23).

Khoḍīyār/Jānbāi stands out in folk stories surrounding the sisters, most signally in her protective capacity. In one instance, the lone brother was bitten by a snake while the siblings played on a riverbank. The other sisters began to cry, but Jānbāi dove without hesitation into

¹⁴⁴ In some versions, it is an entire group of merchants behind the plot, perhaps reflecting tensions between courtly and merchant culture in Saurashtra (Tambs-Lyche 1997, 22).

deep waters, journeying down to the underworld of the Nāgas (serpent people) in hopes of obtaining some ambrosia to save her brother. On her way back, she twisted her foot. Though she was unable to walk, a helpful crocodile carried her the rest of the way to the river. She managed to save her brother, in effect preserving the family line, though the limp (*khodī*) stayed with her and became the inspiration for her foremost moniker (Shukla-Bhatt 2014, 183).¹⁴⁵

Khoḍīyār is not always so benevolent, however. Driven by vengeance, she and her sisters are said to have sought out both the merchant Padarsha and King Shiladitya after their parents' eventual death, with Khoḍīyār leading the pack. To get back at the scheming merchant, the sisters painted pictures of tigers onto pots. Decked out in silver jewellery, the girls appeared in front of Padarsha's shop asking for clarified butter for their father's funeral ceremony. Padarsha said he would grant their request if they gave him their silver jewellery as payment. The sisters agreed to the arrangement, but they warned Padarsha that if he did not fill all the pots, the tigers painted upon them would devour him. He laughed off the admonishment and began to fill the pots with ghee. When he got to Khoḍīyār however, the pot she bore seemed bottomless, refusing to spill over no matter how much clarified butter he poured. The tiger then materialized from the pot and devoured Padarsha (Fischer et al. 2014, 174).

As for the king, the sisters sought out his favourite bull, which some versions identify as a buffalo-demon in a reference to Mahiṣāśura (Tambs-Lyche 1997, 24; Fischer et al. 2014, 174). Again Khoḍīyār fronted the charge, sending her brother ahead to steal the buffalo first. He succeeded, but only with the help of his sister's strength acting within him (Fischer et al. 2014, 174). This strength figures prominently in various tellings. In one such rescension, the bull is dragged away by an "unearthly power" that the royal sentries are unable to track (Tambs-Lyche 1997, 24). Following in the footsteps of Durgā, the sisters killed the buffalo in a mango grove, by some accounts tearing it open with their nails (Shukla-Bhatt 2014, 183). The sisters then invited the 64 *jogaṇīs* to join them in feasting upon the fresh meat. Khoḍīyār sat in the middle while her

¹⁴⁵ Other stories provide alternative explanations for the limp that figures so prominently in Khoḍīyār's name. In one tale recounted by Fischer, Jain, and Shah (2014), the eight siblings were on their way home from the palace when they all turned into snakes because Mamadiyo uttered a curse whereby they would become snakes for the entirety of the day. He then put them in a basket and took them to a snake-hole near a Śiva temple where a serpent-demon lived. All of the snakes slipped into the hole except Khoḍīyār, who wanted to turn back. Her father forced her into the hole, resorting to kicking her, which did damage to her spine. Angry, the snake-king swallowed all the siblings. He was only able to digest them, however, if he coiled himself around the *liṅga* of the Śiva temple. Khoḍīyār explained to the snake that animals are not allowed to eat their own species, and she eventually secured release for her snake-shaped siblings (Fischer, Jain & Shah 2014, 173).

sisters and the *jogaṇīs* danced around her (Fischer et al. 2014, 174).¹⁴⁶ When the king's guards finally stumbled upon the mango grove, they found Khoḍīyār with buffalo entrails wrapped around her like a garland, wearing the animal's golden nostril ring as a bangle and wielding its spine like a sword. The girls were arrested and taken to the king who, in his outrage, ordered their immolation.¹⁴⁷ When placed in the fire, however, they would not burn. Eventually, they were found sitting on a distant bank of a pond and the king instructed his guards to swim over and capture them. When the guards jumped into the water, they immediately turned into fish and a huge crocodile appeared, driving them away. Khoḍīyār rewarded the crocodile for its efforts by giving it the golden nostril ring of the slaughtered buffalo (*Ibid.*).

In other variations of the tale recounted by Tambs-Lyche, the sisters were said to curse the king, explaining the situation to him as follows: “you insulted our father for his barrenness, and so your own family line will come to an end” (1997, 24). As the king repented and pleaded to be freed from the curse, the sisters granted that his children would be able to bear progeny so long as they gave up their caste and did not continue the family line (*Ibid.*). This conclusion to the violent episode, then, has the seven sisters setting in motion the fall of Vallabhi, and so Tambs-Lyche has interpreted their ringleader, Khoḍīyār, as a symbol of the destruction of Saurashtra's last empire (1997, 23). Even with that being the case, Khoḍīyār did not become the enemy of rulers, but rather their supporter, as she effectively inaugurated the “medieval” period wherein Saurashtra became the Rajput-dominated society better known as Kathiawar. Furthermore, her participation in the death of Padarsha signifies her pivotal role in the termination of the golden age of merchants that also correlates with this societal shift toward Rajput supremacy. The power of the bardic Charans, meanwhile, particularly that of the caste's “unearthly” women apotheosized by Khoḍīyār, proves itself capable of conquering both kings and merchants in these stories (1997, 24).

Owing to her intrinsic power, which makes her immensely strong and puts her in league with the *jogaṇīs*, Khoḍīyār ordinarily functioned in the role of guardian goddess of kings and

¹⁴⁶ By some accounts, Khoḍīyār and her sisters are themselves incarnations of the 64 *yoginīs* (see Chapter Five), all of which have a hand in Pārvatī's power (Mehta 1978, as quoted in Tambs-Lyche 2004, 313). Shukla-Bhatt has similarly confirmed that Khoḍīyār and her sisters have a “fierce side as *joganis*,” which drives their hunger for blood and meat (2014, 183).

¹⁴⁷ In some variations, the king was provided with ample forewarning that his buffalo was at risk. In this case, in their hunger for flesh, Khoḍīyār and her sisters begin killing the buffaloes of all their neighbours, leaving the countryside strewn with carcasses. The herders complained to the king, but he paid them little heed (Tambs-Lyche 1997, 124-125).

their dynasties; indeed, kings needed the goddess's blessing and would often go to great lengths to get it (Tambs-Lyche 1997, 26). One such method was the buffalo sacrifice, which is established in the aforementioned stories that lay bare Khoḍīyār's thirst for blood and is demonstrated in the historical record (Tambs-Lyche 2004, 125). That said, in some Khoḍīyār narratives it takes a sacrifice much greater than that of a buffalo to maintain a kingly lineage. Such was the case in the story of Ra Dayas, the eleventh-century Chudasama ruler of Junagadh, who had everything he wanted except children. His wife Samaldi heard about Khoḍīyār and, with the goddess's blessing, she gave birth to a son named Naughan (Tambs-Lyche 1997, 32). Ra Dayas ended up running afoul of a Solanki king and was killed. In the aftermath, Samaldi subsequently committed *satī*. A viceroy was installed in place of the king, and only the young prince, Naughan, survived thanks to a maidservant who fled with him. Naughan was left in the custody of a Khoḍīyār-devoted chief from the Ahir tribe, a group of middle-level pastoralists akin to Charans who are also closely connected to the goddess. When the viceroy came to know of Naughan's survival, he demanded that the prince be turned over to him. The Ahir chief brought his own son instead and publicly decapitated him. Afterward, the chief trained the prince so he would be able to assume his royal duty. Only one element was missing: the resources to support an uprising to retake the throne (1997, 32-33). The chief prayed intensely to Khoḍīyār, who eventually appeared to him. She was quick to praise the Ahir chief for sacrificing his son in place of Naughan and, as a reward, directed him to treasure hidden in a field (1997, 33). The chief was then able to arm his followers, and he organized an ambush on the viceroy and his men, massacring them in the process (*Ibid.*). Naughan was promptly installed on the throne, essentially having received his sanction to rule from Khoḍīyār. Again, the goddess protects the royal lineage, though in this case it is the sacrifice of a human that plays an integral part in the goddess's reinstatement of the Chudasamas in Junagadh.

KHOḌĪYĀR, KINGS, AND NON-ELITES

Given Khoḍīyār's ties to kings in her folktales, the goddess has been historically linked to royalty and ruling classes. In Tambs-Lyche's reading, Khoḍīyār's origin story encodes a transition from the ancient to medieval period in Saurashtra—that is, from a world focused on urban mercantile culture to one based around rulers who were principally rural (2004, 123). The typical devotee for whom Khoḍīyār has performed miracles has usually been the king or chief,

and so the ruling class developed a strong long-term relationship with the goddess, one which the Brahmins or the merchants were not able to forge (Tambs-Lyche 2004, 123; Shukla-Bhatt 2014, 189). Several royal families became Khoḍīyār worshippers, among them the eleventh century King Naughan of the Chudasamas mentioned above, who would go on to receive aid from the goddess in a battle with the king of Sindh (Shukla-Bhatt 2014, 184). When the Chudasama dynasty came to an end in 1470, Khoḍīyār quickly found support from another royal line and became protector of the Gohil Rajputs in the house of Bhavnagar (Tambs-Lyche 1997, 60). Historically, Khoḍīyār's devotees have, above all, been the Chudasama Rajputs of central Saurashtra and the Gohil Rajputs of Bhavnagar district, though she has become associated with the Rajputs as a whole, representing their common *kuldevī* throughout Kathiawar and beyond (Tambs-Lyche 2004, 131). Her Rājārājeśvarī moniker, then, has been well-earned (Shukla-Bhatt 2014, 192).

The king's temporal power could not be sustained without the power of the goddess, and so Khoḍīyār makes kingship possible (Tambs-Lyche 2004, 269). By way of her veritable *śakti*, the goddess is not just the power behind the foundation of each Rajput lineage, but the very source of power itself (Tambs-Lyche 1997, 111). Because she embodies power in all its forms—including the forces of fertility as well as the strength for political enterprise—she naturally demands the most powerful or “heated” among offerings: namely *tāmasik* substances such as meat, alcohol, and opium (*Ibid.*). We have seen that goddesses such as Khoḍīyār traditionally demanded animal offerings, but this was especially crucial in the kingly frame of reference, where the buffalo sacrifice was symbolically foundational to the establishment of royal legitimacy (Tambs-Lyche 2004, 123). The annual buffalo sacrifice to the Goddess was a state ceremony, but such sacrifices were also held by a variety of groups, as the cult of the goddess was by no means exclusively bound to the state (2004, 37). Rajputs shared with most of the non-urban population the worship of goddesses, and animal sacrifice was a central element in royal and rural contexts (Tambs-Lyche 1997, 13).

Like Rajputs, Charans also identify Khoḍīyār as their *kuldevī* (Shukla-Bhatt 2014, 189). These links to the goddess are in line with her origins as a Charan girl, as well as the role bards shared with goddesses in preserving royal lineages. Charans were heavily relied upon by kings, much like the goddess herself. The Charan served as something of a “mouthpiece” for any given Saurashtra Rajput clan and for Khoḍīyār, too, as the goddess was widely held to be their

consanguine—either a sister or a mother—as per her origin story (1997, 271). For this reason, around the twelfth to the thirteenth centuries, the Charans came to be thought of as the “children of the goddess” (Tambs-Lyche 1997, 61). Charan men identify as *devīputras*, or “sons of the goddess,” as they consider themselves direct descendants of the mother of the universe (Meghani 2000, 42). Up to the present many Charans have maintained a pastoralist manner of living, raising buffalo in wooded areas such as the Gir Forest. Tambs-Lyche has speculated that Charan motivations for making their homes in the forest may have to do with their accustomed practice of animal sacrifice, which has been persistently stigmatized in Gujarat (Tambs-Lyche 2004, 263). In addition to more standard goat offerings, the Gir Charans have also performed buffalo sacrifices for the goddess (Tambs-Lyche 1997, 178). According to Tambs-Lyche, when a perfect male calf is born to the Charan *bhuvā*, it is destined for sacrifice, and is allowed to graze freely along with other sacrificial buffaloes, much like those in the origin story of Khoḍīyār (*Ibid.*). The goddess will soon thereafter appear in the *bhuvā*’s dream and tell him she wants a sacrifice. When sacrifice time arrives, the animal is killed by not one but two sword-strokes, one by a Dalit and the other by a Mahia Rajput, the latter of whom keeps the sacrificial blade. The *bhuvā* uses a plate to catch the blood spilling out of the animal and drinks it, his sons following suit. Other Charans in attendance mark their foreheads with a *tilak* (“marking”) of buffalo blood (1997, 178).

Khoḍīyār’s following went beyond Rajputs and Charans, however. Khoḍīyār is a primary goddess among the pastoralist Ahirs, the tribe to which the chief who sacrificed his son to save the Chudasamas belonged. Like Charans, Ahirs are also believed to have been born with Khoḍīyār’s blessings (Shukla-Bhatt 2014, 189). Kolis have held Khoḍīyār in high regard for quite some time, too, as have other lower-caste groups including Thakors, Vaghris (Devipujaks), Dharalas, Rabaris, and Ravalias (Kirparam 1901, 375). In the 1901 *Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency*, it was documented that all these groups “sacrifice a male buffalo to their goddesses Khodyār and Visot on the bright fourteenth of *Bhādarvo* (September) on Dasara Day in October, and on the dark fourteenth of *A’so* (October)” (*Ibid.*). Sacrifice to Khoḍīyār, then, seems to have marked the culmination of Navarātri, and appropriately so, as the holiday celebrates Durgā’s slaying of the buffalo demon. Additionally, Thakors killed goats for Khoḍīyār’s benefit during Navarātri proper, though by the early twentieth century this practice was already being replaced with offerings of *lāpsī*, a sweet consisting of wheat flakes (Enthoven [1914] 1989, 61). This may

be an indicator of early Sanskritization; certainly, I heard tell of (and saw) many of these sorts of substitutions for live sacrifices at the sites I visited dedicated to Khoḍīyār and other *mātās*.

Sacrifice was not the only hallmark of Khoḍīyār's worship as it was conducted in villages and among lower-castes. In these contexts, the goddess was associated with disease and healing, and often "the killing of animals and the pouring out of blood" were undertaken until a sickness subsided (Monier-Williams 1883, 227). Among other ailments, Khoḍīyār has been related to cholera, much like other non-elite, local goddesses (namely Jogaṇī). Enthoven reports one custom among villagers in Sayala in which "*bhuvās* place a small four-wheeled chariot of the Mātā [Khoḍīyār] outside the village, and it is believed that the chariot carries off the plague, cholera and similar diseases with it" ([1914] 1989, 67). The image of Khoḍīyār also followed after the minimalist iconography of non-elite deities. In *The Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency*, it was reported that a red lead cross, a heap of stones, or a painted tree can all mark a shrine to Khoḍīyār, much as they can shrines to Melaḍī, Śikotar, and so forth (Kirparam 1901, 363). Similarly, as we have already seen in the previous chapter, Monier-Williams likened Khoḍīyār's image to an "African fetish" (1883, 226). Aniconic markers can still be found at some present-day Khoḍīyār sites. These symbols include natural stone formations, tridents, handprints, or else human-made non-anthropomorphic images called *fala* (Shukla-Bhatt 2014, 186). Natural stone images are commonly painted red and decorated with eyes that give them the appearance of a human face (*Ibid.*). Often, Khoḍīyār's six sisters appear alongside her in these less elaborate or aniconic shrines. All told, these shrines were typically small and by no means extravagant, and many remain this way today (*Ibid.*).¹⁴⁸ Worship at these shrines has also been "simple and informal," in Shukla-Bhatt's assessment (*Ibid.*). With the exception of a few major sites patronized by princes such as Rajpara just outside of Bhavnagar, rituals to Khoḍīyār are mostly carried out by low-caste *bhuvās* and involve colloquial songs and direct dialogues with the goddess via possession-like states (Shukla-Bhatt 2014, 186).

Given these resemblances to other village goddesses in her aniconic depictions, and links to disease, *bhuvā*-based rituals, and animal sacrifice (the last of which is crucial in both village and courtly contexts), Khoḍīyār has by and large been a non-Sanskritic goddess throughout her history, as per Shah and Shroff's (1958) categorization. As much as she is a goddess of royalty,

¹⁴⁸ Khoḍīyār has also been depicted on older *candarvo* hangings riding a buffalo. In her four arms, she bears weapons such as tridents, swords, and daggers, as well as a shield (Fischer, Jain & Shah 2014, 171).

Khoḍīyār is also thought of as a “*lokdevī*” or “folk goddess” who does not depend upon praise from classical Sanskrit texts but rather is rooted in the popular, vernacular culture of her region (Shukla-Bhatt 2014, 185). Indeed, the centrality of sacrifice to her rituals ensured that she did not require priests, and so Brahmins have been non-essential to her worship (Tambs-Lyche 1997, 256). That said, the uppermost castes were well aware of the power of the goddess, and there are records of Brahmins participating in public buffalo sacrifices (Tambs-Lyche 2004, 132). Tambs-Lyche has documented how Brahmins reportedly officiated the yearly buffalo sacrifices at Navarātri that re-established and legitimated the kingdom (*Ibid.*). Even the high-ranking Nagar Brahmins were sometimes sponsors of blood sacrifices around the nineteenth century, and the Swaminarayan movement roundly denounced them for it (Tambs-Lyche 2004, 154).

KHOḌĪYĀR’S CHARACTER SHIFT

In recent decades, Khoḍīyār’s identity has undergone a noticeable shift. She has, for example, developed her own distinct iconography, and sacrifices in her name are much less prominent, at least at her sizeable urban and suburban sites. While these changes have been most pronounced in the past 30 or 40 years, they take root in questions about Śākta worship raised much earlier on, specifically by the Swaminarayan movement. The Swaminarayan *sampradāya*, in Tambs-Lyche’s assessment, is the most puritanical of Vaiṣṇava sects (2004, 147). In that respect (not to mention the *sampradāya*’s amenability to colonial and missionary moralities), if we conceptualize regional Hinduism in Saurashtra as existing on a spectrum, the Swaminarayan sect represents the polar opposite of the goddess traditions (2004, 122). Local Saurashtra goddess traditions occupy the other end of the spectrum by way of not only their entrenched status and ubiquity, but perhaps most importantly because of their relaxed concerns for ritual purity.

The Swaminarayan *sampradāya*, as we have seen in the previous chapter, marked a radical reformist force in Gujarat in the early nineteenth century and beyond. This was particularly pronounced in Saurashtra, where the Swaminarayan movement was forged. In this reformist capacity, Tambs-Lyche has referred to the Swaminarayan sect as a sort of “low church,” puritan Vaiṣṇavism (1997, 296). At the same time, the sect “may be seen as representative of the ‘new’ bourgeoisie of Gujarat, as opposed to the older Vania groups, who together with Parsis and certain Muslims sects, dominated the early industrialization of the state” (Tambs-Lyche 2004, 147). Even so, the Swaminarayan notion of what constituted caste and class ascendancy still

revolved in large part around a reinvigoration of Sanskritic values. To be a Swaminarayan adherent necessitated vegetarianism as well as abstinence from alcohol and tobacco, as such abstentions mark *sāttvik* lifestyles and therefore render their practitioners worthy of higher ranking (2004, 92). In this way, membership in the sect serviced aspirations to social ascension and even aided, for instance, in the rise of low-ranking mainland Kanbis to hallowed Patidar status, allowing them to emulate the older guard of merchant castes (2004, 152).¹⁴⁹ In the values it embodied, then, Tambs-Lyche has concluded that the Swaminarayan movement can be thought of as an agent of “Sanskritization” (*Ibid.*). I would add that, additionally, it could just as aptly be called an agent of “Vaiṣṇavization.” These Sanskritizing or Vaiṣṇavizing values brought Swaminarayan Hinduism into direct competition with the predominant Śākta religion of Saurashtra, which hinged upon Khoḍīyār (Tambs-Lyche 1997, 296). As a result, goddesses generally declined in popularity, Khoḍīyār included (1997, 308).

Goddess worship seems to have regained some lost ground in the first half of the twentieth century as the Swaminarayan sect came to experience stagnation (Tambs-Lyche 1997, 128). Nevertheless, goddess cults were still in a period of crisis, to some degree, in the 1970s and into the early 1980s as a result of their encounter with Swaminarayan Hinduism and its Sanskritic, Vaiṣṇava influences. Temples to goddesses “were still active, but seemed to suffer from ‘Sanskritization’” (Tambs-Lyche 2004, 126). The cult of the goddess was in danger of becoming perceived as merely “folk” religion by the elite, who favoured the “purer,” textually rooted male gods and their spouses over the unmarried goddesses of the regional milieux (*Ibid.*). The eventual revitalization of goddess cults, realized in the 1990s in Tambs-Lyche’s estimation, came at the cost of rituals involving possession and sacrifice, as the revival benefitted vegetarian and bhakti-friendly versions of fierce goddesses who lusted for meat in their pasts (2004, 134). Khoḍīyār is emblematic of these reimaginings, as we see at a number of her places of worship, which include old sites adapting to modernity as well as entirely new complexes.

¹⁴⁹ “Kanbi” refers to various castes of tillers in western India, Gujarat included. By way of reforms put in place by the colonial British and the subsequent economic prosperity gained therefrom, the Kanbi communities were able to change their identity to that of the Patidars. “Patidar” is essentially an invented tradition of wealthy landowning Kanbis emphasizing their heightened status. To accentuate that status further, many Patidars took the last name of “Patel,” a title typically reserved for village headmen. For more on the Kanbis and Patidars, see Pocock (1972).

RAJPARA THEN AND NOW

Tambs-Lyche's accounts of visits to the Khoḍīyār pilgrimage site at Rajpara in the 1970s and 1990s serve to illustrate how goddesses adapted to conform to Swaminarayan sensibilities. Located in a small valley just outside of Bhavnagar, the current site of the Rajpara temple is tied to the Gohil Rajputs, Khoḍīyār's foremost clan historically, who still maintain their connections with the goddess today. According to the temple's emic history, around 1700 the ruler of Bhavnagar brought the goddess to his capital city from the outer reaches of Gohilwad princely state on the south coast of Kathiawar. The goddess told the ruler that she would follow him on one Orphean condition: that he should not turn back. Thus, the ruler made the journey with only the sounds of the goddess's anklets behind him as evidence that she was keeping up with him. Eventually, the goddess stopped and all the king could hear was silence. He could not resist the urge to look back, and when the goddess saw him turn around she decided she would go no further, and that the spot upon which she stood would be the location of her shrine. This spot is now the present-day Rajpara. It was only in the last 100-150 years, however, that a full-scale ground-level temple came to stand here at Rajpara.

Based on his visits in 1974 and 1979, Tambs-Lyche reported that the temple was a very simple structure, with multiple square and stone pillars buttressing a flat roof adorned with a modest dome (2004, 128). Herein the central image of Khoḍīyār was, by the author's description, "sketchily sculpted from stone, and painted red" (2004, 129), suggesting some correspondence to her earlier aniconic representations. East of the temple was a raised platform, where Tambs-Lyche was told that goats and roosters were sacrificed in the "old days." Coconuts were broken on a sharp stone in the middle, and were then given to the *pūjārī* for a piece of coconut in return, a transaction constituting *prasād* (2004, 128).¹⁵⁰ The break was ideally carried out in one stroke, and so devotees let the priest break the coconut due to his acquired dexterity. Tambs-Lyche has proposed that the one-stroke requirement paralleled animal sacrifice, where the goat's head should be severed at the first blow (*Ibid.*). This kind of symbolic substitution suggests that some degree of Sanskritization or Vaiṣṇavization had affected the temple.

But the Rajpara site was not totally Sanskritized in the 1970s. The *pūjārīs* at the Khoḍīyār temple were Śaiva Brahmins who inherited their position from one generation to the next for as

¹⁵⁰ In Hinduism, among other South Asian religions, *prasād* refers to a ritual offering, often of food, made to a deity that is then redistributed to devotees. For more on *prasād*, see Andrea Pinkney (2013).

far back as anyone Tambs-Lyche talked to could remember (2004, 128). These Brahmins were descendants of earlier priests who had served for centuries dating back to Bhavnagar's statehood, during which time they received a subsidy from the prince (2004, 129). These priests were not held to be vegetarians in the past, and they did not appear to be fully *sāttvik* in the 1970s, either, at least not from the Swaminarayan perspective, as Tambs-Lyche made note of one priest who was smoking in the back of the temple when he visited. On the whole, the temple gave the impression of having a relaxed atmosphere. As most of the visitors came from Bhavnagar and surrounding areas, there were no real modern amenities apart from an infrequent bus service, as tourists did not go there at this point (*Ibid.*).

By 1991, however, things had begun to change for Khoḍīyār, not only at Rajpara but in Saurashtra and Gujarat at large. The goddess had adopted her standardized lithograph image, depicting her as a Charan woman flanked by a crocodile (Shukla-Bhatt 2014, 186; Fischer et al. 2014, 171). Stickers bearing slogans in support of Khoḍīyār such as “Jay Mātājī” and “Jay Khoḍīyār Mā” could now be found on scooters and trucks virtually everywhere in the state (Tambs-Lyche 1997, 313). In the nineties, it was common to see stickers on bigger-ticket items such as cars and motorcycles, suggesting that the goddess's name was closely tied to personal prosperity. By Tambs-Lyche's estimation, these Khoḍīyār-related slogans outnumbered those referring to Rāma (2004, 52). Similarly, cassette shops began featuring a variety of recordings dedicated to Khoḍīyār (*Ibid.*). Khoḍīyār's public profile was unmistakably ascending, and sites such as Rajpara reflected these transformations.

When Tambs-Lyche returned to Rajpara in the early nineties, many things had changed since his previous visit at the end of the seventies. The temple had now become a foundation run by a committee of trustees, much like the Becharaji of today (1997, 313). This committee had laid off the old priestly families, who did not meet with “modern standards” (Tambs-Lyche 2004, 129). Cash offerings had replaced coconuts, and so there was no longer even a semblance of a sacrifice (2004, 130). These substitutions could be interpreted as indexing further Sanskritization or Vaiṣṇavization, though they may also speak to the values of a changing demographic. The “sketchily sculpted” central image of yesteryear had been replaced with a new icon, which, in Tambs-Lyche's appraisal, was “more naturalistic” and “better dressed” (2004, 129-130). The temple itself was also looking forward to refurbishment in the near future because, as one young priest explained it, “the situation at the temple had degenerated to a level unworthy of an

important goddess such as Khodiyar” (2004, 130). In consonance with this sentiment, everything was by this point clean and freshly painted throughout the grounds, and the site as a whole was much neater (1997; 313; 2004, 129). The monkeys that formerly roamed the grounds had been chased away as they made “too much noise” (2004, 130). There were also more visitors than before, many of whom came by private car from cities such as Rajkot or Ahmedabad. Many of these cars carried entire families, who were apparently trying to combine a “pleasant outing” with a devotional experience (2004, 101). While people said they came to see the famous goddess, “their visit now smacks heavily of tourism,” as Tambs-Lyche has phrased it (1997, 313-314). The temple grounds had unquestionably been transformed with this affluent, touristy segment of the site’s audience in mind. On the old platform where animals used to be sacrificed, for instance, there was, at the time of Tambs-Lyche’s later visit, a park where children could play while their parents practiced their devotions (1997, 313). There were also tables and benches for the pilgrims, “since the class of visitor who arrives in his [sic] own car does not like to eat on the ground” (1997, 314). Considering all these changes, seemingly tailored toward middle-class vehicle owners from afar with disposable income and time, Tambs-Lyche has suggested that the temple is becoming “to put it perhaps a little too strongly, a popular picnic spot” (*Ibid.*).

From the perspective of 2019, to call Rajpara a “picnic spot” is not too strong a phrasing; today, in fact, it is something of an understatement. At present, the site is almost like a Khoḍīyār-themed amusement park. On the first evening I visited in May of 2015, the grounds teemed with people, many of them in Western clothes, men and women alike. There were multiple lengthy rows of vendors stretching throughout the grounds, bringing to mind a midway, of sorts (Figure 6). The various stalls offered the usual wares, such as devotional images of the goddess and cheaply-priced pamphlets. During my visit, I purchased a stand-up image of Khoḍīyār with her crocodile, fairly standard in all ways save for the fact that it also included a pattern of numbered blocks not unlike a Viśo-yantra in its top right-hand corner (Figure 7). The stalls were not, however, limited to religious items, and one could also pick up toys for children, as well as various novelty items. A large photo booth, for example, enabled the pilgrim to purchase customized green-screen portraits depicting the persons being photographed on bikes or in swings or kneeling in prayer at the feet of Khoḍīyār.



Figure 6: A row of vendors on the grounds of the Khoḍīyār temple, Rajpara (Photo by author)

At the end of the market-*cum*-midway, I encountered a small shrine with an ongoing *havan*. Taking place alongside the *havan* were coconut sacrifices, a practice apparently renewed since Tambs-Lyche's last visit, thereby putting Sanskritic and Sanskritized rituals in close proximity. Another of the principal shrines sits atop a hillock looming over the site and, for those not inclined to making the moderately steep trek, there is also a gondola that deposits devotees at the peak. Riding in this gondola, I was afforded a bird's eye view of the expansive scope of the temple complex. There are two temple tanks, as well as two *dharmaśālās*, a reflection of the sheer volume of pilgrims received every day, which numbers in the thousands. There is also a massive mess hall that can feed up to 20,000 people on special occasions free of charge, and boasts an automated *capātī* (flatbread) maker to keep up with the pilgrims' demand.



Figure 7: Lithograph-styled Khoḍīyār Mātā image with yantra in top right corner (Photo by author)

From the gondola, I also spotted the imposing watchtower on the far side of a *dharmasālā* and the modern fortress-like walls issuing out around it, topped in coils of barbed-wire. The site certainly has an institutional or even a militaristic feel, perhaps fitting for a Gohil Rajput enterprise, though the visitors come from a variety of castes. There is, for instance, a corps of uniformed workers and armed security personnel patrolling the grounds, some in black, some in RSS-esque tan khakis with knee-high socks, who are largely responsible for directing on-foot traffic. Despite the volume of people, the entire experience is fairly well-managed as these security guards usher people into orderly queues, as is the case at the entrance to the main ground-level temple. Once inside this shrine, an elaborate metal handrail is used to maintain an organized line. In this same spirit, the surroundings are carefully micromanaged to ensure an

orderly, comfortable experience. Beneath the watchtower is the manager's office, into which I was invited on more than one occasion for chai. Here, alongside temple higher-ups, I could watch the multiple HD CCTV screens showing live feed of various parts of the temple grounds. The manager, also in uniform, informed me that all these amenities were provided by the royal family in Bhavnagar, which has overseen the temple for the past 25 years. The royal family's support has allowed for the employment of an extensive staff numbering 125 people, including healthcare professionals who work in the on-site medical facilities.

When I asked the manager what brings people to Rajpara, he cited the rapid access it gave them to divine power. This power could handle all the typical requests people bring to goddess sites. Accordingly, visitors still make wishes to Khoḍīyār regarding matters of health and reproduction, seeking recovery from disease, enhanced fertility, and marriage partners for their grown children. They also make wishes in fiduciary matters, which may include pleas for better crops, getting a job, or else transferring to a better job. People sometimes ask the goddess to grant them judgements in their favour, or, more generally, to give them peace of mind. What Khoḍīyār did not grant, the manager assured me, was anything involving *tamas*-related hexes wished upon others. The notion that the site was imbued with a very real power was alive and well, and this power was framed as unimpeachably pure. Various people on the grounds bore witness to this power. One elderly security guard, Virubhai, told a story of a personal miracle (*camatkār*) that happened on-site. One night after closing hours, he met an old lady who wanted oil so that she could light a lamp to the goddess. He had little choice but to tell her there was no oil available, so she went ahead and used a small amount of ghee instead. Shortly after lighting the lamp, the old woman disappeared, but the lamp stayed on all night. It was Virubhai's belief that the woman was Khoḍīyār.

While Rajpara puts devotees in contact with an increasingly Sanskritized divinity with the fast-acting powers of a village goddess, there are conspicuous class-related elements at play that also seem to attract prospective devotees. The carnivalesque atmosphere encourages performances of revelry and consumption in an environment legitimated by strong sentiments of bhakti devotionism intermixed with Sanskritic, *sāttvik* sensibilities. Moreover, Rajpara's atmosphere can be thought of with reference to Minna Sāāvālā's (2010) reading of the Film City theme park in Andhra Pradesh. Film City, the world's largest motion picture studio complex, is also one of India's most popular thematic holiday destinations for affluent families. Sāāvālā has

characterized the place as having “the air of a huge stage upon which people had ventured rather unprepared, to be gazed at, and to prove their ‘middle-classness’” (Säävälä 2010, 103). This could also be applied to Rajpara, given how carefully attuned (and regimented) its confines are with regard to the order and comfort and also the consumption by which the Indian middle class in part defines itself. The similarity between tourist destinations such as theme parks and places of pilgrimage such as Rajpara has not been lost on theorists. Usually, these two categories of place are juxtaposed in view of their differing goals, as a pilgrimage site is expected to create a feeling of religious rapture or exaltation, while tourism is expected to give pleasure and enjoyment (Säävälä 2010, 108). If Rajpara is a site that simultaneously functions as picnic spot and *upapīṭha*, then perhaps it offers both exaltation and enjoyment, sacred and worldly, to the middle-class pilgrim-*cum*-tourist it attracts.

What Tambs-Lyche wrote about Rajpara over a decade ago holds up today, as the goddess’s popularity appears to be steadily burgeoning on account of her appeals to a widening base of followers. Tambs-Lyche has suggested that this is a consequence of the disappearance of kings and royalty in Saurashtra, which effectively changed the pattern of allegiance to Khoḍīyār by rendering her following less exclusive and more easily accessible to all. This may be the case in part. However, Khoḍīyār’s appeal also seems to be based in her Sanskritized or Vaiṣṇavized identity and her gentrified locales epitomized by places such as Rajpara. These adaptations make the goddess amenable to and affirmative of a middle-class, upwardly mobile lifestyle. Thus, Khoḍīyār draws a demographic that is, in Gujarat as in India at large, itself rapidly expanding. And even though she may assume the identity of a Great Goddess at Rajpara, Khoḍīyār still offers access here to a palpable power that promises quick and tangible fulfillments for her devotees’ requests, very much in the style of a village *mātā*.

CONTEMPORARY URBAN AND SUBURBAN KHOḌĪYĀR TEMPLES

Many Khoḍīyār sites large and small have incorporated the kinds of changes seen at Rajpara, with new icons, upgraded facilities, and comfortable ambience all attracting visitors in large numbers (Shukla-Bhatt 2014, 186). Most remarkable, perhaps, are the sizeable new Khoḍīyār sites that have been built from the ground up with these sensibilities in mind. These can be found either completed or under construction in large cities such as Rajkot, Ahmedabad, and Surat, and even outside of India (2014, 187). As the geographical area of her veneration has

expanded, so too has the scope of Khoḍīyār's theological jurisdiction. In large urban temples, Khoḍīyār, figured in her anthropomorphic form, is worshipped as a manifestation of the Great Goddess, Parameśvarī, and not simply as a partial manifestation of Pārvatī. Moreover, she is generally worshipped alone at these urban sites without the accompaniment of her sisters (*Ibid.*). As a singular entity, Khoḍīyār has garnered epithets such as Cāraṇī Parameśvarī Āī Khoḍīyār: “the Great Goddess in the form of a Charan woman” (2014, 193). While this imagining localizes Khoḍīyār in identifying her with a Charan background, it also universalizes her, extending her theological scope well beyond her pastoralist roots (2014, 187). Correspondingly, Khoḍīyār's rituals have been thoroughly Sanskritized for her urban environs. Both the temples themselves and their liturgies are fashioned on classical models, many of the temple songs having been adapted from Sanskrit hymns (2014, 194). These temples also offer Khoḍīyār strictly vegetarian *prasād*.

Widely disseminated contemporary publications dealing with the goddess, meanwhile, much like those dedicated to Bahucarā, incorporate the theological content and literary structure of Sanskrit texts, as is the case with the *Āī Khoḍīyār Gītā*, published in 1985. As the title and the 18-chapter structure would imply, the text is noticeably patterned after the *Bhagavad Gītā*. Moreover, its first four chapters follow those of the *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa*, a Vaiṣṇava text that dedicates substantial attention to the veneration of Kṛṣṇa's beloved companion, Rādhā, as a goddess personifying the divine femininity manifested in all women (Rocher 1986, 163).¹⁵¹ In like fashion, the composer of the *Āī Khoḍīyār Gītā* also exalts the goddess as the universal feminine principle, while at the same time emphasizing her Charan status (Shukla-Bhatt 2014, 187). As Shukla-Bhatt has explained, this text is reflective of Khoḍīyār's expanded theology, as “[t]he goddess is praised as the omnipresent great goddess and the prescribed worship rituals for her are similar to the *brahminical* rituals performed in large Hindu temples” (*Ibid.*). Clearly, trustees and patrons of upscale temples—a significant portion of the *Āī Khoḍīyār Gītā*'s audience—imagine Khoḍīyār as a divinity of pan-Indian possibilities, and have utilized Sanskritic rituals and Vaiṣṇavic Sanskrit texts to further underline this potential.

In this upscale and often metropolitan setting, more modernized adaptations have been incorporated within worship as well. In March 2012 at the temple in Memnagar, for example,

¹⁵¹ The *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa* is a well-known Sanskrit text based largely on the exploits of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, established in its extant form somewhere between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in Bengal. For more on the *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa*, see Cheever Mackenzie Brown (1974) and Ludo Rocher (1986, 160-165).

Shukla-Bhatt has reported that a birthday cake was prepared for Khoḍīyār (2014, 187). Cake is not a part of classical worship, and so this innovation is a reflection of the demographic of Khoḍīyār's devotees, as cake-cutting has gained popularity among the Indian urban middle class (2014, 187-188). Khoḍīyār's worship, Shukla-Bhatt has concluded, can readily integrate what is popular (2014, 188); this evidently involves gentrified sensibilities alongside the Sanskritized and universalized. Indeed, it is precisely these modern middle-class, upwardly mobile people trying to make good in a fast-paced urban world for whom the rapid blessings provided by Khoḍīyār hold a singular appeal. One blogger quoted by Shukla-Bhatt writes: “[i]n modern age of instant food, ATM banking [and] sms booking, Khodiyar Maa comes upon as a goddess of immediate deliverance [sic]” (2014, 192).

Perhaps the best examples of Khoḍīyār's transformed character and confines can be found at a site-in-progress, the entirely new Khodaldham complex in the town of Kagvad about an hour outside of Rajkot. The foundation stone for this site was laid in 2011, an undertaking that was overseen in its entirety by the Leuva Patel community, principal supporters of the project (Shukla-Bhatt 2014, 180). While Khoḍīyār-related publications have insisted that the goddess's devotees come from “all castes”—a familiar refrain at goddess temples—the strongest base of her worshippers remains Rajputs with allegiances to the Chudasama, Vala, or Gohil princely families as well as bardic, pastoral, and agrarian caste groups such as Charans, Ahirs, and Kanbis (2014, 188). The Leuva Patels, also known as the “sweet Patels,” are a subgroup among the Kanbis for whom Khoḍīyār is *kuldevī* (2014, 178). Like many Gujarat Patels in general, Leuva Patels have experienced pronounced success in education, politics, and business both locally and internationally (2014, 190). As described by Shukla-Bhatt, the ambitious Khodaldham project and the goddess Khoḍīyār, as she is understood by temple trustees and patrons, serves as a testament to the Leuva Patels' upwardly mobile status, indexing their ever-gaining economic, social, and political ascendancy (2014, 193).

As with other contemporary urban Khoḍīyār temples, Khodaldham incorporates Sanskritized and universalized elements in its ritual proceedings. At the temple's inception in 2011, seven young girls representing Khoḍīyār and her sisters carried out the *śīlanya* or “brick-laying” ceremony. This involved the placing of the first foundation stone, while another group of girls chanted Vedic mantras all the while (Shukla-Bhatt 2014, 180). In 2012, at the official laying of this temple foundation stone (or *śīlāpūjan*), the classically-styled ceremony was overseen by

Brahmin priests, who completed the ritual initiated by the girls a year earlier. The ceremonies also featured folk songs to Khoḍīyār in Gujarati, placing the local language alongside and within a Sanskritic ritual repertoire, resembling what Joanne Waghorne has called “Vedic vernacular” in her work on temple gentrification (Shukla-Bhatt 2014, 180; Waghorne 2004, 168). In a comparable blending of local and universal, the temple under construction at Khodaldham promised to feature Khoḍīyār flanked by pan-Indian gods and goddesses such as Śiva, Rāma, Kṛṣṇa, Hanumān, and Kālī, as well as regional *mātās* such as Shihorī and Rāndal (Shukla-Bhatt 2014, 178).

There are also Vaiṣṇava-inspired elements at the Khodaldham site. This was certainly the case on the occasion of the *śilāpūjan* ceremony, which saw a number of Swaminarayan holy men install an image of Swaminarayan on the stage and then offer blessings to the prospective temple (Shukla-Bhatt 2014, 191). A foundation stone for which a famed Swaminarayan leader in Mumbai had performed rituals was also brought to the site; this was similarly installed by another high-ranking member of the sect (*Ibid.*). If Vaiṣṇavization of Khoḍīyār was latent in Tambs-Lyche’s discussion of Rajpara, it is all the more recognizable in Shukla-Bhatt’s observations from Khodaldham. Here and now, the synthesis of Vaiṣṇavism and goddess worship initiated centuries ago by Vallabh Bhatt with regard to Bahucarā appears to be going strong in the context of Khoḍīyār as well. The prominence of Swaminarayan dignitaries at Khodaldham’s inauguration offers evidence of the continued impact of the sect’s sensibilities in Khoḍīyār’s reimagining. Certainly, many Patels, Leuvas included, are followers of the Swaminarayan sect. With its “well-established order of monks, magnificent temples, and classical ritual practices” (Shukla-Bhatt 2014, 193), not to mention its service-oriented community, Swaminarayan Hinduism has offered another mechanism for realizing and sustaining ascendancy for Leuva Patels, and apparently has done much the same for their *kuldevī* Khoḍīyār. That is, Swaminarayan Hinduism provides not just potentialities for Sanskritization or Vaiṣṇavization of the goddess’s image and her worshippers, but also a pan-regional—even international—reach on top of that, continuing the tradition of upward class mobility that Sahajanand’s *sampradāya* has allowed for Kanbi/Patel groups since its inception. Moreover, the tension between mercantile and Rajput cultures identified by Tambs-Lyche is seemingly resolved with ceremonies such as those involved with the *śilāpūjan*, which illustrates how Śakti and Vaiṣṇava bhakti need not be polarized, but can actually be interwoven (2014, 191).

All these reconsiderations in Khoḍīyār's character and worship run parallel to the enhancement of the socioeconomic status of Leuva Patels through education, business, and politics, among other avenues. Displays of eminence and wealth are abundant at the Khodaldham complex. Many Patel luminaries, for instance, were in attendance at the 2012 *śilāpūjan*, among them Keshubhai Patel, former Chief Minister of Gujarat preceding fellow BJP member and sworn rival Narendra Modi (Shukla-Bhatt 2014, 190). Hailing from Saurashtra, Keshubhai is himself a Leuva Patel, and in a speech to the two million in attendance at the event, he encouraged members of the community to fight for their rights under the blessing of Khoḍīyār. This message was of significant political moment considering the size of the gathering and the importance of caste-based vote banks (2014, 191). Keshubhai's speech also linked Khoḍīyār to the creation of wealth for the community, and the former Chief Minister advised entrepreneurs to start businesses with "Khoḍīyār" in their company names. This would not only further the spread of Khoḍīyār's name both at home and abroad, but would also secure grace for the community and guarantee continued financial success (*Ibid.*).

The largesse of the Leuva Patels at the Khodaldham site was also readily identifiable in the many extravagant displays orchestrated during the *śilāpūjan*. This ceremony, for example, featured a shower of flowers dropped from a helicopter (Shukla-Bhatt 2014, 178). A giant TV screen displayed this spectacle for the millions of attendees. Unmistakably, the Khodaldham temple endowment is immense, as is indicated by the ritual and ceremonial infrastructure they can afford. However, the temple funds are not deployed solely for such lavish exhibitions. Community service is also an abiding goal of the complex, and so Shukla-Bhatt has reported that the site is projected to include recreational and educational facilities, including an agricultural university. It is also Khodaldham's objective to create a "Community Development Center" for research, improvement, and maintenance specifically related to the Leuva Patel community (2014, 192). The aim of this Community Development Center is to enable advancement of the broader society and nation, solidifying the identity of the Leuva Patel community as a force dedicated to social service and progressiveness.

Khodaldham's emphases on wealth, prosperity, and aspects of community involvement such as education, point toward the complex's middle-class, upwardly mobile sensibilities. Although unfinished at the time of Shukla-Bhatt's research, Khodaldham epitomizes the ambitions of many other urban Khoḍīyār temples, which have also been shaped by gentrifying

tastes, as well as Sanskritizing, Vaiṣṇavizing, and universalizing adaptations. These processes have subsequently reshaped Khoḍīyār as well, rendering the Charan woman a *bona fide* Great Goddess which, Shukla-Bhatt has suggested, “offers a powerful model for upwardly mobile communities,” such as the Leuva Patels (2014, 193). Just as the goddess may elevate her profile and expand her glory, so too may her followers—both as communities and as individuals—with her blessing.

A SHRINE IN BAPUNAGAR

These interrelated developments can also be found at smaller, simpler Khoḍīyār sites, and one such example is the compact, single-room shrine located in Bapunagar, a neighbourhood on the east side of Ahmedabad. Situated amidst rows of conjoined, boxlike houses, the block of which forms a comfortable middle-class quarter, the shrine is housed in a squat building with several tiny rooms. The main objects of worship are located in a small room, perhaps twelve feet by twelve, and include multiple images of Khoḍīyār Mātā. Despite its small size, the space is typically filled with 20 or more people, especially during Navarātri and other festivals. On Tuesdays and Sunday, visitors drop in to get *darśan* from the main image, a two-eyed stone that follows from earlier *fala*-style depictions of the goddess. Placed to its right when I visited were more modern lithographic and felt renderings of Khoḍīyār, as well as a number of Sanskritic goddesses such as Durgā and Lakṣmī. These juxtaposed icons suggest that the temple visually equates the universalized, Sanskritic Khoḍīyār with the minimalistic, village-styled imagining.

The leading light of the Bapunagar shrine is Manjuma, a gracious, agreeable, middle-aged woman who caught *pavan* of Khoḍīyār at age seven. Wearing a long, dark dress and black hooded shawl for her dealings inside the shrine, she resembles both the goddess as per lithographs and a traditional Charan woman. For Manjuma, also referred to as the “Mātājī,” the hood is a crucial component when channeling *pavan*, as it contains special cosmic power; further, it protects from the evil eye and viral disease. People come to the tiny Bapunagar shrine for the same reasons they visit bigger temples to Khoḍīyār, on account of concerns relating to finance, health, and fertility, all of which Manjuma attempts to deal with on behalf of the goddess. During one of my visits, Manjuma provided blessings for a newborn who was said to have been brought into the world by way of an earlier wish made at the site. On this occasion, the Mātājī draped the shawl over the infant, and the child eventually laid back on the length of

the outstretched cloth, at which point Manjuma very gently lifted the baby over the flame (or *jyot*) to Khoḍīyār. People have journeyed from afar for these sorts of blessings, Mumbai being a common point of origin, as well as from international destinations such as the US and the UK. This international appeal has also ensured that blessings for visa applications have become a common request made of Khoḍīyār at this site.

Other pivotal members of the temple can personally attest to the power of the *jyot* and its blessing, such as Saureshbhai, Manjuma's foremost assistant, who attributes his own personal turnaround to Khoḍīyār. A tall, strapping man, Saureshbhai was formerly a bodyguard for politicians and prominent industrialists, an inauspicious profession that led him into an unsavoury life, by his account. Indeed, I heard from others that Saureshbhai, in his prime, gained the reputation of being something of a "don." This greatly disturbed his married life, and his parents brought him to Manjuma for help. Upon coming to Manjuma and receiving the blessing of Khoḍīyār, his life completely changed. Most of his time has come to be invested in the operation of the little Bapunagar shrine.

Though small, the temple supports some largescale events, perhaps none bigger than its *pāṭotsav* celebration commemorating the shrine's inception, which I attended over the course of several days in late April and early May in 2015. On the first day, following the precedent set in previous years, Manjuma got a mild *pavan* and danced in the streets, leading a procession of hundreds of temple followers through the neighbourhood (Figure 8). Music thundered from the portable *ratha* ("chariot") that followed behind her, bedecked with pictures of various goddesses. Devotees trailed behind it, dancing and clapping. With her hair down and a beatific expression on her face, Manjuma directed the procession through streets and alleys, smearing turmeric on people as she passed. The *ratha* also bestowed a *prasād* of candies to children who approached. The procession came to a head when it entered into one of Bapunagar's major commercial junctions. Here men and women started to circumambulate in Navarātri-styled dancing. Meanwhile, a few people in the crowd were overtaken by *pavan* themselves, and more pronouncedly so than the Mātājī, vocalizing loudly and letting their tongues protrude. One older man began waving his hands in the air amidst the circle of people, and brandished a thin, curved sword, holding a lime in his mouth. Another man, much younger, trembled uncontrollably and, soon after, produced a metal chain. He commenced to whip himself with it over his shoulder, and

after a few lashes, Saureshbhai stepped in stone-facedly to pacify him, getting him to relinquish the chain.



Figure 8: Manjuma dances in the streets at the Bapunagar *pāṭotsav* (Photo by Vimal Shukla)

The next day's *pāṭotsav* undertakings were more sedate, at least at first. To memorialize the shrine's birthday, a *havan* had been organized, and approximately 20 *yajña* pits had been constructed under a long, narrow canopy occupying a lane in the community of row-houses in

the same area where the procession had started the previous day. In the middle of the *havan* pits sat a shrine to Khoḍīyār. Multiple Brahmins were in attendance, commencing the *havan* with the chanting of Sanskrit and Vedic mantras. Husbands and wives sat in front of the fire pits, the women dressed in their finest saris, to chant along with the mantras and cast seeds of barley, sesame, and *gūgaḷ* (a popular variety of incense) into the flame. A cameraman recorded all elements of the celebration. Many of the people in attendance were of Saurashtrian or Leuva Patel origin, or both, as this is the major demographic of the temple. As the Brahmins accelerated the chanting to a very brisk pace, the crowd became more frenzied; as the smoke thickened, people began dancing rather demurely to a drum beat. Then, all at once, a middle-aged woman raised her hand and screamed, announcing the arrival of her *pavan*. Soon after, other women, most of them older, followed suit, clapping and whipping their hair about. All the while, the Mātājī drummed on a metal plate marked with a *svastika*. Men started to get *pavan* as well, among the first of them being Ishwarbhai, a middle-aged Leuva Patel who came not from Saurashtra but from around Becharaji. Eventually the music stopped and various speeches commenced, though the *pavan* had not necessarily departed the group, and occasionally someone would cry out during the orations. A speaker on the microphone resumed the Sanskrit chanting, and an outsized gourd was brought out into a space cleared in the central area in front of the *havan* pit. Silver trays with lit oil lamps were placed all around the large vegetable, and an officiant dabbed a mixture of kumkum and other powders around its stem in the likeness of a *tilak*. The officiant then drew a long, thin sword from its scabbard and handed it to a kneeling man who, from his knees, raised the blade up over his head and plunged it into the gourd, splitting it in one stroke. The act resembled a blood sacrifice in all regards save for the fact that the animal had been replaced with a vegetable. This marks a clear-cut example of Sanskritization, akin to that which Tambs-Lyche observed at Rajpara (2004, 128). As the Sanskrit chanting continued, a tiny representation of the goddess reminiscent of the *fala*-like two-eyed stone in the Bapunagar temple was placed in one of the remaining halves of the gourd, with candles burning from its top. Afterward, additional *havans* continued, with Manjuma casting a coconut into the fire with help from Ishwarbhai, who had seemingly been chosen for the task on account of his sustained *pavan*. As the music resumed, more people got *pavan*. In the evening, thousands of people from the community gathered in the nearby courtyard to sup on behalf of the temple, with nearly a literal tonne of vegetarian food being served.

The third and final night saw the largest gathering. Saureshbhai estimated the attendance at 10,000 during the height of the festivities from midnight to 3 a.m. The Mātājī once again got a light, breezy *pavan* for the occasion, and devotees showered her with ten and 50 rupee notes as she danced before the amassed crowd. Others got *pavan* too, their numbers even greater than on the previous days, and their “breeze” was even more pronounced. One man threw the shawl over his head and began to quiver. Another man—a *bhuvā* from Arnej—beat himself with a chain for a long period of time, flailing it enthusiastically without interference. Saureshbhai was nearby, but this time he did not intervene—instead, he only threw money around the undulating man. As the night progressed, many people scattered throughout the crowd got *pavan*, too. Near the end, it was difficult to distinguish those with *pavan* from those without.

Altogether, the *pāṭotsav*, like the Bapunagar temple itself, is emblematic of the contrasts and continuities between Khoḍiyār’s present and past. There is clearly evidence of the kinds of Sanskritization and universalization of Khoḍiyār’s identity and ritual as observed at Rajpara and Khodaldham, the prime example being the *havans* servicing the goddess as if she were a Mahādevī. Also, the displays of prosperity and the willingness to share this wealth with the community in largescale functions are consonant with the sensibilities of middle-class patrons, as well as the corresponding values of the surrounding quarter in which the temple is located. And yet all the while, the intermingled *fala*-style aniconographies and fairly uninhibited *pavan* on special occasions suggest some enduring connections with village understandings of the Mātā. This marks a synthesis, of sorts, between the village Khoḍiyār and her universalized reimagining.

Before concluding, it is worth mentioning that the Bapunagar temple may also give evidence of some of Khoḍiyār’s tantric facets, as well. During one of my later visits to the shrine, I brought with me the Khoḍiyār image I had purchased at Rajpara with the design resembling a Viśo-yantra in its top right-hand corner (see again Figure 7), hoping Manjuma and Saureshbhai could shed some light on its significance. While they agreed it was a yantra, the two differed in opinion as to what kind it was—Manjuma thought of it as a Viśo-yantra, while Saureshbhai interpreted it as Khoḍiyār’s *bīju* (or “seed”) yantra. Regardless, the image prompted Saureshbhai to reach behind the central Khoḍiyār image of the little shrine. From here he produced a similar yantra. Wrought from copper, it also had the same numbers as the ones in the image I had bought at Rajpara. This yantra, he informed me, can be found at many major Khoḍiyār centres, including Rajpara, Matel, and Rohishula, the latter of which is thought by some to be the limping

goddess's birthplace. Saureshbhai then showed me the other yantras located throughout the shrine, including the Śrī-yantra behind Durgā, and the Lakṣmī yantra to the left of Khoḍīyār. Thus, while not outwardly displayed, tantric accoutrements appear to have an important place in Khoḍīyār's shrines, and apparently at her larger sites, as well. Considering their placement beside Durgā and Lakṣmī at Bapunagar, these yantras hint at another aspect of Khoḍīyār's equivalency with (or at least proximity to) pan-Indian goddesses. David Gordon White has linked tantra with Khoḍīyār's intimate folkloric ties to the 64 *yoginīs/jogaṇīs* as well as blood sacrifices of buffaloes and, allegedly, humans (2003, 129). Additionally, Khoḍīyār's limp parallels the physical irregularities associated with some other tantric female divinities such as Kubjikā (2003, 129-130).¹⁵² These connections have led White to conclude that Khoḍīyār is a "tantric goddess" (2003, 130). While Khoḍīyār's status as a tantric goddess may not be so singularly cut and dried, she definitely shares some connections to tantra, and these may inform some of her instantaneous, wish-fulfilling powers heralded at a number of sites. And while her moniker "Rājarājeśvarī" refers most obviously to Khoḍīyār's kingly past, the name is also an epithet of Bālātripurāsundarī, and therefore shares some reverberations with Śrīvidyā tantra.

Conclusion

Bahucarā and Khoḍīyār are both said to have taken origin as Charan girls, attesting to the spiritual power of females of that caste. Each went on to become a patron goddess for the Charans as well as a number of other specific groups: for Bahucarā, this was primarily the Kolis and Solanki Rajputs, as well as the transgender Pavaiyas and the Muslim Kamalias; for Khoḍīyār, this was the Chudasama Rajput clan (especially their kings), in addition to a variety of other low and middle-caste groups. Customarily, the majority of devotees, hailing from martial and low-ranking castes, worshipped these goddesses through *tāmasik* means, involving liquor oblations, possession-like *pavan* states supervised by *bhuvās*, and animal sacrifices, the rooster and the buffalo bearing especial significance to Bahucarā and Khoḍīyār, respectively. For all their similarities in the past, however, Bahucarā and Khoḍīyār seem just as closely hued in the present-day, albeit for different reasons. At present, they are archetypical, modernized *mātās* in that they boast standardized lithograph prints, major pilgrimage spots, and *sāttvik* worship at

¹⁵² Kubjikā is a tantric goddess worshipped throughout India whose name derives from the Sanskrit root for a "crook" or "curve." This refers to the goddess's back, which is said to be hunched. For more on Kubjikā, see Mark Dyczkowski (1995-1996).

virtually all their urban sites. Sanskritization, Vaiṣṇavization, universalization, and gentrification have all had a hand in shaping the modern iterations of Bahucarā and Khoḍiyār, and it is values informed by the core principles behind these processes that appear to draw in many of the visitors to their temple sites. In the case of Bahucarā, commentators past and present have attempted to establish her roots in Sanskrit scripture, as well as her Vaiṣṇava resonances. More recently, her *śakti-pīṭha* at Becharaji has come to be exclusively staffed with Brahmins and renovated with respect to middle-class tastes. Similar sensibilities have driven refurbishments and constructions at Khoḍiyār temples, old and new. While some shrines like the one in Bapunagar retain vestiges of earlier village worship, particularly *pavan*, prominent sites such as Rajpara and Khodaldham take a different approach. The trustees behind Khoḍiyār's sleek, carefully ordered complexes clearly seek to gain pan-regional and pan-Indian appeal, and for this reason, they actively emphasize the Sanskritic and Vaiṣṇava. Certainly, both Bahucarā and Khoḍiyār mark critical sites of synthesis between Śāktism and the brands of Vaiṣṇavism native to Gujarat. Given these adaptations and alterations, both of these regionalized village *mātās* have become more and more like Devīs in the pan-Indian sense.

For both Bahucarā and Khoḍiyār, tantra has played a role, to some degree, in their re-imagination. This is most obvious for Bahucarā, who is not only worshipped at her major *śakti-pīṭha* by way of a concealed yantra, but is also homologized with the goddess Bālātripurāsundarī of the Śrīvidyā fold and therefore held by some sources to embody the “secret of the three cities,” the yogic idea of macrocosm and microcosm so fundamental to that tradition. In addition to these classical tantric principles, repetition of the famed poetic works in Bahucarā's name can also bring with it tangible benefits typical of folk tantra, such as health, prosperity, and even the magical powers involved with *ṛddhi-siddhi*. While Khoḍiyār's tantric aspect is not so outwardly recognizable, the immediacy of the sublunary blessings she brings is also recurrently cited at her sites. And she herself is no stranger to yantras, which, as we have seen, also lay behind her main image at some of her shrines, large and small.

All told, Bahucarā and Khoḍiyār have been Sanskritized, gentrified, and universalized to such an extent that they are presently considered reasonably safe, *sāttvik* deities for the present-day population. While some elites—among them Baniyas, Jains and Brahmins—may still look askance at these *mātās'* *tāmasik* pasts or the groups by which they have been traditionally worshipped, Bahucarā and Khoḍiyār have each attracted a middle-class, upwardly mobile,

urbanizing following that has expanded beyond these goddesses' usual bases. Given their gradual transformations toward the *sāttvik* and the gaining popularity of their sites, Bahucarā and Khoḍīyār can be seen as prototypical models, in some sense, for the reimaginings currently ongoing for Melaḍī, Jogaṇī, and Haḍkāī, the goddesses we will take up in the following chapters.

Chapter Four: Cleaning up the Dirty Goddess—Melaḍī Mātā's Modern Reimagining

The identity crisis of Gujarati village goddesses is perhaps best exemplified by Melaḍī Mātā. Consider her name itself: in Gujarati, the word *mel* denotes “filth” or “dirtiness,” and so, alongside the maternal connotation of “Mātā,” Melaḍī is literally a “mother of dirt” or “dirty mother.” *Mel* is rife with negative connotations, and can also refer to “darkness” and “black magic.” Much like other *mātās*, Melaḍī has traditionally been associated with rural areas, non-Brahminic rituals—most notably goat sacrifices—and non-elite groups. Her ties to low-caste and “untouchable” groups are especially fundamental to her character, as Melaḍī has long been popularly perceived as presiding over the “lowest of the low” in terms of caste (Franco, Macwan & Ramanathan 2000, 196), particularly groups such as the Devipujaks and Valmikis, formerly known by the derisive names of Vaghri and the Bhangis, respectively (Perez 2004, 88). A number of scholars, while only mentioning Melaḍī in passing, have nonetheless made sure to note the goddess's low status. Pocock, for instance, has referred to her as “the dirty goddess” and portrayed her as no less than archetypical of deities who receive blood sacrifices (1973, 62-63). Such descriptions seem to follow from Forbes' earlier description of Melaḍī as one among the “filthy night birds” (Daya 1849, xiv). In comparable fashion, many among the Gujarati elite still dismiss Melaḍī today, as she remains synonymous in the popular imagination with the dark elements of village religion, including *tāmasik* tantra, negative witchcraft, and “black mesmerism.”

Regardless, Melaḍī has become one of the most ubiquitous goddesses in rural and urban Gujarat at present. Her image appears in a wide variety of public spaces, with billboards, store signs and car windows all brandishing the standard lithograph presentation of the goddess, a smiling six- or eight-armed young woman seated upon a goat (as seen in Figure 1). She is also the subject of movies and music videos, many of which circulate on various social media sites such as YouTube, Facebook, and WhatsApp.¹⁵³ Along with this increased public presence, Melaḍī has also seen stylistic shifts in her worship, which at many sites has moved toward Sanskritized hymns and purely vegetarian *pūjās*. Moreover, an increasing number of her *pūjārīs* actively denounce practices such as animal sacrifice and *pavan*. Melaḍī sites have also been

¹⁵³ At least two feature films are based upon Melaḍī, including *Lankānī lādī ne Ghoghā no var*, or *The Bride from Lanka, the Groom from Ghogha* (1980) and *Maa Meldi Tari Mer* (2004). The earlier film deals with one of Melaḍī's foremost origin stories as Rāvaṇa's daughter, to be discussed later in the chapter. The later film takes up some of her “dark” aspects, the English description on the back of the DVD sleeve characterizing the goddess as follows: “[h]er ‘tantric’ disciples are adept at dealing with ghosts, demonic and extra-terrestrial creatures.”

transformed: while small shrines maintain their popularity, expansive temples in her name have sprung up throughout urban and suburban Gujarat, drawing upwardly mobile and middle-class devotees from a variety of castes. It is the increasingly *sāttvik* sensibilities of this diverse and burgeoning audience of socially and economically ascendant devotees that have powered the pronounced changes to Melaḍī, sweetening and, in a manner of speaking, sanitizing the ostensibly dirty goddess.

This chapter endeavours to better understand Melaḍī's ongoing present-day reimagining. In order to do so, it is first necessary to appreciate her roots as a “dirty” goddess. We will embark upon this task by looking for sources within the Gujarati village tradition, delving into the wealth of folk narratives linking Melaḍī with dirt and depressed classes, as well as outside of it, evaluating colonial materials that portray Melaḍī as a fickle spirit—as much ghost as she is goddess—who can both possess and exorcize. This will also establish Melaḍī's background as a goddess who took sacrifices and alcohol oblations, and who was frequently encountered by way of *pavan*. This will bring us to present-day vernacular formulations of Melaḍī composed by and for her worshippers. Though the authors of these textual accounts most often take great pains to deterge the goddess, their imaginings sometimes portray her as both *sāttvik* and *tāmasik*, while also promulgating her positive tantric aspect. *Tāmasik* elements still figure into Melaḍī worship in some villages, as we will see in the first of our ethnographic excursions vis-à-vis the goddess. This takes us into a lower-caste Vadi (“snake charmer”) community based in a village outside of the small city of Dhrangadhra that continues to worship Melaḍī in a decidedly non-Brahminic, *tāmasik* mode.

From here, our ethnography will shift toward Melaḍī's more recently developed urban and suburban temple complexes, almost all of which are centred upon a charismatic spiritual head and operated and attended by a diverse plurality of caste groups. At every one of these sites, the goddess is, without fail, presented as a purely *sāttvik* Devī in the pan-Indian idiom with an upwardly mobile, middle-class audience in mind. As such, sacrifices and liquor offerings are openly decried, and *pavan* is more often than not de-emphasized. Despite their similarities in scale and sensibilities, the contexts are varied: the inner-city temple in Beherempur caters to an upwardly mobile working-class population, its trustees demonstrably influenced by the Hindu right; Paroli, in putting forward a hyper-*sāttvik*, tantric-inflected Melaḍī, represents a conscious break from the less Sanskritic, more ecstatic rites dedicated to the same goddess in the same tiny

town; Kheda centres upon an affluent, globally-connected charismatic leader wielding miraculous healing power, as does the complex at Kaiyal, albeit with a Dalit twist. The resplendent Jasalpur, meanwhile, stands as a testament to the Patel community's prosperity and flourishing middle-classness at home and abroad.

The stark contrast between the ritual atmosphere of the village Vadi community and that shared by these urban and suburban complexes serves as a point of departure for evaluating Melaḍī's marked shift in character. As I contend, she has migrated beyond an exclusively rural, lower-caste milieu toward a more Sanskritized, pan-Indian, and international identity agreeable to the tastes of a rapidly modernizing, increasingly upwardly mobile base of urban worshippers. Sanskritizing, Vaiṣṇavizing, universalizing, and gentrifying impetuses are all at play here, accounting in different measures at different sites for the adaptations and alterations in the ritual and iconography of Melaḍī Mātā. Ritual, architectural, theological, and organizational adaptations informed by the sensibilities attendant to these processes have been deployed by trustees and officiants at Melaḍī temple complexes and sought out by visitors thereto, and these cumulative efforts have effectively converged to tidy up the goddess of dirt.

Prevailing Perceptions of Melaḍī Mātā

On account of Melaḍī's non-elite, vernacular origins, there is little in the way of early print material surrounding her, and so much of what we know about her past must be gathered from Gujarati folklore and colonial writings. There are a number of origin stories concerning the goddess, all of which revolve around her associations with dirt, impurity, and malevolent forces. One such narrative provided by Fischer, Jain, and Shah accounts for Melaḍī's name by tying her to the bodily scurf of the goddess Pārvatī:

Once, *Pārvatī*, *Shiva*'s wife, removed dirt from her body and created out of it the goddess *Shakti*, who saluted the great *Bhavāni* (*Pārvatī*) and said: "Oh Mother! You were so kind as to create me, please take care of me too." *Pārvatī* smiled and said: "Because you were created from the dirt of my body, you shall be known worldwide as *Melaḍī Devī*. I give you the goat as your animal mount as well as pass to you all my *shakti* energy. I also give you the power to be benevolent as well as angry. Therefore, people will worship you and will fear to neglect you. You will do everything that a pure (or clean) goddess cannot. Because the temples in towns and villages are already occupied by other gods, you will reside at cremation sites and entrances to villages (Fischer, Jain & Shah 2014, 170-171).

In the process of establishing Melaḍī's defining iconographic features, as well as her mercurial nature, this unapologetic introduction immediately relates her to impurity. This, however, is interpreted as giving Melaḍī an advantage over more refined goddesses. As a consequence of her unblushing earthiness, she becomes sited in some decidedly inauspicious places related to death and liminality such as burial grounds and village boundaries. Melaḍī's connections with death are in no short supply, as is connoted by her name's association with the noun *melī* or "funeral bier." The epithet *melaḍī* itself can be used to refer to the ghost of an outcaste woman who has died a violent death (Randeria 1989, 181 ff. 22). Accordingly, the funeral ground has been one of Melaḍī's traditional haunts, and this, too, has been reflected in the goddess's epithets. In present-day Ahmedabad, for instance, there is a small shrine to Masāni Melaḍī (that is, "funeral ground" Melaḍī, deriving from the Gujarati *smaśān*) just metres away from a major cremation site on the eastern banks of the Sabarmati river.

Along with these inauspicious places, Melaḍī is also related to impure substances, as well as groups deemed to be the same. The Thakors, for instance, link her with feces (Lobo 1995, 142). The Patidars, the upwardly mobile Patel subgroup, have chronicled this very same association in their version of the goddess's origin story:

Once all the gods were fighting with a *zan* [malevolent being], fearful and disgusting just like a member of the *Bhangi* caste, scavengers, or a *Vāghari*. They fought three long days and did not win. Indeed, they were so tired that the *zan* nearly conquered them. At night they sat down to consider the situation and one of them said 'Brothers, let's make a goddess from our faeces.' This they did. Their new goddess was so powerful that she fought the *zan* and killed him. Once she had achieved their purposes the gods ran off because they had made the goddess from filth. However, the goddess ran ahead and, by taking a short cut, outdistanced them and, by her magic, made a garden in the road along which they should pass. The gods came, saw the garden and sat down to drink from the well in the middle of it. As soon as they had drunk the water the goddess appeared to them and said, 'Well, brothers, you have drunk my water and what are you going to do about that now?' They were in danger of becoming Untouchable and begged the goddess for mercy. She said 'Well, I will release you on condition that you give me a name and worship me.' After thinking about it they decided to call her Meladimātā because she was made from filth, *mel*. And that is how she has always been known (Pocock 1973, 64).

So powerful is the goddess's impurity that she has the capacity to lower even the gods to untouchable status. This narrative also passingly disparages two untouchable groups closely

associated with Melaḍī, the Bhangis and the Vaghri. The term “Bhangi” is an antiquated and deeply pejorative name for “sweepers” or “scavengers,” reputed by some Gujaratis to be the “lowest of the low” on the putative hierarchy among untouchable castes due to their ritually polluting occupational duties such as the disposal of human waste and carcasses (Franco et al. 2000, 196; Perez 2004, 88).¹⁵⁴ In *The Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency*, it was reported that Melaḍī was among this group’s favourite objects of worship (Kirparam 1901, 335-336). Members of this group, many of whom presently self-identify as adherents of the Valmiki Samaj having rejected the offensive label “Bhangi,” still recognize Melaḍī as one of their foremost *kuldevīs* following from generations of precedent (Franco, Macwan & Ramanathan 2004, 271; Perez 2004, 88). Almost equally denigrated are the Vaghri or Devipujaks, a group that claims to have formerly been Rajput but is currently “arch-untouchable” in Tambs-Lyche’s description (2004, 22). Though their primary goddess is Haḍakṣā, as we will see in Chapter Six, Devipujaks also have a longstanding link with Melaḍī (Kirparam 1901, 514). Enthoven reported that “[a] *bhuvā* attending upon the goddess Meldi is generally a Vaghri by caste and always wears dirty clothes” ([1914] 1989, 84). While Enthoven and the school master of Jodia cited as his source were conceivably overgeneralizing on a number of levels, this may suggest that the Devipujaks’ relationship with Melaḍī was so strong that they deliberately evoked the dirty goddess in their choice of vestments. More plainly, though, it speaks to elite Gujarati prejudices against Devipujaks and the colonial observer’s willingness to replicate them.

In yet another Melaḍī origin story, variations of which were often cited by people with whom I spoke, the goddess is identified as the daughter of the demon king Rāvaṇa, antagonist of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Fischer et al. have recorded the narrative as follows:

Melaḍī was the daughter of King *Rāvana* and his wife *Mandodari*. It was prophesied, however, that she would marry a Bhangi, an untouchable sweeper, named *Bhīmdo*. *Rāvana* was extremely angry over his daughter’s destiny. He went to the Bhangi neighbourhood, sought and found the boy *Bhīmdo*, put him in a box and threw him in the river. The box floated on the river, reached the ocean, and finally found its way to *Chandrachūd*, the ruler of Ghogha at the seashore in Saurashtra (Gujarat). The king took the child out of the basket, adopted the boy, reared him and, later on, arranged for him to be engaged to *Rāvana*’s daughter *Melaḍī*. During the wedding

¹⁵⁴ The Valmiki were generally associated with *tāmasik* practices and even “darkness” itself as an abstract concept. One such folkloric belief in Gujarat holds that a Valmiki is the “creditor of the sun and moon,” and so he is perpetually trying to recover his debts due from them. When his shadow falls against either celestial body, it causes an eclipse (Enthoven [1914] 1989, 21).

ceremony, *Rāvana* found out that his future son-in-law was none other than *Bhīmdo*, the Bhangi child. He interrupted the ritual, only to be held back by his daughter who was adamant that she would marry the man to whom she was engaged. But the young man ran back to his relatives in the Bhangi quarter of Lanka begging them to hide him as he was afraid that King *Rāvana* might kill him. They dug a hole and put the young man in it. *Meladī* followed him to his family's home and built there a pyre of wood which she set fire to. She then rode on a black goat upon this stake and burned to death in front of everybody. Today she is known as *Masāniyā Meladī*, *Meladī* of the burning sites (Fischer et al. 2014, 171).

Thus, this narrative renders *Meladī* ambivalently. While she is the offspring of evil and wed to an impure Bhangi, she is at the same time the *pativrata* (“virtuous wife”) unfailingly dedicated to her husband, much like *Sītā*. So enthusiastic is her dedication to her untouchable husband that she spurns her wicked father for the sake of the marriage. In fact, the story renders her as the most intense exemplar of marital devotion available—rather than interpreting *Meladī*'s sitting at funerary grounds as a mark of her impurity, this narrative reads these associations in terms of *satī*, marking her as the ideal chaste wife. More broadly, the father-daughter relationship the story establishes between *Meladī* and the king of Lanka places the dirty goddess in the Sanskritic, Epic tradition. Given *Rāvaṇa*'s reputation as a great devotee of Śiva, the relationship also affirms *Meladī*'s Śaiva links, which are apprehensible at a number of her modern-day temples. This *Rāmāyaṇa*-styled origin story remains popular. It forms the basis, for instance, of the 1978 movie, *Lankānī lādī ne Ghoghā no var*, or *The Bride from Lanka, the Groom from Ghogha*, which has shaped many contemporary imaginings of *Meladī*.

Although *Meladī* spurns her father in the story, the idea that she is the daughter of the evil *Rāvaṇa* conveys the capriciousness and ambiguity fundamental to her character. In the village context, she has often been described as a malevolent spirit that is as much a ghost as a goddess. This is perhaps fitting considering her connections with death. Enthoven, for instance, provided a roll call of 46 types of evil spirits and witches in Gujarat, and *Meladī* can be found on this list ([1914] 1989, 115). As we have already seen in Chapter Two, *Meladī* was similarly listed in *The Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency* as one among many designations for female ghosts or witches, along with *Jogaṇī*, *Jhāmpḍī*, and *Cuḍel* (Kirparam 1901, 417). Indeed, in some village contexts today, shrines to *Meladī* are found alongside those of *Jhāmpḍī* and *Cuḍel* in a trio (Figure 9). These present-day village shrines continue the custom of aniconic representation described in colonial writings, in which deities were represented by tridents painted in red lead

upon heaped stones or on the trunks of trees. On account of the volatile nature of Melaḍī and other ghostly deities depicted in such fashion, it was reported in the *Gazetteer* that passersby, women especially, would pay considerable heed to these makeshift shrines, adding a stone to the heaps thereof or else tying rags to tree branches in order to appease the indwelling female spirit (Kirparam 1901, 363).



Figure 9: A trio of shrines to Cuḍel, Jhāmpḍī, and Melaḍī Mā in a rural area outside of Kheda, Gujarat (Photo by author)

As is typical of these unpredictable spirits, Melaḍī plays an integral role in *pavan* and other ecstatic expressions of religiosity. As described in the *Gazetteer*, not only is Melaḍī liable to possess a person, but she is also involved with *expelling* spirits. For this reason, she featured prominently among local goddesses whose favour the *bhuvās* attempt to gain in order to perform exorcisms. According to Kirparam, most *bhuvās* kept an altar to Melaḍī in their homes (1901,

418). Before venturing out upon a “spirit-scaring” performance, *bhuvās* would consult the goddess by throwing dice or by counting grain in front of this domestic shrine (*Ibid.*). Dalpatram Daya noted that Melaḍī was called upon by specialists and non-specialists alike in her capacity to cast away ghosts (1849, 42; 54). Similarly, Melaḍī has been persistently related to expelling epidemics (Fischer et al. 2014, 170). Enthoven gave one very localized example of this: “[t]o the north of Charadwa there is a field-goddess, named Motisāri Meldi Mātā, in whose honour persons who are afflicted by diseases take a vow of presenting *tavā* (a cake fried in oil in a pan)” (Enthoven [1914] 1989, 63). This no doubt refers to the practice of *tāvo*, by which the “cakes” in question (more accurately a kind of flatbread) are pulled from boiling oil barehanded with help from the power of the goddess. *Tāvo* is still observable at some Melaḍī sites today, including the Kheda temple complex.

Melaḍī has also been repeatedly tied to blood offerings. In the *Gazetteer*, Melaḍī was listed among the goddesses who accept animal sacrifice, her preferred offering being a black goat whose shadowy colour presumably denotes “dark” or *tāmasik* qualities (Kirparam 1901, 406). Origin narratives of Melaḍī that circulate locally among Valmiki communities in Ahmedabad identify sacrifice as being integral to her divine character. The following is a summary of a Melaḍī origin story told to me in late October 2015 by an enigmatic Dalit *bhuvā* named Jhalaji, who himself boasted a very strong *pavan* of the goddess:

Melaḍī was petitioning various gods and goddesses, including Śiva, to obtain divine power and have status as a goddess. In due time, she met an untouchable *bhuvā* named Nooriya, who requested that she bring him a divine black goat owned by a pastoralist named Jivan Rabari living in Patan. Melaḍī approached Jivan Rabari several times but he denied her request for the goat. Melaḍī then began to play tricks on Jivan Rabari, even going so far as kidnapping his seven sons and their wives. Melaḍī handed these people over to the divine seven sisters to keep them in their custody as a bargaining tactic to get the divine goat. The tactic did not work. Melaḍī then approached Jivan’s sister, wielding black mesmerism through her to put even more pressure on her brother. As a result, Jivan took ill, but still he would not surrender. Melaḍī continued creating terror for Jivan’s kin. The sister eventually said she’d give whatever she could, so long as her brother did not die. Using her miraculous power, Melaḍī healed Jivan Rabari. Soon after, Melaḍī appeared in front of Jivan and his sister, reminding the latter of her promise to give anything. Melaḍī was given the black goat, and immediately began sucking blood from its horns. Afterward, Melaḍī gave back the seven sons and daughters-in-law of Jivan Rabari and everyone went on happily with their lives. Even after all this transpired, the gods and

goddesses still refused to give Melaḍī status as a goddess—to them she was still just a statue brought to life from dirt. But Melaḍī had gained considerable power from drinking all the goat’s blood. At Śiva’s request, she fought the *bhuvā* Nooriya and defeated him. Although killing a person of this *samāj* is a giant sin, not unlike killing a Brahmin,¹⁵⁵ the Śaktis approved Melaḍī as their daughter, and hereafter she became a full-fledged goddess.¹⁵⁶

Jhalaji’s narrative reveals many of the complexities of Melaḍī Mātā as well as the customs and people surrounding her. Melaḍī, we see, can be a trickster, and a malevolent one at that, who sometimes resorts to black magic even though she is ultimately a source of healing. She brings illness, but also takes it away when satisfied. This satisfaction is realized after she quenches her thirst for blood, which emerges as something of a disjuncture in the narrative. Her need for animal offerings—established quite specifically here as that of the goat coloured black—is actually predicated on the *bhuvā* and his own requests as opposed to her hunger. Nonetheless, the *tāmasik* consumption of goat’s blood sustains Melaḍī and supplies her with a great reservoir of divine power. This seems to play some role in occasioning the trepidation that the more established—that is, *sāttvik*—deities express toward letting Melaḍī into their fold. Indeed, it is only after she overthrows the *bhuvā* in single combat that she becomes a goddess. She assumes this role notwithstanding the *tāmasik* source of her power, which is left unaltered. And while the untouchable *bhuvā* suffers some rebuke and a mortal defeat at the hands of the goddess, he is still hailed as retaining his own auspiciousness due to his position opposite Brahmins on the purity spectrum.

On occasion, sacrifices were necessary for appeasing Melaḍī, either in the context of a successful exorcism, fulfillment of a vow, or prevention of disease. Enthoven obliquely referenced Melaḍī when he described the following animal sacrifice related to cholera:

It is said that the Bhangis have to present an offering to their *malin* or evil goddess every third year, and that, in so doing, they kill a black animal before the goddess. They then place an iron pan full of sesamum oil on the fire, and suspend the body of the animal above it. It is believed that as many human beings will fall victims to cholera as the number of drops of blood that fall from the body of the animal into the iron pan (Enthoven [1914] 1989, 75).

¹⁵⁵ In Gujarati folklore, it is not uncommon to hear of the “kindred” relationship between Brahmins and Valmikiis on account of each group’s superlative rank at either end of the caste hierarchy.

¹⁵⁶ I am grateful to Vimal Shukla for his assistance with rendering this narrative in English.

Certainly, Melaḍī received a variety of sacrifices in the past. We recall, for instance, that in the *Gazetteer* she was listed among deities to whom blood offerings are made (1901, 406). The sacrifices of yesteryear live on in the memories of older Melaḍī worshippers. A follower of Jhalaji named Ramesh Mayor, a courteous Valmiki man who earned his Anglicized title based on his high stature in his community, explained to me that in his great-grandfather's time, all kinds of meat were offered to Melaḍī, most often the hearts of chicken and goats. In some cases, however, animal flesh was insufficient for conciliating Melaḍī. Matter-of-factly, Ramesh Mayor shared with me a story he had heard from his great-grandfather that almost involved human sacrifice. In this case, his great-grandfather's cohorts abducted an upper-caste child. This caused uproar among the elite-class people, who pursued the Bhangi kidnappers very aggressively. Seeking solace, Ramesh Mayor's great-grandfather petitioned Melaḍī herself for a solution. She told him that if that child were to become a goat, then his family must only sacrifice goats from that point on. When the elite classes stormed the houses in Ramesh's great-grandfather's community, they began overturning bamboo baskets. Looking under one of these they found not a child but a goat. Afterward, the elite classes called off their mob and spared Ramesh's ancestors. From that point on, Ramesh Mayor's family only sacrificed goats. While I found no historical or contemporary evidence of human sacrifice as a regular or even infrequent practice vis-à-vis Melaḍī or any other goddess in Gujarat, the narrative Ramesh received from his ancestors functions more crucially to convey the macabre aspect that emerges from Melaḍī's heavily *tāmasik* past.¹⁵⁷ The story can also be read as an attempt to attenuate the distress caused to some, elite or otherwise, by the thought of violence in the name of the goddess Melaḍī. The blood offering of a goat, though far from *sāttvik*, does not compare to the murder of a child.

¹⁵⁷ There are scattered references made to human sacrifice with regard to Gujarati *mātās*. As we have seen, in *The Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency* it was reported that at Bharwad weddings, Pavaiyas serve as vessels of the Mātā in taking offerings of ghee on her behalf, since this “to a large extent appeases the Mātā's craving for brides and bridegrooms” (Kirparam 1901, 284). This refers, apparently, to an older custom involved in the wedding ritual, which the *Gazetteer* writer interpreted as having involved human sacrifice (*Ibid.*). He explained: “[w]ith the mother thus partially appeased the sacrifice of a human bride and bridegroom at the beginning of the gathering has ceased to be urgent. Sufficient practical safety is secured by centring ill-luck on one couple and by branding one bride-groom on the brow, devoting him to Mātā, leaving it to the mother to choose her own time and place to claim her victim” (1901, 284). Another example can be found in the manuscript folio of the *Śrīpālā Rāsa*, which contains the story of a wealthy merchant who worships Śikotar Mā in hopes of getting his boat freed from a harbour. The goddess demands the sacrifice of a human being before allowing the ships of the wealthy merchant to leave the harbour (Fischer, Jain & Shah 2014, 181; Chandervaker 1963, 45-46). Additionally, Harald Tambs-Lyche visited a Śākta temple in Saurashtra where he was told humans were sacrificed “in the old days” (2004, 87).

Melaḍī's established folkloric and historical connections with sacrifice, *pavan*, *bhuvās*, and Bhangis, not to mention her symbolic associations with dirt, disease, and funerary haunts, have been commonly extrapolated toward a general consensus that Melaḍī has strong ties to *tāmasik* rituals and black magic. Blackness permeates her imaginings, most notably her sacrificial animal/vehicle, and I was told over and over again, at least by non-worshippers, that this was proof positive of her status as a “dark” goddess. While he did not name Melaḍī specifically, Enthoven recorded the roots of this sentiment much earlier on: “[t]here are many branches of this black art [...] and although the *melī vidyā* (sacrilegious art) is not held in respect by high class Hindus, it is popular among the lower classes” (Enthoven [1914] 1989, 50-51). It speaks volumes that the “sacrilegious” or “impure” art is denoted in Gujarati by *melī*, a noun for “witchcraft” or “black art” sharing the same root from which Melaḍī's name is derived. Once again, Melaḍī's name encodes another semantic trajectory relating to putatively unsettling practices.

Sāttvik, Tāmasik, and Tantric: Reconciling and Reimagining Melaḍī in Texts and Images

The picture of Melaḍī we receive from colonial accounts and circulating Gujarati folklore is that of a *mātā* who is part-ghost and part-goddess, worshipped by the lowest castes, and implicated in bloody sacrifices, spirit possession, and the profit-driven legerdemain of the *bhuvās*. With this being the case, Melaḍī calls to mind the dark side of village religion for many present-day Gujaratis. Elite castes and classes, it has generally been understood, would only make a request of Melaḍī in times of dire desperation, if at all. Even so, Melaḍī has maintained a following that has grown steadily in scale, which is evident in the number of movies and other publicly circulated images related to her. With this increased public presence, new imaginings of the goddess have emerged that, I contend, serve to “tidy up” her dubious aspects.

Melaḍī's lithograph images are perhaps the most obvious index of her ongoing reimagining. Melaḍī is at present most recognizable as a pleasant-looking young woman in a red sari who is seated upon a black goat. In her multiple arms she bears many of the usual accoutrements of lithograph deities, including the all-important trident, along with a sword,

cakra, and a mace.¹⁵⁸ She wears ornate jewellery along with a demure smile, her bearing altogether in line with pan-Indic goddesses such as Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī (O.P. Joshi 1994, 308). More antiquated aniconic images of the goddess are consigned mostly to village or home shrines. As Om Prakash Joshi speculated earlier on with regard to these sorts of iconographic shifts, “[t]hrough these pictures, caste groups and devotees of a particular deity try to raise their status by depicting the deity as a god of the classical tradition” (1994).¹⁵⁹ Further, with regard to Khoḍīyār and Melaḍī, Joshi has argued that: “[p]ublication of prints of regional and local deities helped in enlarging their region of influence, some of the examples are of ‘Meldi Mata’ and ‘Khodiyar Mata’ from Gujarat” (*Ibid.*). Thus, Joshi has effectively hypothesized that Melaḍī’s universalizing reconfiguration in the standard lithograph mode of pan-Indian goddesses parallels the upward social mobility of her followers. Such a parallel is clearly in evidence in the modern Melaḍī complexes we will visit in this chapter. That said, some ambiguities can still be found in the lithograph image. For instance, Melaḍī also carries in one of her arms a bottle that is usually said to be *amṛta*, the divine ambrosia, but, depending on whom you ask, is also sometimes identified as alcohol. Melaḍī’s village supporters have no problem labelling the contents of the bottle as the *tāmasik* country liquor.

Along with this shift in imagery, new Melaḍī Mātā narratives have developed, as well, that offer examples of comparable attempts to countervail the “dark” elements of her village roots. Fischer et al. have provided an example of what they call a “reformatory” legend of Melaḍī involving an intervening *bhagat* which, by their estimate, has been in circulation for several decades (2014, 171). It reads as follows:

During the eighth night of the *Navrātrī* festival, a male goat was once tied to the front of the shrine of the goddess *Melaḍī*. The *bhūvo* master of ceremonies danced there and went into a trance. When it was time to kill the goat, an old *bhagat* devotee turned to the *bhūvo* and said: “It is not right to make blood sacrifices to the goddess. Let us ask her for permission.” The goddess remained silent. The *bhagat* called: “Oh goddess! If you accept this innocent animal as a sacrifice, I will kill myself in your presence. It is a sin to kill, and you should not want this. You should forbid it.” The goddess remained silent. The people started to strike the male goat with their swords and suddenly the goddess spoke: “Oh great *bhagat*, follower of the highest

¹⁵⁸ For more on modern lithograph treatments of goddesses and their tropes, see Kajri Jain’s *Gods in the Bazaar* (2007), Christopher Pinney’s *“Photos of the Gods”: The Printed Image and Political Struggle in India* (2004) and Sumathi Ramaswamy’s *The Goddess and the Nation* (2010).

¹⁵⁹ This passage from O.P. Joshi (1994), as well as the one to follow, appears in the preface of his book *Gods of Heaven, Home of Gods*. The pages of the preface are not numbered.

religion of non-violence! Today, you taught me something new and very important. From now on, the goat is my mount, and never again shall anyone kill my pack animal.” From then on, the custom of sacrificing animals to the goddess *Melaḍī* was almost completely abandoned (Fischer et al. 2014, 171).

This story of the intervening *bhagat*, in providing an explanation for Melaḍī’s lithographic rendering, also serves to distance her from animal sacrifices and, by extension, alcohol offerings, leading Fischer et al. to conclude that “[t]his legend has robbed the goddess of her dark side” (2014, 171). On account of the intervening *bhagat*, the goddess herself comes to realize the “highest form of religion” as *sāttvik* and therefore without sacrifice. In other words, in coming into conversation with conscientious objectors in her community, the goddess has been shown a better way, most notably that her sacrificial animal serves her better as her vehicle.

The print culture that has developed around Melaḍī in the past two decades also attempts to reconcile the goddess’s rural past with her urban reimagining, sometimes taking a less censorious view of sacrifice, oddly enough. As with other *mātās*, economically-published, cheaply-priced devotional pamphlets dedicated to Melaḍī are commonplace at temples and book stalls. In fact, relative to other *mātās*, the goat-mounted goddess has seen a considerable variety of these Gujarati-language texts printed in her name. One such text is the *Śrī Rājarājeśvarī Śrīmelaḍī Sādhanā-Upāsanā* (“Service-Discipline of Rājarājeśvarī Melaḍī”), written and compiled by Rajan Patani. Though its date of origin is unclear, I was able to purchase a new copy of the perfect-bound pamphlet in 2015. While going through the usual devotional-text motions of describing the goddess’s iconography, mythology, and ritual techniques, Patani’s publication also contains a fairly openminded take on all forms of *pūjā*. In an early passage, Patani begins by describing how “the *pūjā* ceremony of Rājman Rājeśvarī Bhagavatī Śrī Melaḍī Mātā can be done in *sāttvik* or *tāmasik* fashion. Melaḍī Mātā is pleased with both *pūjās*. Both give the same fruits to *pūjārīs*” (n.d., 7).¹⁶⁰ In this manner, somewhat surprisingly, *sāttvik* and *tāmasik* practices are not treated as mutually exclusive, at least not as they relate to Melaḍī. Indeed, Patani does not cast much judgement on the latter category. It is not immediately stated what exactly constitutes *tāmasik* ritual, though Patani soon provides some clues. When describing in the next paragraph the goddess’s various accoutrements in her lithograph image, Patani identifies the bottle as

¹⁶⁰ This is my translation from the original Gujarati. All translations from Gujarati that follow in this section are mine.

containing not only wine, as per village understandings, but also blood (*madirāno pyālo ane raktno pyālo*; “a bottle of wine and a bottle of blood”) (n.d., 8). A few sentences later, Patani briefly mentions an animal offering to the goddess that is undertaken in a time of misfortune (*vakht*), remarking upon the characteristic excitement (*āveś*) that overtakes the goat, marking it as ready for offering. In the *Śrīmelāḍī Sāadhanā-Upāsanā* then, Melāḍī’s low-caste and village roots seem to be at least acknowledged alongside her emerging urban-friendly, *sāttvik*, pan-Indian rendering.

Also noteworthy about the passage cited above from the *Śrī Rājarājeśvarī Śrīmelāḍī Sāadhanā-Upāsanā* (as well as in the title of the pamphlet itself) is the inclusion of the “Queen of Kings” epithet in its invocatory mention of Melāḍī’s name. Rājarājeśvarī, we have already seen, is another moniker for the tantric goddess Tripurāsundarī. While in the case of Khoḍīyār the Rājarājeśvarī epithet stems in large part from kingly associations, with Melāḍī the connection is less obviously royal and more likely tantric. Melāḍī possesses no shortage of tantric-styled paraphernalia, which probably grew out of her “black magic” associations. In this spirit, later portions of the *Śrī Rājarājeśvarī Śrīmelāḍī Sāadhanā-Upāsanā* contain diagrams of various yantras and “Paurāṇik” mantras, including Melāḍī’s own. This mantra, given in the pamphlet as “*auṃ klīm Mailḍye namaḥ*” and typeset in Devanagari script in a possible attempt to accentuate its Sanskrit character, is said to give its reciter numerous benefits (Patani n.d., 49). In order to reap such benefits, devotees are instructed to recite the mantra 120,000 times, and to supplement their *japa* with various Brahminical rituals. These include carrying out “one-tenth” (*daśāṃśa*) of a *homa* or fire sacrifice, involving offerings of barley, sesame seeds, and tobacco powder into a fire while reciting the Gayatri *havan*. Additional *havan* should be done in troubled times, Patani suggests, and this involves 1250 repetitions of a variation of the Melāḍī mantra given above, “*auṃ klīm Mailḍye namaḥ svāhāḥ*” (*Ibid.*). Altogether, these mantras, *havans*, and additional rites round out a ritual repertoire that will, according to Patani, ease the mind of Melāḍī devotees, empowering them with vigilance and energy (n.d., 50). Despite Patani’s earlier acknowledgement of *tāmasik* rites to Melāḍī, the *Śrī Rājarājeśvarī Śrīmelāḍī Sāadhanā-Upāsanā*’s Brahminically-inflected Purāṇic mantras and their supplementary ritual apparatuses suggest a decidedly positive tantric element (their employment of the *tāmasik* tobacco powder notwithstanding).

Other recent Melaḍī pamphlets are more deliberately tantric, or at least more overt with the esoteric mantras and yantras that they divulge. One such example is the *Śrīmelaḍī Sāadhanā: Siddha Mantra Tathā Yantra Sahit*, another undated pamphlet I was able to purchase new in 2015. The text's author is Jeram Bhaddaj, who is billed on the title page as a Cāmuṇḍā devotee and a *tāntrika*. The front cover features an image of the goat-mounted Melaḍī framed in a triangular Viśo-yantra, the mantra “*auṃ em hrīm klīm Melḍī Mātāye namaḥ*” encircling her. On the back cover is the Śrī Melaḍī Yantra, a six-pointed star formed by a pair of triangles, one facing upward, the other downward. Inside the star is a table of numbers, and its points are encircled by petals containing individual syllables of the mantra from the front cover. The contents of the booklet deliver precisely what is advertised in the title and on the cover page. Various mantras are provided, alongside diagrams of their accompanying yantras. These are supplemented with stories of *camatkārs* (or miraculous occurrences) that have graced Melaḍī devotees, which are interspersed throughout the text to underscore the benefits of these ritual apparatuses. For instance, one very simple mantra/yantra combo, “*klīm Melḍyai namaḥ*” infixed within three concentric triangles, is referred to as the “*siddha yantra*,” and its repetition promises attainments such as safety from all kinds of harm (Bhaddaj n.d., 98). Recitations of additional yantra/mantra combinations containing Melaḍī's name—either as a whole or separately in its constituent syllables—offer better financial outcomes, the birth of sons, and the destruction of enemies (n.d., 99-100). All of these elements are enduring trademarks of classical tantric texts composed in Sanskrit. One yantra is dedicated specifically to childless women, and involves the construction of the design from hair dye placed in the breastmilk of a woman (*strīnā dudhmā*), a practice that is seemingly a variation of contagious magic rituals linked to Melaḍī's folk/rural roots (n.d., 102). Another yantra heals recurring fever and keeps away ghosts such as *bhūts* and *cudels*, again resonating with the exorcism practices connected to Melaḍī in her vernacular village context (n.d., 103). Even with these village-styled elements, however, Bhaddaj insists upon the purity of the person involved as a prerequisite for performing the rites and rituals relating to the yantras and mantras. This involves not just proper diet and personal conduct in temporal proximity to the ritual but also purity of motivation. Bhaddaj explains: “It is absolutely necessary to maintain *brahmacharya* [celibacy] on the day of *sāadhanā*; in the same vein, do not speak falsehoods and do take a *sāttvik* dinner. You should not employ this *sāadhanā* for purposes of injuring someone or some other bad aim. Doing as such, the *sadhak* will be the one injured”

(n.d., 104-105). In brief, Bhardraj is insistent that Melaḍī's mantras and yantras are not to be used for black magic, which seems to be a conscious attempt to spurn popular perceptions of her past. Wrapped up now in positively tantric Sanskritic yantras and mantras, Melaḍī is established as *sāttvik*. Black tantra has become white tantra, and, moreover, Melaḍī is able to bring immediate benefits to her devotee. In the final line of the yantra section, the devotee is challenged to test this efficacy empirically: "Doing 10,000 [repetitions] brings fruit very promptly. Do it and then see" (n.d., 105).

Seeing the sheer variety of these sorts of texts in the religious marketplace, the question arises as to who actually purchases, reads, and utilizes them. In many cases, the texts may not be read by their purchasers, and the yantras and mantras may not be employed as described inside. This does not, however, obviate the texts, as they embody a power that is effective even when their contents go unread. That is to say, the words in these pamphlets are not just informative or transactive with regard to the *mātās* they describe, but rather the text itself bears a symbolic and transformative significance, sometimes on the merits of its presence alone.¹⁶¹ Thus, regardless of whether or not they are read or recited, these booklets can often be found as part of personal shrines to Melaḍī and other goddesses. Be that as it may, the question still stands: does the kind of tantra these texts describe actually get employed, if even acknowledged?

For one family I met in the small town of Geratpur on the very edge of the Ahmedabad suburbs, the yantras and mantras in Melaḍī-related publications, as well as the *camatkārs* resulting from them, have been an exceptionally dynamic part of their lives. Indeed, the family was very active in compiling comparable texts. The patriarch is Dineshbhai, a Brahmin man in his early forties who was working as a lawyer in the state-level court. He not only ran the local Melaḍī temple, but was also something of a self-made expert on the Mātā. He has published a Gujarati-language reference work describing in encyclopedic detail dozens of the goddess's various sites, and he has updated it with new editions every few years as new information comes in. He has also put together manuscripts closely resembling the aforementioned devotional pamphlets in style and content, providing *stutis* and *ārātīs* of Melaḍī alongside a commendably thoroughgoing compilation of various *camatkārs* credited to the goddess, some of which he has

¹⁶¹ Here I am drawing on Miriam Levering's "four fundamental modes of reception" for scriptural words and texts (1989, 60). In Levering's assessment, the modes in which texts can be received are the informative (shaping one's understanding of the world), transactive (allowing one to act with supreme power), transformative (allowing for a deeper encounter with the numinous) or symbolic (in themselves epitomizing the ultimate) (*Ibid.*).

witnessed or experienced himself. For instance, Dineshbhai claimed that, without exception, all people requesting children at the Geratpur temple have consistently conceived—all of them with baby boys at that—which Dineshbhai put forward as Melaḍī’s “proof of *camatkār*.” As of the spring of 2015, the goddess has, in a divine decree for gender equity, started to bestow children without consideration of sex. In one recent case, Dineshbhai claimed, conception occurred in a woman without a uterus. Dineshbhai himself has *pavan* of the goddess, receiving various decrees Melaḍī has made and then faithfully recording them alongside the *camatkārs* when they come true. He claimed to have recorded so many that he could not keep up; when I visited in 2015 he had already filled more than 20 composition books with accounts of these miraculous happenings. Due to considerations of space, only a select few made it into his devotional manuscript. Though this work was composed in Gujarati, the family has also produced a single English translation of the document, a manuscript handwritten on *Angry Birds*-themed stationery, of which I was given a photocopy.¹⁶² Here at Geratpur, the inscription of Melaḍī and her miracles was (and is) an ongoing task, an active textualization and propagation of the goddess’s history performed out of devotion. These miraculous revelations and the rapid benefits they bring were also framed by Dineshbhai and his family in tantric terms. The very first page of the English translation of their manuscript is filled by a hand-drawn version of the Śrī Melaḍī Yantra, much like the one in the *Śrīmelaḍī Sāadhanā*, in this case labelled the “Sankatharam Mahasiddhidayak Shree Meldi Yantra.” The numbers columned at the centre of the yantra are all identical to those in the *Śrīmelaḍī Sāadhanā*, albeit in Western Arabic numerals, and all the Gujarati and Sanskrit words and syllables are transliterated in Roman script. The primacy of the yantra in the book, and the miracles recorded thereafter that have followed from it, suggest that for this family, and seemingly this town as well, the *sāttvik*, white-tantric Melaḍī is at the core of their religious lives.

The *sāttvik* Melaḍī has developed out of concerted and ongoing efforts to clean up the goddess’s image. This image is encapsulated in the aforementioned story of the intervening *bhagat* in which she gives up sacrifice (Fischer et al. 2014, 171), and promulgated even more directly through her contemporary lithograph, in which she is imagined as a Sanskrit goddess. At present, her worshippers take great pains to assert the goddess’s purity in print and in popular

¹⁶² This in itself, I was told, was a *camatkār*. Apparently the goddess had requested of Dineshbhai an English translation of the text several years before, on the grounds that a foreigner was going to be coming to the temple in due time to make a study of the goddess.

discussion. To this end, a catchphrase pertaining to Melaḍī that goes “*melī melī sau kahe, melī nathī talbhār*” (“dirty, dirty many say, but there’s not even the slightest bit”) has become an oft-cited trope at modern sites to the goddess, appearing on posters and temple-based publications to upend stereotypes about the Mātā. This slogan perhaps best illustrates her devotees’ recognition of the prevailing popular perception among non-worshippers that Melaḍī is “dirty” and “dark,” requiring their continued exertions to overturn that idea. While some sources de-emphasize this *tāmasik* past, others, such as the *Śrīmelaḍī Sāadhanā-Upāsanā*, acknowledge it alongside Melaḍī’s gaining *sāttvik* imagining. Here the two modes of worship, equally effective, seem to bear witness to Melaḍī’s all-purpose pervasiveness. This bespeaks the same kind of versatility that befits a Great Goddess. So great is Melaḍī, she encompasses both *ugra* and *saumya*, so to speak, much like a Kālī, making her a goddess for potentially everyone. Tantra also seems to have provided another strategy for adapting Melaḍī’s earlier associations with black magic and witchcraft and integrating them into a more widely accepted, positive, and ultimately Sanskritic mode.

All that being said, despite Melaḍī’s gaining popularity and her recent recasting in recognizable Sanskritic ritual and visual idioms, her reputation as a ghost-*cum*-goddess of dirt and other disconcerting dimensions has proven difficult to wash away entirely. Like Fischer et al.’s story of the intervening *bhagat* dictates at its very end, sacrifice to Melaḍī was *almost* completely abandoned: the teller and listener are tacitly aware that, in some lower-caste and village contexts, Melaḍī still takes animal offerings.

A Contemporary Village Melaḍī

Notwithstanding the changes in Melaḍī’s imaginings put forth in textual materials and in the ritual and iconography of her urban temples, the “village” Melaḍī is in certain areas marked by pronounced continuities with her past, at least bearing in mind what we know from colonial and folkloric accounts of the goddess. Mirroring the stereotypes of Gujarati elites, Melaḍī is still sometimes evoked for the purpose of taking revenge through black magic as recourse for wrongdoing. *Muth mārvi*, moreover, the practice of revoking curses, is widely associated with Melaḍī in Valmiki communities, as it is among Bharwads, Rabaris, and Koli Patels (Franco et al. 2004, 270). Just as the author of *Śrīmelaḍī Sāadhanā-Upāsanā* would have it, Franco et al. report that Melaḍī’s *tāmasik* elements live on in lingering aspects of her rituals, with offerings of liquor,

chickens, and goats playing a role in some village contexts (2004, 271). While the presence of alcohol and blood offerings involved in the worship of Melaḍī and other goddesses in contemporary Gujarat has been intimated by a number of scholars, few ethnographic accounts of these rites exist, possibly due to worshipper's wariness of animal cruelty laws, not to mention the state's "dry" status regarding alcohol.¹⁶³

During my fieldwork in 2015, I was able to visit a community of people from the Vadi tribe that still undertakes *tāmasik* rites to Melaḍī. A Vadi village is located on the very edge of the small city of Dhrangadhra, about an hour and a half west of Ahmedabad. Dhrangadhra proper is home to a well-kept palace, one among the many vestiges it retains of its former status as a state capital and home of the Jhala Rajput rulers. Vaiṣṇavism runs very strongly through the city, as there is a sizeable Rāma temple opposite the palace, and the current population is influenced by the city's prominent Swaminarayan temple (Tambs-Lyche 2004, 35-37). The royal imprint of Dhrangadhra, however, is largely consigned to being a "thing of the past," in Tambs-Lyche's assessment, and the town has been "ruralized" since Independence, having failed to produce the modernized middle-classes of nearby Rajkot and Bhavnagar (2004, 54). In fact, the region around Dhrangadhra is generally considered to be "backward," with limited influence from the higher castes. It was on these "backward" fringes of Dhrangadhra where the Vadis that I met subsisted in small hutments and shelters lining narrow, dusty paths that occasionally made way for a shrine.

The Vadis, often glossed as "snake charmers," are a semi-itinerant, economically depressed class group found throughout Gujarat and Rajasthan. Vadis traditionally made their living as entertainers, putting on shows that incorporate magic tricks and, in some cases, live cobras. The Vadis' place of origin is Rajasthan, as is evident in the Marwari dialect they speak today. Their origin story narrates how they migrated from deserted edges of what is now Rajasthan and wound up at the foot of Junagadh, fountainhead of the Nāth Siddhas. The yogi Kānipānāth is considered the primordial guru of the Vadis, who claim themselves as originally Rajputs.¹⁶⁴ One folktale I heard in Dhrangadhra links the Vadis to both Kānipānāth and also

¹⁶³ One example of an ethnographic account of such rituals at a goddess shrine can be found in Joan Erikson's *Mātā Nī Pachedi*, which described a *bhuvā* consuming a fermented drink and then sacrificing goats (1968, 59).

¹⁶⁴ Kānipā was a pupil of Jālandhar, one of two disciples of the great mythical guru Ādināth, along with Matsyendranāth, guru of Gorakhnāth and other important Nāth yogis (Briggs [1938] 1973, 31). As Briggs has recounted, while Jālandhar was confined in a well at Ujjain, Kānipā occupied his teacher's place, afterwards founding a *panth* of his own. From this line came Gopicand, who became a famous siddha (1938, 69). Kānipā's

Gorakhnāth, a yogic superman who probably lived around the twelfth to thirteenth centuries CE. Soon after their arrival at Junagadh, the story goes, there was a meeting of Sadhus, during which Gorakhnāth served as refreshment a human skull full of poison extracted from snakes, scorpions, cobras, and even the mongoose. None of the nine Nāths present dared to sip from the skull except for Kānipānāth. On account of their guru's invulnerability, the Vadis were ever since blessed such that they would be able to make their livings catching poisonous animals.¹⁶⁵



Figure 10: The author with Saujibhai in the Dhrangadhra Melaḍī temple (photo by Sohan Singh)

followers were not, strictly speaking, considered to be among the twelve *panths* of Gorakhnāth. Rather, they were considered a half sub-sect (*Ibid.*). To this line also belong the Sepalas, who keep snakes, not unlike the Vadis, with whom they would seem to bear a close relation.

¹⁶⁵ This story resembles a narrative that determines the rank of Gorakhnāth above Kanhapatiyas. At a feast hosted by Gorakhnāth and Matsyendranāth, every single guest was given what they desired, the chosen dishes all being provided by the magical powers of the two yogis. Kānipā demanded cooked snakes and scorpions, and he was promptly removed from the feast (Briggs [1938] 1973, 56).

Due to a ban on “animal cruelty” that took effect in 1991, cobra-charming was largely criminalized. As such, Vadis have moved away from this profession and now mostly work as labourers. With that said, Saujibhai (see Figure 10), the prominent member of the community with whom I most frequently met, still undertakes magic shows, and carries a cobra coiled in a wicker basket on his person at all times for such occasions. The standard performance involves throwing his voice, making money—preferably an American note—appear and disappear, and then unveiling his cobra. Saujibhai dresses in pink robes and a reddish turban, the latter feature being an important identifier of Vadi affiliation. There are two groups of Vadis: the Lālvādi, to which Saujibhai belongs (the “*lāl*” or “red” referring to the colour of their turbans), and the Phūlvādi (who wear a turban in the shape of a flower or “*phūl*”). The groups can additionally be distinguished by the Phūlvādi custom of holding their walking stick over one shoulder, in contrast to Lālvādis who hold it over both shoulders. Lālvādis may take Phūlvādi brides, but do not give their own daughters to Phūlvādīs for marriage.

Vadis hold a number of goddesses in high esteem, and Melaḍī is one among these. Vadi mythology provides its own version of Melaḍī’s origin that holds the goddess responsible for maintaining the fertility of the group. In the distant past (Saujibhai glosses it as “five to six generations”), as the story would have it, there was a scarcity of male children in the community. Desperately, the Vadis petitioned various gods and goddesses for help, but received no success in conceiving. Frustrated, they began picking up all the statues dedicated to these disobliging deities and cast them one by one into the ocean. Seeing this, Melaḍī materialized from the dirt and, drawing upon her miracle power, rescued the 999 goddesses that had been thrown away. She then decreed of the Vadis: “you will have children.” In sum, the goddess manifested to support the continuation of the Vadi line.

Melaḍī still holds a prominent place in Vadi religious life. In this settlement outside of Dhrangadhra, a number of sites dedicated to Melaḍī could be found. These included numerous *ḍerīs*, a few low-to-the-ground canopied shrines known as “*māṇḍvās*,” and also a small temple bearing Melaḍī’s standard image as per contemporary lithographs. As with other *mātās*, she is connected to requests related to improving fertility and healing disease. *Āso* and *Caitra Navarātri* are especially promising times for Melaḍī’s curing of severe health problems, and so during these festivals, Lālvādis erect a platform to receive people with an assortment of ailments. *Āso* is the most crucial time for such healing, given the predominance of viral infections that

occur in part because of the cooler climate at that time of the year. Saujibhai knew of a few members of the Lālvādi community who possess particularly strong healing powers given by Melaḍī, and cited examples of *bhuvās* who, in dealing with someone with impaired vision, have been able to touch hands to the sufferer and cure their blindness. Saujibhai claimed that this mode of healing also works with a number of other diseases.

While Melaḍī is approached by members of this Vadi community for her positive powers related to healing and fertility, she is also capable of intervening in matters of the *melī vidyā* (or “dark arts”). In the event that someone is victimized by black magic, the community has a wooden stool upon which they perform *pāṭlā* with the throwing of seeds. As in earlier depictions we have seen, the presiding *bhuvā* attempts to establish a relationship with the malevolent entity or individual—in many cases a witch—who originally invoked the curse, so as to ascertain the *bhūt*’s demands. The spirit will eventually declare what he or she needs, which is most often food.¹⁶⁶ The following day, the requested food will be offered to Melaḍī, and the person suffering the black magic will be cured. Here Melaḍī becomes a benevolent entity for the magician. In spite of the *sāttvik* lithograph imagining of Melaḍī at her small Dhrangadhra temple, the offerings given to the goddess are often *tāmasik*. Lālvādis worship Melaḍī in a decidedly non-Brahminic mode with liquor oblations and animal sacrifices, as she is understood by the community to be one of a few goddesses who accept such offerings. Thus, when Melaḍī has succeeded in driving out possessing entities or curses placed upon members of the community, she is typically rewarded with a goat. Melaḍī is also offered goats during the various Navarātris that take place over the course of the year, as was the case when I attended during the spring and fall iterations of the celebration in 2015.

The spring Navarātri offerings to Melaḍī took place on the pathway in front of her temple. Men and women of the community gathered around as the *pūjārī* and the shirtless, grey-bearded *bhuvā*, accompanied by various assistants, assembled in the early afternoon. Tied to a fence just across from the temple door were four goats of various colours, each of which had pinkish-red *sindūra* powder sprinkled down its back. Four bottles of Royal Stag whiskey lined the entrance to the temple; these were offerings for the goddess, and were to be consumed by the *bhuvā* channeling her. As a preliminary, the presiding *pūjārī* drew a circle in *sindūra* on the ground in

¹⁶⁶ This process very closely resembles the “spirit-scaring” described in the *Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency* (Kirparam 1901, 418-424), as well as Pocock’s description of an exorcism (1973, 45-50).

front of the temple steps. This circle and the *svastika*-like design within it are together referred to as a *cācar*, which literally stands in for a “sacrificial altar.” The goats were herded all around the *cācar*, with the various onlookers and officiants including the *bhuvā* and the *pūjārī* waiting to see which goat, if any, would get *pavan* of the goddess. On some occasions, this can take several hours. In due course, a brown-coloured goat began to shudder in a telltale way—comparable to the shake of a wet dog—marking the presence of the goddess. The *pūjārī* produced two bladed weapons, one long and sword-like, the other more closely resembling a hunting knife. The assistants encircled the goat and drew together its legs. The knife was run across its neck and blood began to spill into the *cācar*. The *bhuvā* vocalized loudly, having himself received *pavan* of Melaḍī. He took a sip of Royal Stag and then brought his head toward the neck of the goat, tasting on behalf of the goddess. The first bite, I was told, is always saved for the Mātājī. Eventually the goat’s head was removed and passed over to a young man on the steps of the temple, where the bottles of alcohol sat. The same procedure was followed with each of the next three goats, their bodies carried to metal tubs beside the temple. The heads were lined up on the steps of the temple, burning incense sticks placed in their mouths. Also, there was a stick of incense stuck in the clumped mound of spilled blood and dirt where the *cācar* had been drawn. The men butchered the goats for meat while the women made *capātīs*. Later in the evening, goat curry and *capātīs* were to be served as a part of *prasād*, along with the alcohol.

The sacrifice and its preliminary proceedings show considerable overlap with the colonial-era description provided in the 1901 *Gazetteer* (see Kirparam 1901, 406-407). According to Saujibhai, all worshippers of Melaḍī performed these kinds of sacrifices to Melaḍī in former days. At present, Saujibhai estimates that goat offerings to Melaḍī are only made among tribes and castes such as the Kolis, Vaghri, Mols, Satvarias, and Loharias, with Bharwads also undertaking the rite on very rare occasions. When I mentioned the contrast between Melaḍī worship as it is done at city temples and that which takes place in the Vadi community, Saujibhai discerned between two imaginings of the goddess. One is Melī Melaḍī and one is Ūgtī Melaḍī—that is to say, “dark” and “rising,” respectively. The latter term bears solar associations in Gujarati, thereby evoking connotations of shining, brightness, and light. Dhrangadhra was not the only community in which I was informed of these Melaḍī subtypes. As I delved further into the nature of the Melaḍī worshipped in his particular community, I expected Saujibhai would tell me that the *tāmasik* undertakings I had witnessed were dedicated to Melī Melaḍī. I was

surprised, however, to find that Saujibhai identified Ūgtī Melaḍī as the goddess that his community worshipped. The operative difference, at least in his assessment, was that Ūgtī's sacrifice happens in the daytime, while Melī takes the same offering at night. Thus, even in the context of a *tāmasik* ritual such as animal sacrifice, there are auspicious and inauspicious times. Sacrifice and alcohol oblations notwithstanding, Melaḍī's Dhrangadhra worshippers still identified the goddess with "Ūgtī" and positive qualities related thereto. It would seem that "Melī" Melaḍī, by and large, represents a goddess that is worshipped by unspecified "others."

Though he did draw this differentiation between two variations of the goddess, Saujibhai also agreed that Melaḍī had, on the whole, undergone a transformation of late. Temples were getting bigger, he agreed, her community of worshippers was growing, and sacrifices were declining in frequency. When I probed him as to why he thought these kinds of changes had taken place for Melaḍī, he explained to me what his father had told him: at one point, very few subgroups of people worshipped Melaḍī, and they did so on a small scale, mostly in *derīs* with a few people present on certain occasions. In the past 30 or 40 years, Saujibhai told me that he has observed more and more people spanning all castes and classes—including carpenters, blacksmiths, Patels, and Brahmins—beginning to worship Melaḍī with very deep faith. Accordingly, the goddess has rewarded them. Whether lower or higher in caste status, Saujibhai explained, people received *camatkārs* from the goddess, ranging from spiritual blessings to material benefits such as better housing. The matter of whether the means of worship and devotion was Brahminic or non-Brahminic—that is, eschewing sacrifices or involving them—is apparently, in Saujibhai's estimation, little more than a detail of caste or class background, with both approaches being equally effective in channeling the power of Melaḍī and receiving good outcomes as a result. This view is congruent with that put forward in contemporary devotional pamphlets to Melaḍī, most notably the *Śrī Rājarājeśvarī Śrīmelaḍī Sādhanā-Upāsanā*. Even with her demands for sacrifices, Melaḍī is nonetheless a pure and positive force for the Vadi community.

Upwardly Mobile Melaḍīs

Despite the *tāmasik* continuities in some village contexts, the worship at the temples to Melaḍī Mātā springing up in Gujarati metropolises in recent decades looks markedly different. To refer to these Melaḍī sites collectively as "temples" is actually to underestimate the area they

span, as most are better described as “complexes” serving a number of functions for their worshippers and members of the surrounding communities. Usually located just a short drive (or chartered bus-trip) from Ahmedabad and other cities in Gujarat, these temples are typically fronted by a charismatic figure from a non-elite caste background. Serving as lead *pūjārī* and head of the temple trust, these individuals, exclusively men, often take on the title “Māḍī” (Māḍi), an honorific form of “mother.” In addition to leading *pūjās* and other ceremonies, these Māḍis also deal with the everyday problems of their visitors, in this way functioning much like a *bhuvā*. Be that as it may, Māḍis are not *bhuvās*. In fact, most follow the trend of casting aspersions on that title or if they do use it, do so with qualification. Other elements of village Melaḍī worship, such as getting *pavan*, are in most cases actively de-emphasized at these temples, at least for visitors. Other than some degree of *pavan* in the prior or private life of the main charismatic figure, entranced states are considered on the whole indecorous. Most consistently disparaged is the use of alcohol and sacrifice. In fact, it has become something of a trope on major Melaḍī temple websites to include a disclaimer against animal sacrifice and intoxicating substances. Such a proviso seems to be aimed at appeasing the upwardly mobile and deterring the non-elite. In this section, we visit several urban and suburban Melaḍī temples that are growing in size and following, and upholding stringent standards for the goddess within them as she and her followers enter an increasingly *sāttvik* religious mode.

BEHEREMPUR

At the eastern edge of the Sabarmati river in Ahmedabad’s old city sits the subdivision of Beherempur, an exceedingly busy working-class neighbourhood bustling with Hindu and Muslim tradespeople. Beherempur’s best known holy site is the Jagannath temple (named after the Odisha temple famed throughout India for its annual Rath Yātrā procession) but within a few blocks of it is another very active religious spot: the two-storey temple to Melaḍī Mātā. Over the course of an evening, dozens of people mill around the Melaḍī temple entrance to receive a quick *darśan*, some parking their vehicles on the way home from work, some coming from school or college and still wearing backpacks. Any night of the week, there is a constant stream of people coming in and out, most of them women, many of them from lower-caste groups such as the Vankars and Rohit Samaj, but certainly not all. Many of the visitors are employed at the textile factory nearby, and come to the temple directly from work. At peak times, a temple-affiliated

man with a stentorian voice comes out to direct the heavy foot traffic, keeping people moving as they make their way through the tortuous temple layout that leads from the main *mūrti* of Meladī to her various subsidiary shrines, as well as the Śiva-liṅga in the back corner.

To call the Beherempur temple “middle-class” would be to mislabel it, given the sheer mass of working-class people that attend. That said, I would suggest that the temple’s present-day arrangement appears to be the result of an upward-mobilization process that has expanded its size, popularity, and reach. More than 80 years ago, the temple began as a small *derī*, popular on account of its placement on what used to be the only highway connecting Baroda and Mumbai. The space has expanded only relatively recently, following a catastrophic event at the site in 1992, in itself a microcosm of the communal violence exploding throughout India at the very same time as a result of the Ayodhya conflict. The Beherempur temple’s expansion in scope and fame is the result of two individuals’ efforts: Dasharathbhai, the charismatic *pūjārī* from the low-caste Rohit Samaj group (Figure 11), and Mr. Sharmaji, the Brahmin organizer with Sangh Parivar ties.

The first person who greeted me at the Beherempur temple was Mr. Sharmaji, a tall, self-possessed man who looked to be in his mid-to-late forties but may very well have been older. An autoworker by trade, in the course of our introduction, he took care to nuance his position at the temple. That is, he insisted he was not a trustee for the temple, for as he phrased it, “there is no trustee—god is the only trustee.” Mr. Sharma invited me into the back of the temple to continue the conversation. Here he sat down and began feeding bale-like stacks of ten-rupee notes gathered from the donation slot into a money counting machine and, between brief recesses to answer his iPhone, related intertwined histories—the story of the temple, and that of his life, as well. Sharmaji’s father was a member of the British army, all the while travelling through India and disciplining his body by mastering yoga. He finally settled down in Ahmedabad in the 1940s. As a military man, Sharmaji’s father was expected to eat meat, but Sharmaji’s mother convinced her husband to stay vegetarian. This concern for health and a meatless diet has inspired Sharmaji’s own staunch vegetarianism. He self-identified as an animal rights activist, and was in support of pro-cow political agitations. He claimed that at one point in the 1990s he was attacked by Muslim butchers on account of his activism. As a result, he received 14 stitches in his head. This episode in Sharmaji’s life parallels a larger-scale communal incident that took place at the Beherempur Meladī temple on December 28th, 1992, just days after the destruction

of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya by fundamentalist Hindus. On this day, the Melaḍī site was, in Sharmaji's assessment, overrun by Islamic fundamentalists who attacked during a time of prayer. One man in attendance ended up being taken to the hospital, receiving injuries to his spinal column as well as 22 stitches in his skull. Despite the best efforts of a surgeon who was also a family member, all hope for the man's life was lost. Sharmaji and others in attendance made a wish upon Melaḍī, and, with her blessing, the wounded man was able to survive. The *pūjārī* Dasharathbhai also has stories of similar outcomes, claiming that all Hindus who were assaulted in the attacks were healed, while all "guilty" Muslims died within two to three years. Now, every year on the 28th of December there is a mass prayer at the Beherempur temple, with leaders from the VHP and RSS attending. This suggests that the temple has become a vital space, at least symbolically, for affirming Hindu nationalist values. Sharmaji claims the temple expansion began in 1993, which would seem to indicate that its largescale development was born out of the communal violence and the site's newfound signification related thereto. Even so, Sharmaji made it clear, in consonance with the proclamations of so many other *mātā* temples, that the site accepts all types of people.

Indeed, the identity of the presiding *pūjārī* exemplifies this inclusivist spirit. Dasharathbhai Madi, a composed, heavy-set man with a distinctive look on account of his long hair, beard, and orange vestments, hails from a scheduled caste of weavers. For Dasharathbhai, Melaḍī Mātā emerged as a refuge in the midst of a tumultuous youth. Due to his unrestrained behaviour, Dasharathbhai's father sent him away to boarding school as he was entering the sixth standard. Dasharathbhai was soon enough racked with homesickness, and he ran away from the boarding school without a rupee to his name. He rode the rails without a ticket and wound up in the vicinity of Kadi, proceeding on foot to try to find the house of his maternal uncle, who lived within 15 kilometres. Through fields and through bush, Dasharathbhai pushed on determinedly, going a long stretch without food. Halfway between Kadi and his uncle's place, he met an old lady and began to feel a *pavan*-like presence of the goddess. This *pavan* persisted after he had reached his maternal uncle's house and the ordeal was over, and it proved to be quite formidable. The power coursing through him was so strong, Dasharathbhai claims, that from the outset it could break stone. Seeing the situation, one of Dasharathbhai's gurus recommended that he should not carry so strong a *pavan*, as it has been known to harm the body and mind when present for prolonged stretches. It was only after Dasharathbhai got married that his *pavan*

subsided, an interesting consequence of entry into conjugal life. However, he claimed that the *pavan* still comes back from time to time. In 1996, for instance, during Caitrī Navarātri, Dasharathbhai's *pavan* returned while he was staying at his place of birth. During the four day celebration of Caitrī that followed, festivities involving the *ḍāḱlu* ("drum") were performed and, while Dasharathbhai entered into this possession-like state, it was foretold that his wife would have a male child whose name began with the letter M. This prediction came true and was interpreted as another blessing of the goddess.



Figure 11: Dasharath Madi performs evening *āratī* at Beherempur (Photo by author)

In terms of day-to-day operations, Dasharathbhai is the spiritual leader of the temple. As the crowd would stream in for evening *ārati*, people regularly approached him for quick blessings, especially women with children. In the process, he would distribute dozens of wrist-ties, pausing to twine them around the wrists of the temple's visitors. Every evening it was his routine to perform preliminary blessings and then carry out *ārati*, during which 800 to 1000 people would gather outside the threshold at the front of the temple to watch the proceedings, singing and clapping along all the while (see Figure 11). When the Melaḍī *mūrti* was given food offerings, I noticed that Dasharathbhai would pull closed the curtain in front of the main shrine. This measure is taken, Dasharathbhai told me, to allow Melaḍī some privacy so that she may eat undisturbed. This exemplifies a concern for the deity's preferences through the various stations of her day, not unlike that shown to Śrīnāthjī in Puṣṭimārg Vaiṣṇavism.

This nod to Vaiṣṇavism is just a small part of the larger constellation of sanitizing or Sanskritizing affectations for Melaḍī at the Beherempur site. Sharmaji estimated that up until about ten years before, the temple had had some sacrifices and liquor offerings, but in accordance with his staunch vegetarianism, he has personally ensured that this has been put to a stop. The temple had had many followers from the Vaghri (Devipujak) caste to that point, but Sharmaji claimed that they left soon after sacrifices were prohibited. In Mr. Sharma's estimation, one does not need intoxicating beverages such as cognac to get *pavan*. Dasharathbhai pushed the latest point at which *tāmasik* elements were used back even earlier, claiming that no sacrifice has occurred inside the temple for 20 years. He speculated that passersby sometimes offer a small portion of the heart of a chicken (*kaḷej*) outside, suggesting some remnants of village *mātā* worship, but beyond that, the temple was at present entirely *sāttvik*. Dasharathbhai was keen to emphasize Melaḍī's Sanskritic aspects, placing her in the Sanskrit canon in the custom of *mātā* pamphlets. He provided, for instance, folk etymologies to suggest that Melaḍī actually appeared in some Vedas under the title Anāmikā or "she who is without a name." This, he explained, was Melaḍī's moniker in the Tretā Yuga, and eventually it came to be conflated with the Gujarati word for the funeral bier, "*nanāmī*." *Nanāmī* was thereafter corrupted to "Masāni," a common epithet, as we have already seen, for Melaḍī of the cremation ground. Dasharathbhai's extemporaneous etymology, then, has effectively placed Melaḍī in the Vedic past. Similarly, the Śiva shrine in the corner of the Beherempur temple staked Melaḍī's presence in the classical Sanskrit milieu. Rāvaṇa, after all, demonstrated his devout Śaivism in the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

Dasharathbhai often referenced Rāvaṇa as Melaḍī's father, affirming that the Epic and Śaiva traditions have a place for the goddess and for lower castes, as well. In Dasharathbhai's interpretation of the Rāvaṇa/Melaḍī narrative, Melaḍī's husband Bhīmdo was a member of the Valmiki Samaj, and the marriage was decreed by Lakṣmī herself in no uncertain terms. In Dasharathbhai's telling of the tale, when Rāvaṇa protested the cross-caste match, Lakṣmī asserted: "I cannot change the future; your daughter will marry a Valmiki Samaj man."

Dasharathbhai identified the Melaḍī in this myth, and the Melaḍī he worships, as Ūgtī, drawing on the same dichotomy as Saujibhai from Dhrangadhra. And as with Saujibhai, Dasharathbhai claimed that "Ūgtī" status is dependent on the tastes of the Melaḍī followers in question and their method of worship. Evidently, two Melaḍīs worshipped in markedly different ways can still bear the same positive epithet. In Dasharathbhai's estimation, a very substantial 80 percent of Melaḍī worshippers approach the goddess via *tāmasik* means. Dasharathbhai placed himself in opposition to such kinds of negative applications of Melaḍī worship, and provided examples of instances in which he'd heard of dark tantra failing. Such was the outcome, he had heard, for an Aghori from Kamakhya at Assam who tried to mesmerize dead bodies by harassing their *ātmāns*. Melaḍī, with her positive power, was able to intervene and rescue the *ātmās* ("souls") of the dead bodies. Melaḍī, then, is a pure, *sāttvik* force countervailing the *tāmasik*. When I brought up the catchphrase "*melī melī sau kahe*," Dasharathbhai offered his personal interpretation as follows: those dirty by mind and heart—that is, those who wish to wield dark forces in the goddess's name—never actually receive any help from Melaḍī.

Despite the harsh words both Dasharathbhai and Sharmaji had for Muslims and Devipujaks, the temple is by all appearances very inclusive. Spiritually speaking, Sharmaji explained that, much as one does not need liquor, one also does not have to be a *bhuvā* to get *pavan* at the Beherempur temple. Rather, it is available to all *bhaktas* of the mother. This follows from a general trend I observed at many other Gujarati sites, to delink a given *mātā* from practices based upon a single, enterprising *bhuvā* who has commodified his (or in rare cases, her) own *pavan*. Temples headed by this sort of religious officiant are held in suspicion, as they would seem to attenuate the power of the goddess through their reliance on a middleman who is both out for profit and willing to deal in negative forces. Rather than being a trance-like state overcoming visitors, *pavan* seemed to be framed as a more generalized positive sentiment at Beherempur; indeed, I saw no such instances of people openly getting a wind of the goddess

during my repeated visits to the site. More mundanely, the egalitarian availability of this spiritual power was perhaps best reflected in the variety of people that attend the temple. The temple is frequented by multiple castes including Devipujaks, Patels, “Harijans” (in Dasharathbhai’s wording), and also people from the Valmiki Samaj, as well as from a variety of regions, such as Punjabis (some of them Sikhs), Bengalis, and South Indians. Hindi, Punjabi, and Rajasthani can all be heard on the grounds. In Dasharathbhai’s estimation, approximately 15 percent of visitors are Brahmin, and Jains also attend as well, sometimes coming from afar on Navarātri and other auspicious times. This suggests that the cultivated Sanskritic elements appeal to at least some among the cultural elites. It would seem that Melaḍī is not uniformly perceived as a low-caste goddess, at least not in Beherempur, thanks to the efforts of Dasharathbhai and Sharmaji. But the diversity goes beyond a wide range of castes and regions. During Navarātri celebrations—a particularly good time to see this diversity on full display—at least five transgender youths could be spotted dancing *garba* in the streets with the other members of the temple. During my visits throughout 2015, I regularly saw a Pavaiya who dressed in men’s clothing and served as an integral member of the temple staff. This inclusivity for transgender individuals suggests a surprisingly open-minded outlook for a temple with a history of Hindu conservatism. Even more notably, there were a number of Muslims who attended the *garbas*, including one man dressed all in black who showed up on the very first night of the fall Navarātri celebration. Also, there was an elderly Muslim woman who regularly attended *darśan* year-round, and I saw Dasharathbhai gladly tie a wristband for her. In sum, despite the fact that the Beherempur temple represents a charged symbolic site for local Hindutva affiliates and politicians, it seems to maintain an admirable inclusiveness—perhaps even a pluralism—in practice.

By all indications, Dasharathbhai is an autonomous and charismatic religious figure, inspiring a working-class community in Beherempur through his work at the Melaḍī temple. He embodies an upward mobility, of sorts, as an “untouchable” weaver who has risen to local prominence performing Sanskritic-styled rituals to a purely *sāttvik* Melaḍī. Beyond the Sanskritization, there looks to be a measure of Saffronization at play here as well, given the communal violence in the temple’s past and the subsequent significance the site has come to bear for some Hindutva sympathizers, foremost among whom is the temple’s main organizer Sharmaji. The 1992 Ayodhya riots seem to have driven the temple’s expansion, and Sharmaji’s pro-cow politics fit especially well with contemporary Gujarati Hindutva. Beherempur, then,

parallels other movements among upper-caste Hindutva supporters that set as their goal the “upliftment” of depressed castes. Sharmaji appears to be dedicated to “cleaning up” the temple, getting rid of sacrifice and alcohol but also the incorrigibly backward sectors among groups such as the Devipujaks as well, ultimately bringing Dalits, and Melaḍī herself, into “proper” Hinduism. Hence, at Beherempur we meet a *sāttvik*, vegetarian Melaḍī who is embedded in a Vedic and classical Sanskrit past. With all that said, however, the temple remained open to both Hijras and Muslims, despite its history of communal violence involving the latter. And so, ideological biases aside, the temple gave the impression of being inclusive. Nonetheless, a Brahmin sensibility seems to be shaping both Melaḍī and her Madi at Beherempur, in contrast to the temples we will visit in the remainder of this chapter, where the Madis and their non-Brahmin trustees have been doing the lion’s share of the Brahminizing and sanitizing.

PAROLI

At the foot of Pavagadh Hill, home of the famed Kālī *śakti-pīṭha*, there begins a sinuous road that weaves up the mountain, allowing motorists to ascend the great pilgrimage site without having to hike the many steps it takes to get to the topmost shrine by foot. If one were to have embarked on that road in the spring of 2015, he or she would have seen at the very start a billboard advertisement bearing the high-quality image of a handsome, youthful 40-something man with a beaming, beatific smile. The text written on the billboard informed the ascendant, car-owning Kālī pilgrim about the Trimurti Mandir in the town of Paroli, just a short drive away—to get there, one would not have to leave the Panch Mahal region—where Bhaishri, the man pictured, leads worship of Melaḍī Mātā. If the viewer were to follow this advertisement’s recommendation, he or she would soon arrive at a temple that stands as one of the most compelling examples of not only Sanskritization but also gentrification of Melaḍī Mātā. Trimurti Mandir, however, is not the singular and exhaustive font of Melaḍī Mātā in Paroli. Rather, Paroli is a tale of two temples, for even though the charismatic Bhaishri has established (and franchised) a sprawling complex, as of 2015 a more traditional undercurrent of Melaḍī worship continued at an older, smaller-scale site on the outskirts of town. In his youth, Bhaishri was closely tied to this smaller, older temple, but this affiliation came to an end. By 2015, the devotees of the original Melaḍī temple were mostly indifferent to—and in some ways, doubtful

of—Trimurti Mandir’s gaining pan-regional success, much like the rest of the Paroli community at large.

Paroli is located outside the small city of Halol, 36 kilometres up the narrow road to Bariya, about two hours from Ahmedabad in the heart of the Panch Mahal region. The Panch Mahals enjoyed some measure of glory in the past as the site of Pavagadh Hill as well as Champaner fort.¹⁶⁷ In recent decades, however, the area has been prone to drought and characterized by economic struggle and a lack of educational resources. The town of Paroli itself is tiny, its claim to fame being its status as a pilgrimage centre for Śvetambarā Jains, who visit this place on every full moon day. Historically, Paroli village was connected with royalty, specifically the rulers of the Devgadhi Baria state.¹⁶⁸ In the *Gujarat State Gazetteer*, it has been reported that these rulers can be traced back to the royal family of Patai Rawal, having descended matrilineally from one of their queens (1972, 798).¹⁶⁹ The Raj Tilak emblem of the Devgadhi Baria is still connected with the town (*Ibid.*). This royal association still bears some influence on Bhaishri’s temple, and the imagining of Melaḍī Mātā as Rājarājeśvarī therein.

Bhaishri is regarded by followers as having been chosen for the spiritual life from birth on account of the presence of a birthmark on his body shaped like the Devī’s trident. The son of a local blacksmith, he was given the name “Kishorbhai,” and proved to be an eager participant in *pūjās*, prayers, and *yajñas* as a youth. According to the temple website’s English-language introduction of Bhaishri, at age twelve, he purportedly had a direct experience of the goddess, when a ray of energy emanated from him and travelled into the sky, taking the form of Ambā dressed in red. The fact that the miraculous, goddess-bearing light came *from* Bhaishri rather than *to* him has been taken as having profound significance: “it must be distinctly noted here that the energy went out from Bhajji and returned after a form had been revealed. This signified that the time had come to disclose to mankind that an ‘Avatar’ (Divine Being) had been born”

¹⁶⁷ Champaner fort was founded by King Vanraj Chavda in the eighth century. It was held by the Chauhans, a Rajput clan powerful in western India, until the fifteenth century, when it was overtaken by Mahmud Begada, the sultan of Gujarat.

¹⁶⁸ The Baria state was a princely state founded in 1524 and ruled by Rajputs of the Chauhan dynasty.

¹⁶⁹ After the demise of the Patai Rawal, a queen from that family was taken under protection by the Thakor of Paroli and treated as a sister. She eventually bore two sons, and the Paroli Thakor, as their maternal uncle, gave five villages to these boys. As they grew, the sons expanded their domain and established the Baria state. In their adulthood, a custom was established whereby the Thakor of Paroli would apply the Raj Tilak to any newly installed ruler of the Devgadhi Baria. This continued until the merger of the State in 1948 (*Gujarat State Gazetteer: Panchmahals District* 1972, 799).

(“Bhaishri,” Meladi Mataji 2011).¹⁷⁰ This initial religious experience, then, was a sign that Bhaishri was an actual manifestation of the Devī, given here as Ambā. On the website, it is explained more succinctly in Gujarati: “In 2048 Samvat [around 1991], on the last day of the dark half of *Aṣāḍ*, manifestation of the Mātājī came to be in the body of Bhaishri Kishorbhai. By way of the manifestation of the Mātājī, Bhaishri became the goddess and man in one” (“Pravṛttio,” Meladi Mataji 2019). It was on account of this perceived divinity, as well as a series of subsequent miracles, that a congregation established itself around Bhaishri (“Bhaishri,” Meladi Mataji 2011). The notion that Bhaishri embodies the goddess is readily apparent at temple proceedings, as he has on occasion dressed in women’s clothing during ceremonies. Moreover, he comports himself with a distinct air of femininity. Indeed, when I first met him at the temple grounds in 2014, he dismounted very gracefully from his Honda Hero and strode into the temple with a certain measure of elegance.

The construction of the Parolidham temple represented the culmination of Bhaishri’s gaining popularity within the Panch Mahals region and beyond. The Trimurti Mandir was built around the turn of the millennium, at least by the estimation of the residents of Paroli with whom I spoke. With two levels and three peaks—the “*trimūrti*” for which the complex is named—the temple towers imposingly over the squat, modest houses around it (Figure 12). Inside, the ground level features the bodiless head of Melaḍī bearing an opulent crown and nose-ring (to the right), in front of which people lie prostrate on the ground. Enwreathed in flowers, it is reminiscent of Śrīvidyā imaginings of Bālātripurāsundarī and Rājarājeśvarī, such as those found in the temple at Kadi, where the goddess also bears a crown, nose-ring, and many flower garlands. The similarity is fitting, as the Paroli complex identifies Melaḍī Mātā with Rājarājeśvarī in its promotional materials. On the wall opposite Melaḍī’s head, a yantra is set in a niche along with a tiny *mūrti* of Melaḍī. The second level of the temple is an open hall featuring elaborate life-size *mūrtis* of three goddesses side-by-side on their *vāhanas* at its far end. To the viewer’s left is Lakṣmī and on the right is Sarasvatī. In the middle is Melaḍī Mātā, seated on a beautiful goat wrought from white marble. Her placement in this trio marks Melaḍī as one among three Sanskritic, lithograph-

¹⁷⁰ The links to this page and some of the others to follow from the Paroli Dham website are, as of 2019, dead. Any citations dated to its 2011 iteration are based on text I was able to salvage from the site. It should also be noted that the Trimurti Mandir website, in the many forms it has taken throughout the past decade, contains both Gujarati and English text. Unless otherwise noted, the directly quoted excerpts to follow have been translated from Gujarati by me. In recent years, the English language pages have been modified from their earlier (i.e., 2011) forms, featuring English text that has quite obviously been translated automatically from the Gujarati, and is virtually unreadable.

friendly goddesses, and casts her in the role of Pārvatī or, alternatively, Kālī. Evidently, she is substitutable for these kinds of pan-Indian goddesses. Moreover, the choice of white colouring for the goat accentuates Melaḍī's *sāttvik* qualities, at the same time wiping away the vestigial signification black goats bear with *tamasik* sacrifice and the *melī vidyā*.



Figure 12: Trimurti Mandir in Paroli, seen from the back alleys of the surrounding village (Photo by author)

The elaborateness of the *mūrtis*, like the temple itself, attests to the sheer wealth of Bhaishri's enterprise. Judging by the bookstall beside the temple, the trust can also afford expensive print costs, as it has produced numerous sleek publications tailor-made for Paroli devotees. Though these resemble the general *mātā* devotional pamphlets in content, they have

been customized for Paroli with the faces of Bhaishri and the main *mūrti* on their covers. These contain *stutis* and *stotras* (encomiums) to Melaḍī and other goddesses, which have been composed either in Sanskrit or Sanskritized Gujarati. The bookstall also contains Bhaishri-themed DVDs. On the whole, this temple enterprise has been so successful that Bhaishri has opened up satellite temples in Bodali and in Surat. His plans to expand only continue. There is also a rumour I heard that Bhaishri had been planning to open a larger temple complex, which was under construction only two kilometres away in the village of Naraganden.

The money collected by Trimurti Mandir has not, however, been dedicated solely to expanding the temple's reach. Trimurti Mandir has also made a concerted effort to display its involvement in the surrounding community. On its website, greed is repeatedly denounced, while the details of the public initiatives that the temple trust supports are elaborated upon at length. These have included programs for impoverished children, those differently-abled physically and mentally, and other underprivileged groups, to all of which the temple has cumulatively given many millions of rupees ("Trust Activities," Meldi Mataji 2011). The temple runs in large part on the goodwill of volunteers, with an army of *sevaks* ("attendants") ensuring the smooth operation of the temple grounds. These *sevaks* are easily identifiable on account of the black pants and bright red shirts that they wear. They are just one important component of Bhaishri's well-organized establishment.

My meeting with Bhaishri was brief. When I attempted to get an idea as to what sort of audience the temple is catering to by asking him who attends the Paroli temple complex, he said he has no idea of caste or class, as he does not see either. Despite this dismissive reply, several trips I made to Sunday festivities established that Bhaishri's community of followers is indeed diverse, as there are Rajputs, Vaishyas, and Koli Patels in attendance. While perhaps a third of them were local, by a very rough estimate, the majority were from outside the Panch Mahals. The pan-Gujarati audience also included Surat Patels, Aiyars from Saurashtra, and a significant portion of Sindhi followers, as well as people from Dahod District. Devotees journey here from out of state as well, with people from Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan among the crowds. A large percentage of these pilgrims no doubt include Paroli along with visits to Pavagadh. On one Saturday evening, I met a family from Rajasthan that had come for two purposes: firstly, to have their newborn receive Bhaishri's blessing, as they were on the verge of

the naming ceremony of the child, and secondly, to cure the young father of his chronic dizziness.

At dawn the next morning, before the Trimurti Mandir had opened, there were already 500 to 600 people positioned in front of the gates. They were eager to receive *darśan*, an auspicious “vision” of the deity. As many of the devotees wear red bandanas with the name of the goddess scripted across the crown, Bhaishri’s followers bear a certain uniformity regardless of their background. As they eagerly waited, Sanskrit mantras resounded inside. Finally, the doors opened and everyone rushed up to the entrance for *darśan*, shouting the name of the goddess. Chants continued with mantras of the “*oṃ namaḥ śivāya*” variety, and the crowd began to chant, too: “Śrī Rājarājeśvarī, Śrī Meladī!” Once the devotees got settled in the temple, the chanting started anew, mostly Sanskrit *ślokas* (“verses”) mixed with Gujarati names of the goddess, and then some *bhajans*. Even after *pūjā* began, more and more people continued to arrive, and the temple filled on both levels, the visitors eventually spilling outside. To accommodate the spillover with seating, the red-shirted *sevak*s, who stand out among the crowd, laid down tarps on the ground in front of the entrance. Although the temple was filled well beyond capacity, the proceedings stayed fairly organized, largely on account of these red-shirted workers. All the while, chartered busses arrived before and during the Sunday morning service, several coming from nearby Baroda. Waiting on the outskirts one Sunday morning, I counted three buses, and the interval was approximately 15 minutes between each. Also, there is an overnight bus that comes from Surat Navgari. Each bus deposited devotees, who were mainly women decked out in many-splendoured saris. In this manner, Bhaishri and his helpers have put in place an infrastructure of personnel and services to facilitate the transport and accommodation of visitors, ensuring they will both keep and add followers.

Judging from the assembled crowd, urban patrons make up a substantial portion of Bhaishri’s followers. Given their polished Gujarati, as well as their elaborate shoes, saris, and ornaments including earrings, nose rings, bangles, and heavy necklaces, much of this clientele appeared to be middle class or higher. The influx of bikes and sedans into the village—many of the latter blasting goddess *garbas*—further suggests an ample bourgeoisie presence. The efforts made by the temple trust toward organization, then, seem to cater to middle-class sensibilities for orderliness. Throughout the ceremony, for instance, I saw people being directed by *sevak*s into queues to register their names so that they could have an audience with Bhaishri, in order to aim

their questions and problems to him. They then received a ticket bearing a number so that they could be called forward in a systematic fashion. In addition, there was a prominent sign above the temple doors stating that no *prasād*—coconuts, sugar, and so forth—is permitted inside this temple, again betraying a concern for tidiness.

This tidied-up *prasād* parallels the thoroughgoing Sanskritization of ritual at Parolidham. The temple trust has made its position on sacrifice clear, inveighing against blood offerings and alcohol oblations on its website: “This *dham* is supremely pure [*ati śuddha*] and sacred [*pāvana*], and thus there is an extreme prohibition against the killing of animals [*prānīna vadha*] here. Mātāji is also in fierce [*ugra*] opposition to anyone using liquor or any intoxicating substance” (“Mātāji Viśe (3),” 2019). Here Melaḍī’s capriciousness—in other times and other contexts thought to be the reason for her *tāmasik* appetites—is reserved for those who would dare to consume non-*sāttvik* substances in her name. For the middle-class, device-owning patron considering a visit to the temple, this condemnation of animal sacrifice and intoxicants presumably helps to alleviate unspoken (but ever-lingering) concerns that the *tāmasik* village practices associated with the worship of these goddesses could resurface in the present-day. Trimurti Mandir makes an obvious effort, then, to assert itself as a temple not only of material prosperity but also of orthodox, Brahminical worship, as both fit the image of the clean, unfalteringly pure, and pan-Indian goddess housed within it.

Sanskritization is not, of course, limited to that which is kept out of ritual, but also includes what is inserted into it. Much like the sleek, custom-made temple publications, the actual worship taking place at Trimurti Mandir has been injected with Sanskritic, Brahminical, and Vaiṣṇava ritual elements. When I attended in 2015, almost all of the chanting was carried out by Brahmins, and most of the passages were in Sanskrit. An initiatory *āratī* was followed by a recitation of the *Śakrāday Stuti*, a chapter of the *Caṇḍīpāṭh* from the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* in which Indra sings the praises of the feminine divine. Other prayers followed, slightly modified in their wordings so as to accommodate the name of Melaḍī Mātā, as well as Ambā. Similarly, there were *stutis* for Khoḍīyār and Bahucarā. No longer the sacrificial offering, the goat (*bōkaḍo/buṭiyo*) played a central role in the ceremony, at least in name, as there were invitations to “ride a goat for rescue” (*“buṭiyo carni āvjo”*). Two prayers were offered that referred to Melaḍī Mātā as if she were royalty, no doubt playing on the associations with the Patai Rawal and Rājarājeśvarī. During chanting, there was a combination of Brahminic and Vedic hymns

alongside folkloric songs mentioning local figures including the folk-saint Bapu Sītā-Rām. There were also some Bollywood tunes intermingled as well. All in all, the Trimurti liturgy is an intricate mix of Brahminic and folk elements, very much like the “Vedic vernacular” referenced by Joanne Waghorne (2004, 168). Throughout the entire process, Bhaishri typically sat to the right near the giant head of Rājarājeśvarī/Melaḍī, decked out in a matching white dhoti and vest combo resembling the Puṣṭimārg style of dress. Bhaishri spent most of these ceremonies observing, having limited vocal function in the proceedings. For the most part, he did not participate in the *ślokas*, though on one occasion he did sing a small *stuti* by himself. When the prayer ceremony ended, Bhaishri sat on the swing—another reverberation of Puṣṭimārg—and worshippers, nearly all of them female, approached him to touch his feet. So while the proceedings at Trimurti Mandir managed to synthesize folk and Sanskritic elements, they also placed special emphasis on the latter through the presence and the rituals of Brahmins, along with repeated, subtle nods to Vaiṣṇavism.

Persisting within both these folk and Sanskritic elements at Parolidham, albeit less visibly, are Melaḍī Mātā’s tantric aspects. There is, most obviously, the yantra inset in the niche, following in the pattern of those secreted within the purlieus of Gujarat’s trio of *śakti-pīṭhas*. There are also some understated visual cues, such as the small statue of Bhairava with his black dog *vāhana* positioned on the steps up to the second floor. More pronouncedly, I think the tantric Melaḍī is evoked through her identification with Rājarājeśvarī (“Queen of Kings”). This identity is rooted in royal associations, no doubt, and features prominently throughout the Paroli temple complex: the Rājarājeśvarī title is recurrently appended to Melaḍī’s name in the promotional literature; the goddess is depicted with royal accoutrements such as the ornate crown; and in the actual rituals she is addressed like a queen. As with Khoḍīyār, Melaḍī’s “Queen of Kings” title may stem principally from imperial history, in this case Paroli’s earlier connection with a princely state. Indeed, this is intimated on the Trimurti Mandir website: “Because that first Darbar was here,” it explains, “Melaḍī has become splendourous [*virājmān*] in the manner of a queen mother” (“Pravṛttio,” 2019). With that being said, however, the epithet and imagery of Rājarājeśvarī offers not just imperial cachet, but also some additional tantric resonances. Rājarājeśvarī is, after all, another variation of the Śrīvidyā goddess, Tripurāsundarī, whom we have already encountered in the context of Bahucarā Mātā. Tripurāsundarī possesses those additional trademark qualities of Sanskritic goddesses such as fertility and wealth, on that

account most closely resembling Lakṣmī. Just as was the case with Bahucarā, Melaḍī acquires from Tripurāsundarī/Rājarājeśvarī a mode of abstracted tantric worship via mantra and *Śrī-cakra* that is safe, esoteric, and elite. Additionally, Śrīvidyā texts such as the *Saundaryalaharī* contain conceptualizations of Tripurāsundarī as the supreme goddess—creator, operator, and destroyer of the cosmos (Kinsley 1997, 117). When Melaḍī Mātā inherits the name and the markings of Rājarājeśvarī, then, she receives with them the fertility, wealth, and auspiciousness of a Sanskrit goddess *par excellence*, as well as an ontological status as substratum of the universe. Thus, she too becomes supreme deity in the Śāktādvaitic sense and so her territory extends beyond the boundaries of the village and now spans a much greater domain. In effect, this tantric identity as Rājarājeśvarī universalizes Melaḍī. These potent, positive tantric resonances, even if they remain subtle, still play a critical role in the goddess’s appeal.

When I asked Bhaishri about the connection between Rājarājeśvarī and Melaḍī, he did not elaborate on any particular link between the two, other than providing a summary Advaitic reduction that “all Śakti is Rājarājeśvarī.” He was reticent to expound on the historical link with royalty, notwithstanding the information provided on the website. Despite Bhaishri’s hesitancy to explicate the relationship between Melaḍī and Rājarājeśvarī, decidedly tantric language has been employed on the temple website to describe the immediate benefits Melaḍī/Rājarājeśvarī can bring. Here it is promised that: “[i]n proximity to Mā is a storehouse [*bhandār*] of *siddhis*. These are *śaktis* for health, beauty, strength, and, in the same manner, good qualities in bodily, mental, societal, and social realms” (“Mātāji Viśe (3),” Meldi Mataji 2019). Thus, the goddess enables speedy, sublunary attainments in the traditional tantric idiom of *siddhis*, or “miraculous powers” that are typically eight in number. In the context of Trimurti Mandir, however, the *siddhis* function toward the service of both general individualistic ends such as health and beauty and also broader, more societally-minded concerns that would seem to appeal to a middle-class social conscience. Though these benefits are listed as fairly broadly-stated abstractions—body, mind, and society—their across-the-board association with Melaḍī intimates that they can nonetheless be delivered with the immediacy typically reserved for village goddesses. Rājarājeśvarī, it follows, may also serve as a shorthand for a non-threatening, imperially-bound tantra that denotes access to an fast-acting power enabling personal and societal growth. This epithet, in essence, rephrases or renames Melaḍī’s folk magic association in accordance with royal or bourgeoisie-inflected idioms of tantra, if not both. With her links to royalty as well as

the mainstream, Sanskritic Śrīvidyā tradition, Rājarājeśvarī embodies a nonthreatening gateway to esoteric power. While Melaḍī may have been associated with comparable powers and gains in her village past, under the unimpeachable name of Rājarājeśvarī she now does so unambiguously removed from the dubious domain of the *melī vidyā*. Tantric imagery, then, has helped to clean up Melaḍī at Parolidham. Here she is no longer the dirty village Melaḍī of animal sacrifices, alcohol consumption, and black mesmerism, but rather a pristine, all-encompassing Great Goddess best worshipped by complex, esoteric means on account of her interchangeability with Rājarājeśvarī/Tripurāsundarī and, for that matter, Pārvatī. Tantra, then, is another thread in the Paroli fabric. At Parolidham, Bhaishri and his trust have managed to interweave various strands of Sanskritic Hinduism—the Brahminic, the Vaiṣṇavic, and even the mainstream tantric—within the image of a *lokdevī*, improbably enough.

While this Melaḍī might appeal to devotees from urban Gujarat and out-of-state locations, Paroli residents had varying reactions to the popularity of the Trimurti Mandir complex. Behind the temple sit a few rows of homes wherein life goes on with little heed paid to the sizeable Mandir just metres away. In the late morning after my first visit to Trimurti Mandir, I ventured into the town behind the temple and met an elderly woman in one of the modest houses there. The low-roofed, dirt-floored hut in which she lived with her son and grandson was cool and tranquil, a nice reprieve from the thunderous, kinetic atmosphere of the *mandir* within earshot. With her hair down all the while we talked, the woman sat cross-legged in front of a self-made shrine to Harsiddhī Mātā. She talked about having some experience with subaltern activism, at one time having been a member of the non-Brahmin Self-Respect movement. As for her religious life, she claimed to have made five pilgrimages to the Harsiddhī temple at Porbandar. In regard to the Parolidham complex, she seemed largely uninterested in the proceedings thereof. For her, Bhaishri is simply Kishor. She said she felt happy that Kishor caught *pavan*, but she also noted the considerable wealth he has accumulated on account of it. She was not overly enthusiastic about this commercial gain, but she felt there was no use gossiping. She described herself as perfectly content where she was, as the goddess had promised her she would one day have a *derī* of her own, and this had come to be. After we had chatted, she turned to this *derī* to perform *āratī* and sing *bhajans* to Harsiddhī, eventually swaying with *pavan* of the goddess. Her own experience of Śakti went on wholly unmediated by Bhaishri's largescale reimagining of Melaḍī.

Later that afternoon I journeyed out into the fields surrounding the town. I met a toddy tapper from the Rathva tribe, and he climbed down from the palm tree in which he was working to talk. His father died when he was in the fifth standard and, in the aftermath, he took a job helping to build the Trimurti Mandir in order to support his mother and three sisters. Going by what he had heard, the toddy tapper thought Bhaishri's *pavan* was originally that of Ambā Mā, as per the website, though it later on switched to Melaḍī. This was corroborated by comparable alternative narratives of Bhaishri's spiritual development I had heard from other people of the village. Some villagers also added that it was Bhaishri's brother-in-law who convinced him early on to worship Ambā and Śiva. The *pavan* and the Melaḍī aspect only came later in Bhaishri's life. Why any or all of these switches occurred never became precisely clear, though it was the toddy tapper's understanding that Bhaishri felt more comfortable with Melaḍī. Bhaishri's preference is not surprising, given the Melaḍī shrine in Paroli that pre-existed Trimurti Mandir and his own earlier affiliation with it. In view of the town's established Melaḍī-worshipping background, perhaps it was a strategic move.

On the outskirts of Paroli, facing into the palm-girded fields where the toddy tapper worked, is the small, squat Melaḍī temple that predates Trimurti Mandir. Approximately 40 years old, the temple is patronized mainly by local cattle farmers of the Bharwad caste, though it does draw some occasional visitors from beyond the village limits. This temple is fronted by a *bhuvā* named Nagjibhai, a mustachioed man who attends to ceremonies in a blue dhoti with a black vest overtop (Figure 13). His face appears prominently on the inexpensively-printed temple poster, situated beside the picture of the goddess and right above the familiar phrase in Melaḍī's defence: "*melī melī sau kahe, melī nathī talbhār.*" The inside of the temple was always dark. The central icon was a large, framed painting of Melaḍī, and a smaller *mūrti* had been placed below it to the side. Across the surfaces of both, an ever-circling rainbow-coloured strobe light swirled and danced. All the while, the speakers blasted Melaḍī folk songs at full volume, most notably an infectious, repetitive tune, the title (and chorus) of which is "Melaḍī, Bole!" ("Speak, Melaḍī!").



Figure 13: Nagjibhai, spiritual leader of the older Paroli Melaḍī temple (Photo by author)

Loud music aside, the proceedings at this tiny temple contrasted with the spectacle just down the road at the Trimurti Mandir. While less animated in terms of sheer attendance, the overall atmosphere was much more concentrated and intense. On both of the occasions I attended, dozens of people packed themselves tightly into the limited floor space, crouching knee to knee, their mobility limited. The main lights, if there were any, were turned off for the entirety of the ceremony, the opening and closing of the door the sole substantial source of illumination. Otherwise, there was only the strobe-light. When Nagjibhai was ready to begin, he entered into the room full of squatting people, trembling a little as he stepped through the door. He sat down

in front of the main image and took the *ārati* flame on his palm. The wick began to burn down closer and closer to his flesh. All the while, he shuddered. Occasionally, he passed his hand through the flame. As he offered prayers, he repeatedly closed his hands on the flame, which did not go out. Sweat beaded on his brow, and a younger man in a check-print shirt, serving as his assistant, periodically poured water on the *bhuvā*'s hand to cool it. With eyes closed, Nagjibhai raised his index finger, waving it in the air. This, I was told, establishes *pavan*. Nagjibhai entered into a conversation with the *mūrti* and the painting that was inaudible due to the volume of the music. On the first occasion I attended, focus quickly shifted to the assistant in the check-print shirt, as he began to shudder as well, kneeling with his face to the ground. He too was channeling the presence of the goddess. He quickly worked himself into a frenzy, albeit rhythmically so, torso oscillating back and forth on a short loop. Periodically he snapped his head back to vocalize. From time to time, he moved his hand over the flame. Meanwhile, Nagjibhai pulled a hooded cloak over his own head, in mimicry of the feminine vestments of the goddess. Fully channeling the goddess, Nagjibhai took a lit incense stick and pressed the smouldering end down into his palm.

These gestures all functioned to demonstrate the strength of the *pavan*. With that having been established, people began approaching Nagjibhai with requests. On the occasions I attended, these included people in the midst of land disputes and health problems, as well as fertility issues including the inability to bear sons. In the case of one woman who was suffering from kidney stones, Nagjibhai threw his hood over her head and drew her closer to him. With a trembling hand, he gave her a hard slap on the back for *dakṣiṇa*, a method of conferring blessing that I saw him perform for a number of other visitors, as well. In another case, he employed a technique that was unprecedented, at least with respect to what I had seen at all the other temples I visited before or after, and also quite an impressive spectacle at that. Hood over his head, Nagjibhai drew a knife and began to spin a coin on the tip of its blade. Blowing gently upon the coin, he was able to keep it spinning for an improbably long span of time. While I was not able to ascertain the aim of this demonstration, I suspect it may have had some magical significance.

Certainly, comparable magical procedures were employed at the site. In one case, a Solanki Rajput came to the temple because, ten days previously, he and his wife had found in their home a black cloth with pins—a hallmark of black tantra in the folk idiom. The couple's fears were confirmed when, very soon after, the wife experienced pain in her leg and groin. At

the recommendation of one of the husband's colleagues, the couple came to Paroli because they had heard of its reputation for providing cures. To remedy the situation, Nagjibhai fixed a lemon with pins to counteract the pain, drawing on folk methods. The smaller of the two temples in Paroli, then, would seem to offer something that the larger cannot, namely detailed remedies tailored to respond to black magic. Trimurti Mandir, given its emphasis on all things *sāttvik*, Brahminic, and prosperous, may not have taken such concerns as seriously or dealt with them as promptly, given its interminable queues. While Bhaishri's tantra was clearly white and Sanskritic, the smaller Paroli temple could still deal in folk magic that might be glossed as "folk tantra," in this case counteracting the threat of malevolent sorcery.

For the local patrons of the elder temple, theirs is still the primary Melaḍī site in Paroli. One woman, Deetya (a pseudonym), who played a prominent role in the temple, was a schoolteacher originally from Saurashtra. She explained that this temple site is the authentic original birthplace of Melaḍī. The little temple was here before Bhaishri, who apparently used to attend and even followed Nagjibhai. Bhaishri served, at one point, in the role currently held by the aforementioned young man in the check-print shirt, pouring the water on Nagjibhai's palm while he was performing *āratī*. By Deetya's report, it was Nagjibhai who transferred *pavan* to Bhaishri. Bhaishri, however, eventually moved away for the bigger temple. As of 2015, according to Deetya, he no longer came back. Thus, Nagjibhai helped Bhaishri create his public religious identity, though he has not stayed on as a part of Bhaishri's operation. There appeared, then, to be some degree of tension between the two temples. Regardless, people paying visits to Trimurti Mandir are still welcome at this temple, and very often Melaḍī devotees from out of town end up visiting both.

The divergences between the two Melaḍī temples at Paroli prove edifying when evaluating the transformations that have reshaped the goddess in the past decades. Though it displays Melaḍī's Great Goddess lithograph imagery, the smaller temple has maintained ecstatic elements such as *pavan* and also folk remedies for persistent concerns of black magic. These bespeak continuities with earlier portrayals of *mātā* worship in villages. Trimurti Mandir, by contrast, has moved away from many of these customs entirely, eschewing anything remotely *tāmasik*, only retaining occasional references to folk or vernacular figures and mythologies. Bhaishri's *pavan*, meanwhile, is relatively inert—an earlier blessing that pervades him, true enough, but that is also outwardly inactive in terms of ecstatic displays. He is the goddess, but he is not in conversation

with her as is Nagjibhai when in *pavan*. Bhaishri apparently inherited from Nagjibhai's *pavan* and transmuted it into something more sedate and Vedāntic. In much the same spirit, the better part of Bhaishri's liturgy is in Sanskrit and performed by Brahmins, with Vaiṣṇavic motifs intermingled. Melaḍī, meanwhile, is elevated to the status of a Devī with universal scope, an idea that is visually and vocally reiterated by iconographic and textual associations with goddesses such as Pārvatī and Rājarājeśvarī. The latter epithet lends Melaḍī not just a royal esteem, but also an esoteric, tantric quality modulated by way of its safe, strictly Sanskritic register. While both temples, in differing measure, offered swift gratification for the wishes of their devotees, the Trimurti Mandir more pointedly courted the desires—both material and atmospheric—of the urban upwardly mobile and middle classes. Trimurti Mandir represents an attempt not just to Sanskritize the Melaḍī experience, but also to gentrify it. The temple's prosperity and orderliness serve the aim of making Paroli as comfortable and convenient as possible for a wide variety of visitors performing middle-classness—that is, either attaining to, actualizing, or reiterating middle-class status. Given the distances so many of its patrons travel to have this experience, Trimurti Mandir is, at least when compared to its smaller counterpart, not a local temple. Rather, it draws on a universalized idiom, and attracts a following that is pan-regional and to some degree pan-Indian (or at least pan-Western-Indian). Hence, the foot of Pavagadh hill, a pan-Indian pilgrimage site, was (and is) a prime location for Bhaishri to situate his billboard advertising campaign. What better place is there in the Panch Mahals to attract a transregional audience for an increasingly pan-Indian imagining of Melaḍī than a *śakti-pīṭha*?

KHEDA

Less than an hour outside of Ahmedabad is the small city of Kheda, location of one of the most prominent Melaḍī temples in Gujarat, and perhaps even on the planet. Kheda was historically ruled by the Pashtun Babi dynasty until 1763 when it was taken over by the Marathas.¹⁷¹ The temple today betrays a discernible martial influence that is most evident by way of its Rajput majority. Thanks to the much-touted therapeutic powers of its spiritual lynchpin, Jay Madi, the temple has gained international renown, at least among ex-patriate Gujaratis.

¹⁷¹ The Babis were a tribe of Pashtun origin that seems to have entered India during the early phases of the Mughal Empire. The Babi dynasty was founded in Kathiawar in 1654 by Sherkhanji Babi (r. 1654–1690), and retained sovereignty over a number of princely states (Junagadh included) even while the Marathas ruled throughout Gujarat. For more on the Babi dynasty, see the *Gujarat State Gazetteers: Banaskantha District* (1981, 110–111).

Throughout the sprawling temple complex there are wall-mounted photographs attesting to Madi's extensive travels, as well as the reach of his influence. He is pictured, for instance, at a cattle farm in Jersey, England, the photo dated to August 2012. There is also a photo of Madi seated on the Queen Victoria throne in the House of Lords. I was told by several temple patrons that Madi was the last person ever given the privilege of sitting here. Madi also appears in photos with religious figures, including Swaminarayan gurus, indicating some all-important Vaiṣṇava connections, and even some with Catholic nuns, intimating Madi's pluralism. One collage of pictures places him among various regional and national politicians, including Prime Minister Modi. Madi's reputation for faith-healing, along with the substantial wealth his temple has generated, seems to have allowed him the opportunity to fraternize with a variety of religious luminaries across India and the globe, and it has also attracted some high profile patrons to Kheda. While traces of village-inflected religion remain in Kheda, Madi eschews most of them fairly stridently, emphasizing instead a pan-Indian, Sanskritic, and highly *sāttvik* vision of Melaḍī worship.

Madi hails from humble beginnings. Born Bhogilal Shantilal Panchal in a small village in Kheda district in 1944, Madi entered the world prematurely as a pale, brittle baby who was thought to have little chance of survival. From birth, however, his mother kept the faith, claiming to have a feeling of Melaḍī's blessing throughout the turbulent beginnings of her infant son's life. Eventually, the newborn Bhogilal's sickness was cured, his recovery attributed the goddess's *camatkār*. Throughout his youth he would fall sick again and again, yet he always managed to recover. These incidents have led both Bhogilal and others to claim that he was born with the power of *śakti*. The phrasing here is critical, for when I asked Madi himself about his watershed religious experiences, he was careful to nuance the phrasing. He did not, for instance, "get *pavan*" and certainly did not claim to have such a "wind" of the goddess.¹⁷² Rather, he only has her *aiśvarya* (or "blessing"), a word that can be, compellingly enough, synonymous with "*siddhi*."¹⁷³ For this reason, he said there is no notion of lineage at the Kheda temple. Unlike Puṣṭimārg or other *sampradāyas*, Madi did not have plans to name a successor. Rather, he is of the belief that the goddess will transmit the *aiśvarya* herself. As we will see momentarily, it is

¹⁷² Alternative accounts do exist, however, connecting Madi to *pavan*. According to a drink vendor just down the road from the temple, for instance, Madi got *pavan* in his early to mid-twenties while working in fields several kilometres away from Kheda.

¹⁷³ In *A Concise Dictionary of Indian Philosophy*, John A. Grimes has confirmed that the terms *siddhi* and *aiśvarya* are used interchangeably in yogic schools of thought (1996, 63).

not just the grammar and transmission of *pavan* that Madi abjures, but also its performance. In consonance with his understanding that he is the recipient of a blessing, Madi maintains a humble and exceedingly calm demeanour in spite of the international fame that has grown around him.

The present-day temple also began humbly, starting off as a small *derī*. From here Madi moved into a multi-floored, classic-styled temple on Vad Wali Street (a main street in Kheda named for its banyan tree), establishing Melaḍī Mātā there in the mid-1980s. Today the temple is the main attraction of the street, with its multiple tiers and pinkish sandstone exterior. According to Madi, the temple is 60 years old, though there are several new elements that have been more recently added, such as the ornate sculpted panels displaying a variety of gods and goddesses. As I first made my way through the various levels of the temple in April 2015, I could hear Sanskrit chants playing gently on speakers hidden from view. Throughout the temple are scripted felicitations to Melaḍī under the epithets of Mā Bhagavatī, as well as Rājarājeśvarī, the latter suggesting the royal and tantric resonances—most likely the former due to the Rajput connections—attributed to the goddess at this site. On the walls of the various levels of the temple, as well as in the main hall, collages of lacquered pictures display the many achievements of the main *pūjārī*. And all throughout, signs have been placed insisting that no donation is to be made at this temple, a marked disjuncture from other temples and shrines, *mātā*-based or otherwise, where donation boxes tend to be in plain view.

When I asked Madi about these signs and their frequency, he switched from Gujarati to his limited English to restate and expand their message: “no donation, no greed.” To his mind, the two are inextricably linked. The temple website has offered further explication of this policy, claiming that the trust will not accept any form of donation or financial support in an effort to assure devotees that they have no obligation of any kind when visiting (“Patotsava,” Jay Maadi 2011).¹⁷⁴ Madi, rather, will bear the entire expenditure. Even without the support of donations, the temple has nonetheless prospered. Aside from the temple proper, the complex surrounding also houses a semi-enclosed hall where affiliated ceremonies take place. A short drive away is a *gośālā* (“stable”) personally tended by Madi, which featured some admirably kept stables for cows and horses, the animals all looking very well-fed. The cow’s milk featured prominently in

¹⁷⁴ The links to this page and others from the Kheda temple website are, as of 2019, dead. However, I was able to archive text from the site’s 2011 iteration, and that is what is cited from here onward.

the ceremonies I attended at the main temple in 2015, as did the horses themselves. Another impressive feature of the *gośālā* is its elaborate gate, which is set between brick battlements painted bright red. In the partition running atop it stands the sculpture of a reared-back, warrior-mounted horse, no doubt inspired by the martial idioms of the Rajputs and Marathas.

Judging from the dress and mannerisms of the crowd that assembles for Sunday ceremonies at Kheda, Rajputs make up most of the attendees. Many of the women, for instance, veiled their faces with their saris in the Rajput custom. Conversing with the patrons revealed that these Rajputs come from a wide variety of clans, including Vaghelas, Jalas, Davhas, Thakors, and Solankis, as well as some claiming descent from the Chudasama dynasty. The temple is not, however, exclusive to Rajputs. Like most other *mātā* officiants, Madi expressed a sentiment of equanimity, stating that all castes and communities are welcome at the site. Accordingly, he has allowed various members of the surrounding locality to participate in *āratī* every Sunday, a process that has become quite drawn out given the variety of groups that attend. Among these groups are the Patels, who have represented another large portion of the devotees, in addition to Vaishyas, potters, tailors, and a few Rabaris. Perhaps most noteworthy amongst the multifarious followers I saw during my visits was the singular Muslim woman. One Sunday afternoon in April 2015, she took part in the public assembly that was being held in the semi-enclosed hall beside the temple proper. She was invited up to the front and took the microphone to give a discourse on communal harmony, which Madi has long championed. Accordingly, I have been told that he has regularly visited mosques to share his healing powers therein.

There were also some Brahmins in the mix when I visited, and though they may not be a majority, Madi's means of worshipping Melaḍī did not lack for Brahminical components. Madi's vision of Melaḍī and her worship draws intensively from Sanskritic and Vedāntic Hinduism, even relative to corresponding reimaginations of the goddess seen at other contemporary sites. The community is totally *sāttvik* to a Swaminarayan standard and beyond: there is no alcohol, no smoking, and not even chai, Madi explains to me, only lunch, dinner, and snacks. These edibles are, not surprisingly, fully vegetarian. As for sacrifice, Madi has gone on record to oppose it with zeal. On previous iterations of the temple website homepage, underneath a picture of Melaḍī Mātā on her trademark black goat, Madi has railed against the performance of blood offerings. In the process, he has argued for the irrationality of sacrifice with a logic that is piercingly straightforward:

Many people have [a] belief that Bhagwati Shree meldi Maa will get pleased upon by offering fresh blood, alcohol and flesh of slaughtered male goat. No rider is ever becoming happy on loosing own vehicle. Bhagwati Shree Meldi Maa is an ocean of kindness therefore on contrary will get displeased, because no mother ever likes killing/humiliation of own child, (As Shree Meladi Maa is the mother of universe, all livings are her children, on contrary Butio is very pet of Maa, so naturally Maa will get annoyed). If devotee of Bhagwati Shree Meladi Maa offers assassinated male goat to please Maa, devotee of Shri Durga Devi should have to offer assassinated lion, devotee of Shree Khodiyar Maa should offer crocodile, devotee of Shree Ambika Maa should offer assassinated tiger and so on. Therefore offering of blood, flesh, and alcohol etc. non-purifying things is an absolutely wrong and humiliating tradition to ever-worshipped Mother of Universe [all sic] (“About Us,” Jay Maadi 2011).

The line of reasoning is profoundly simple, posing the same question as the earlier story of the intervening *bhagat*. Why would Meladī want to see her beloved goat *vāhana* killed? In exploring this fairly self-explanatory inquiry, Madi levels a strong criticism against low-caste and village offerings for *mātās*. The alternative for Madi and his followers appears to be a non-violent, Brahminic mode of worship. All these descriptors apply to the goddess as she has been imagined on the website, which praises her as not just a loving mother as per pan-Indic conceptualizations of Mahādevī, but also as substrate of the universe. Indeed, she has been described on the website as: “supreme controlling power cause for creation of all kinds & creatures of world, [sic] support all livings by providing fresh cool water & food and at last terminate it when specified life span is over” (“About Us,” Jay Maadi 2011). In this conceptualization, Meladī Mātā is not the filth goddess of the village, but instead the creator, operator, and destroyer of the entire universe, echoing a commonplace Vedāntic-styled idiom for the supreme deities of the Sanskrit canon. Effectively, Meladī has been universalized as well as Sanskritized.

Sanskritic, Brahminic sensibilities also inform many aspects of the ritual repertoire at the Kheda temple. The motif of the *havan*, or fire sacrifice, features prominently on Sundays and on special occasions. Every Sunday, for instance, Madi constructs a small fire of bundled incense sticks in the altar, signifying a miniature *havan*. In February of every year, the temple commemorates the establishment of Meladī’s infusion into Bhogilal Madi by way of a Navcaṇḍī *havan*. This ceremony involves a *homa* combining hundreds of mantras from the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, a text ever-present at Meladī sites. Similarly, during fall Navarātri, a *havan* takes place in which freshly shucked corn is included amongst a cornucopia of sweets, flowers, and

fragrances to express gratitude for the harvest. Typical Sunday worship also incorporates some decidedly Śaiva elements, likely stemming from Melaḍī's connection to Rāvaṇa. Situated by the altar when I visited was a large *liṅga* inset in a *yoni*. It is customary for the combo to be repeatedly bathed in milk, first by Madi and then by the devotees in attendance. For the opportunity to bathe the *liṅga*, a long line of temple-goers would form, each person carrying a pail of milk. The pearly-white milk went cascading off the *yoni* into additional pails positioned underneath so as to be redistributed to queued devotees. This milk had been collected from the affiliated *gośālā* and was further indication of the bounty produced by the temple's enterprises. Another element of the *gośālā* featured at the ceremonies is the pair of pristine white horses that are sometimes brought into the temple for the Sunday service. One Sunday as the ceremony progressed, I watched as they were fed milk, grains, and copious amounts of *sukhḍi*, a sweetmeat of jaggery, clarified butter, and wheat flower. While the stallions serve to display the largesse of the temple and the power of Melaḍī's Rajput followers, their white colour also hints at the *sāttvik* nature of the goddess and the worship dedicated to her.

Alongside the Sanskritized portions of its rituals, the Kheda temple to Melaḍī still gave some indication of the goddess's village roots. Some of these resonances are subtle. For instance, Madi commonly donned a black shawl, a vestment we have already seen at smaller village-styled shrines. Others were more obvious. People come, for instance, with all the usual concerns brought before *mātās*, seeking fast-acting results for their desires or diseases. These included family problems, money issues, and agricultural matters, such as cows not yielding enough milk. Madi is particularly adept at assuaging and diagnosing health problems—skills beyond scientific explanation and even efficacy, as we will soon see. Madi does not just solve problems, however, but he also brings good fortune, and can apparently ensure good dividends for commercial enterprises, commonly giving blessings for new business ventures. On one Sunday, I watched as Madi took time during regular proceedings to sketch a *maṇḍala* on a sign board of a store. The sign board had been brought by people from Mehsana who were starting a new business. The *maṇḍala* spoke to a measure of positive tantra enacted for a commercial end, in this case for the benefit of enterprising urban devotees.



Figure 14: Madi, holding the microphone, inaugurates *tāvo* in the hall outside the Kheda Melaḍī temple (Photo by Vimal Shukla)

Another practice at Kheda very much in line with village customs is the performance of *tāvo*, the aforementioned practice of cooking *pūrīs* (flatbreads) and then removing them by hand from the boiling oil in which they are frying. At the Kheda Melaḍī temple, *tāvo* is undertaken in the adjacent semi-enclosed hall, where perhaps a dozen pans are balanced upon bricks overtop small makeshift fire-pits (Figure 14). When I attended a *tāvo* ceremony in April 2015, a devotee stood watch while the fire-pits were constructed, holding in his hand a red parasol on a silver pole. The parasol would seem to mark another another kingly motif. Once the oil reached a boil, the uncooked *pūrīs* were inserted, and in due time they were eventually retrieved with the fingers of the men tending the fires. Spoons made from wood or metal are never permitted at this temple for drawing out the cooked *pūrīs*, as the extraction must be done manually with assistance of the

goddess. Even children are allowed to take part: “[t]o see a boy of an age of just 4-5 years,” the website has recounted, “removing suvali [the raw mixture] is a common [sight] and [there is] no surprise about it” (“Tavo,” Jay Maadi 2011). On the day I witnessed *tāvo*, after all the temple mainstays had finished flipping their *pūrīs*, Madi himself leaned over to dip his fingers in the hot oil. When he raised his oil-slicked hand, a rousing cheer rose up throughout the hall.

Participation in *tāvo* demonstrates the “utmost faith” in the goddess Melaḍī, as well as the power of her “darshan,” as the website has phrased it (“Tavo,” Jay Maadi 2011). Once again, the wording is crucial. In village contexts, the removal of *pūrīs* from oil is often done to demonstrate the strength of *pavan* of the goddess, but the term “*pavan*” is absent in conceptualizing *tāvo* at Kheda.

While various forms of religious expression are actively integrated in the Kheda temple’s repertoire, *pavan* is not one of them. On a later visit, I witnessed a curious incident that illustrated the determination of Madi and his temple trust to leave this aspect of village *mātā* worship *out* of their institution. On this specific Sunday, the proceedings had been mostly business-as-usual and were proceeding uneventfully with everyone seated for some routine *bhajan* singing. Suddenly, the *bhajans* were interrupted by a loud shriek. The cry had come from a middle-aged woman in glasses, to whom all eyes turned, at least for a few minutes. She began to warble loudly, soon after letting her hair loose as is customary of women who have become “unbound,” in a sense, with the presence of the spirit visiting them. Her mode of dress suggested she hailed from a Rajput caste. Quickly, two women arrived at her side with a garland to put around her neck, as well as some water, which they helped her drink. This, however, did not assuage the possession-like state. The woman vaulted up, a dread expression on her bespectacled face. As she swayed, another woman offered her physical support. All the seated people watched her carefully. She fixed her eyes on the *bhajan* singer and removed her glasses, staring him down. She eventually began to smile, shrieking some more, and then regained consciousness. At this point she was hurriedly led away. Unlike at some other shrines I had visited, no one had encouraged the woman in her *pavan*, and *bhajan* singing continued fairly sedately while her trance was ongoing. Asking around for further details after the ceremony concluded, I was informed—assured, even—that this woman’s *pavan* was not of Melaḍī Mātā, but rather of Mogal Mā, a goddess of some significance to her Rajput subgroup. This explanation, as well as the briskness with which this entire incident was handled, follows in the spirit of Madi’s general

circumspection regarding *pavan*. According to a member of the tailor community who was volunteering at the temple, *pavan* is not approved of at the complex. Because Madi does not want people to show off their “wind” of the goddess, he does not allow *pavan*, nor does he allow the *ḍāḱlu* drumming that so often encourages it. Like sacrifice, *pavan* marks another aspect of village *mātā* worship barred from the Kheda temple. Its mandated absence—or at least de-emphasis when it does happen—indexes a concern for restraint and orderliness that is in line with Brahminic or Vaiṣṇavic sensibilities but, perhaps more importantly, congruent with urban and middle-class tastes.

Madi has developed a profile that is international and cosmopolitan, and these descriptions can also be applied to the audience he is courting. On any given Sunday at the Kheda temple, it was not uncommon to see people from out of state and outside of India. I met, for instance, people who had come from Maharashtra. When Madi paid a visit to their village several years previous, they were quickly won over by his abilities. There are also international devotees hailing from North America, Africa, and Southeast Asia, as has been explained on the website:

Name of Kheda town and Bhagawati Shree Meladi Maa is ever up lifted, not only within India but also foreign countries like America, Canada, Kenya, Nairobi [sic], U.K., Malaysia, Shri Lanka...by an absolute [saviour], prophet, worthy of reverence, ever adorable beloved child of Bhagawati Shree Meladi Maa [that is to say, Madi] (“Garba,” 2011).

Madi’s reputation for efficacy precedes him, and he has certainly attracted a variety of devotees from around the globe. Indeed, on my visits to the temple I also met people visiting from the United States and the United Kingdom. One such individual was a distinguished British surgeon by the name of Dr. Patel, who visits the temple on his frequent working stopovers at the Kheda hospital, and counted himself among Madi’s most enthusiastic proponents. To this end, he stood up during the ceremonies one Sunday in May 2015 and offered a testimonial to the power of Madi’s *darśan*, comparing it to medical imaging technology.

Dr. Patel elucidated for me just how far Madi’s influence stretches. A specialist in renal cancer based out of King’s College, London, the youthful Dr. Patel was himself quite decorated. In his early forties, Dr. Patel claimed to be one of the highest ranked surgeons worldwide in terms of success rates of the operations he performs, and has published numerous journal articles and books in his subject area. Dr. Patel attested ardently to Madi’s incredible healing ability, which he characterized as a very real and ubiquitous manifestation of Śakti at full power. This

Śakti, in his assessment, operates far beyond the capabilities of medical science. Before being put into contact with Madi, Dr. Patel was not particularly religious: though he was not an atheist, he had no belief in Hindu customs such as touching the feet of the guru and so forth. Patel first met Madi in 1994 over the phone from London. Madi asked what it was that the young Patel wanted in life, and upon hearing his voice, Patel's immediate materialistic wants disappeared. Instead, he found himself asking for a blessing that would enable him to help other people all around the world. Madi promptly sent a blessing through the phone line. One year later, Madi was in London. Dr. Patel's mother, who had been having health problems involving leaking pus cells, went to see Madi, and Madi advised her against surgery. Instead, on the power of Madi's touch alone, the pus cells that had been suppurating for two-and-a-half years promptly stopped. Patel paid a visit to Madi thereafter, and the two embarked upon a conversation Patel described to me as "incredible." So impactful was their discussion that Patel missed a scheduled flight to the Mediterranean in order to prolong the talk. Patel and his sister ended up staying in the presence of Madi for two weeks, helping him out in whatever ways they could. Patel made a point of meeting Madi periodically thereafter. As of 2015, Dr. Patel attributed his growing profile as a medical professional, as well as his capacity to deliver advanced lectures in front of large groups of people, to Madi's sustained presence in his life. He even sought out Madi's approval when it came to determining his best possible spouse.

Dr. Patel explained in his brief speech to the Kheda temple faithful that Madi's *darśan* is like an fMRI, in that Madi can see into people and diagnose any ailment. Dr. Patel expanded upon this in conversations with me. Madi has scanned thousands of debilitated people and, upon looking into them, drawn pictures of fistulas and tumours that have subsequently proven useful in curing their illnesses. Dr. Patel claimed that scientific apparatuses have substantiated Madi's findings, as scans of the inside of the body made by Madi have synched up with those of actual medical imaging equipment. When people diagnosed with brain tumours have gone to Madi, he has been able to describe the tumour before the sufferer has even entered the room. In this way, Madi's *darśan* far surpasses the best tools of medical science, in Dr. Patel's appraisal. A surgeon may take an hour to make a diagnosis, and a computer takes about ten seconds, but for Madi it all happens in an instant. Madi is plugged into this Śakti power like broadband, Dr. Patel explained, and with this ability he can diagnose people anywhere in the world. The doctor

attested to this personally, as Madi at one point diagnosed ailments of Patel's own family members from thousands of miles away.

Dr. Patel felt that he himself has benefitted immeasurably from the power of the goddess. He mused that Melaḍī has helped improve his karma, and has also kept his ego in check. But these benefits extend beyond the personal sphere, and Dr. Patel was also of the belief that he can use whatever he has been given by the goddess to help others, especially with regard to his practice. At one point Madi advised him that, before entering the operating room, he should pray to Melaḍī Mātā, requesting that she enter his hands. Dr. Patel claimed that this is a ritual he undertakes before every surgery, asking the goddess to make his hands into hers. For this reason, Dr. Patel attributed his exceedingly high rating in surgery performance to Melaḍī. The religious aspect did not, however, conflict with the scientific aspect because, in Dr. Patel's view, good doctors help people not just at the level of the body or the mind, but also on the spiritual level. Ultimately, Dr. Patel explained that he felt successful on this spiritual plane, an attainment that seems to have manifested itself in his surgical proficiency.

This immense faith in Madi and Melaḍī has inspired Dr. Patel to visit the hospital in Kheda one week out of every month. Working alongside Madi in diagnosing and treating a variety of ailments such as HIV, tuberculosis, and cancer, among others, Patel claimed to have seen firsthand the efficacy of Madi's healing in practice, and has taken a vested interest in amassing information on these miraculous feats. This has included compiling countless stories of *camatkārs*. In one such narrative, a headmaster of a music school in South India (himself a devout Christian) experienced liver failure. After consulting the top doctors in India and getting several opinions in the United States, he was still without a cure, and became jaundiced. The expense of a transplant was too much of a financial burden for the headmaster, and so Dr. Patel arranged to fly him up to Gujarat. Madi saw the headmaster and advised him to have a rest and then to come back and eat. When the headmaster returned, Madi told the staff chef to prepare extremely hot food. The headmaster finished his food and went to sleep. He stayed in the local hospital for three months to follow, having his blood tested every few days. Medical scans chronologically documented an improvement in liver function. By the time the headmaster left, his blood tests were normal, which Dr. Patel attributed solely to faith. The headmaster's weight and hunger steadily increased, and he was able to return to teaching. Similarly, Dr. Patel has witnessed groups of tuberculosis sufferers treated successfully with yogurt and ghee from Madi's

stables. Madi has also helped patients suffering from spinal problems caused by accidents and strokes. Dr. Patel has even seen HIV-positive patients treated here without anti-viral medication. In my own visits to the temple I heard similar stories relaying as much, such as that told by Prajapati Patel, a potter from Nadiad. Prajapati Patel claimed that, with help from Madi, his cancer was cured. Basically, through Melaḍī's *aiśvarya*, Madi has demonstrated himself to be a veritable force against a number of conditions mainstream medicine has difficulty treating. All of this has been done without a fee; just as is the case with donations, the terms of Madi's agreement with the goddess dictate that Madi must not risk taking advantage of people by charging them.

Less anecdotally, the local hospital has also allowed Dr. Patel to collect five years of prospective data on their patients and temple visitors who have interfaced with Madi. Patel claimed to have accumulated enough information to scientifically say that there is statistically significant improvement in people with ailments after they meet with Madi. While many cases involving other diseases have proven difficult to collect follow-up data on (as the healed often do not come back), Dr. Patel said he would not be averse to publishing some of the data he has collected in a peer-reviewed journal. At the same time, however, he did not want to put Madi's ineffable healing power into print disrespectfully. When I asked Dr. Patel what his Western medical colleagues thought about his religious beliefs in Madi and Melaḍī, he explained that because he was senior in his position, his associates have had little choice but to defer to him. So strong is his faith, he claimed, he has no problem putting his reputation on the line.

At Kheda, then, we see a profound expression of the immediacy and efficacy of Śakti delivered in both Sanskrit and even quasi-scientific trappings. The incorporation of Sanskrit chants and *havans* establishes a Brahminic atmosphere around Melaḍī, as does the expurgation of animal sacrifices and stimulants all the way down to chai, which ensures the goddess stays purely *sāttvik*. While *tāvo* continues to be a part of the ritual repertoire, ecstatic or village elements are otherwise difficult to find or de-emphasized when they do arise, as is the case with *pavan*. This *sāttvik*, Sanskrit, and restrained register is consonant with the temple's overall orderliness, as well as its displays of prosperity, community involvement, and intercontinental scope, all of which are amenable to visitors performing middle-classness. Madi's ecumenism, displayed by his venturing out and healing across religious boundaries, speaks further to this worldliness. The seemingly scientifically-verifiable quality of Madi's work, as attested to by

people such as Dr. Patel, meanwhile, demonstrates Melaḍī's relevance in an increasingly technologically-advanced world—a world in which the middle and upwardly mobile classes become deeper immersed on a daily basis. At Kheda, Melaḍī is not “backward,” as elite stereotypes might dictate, but profoundly forward, the power she provides to Madi capable of interfacing with and even outpacing medical science in its ability to heal. The “dark” goddess apparently shines brighter than science, and there are high profile devotees at Kheda who can vouch for this. Dr. Patel's presence among the speakers at the Kheda temple is crucial, then, as his superlative ranking in medical science apparently lends an epistemic legitimacy to the miraculous healing powers attributed to Madi and Melaḍī. Moreover, Dr. Patel embodies the kind of (upper) middle-class success story Melaḍī can readily make, marking a metonym for Madi and his temple that demonstrates the Kheda complex's potentialities for healing, prosperity, and global reach.

KAIYAL

Perhaps the most archetypal of the urban temple complexes to Melaḍī is the Mā Melaḍī Kaiyal Dham located near the village of Kaiyal in Mehsana District, approximately 45 kilometres from Ahmedabad near the important Nandasand junction. On its website, the temple trust has worked hard to evoke a halcyon image of the locale for the potential visitor, waxing on about its thriving landscape and well-maintained roads, as well as its multicultural, multilingual residents who “live [a] happy life without any discrimination and with mutual understanding” (“History,” Jaimadi 2011).¹⁷⁵

The Kaiyal temple's spiritual head is Shri Raman Madi (Figure 15), a member of the Chamar community and therefore of Dalit origin. The Chamars were customarily employed as leatherworkers and, due to their contact with highly pollutant dead animal skins, were considered ritually impure. Raman Madi and his family, however, did not allow caste stigma to affect their religious and economic lives. Raman Madi's father worked as a farmer, and though he often faced poverty, he and his wife laboured determinedly to feed their family. Raman Madi's parents were equally dedicated to Melaḍī. The devotion of Raman Madi's father intensified in his adult life in the wake of having two of his buffaloes stolen from him. He vowed to Melaḍī that if she

¹⁷⁵ The links to this page and others from the Kaiyal temple website are, as of 2019, dead. However, I was able to salvage text from the site's 2011 iteration, and that is what is cited from here onward.

helped him get his buffaloes back, he would honour her by presenting an oil lamp to her every day. Much later, he ended up reuniting with the lost livestock in a town 60 kilometres away from Kaiyal. It was not, however, Raman Madi's father who recognized the buffaloes; rather, the buffaloes recognized *him*. Raman Madi's father interpreted this fortuitous reunion as a *camatkār* and from then on carried out his daily devotions as promised.



Figure 15: Raman Madi at Kaiyal (Photo by Vimal Shukla)

Raman Madi was born in 1963, and he quickly took after his parents with respect to religion. From an early age, Raman Madi involved himself in religious acts and helping others. He would, for instance, offer food to priests and devotees passing through the area, sometimes arranging accommodations for them in the family home. Throughout his youth, Raman Madi not only worshipped Melaḍī, but he also tended shrines to her and Cāmuṇḍā located near his family

home. During the Navarātri festival, he and his friends would “spring clean and refurbish” these sites, as it has been phrased on the temple website (“History,” Jaimadi 2011). Raman Madi would spend all nine nights of Navarātri engaged in prayer. In fact, Raman Madi’s mind was so passionately fixated on Melaḍī, he was not able to fully concentrate on his studies.

After a lackluster performance on his secondary exams, Raman Madi settled into a job working for the Gujarat state telecommunications department. This saw him relocate to Ahmedabad, where he currently lives in a well-furnished apartment with his wife and teenage children. It seems he had attained to this comfortable middle-class lifestyle before the pivotal religious experience that changed the course of his life. Even in the story of Raman Madi’s *camatkār* there is something of a charmingly middle-class quality. The *camatkār* took place at a shopping mall in Ahmedabad, to which Raman had come to watch an exhibition in marathon bike-riding—a person attempting to ride a stationary bicycle for 72 hours. As Raman Madi took in the event, an elderly woman worked her way through the sizeable crowd to approach him, asking him if he would keep an eye on her shawl until she came back, presumably from shopping. Raman Madi stayed around for four hours, but the woman did not reappear to reclaim her shawl. As Raman Madi’s concern grew, he made sure an announcement was sent out to the mall patrons about the unclaimed shawl. Still the woman did not show, and so Raman reluctantly kept the shawl. The following night, Melaḍī appeared in Raman Madi’s dreams, claiming that he had been given the shawl as a gift rewarding his devotion to his elders and his family. The shawl itself symbolized Melaḍī’s divine eternal power that was now Raman Madi’s to share for the betterment of society. After that, people started to seek out Raman Madi, and a following gradually grew around him. Soon enough, he had sufficient financial resources to oversee the construction of the present-day compound on land he owned along with his father and brothers near Kaiyal. The compound has operated here for around 30 years as of 2019.

The compound at present is marked off by an elegant metal gate that opens onto capacious temple grounds enshrouded with verdant foliage. Twice-weekly *pūjās* and public performances currently happen in a semi-enclosed, Quonset-like main hall. The front of this hall is decorated with pictures of previous events that have taken place at the present site during its 20 year history. Higher up on the canopy, the inner perimeter features plaques commemorating more than 30 of the most prominent Melaḍī temples in Gujarat, effectively placing the Kaiyal temple amongst that special network of sites. During my fieldwork in 2015, the temple featured two

primary *mūrtis*: firstly, a picture of Melaḍī, and secondly, an elaborate wood-carving of the goddess. Numerous banners throughout the main hall identified the goddess as “Bhagavatī Melaḍī,” which Raman Madi described as a Śakti in the same category of Bahucarā and Ambā. He characterized these pan-Gujarati (and to some degree pan-Indic) *mātā* prototypes—and Melaḍī as well, by extension—as upper-caste, upper-class goddesses favourable to Rajputs, Patels, and Brahmins, and worthy of *śakti-pīṭhas*. While the Quonset-like hall hosts most ritual gatherings at present, soon enough the Sunday *pūjās* and other ceremonies will move toward the larger, classical-styled temple that was under construction further back on the grounds during my visits. This new temple has been paid for with donations from the community of worshippers. Donations will also allow for a new main image of Melaḍī in this temple—specifically, a *mūrti* of the goddess wrought from marble.

The temple’s wealth is only growing, and this new money has been delegated not just to upgrades but also to social services. The temple has overseen blood donation camps, treatment for cataracts, physical check-ups for women and children, and has also provided medical attention for the poor. On occasion, the temple has also sponsored major operations for ailing devotees. Raman Madi told me that he wants to promote education alongside religion, and so the temple trust provides school materials to children and awards scholarships for academic standouts in the tenth, eleventh and twelfth standards. Additionally, the temple sponsors anti-addiction camps for smoking, gambling, and alcoholism. A temple dedicated to a goddess once worshipped with liquor offerings, then, is now taking initiatives to treat and prevent alcoholism in its surrounding community. These anti-addiction initiatives have proven highly successful, rehabilitating addicts and getting them involved in volunteer work at the site. The resources dedicated to this social outreach stem from the five core objectives that have been listed on the temple website, which I lightly paraphrase here: (1) Stop believing blind faiths and fake orthodox beliefs, (2) Become addiction free, (3) [Avoid] gender discrimination, (4) Save daughters/female child and (5) Be literate, religious and help the nation (“Social Service,” Jaimadi 2011). In its concern for equal rights for women and low castes, the Kaiyal temple has established itself as very progressive, which parallels Raman Madi’s basic political outlook. On the wall of the main room in his Ahmedabad home, for example, he has hung a plaque bearing

the visage of Ambedkar, suggesting a staunchly pro-Dalit social agenda.¹⁷⁶ However, the spirit of sharing and generosity operates for the most part in simpler, less politicized ways. For instance, the regulars at the Kaiyal temple take it as their duty to treat every passerby with chai if they can. This hospitality goes beyond human visitors. Even the birds flying in and out of the site are well taken care of, as there is an ornate pigeon-roost in front of the main hall that towers over the rest of the temple grounds. As of 2015, there were plans to expand the temple's outreach-based infrastructure, funds permitting. A long-term goal has been the eventual addition of a guest house and a free hospital.

These initiatives and the wealth that makes them possible appear to be extensions of the general prosperity of the region; they may also correlate with the wealth possessed—or attained to—by the community of worshippers that visits, which gives indications of striving toward middle-classness. The individuals and families who consult one-on-one with Raman Madi, for instance, often bring with them upwardly mobile, middle-class concerns. These consultation sessions, referred to as “sitting *pāṭlā*,” typically involved the throwing of seeds, a carryover from earlier *bhuvā*-based divination. While consultations at Kaiyal regularly centred upon assistance for health problems and the birth of children (as is the case in both village and urban *pāṭlās* at a variety of goddess temples across Gujarat), Raman Madi also handled an array of more twenty-first century concerns. On the day I sat in on these sessions in June of 2015, a teenage girl came in with hopes of bolstering her grades so as to aid her admission into a college of mechanical engineering. After that came a Patel woman who consulted Raman Madi in hopes of getting the goddess's blessing for obtaining a work visa to the United States. This is the “American Dream” for Patels, though visa applications have often been a difficult acquisition for members of the group, as the Patel surname has been earmarked by American governmental authorities on account of its association with illegal immigration. Finally, a father and son came in and retreaded a lengthy debate on prospective motor-vehicle purchases, which they hoped Raman Madi could contact the goddess in order to solve. The son wanted a Hayabusa motorcycle, while the father insisted that a car was the better investment; after Raman Madi tossed the seeds, Melaḍī ruled on the side of the father and the car. Given the nature of the requests and concerns

¹⁷⁶ Bhimrao Ambedkar (1891-1956) was a Western-educated Dalit-rights activist who played a prominent role in shaping the Indian constitution. A tireless opponent of caste, he eventually led a mass conversion of depressed classes to Buddhism just weeks before his death. For more on Ambedkar, see Christophe Jaffrelot's *Dr. Ambedkar and Untouchability: Fighting the Indian Caste System* (2005).

of these devotees, the temple clearly draws in a middle-class (or at least upwardly mobile) audience with aspirations spanning vehicle ownership, higher education, and international citizenship. Evidently, a significant portion of the visiting devotees has disposable income, or at least *seeks* to have as much, moving them into a world of commodities such as cars, bikes, and perhaps most crucially, computers. The temple trust seems to be enthused about courting the middle class through its online presence. Accordingly, signs advertising the temple's Facebook page have been draped in the main hall.

This Facebook page has over 3,600 followers as of 2019, suggesting that a large portion of the temple's devotees have access to tech. Between 5,000 and 7,000 people typically attend *pūrṇimā* (the full moon day), one of the major monthly events at the temple. When I inquired of Raman Madi and other temple devotees as to whom exactly it is that attends the Kaiyal temple, I received a variation of the same answer I had heard at other major suburban complexes dedicated to Melaḍī. The response was, quite simply, "everyone." In part, this assessment conveyed the geographic diversity of the visitors, who came from all over Gujarat and beyond. I met, for instance, an actor from Mumbai who had a minor role in a soon-to-be released film. Also, I met a man named Rocky Patel, who had recently come back from the United States, where he had earned his living and his moniker. Raman Madi also has a significant contingent of followers in the United Kingdom, and so he has journeyed there on a number of occasions for temple dedications and other events. In fact, he travelled there and back while I was conducting my 2015 fieldwork. But over and above the transregional and transnational following, this "everyone" response also keeps with a middle-class sensibility of democracy and generally egalitarian values, accepting all people without casteism or classism. As it has been explained on the complex's website: "[e]very single visitor at the temple is welcomed equally and ambience itself helps the visitors to feel the peace" ("History," Jaimadi 2011). Looking a little more specifically into the caste makeup of the visitors that drifted in and out of the temple on Sundays and Tuesdays, I found that many hailed from non-elite groups. Most were lower-caste or Dalit, and there were also some Adivasi people in the mix. That said, there were also Patels and Solanki Rajputs in attendance, as well as some Brahmins.

The ritual repertoire of the Kaiyal temple on Sundays and Tuesdays, while vernacular and devotional, certainly would not disturb upper-caste sensibilities. The standard proceedings were fairly basic when compared to other suburban Melaḍī temples, consisting mostly of Raman Madi

leading prayers and worship for the hundreds seated in the main hall. At various junctures along the way, guest speakers shared religious stories and anecdotes of local saints. All the while, Raman Madi listened intently, seated on a custom-made couch comprised of a mattress pillowed with large, tubular arms. These presentations were interspersed with Gujarati devotional *bhajans* led by a troupe of vocalists and drummers, who were periodically showered with ten rupee notes by temple trustees. Some attendees sang along with the *bhajans*. Others approached Madi to bow before him and receive *darśan*, and he greeted them with a warm smile. Everything took place in a fairly orderly but laid-back fashion. The focal point of the typical temple ceremonies was Raman Madi's offering of *āratī* to Melaḍī, in which he waved the *jyot* in front of the central images of the goddess. For this process, Raman Madi donned a black shall—I neglected to ask whether or not this was the shawl from the original *camatkār*, though the symbolic homology is nonetheless apparent. Raman Madi's *āratī* is for the most part standard, save for the fact that he offers the candle on the upturned palm of his hand without any protective material, letting the flame burn down to his flesh. This technique, which Raman Madi claimed to have adopted 20 years previous, is employed at some village shrines, including the smaller of the two Paroli temples. Unlike the Paroli temple, however, no one poured water over Raman Madi's hand to cool it throughout the process. As the flame burned down, sweat beaded on his brow, devotion pulling him through the palpable physical discomfort.

Aside from this *āratī*, there were few overt aspects of village religion within Kaiyal's temple-based ceremonies. In a nod to a universalistic, Advaitic non-dualism, Raman Madi proclaimed to me that "Śakti is one." As such, he characterized the use of *tāmasik* or *sāttvik* rituals largely as a function of the preferences of particular communities. That said, it is quite apparent what side he favours. Like the Madi at Kheda (with whom he is friends), Raman Madi insisted that there should be no showing off of *pavan*. For this reason, people who get a wind of the goddess at Kaiyal are not encouraged but instead helped gently out of their trance. Accordingly, when I mentioned to Raman Madi the episode with the woman who got *pavan* at Kheda, he seemed to approve of the efficient, discreet manner in which that situation was handled. *Prasād*, meanwhile, is strictly vegetarian at Kaiyal, consisting of the coconuts or gourds that have become the standard offerings at urban *mātā* temples. Additionally, a mixture of ground-up white millet and jaggery is left for the goddess during Navarātri. Raman Madi decries animal sacrifice, not only in word but in deed as well. He told me of one instance in which he

heard of a temple where the *pūjārī*, a member of the martial Vaghela Rajputs, was allowing people to perform sacrifices to Melaḍī. Madi promptly brought a complaint against the temple to the authorities, ensuring that the practice was put to a stop.

The Kaiyal complex becomes more overtly Brahminical and Sanskritic in feel during special events. This was the case when I attended the temple's *pāṭotsav* celebration in October 2015. For this occasion, a massive tent had been set up beside the main hall. It housed approximately 30 makeshift fire pits, each of which was attended by a married couple who participated in the performance of a mass *havan* under the supervision of a Brahmin, who chanted Sanskrit mantras and *ślokas* throughout the undertaking. This large-scale *havan* was an unambiguous affirmation of Vedic orthodoxy. Similarly, the much-touted guest appearances of famed ochre-robed sadhus from around the country, as well as a swami from the major Jagannath temple in Ahmedabad, further underscored the pan-Indian, Sanskritic feel. The *pāṭotsav* was at the same time a celebration of the temple's prosperity, and displays of wealth were in no short supply. In a rousing intro, a troupe of drummers accompanied Raman Madi as he made his grand entrance into the *pāṭotsav* tent. As a reward for their performance, Madi showered the drummers with a heaping handful of ten rupee notes. Soon after, multiple devotees rushed up to Raman Madi, draping him with luxurious saris. All the while, multiple camerapersons wove through the grounds, their feed broadcasting on a giant screen in the tent, as well as live for a television audience throughout India and across the world. Telegenic spectacles abounded. Inside the tent, for instance, a large square table bore a staggering variety of food offerings and, just as impressively, the word "Mā" in Gujarati script grown out of grass, a minor horticultural marvel (Figure 16).

The pinnacle of the celebration came in the evening when the temple carried out its own version of the *tulāpuruṣadāna*, a classical method of gifting in which a person's weight is matched in gold or other precious metals. At this *pāṭotsav*, donors to the Kaiyal temple matched Raman Madi's weight with bars of silver. Raman Madi was seated on an oversized scale positioned on one of the main stages while the silver bars—many of which had been given by Patels or Solankis—were placed on a counterweight. Within half an hour, a vigorous cheer surged through the tent as the silver lifted Madi off the stage. And, as fortune would have it, the donated bars ended up outweighing Madi considerably. This inspired *garba*-styled singing within the crowd. The singing was followed by an extended performance of *ārati* by Raman

Madi, who was fully enthralled by his ritual service to the main *mūrtis*. Once *ārati* was finished, Raman Madi turned the candle toward the crowd, which stampeded to get a swipe at the flame as Madi carried it through the hall.



Figure 16: The name of “Mā” spelled out in grass at the 2015 Kaiyal *pāṭotsav* (note the many varieties of food offerings in the background) (Photo by author)

For special occasions of this sort, the Kaiyal complex evidently goes all-out in terms of ritual register and budget. Such was also the case on Navarātri a few years previous, where Melaḍī was presented with another massive feast, this one featuring 56 variations of sweets and other culinary delights. This clearly borrows from the sacred gastronomies that have become a trademark of influential Gujarati Vaiṣṇava traditions. Puṣṭimārg has long been known for its lavish food offerings to Śrīnāthjī, and the largescale edible offerings made by Swaminarayan

affiliates have been increasingly publicized of late.¹⁷⁷ In this way, an offering of such scale marks a double-layered Vaiṣṇavization, part of (or parallel to) the Sanskritization that seems to be taking place resoundingly at the Kaiyal temple judging from the prominence of *havans* and Sanskrit chanting—not to mention the increased presence of Brahmins—observable at its *pāṭotsav*.

The prevalence of these ritual modes and aesthetics marks a concerted cultivation and deployment of Sanskritic, mainstream Hinduism as per Gujarati imaginings. These “properly Hindu” ideas also inform the general de-emphasis or disavowal of ecstatic ritual practices such as *pavan*, alcohol oblations, and animal sacrifice. It bears repeating that all three of these elements fail to meet the standards of Vaiṣṇava restraint, as well as Brahminic notions of pure and impure. In view of this new standard of purity, Melaḍī now has the opportunity to move beyond her indistinct village identity as ghost and goddess. Certainly, at Kaiyal she is fit to be deemed exclusively the latter—and of the highest order, no less, representing a singular Śakti worthy of elaborate, Sanskritic temples familiar to devotees across varied regions. Indeed, Kaiyal has been referred to quite ambitiously as a “major shakti Peeth of India” on its temple website (“Index,” Jaimadi 2011). Although the temple is not on any of the “official” lists of *śakti-pīṭhas*, such lists are multiform by nature and therefore negotiable. Thus, even the suggestion that Kaiyal *could* be considered as one among this transregional network of Hindu goddess sites has currency in itself. This sort of pan-Indian figuring suggests a movement toward universalization. But tied up in these aforementioned practices, principles, and prohibitions are also sensibilities not exclusively religious. The tidy atmosphere, orderly proceedings, and the acceptance of virtually everyone at the Kaiyal Melaḍī temple all cater to increasingly gentrifying tastes. It is these middle-class discriminations, I contend, that also shape the temple’s prominent sensitivities to prosperity, commodities, and the upwardly mobile aspirations of the devotees who make wishes upon Melaḍī. Melaḍī Mātā and her Kaiyal confines have essentially been cleaned up for an emergent middle class.

¹⁷⁷ Among other means of pleasing the infant Kṛṣṇa, Puṣṭimārg Vaiṣṇavas attempt to feed him luxuriously. Best known of the large food festivals is that of the “56 Delicacies,” where 56 recipes prepared five or six ways are offered in 56 baskets, making for 21,952 potential offerings (Toomey 1990, 168). Not to be outdone, the Swaminarayan fold has popularized offerings of 108 varieties of food. Also of increasing scale at Swaminarayan establishments is the *annakut* ceremony, which is held during Diwali and is named for its central offering: a heaping “mountain” of rice.

When I asked Raman Madi about the transformation he has witnessed in Melaḍī Mātā over the course of his lifetime, he encapsulated the shift in much the same fashion I just have, though his explanation cuts through the academic jargon and gets directly to the point. In the past 40 to 50 years, he estimated, Melaḍī's rituals, prayer, and worship have seen big changes. Previously, it was thought Melaḍī was lower-class or lower-caste by way of her link with *tāmas* elements such as hard alcohol and sacrifice. But under the inspiration of *pūjārīs* at small *ḍerīs* who had “positive qualities”—and with great effort—the image of the goddess was changed to not wanting liquor or meat. There was a shift, then, from *tāmasik* to *sāttvik*. This kind of shift, Raman Madi suggested, has attracted middle and elite classes such as Patels and Jains, all of whom became gradually impressed. As a result, large temples to Melaḍī came to be constructed. So while Saujibhai of the Vadi settlement in Dhrangadhra seemed neutral to Melaḍī's recent transformations, seeing both the *tāmasik* and *sāttvik* approaches to her worship as capable of coexistence, neither being superior in effectiveness, Raman Madi clearly favours the cleaned-up Melaḍī. To be sure, he has linked her evolving profile to the positive, purifying efforts made by low castes and classes against sacrifice and alcohol, as well as the increased participation of elite caste and class groups. For Raman Madi, all of the above has changed Melaḍī for the better.

JASALPUR

It was Raman Madi who first directed me to the Melaḍī temple in Jasalpur, a small village on the outskirts of Kadi. The Jasalpur temple, a complex in the fullest sense, bears tightknit connections to other Melaḍī sites in the area, including not only the one at Kaiyal but also an older temple in central Kadi with ties to the Gaekwar Malharav (r. 1870-1875).¹⁷⁸ These are just two of many temples in India and abroad with which the Jasalpur temple is linked; indeed, it is an internationally connected site. This is a function of the far-reaching networks of the Jasalpur community, whose collaborative efforts both locally and worldwide made the construction of the temple possible. Community and collaboration are paramount at Jasalpur. Unlike the other major suburban Melaḍī temples we have visited, the Jasalpur temple does not revolve around a single

¹⁷⁸ The Melaḍī temple in Kadi is reportedly 300 years old, based on local estimates, and was expanded to its current, architecturally impressive seven-storey structure around 50 years ago. Visitors climb steps in order to see the small niche housing Melaḍī at the very top. The temple traces its history back to the Gaekwar Malharav, who, as we will soon see, has ties to Jasalpur. Based on these connections, the current *pūjārī* of the Kadi temple and his elderly grandmother each suggested that all subsequent prominent Melaḍī temples—especially Kaiyal and Jasalpur—were influenced by Kadi. At present, the temple itself is rather low-key compared to other Melaḍī sites and, by report of the main *pūjārī* I spoke to, hosts only one major annual event, which takes place on Āṣādhī.

charismatic figure. While there is a main *pūjārī* hailing from the Nāth *sampradāya*, he maintained a low profile during my visits. Instead, the temple is predominantly based around the Jasalpur community and surrounding villages as a whole, especially the local Patels who have succeeded abroad. The vibrantly-wrought Jasalpur Melaḍī temple and its sprawling outlying complex, then, serve as self-affirming testaments to the collective hard work and global industriousness of Patels hailing from the area. Moreover, the quite literally upwardly mobile Melaḍī that is worshipped therein can be thought of as representative of the past successes and future potentialities of the Jasalpur community, Patel and otherwise, writ large.

According to locals, the story of the Jasalpur temple—and Melaḍī herself—begins with a well, or *vāv*. As we have already seen in Chapter Two, wells have long been associated with female ghosts and *mātās* in Gujarati folklore, and such is the case for the Jasalpur Melaḍī. It was from a *vāv* in Jasalpur that Melaḍī was “self-born” (*svayambhū*) 700 years ago, according to the temple’s website (“About Us,” Jaymeldi-Jasalpur 2017). Following this on the website is a story of local fame that I heard reiterated by several Jasalpur devotees and that has also been made into a short film of medium-high production value.¹⁷⁹ In this narrative, a stepwell was discovered at this present-day location by the Gaekwar Malharav and his retinue. Impressed with the quality of the sandstone, Malharav fancied the idea of extracting the brickwork so as to incorporate it into his palace in Kadi. He put his idea into action and damaged the stepwell in the process, raising the ire of the goddess. In time, a small *ḍerī* developed at the site, and it swiftly gained a reputation for *camatkārs*. As it was one of the few sources of water in the area, locals frequently visited the site. In one oft-cited instance, a young girl came to fetch water and fell into the well, which was 80 feet deep with only about 25 feet of water. The girl was saved from drowning, however, as she was lifted out by an invisible force. Astonishingly, witnesses reported that the girl’s hair remained dry. Then, an agitation began inside the well-water, which the girl’s on-looking sister and father described as being akin to cyclonic activity. From this tempest arose an earthenware pot with an oil lamp inside it. This was, of course, the *garbo* of Melaḍī. Comparable cases have since been reported where people fell down the well but did not drown, their bodies always staying above the water level. As a bonus *camatkār*, the well has deepened preternaturally in recent times. People explained to me that while the well-water was hardly 15 feet deep three or four decades ago, now it is 350 feet or deeper by some reckonings. This has

¹⁷⁹ This video is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1iSaqmC8EJg&t=610s>.

been aided in part by unseasonal rains that apparently come to the area every Navarātri, causing considerable leakage but never damaging the images of the goddess. This outcome has been counted by some as yet another *camatkār*. All told, the *vāv*, with its ever-rising watermark, seems like a suitable metaphor for the prosperity of this largely agrarian Jasalpur community.

The present-day temple complex is the most noticeable index of the area's good fortune. If asked to identify the most beautiful of the Melaḍī shrines, I would be hard-pressed not to include the Jasalpur temple among the top contenders. Built in the late 1980s, the pink sandstone *vimāna* ("temple tower") slides into view over the treeline well before the car passenger reaches the ostentatious gate marking off the Jasalpur town boundary. Once inside the community, there is a hamlet-sized conglomeration of temple-affiliated outbuildings. To enter the temple itself, the visitor passes through an elaborate archway with three porticos beneath tall, swaying palm trees. This leads into a courtyard where the original *vāv* is located. When I visited, the *vāv* was under restoration for its inauguration in the fall of 2016. The temple itself consists of two shrines on two levels. The top level is an outdoor, many-pillared hall wrought from pink sandstone. The lower level is built from white marble. On the top level, the brass rails and carvings in the sandstone pillars give one the impression of being in a luxurious Swaminarayan temple. During my first visit, Sanskrit mantras played gently in the background. The local man who guided me around the temple was Mr. Trivedi (a pseudonym), a Brahmin among many Patels. He described the temple as 100-percent Brahminic and *sāttvik*, with ghee-suffused *sukhḍi* serving as the *prasād*. The top-level shrine features a marble *mūrti* of Melaḍī, which bears a crown. The *jyot* that burns in front of the goddess, I was told, originally came from the older Kadi temple. Mr. Trivedi also explained that there has been a yantra beneath the *mūrti* for the past 20 or 30 years. The combination of crown and tantric accoutrements, not to mention the proximity to Kadi wherein the prominent Śrīvidyā temple is located, prompted me to ask if there was a Rājarājeśvarī connection drawn here. Mr. Trivedi and others all agreed that there was not. Rather, the Jasalpur Melaḍī is known by her own unique epithet, which appears on many of the temple publications. Travelling down into the lower level, which is labyrinthine and lends a mighty echo to even the most offhand comment, one can see elaborate illustrations of Melaḍī rising up from the well as per the temple's foundational *camatkār*. In these images, the goddess bears the title Ūgtai Mātā, literally "rising mother." This name, of course, corresponds directly with the "Ūgtī" Melaḍī mentioned at Beherempur and Dhrangadhra. Here, however, the title is

attached to the specific imagery and motif of the goddess emerging from the *vāṇ*. In this ever-rising capacity for which she is named, the goddess of the *vāṇ* in Jasalpur is quite literally upwardly mobile, much like the founding members of the temple and many of its patrons.

The temple's affiliated area is also extensive and replete with amenities. Nearby the temple is located a guest house for pilgrims and a lush, spacious garden. There is also a giant kitchen for feeding devotees and an adjacent dining hall. Marriages are often conducted in this area. As was the case at Kaiyal, there is a temple-funded bird sanctuary of which the community members I met were especially proud. Interspersed between these various locales and features are a number of shrines and small temples to other goddesses. One such mini-temple has been dedicated to Jogaṇī Mā, another Patel mainstay. There are plans to add further goddess temples surrounding the *vāṇ* as per the request of locals, as it was understood that people have particularized preferences regarding the female divinities they like to worship, such as Cāmuṇḍā or Jogaṇī or others. According to Rocky Patel (not to be confused with the Rocky Patel of Kaiyal), a well-travelled, easy-going member of the community whom I befriended, a visit to Jasalpur is like “one-stop shopping” for goddess worship. When I asked Rocky about all the additional buildings and shrines, he characterized them as a means of saying “thank you” to Melaḍī for two things: firstly, all the wealth they had amassed; and secondly, the fact that all their “work” was able to be completed. “Work” referred here not just to the building of the temple or the careers of the townspeople, but more broadly evoked a sense of tenacious, spiritually-driven exertion.

The prosperity given to the Jasalpur temple trust by Melaḍī has also been paid forward. To that end, the temple is deeply involved in the surrounding community and oversees a number of charitable organizations. The temple has, for instance, provided money toward renovating the local hospital, which had until recently been in disrepair. This investment in the hospital has made possible the establishment of medical camps for locals. These camps provide periodic checkups for blood pressure, heart problems, joint pain, and diabetes, among other conditions. Usually, there is only a token charge of 10 rupees for these sorts of checkups. Rocky told me that almost 500 patients attended one of these camps on a Sunday leading up to Diwali 2015. The temple has also funded renovations for the local school, which is now providing an improved educational experience for the children. As a whole, these temple initiatives appear to have enhanced the quality of life in Jasalpur. Residents I spoke with often noted that the growth of the village has accelerated after they started worship of Ūgtai Melaḍī. The goddess and her “rising”

nature seem to signify and support the upsurge of her worshippers. Indeed, she is considered instrumental in bringing widespread agricultural prosperity to the area and creating opportunities for members of the community—particularly Patels—to earn money abroad.

The temple reportedly attracts 2,000 to 3,000 people on a typical Sunday, and upwards of 10,000 on *pūrṇimā*. When I asked Rocky Patel and Mr. Trivedi about who came to worship at Jasalpur, they both repeated the familiar refrain, declaring that their temple is for “everyone.” Rocky suggested there were no restrictions on who could attend; similarly, Mr. Trivedi described the temple as an “open club.” This is demonstrated on the website, which contains a listing of the caste-groups that attend the temple: Brahmins, Suthars, Darjis, Rabaris, Thakors, and various clans of Rajputs, as well as “Harijans” (“About Us,” Jaymeldi-Jasalpur 2017). These people come from diverse regions of India—Mumbai, Hyderabad, and Rajasthan, among others—and diverse religions as well. I heard from a number of sources that some Muslims attended the complex. In fact, the complex bore close connections to a Melaḍī temple patronized by a Sayid Muslim community in the town of Nandasan, the busy junction very close to Kaiyal.¹⁸⁰ That temple, like the Melaḍī temple at Kadi, also features a stone that was brought from the Jasalpur *vāv* by the Gaekwar Malharav. To account for this kind of pluralism, Rocky Patel drew upon Advaitic language and suggested that the goddess is one, but manifests in different forms as per Christian, Islamic, or Hindu customs. As is the case at other temples, Rocky’s line of theologizing makes Melaḍī once again into the Great Goddess. Rocky goes further, however, by framing her not just in a pan-Indian or pan-Hindu sense, but actually in a pan-religious mode.

Looking beyond the laudable diversity, the driving force behind the Jasalpur temple is clearly a Patel majority. The board of directors is made up almost entirely of Patels, and virtually all of the donors listed on the wall in the main courtyard in proximity to the well are Patels, both local and American. An exhaustive registry of such donors is included on the website, with Patels—often based in the United States—listed recurrently (“About Us,” Jaymeldi-Jasalpur 2017). As Rocky explained it, Jasalpur’s bounty is not solely agricultural, as a considerable amount of wealth has also been generated by members of the community who went to America to start up business ventures, most often in the hotel industry. Among other jobs, Rocky himself worked as a motelier during his time in the United States. This would seem to follow from the

¹⁸⁰ The temple at Nandasan is located in a Muslim area directly across from a mosque. Many among its Sunday visitors are Muslims, particularly from the Sayid community. I was only able to visit briefly, but during this time I was told that a number of the Muslim attendees get *pavan* from Melaḍī.

blueprint for Patels in Gujarat at large. Patels, who form almost 20 percent of Gujarat's population, have climbed steadily to social and economic prominence throughout the state, the country, and abroad due to their agricultural and entrepreneurial acumen (Shukla-Bhatt 2014, 190). The booming Jasalpur community and temple appears to be largely the product of the intercontinental business ingenuity of immigrant Patels.

Rocky exemplifies the kind of success Jasalpur Patels have enjoyed overseas. Named Rakesh by birth, he gained the sobriquet "Rocky" while living in Macon, Georgia. By moving to the United States, Rocky basically followed the precedent that had been set by the previous generation of Jasalpur Patels. It was on the brink of 1970s, by Rocky's estimation, that the first Jasalpur dwellers made their way to America when one man from the community obtained an illegal visa. Once this man had accumulated some surplus income, he began to send money back to the community. Members of Rocky's family followed suit, with his uncle moving to the States in 1973 and finally winding up in Georgia in 1982. Rocky had already acquired a taste for world travel at a young age, having visited 25 countries via bicycle in the span of one year as part of the Gandhi Mission. He himself immigrated to Georgia in 1993, operating a convenience store and then building his own motel from scratch, pursuits that proved to be very lucrative. He now has sufficient capital to run a small IT company. Thanks to the efforts of Patels such as Rocky, a community of around 500 people from Jasalpur and the surrounding area has by this point coalesced in Georgia. Patels have constructed a temple to Umiyā Mā, their caste *kuldevī*, in Macon, and the community has been able to connect and mobilize in this space. Intriguingly, it is the more universal *kuldevī* that has seen the American temple built in her name, rather than the localized village goddess. By Rocky's reckoning, the Melaḍī temple in Jasalpur—like the Umiyā temple in Georgia—has also created a site where the community can bond, its members providing support for one another no matter where they are. This international unity has basically forged a support system through which education and agricultural endeavours can flourish. As such, there is much more farming and education in Jasalpur now than there was 30 years previous, in Rocky's considered opinion. At present, Rocky Patel is, like many of the Jasalpur Patels, transcontinental. He goes back and forth between the United States and India frequently, and he has friends and family in both countries. This is the lifestyle he seeks for his school-aged children, as well: currently, they are enrolled in English Medium school in India because he believes that early education is better in India than America. That said, Rocky wants his children

to go to college in the United States because, in his view, American college is superior to that of India.

Rocky's internationalist vision of ever-ascendant middle-class prosperity embodies the aspirations of many of the visitors to the Jasalpur Melaḍī temple. While people come to the temple with the standard desires such as fertility—child-related wishes come true at Jasalpur with impressive regularity—there are also frequent requests for prosperity in business and for the successful acquisition of international visas. When wishes are fulfilled, people come back and offer a *prasād* of *sukhḍi*. So efficacious is the temple, I was told, that it is not uncommon to go through 100 kilos of ghee on a routine Sunday just to make recompense for all the wishes that have been fulfilled—20 kilos per visa, Mr. Trivedi and Raman Madi joked. Similarly, around 200 people walked from Ahmedabad to Jasalpur in the late summer of 2015 to express their gratitude for wishes fulfilled. Evidently, countless Jasalpur temple attendees have been achieving their desires. For many of them, this entails replicating the successes of prototypical Patels previous—that is, moving overseas and generating enough wealth to attain to a middle-class lifestyle and then to eventually bring that prosperity to the community back home.

Diwali, the most significant annual event at the Jasalpur Melaḍī temple since 1972, is something of a homecoming for home-grown Patels, among other Jasalpur natives living abroad. Ten to fifteen thousand people flood Jasalpur for Diwali, with approximately half of these visitors, by some estimates, coming from overseas. In the spirit of the season, Jasalpur is decorated with an elaborate display of lights, throbbing and pulsing throughout the night on the front of the temple and on the *vimāna*. When I attended in 2015, a giant soundstage had been set up in a makeshift concert area adjacent to the temple. To the right of the stage, in a nod to the festival's historical origins, sat an elegant Melaḍī shrine from 1972. Regionally popular professional singers had been brought in for the event, and they sang uninterrupted *garbas*. Meanwhile, groups of women perpetually made their way around the extensive perimeter of the concert area in a sprawling, Navarātri-styled dance. At the far end of the concert area, a towering *māṇḍvo*—that is, the platform of the goddess enclosing her *mūrti*—containing hundreds of burning oil lamps rotated on a motorized axis, with a Melaḍī icon under glass at the bottom level. A number of TV camerapersons milled around the village, capturing the proceedings for a webcast that I was told was being made available on at least three different websites for the benefit of temple affiliates in the United States and Britain. All the while, people drifted in and

out of the main temple to take a quick *darśan*. I met multiple people who resided in the United States, United Kingdom, and Canada. I also spotted more than a few familiar faces from the Melaḍī-worshipping community, including a gentleman who was at Raman Madi's *pāṭotsav*. This again speaks to the interconnectedness of many urban Melaḍī complexes, particularly Jasalpur and Kaiyal. The upper level of the temple, meanwhile, was full of milling onlookers hoping to get a good vantage point for the perpetual *garba* concert. This program continued on until the early morning.

The high point of the yearly Diwali proceedings is the *garbo* procession, in which the women of the community join together to carry their candle-bearing earthenware pots through the Jasalpur streets, their final destination the concert area and the main Melaḍī *māṇḍvo*. I took in the preparations for the procession among the female relatives of Mr. Trivedi. While their family *kuldevī* is the Brahminic Annapūrṇā, the family worshipped Melaḍī because she is so closely tied to their home of Jasalpur as its *gāṁdevī* ("goddess of the village"). Melaḍī has been in the family for four generations, and her niche was afforded a central place alongside pictures of more Sanskrit deities such as Śiva and Lakṣmī. At Diwali, the family niche to Melaḍī was stocked for the occasion with beauty products including the perfumes "Sport Club" and "Bleu de Chanel," all of which are thought to make the goddess happy. The family started into recitation of the "Kunjikā Stotram," a Sanskrit prayer chanted before the reading of *Caṇḍīpāṭh* of the *Devī Māhātmya* to ensure, in tantric fashion, the best possible results. Mr. Trivedi said that members of his household chant the "Kunjikā Stotram" twice daily. Into this chant they have inserted the names of Melaḍī and Rājarājeśvarī, notwithstanding the lack of relation between these goddesses that Mr. Trivedi had earlier professed. Mr. Trivedi donned a fine silk dhoti while undertaking the chanting.

Once the Diwali chanting was completed, the *garbo* pot, custom-made by potters several months before, was prepared for the procession. Most importantly, the name of Melaḍī had been written upon its exterior. In due course, the women lit the *garbo*, and one among the group lifted it onto her head. No fewer than five married (and therefore auspicious) women flanked the *garbo*-bearing woman as she made her way out into the streets. Commencing in the collective singing of *bhajans*, women emerged from the neighbouring houses also carrying pots, and soon the streets were filled. In the evening dark, the oil-lamps gave the impression they were floating on a river of humanity, and through the three main lanes in Jasalpur flowed hundreds of orb-like

lights into eventual confluence. Meanwhile, deafening drums accompanied their movement through the streets. The *garbo*-bearing women converged at the entrance to the concert area surrounding the *māṇḍvo* (Figure 17). Once assembled altogether in front of the *māṇḍvo*, they started to chant *garbas*, and the pots were assembled along the inner wall of the barrier that marked off the concert area. Rows of women began to dance in a circle as per Navarātri. In due time, some men entered into the dancing. Two of these men started into some mild trembling not unlike that of *pavan*. Word circulated quickly through the crowd that they were Patels and that they did indeed have *pavan*, reportedly of Jogaṇī Mā. This is not a rare occurrence in Jasalpur during Diwali. By Rocky Patel's estimation, the number of people getting *pavan* on this evening could be counted in the thousands as late night turned to early morning. Hence, no matter how far out internationally her devotees may have branched, essential hallmarks of the *gāṃdevī* persist.

Given the de-emphasis on such displays at other Melaḍī temples, I was struck by the sheer amount of *pavan* available and openly demonstrated by the Jasalpur community on Diwali. When I asked Rocky to elaborate on this turn of events a few days after, he assured me that people get just a small wind of the goddess on Diwali. Upon identifying a person who has *pavan*, he said that the primary concern is usually just to make the person feel comfortable. The attitude, according to Rocky, is that someone with *pavan* should "be cool, not aggressive." Though this perspective may seem to minimize the significance of *pavan*, getting a breeze of the goddess has from time to time served an integral role in the development of the Jasalpur site. Rocky explained to me that two or three years previous, a number of people in the community started to get *pavan* with regularity. In all cases, the divine message was clear: "open the *vāv*." This helped to initiate the restoration of the stepwell that was underway during my visit and would culminate in the 2016 ceremonial opening. More broadly, Rocky explained that in Jasalpur Melaḍī never gives *pavan* to just one person. Rather, it is equal opportunity *pavan*, and everyone can get it. "You don't have to go through others," Rocky explained, thereby following a tendency of many other ascendant *mātā* worshippers to delink their goddesses from the enterprises of an individual *bhuvā*, whose motivations might be questionable. In Rocky's opinion, it was in large part because of this direct link to Melaḍī that people came to the temple. She was always "straight and real," eliminating the mistakes a middle-man can potentially make. In doling out *pavan*, the goddess is, for Rocky, like a CEO delegating powers to workers. The community, it follows, is

the corporation, with everyone having the opportunity to take up some kind of mid-management position, ultimately collaborating for the greater good of the entire social body. It seems appropriate that *pavan* would be framed as a community phenomenon, available theoretically to everyone rather than to just one person, at a site that has been defined so markedly by cooperative group efforts.



Figure 17: Women carrying *garbo* pots converge at the main concert area in Jasalpur during Diwali (Photo by author)

Thanks to the affluence of its people at home and abroad, Jasalpur has seen its *vāv* grow into an impressive restored stepwell and its small *derī* expanded into a large complex with a luxuriant temple that boasts a burgeoning following. Indeed, the 2016 *prāṇapratishṭhā* (“consecration”) of the refurbished *vāv* attracted as many as 35,000 people, by some estimates.

The temple is, as we have seen, established on transcontinental wealth won from hard work across multiple countries. While the primary contributors to the development of the complex have been mainly Patels, the site appeals to a wide range of patrons for a number of reasons. Firstly, its classical-temple style and Sanskritized, Brahminical atmosphere—certainly amenable to the Brahmin participation, as Mr. Trivedi would attest—evokes a “proper,” pan-Indian Hinduism. While widespread *pavan* is permitted and to some degree encouraged given its crucial place in steering the progress of the community, it is nonetheless carefully monitored and kept in check. Secondly, brimming as it is with amenities and initiatives for uplift, the temple epitomizes the promise of material betterment. This makes the Jasalpur site highly alluring to middle-class and upwardly mobile followers, many of whom have their own quintessentially Patel-like determinations to succeed beyond India’s borders. In her “rising” quality, Ūgtai Melaḍī embodies the ambitions and potentialities of the community and individuals who come to worship her in Jasalpur.

This was perhaps best conveyed to me by another Patel man I briefly met in June 2015 who, like Rocky, had had success in the United States and had thereafter come back to Jasalpur. He was eager to speak to me in English, though his English was curious in that, while he had the basic fundamentals of the grammar, he was somewhat lacking in vocabulary. Often he would stumble when trying to find the right word, uttering the phrase “something-something” in its place. Even so, he was still very keen on showing me around the temple grounds, pointing out the many facilities contained within. Endearingly, he used the phrase “something-something” repeatedly when he attempted to describe for me the overall character of his community and its fortunes. Finally, he gave way to gesture: “this is a poor country,” he said, seemingly referring to the area, “but...up, up, up!” He pointed skyward as he said this last part. It is hard to be sure what he meant—and certainly I have my own interpretive agendas—but I took him to be referring to the general upward-mobility of the community, which seemed to be limitless given the blessings of Ūgtai Melaḍī. There was only one direction for Jasalpur. “Up” is the Jasalpur motto, embedded in the name of the local goddess. It seems more than fitting, then (at least if we put any stock in Feuerbach), that an unboundedly upwardly mobile community would put their faith in a goddess who is known and named for her “rising” nature, thereby epitomizing “upward

mobility” in her own right.¹⁸¹ For Ūgtai Melaḍī at Jasalpur and her variations elsewhere, “upward” is not only a name but also an eminently realizable lifestyle trajectory for many of her faithful.

Conclusion

Contra elite stereotypes, Melaḍī has become much more than simply a “dark” and “dirty” goddess venerated strictly by people from villages and depressed classes. While Melaḍī has commonly been linked with *tāmasik* practices and the *melī vidyā*, elements of which are still active at some sites including the one in Dhrangadhra, a tidied-up reimagining of the goddess has gained momentum in recent decades. Most visibly, her lithographs depict her in the style of a pan-Indian goddess. Indeed, she is worthy of standing in for Great Goddesses such as Parvati. Also in consonance with this profile, the goddess is framed in vernacular literature as being *sāttvik* as much as she is *tāmasik*, if not more so. Modern urban and suburban Melaḍī sites have emphasized the goddess’s exclusively *sāttvik* character, banning sacrifice and liquor oblations across the board and often moderating ecstatic displays such as *pavan*. Meanwhile, Brahminical and Sanskritic elements—among them Vedic chanting and *havans*—have been moved to the forefront. Similarly, aspects of Vaiṣṇava culture, which are deeply evocative for a Gujarati audience habituated to Puṣṭimārg and Swaminarayan aesthetics, have also been interspersed. These borrowings from an upper-caste or Vaiṣṇavic vision of Hinduism seem to have been undertaken in hopes of fostering an atmosphere of restraint and dignity within Melaḍī temples. These values and the ritual performances that enact them fit together with an increased concern for orderliness and cleanliness within the temple’s physical space, and all of these considerations satisfy the sensibilities of an increasingly middle-class base of devotees. Likewise, the temple spaces themselves and the success stories promulgated among their patrons, both in India and abroad, repeatedly demonstrate the prosperity generated by the goddess. This holds obvious appeal for the upwardly mobile individuals who attend these Melaḍī sites. In addition to the usual health and fertility concerns, aspirations toward middle-class values show through plainly in the kinds of desires visitors bring before the goddess. Cars, careers, and international visas can all be attained in the near future by a Melaḍī devotee. In this way, modern Melaḍī temples aid in

¹⁸¹ I refer here, quite superficially, to ideas put forth in *The Essence of Christianity*, wherein Ludwig Feuerbach argued that the divine is a projection of its worshippers, necessarily reflecting the human imagination ([1881] 2008).

creating hopes for acquiring the material underpinnings of middle-classness. Perhaps even more importantly, they aid in a *performance* of aspiration toward such a bourgeoisie status.

The Beherempur temple stands out as something of an outlier among these Melaḍī sites in urban Gujarat on account of the working-class status of most of its patrons. While not undergoing a gentrification *per se*, the site still seems to have been transfigured to some degree by another variation of upward-mobility—that which is afforded via Saffronization. That is, the values of the Hindu right held by members of its managing staff have steered an effort, at least in part, to raise the status of the temple’s Dalit constituents. The end goal is embodied by Dasharath Madi, an exemplar of “upliftment” whom adoring followers can pattern themselves after. In this way, the Beherempur temple is an outlier in a second sense, as well. Intensely right-wing Hindutva values, if they are at all present at the other temples I visited, are highly veiled. While the Melaḍī temples we have looked at are not altogether devoid of right-wing politics, considering the positive attitudes devotees sometimes expressed here and there toward Modi, I saw little systematic evidence that Hindutva was a galvanizing force behind these sites. If communal attitudes provide an accurate gauge of Hindutva sympathy, then many Melaḍī sites, with their open-door policy that accepts all people regardless of their caste-group or religion, can hardly be counted among the militant. Some Melaḍī officiants showed solidarity for subaltern movements, such as Raman Madi, who gave every indication of championing Dalit rights. Moreover, Muslims were openly welcomed at many Melaḍī temples, including even Sangh Parivar-slanted Beherempur. This suggests that the middle-class value of inclusivity has trumped Hindutva, at least outwardly. With all that said, I did not often see Hindutva actively decried. This is a possible by-product of efforts on the part of trustees and officiants *not* to risk seriously offending saffron sensibilities, even if these parties do not themselves champion Hindutva.¹⁸² Further work needs to be done to determine whether or not this acceptance of Muslims and other minorities at Melaḍī temples goes beyond tokenism, especially given the widely-known communalism espoused by the Gujarati middle class.

¹⁸² Jessica Falcone has observed Hindutva working in similar, subtle ways in her ethnography of *Garba-rās* performance traditions among the Gujarati diaspora in North America. According to Falcone, competitive teams of *garba* dancers “have learned to be careful not to upset the delicate sensibilities of Hindutva sympathizers who may be in the crowd or on the panel of judges” (2016, 56). This was the case even though “second-generation Gujarati-Americans did not seem particularly interested in, sympathetic to, or even abreast of contemporary Indian Hindutva politics” (*Ibid.*). This encapsulates fairly well the attitude toward Hindutva among many of the Gujaratis with whom I spoke.

The tidied-up Melaḍī is not without her tantric elements, which are included at virtually all of the temples we have visited in some measure. *Caṇḍīpāṭh*, for instance, is a recurrent sonic apparatus within Melaḍī temples and also in the private worship of temple-goers. Yantras are elaborated at length within a number of publications dedicated to Melaḍī, and they can also be found on her pan-Indian, goat-mounted images. Many of her temples feature yantras as well. These yantras and their accompanying mantras can offer fertility, pacify enemies, and ward off spirits in the customary folk-tantra idiom, though they are framed in a *sāttvik* mode, thereby moving beyond the so-called *melī vidyā*, the dark arts that Melaḍī embodies in name. And as far as epithets go, Melaḍī is referred to at several sites as “Rājarājeśvarī,” a title that denotes her associations with royalty and a more universalized notion of Devī. The name also carries some tantric resonances as per Śrīvidyā, and it may serve to reframe Melaḍī’s stereotypical black magic connotations in a more *sāttvik*, Sanskritic mode. Some, however, are not so convinced of Melaḍī’s ties to Rājarājeśvarī. When I mentioned the homology to one of the principal patrons at the Kadi Śrīvidyā temple, a former banker, he promptly switched into English to make his position on the matter crystal clear: “Melaḍī cannot be Rājarājeśvarī,” he said. When I mentioned the white marble goat upon which Melaḍī/Rājarājeśvarī was mounted at Paroli, he went on to add that “it should be black.”

These comments suggest that elite stereotypes about Melaḍī’s *tāmasik* nature continue to linger. Although the Melaḍī worshipped by a largely middle-class and upwardly mobile crowd at these expansive urban and suburban temples has transformed into a much different goddess from that of colonial-era depictions, some non-worshippers are still suspicious of the change. To be sure, Melaḍī has not entirely left behind her capricious, non-elite identity despite her urban devotees’ insistence otherwise. At some sites, her *tāmasik* rites are alive and well, and some pro-Melaḍī publications acknowledge as much. Although Melaḍī has been in many contexts sanitized on account of fastidious exertions toward gentrification, universalization, and Sanskritization intertwined with some nods to Vaiṣṇavization, her reputation among elites as a “dirty” goddess may be impossible to scrub away entirely.

Chapter Five: Middle-Class Tantra—Jogaṇī Mātā, a Uniquely Gujarati Chinnamastā

In Gujarati folklore, the term “Jogaṇī” or “Jogṇī” has typically denoted a female ghost or spirit often associated with cholera, among other ailments. In its spectral connotations, the term follows its obvious homology with the Sanskrit “*yoginīs*,” referring to minor female divinities thought to serve collectively as Durgā’s entourage. While Gujarat has no famous *yoginī* temples to speak of in this pan-Indian idiom, a singular Jogaṇī has often functioned on her own like a goddess, and so small *ḍerīs* dedicated to her abound in villages, fields, and roadsides throughout the region. At these sites, the singular Jogaṇī appears to have been portrayed in aniconic form and worshipped with meat offerings, liquor oblations, and possession-like trance states overseen by *bhuvās* from non-elite groups. “Jogaṇī” is still an operative word in Gujarati religion; today, however, there are an increasing number of prominent shrines and temples to Jogaṇī Mātā in major cities where she is worshipped as a *bona fide* Great Goddess. Like Melaḍī, the Jogaṇī Mātā imagined in these spaces has moved toward what worshippers commonly describe as *sāttvik* rituals, completely separated from the *tāmasik* non-vegetarian and alcoholic rites of her past. As with other Gujarati *mātās* who have undergone similar changes as they move beyond low-caste and village contexts, Jogaṇī Mātā has also taken on a new and distinct iconography beyond the simple stones, trees, or *triśūls* that formerly signified her sites. Yet while sweetening and sanitizing efforts have seen nearly all the Gujarati *mātās* of note adopt lithographs depicting them as smiling young women on idiosyncratic animal mounts following after the pan-Indian style, Jogaṇī’s iconography stands in sharp contrast. Jogaṇī is a headless female, one of her hands carrying the scimitar with which she has self-decapitated, another bearing her own head. She is naked save for a garland of skulls and stands atop the copulating Kāma and Rati while a duo of female attendants drinks the blood spouting from her neck (Figure 18). This is the iconography of the tantric Mahāvidyā Chinnamastā, “she who has cut off her own head.”

This representation would seem to mark Jogaṇī Mātā as one of the few examples of a regionalized Chinnamastā in contemporary India, comparable with those found at Cintapūrṇī in Himachal Pradesh (Benard 1994, 145) and Rajrappa in Jharkhand (Mahalakshmi 2014; Singh 2010). Jogaṇī Mātā’s historical development, however, is not so easily elucidated. The phonological similarity between her name and the term “*yoginī*” opens up multifarious Sanskritic and folkloric connections that have undoubtedly influenced the goddess throughout her evolution. Folk elements are especially crucial, chiefly the Gujarati notion of “Jogaṇī” in the

singular, which denoted an entity that was almost as much a ghost as she was a goddess, and seems to be at the core of the present-day Jogaṇī Mātā.¹⁸³ In addition, Jogaṇī's more recent assumption of the “Mātā” mantle marks her as one among a series of divinities in flux, as many of the *mātās* (as we have established in previous chapters) have been Sanskritized, gentrified, and universalized for an upwardly mobile urban audience, particularly following the liberalization of India's economy in the early 1990s.

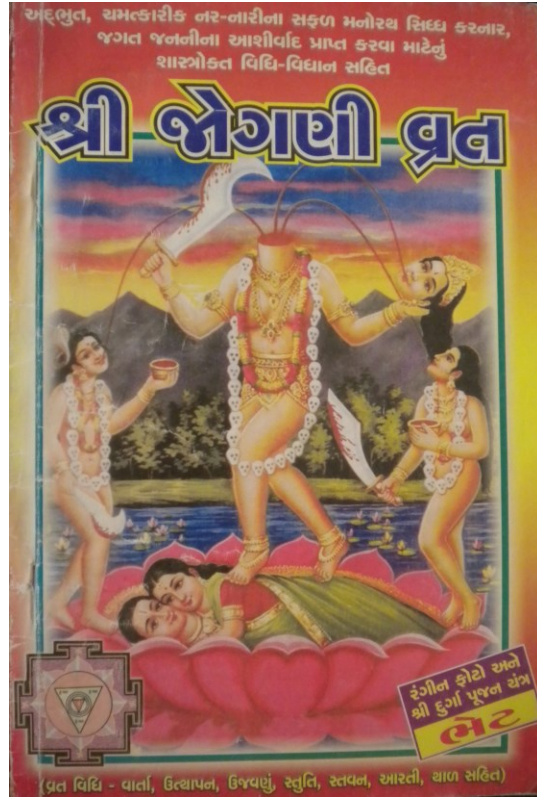


Figure 18: Cover of the *Śrī Jogaṇī Vrat*, a Jogaṇī Mātā devotional pamphlet featuring the standard lithograph imagery of the goddess (Photo by author)

¹⁸³ In hopes of avoiding confusion, I should mention that throughout the early portions of this chapter I will often make reference to both a “singular” Jogaṇī and “plural” *jogaṇīs* or *yoginīs*. The “singular” Jogaṇī (also given as “Jogṇī” or “Jognī” depending on transliteration method used by the source cited) refers to the standalone ghost/goddess Jogaṇī of Gujarati folklore that appears to have been worshipped as an individual entity primarily in villages of the region, which will be discussed in a section to follow. The “plural” *jogaṇīs* or *yoginīs* refer to a cadre of attendant spirits, usually 64 in number, that are also acknowledged in Gujarati folklore, as well as in transregional Sanskrit and tantric literature. The localized spelling “*jogaṇīs*” will be used to designate folk Gujarati imaginings, while “*yoginīs*” will denote references to a similar entourage of spirits in the pan-Indian idiom. References to “Jogaṇī Mātā” or “Jogaṇī Mā,” meanwhile, will designate the goddess as she appears in contemporary Gujarat. (In the chapter’s ethnography portion, I will sometimes abbreviate Jogaṇī Mātā/Mā as simply “Jogaṇī.”) With that being established, it must be stated that there is considerable overlap and cross-pollination between each of the categories delineated in this note, as I hope this chapter will demonstrate.

While Jogaṇī Mātā's background may be multifaceted, her Chinnamastā imagery and her *yoginī*-homonymous name suggest that she has some undeniably tantric valences. These tantric aspects do not appear to clash with the sensibilities of her expanding devotional base, as Jogaṇī's temples attract an increasingly middle-class, mainstream audience that readily consumes her images and eagerly seeks the benefits of her yantra and mantra. And yet despite the presence of these tantric accoutrements, Jogaṇī officiants and devotees alike rarely acknowledge her ties with tantra—in fact, they often de-emphasize or deny them. Of course, following Douglas Renfrew Brooks' proviso to his polythetic definition of what constitutes tantra, any given text or tradition need not explicitly refer to itself as tantric to be considered tantric (1990, 53). With that in mind, I take this unrecognized tantra at contemporary urban Jogaṇī Mātā temples as my point of departure.

This chapter attempts to understand not only why Jogaṇī's tantric elements are so often downplayed, but more importantly how tantra functions in conjunction with her ongoing reimagining for a middle-class audience. I will begin by sorting through the plurality of historical, iconographic, and popular literary associations Jogaṇī Mātā has accumulated on account of her links with both Chinnamastā and the *yoginī*(s). In the process, I hope to establish the presence in the past of a grammatically singular Jogaṇī from which the contemporary Jogaṇī Mātā evolved. From here I will move into ethnographic data, first visiting a trio of bourgeoisie-friendly Ahmedabad-area Jogaṇī sites that are representative of the abovementioned tantric de-emphasis. I will then finish at a fourth site that provides a critical exception to this trend, wholeheartedly accepting Jogaṇī as tantric. Reading all of these Jogaṇī sites through the insights of a self-identifying *tāntrika* from this outlying temple, I argue that all four shrines are united by their acceptance of tantra insofar as it situates the goddess within a Sanskritic and Brahminically-amenable form of religious expression. That is, each site has been able to realize, tacitly or overtly, a positive, *sāttvik* tantra that contrasts malevolent, “black” tantra. As such, their enduring appeal is attributable to the immediacy with which the “white” tantra of Jogaṇī Mā can solve worldly problems. This being the case, I contend that these temples, even the ones that downplay the tantric components, actually speak to how *prevalent* tantra has become in Gujarat, in that it can operate unacknowledged and unproblematically in some fairly conventional contexts. This endeavour provides some of the most convincing examples of the cachet tantra wields within the expanding Gujarati urban middle class, suggesting that tantra may even be able to play a role in

the mainstream transformation of *mātās* such as Jogaṇī. All four temples illustrate how tantra, as a *sāttvik*, Sanskritic power, can aid in an ongoing effort amongst members of a variety of relatively non-elite groups (among them Rabaris, Barots, and Patels) to cultivate and perform perceived hallmarks of high status such that their social rank can parallel their desired—or, in some instances, actualized—socioeconomic ascendancy. Indeed, upwardly mobile classes—and sometimes even upper castes—have found places at these Jogaṇī sites.

Chinnamastā, Yoginī(s), and Jogaṇī Mātā

Tracing Jogaṇī Mātā's history and background is complicated due to the nexus of associations evoked by her ties with Chinnamastā and the *yoginī/yoginīs*. While these associations provide some possible clues as to Jogaṇī Mātā's development in Gujarat, care must be taken not to let her name and imagery lead us to underestimate the localized village aspects that also substantially inform her current imagining. To wit, an earlier, singular, folk “Jogaṇī” seems to be at the core of the present-day Jogaṇī Mā. In this section, I will proceed from present to past (and somewhat circuitously at that), unravelling the layers to move toward this core.

While Jogaṇī Mātā's Chinnamastā connections are most evident with respect to iconography, they also span her ritual apparatuses. In the *Śākta-pramoda*, a popular tantric manual devoted to the ten Mahāvidyās published in North India in the late nineteenth century, the Chinnamastā mantra is given as “*Śrīm hrīm klīm aiṃ vajravairocanīye hūṃ hūṃ phaṭ svāhā*” (Benard 1994, 36).¹⁸⁴ In the *Śrī Jogaṇī Vrat* (see Figure 18), a contemporary devotional pamphlet outlining votive rites (or *vrats*) to Jogaṇī Mātā in the style of those dedicated to other *mātās*, the author Nirmal Rasik provides the very same series of syllables under the title of “Jogaṇī Mantra,” adding an initial “*aum*” at the start for good measure (n.d., 4). Mantras presented and performed in urban Jogaṇī Mātā sites are also virtually identical, with only minor variations. Also commonly on display at these sites is the Jogaṇī Pūjan Yantra, two inverted triangles enwreathed in eight petals and bordered by a square with projections on each of its sides. This follows after the Chinnamastā Yantra.

While her yantra and mantra match Chinnamastā's with near exactitude, Jogaṇī Mātā's standard Gujarati image corresponds with the more contemporary pan-Indian lithograph

¹⁸⁴ The *Śākta-pramoda* was compiled and edited by Raja Deva Nandan Singh Bahadur, a zamindar from the Muzzafarpur district in northern Bihar (Khanna 2013, 3).

imagining of Chinnamastā available at sites such as Rajrappa.¹⁸⁵ Were it not for the overlaid Gujarati script giving her name as “Śrī Phūl Jogaṇī Mātā,” the two images would be interchangeable (see again Figure 2). This illustration is relatively anodyne when compared to traditional paintings and early chromolithographs of Chinnamastā. While earlier portrayals combined nudity and bloodshed, the contemporary pan-Indian imagining conceals Jogaṇī/Chinnamastā’s nakedness with the garlands of flowers and skulls that she wears, and the same goes for her attendants.¹⁸⁶ The bodies of Kāma and Rati upon whom Jogaṇī/Chinnamastā stands, meanwhile, are fully swaddled in cloth, their intimacy only hinted at rather than depicted explicitly as per eighteenth- and nineteenth-century paintings.¹⁸⁷ Perhaps most notably, Jogaṇī/Chinnamastā and her attendants bear a golden complexion. While earlier paintings and chromolithographs of Chinnamastā found throughout the subcontinent often represent her as dark-blue or red in skin-tone,¹⁸⁸ respectively suggesting either a *tāmasik* or *rājasik* character, the golden hue appears to mark the goddess as *sāttvik*, a point of curiosity considering the blood that streams freely in the image (Mahalakshmi 2014, 204).¹⁸⁹

On account of this pronounced overlap of iconography and ritual appurtenances, it is tempting to conclude that Jogaṇī Mātā is Chinnamastā. Some Gujarati-language devotional texts posit just such an equivalency, including the *Śrī Jogaṇī Vrat*, which bears the image of Chinnamastā on its cover. Inside, the author Rasik uses the two theonyms interchangeably from the outset, with the very first sentence referring to the goddess as “Chinnamastā (Jogaṇī)” (n.d., 3). Jogaṇī/Chinnamastā is also homologized with Caṇḍīkā, Cāmuṇḍā, and a more general

¹⁸⁵ R. Mahalakshmi included an example of such an image in her study of Rajrappa in Jharkhand (2014, 204).

¹⁸⁶ For an example of a Chinnamastā chromolithograph dating back to the 1880s, see Pinney (2004, 44).

¹⁸⁷ See, for instance, the various images included in David Kinsley’s (1997) chapter on Chinnamastā, most notably the picture appearing on page 156 (and on the cover of the book itself). Here Kāma and Rati are both naked, the latter squatted astride the former in the *viparīta-rati* sexual position.

¹⁸⁸ See again Pinney (2004, 44).

¹⁸⁹ Dating this fair-skinned image of Chinnamastā, as well as its link to Jogaṇī, is difficult. While a brighter complexion is mandated for Chinnamastā alongside a “hibiscus red” variation in compendia such as the late sixteenth-century CE *Tantrasāra* (Pal 1981, 80–81), the goddess’s *sāttvik*, pan-Indian lithograph appears to be a fairly contemporary development. In his study of printed images in India, Christopher Pinney has documented mass-produced chromolithographs of Chinnamastā published in Calcutta as early as the 1880s (Pinney 2004, 44; see the note previous). While this may suggest a possible early limit for Chinnamastā’s popular prints—and perhaps even for the dating of Jogaṇī’s identification with this Mahāvidyā—the image Pinney has included in his volume depicts the severed-headed goddess’s body as being red in colour, her attendants portrayed as demonic hags, thereby highlighting the *rājasik* or *tāmasik* elements of the scene. If the Cintapūrṇī temple to Chinnamastā is any indication, images of the goddess were not widely circulated even as late as the 1990s (Benard 1994, 47, ff. 23). This is a point to which I will return. While circumstantial, these lines of evidence suggest that Chinnamastā’s comparatively *sāttvik*, pan-Indian lithograph emerged rather recently.

Mahādevī or Śakti. Subsequently, she is credited with slaying Śumbha and Niśumbha, rendering her akin to Kālī or Durgā (Rasik n.d., 3-4). As is perhaps predictable given the Sanskritized Gujarati in which the text is composed, Jogaṇī Mātā is dealt with in a decidedly Advaitic fashion. In Rasik's composition, her name comes to be a transposable signifier for the Great Goddess. This suggests that Jogaṇī is just as capable of assuming the role of divine substratum as any of the aforementioned goddesses. In the *Śrī Jogaṇī Vrat*, Jogaṇī/Chinnamastā is also linked with some other famous faces from Hindu myth and lore. As Rasik explains early on:

Paraśurām was a devotee of Jogaṇī Mā. Nāth Panthī Sadhus also demonstrated piety to this particular Devī. Their own guru Gorakhnāth likewise performed devotion to the goddess Chinnamastā (n.d., 6).¹⁹⁰

Here we see not only the interchange of goddess names, but also an effort to further embed Jogaṇī Mātā in Sanskritic mythology by tying her to Paraśurāma, the axe-wielding sixth avatar of Viṣṇu. Paraśurāma comes to be associated with Chinnamastā, in some sense, in the *Mahābhārata* (3.117.5–19).¹⁹¹ In the *Śrī Jogaṇī Vrat*, this story is left untold, though Rasik does assert that it was power from the Jogaṇī *vrat* that Paraśurāma used in his epic battles against the Kshatriyas (n.d., 6).¹⁹²

Similarly, Rasik explains in the *Śrī Jogaṇī Vrat* that Gorakhnāth gained *siddhis* from performing the pamphlet's titular votive rights (n.d., 6). This reference to Gorakhnāth and the Nāth Sadhus may provide clues as to Jogaṇī's roots in northwestern India as per emic historiographies, and it opens up further resonances for the goddess beyond her depiction as Chinnamastā. The yogic hero Gorakhnāth has been closely tied to Matsyendranāth, forefather of the Yoginī Kaula aptly named for its founder's special bond with these female spirits.¹⁹³ In the thirteenth-century *Gorakṣa Saṁhitā*, the purported author Gorakhnāth continues this Kaula tradition, concluding each chapter with a declaration that the text is transmitting the secret doctrine of the *yoginīs* (Dehejia 1986, 32). Gorakhnāth is also credited with the establishment of

¹⁹⁰ This is my translation from the original Gujarati.

¹⁹¹ This story, as told in the *Mahābhārata*, goes as follows: when Paraśurāma's mother Reṇukā becomes infatuated with the king of the celestial musicians, her husband promptly orders his sons to kill her. Paraśurāma is the only son willing to undertake the matricide, and beheads his mother; as a result, Reṇukā comes to be referred to as a "Chinnamastā" (Benard 1994, 6).

¹⁹² Viṣṇu's Paraśurāma descent was prompted by an urge to combat the arrogance and tyranny of the Kshatriyas, who had come to oppress the Brahmins. Throughout his mythological life, Paraśurāma carried out his duty with ferocity atypical of a Brahmin, skillfully using the *paraśu* (or "axe") for which he is named in order to obliterate all Kshatriyas on earth.

¹⁹³ According to the eleventh-century CE *Kaulajñānirṇaya*, Matsyendranāth was responsible for introducing the *yoginī* cult among the Kaulas (Dehejia 1986, 74).

the Nāth *sampradāya* that flourished in western India, its main cultic centre to their foremost goddess Hinglāj Mātā located over the Pakistan border in Baluchistan (Gold & Gold 1984, 121).¹⁹⁴ Gujarat in particular has a high concentration of Nāth Siddhas, who have monasteries and temples throughout the state (White 1996, 118). Gujarat's topography also bears witness to Gorakhnāth's lasting legacy. Located south of Junagadh are the Girnar Mountains, and their highest peak is named for Gorakh (White 1996, 117-18; Briggs [1938] 1973, 119).¹⁹⁵ The site abounds with various shrines and sacred spots hallowed by the Nāth Siddhas, and so Girnar has been an important pilgrimage site for the order since at least the thirteenth century (White 1996, 118). *Yoginīs*—or *jogaṇīs*, in the local parlance—are also said to be found in the Girnar area, to such an extent that they too are part of the topography; there is, for instance, a Jogni Hill among the Girnar range (S. Desai 1972, 40). At the nearby Kālīka Hill, the *jogaṇīs* were thought to take the lives of visitors, and it was generally understood that anyone who unwittingly ventured into the area never returned (Enthoven [1914] 1989, 46). In referencing Gorakh and the Nāth Sadhus, then, Rasik implicitly situates the *Śrī Jogaṇī Vrat*'s eponymous goddess at Girnar. Indeed, Girnar and the Nāth Siddhas represent fountainheads of Jogaṇī Mātā's present-day significance; as we will see, some of her officiants trace their gurus to this site.¹⁹⁶ Moreover, the connection the *Śrī Jogaṇī Vrat* calls to mind between Jogaṇī Mātā and the Yoginī Kaula prompts us to interrogate the “*yoginī*” resonances, both Sanskritic and regional, already rooted in the name of the goddess it describes.

I would be greatly remiss if I did not first mention that Chinnamastā herself is occasionally referred to as “*yoginī*.” For example, in its hundred-name hymn dedicated to Chinnamastā, the *Śākta-pramoda* contains “Yoginī” among the epithets (Benard 1994, 41). While this may speak to her yogic abilities as much as it does to her identity as a female spirit,¹⁹⁷ Chinnamastā is also

¹⁹⁴ Even though this temple is now largely inaccessible to village Nāths on account of its location in Pakistan, the goddess still plays a role in rituals performed by the group. For example, Hinglāj Mā Pūjā is an integral aspect of funerary rituals, enabling immediate and complete salvation for the deceased. To not have this *pūjā* performed, by contrast, guarantees that a soul will become a hungry ghost (Gold & Gold 1984, 121-122). Hinglāj is widely considered tantric (Khan 1996, 31). For a thoroughgoing study of Hinglāj, see Schaflechner (2018).

¹⁹⁵ This labelling scheme, which also names a peak neighbouring that of Gorakh after the Siddha Dattātreya, is accepted by Hindus, but not by Jains, who have their own sacred map of Girnar.

¹⁹⁶ Mount Abu, located in southern Rajasthan bordering Gujarat and, culturally speaking, a Gujarati site, also bears strong associations with the Nāth Siddhas and Gorakh (see White 1996, 118-22). One of its peaks features a Śiva temple tied to Gorakh. *Yoginīs* from medieval temples also feature prominently in the museum at the site.

¹⁹⁷ Consider that in this list of Chinnamastā's 100 names, “Yoginī” appears in close proximity to titles such as “Yoganirātā” (“she who practices yoga”), “Yogamārgapradāyini” (“she who bestows the yoga path”), and “Yogamayī” (“she who embodies yoga”) (Kinsley 1997, 154).

referred to in passing as a *yoginī* in the *Śākta-pramoda*'s *stotra* portion (*Ibid.*).¹⁹⁸ This designation of “*yoginī*” may be a holdover from Chinnamastā's well-documented Buddhist roots. Benoytosh Bhattacharyya has convincingly established that Chinnamastā is a later Hindu adaptation of the Vajrayana Buddhist goddess Vajrayoginī, who is likewise depicted in her “Chinnamuṇḍa” form as feeding her attendants with sanguinary streams from her self-severed neck (Bhattacharyya 1964, 159). It is on the basis of the names of Vajrayoginī's attendants—Vajravarṇanī and Vajravairocanī—mentioned in her mantra in the twelfth-century CE *Sādhnamālā* that Bhattacharya has formulated part of his argument. If the “Vajra” prefix indicates their Buddhist character, the fact that it is dropped in the attendant's names as given in the Hindu literature—Varṇanī and Dākinī—suggests an attempt to make the deity less Buddhist (Bhattacharyya 1964, 160-61).¹⁹⁹ Oddly enough, “Vajravairocanī” is still a part of the Chinnamastā (and Jogaṇī) mantra today, as we have already seen. All told, the link with the name “Yoginī,” for Chinnamastā as for Jogaṇī Mātā, could simply reflect Chinnamastā's development out of the Buddhist Chinnamuṇḍa Vajrayoginī.

But the abundant connotations evoked by the *yoginīs* are not so speedily exhausted. Scholars have made much of the term “*yoginī*” on account of its manifold semantic trajectories, singular and plural, Sanskritic and folkloric, and so even in Gujarat alone we are left with a complex matrix of *yoginī* connections to explore.²⁰⁰ Starting with the Sanskritic—or at least pan-Indian—understanding of the term, the widespread cult of the 64 *yoginīs* is conspicuous by way of its virtual absence in Gujarat. Despite the preponderance of *yoginī* artifacts in neighbouring Rajasthan, among them paper and cloth *cakras* dedicated to the plurality of female spirits, there are no well-known 64 *yoginī* temples in Gujarat (Dehejia 1986, 75). In her exhaustive study of such locations across India, Vidya Dehejia has cited Palodhar in Mehsana district as the only

¹⁹⁸ It is also worth mentioning that statues at several *yoginī* temples throughout India bear features reminiscent of Chinnamastā's imagery. At the Hirapur temple in Odisha stands a Cāmuṇḍā-like skeletal figure wearing a garland of skulls and wielding a severed head and a dagger. Unlike Chinnamastā, however, she has a concave stomach and pendulous breasts, and she also holds aloft a lion carcass (Dehejia 1986, 97). Similarly at Bheraghat in Madhya Pradesh, several *yoginīs* are associated with severed heads, skulls, and curved knives (1986, 136). There is, for instance, a Yoginī Sarvatomukhī who wears a tiara and a long garland of skulls and is flanked by female attendants holding severed human heads, skull-caps, and curved knives (1986, 131). The syllable “*hrīm*” is inscribed at the base of the statue, suggesting a mantra. While these and other fearsome *yoginīs* and their attendants are clearly steeped in the motifs of skulls and severed heads, none of them have auto-decapitated as per the Chinnamastā iconography.

¹⁹⁹ To the same end, in the original Vajrayoginī Mantra in the *Sādhnamālā*, Vajrayoginī's attendants are prefixed with the descriptor “Sarvabuddha,” which is changed to “Sarvasiddhi” in the seventeenth-century Hindu *Tantrasāra* (Bhattacharyya 1964, 161).

²⁰⁰ For some of these pan-Indian trajectories, see Shaman Hatley (2013).

Gujarati example. This temple, in Dehejia's estimation, "has apparently crumbled away" (1986, 80). There is, in fact, a tiny modernized Cosāṭh ("sixty-four") Jogaṇī temple up and running in Palodhar at present, a few hundred yards away from a much older site decorated with carvings of female figures. Whether the latter structure is a remnant of the ancient *yoginī* cult or not, the modernized temple is a fairly standard Hindu site, drawing only nominal relations with the 64 *yoginīs* or Chinnamastā, at least from the perspective of the *pūjārī* with whom I spoke in May of 2015. As a case in point, the central shrine is dedicated to a singular Śakti, her head intact. The *pūjārī* informed me that there was a yantra underneath this image. Beyond this, however, there were few other tantric elements, and certainly no images of Chinnamastā or Jogaṇī Mātā. If anything, the temple seemed to draw more connections to the nearby Bahucarā Mātā *śakti-pīṭha* at Becharaji than it did to Jogaṇī Mātā. By way of its minimally tantric atmosphere, the temple helps to reaffirm the findings of Benares-based "64 Yoginī" temple studies made by Istvan Keul (2012), Fabrizio Ferrari (2013), and Peter Bisschop (2013). In Benares, as in Palodhar, there is little to no evidence of tantra or of the iconography and worship of the 64 divinities (Keul 2012, 400; Ferrari 2013, 149–51). In their place is a non-tantric goddess named "Chaumsathī Devī." Chaumsathī is basically a modified form of Durgā—that is, a singular deity standing in for all 64 female divinities (Keul 2012, 389; Ferrari 2013, 149; Bisschop 2013, 55).²⁰¹ This is also the role of Palodhar's Cosāṭh Jogaṇī Mātā. Cosāṭh Jogaṇī Mātā of Palodhar, then, is not Chinnamastā, nor is she strongly associated with Jogaṇī Mātā. While a few Jogaṇī Mātā sites, as we will see, claim some degree of acquaintance with Palodhar, this is definitely not found across the board.

The *yoginīs/jogaṇīs* show up as a plurality more frequently in the Gujarati folk milieu. No less a commentator than Alexander Kinloch Forbes of the Gujarati Vernacular Society reported in his 1856 *Ras Mala* that *yoginīs* were believed to be helpful in cases of drought. During a dry spell, low-caste *bhuvās* were acquisitioned to channel the Mātāji and inquire with regard to the lack of rainfall (Forbes [1878] 1973, 605). As we saw in Chapter Two, the *bhuvā* would then put

²⁰¹ Keul's study of Chaumsathī Devī in Banares offers a Gujarati connection, as the owner and administrator (or *mahant*) of the temple belonged to a lineage of Vaiṣṇava Brahmins from Gujarat that the author leaves otherwise unspecified (2012, 387). The *mahant*'s ancestors were invited to Benares several generations previous by the Mahārāja of Kāśī on account of their skills as Vaiṣṇava ritual specialists (2012, 387–388). The Śākta affiliation of the temple was not problematical for the *mahant*'s Brahmin or Vaiṣṇava sensibilities in any way, as he cited the wholly vegetarian nature of the confines, and the prevalence of Brahmins at other goddess sites in the city (2012, 388). While the temple also generally downplayed its tantric aspect alongside *tāmasik* rituals, some visitors did claim to have attained *siddhis* from proper, *sāttvik* ritual performances. This suggests that at least some remnant of the *yoginī* cult had not been fully Sanskritized or Vaiṣṇavized.

in a request for food sacred to the Devī, and a feast was subsequently set out beyond the eastern gate of the town in question. These offerings were served in broken earthen vessels representing human skulls, out of which the *yoginīs* supposedly preferred to eat. This banquet for the Devī and the *yoginīs*, the latter seemingly playing their traditional role as attendants, was deemed successful if rain returned to the area (Forbes [1878] 1973, 605). The *yoginīs* were not always so munificent, however, as they were also held responsible for the spread of contagious diseases among human beings and cattle (Enthoven [1914] 1989, 65-68). The only solution to epidemics caused by the 64 *jogaṇīs* was the offering of a goat or a male buffalo, or else, once again, the observance of a feast in their honour (Enthoven [1914] 1989, 80). In Girnar, as in other regions, the *yoginīs* were specifically called upon when the area was afflicted with cholera (Chitgopekar 2002, 105).

These folk rites related to disease shed light on the interplay between the plural and singular nature of Jogaṇī. German Indologist Gustav Oppert, who in the 1890s travelled to Gujarat, among other parts of North India, reported that an informant in Ahmedabad distinguished between three kinds of “Yōginīs” [sic]: *Pul* (flower), *Lāl* (red), and *Kēśur* (hair).²⁰² The first is integral in the process of casting out disease:

They [*yoginīs*] are invoked when epidemics, especially cholera, rage in the country. With their hair hanging over their shoulders, their faces painted with red colour, the Bhuvas assemble at a prominent Yōginī-temple, and after having partaken of a liberal supply of intoxicating liquor, jump about, pretending that the Yōginī has entered them, and that they speak in her name. At first the Pulyōginī appears alone, complaining about the neglect she and her sisters have suffered threatening the arrival of her sisters Lālyōginī and Kēśuryōginī, if she is not properly appeased now. The people made then in their homes the requested sacrifices consisting of a goat, rice, ghee, and liquor, and in the evening Pulyōginī is in a small carriage, resembling a children’s toy, taken with tomtom beating out of the town, and in the dead of night drives to the limits of the neighbouring village, where the chief Bhuva leaves her without looking backward. The inhabitants of the next village when they find the carriage on the next morning are frightened by the arrival of Pulyōginī and send her with similar ceremonies to another village (Oppert 1893, 571 ff. 399).

²⁰² Here Oppert has inaccurately rendered *phūl*, or “flower,” as the non-aspirated *pul*. As we will see, the two terms are by all indications interchangeable. While I did not encounter this particular tripartite division of Jogaṇīs during my fieldwork, several people with whom I conversed mentioned a differentiation between Phūl Jogaṇī and Lāl Jogaṇī. One such individual was the junior *pūjāri* at Amraivadi, whom we will meet momentarily. Explanations as to the specifics of the distinctions differed vastly depending on the person doing the explaining—some said Phūl Jogaṇī was headless, others said the opposite. It should be noted, however, that the name “Phūl Jogaṇī,” as I discuss very soon, is often found on contemporary Jogaṇī Mātā images (as we have seen in Figure 2).

This passage is edifying for a number of reasons. Firstly, it describes the decidedly non-*sāttvik*, *bhuvā*-based rites that took place in a rural, village-based context. This seems to map on to *pavan* as it is observed at many goddess shrines and temples today, Jogaṇī sites included. Sacrifice and liquor oblations, while less common due to animal cruelty laws and Gujarat’s “dry” status prohibiting liquor, also occur at some *mātā* *derīs* in rural or depressed-class areas, as we saw was the case at the Dhrangadhra Melaḍī site. Jogaṇī Mātā sites in such areas are no exception. One such present-day example is a Jogaṇī temple, reportedly over 200 years old, located very close to the airport on the outskirts of Ahmedabad. In April of 2015, the presiding *bhuvā* informed me that sacrifices still take place here on select occasions. Even more importantly for our purposes, Oppert’s passage establishes that *yoginīs*, while treated as a group, were also portrayed as individual entities in Gujarati folklore and approached as such. “Pulyōginī” bears particular significance in this cholera rite, and speaks to the prominence of a singular, discrete Jogaṇī in Gujarati village religion in the nineteenth century. The “Pul” in “Pulyōginī” also corresponds directly with the “Phūl” prefix that is, as we have already seen, commonly bestowed upon Jogaṇī Mātā in many of her modern lithographs.

The singular *yoginī* or “Jogni” is mentioned in other colonial-era ethnographic writing as well. In *The Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency*, Jogaṇī—rendered here as “Jogni”—was listed as one among many Gujarati words referring to “outside spirits” or ghosts who are female (Kirparam 1901, 417). Also on this list are Melaḍī, Cuḍel, and Śikotar, all of which at present bear the title Mātā, and all of which have seen major modern temples erected in their names (*Ibid.*).²⁰³ Alongside these other female divinities, this Jognī is sited at funeral grounds, crossroads, and, like the plural *yoginīs*, thresholds especially (*Ibid.*). Moreover, Jognī was designated in the *Gazetteer* as being among “goddesses to whom blood offerings are made” (1901, 406), thereby corroborating the account of the sacrifice from Oppert. In the *Gazetteer*, a listing of the various Dalit and lower-caste groups who perform such blood offerings has also been provided. These groups include the Devipujaks, the pastoralist Bharwads and Rabaris, and the Kolis and Rajputs, all of whom are among Jogaṇī Mātā worshippers today (*Ibid.*).²⁰⁴ More recent ethnographies have also referenced Jogaṇī as a single divinity for similar caste groups.

²⁰³ For more on Śikotar, see Chandervaker (1963). For an introduction to Cuḍel in her folkloric and modern temple iterations, see Dinnell (2015).

²⁰⁴ In the *Gazetteer*, it was explained that blood offerings are made on occasion by high-caste Hindus, sometimes to secure the favour of a particular female divinity (Kirparam 1901, 406).

Lancy Lobo has reported that Thakors, a lower-status group identifying with the Koli caste category, worship Jogaṇī as a “lower Mātā” (Lobo 1995, 142). This group features in a folktale I heard during my fieldwork wherein Jogaṇī beheads a Thakor married couple who did not honour her appropriately. While this story could be a by-product of Jogaṇī Mātā’s Chinnamastā imagery, it may also emerge from more general connections between the goddess and blood, specifically bleeding related to the head. Joan Erikson, for instance, in her work on temple textiles in Gujarat, has recorded that Jogaṇī is the goddess consulted by individuals suffering from severe nosebleeds or head wounds (1968, 28).

So while the term “Jogaṇī” was no doubt in conversation with a panoply of pan-Indian and local semantic connotations, both singular and plural, there is also evidence that “Jogaṇī” referred to a standalone spirit in the folk Gujarati context. Underneath this convoluted plurality of meanings, there is a singular entity—a uniquely Gujarati “Jogni” who was both ghost and goddess. Associated with afflictions such as cholera, nosebleeds, and head wounds, she was worshipped via *tāmasik* means such as blood offerings and liquor oblations as something of a proto-Mātā. This appears to be the core of the current-day Jogaṇī, affixed now with the Mātā title.²⁰⁵ The historical overlap with regard to castes that pay her worship, the ritual use of *tāmasik* substances and intoxicated *pavan* at some of her village or non-elite sites, and the stability of the prefix “Phūl” for a singular “Jogaṇī” all suggest a high degree of continuity between the singular “Jogni” or “Pulyōgini” of the past and the Jogaṇī Mātā who is depicted like Chinnamastā in the present.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁵ As a variation of “mother,” the title “Mātā” brings with it further considerations as to the possible origins of Jogaṇī and other Gujarati goddesses. Suffice it to say, both the *yoginīs* and Mahāvidyās are linked with *mātrkāś* (or mothers) in Sankritic and folk traditions (see Hatley 2012; Mahalakshmi 2014, 201–202).

²⁰⁶ *Tāmasik* rites are not necessarily the norm at all—or even the majority—of village Jogaṇī sites. One such *sāttvik* village-styled site to Jogaṇī I was able to visit is located on a rural siding on a highway heading westward from Ahmedabad. Aside from its small scale, it closely resembles the Jogaṇī temples in the following section, and so it is worth detailing here. The shrine is fronted by a woman named Madhubahen from the Devipujak community (formerly the Vaghris), who maintained the site along with her husband, a retired railroad worker. Madhubahen’s *pavan* started approximately a quarter-century in the past when she was in the throes of mental illness that grew out of abuses she had suffered at the hands of her male in-laws. At the nadir of her suffering, she ran away from home to the Gir forest where she planned to commit suicide, even attempting to give away her saris in preparation. At one point she tried to gift these saris to an unknown Brahmin lady, and the mysterious woman instructed her to take a bath and then get a blessing from a religious figure operating nearby who was known for curing negativities via a “Brahminic” power. Madhubahen took the woman’s advice and was relieved of her mental illness. Her family members also recognized the *camatkār* and, instead of beating her, from that point began worshipping her as a goddess. From the time this *pavan* started, Madhubahen and her husband have lived in celibacy. Madhubahen’s religious work, meanwhile, mainly involves using her power positively—that is, to heal and help out others. In one instance that hit close to home for Madhubahen, her husband received a massive electric shock when trying to clip a power line to get electricity illegally. He fell from the pole and showed no signs of life. Madhubahen received a

And speaking of Chinnamastā, what stands out in all the ethnographic accounts cited above relating to Jogaṇī, both colonial and even later, is what is *not* mentioned. That is, none of the authors previously referenced have described Jogaṇī as bearing the self-decapitated iconography of Chinnamastā. This is somewhat surprising given the proclivity of the colonial gaze to fixate on such evocative images. This gives the impression that Jogaṇī's Chinnamastā iconography is a relatively recent overlay atop the singular ghost-*cum*-goddess Jogaṇī/Jogaṇī. The question of *when* exactly the adoption of this imagery took place remains harrowing, however. When I asked people at Jogaṇī temples to estimate what approximate decade they remembered the goddess taking on her current lithograph illustration as Chinnamastā, I was told that this had been her image since time immemorial, and could be traced back to Jogaṇī's creation of the universe.

Looking at this question in terms of a more etic historiography, this pairing of Jogaṇī with the Chinnamastā image likely took place in the past two or three decades. The availability of Chinnamastā lithographs in other parts of India may provide some clue as to just how recently Jogaṇī came to be connected to the image. While Chinnamastā's chromolithographs date back at least as far as the 1880s (Pinney 2004), she has only seen her devotional images broadly circulated in recent times, at least if the curio shops surrounding her Cintapūrṇī temple complex in Himachal Pradesh are any indication. It was at this complex that Elisabeth Benard, in the course of doing fieldwork for her 1994 study of Chinnamastā's temples, was informed by *pūjārīs* that household devotees visualize Chinnamastā solely as Durgā when worshipping in their homes. No Chinnamastā prints, they explained, were sold at the temple's outlying shops, as her form was thought to be of interest only to yogis and other adepts (Benard 1994, 47 ff. 23). Absence of proof is not, of course, proof of absence, but Cintapūrṇī provides at least some

vision of this calamity in a dream and eventually wound up by her husband's side. Taking him in her lap and worshipping Jogaṇī by mind and by incense stick, while also performing mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, her husband received energy from the goddess. After vomiting blood and bleeding from the ears, he finally resumed breathing. All he was left with was a minor head injury that required only two stitches to heal. While she was in the hospital with her husband, Madhubahen was able to heal other people and gained more publicity. As of November 2015, she was conducting similar healing every Sunday and Tuesday, or whenever the need arose regarding matters of health or fertility. In one case of which she was particularly proud, she was able to find a wife for a bald man in his thirties. Madhubahen insisted that the rituals at her shrine are entirely *sāttvik*. There are no animal sacrifices here to propitiate or thank the goddess, she explained, only the offering of coconuts. When I asked Madhubahen to characterize Jogaṇī, she drew upon Vedāntic theological ideas, affording the Mātā a jurisdiction that stretches far beyond the immediate locality. Indeed, she referred to Jogaṇī as an *Ādyaśakti* ("first" or "primordial Śakti"). All in all, the references to "Brahminical" power, the ascetically-oriented commitment to celibacy, and the Advaitic summation of Jogaṇī's power all suggest a *sāttvik*, Sanskrit-styled imagining of Jogaṇī within this particular village context. Curiously enough, Madhubahen also outwardly shunned the tantric, not only in label but in practice as well, as she explained that she does not employ any mantras in her faith healing.

indication that *sāttvik*, gold-complexioned Chinnamastā images (and the Gujarati Jogaṇī Mātā images patterned after them) may have only become widely available after the mid-1990s.

Regardless of the date of its introduction, the Chinnamastā imagery has not alienated the crowds that flock to Jogaṇī Mātā temples in Gujarat, including their middle-class and upwardly mobile sections. While Jogaṇī, like other *mātās*, sometimes occasions a negative perception among some elites in view of links with *tāmasik* practices and lower castes, the gold-complexioned Chinnamastā imagery seems to work in tandem with the relations to established figures such as Paraśurāma and Gorakhnāth to move the goddess outside of the village context toward a safer, *sāttvik*, Sanskritic mode. What results is the Jogaṇī Mātā we meet in the temples of urban Gujarat—a deity that is quite different from the Durgā-like Cosāṭh Jogaṇī Mātā but still treated as a Great Goddess in her own right.

Ethnography of Urban Jogaṇī Mātā Sites

In order to better understand how Jogaṇī Mātā’s village and tantric resonances function in a contemporary Gujarati context, I dedicated a portion of my fieldwork to a number of her sites in and around Ahmedabad. The first three of these we examine—one located in Gandhinagar, the other two in the Ahmedabad subdivisions of Amraivadi and Naranpura—each in their own way exemplify middle-class and Sanskritic sensibilities in the familiar pattern of urban *mātā* temples. As such, they attract audiences that include upwardly mobile patrons. At each site, tantric imagery and apparatuses are present to varying degree, ranging from lithographs of Jogaṇī Mā as Chinnamastā to yantras and mantras. Also, all three sites claim to provide access to the fast-acting, highly efficacious power of *śakti*. Even with that being the case, officiants at all three sites were reticent to recognize the tantric elements situated around them. Regarding my inquiries into Jogaṇī Mā’s fairly obvious tantric resonances and ritual appurtenances, their responses ranged from non-acknowledgement to downplaying to outright disavowal. Tantra is, of course, characteristically given to secrecy. Thus, keeping such practices private may be one of any number of reasons why my conversationalists did not identify Jogaṇī Mā’s tantric elements as being tantric. In keeping with the spirit of good faith necessarily cultivated by an ethnographer, however, I have my doubts that these small shrines and temples have elaborate tantric rites going on “behind the veil,” so to speak, and I believe I built sufficient rapport to conclude that my conversationalists’ answers were not deceptive. Rather, I think something more

novel and uniquely contemporary is taking place that speaks to just how mainstream and second-nature tantra has become in present-day India. This becomes more tenable when we consider our fourth temple, based in Odhav, which operates in much the same way as the previous trio with its own Sanskritized rituals and middle-class following. Here, however, the presiding *pūjārī* enthusiastically accepts the tantric label. This brand of forthright tantra certainly does not seem to have alienated upwardly mobile devotees in Odhav, just as a comparable well-intentioned tantra, even if not explicitly labelled or consciously acknowledged as such, has not prevented a similar crowd from frequenting the other sites I visited.

AMRAIVADI

At a busy junction in the Ahmedabad subdivision of Amraivadi, the rather exquisite Śrī Jogaṇī Mātā Mandir stands shaded in tall margosas. Pristine white with pinkish trim, the temple's marble is ornately detailed, especially on its many pillars, which support a rectangular roof that peaks in a 36-foot *vimāna* (Figure 19). Beneath the impressive *vimāna*, the temple is open on all four sides, both indoor and outdoor and, in that sense, betwixt-and-between, not unlike the imagining of Jogaṇī housed within. In the *garbha-grha* (sanctum sanctorum), the central icon of Jogaṇī Mā is very small—perhaps no more than a foot in height—but otherwise a fairly standard goddess icon, bejewelled and sari-draped with tridents on either side. Curiously enough, her head is intact. The headless lithograph imagery of the goddess detailed above does not figure prominently inside the Amraivadi temple itself, though the Chinnamastā image is hardly absent. Rather, there is a subsidiary shrine located right at the entrance to the temple featuring a prominent relief of the headless Jogaṇī Mā hued from marble. This placement of a Chinnamastā-styled image at the entryway would seem to follow from folkloric associations between Jogaṇī(s) and thresholds, playing upon her (or their) domain over liminal spaces. Peculiarly, the top halves of the attendants and the goddess depicted in this relief had been covered with a small piece of cloth (*cūndaḍī*), a convention I did not observe at any other Jogaṇī temple or shrine. The coexistence of the decapitated and non-decapitated goddess suggests that, even though this is a Mandir to one Śrī Jogaṇī Mātā as per its name, there are plural imaginings of Jogaṇī at the Amraivadi temple—not 64, but two, to be precise.



Figure 19: The Jogaṇī temple in Amraivadi (Photo by author)

My discussions with temple officiants confirmed as much. The junior *pūjārī*, a Rajasthani Brahmin whom I met in May 2015, offered that these two Jogaṇīs were sisters and that their

names were Phūlbāi and Lālbāi. Phūlbāi took the Chinnamastā form (as per the lithograph labels) and Lālbāi was seemingly the more conventionally-figured goddess within the temple. This corroborates two-thirds of Oppert’s tripartite colonial-era classification of “Yōginīs” as *Pul*, *Lāl*, and *Kēśur*. That said, it stands as just one among innumerable categorizations and enumerations of “Jogaṇīs” that I heard in the field, speaking further to the non-standardized, free-form, and multifarious imagining of Jogaṇī(s). Whether these two images at Amraivadi are sisters or separate aspects or one and the same Jogaṇī, what I ascertained more concretely at this site was that their differences are, for the most part, cosmetic. While the Jogaṇī inside the temple fits the Great Goddess model and quite observably fills a more central role in ritual, both she and Phūl Jogaṇī/Chinnamastā are understood here to be *sāttvik* and are worshipped as such in both Brahminic and tantric modes, apparently for the benefit of an increasingly middle-class following.

The Amraivadi Jogaṇī Mandir’s strong Brahminic presence is indexed by more than just the junior *pūjārī*, as the main officiant is himself a Brahmin. His name is Mr. Pandiya, a man of merry disposition who works as a schoolteacher by day and tends to the temple’s priestly duties on Sunday and Tuesday, as well as during major events. From the perspective of his colleagues, Mr. Pandiya’s role as “priest” is solidly established. For example, when I asked somewhat presumptuously on my first visit to the temple if I could “meet the main *bhuvā*,” I was promptly corrected by the junior *pūjārī*. The head of the Śrī Jogaṇī Mātā Mandir, he explained, is *not* a *bhuvā*, but rather a priest. This distinction seems to be tied to the array of refined ritual services that Mr. Pandiya can offer on account of his being a Brahmin. These ritual aptitudes would appear to prevent him from falling into the ever-dubious *bhuvā* category.

Mr. Pandiya was by no means officious in his manner, however, and he freely discussed Śrī Jogaṇī Mātā Mandir. In the process, he shed some light on its eventful history. The village of Amraivadi is, in his estimation, 400 years old, and the original *ḍerī* out of which the present-day temple grew dates back about 250 years. At that time, Amraivadi was a very small village far removed from the city of Ahmedabad, and the Jogaṇī *ḍerī* served as the community’s boundary marker, as could be expected of a Jogaṇī shrine given the goddess’s folkloric connections to thresholds. Mr. Pandiya reports that in the original *ḍerī*, the goddess was depicted riding a goat, possibly indicating some intersections or permeability between Jogaṇī and Meladī. According to Mr. Pandiya, an ancestral Patel received this goat statue from some Banjara people in a caravan

just after the inception of the village.²⁰⁷ Though the vehicle is a goat, the goddess was always worshipped as Jogaṇī, an incongruity that Mr. Pandiya attributes to the fact that the main worshippers at this site were from lower castes and had little formal knowledge of iconography. From the very start, the temple was heralded as a protector of the village people. Mr. Pandiya cited a local belief that, through the centuries, no damage ever came to any village resident from any accident of any sort, not even when they were travelling. Mr. Pandiya referred to this as an “ongoing *camatkār*.” Though the miraculous power of the *ḍerī* that became Śrī Jogaṇī Mātā Mandir may be evenly distributed among village residents, there are also a number of significant, large-scale *camatkārs* that have taken place at the site as well. For that reason, its history reads like an inventory of auspicious events.

For most of its history, the *ḍerī* was small and, until very recently, in disrepair, but it was a *camatkār*, it seems, that initiated the shrine’s growth and restoration. When communal riots broke out between Hindus and Muslims in the fall of 1969, a curfew order was imposed in Amraivadi. Military personnel were scattered throughout the area to enforce these temporal restrictions. One night after curfew, soldiers stationed in close proximity to the *ḍerī* were approached by a mysterious lady of advanced age who asked for *darśan*. Based on accounts from elderly people in the community, this unidentified old woman started a trend. From the next day forward, people began coming to the *ḍerī* asking for *darśan* and *prasād*. By 1976, the village began rebuilding this *ḍerī*, and once again a *camatkār* resulted. In order to enable expansion, builders needed to cut down a margosa tree on the site. As the story goes, a Thakor girl told the builders “do not try to cut it,” apparently speaking the will of the goddess. The builders did not heed the warning, and the man making the cut received an electric shock. Despite this misfortune, the temple was eventually completed with stone, brick, and other building materials supplied by individuals from the community. Since then, the benevolent blessings have continued. At one point in the late 1990s, there was a fire around another of the margosa trees shading the shrine, but there was no damage to the Jogaṇī idols. Once again, a Thakor girl showed up, this time making entreaties to the goddess that she should cool down. Within minutes, the fire disappeared without the advent of water, leaving firefighters flummoxed. When

²⁰⁷ Banjaras are a community of itinerant Indian Muslims predominately living in the states of Gujarat, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh. Their religion is syncretic, and they worship a number of Hindu gods and goddesses, including *mātās* (Deogaonkar 1992, 42). For more on the Banjaras, see S.G. Deogaonkar (1992) and J.J. Roy Burman (2010).

the Gujarat earthquake struck a few years later in 2001, there was yet again no damage to the temple, even though renovation work was going on at the time. Perhaps more remarkably, when riots broke out in 2002 in connection with the Godhra carnage, there was, according to the junior *pūjārī*, peace in Amraivadi. This supposed *camatkār* intimates that the temple's object of worship epitomizes a progressive stance with regard to communal disharmony, paralleling that of the temple's surrounding community.

Camatkārs supplied Mr. Pandiya's own inspiration for serving the Śrī Jogaṇī Mātā Mandir. When he was an infant, his kinfolk ran a business in Pune. This lasted until a familial dispute arose and his mother became scared by suspicions that black mesmerism was being performed against her. Mr. Pandiya's immediate family migrated to Ahmedabad, where they had an aunt living in Amraivadi. As Mr. Pandiya's family got settled in the new city during this difficult time in their lives, the people of the village supported them. At first, the young Mr. Pandiya did not play with the non-Brahmin village children due to concerns over what he described as the “*saṃskāras*” of his caste. At the age of about four or five, however, the young Mr. Pandiya began going with the other children to the Jogaṇī *ḍerī*. From that point on, his attachment to the temple grew deeper and deeper, and gradually he came to realize that it was with blessings of this goddess that the surrounding community prospered. Moreover, his family prospered as a result of the community's support. Owing to the fact that so many Jogaṇī worshippers helped his family in his youth, Mr. Pandiya explained that he has a personal debt to repay, at minimum, by way of service to the temple throughout his lifetime. Mr. Pandiya and his family have continued to benefit from the blessings of Jogaṇī. For instance, he attributes the goddess with helping him land his respectable job as a schoolteacher. Thus, upon gaining this employment, he came to the *ḍerī* with thanks. Later on, he claims the Mātā's power revitalized his ailing father, who at one point, due to intensive swelling, could barely move a muscle, let alone walk into the *mandir*. With the blessing of Jogaṇī Mā, however, the elder Pandiya was able to take hold of the oil lamp and ascend the steps of the temple, doing *ārātī* in full swing. Jogaṇī has also cured Mr. Pandiya's own infirmities. In 2014, just a year before I met him, Mr. Pandiya suffered from serious chest pains. At a private hospital, he was diagnosed with a blockage in three veins, and doctors called for an operation he could not afford. Mr. Pandiya promptly prayed to the Mātājī, and the next time he went to the hospital, all his tests were found to be normal, allowing him to avoid surgery. Because of all these blessings, Mr. Pandiya has a demonstrably intense faith in Jogaṇī Mā.

Though she does not rank among his three *kuldevīs*, his faith in Jogaṇī goes beyond the de facto devotion afforded to a family goddess. To be sure, the intensity of Mr. Pandiya's piety is verily inscribed on his flesh itself. This was laid bare when he showed me the scar tissue on his arms and hands, the result of heat burns from all the ghee he has offered to the goddess over the years. He does not treat these burns with ointment, but instead daubs them with flowers—that is, the *phūl*—blessed by Jogaṇī Mā.

Come Sunday nights, Mr. Pandiya carries out *āratī* with a zest that is anything but routine. When I attended in June 2015, the crowd assembled as it grew dark, filtering in by rickshaw and on foot. By seven o'clock, the area surrounding the temple was bustling with activity. Some people waited inside the temple, getting *darśan* before the ceremony began. As *āratī* time approached, they eventually moved outside to join the crowd amassed in the streets. So extensive is the typical Sunday night audience that part of the street had to be cordoned off by local authorities. The assembled devotees stood back from the temple, leaving perhaps 15 feet of space between themselves and the entrance. This gave Mr. Pandiya room to move around with the flame. Mr. Pandiya started off by making his way in and around the temple with a bell and a pan of burning incense, ringing the former and letting smoke from the latter waft throughout the area. After a while, he traded the incense for an apparatus bearing multiple tiny oil lamps, their close-set flames converging to create the appearance of a torch-like blaze. With brio, Mr. Pandiya wielded this in front of the various icons within the temple and outside of it, ringing the bell and singing joyfully at full volume all the while. In the streets, the people looking on sang along. Standing together in neat arrangement were multiple caste groups, the majority lower or middle, consisting most prominently of Thakors and Patels. The Patel presence could be expected, as virtually all of the trustees listed on the temple billboards bore this surname. That said, the people assembled for *āratī* ranged from potters to Brahmins. When *āratī* ended, they all dispersed for *prasād*, with women and children getting the opportunity to take the first taste of the *sukhḍi* that had been offered to the goddess.

Prasād is, not surprisingly, vegetarian, and, as could be expected given the heavy Brahmin involvement, the temple is completely *sāttvik*. While Jogaṇī as depicted inside the temple receives *sukhḍi* as well as coconut, her acephalous counterpart at the entrance receives *prasād* that is referred to as *cavāṇu* or “mixed,” with spicy and sweet flavours intermingled. This “mixed” *prasād* seems to stem from (and attest to) the goddess's liminal characterization. That

said, the *prasād* is also wholly vegetarian and does not emulate gastronomically Chinnamastā's bloody imagery in any way. Both imaginings of Jogaṇī are entirely *sāttvik*. According to Mr. Pandiya, sacrifice used to take place at the temple, but has stopped in the past 20 years. When I asked what motivated this change, he answered succinctly: "we have no right." In this same spirit, the temple trust has attached to the railing on the front of the temple a prominent, text-heavy sign explaining that no one is allowed to sacrifice animals at the site (Figure 20). The sign serves warning that the temple trustees will launch a police case against offenders of this rule. Sketched above the text are pictures of a goat and a chicken, presumably for the benefit of non-literate passersby. This amounts to an on-site variation of the admonitions against sacrifice so commonly found on websites to Melaḍī Mātā. Instead of live animals, coconuts are the primary offerings at Amraivadi. Sometimes as many as a thousand coconuts are sacrificed on Sundays for *prasād*. So committed is the temple trust to nonviolence that no weapon is allowed within range of its boundaries. Even police officers will not bring weapons in, I was told, and this was a standard set by yet another *camatkār*. This case involved a policeman who claimed the goddess revealed herself to assure him that she would take care of all necessary security measures on site. The ethic of nonviolence at Amraivadi extends more generally toward non-conflict: in the presence of Jogaṇī, the junior *pūjārī* explained to me, there are no clashes, no fights, and no litigations. Once again, this may be taken as encoding a value system that is less hardline conservative and more tempered with regard to communal struggles.

Despite the determination to curb carnage in all forms, it was Mr. Pandiya's suspicion that sacrifice actually does happen near this site from time to time. He hypothesized that sacrifices take place in a covert way, probably after midnight and outside of the temple. The beneficiary, he speculated, is none other than the Chinnamastā-styled statue. Perhaps this image of Jogaṇī retains some vestiges of a village-styled, *tāmasik* following. Even though Mr. Pandiya could not confirm as much, he seemed on the whole somewhat resigned to that likelihood.



Figure 20: Sign forbidding animal sacrifices at the Amraivadi Joganī temple (Photo by author)

If the expansive appeal of a Sanskritized ritual repertoire can unite diverse castes, so too can middle-classness, the aspirations and accessories of which are easily discernible at the Amraivadi Joganī temple. Many young men and women showed up in jeans, t-shirts, and other Westernized clothing. This is fitting, as North America is a prospective target for many visitors. The junior *pūjārī* explained to me that while people come here for all the standard requests (particularly fertility and good marriages), many also visit specifically to pray for visas to the United States, Canada, and other countries. In fact, the goddess at Amraivadi has earned the nickname of “Visa Joganī Mātā.” This moniker, which developed about a decade ago, puts a modern gloss on her long-established proclivity for assisting travellers. Near the end of one of my fieldwork stays, with my flight back home looming, Mr. Pandiya placed my own Canadian passport under the central shrine so as to confer Joganī Mātā’s blessings and ensure an easy trip

through customs and security. So profound is the power of Jogaṇī Mātā vis-à-vis boundaries that even the TSA, apparently, stoops before her. Middle-classness was also demonstrated through displays of prosperity at an impressive scale—indeed, every Sunday the temple goes through 50 to 60 kilos of *sukhḍi* for *prasād*, Mr. Pandiya and the junior *pūjārī* informed me, much of which is brought by Patels and Thakors. Despite the volume of people and *prasād*, the temple makes a vigilant effort to keep things orderly. Their concern with the area's itinerant livestock goes beyond sacrificial matters. During my first stop at the temple, for instance, when a goat wandered up the pristine marble steps and into the temple proper, two trustees promptly drove it out. The Amraivadi temple is, evidently, not a barn. The temple signage, meanwhile, is not merely limited to the anti-sacrifice billboard. Inside, an eye-level sign requests that patrons refrain from sitting in the temple for more than 20 minutes. Like the cordoning around the temple during *āratī*, these signs are clearly aimed at organizing the sheer volume of people passing through. Moreover, in accordance with the temple's preference for priests over *bhuvās*, the practice of *pāṭlā* via seed tossing is not performed at the Amraivadi temple. *Pavan*, meanwhile, is an occasional phenomenon at best. According to the junior *pūjārī*, *pavan* sometimes occurs as a result of music played over the temple's stereo system, but it rarely amounts to anything more than that.

The confluence of middle-class and upper-caste propriety seems to inform the unique practice of placing the *cūndaḍī* overtop the headless Jogaṇī and her attendants. When I asked about the cloth, Mr. Pandiya related it back to notions of decency supplemented by some traditional middle- and upper-caste ideas of femininity. Originally, Mr. Pandiya explained, there was no cloth atop the figures in marble outside. However, the Patel community so influential in shaping the temple requested that the junior *pūjārī* place the fabric over Chinnamastā. This, Mr. Pandiya surmised, was based in a notion of *purdah* (*ghūṅghaṭ*), veiling the faces and naked torsos of the two female attendants and the goddess in accordance with Patel ideas and practices borrowed from Baniyas and other elite groups. Though monitoring female modesty is far from unfamiliar to Brahmins, Mr. Pandiya did not himself agree with this practice and thought the figures' faces (or severed neck, in the case of Jogaṇī/Chinnamastā) should be open to view. However, it was at odds with his easygoing comportment to raise such complaints. Nonetheless, the majoritarian Patel community's insistence on veiling of the headless goddess speaks to the persistent significance of moral propriety—especially that of women—in aspiring to or

actualizing ascendancy in Gujarat. We could think of this veiling as Sanskritizing or Vaiṣṇavizing, especially in view of the reference to perceived Baniya mores. At present, however, it likely has as much (or more) to do with middle-class values of decency, wherein women's propriety—especially modesty—is a crucial locus for generating and sustaining elite status. With her severed head covered to protect some element of decency (if not to hide the *tāmasik* bloodshed then to maintain modesty), it is the goddess Jogaṇī herself that is made to conform to perceived boundaries of the elite regarding feminine decorum. While Patels hold economic clout in Gujarat, these efforts to sanitize or tidy up Jogaṇī and the temple in which she resides, alongside the extensive Brahmin involvement, appear to work against lingering stigmas that firmly established elites may still have toward Patels and other low- or middle-caste groups that attend. At Amraivadi, I got the impression that the moral capital of Patels and other involved castes is in an ongoing process of refinement aimed at rendering these groups' social status congruent with their gaining economic capital.

Perhaps it is a sense of decorum that accounts for the scant number of severed-headed Jogaṇī Mātā images throughout the temple (apart from the entryway relief). Even so, the grounds are not without such lithographs. There is one, for instance, placed quite fittingly overtop a door in Mr. Pandiya's office, which is located across the street from the temple itself. Jogaṇī Mā's yantras and mantras also play a part in ritual activities at the temple. A favourite of Mr. Pandiya's was the *sarvatobhadra cakṛa*, a *maṇḍala* constructed with multicoloured food grains and used in the month of October on the fourteenth day of Navarātri, five days after the main ceremony has concluded. Similar food-grain yantras have been made for special occasions such as engagements, which are typically attended by processions of 50 or more people. Notably, at these events a *bhuvā*, not a priest, is permitted to perform *pāṭlā* to thank the goddess for fulfilled wishes (*badhra*) pertaining to the occasion. Mr. Pandiya assured me that, while he was present twice weekly and also at significant events, the *bhuvā* only appeared two times per year on average. What is interesting here is that when the *bhuvā*-based, village-styled religion makes its rare appearance in Amraivadi, it does so alongside these yantras and mantras. This suggests that the site plays host to reconfigurings, albeit infrequent, of folk tantric practices in conjunction with a more classical, Sanskritic, and yantra-based tantra overseen by Brahmins. Perhaps the Brahminically-amenable tantra mediates between folk and mainstream rituals, transmuting village-styled, potentially *tāmasik* (or at least less-restrained) aspects into safer, Sanskritic

channels. Regardless, neither the senior nor junior *pūjārī* acknowledged apparatuses such as the *sarvatobhadra cakra* as tantric, nor did they label Jogaṇī Mātā as such. Rather, the yantras, mantras, and lithographs were just a part of business-as-usual for the *pūjārīs* and for their patrons, including the well-to-do, cosmopolitan visitors.

GANDHINAGAR

Tucked away amongst conjoined houses in a comfortable, tree-ensconced residential sector of Gandhinagar is a small but popular Jogaṇī Mātā shrine. Founded just over a decade ago, the shrine operates out of a tiny room in the home of Anitabahen (Figure 21), an Ayurvedic nurse, and her husband Mukeshbhai, who works for the state government distributing electricity. The couple hails from the Barot community, a bardic caste that is, much like the Charans, thought to be strongly linked to goddesses. So strong is their Śākta link that Barots are collectively referred to as “Devīputras” or “sons of the Devī.”²⁰⁸ Both husband and wife have *pavan* of local deities, Anitabahen from Jogaṇī Mātā and Mukeshbhai from Śikotar Mā and Gogā Mahārāj.²⁰⁹ While it takes Mukeshbhai considerable effort to get *pavan*, Anitabahen can get it spontaneously and with greater intensity. For this reason, she represents the spiritual focus of the shrine.

Anitabahen first experienced *pavan* as an adolescent. This *pavan* stemmed from an encounter she had when travelling from her in-law’s village of Galothra to the nearby town of Mansa. In the midst of her trip, she encountered a young girl on the roadside who offered her a rose flower—that is, a *phūl*, the predominant Jogaṇī Mātā symbol. Anitabahen initially refused the rose, and then carried on. When she turned back, she saw that the girl was gone, having left behind only the rose. Anitabahen picked up the rose, and soon thereafter began to suffer from pain in her chin and stiffness in her neck. Unsure of the cause of the malady and desperate for help, her family consulted several *bhuvās*, even though Anitabahen had her doubts about their methods. While she had faith in her *kuldevī*, she did not believe in *pavan*. One of the *bhuvās* said

²⁰⁸ For a discussion of the Barots of Gujarat, as well as their connection to goddesses, see Shah and Shroff (1958). While Barots, Charans, and other pastoralist groups enjoyed a special relationship with goddesses on account of their status as genealogists of royal families, they were also not, as a whole, a particularly high-status group. Pastoralist groups often engaged in *tāmasik* practices such as goat and buffalo sacrifices, which resonated with royal sacrifices offered by kings (Tambs-Lyche 1997, 178).

²⁰⁹ Gogā Mahārāj, also known as Gūgā, is said to have been a disciple of Gorakhnāth. Gogā Mahārāj was educated by his guru in the art of charming snakes. There are many *derīs* dedicated to Gogā Mahārāj throughout Gujarat, and he often appears in subsidiary shrines at goddess temples. For more on Gogā Mahārāj, see G.W. Briggs ([1938] 1973, 193-201).

that Anitabahen should throw away the rose, and so she did as requested, placing it in a pile of old bricks. Afterward, she had recurrent, restive dreams about what she had thrown away. She then consulted another *bhuvā* who told her that she had to get the rose flower back; as he phrased it to Anitabahen, “you threw away your fortune.” Meanwhile, she was still pained above the collar. Regarding this ailment, she was advised by yet another *bhuvā* that such stiffness indicated the presence of Jogaṇī Mātā, consonant with the goddess’s connection to afflictions of the head and neck. This *bhuvā* also determined that the mysterious girl was the *svarūpa* of Jogaṇī from Palodhra. At first, Anitabahen felt scared, but the *bhuvā* said that she would gradually gain fame for her work. Hearing this, Anitabahen accepted her *pavan*, and from that point forward saw it as her duty to worship Jogaṇī with an oil lamp for the advancement of society.



Figure 21: Anitabahen channels Jogaṇī at her home in Gandhinagar (Photo by author)

Anitabahen's *pavan* has only strengthened after she and her husband co-founded their shrine, and now she possesses the ability to link up with the goddess at any time. Typically, the sensation of *pavan* starts in her right hand and then moves upward, manifesting as a pain in the point of her chin. By this stage, she is completely immersed in a trance, her thoughts turned so determinedly toward the Mātājī that she is not able to recognize family members. Her *pavan* is especially pronounced, she explained, during the nine nights of Navarātri. For the duration of the festival she goes on leave from her work and gives up all housekeeping duties such as cooking and washing, which are taken on by other family members. So although Anitabahen describes herself as a dedicated and obedient wife, it would appear that *pavan* absolves her of domestic duties, at least during Navarātri. She also observes a Navarātri fast, consuming only lemon juice, milk, and water. Day and night throughout the festival she stays on the floor of the shrine, sleeping there on a jute rug over which she may or may not put a silk bedsheet. Jute is a good insulator, Anitabahen explained, hence it keeps *pavan* and bodily energy strong for a long period of time. Throughout the course of Navarātri, no one is able to wake her from this deep, *pavan*-infused slumber despite their best efforts. Anitabahen eventually stirs around two or three in the morning after each of the nine nights to meditate and recite mantras. Also, she dances and sings *garbas* periodically throughout the festival, either in the temple or in open fields. Drifting in and out of her waking consciousness, she plays and talks with Jogaṇī Mā. When people arrive at the site, she is able to announce the purpose of their visit without fail.

Anitabahen described her life's work as a process of transferring her Jogaṇī *pavan* to her patients, both in her home and in the hospital. When patients visit her home shrine, Anitabahen repeats prayers, mantras, and *ślokas* in her mind or under her breath. All the while, she petitions the goddess for good healing and good resolve for patients, trying to awaken whatever *śakti* she is getting from Jogaṇī within those who need it most. At some point during this process, either she or Mukeshbhai will apply a cloth to the visitor, attempting to remove "negativity" (*doṣ*). On the occasions during which I watched these undertakings throughout 2015, recordings of Sanskrit chants played in the background all the while. These consultations were also concerned with solving everyday problems in devotees' lives and fulfilling their wishes. In these cases, Anitabahen read beads in order to provide solutions. As was the case at Amraivadi, a recurrent request among devotees at the Gandhinagar shrine involved securing visas to the United States and other Western countries. During my visits, a number of people came in seeking help for just

such a desire. This was the case for one Patel woman who was trying to get American work visas for herself and several family members.

From Anitabahen's own perspective, however, the shrine's primary achievements have involved the alleviation of health problems. In this way, her *pavan* has allowed her to heal people in two ways, as she conceived it—directly as the Mātājī, and secondarily through her Ayurvedic nursing. Drawing on the local parlance, she labelled these twinned methods as *duā* (blessings) and *davā* (medicine). She saw herself as a powerful supplement to an ill person's regular treatments in Ayurvedic or allopathic medicine. It was this kind of hybrid healing, in fact, that initially solidified the power of Anitabahen's *pavan* and her profile as a healer. Before her *pavan* had become firmly established, Anitabahen helped cure a female friend suffering from breast cancer. When all medical treatments had proven insufficient, Anitabahen prayed to Jogaṇī on the woman's behalf: "if you have real power," she proposed to the goddess, "please cure this cancer within 21 days." Anitabahen's friend made a full recovery. Out of gratitude, the friend later installed the goddess in a small personal shrine in her home. After this, Anitabahen gained the confidence to practice as a Mātājī herself. This method combining prayers and *pavan* has yielded similar stories of miraculous cures. For instance, Anitabahen told me of one woman who was under intensive treatment at a leading cardiac hospital, heart surgery being her only conceivable hope for survival. This woman started to visit the shrine regularly, and, with the blessing of the goddess, her health steadily improved. As of 2015, she needed only minimal medication for her condition, as she relied mostly on Jogaṇī's cosmic energy to maintain her wellbeing.

Anitabahen attributes the entirety of her success at healing and granting requests to her role as a conduit for Jogaṇī Mātā. She framed Jogaṇī in a very Advaitic mode as the most ancient power in the universe from which everything else was created, including all other gods and goddesses (most notably Brahma, Śiva, and Viṣṇu). Jogaṇī, by Anitabahen's reckoning, pre-existed the universe, and it was the goddess's self-beheading that marked the primordial sacrifice that set in motion the creation of the universe. Accordingly, Anitabahen explained that the goddess, as the world's creator, is able to manifest in any place. Moreover, Anitabahen attributed Jogaṇī Mātā with the power to control any authority related to any religion, making her a truly all-encompassing deity with pan-religious scope. Because she has the widest possible jurisdiction, it follows that Jogaṇī is the most effective spiritual force available. In Anitabahen's words, Jogaṇī is a "Brahminical" power that brings prosperity, healing, and also fertility.

The effectiveness of her method of healing has gained Anitabahen a loyal following in Gandhinagar and beyond. During my visits, people showed up at the shrine from the early morning to the late evening, crammed on their knees in the 15-by-15 foot space, awaiting an audience. Meanwhile, Anitabahen and her husband were continually handling phone calls from prospective visitors. This following, they informed me, has spread to other parts of India and also abroad, and so they have accumulated devotees in the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and Canada. During one of my early visits, Mukeshbhai proudly showed me his ringing cellphone, which displayed a number with an American area code. Much like the Meladī temple in Jasalpur, the majority of their support has come from Patels based in America. Locally, major events draw crowds well beyond the capacity of the shrine's tiny confines, as is the case at the yearly *pāṭotsav*, which has brought in as many as 1500 people. In order to provide more space for their devotees, the couple plans to build a full-scale temple in close proximity to the present site on the strength of local and international donations. Their immediate goal as of 2015 was to start a drive for these contributions in North America. Their long-term vision also involves charitable works. For instance, they hope to dedicate some of the funds they raise to the construction of an affiliated old-age home that will be free-of-charge. This reiterated Anitabahen's concerted commitment to full-spectrum healthcare. Despite their success and ambitions, Mukeshbhai told me that he and his wife are not seeking big commercial gains. Humility is at the core of their self-definition—that is, they only want the status of *sevaks* or “humble servants” rather than *bhuvās*, because *bhuvās* are synonymous with profit-seeking and greed. By virtue of this unpretentiousness, they felt they had been further rewarded by the goddess in other, non-monetary ways. For instance, Mukeshbhai told of a miraculous instance in which his young son fell from a third floor window and survived unharmed. Mukeshbhai attributes this fortunate outcome to the non-lucrative approach he and his wife advocate.

Tantric imagery covered virtually every square inch of this Gandhinagar site, the shrine room festooned with yantras and numerous icons of Chinnamastā/Jogaṇī. These representations ranged from small lithograph prints to framed statuettes. Standing out among these Chinnamastā-styled icons was a plug-in three-dimensional lithograph that simulated the streams of blood from Jogaṇī Mātā's neck in blinking red LED. Yantras sat all around the main *mūrti*, the most prominent being the Jogaṇī Pūjān Yantra. During consultation with her followers, Anitabahen murmured mantras, counting them off on prayer beads while consulting the goddess.

Additionally, there are 64 oil lamps that are lit and offered on peak days such as Sunday and Tuesday. This appeared to be a conscious nod to the Cosāṭh Jogaṇī temple at Palodhra, which Mukeshbhai has visited on festivals days. When I inquired about the tantric nature of these ritual and visual apparatuses, Anitabahen and her husband were quick to set apart what they did from tantra. Mukeshbhai was particularly skeptical of tantra, as his grandfather had apparently engaged in some *tāmasik* tantra in the past and had suffered undesired consequences as a result. Having learned a lesson from his grandfather's dabbling, Mukeshbhai claimed he only deals in the *sāttvik*, and his wife held the same outlook. Their *pūjā* is entirely vegetarian, with coconuts being the only thing sacrificed in the shrine. And if *tāmasik* tantra or malevolent sorcery does present itself as the cause of a devotee's suffering, Anitabahen and her husband try to be eminently responsive, making sure to act as quickly as possible. On the whole, Mukeshbhai said he does not want to deal in tantra, a kind of power that he differentiated from that of the *pavan* he and his wife experience. In his view, their *pavan*—especially Anitabahen's—is a direct connectivity with the goddess. Mukeshbhai's framing of the rituals at his home shrine reflects a tendency we have found at many other Gujarati sites to delink a given *mātā* from *bhuvā*-based practices, with so-called “black” or “*tāmasik* tantra” often included therein. Indeed, having heard Anitabahen's story of her own *pavan*, the religious life she and her husband cultivate would seem to represent the culmination of a biographical arc moving from a confused plurality of competing *bhuvās* to the orderly, efficient, and singular power offered by Jogaṇī Mā.

NARANPURA

Comparable attitudes can be found at the Jay Mātājī Mitram Maṇḍal temple to Jogaṇī Mā located within a maze of interconnected housing units just off the busy Sola Road in Ahmedabad's Naranpura section. This medium-sized temple and surrounding complex was constructed in the early 2000s, and is centred upon the figure of Maa Laadchi (see Figure 22). Laadchi is a woman of pastoralist roots who has had an ongoing *pavan* of Jogaṇī from a young age. Such a leadership role is not atypical for women of Rabari and Bharwad origin, who characteristically serve as “spokespersons” for their groups over and above men (Tambs-Lyche 1997, 158). It was after suffering a snake bite in her adolescence that Laadchi first started to experience the telltale signs of *pavan*, though she was not entirely sure what was happening to her and what kind of *pavan* she was experiencing. Like Anitabahen, Laadchi did not immediately

open up to the presence of the goddess. Her youth was from then on fraught with troubles until she was assisted by her maternal aunt, who, in village-styled fashion, aided her in placing her newfound energy in a coconut. The aunt herself had *pavan* of her own village Jogaṇī and transferred it to Laadchi, who could then proceed with certainty with respect to her newly acquired powers. Laadchi subsequently began providing solutions to people's problems and gained a following that has further burgeoned with the construction of the Naranpura temple.

The Naranpura site has over time come to attract a diverse following, including some fairly well-heeled, upwardly mobile patrons. Among my foremost conversationalists were a number of English-speaking trustees with esteemed occupations. One of these people was Jayram, a robust, kindly Rabari man in his late thirties who works as a cameraperson for a local Ahmedabad TV station. The nature of his work has put him in contact with many local celebrities as well as regional and national dignitaries, and so his is a very active, upbeat social media profile. Life was not always so vibrant for Jayram, however. Several years before I met him in 2014, he was experiencing problems with interfamilial disputes, and so he sought out the aid of Laadchi. After she worked through these difficulties and helped settle the disagreements, Jayram began to attend the temple regularly and gradually became more involved in its inner workings. Now he is happily married, which he attributed to Laadchi's blessing. Out of appreciation, he has dedicated a considerable amount of his free time to the temple. Another prominent member of the temple is Dr. Vipul Patel, a physician at a local hospital who specializes in medical software. While his *kuldevī* is Umiyā Mā, in congruence with his Patel background, he has been drawn to the Naranpura temple on account of the effectiveness of Laadchi's power. By all indications, Dr. Patel saw Laadchi as being engaged in a very real conversation with the divine. Though they are well-employed, both Jayram and Dr. Patel, among others at the Naranpura temple, seemed to be undertaking a continuing negotiation of their middle-classness and social status, working against ingrained negative ascriptions still made by entrenched elites and other non-worshippers toward Rabaris and even Patels. Accordingly, they accentuated a very *sāttvik*, Advaitic, non-village vision of their temple in consonance with perceived elite tastes. The profile of the complex only seems to have benefitted as a result of these accentuations, as it attracts visitors whose elite status is not under any debate. As a case in point, Jayram was proud to report that Narendra Modi's family has visited the site on a number of occasions. This politically influential guest list may bespeak Saffronization as an avenue of upward mobility for people such as Jayram, Dr. Patel,

and others in attendance, as well as prospective patrons. That said, its mention functioned more plainly as an illustration of the Naranpura temple's connections to Gujarati luminaries. In this way, temple attendees worship in proximity to patent elites, a reminder for new and established visitors alike just how vaunted the temple is.



Figure 22: Laadchi Ma sits *pāṭlā* at the Jogaṇī temple in Naranpura (Photo by author)

On every Sunday and Tuesday that I visited Naranpura, a long lineup wound its way through the temple. There seemed to be an endless supply of visitors willing to wait for an opportunity to meet with Laadchi. These meetings usually involved sitting *pāṭlā*, Laadchi throwing seeds to chart a course of action for solving a devotee's concerns (Figure 22). Like Anitabehen, Laadchi confronts head-on visitors' health problems, among them diabetes and

cancer. These diseases are framed as “negative power” that has entered a person’s body. When the resultant sickness proves incurable by the best efforts of an allopath, I was told by Dr. Patel, people then come to Laadchi, who will help them without any further obligation, monetary or otherwise, on their part. As Dr. Patel explained, “if you want to continue to come it’s up to you. There is no compulsion or donation.” The bio-medically trained Dr. Patel is one of the chief proponents of Laadchi’s faith healing. As he described it, the cures that result after visiting the temple are 99 percent on account of the *Mātāji*, one percent on account of the attending physician. As is characteristic of *mātā* sites, the Naranpura temple has its share of extraordinary healing stories. One such example was told to me by Vindushah, an English-speaking woman who works at the Ahmedabad airport and has several children living abroad in Australia. Vindushah suffered from severe diabetes until meeting with Laadchi, who tamed the disease. Now the diabetes is less serious, Vindushah informed me in June of 2015, and treatable with pills. Laadchi also handles infertility, which seems fitting given that her name refers to the love of a parent for a child. There are several near-miraculous stories of women in their late forties who, after years of previous barrenness, conceived children shortly after visiting the temple. But while Laadchi answers general prayers for fertility, this comes with certain stipulations. She would not, for instance, honour requests specifying the desire for a male child, suggesting a relatively progressive stance on gender equity.

As it was summed up for me by Dr. Patel, the temple approaches any “time-being” problem with the aim of transferring people from the “ocean” to the “green.” That is, Laadchi always reassures people that, while they may be temporarily drowning in an ocean of problems, after coming to the temple they will eventually find the green and then the gold—specifically, land and money. It is not just expedient resolutions that come to temple devotees, ostensibly, but prosperity over and above those. Accordingly, Laadchi is just as likely to advise on business deals and career moves as she is to cure ailments. Success stories abound in this fiduciary context, as well. For instance, during one of my visits I met a Brahmin woman who had come to give thanks for a wish that had been fulfilled pertaining to the success of her daughters’ careers abroad in the United States and Canada. By virtue of its gaining reputation for very quick, very tangible results, the Naranpura temple attracts a wide range of visitors from all over Gujarat, as well as India at large, and during my visits I met people who had come from as far as Kerala to meet with Laadchi.

While the temple grounds are frequented by a significant contingent of Bharwads and Rabaris, prominent members of the temple assured me that people from a variety of communities attend. As Dr. Patel phrased it, “both sweepers and Brahmins are welcome.” In addition to all castes, all conceivable creeds and cultural milieux are welcome as well. These include people from the village, and even Christians and Muslims. These visitors spanned all economic capacities, too. In many cases, Dr. Patel explained, the underprivileged received healing from the temple that they could not otherwise afford from hospitals. The *Mātājī*, I heard again and again, sees no difference between people, and so, in typical egalitarian *Mātā*-temple fashion, all groups are welcome. What was not welcome, I was told, were any people who betrayed an attitude that was “hi-fi,” as both Jayram and Dr. Patel phrased it in English. “Hi-fi” apparently referred to a disposition of class or caste-based elitism. The “hi-fi” was epitomized, for Dr. Patel, by the “VIP queue” that could allegedly be found at other temples, where certain people are offered preferential treatment by way of their money and status. I think that the conscious spurning of the hi-fi at Naranpura not only combats snobbery, but also actively encourages the performance of middle-classness in that it endorses an outward spirit of inclusivism. This is just one among many middle-class values cultivated by the Naranpura temple. The clean, tidily kept environment and well-ordered (non-VIP) queue further underscored the temple’s middle-class sensibilities, as did the recurrent emphasis on material prosperity. The most obvious indicator of the temple’s wealth is its size, which is considerable by virtue of its adjacent land holdings. Keeping with the complex’s pastoralist roots, well-fed livestock grazed on a section of land right beside the temple in the midst of the city. Moreover, in 2014 the temple trust had three sleek new automobiles in its keep. It appears that the temple has also been trying to share this kind of material wealth with its visitors. This could be seen on one of my earliest visits, in which trustees handed out glossy fliers promoting a temple-sponsored raffle. Advertised as the big-ticket prizes were luxury commodities such as flat-screen TVs, air conditioners, and motorcycles, among other markers of middle-classness. At the same time, upper-caste influences were also conspicuous. The most notable of these was strict vegetarianism forbidding non-veg food and animal products on the Naranpura temple grounds. Drinking and dancing were also repeatedly singled out by Dr. Patel as negatives in accordance with both Sanskritic and middle-class moralities. According to Laadchi’s instruction, the elimination of these kinds of activities will improve a person’s karma. Collectively, this constellation of sensitivities suggests the trustees of the Naranpura temple are

trying to foster some degree of upward mobility for visitors and perhaps for themselves, involving elements of Sanskritization and/or Vaiṣṇavization alongside gentrification and/or bourgeoisification in the process.

Although not elitist by any stretch—in fact quite determinedly the opposite—the Jay Mātāji Mitram Maṇḍal in Naranpura still wanted to distinguish itself from other *mātā* temples. During a lull between activities on a Sunday in June of 2015, I found myself milling around just outside the doorway to the temple. I took a glance at some advertisements for other *mātā* sites outside of Ahmedabad that had been papered to the wall of an adjoining building just a few feet away. Some of these sites were comparably rural, and may or may not have featured the hallmarks of village worship such as *pavan* and so forth. When Jayram saw me looking at these posters, he approached and promptly made sure that I was not confusing the Naranpura site with any of these others. Apparently, he sought to prevent me from getting the wrong idea about *mātās* such as his own and the people who worship them.

While tantric accoutrements were less concentrated throughout the Naranpura temple grounds than at other Jogaṇī Mātā sites, there were still a number of yantras and prominent lithograph images of the goddess as Chinnamastā. When I asked Dr. Patel for an explication of this imagery, he offered a fairly summary metaphorical reading to the effect that Chinnamastā represented the separation of mind from body. This seems to follow from a mainstream yogic or Brahminic interpretative lens. The trappings of tantra are more readily discernible in formulations of the Naranpura temple's power and the immanent availability thereof. When I asked what separates Jogaṇī Mātā from other goddesses, both Jayram and Dr. Patel gave me further variations of the somewhat standardized Advaitic response. With regard to the discrimination between Jogaṇīs such as Phūl and Lāl, Jayram said that Jogaṇī's expression depended on the community worshipping her. In Naranpura, he explained, she is just one singular goddess as per the taste of the people. Dr. Patel modified this slightly by saying that all goddesses, like doctors, are essentially the same, though a person ends up going to the one that works best for them. For Dr. Patel and other temple attendees, Jogaṇī is what works. Dr. Patel then went on to liken the singular, all-powerful Great Goddess to a CEO with a plurality of assistant managers, directors, and employees. These middle-management types are the local goddesses and their manifestations such as Laadchi. These operatives provide more immediate results to the devotees, and allow people to participate in Jogaṇī's power directly. It is the power

of this temple alone, Dr. Patel explained, that draws in passersby. Of the thousands who travel past on Sola Road, Mā filters out some, while drawing in the people who can benefit most from her power. So too, he explained, did this power draw *me*, the researcher, in. But the power at the Naranpura temple is not simply a nebulous philosophical construct; rather, it is both highly efficacious and pragmatically directed. Having noted the busy, fast-paced nature of city life, Dr. Patel stressed that Laadchi cares first and foremost about results. Her role, then, is primarily one of facilitating or catalyzing the delivery of any given devotee's requests, very much in the spirit of a tantric, results-based power. Be that as it may, when I brought up the topic of tantra with Jayram, he was quick to shake his head. Jayram told me there is no tantra-*vidyā* at the Naranpura temple, only the reading of seeds and the faith of the people. As a whole, neither he nor the other major players at the temple thought particularly highly of the tantric label.

ODHAV

The Amraivadi, Gandhinagar, and Naranpura sites are representative of most Jogaṇī locations I visited. At these sites, an environment that is to varying degrees middle-class and Sanskritized prevails, and access to an efficacious power is widely reputed. In spite of this palpable power, in addition to the use of yantras, mantras, and Chinnamastā imagery, explicit associations with tantra were unacknowledged, de-emphasized, or denied entirely by these urban Jogaṇī Mātā sites. There are, however, exceptions to this rule.

One such outlier is the small Jogaṇī Mātā temple in Odhav, a residential and commercial suburb of Ahmedabad. This temple began as a small *derī* in 1967 when the area was still fairly remote and isolated. As the city built up around it, so too did the temple, which has been further expanded in the past two decades. The temple is currently fronted by Dhananjay (see Figure 23), a man in his early thirties who self-identifies as a Brahmin. Accordingly, he donned the sacred thread. Dhananjay also claimed affiliation with the Rāmānandī *sampradāya*, a North Indian Vaiṣṇava ascetic lineage.²¹⁰ Rāmānandī Sadhus, he explained to me, have a special relationship with the *yoginīs*. That is, the *yoginīs* represent Śakti's 64 dimensions, and are together responsible for directing Rāmānandī *kuldevīs*. Dhananjay also claimed affiliation with the Nāga Sadhus, an order of ascetics closely tied to the Nāth Siddhas (White 1996, 254). Dhananjay's

²¹⁰ For discussions of the Rāmānandī *sampradāya*, see Burghart (1978), Pinch (1996), and van der Veer (1988).

own guru lives at Girnar, which is demonstrably the Gujarati hotbed of Jogaṇī(s), as was intimated in the *Śrī Jogaṇī Vrat*.

Śaktis and Jogaṇī have played an integral part in the religious life of Dhananjay's ancestors, and he can trace his own *pavan* of the goddess back five generations. A quarter of a century previous, Dhananjay's grandfather was associated with the Odhav site and had his own miraculous interactions with Śakti. In one such instance, there was a family with a six-year-old daughter who was suffering from severe paralysis, shivering and sweating on the verge of death. Dhananjay's grandfather lifted the little girl's lifeless body and put her in the arms of the main *mūrti*. After a half hour had passed, the girl was able to walk again. Dhananjay's father has also communed with the goddess, and he plays an integral role in the present-day temple as well. Dhananjay established his personal connection to Jogaṇī in his late teens, when he received his first *pavan*. Since then, his *pavan* has remained relatively understated, occurring in very short but very intense bursts. This *pavan* usually only happens during holy days such as Śivarātri, Holi, and Mahārātri, as well as more tantric-styled events such as Kālī Caudas. No matter the event, Dhananjay has always made sure to keep his *pavan* short-lived and discreet because, as he phrased it, he does not want to "show off." Though he is trained in the family business of refrigerator and air-conditioning repair, Dhananjay has dedicated the majority of his energy to the temple and to the study of tantra.

The temple itself operates much like other *mātā* sites, based upon consultation between officiants and visitors, though its following is smaller and mostly local. Temple patrons are mainly Rabaris with some Bharwads intermixed, and these communities have contributed significantly to the temple's devotional infrastructure. For instance, they combined resources to purchase both the sound system and the fans found at the present site. There are also small sections of attendees from an assortment of other castes, as well as some Sikhs and Muslims from the surrounding community. The crowd swells at the time of Navarātri, with upwards of 400 or more people visiting the temple to see the new *jyot* and the new vestments provided for the main *mūrti* on each of the nine days. Also well-attended is the *havan* ceremony that marks the culmination of the festival on Dasara. On comparably routine non-festival Sundays and Tuesdays, Dhananjay's father handles more standard requests from visitors, using a feather broom to whisk away negativity and bestow blessings. The tantric tasks, meanwhile, are delegated to Dhananjay. In these cases, Dhananjay fixes a timeslot to perform the necessary

rituals, which are, by his report, largely focused upon mantras. On occasion, these rituals involve the construction of elaborate yantras out of multicoloured food grains, much like those made at Amraivadi. Dhananjay explained that the colours and types of grains used vary depending on the specifics of the particular situation, as do the corresponding geometrical shapes into which the grains are arranged. Once these designs are fashioned, the person undergoing the ritual sits in the centre and then Dhananjay proceeds with invitations to various deities. Altogether, these undertakings help with the usual difficulties brought to *mātā* shrines, and apparently more contemporary tribulations as well. Indeed, as Dhananjay's father phrased it when we first met in May of 2015: "all middle-class problems are solved."



Figure 23: Dhananjay (bespectacled man in the centre) partakes in *havan* with Brahmin priests at the Odhav shrine, his father sitting to his right (Photo by author)

The Odhav temple also seems to have evolved with the middle class and upwardly mobile in mind, Sanskritizing the rituals and eschewing many village trappings. While goat sacrifices once took place at the site more than a decade ago, these have ceased on account of a gradual movement toward the *sāttvik*. At first, sacrifice was attenuated to a minimally *tāmasik* blood offering in which a goat would be taken away from the temple proper to receive a small cut on its ear. After the blood had been extracted for the goddess, the animal would be set free. In the last ten years, these sorts of offerings have also been halted, and now live goats have been obviated entirely by symbolic substitutes such as coconuts, gourds, and betel nuts, which are sacrificed under Dhananjay's direction. Like other Jogaṇī temple heads, Dhananjay also railed against *bhuvā*-based practices, as he considered them largely inauthentic. While his own *pavan* is intense and understated, he chided most other *bhuvās* for exaggerating whatever little gust of the goddess they have received. As he put it, such *bhuvās* have been given some “chai” from the goddess—however, the chai is prone to spilling, and the *pavan* liable to go on pause thereafter. Moreover, Dhananjay decried the apparently widespread convention whereby certain *bhuvās* would attach the name of Jogaṇī to a female in their family who has passed away. Such a strategy would appear to exploit intensely localized and emotional associations, deifying spirits while at the same time making the Devī spectral. Dhananjay's rebukes, then, voiced palpable disdain for village-styled practices. For Dhananjay, Jogaṇī Mātā is a goddess of much greater magnitude than a mere ghost.

Like the other officiants at middle-class temples to Jogaṇī and other *mātās*, Dhananjay also accentuated his temple's affluence. The temple itself was by no means suffering financially during my visits in 2015, as it sponsors a half-dozen *havans* of considerable scale every year, with a team of Brahmins hired for these events (Figure 23). These *havans* typically last for at least five hours and require intermittent breaks for rest and refecation, during which well-to-do Brahmins can be seen chatting and palming iPhones while they wait for the ceremony to resume. Between the food, ritual supplies, and Brahmin staffing they require, Dhananjay assured me that these *havans* cost an exorbitant amount. However, the goddess's blessings have easily defrayed the expenses. For Dhananjay, one of Jogaṇī's foremost qualities is monetary munificence. In fact, Jogaṇī's Chinnamastā imagery forthrightly encodes the prosperity that awaits her devotees. In Dhananjay's interpretation of the lithograph print, Jogaṇī stands not on Kāma and Rati, but rather

upon Viṣṇu and Lakṣmī.²¹¹ With Viṣṇu and Lakṣmī literally under foot, Jogaṇī secures for her devotees not only the blessing of Viṣṇu, but the lucrative rewards of Lakṣmī, as well.

When I inquired deeper into the specifics of the Chinnamastā image, Dhananjay explained that it depicts Jogaṇī after she slayed the blood-demon Raktabīj. This interpretation puts the goddess in a role closer to that of Durgā or Kālī, which we have already seen her assume in the *Śrī Jogaṇī Vrat*. Her nudity, meanwhile, is strategic, Dhananjay claimed, as it serves to distract her demonic foes. The ostensibly violent imagery of the auto-decapitation, in his view, is also created out of consideration for people from lower castes and classes, who come to Chinnamastā at the end of their workday with feelings of frustration, anger, fatigue, and failure. All of this “wild excitement,” as he referred to it, is absorbed and withdrawn by the *tāmasik* imagining of the goddess, which she takes on in the evening. By morning, however, she is soft and *sāttvik*. The goddess as Jogaṇī, then, in Dhananjay’s reading, appears to have a quintessentially transformative power, sublimating the supposedly *tāmasik* urges of non-elite groups and rendering them *sāttvik*. In this way, her image as Chinnamastā is tantamount to a purifying force. In Dhananjay’s view, Jogaṇī can be *tāmasik* and *sāttvik*, as well as *rājasik*, and this flexibility is a testament to her all-encompassing nature. With this transcendent theological imagining in mind, he assured me that Chinnamastā is just one name of Jogaṇī, whom he described as being akin to a giant power station that has channels of distribution numbering 64 or, by some counts, even more. Even as prominent a goddess as Kālī herself, by Dhananjay’s reckoning, is an imagining of Jogaṇī, and not the reverse. Moreover, as with other Jogaṇī Mātā sites we have visited, the main goddess is again attributed with the inception of the cosmos, an event at which she appeared first on the scene as the primordial *jyot*, or flame. And, once again mirroring the *Śrī Jogaṇī Vrat*, Dhananjay also made repeated references to Jogaṇī’s extensive Sanskritic *itihās*, or history, which he claimed can be traced back to various Vedic and Purāṇic texts. Jogaṇī, then, is the Great Goddess, and Chinnamastā is one among many facets of her all-embracing Sanskritic and Advaitic character.

Unlike the other Jogaṇī affiliates we have met, Dhananjay openly affirmed that the goddess is tantric and that he himself is a *tāntrika*. This tantric aspect was plainly reflected in the layout and rituals of the Odhav temple. Inscribed high up on the door-facing wall were the syllables of

²¹¹ Alternative postulations exist concerning who comprises the couple underneath Chinnamastā. Usually they are identified as Vaiṣṇava on account of the male’s sectarian markings. Philip Rawson, for instance, has reported that it is Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā beneath the severed-headed goddess (1973, 126).

the Śrī Jogaṇī Mātā Mūlmantra, which are virtually identical to those of the Jogaṇī Mantra given in the *Śrī Jogaṇī Vrat*. At various spots throughout the temple there was also prominent imagery of Hanumān, the all-purpose tantrified divinity. Dhananjay's father referred to Hanumān as one among the "live" deities along with Jogaṇī Mātā and also Gaṇeśa. These are gods and goddesses Dhananjay's father deemed to be crucial for the present Kali Yuga, which apparently speaks to the exceptional vitality of Jogaṇī and these other mainstream Sanskritic deities in a difficult period of time.²¹² Additionally, there is another yantra, Dhananjay informed me, underneath the central Jogaṇī *mūrti*. Yantras also figured into *havans* for mainstream goddesses at Odhav, as was the case in June of 2015 when a Lakṣmī yantra served as centrepiece in a day-long fire sacrifice. Such inclusions speak to a very Brahminical *Śākta-tantra*. It is necessary to have apparatuses such as yantras in place, Dhananjay explained, in order to maintain not just prosperity but also peace of mind. This tantric infrastructure helps to digest the negative symptoms that he is prone to taking on from visitors.

It is toward this same end of purging negativities that Dhananjay annually contracts an extensive tantric *havan* on Kālī Caudas, the darkest and most inauspicious day of the year. In November 2015, I attended the Kālī Caudas rituals in Odhav. After midnight had arrived, Dhananjay and his usual team of Brahmins completed 125,000 mantras in order to recharge the energy of the temple for the entirety of the dawning year. Also, *pūjā* was performed to a pomegranate. As per Dhananjay's exegesis, this act is symbolic of worshipping the mantra itself. The mantra, after all, is much like the pomegranate in that both see their many seeds proliferate from one. This entire *havan* ceremony, I was told, is highly beneficial due in large part to the temple's location within several blocks of a lot in which funerary grounds were located in decades previous, a nod to timeworn tantric criteria for effectiveness. Accordingly, interspersed between the mantras were performances of *ārati* dedicated to Jogaṇī and an assortment of notorious cremation ground deities such as Bagalāmukhī, Bhairava, and Kālī. So effective was the 2015 Kālī Caudas that Dhananjay later reported getting an intense three-second burst of *pavan* when performing an invitation mantra overtop the Brahmins' chanting. What could better epitomize the confluence of tantric, village, and Brahminical?

²¹² The Odhav temple, much like the Jogaṇī sites at Gandhinagar and Naranpura, also contains a shrine to Gogā Mahārāj. The fact that the latter three sites discussed in this chapter acknowledge Gogā Mahārāj suggests an abiding connection between Jogaṇī and this snake deity.

Because of his tantric erudition and his Jogaṇī *pavan*, Dhananjay has maintained an esteemed place among *tāntrikas* in Ahmedabad. He even professed earlier involvement with more secretive tantric rites. A number of these, he claimed, have been commissioned by members of the city's elite, including prominent bank managers trying to influence CEOs and political figures. When some of these rites began to incorporate black magic, however, Dhananjay ceased to attend.

Dhananjay defined his temple's tantric activities in sharp counterpoint to such malevolent undertakings. When I asked him why other Jogaṇī affiliates would be so quick to dismiss tantra, Dhananjay suggested to me that, first and foremost, 90 percent of people do not have any real systematic knowledge of tantra. For that reason, they fear that their lack of true understanding will be outed. Secondly, many have come to associate tantra with negative ends such as the black magic mentioned above. Dhananjay estimated that for 90 percent of *tāntrikas*, the goal of their practice is negative "black tantrism" seeking to cause ill to others and to yield profits. By contrast, Dhananjay placed himself among the ten-percenters, in that he only takes part in positive or "white tantrism" that is employed solely to cure physical and psychological pain. For these services, he has refused to accept monetary rewards. True tantra is, in his view, a form of therapy to cure a patient. However, with yantras and mantras as with medicine, every tablet has a side effect if not taken in the proper dosage. Tantra, therefore, like medicine, is a deep science that should be applied precisely and carefully. In terms of precision, a mantra spoken by a Brahmin becomes like a "guided missile," as Dhananjay phrased it. The implication here is that, by contrast, more *tāmasik*, less Brahminic, and less benevolent *bhuvās* are using an exceedingly powerful weapon sloppily and without discrimination. Dhananjay assured me that his tantra is strictly *sāttvik* and Brahminic, as the Brahminical and Sanskrit further assists in preventing the ill effects of the negative residue a white *tāntrika* inevitably takes on from his clientele. While Jogaṇī Mātā can be *tāmasik*, *sāttvik*, or even *rājasik*, she is nonetheless central in attaining to this Brahminic standard. Why is this? It is because, in Dhananjay's view, Jogaṇī is highly Sanskritic when compared to other goddesses, mostly on the strength of her substantial Vedic and Purāṇic *itihās*.

While Dhananjay was the only Jogaṇī Mātā affiliate I found who openly avowed a tantric affiliation or identity, in differentiating two types of tantra, he provides some insight into why most Jogaṇī temples de-emphasize the goddess's tantric components. Presumably, these temples

do not want to risk being connected with a form of religion that still carries with it some negative connotations. That said, while Mr. Pandiya, Anitabahen, and Laadchi may downplay or deny tantric appurtenances, they still offer visitors—as does Dhananjay—access to some degree of “white” tantra that brings its benefits rapidly and (just as importantly) removes “negativity,” a concept widely referenced at these Jogaṇī sites. Indeed, Anitabahen, Laadchi, and Dhananjay share a direct connection to the Great Goddess via *pavan* that has not been corrupted by the avarice of *bhuvās* and black *tāntrikas*, who deal in destructive forces for profit. And even though Mr. Pandiya did not claim to have *pavan*, as a Brahmin priest he has nevertheless offered devotees the opportunity to transact with the time-honoured miracle-bestowing power of the Amraivadi Jogaṇī through a *sāttvik* ritual syntax. In the process, he has drawn upon Sanskritic, tantric apparatuses and precluded the need for a full-time *bhuvā*. Whether acknowledged or not, then, this positive tantric power (and all the rewards it can expediently bring) plays a fundamental role in making Jogaṇī Mātā temples appealing for an increasing base of devotees who aspire toward a long and prosperous middle-class lifestyle in India or abroad.

Conclusion

Although Jogaṇī was at one point appeased through sacrifices and liquor oblations, the Jogaṇī Mātā sites we have visited in and around Ahmedabad appear to be participating in an ongoing effort to reimagine and reconfigure their patron goddess and her ritual spaces. This involves a number of imbricated strategies. While some of these sites have maintained village elements such as *pāṭlā* and *pavan*, all of them have gone to great lengths to accord with elite Sanskritic or Vaiṣṇavic moralities. This is evident in their emphasis upon vegetarianism and symbolic sacrifices. It can also be seen and heard through their deployment of Sanskrit texts, recordings, and ritual apparatuses, not to mention their employment of Brahmins. These elements converge to actualize the kind of Sanskritic, Brahminic imaginings of the goddess put forward in widely-available devotional pamphlets such as the *Śrī Jogaṇī Vrat*. In the text and in the temples, this preference for the Sanskritic informs several variations of Advaitic theology relating to Jogaṇī, each of which figures her as interchangeable with—if not fully embodying—the Great Goddess in what we might refer to, following Cynthia Humes, as a universalistic mode. In their intrinsic refinement, these Sanskritic ritual modalities and universalized theologies coincide with middle-class sensibilities. These sensibilities are readily identifiable in the

demonstrations of material prosperity and cosmopolitan, intercontinental ambitions that abound at urban Jogaṇī sites. Middle-class values also inspire the sites' efforts toward inclusiveness, as well as more subtly gentrified considerations such as cleanliness and orderliness. All these converging strategies work to countervail lingering stigmas against relatively non-elite groups such as Rabaris, Bharwads, and Barots, among others, as well as debatably elite groups such as Patels. They also have profound effects upon their Mātā. Far removed from the Phūl Jogaṇī of the village, Jogaṇī Mātā has, in effect, been Sanskritized, universalized, and gentrified for a mainstream audience. These processes, however, have not necessarily "sweetened" her main image.

Bloody though it may be, Jogaṇī's tantric imagery as Chinnamastā does not run contrary to this Brahminic, Advaitic, and middle-class aesthetic being cultivated at her temples. If anything, it coexists harmoniously, and so Jogaṇī Mātā exemplifies how "tantrification," as Philip Lutgendorf (2001; 2007) has termed it, has operated alongside and in conversation with the processes of upward mobility discussed above. Much as Lutgendorf has argued is the case with Hanumān throughout North India, Jogaṇī exemplifies a positive tantra that satisfies a middle-class need for "quick-fix" solutions in a frenzied modern marketplace, providing fast access to esoteric power. This esoteric aspect is neither off-putting nor transgressive to middle-class and upwardly mobile tastes so long as it presents itself in the context of a respectable form of religiosity, which Chinnamastā, among other Sanskritic signifiers, can provide. As R. Mahalakshmi has contended regarding Chinnamastā at the Rajrappa site in Jharkhand, the tantric tradition of the Mahāvidyās offers a broader framework within which a local form of worship can be assimilated into the Brahminical tradition (2014, 213). This seems to apply to the Jogaṇī Mātā sites in urban Gujarat. By taking on the image of Chinnamastā, Jogaṇī participates in a non-threatening, *sāttvik* tantra that is, whether explicitly identified by her affiliates or not, satisfactorily removed from black tantra and the interference of the *bhuvā*. In this light, this kind of tantra does not preclude middle-class involvement. Even at Amraivadi, where Jogaṇī's Chinnamastā depiction is veiled (apparently more for modesty than to mask the *tāmasik* imagery), the goddess still flourishes in a pronouncedly middle-class and gentrifying context. So why is it that a goddess such as Jogaṇī Mātā is so popular with the incipient upwardly mobile?

Most obviously, the rapid material benefits promised by the *sāttvik* tantra Jogaṇī represents make the ambitions of the ascending classes more eminently attainable. It is not, however,

merely *what* is sought after in these rites that is so crucial to class mobility, but perhaps more importantly *how* it is asked for. Tantric imagery and efficacy, when present in a certain measure alongside both familiar folk/village and Sanskritic/Brahminical elements, can be part of a religious experience that is safe and self-affirming for the middle-class and upwardly mobile. In short, “white” tantra dovetails with other perceived signifiers of status, such as the Sanskritic/Vaiṣṇavic, the universal, and the gentrified. Jogaṇī’s popularity may also reflect just how influential Madhu Khanna’s “*bāzārī* tantra” has become in contemporary India. That is to say, with tantric imagery circulating so pervasively in popular culture by way of mass-mediated cultural products, its visibility and influence has become to some degree almost second nature given how intuitively compatible it is with middle-class tastes and aspirations. This form of consumer-friendly tantra is sufficiently mainstream, and so it does not hinder the mainstream appeal of a goddess. Certainly, for individuals at the sites I visited, tantra appears to play a part in the *performance* of realizing and reiterating class status, even when it goes unacknowledged.

These speculations aside, the countless urban and rural Jogaṇī Mātā sites demonstrate just how ubiquitous a variation of Chinnamastā imagery has become within Gujarati religious and visual space. David Kinsley (1997) and Elizabeth Benard (1994) have each characterized Chinnamastā as one of the least worshipped Mahāvidyās, though the hundreds of shrines throughout Gujarat with her image at the centre should prompt some re-evaluation of this claim. While Jogaṇī Mātā is not simply Chinnamastā, as many of the people I spoke with confirmed, the image of the severed-headed goddess may be closer to the everyday lives of worshippers than was once assumed.

Chapter Six: Pure Justice—The Rabies Goddess Haḍkāī Mātā

Haḍkāī Mā is unique among Gujarati *mātās* for a number of reasons. Firstly, while many *mātās* are capable of curing health problems, Haḍkāī is primarily a goddess of disease, specifically rabies. People suffering from or at risk for rabies as a result of dog bites would traditionally visit a Haḍkāī shrine for the goddess's blessing en route to prevention or a cure. This *mātā* is known by a number of closely related epithets, including Haḍakṣā, Haḍakmāī, Haḍakbāī, Harakhmāī, and Hulan, most of which render her as a “rabies mother” (Fischer, Jain & Shah 2014, 185). Secondly, while most *mātās* have at least some written history, either in conjunction with or in addition to devotional literature, Haḍkāī has virtually none. My many inquiries into the existence of pamphlets comparable to those dedicated to other *mātās* proved fruitless, as I was told repeatedly by devotees that such publications did not exist. While I heard a few scant rumours of print materials related to Haḍkāī Mātā, my own best efforts plus those of my contacts were unable to track them down. The goddess, I was told by prominent members of a Haḍkāī temple at Patan, is chary of that which is written about her. Thus, if someone creates print material about the goddess, it will erode slowly. This scarcity of written materials is only one of the reasons why Haḍkāī is hard to study relative to other *mātās*. Devipujaks (formerly Vaghris), the chief worshippers of Haḍkāī, are fiercely protective of the goddess, believing she is fundamentally misunderstood and misappropriated by outsiders. Often, my conversationalists were reticent to provide information or images related to Haḍkāī, even when it came to simple requests for pictures of her widely-circulated lithograph depicting the goddess mounted upon a dog (see again Figure 3). The risk of misuse, they suggested time and again, was simply too great.

And while Haḍkāī has, like other *mātās*, substantially evolved over the past decades, it is difficult to say that she has been “gentrified.” The Devipujak communities in which she is most popular are in many cases slum areas wracked by poverty, alcoholism, and a lack of educational resources. Some Devipujaks and their families have managed to attain to an upwardly mobile lifestyle, but the vast majority do not approach middle-classness. Indeed, Devipujak areas are often far from tidy, riddled with garbage and roaming, sickly dogs. In view of this less-than-sanitary environment, it is not difficult to conceive how a goddess of rabies with a dog *vāhana* could gain currency in Devipujak and also Valmiki Samaj communities, where hydrophobia is still an imminent threat. Outsiders, meanwhile, have seized unsympathetically upon this image of

the patron goddess riding an animal generally deemed unclean. For this reason, Haḍkāī has in popular perceptions served as something of a metonym for the unsanitary verities of Devipujak life. And yet in spite of these associations with disease, slum-areas, Devipujaks, and Dalits, Haḍkāī is held by her worshippers to be strictly *sāttvik*. While *mātās* such as Melaḍī and Jogaṇī have undeniable *tāmasik* elements in their pasts, which contemporary worshippers acknowledge and actively negotiate, Haḍkāī's purity is for her devotees unambiguous and incontestable. While the limited available historical accounts do suggest that some blood may have been spilled in Haḍkāī's name, there is no mixed *sāttvik* and *tāmasik* nature as per Melaḍī, and there is no occasional sacrifice as per Jogaṇī. In fact, so *sāttvik* is Haḍkāī that her present-day worshippers routinely attribute the goddess with Brahminic roots.

This chapter will set in place some background concerning Haḍkāī's origin stories and popular perceptions, and then it will proceed into ethnographic material from some of the goddess's contemporary sites. In the process, the chapter's primary objective is to document this tendency among followers at various popular Haḍkāī sites to assert the unquestioned, Brahminical purity of the goddess, not just at present but also in her mythological and historical past. These sorts of emic histories and theologies can be heard at a number of prominent Haḍkāī sites such as those located in the towns of Patan, Kotha, and Kodava, as well as in the Ahmedabad subdivision of Shahpur. This propensity of the Devipujak community, I argue, represents what might be thought of as a "retroactive Sanskritization," defending the past and present dignity of the community alongside that of their goddess and rendering Haḍkāī congruent with the aims of their budding upwardly mobile sections. These assertions, however, cannot simply be dismissed as revisionist historiographical strategies. The goddess does bear some Brahminic valences that are intimated at a number of the aforementioned sites and are foundational to the Haḍkāī temple located in the village of Karadra. Haḍkāī's Brahminic connections are seasoned with some tantra, too, in that they centre upon the divine personage of Lalitā, another Tripurāsundarī equivalent from the Śrīvidyā goddess matrix.

This chapter's second objective is to establish Haḍkāī's continued role as rabies goddess, even in the face of medical treatments for the disease. While some scholars have claimed Haḍkāī is less feared vis-à-vis rabies than in the past (Pocock 1973, 51), the devotees I talked to still consistently labelled her as their preferred approach for curing the disease. In fact, they sometimes cited cases of doctors who sent patients to Haḍkāī temples when Western medical

treatments failed to heal them. In this way, Haḍkāī has not necessarily followed the path of deities such as Śītalā Mātā and Māriyamman, smallpox goddesses from North and South India, respectively, who developed into more general goddesses of health when a vaccine became available for their specific disease (Nicholas 1981, 40; Trawick-Egnor 1984, 40). Although Haḍkāī does have some broad-spectrum associations with health, with some hospitals maintaining small shrines where patients can worship the goddess while waiting for doctors, Haḍkāī's domain is still very much the treatment of rabies (Fischer et al. 2014, 185). Once again, Haḍkāī is imagined as steadfastly rooted in her beneficent past.

Mixed Messages: Haḍkāī's Origin Stories

As with other *mātās*, Haḍkāī Mātā has her fair share of origin stories circulating orally, and these take on both pan-Gujarati and highly localized forms. While these stories explain the goddess's association with rabies and typically involve lower castes, they are also notable for their inclusion of Brahmins in some pivotal roles—that of her first worshippers, among others—and their insistent affirmations that the goddess is *sāttvik*.

One prominent Haḍkāī origin story begins in the aftermath of a war between the *devas* and *asuras*.²¹³ When the *devas* prevailed as the victors, they wanted to celebrate their triumph in style. To this end, they held a feast in a jungle, which is often identified as the Gir forest. (The various retellings of Haḍkāī's origins all seem to agree that she came from wooded parts of Gujarat, especially the Gir forest in Saurashtra.) Ambā, that Brahminical *svarūpa* of Śakti, was invited to attend the feast, as was Khoḍīyār Mā. The two goddesses were to be seated beside one another. Before the feast, Ambā went for a bath in a pond and took her time doing so, a detail likely underscoring the thoroughness of her dedication to purity. In the delay, Khoḍīyār became exceedingly hungry and, lacking patience, consumed the plate set out for Ambā. From there, Khoḍīyār made her way through all the rest of the food as well. When Ambā finally showed up, she saw that there was no food left for her. When she asked for her plate, the gods explained what had transpired in her absence. Incensed, Ambā demanded the food due her, and Khoḍīyār informed her that it was lying under a fabric cover. Ambā overturned the cloth to find only red rose petals. Seeing this, Ambā was overcome by anger, another word for which is “Haḍakva.”

²¹³ I am grateful to Vimal Shukla for his assistance with rendering this narrative, as well as the Haḍkāī narratives to follow, in English.

This term plays on the semantic overlap in Gujarati between anger, hunger, and a hydrophobic demeanour, which is comparable to that found in English. Indeed, the Gujarati phrase “did you have a Haḍakva?” essentially implies one has a rabid hunger. Because dogs are known to snatch foods away from one another hungrily, it can also be said in Gujarati that one has “a Haḍakṣā for food.”

In her “hangry” emotional state, Ambā cursed Khoḍīyār such that she became Haḍakṣā (one of the more common names for the goddess). The accursed Khoḍīyār went to another part of the forest, where she changed her *vāhana* (or, in some versions, her form itself) to that of a jackal. She also transferred rabies to jackals, which are considered in Gujarati folklore to be the most rabid species of canine. Haḍakṣā stopped at various places that are now recognized as major sites of her pilgrimage and worship. The first of these was Kodava, one of the foremost present-day homes of the goddess. Later, she left a bracelet at Karadra. Eventually, she moved deeper into the forest, where she dismounted the jackal. Here the jackal (or, in some versions, the goddess herself) began biting the trees. This caused the trees to dry up, essentially transmitting the hydrophobic nature of the affliction to the foliage itself. When Mukhi, the Brahmin who owned the forest, saw what was happening, he decided that the trees should be cut down to salvage the wood for resale. His son Uḍānsinh ordered a carpenter to start cutting. When the carpenter made the first cut, milk began to pour out from the tree trunk. All the rest of the trees that were cut yielded milk, too. The milk, it was soon discovered, caused rabies in anyone who drank it. With that being the case, the concerned parties decided to wait out the situation, letting the trees dry naturally.

In the meantime, a miracle began to take shape. Uḍānsinh was attending a *gurukul*, and he had to pass through the jungle each day to get to his lessons. On his way there, Haḍakṣā Mā appeared before him and stated boldly: “your teacher will teach you 34 *vidyās*, but I will teach you 36 *vidyās*.” The boy went under her instruction and began to demonstrate dumbfounding proficiency in these 36 areas, going so far as to calculate the numerical age of the universe. This was all very much to the astonishment of his original guru. The guru promptly went to meet with Mukhi to report Uḍānsinh’s absence. Clearly, Uḍānsinh was getting an excellent education from Haḍakṣā Mā, but this was unbeknownst to the guru and Mukhi. To get to the bottom of things, Mukhi decided he was going to spy on his son as he went to school the next morning. Silently, he followed after his son, soon enough observing that he was being taught by an old lady—that

is, Haḍakṣā Mā in disguise. “Why are you spoiling the career of my son?” he asked of the old woman, and then followed up with a challenge: “prove your power by making the dried-up jungle green again.” The old woman asked that the son dress in white and, after having a bath, put *sindūr* (lead oxide) on every tree. After doing this, Uḍānsiṅh was advised to perform a *tāvo* and sprinkle the oil on all the trees. Such an undertaking, it was promised, would remove the arboreal rabies. Uḍānsiṅh did as the goddess suggested and, within three hours of performing the sprinkling, all the trees in the forest flourished with green leaves. The goddess then made a final request: that she should thereafter be worshipped by Brahmins as a *kuldevī*, with white garlanding, flowers, rice, and *barphī* (a sweetmeat) provided as offerings to her *svarūpa*.

In the process of establishing Haḍkāi’s connection with rabies and identifying her major sites, this origin story also emphasizes the *sāttvik* nature of her accoutrements. It also charts the Brahminic affiliation of her original and prospective worshippers. Evidently, Haḍkāi was intended for the purest. Indeed, one person who told me a variation of this tale—none other than Dasharathbhai, *pūjārī* of the Beherempur Melaḍī temple—cited it as proof that Haḍakṣā is “pure and Brahminic.” At her point of origin, Haḍakṣā was a goddess worshipped by Brahmins, he stressed. Moreover, it was the young Brahmin Uḍānsiṅh whom people sought out when the problem of rabies arose.

Another story dealing with events soon after Haḍkāi’s origin-point on the mythological timeline establishes her associations with lower castes and other non-elite groups. The principal characters are Rāmo and Pārabo, who are given as either two Devipujak brothers or as a Devipujak and a Dalit, respectively, depending on whom is telling the story. I first heard the tale from a Valmiki man living in Ahmedabad named Mohan Bhuvaji, who is, as his title suggests, a *bhuvā*. From his perspective, Rāmo and Pārabo were Devipujaks. These two were skilled thieves due to their prodigious skills for intuiting where families hid their jewellery, as well as their rather complementary ability to break through thick walls. In the act of carrying out a burglary in the Saurashtra region, they were apprehended by a ruler and imprisoned.²¹⁴ One morning in their jail cell, they woke to the sound of *bhajans* sung by Uḍānsiṅh. This inspired Rāmo and Pārabo to

²¹⁴ While most of Haḍkāi’s foundational stories are set in Saurashtra, others occur elsewhere. One man I met in Vasna, a recently developed Devipujak-dominated community in Ahmedabad, traced Haḍkāi’s origin back to the town of Delwada near Mehsana. Here lived a *bhuvā* named Rāmji Dādā (possibly an analogue of the Rāmo partnered with Pārabo) who was faced with a situation in which 125 camels became afflicted with rabies. A wall of the Vasna temple features an illustration of this story, and the camels depicted herein sport jutting tongues to signify their hydrophobic state. Rāmji Dādā made efforts to get these camels cured and Haḍkāi, wanting exposure, granted the request.

send out a request for help to whatever deity was willing to save them. One goddess offered to honour their request on one condition: that they give her more priority than their own *kuldevī*. Soon after, the king in question had a dream during prayer time dedicated to Haḍkāī. In it, the goddess conveyed the message that Rāmo and Pārabo were innocent, and that his family's real treasure was buried in a nearby garbage dump. Following through with the goddess's counsel, the king found the treasure in the spot to which he had been directed. Rāmo and Pārabo were promptly released by the king. Understandably grateful, they sought to find out the name of the goddess who had helped them. This led them to Uḍānsinh, who, with the goddess's power, was able to withdraw rabies from animals. Rāmo and Pārabo were captivated by Haḍkāī, as she struck them as a very strange, *sāttvik* goddess. Nonetheless, they decided to take her into their home. At the same time, the goddess once again appeared in a dream, this time that of Uḍānsinh, giving advance notice that two Devipujaks would be coming around in the morning to make a demand for her. "Don't let me go to them," the goddess requested of Uḍānsinh, as she was perturbed by the fact that Devipujaks are non-vegetarian and consume cognac. As per the message, Uḍānsinh informed Rāmo and Pārabo, "I will not give my goddess to you because she is Brahminic." Rāmo and Pārabo grew frustrated, seeing as a Brahmin was preventing them from worshipping the goddess whose blessing had helped them circumvent their execution. Together, they decided to go on a hunger strike, threatening a fast unto death. They were able to go without water and food for 40 days. As they grew weaker and weaker, they gradually evoked Uḍānsinh's sympathies. Uḍānsinh finally resolved that if he were to give the goddess to these two thieves around four a.m., at the time of prayer, no one would witness the transaction. However, when the gifting occurred, the goddess herself manifested and cursed Uḍānsinh and all other Brahmins. "You cannot keep your pure, *sāttvik* goddess," Haḍkāī decreed, "and from today, you will have to beg." Ever since, as the moral of the story would have it, Brahmins have begged for alms. The goddess, meanwhile, was transferred to the Devipujaks.

This rather tortuous narrative puts forward an ambivalent message. Haḍkāī, even though she helps lower castes, initially does not want to be worshipped by them. Moreover, she cannot be worshipped by Brahmins, despite the fact that she was so closely tied to them (even serving as their *kuldevī*, as per the previous narrative). On account of her curse prohibiting Brahmins, she falls into the hands of the *tāmasik* Devipujaks. So while the story has the goddess reducing Brahmins to beggars, it also portrays lower castes none too glowingly at the same time. Oddly

enough, I heard variations of this story from several different sources within the Devipujak and Valmiki Samaj groups, suggesting a persistent, self-deprecating subtext in their renderings of Haḍkāī's arrival within their communities. These puzzling elements aside, one thing is clear: the goddess herself is pure and *sāttvik*, a fundamentally Brahminic deity who was intended for Brahmins but fell into the hands of Devipujaks instead.

More localized foundational stories staking Haḍkāī at particular sites also champion the *sāttvik*, Brahminic qualities of the goddess and her followers. One such example is that of Haḍkāī's temple at Angoli, an out-of-the-way location near the city of Dholka and one of the primary pilgrimage destinations for the goddess's devotees. At present, there is a small temple in this village that was built up from a small *derī* dating back beyond the memory of present-day locals. The Devipujak community of Angoli traces itself back to two mythological characters, a woman named Kalāri Doṣi Mātā and a man named Rāmjī Dādā.²¹⁵ The former was a Brahmin and the latter a Devipujak. Despite their mismatched caste backgrounds, Rāmjī Dādā and Kalāri got married, though they were unable to conceive a child during her fertile years. With the blessing of Haḍkāī, Kalāri at last became pregnant, miraculously, at age 80 and went on to have many children. Because of the caste background of their ancestor Kalāri Doṣi Mātā, the Devipujaks of Angoli believe themselves to have more of a Brahmin influence than other Devipujaks. Given the importance of this town in Haḍkāī's pilgrimage circuit, I got the impression that the half-Brahminic foundation of the goddess's followers at Angoli could function as an attestation to the purity of Haḍkāī worshippers as a whole. The gentleman with whom I spoke during my visit to the temple in May of 2015 implied as much. He explained that it was not only the residents of Angoli but *all* Haḍkāī worshippers who trace their lineage from Kalāri. This suggests that some Haḍkāī devotees see themselves as bonded by a bloodline that is partially Brahminic, the attendant purity living on within them, at least in the context of worshipping Haḍkāī.

If this story implies the purity of Haḍkāī and her followers, other folktales from Angoli assert more explicitly how the goddess works against *tāmasik* religion. Another leading lady of village lore is Kaṅkubā, an exemplary Haḍkāī devotee. She is said to have married a Thakor boy from Kotha, which is itself a present-day Haḍkāī pilgrimage site (and subject of a subsequent subsection). This union effectively intertwined the fates of Angoli and Kotha. After Kaṅkubā left

²¹⁵ See the previous footnote.

for her husband's village, a Valmiki man by the name of Jhapaḍ Dādā caused a stir in Angoli. He had considerable *tamas* power, and counted himself as a worshipper of Haḍkāī. Jhapaḍ was a supporter and protector of Angoli, but he had a taste for non-vegetarian food, above all the hearts of goats and chickens. He also liked alcohol, and was powerful in the art of mantra and tantra—in short, he was a black *tāntrika*. Kaṅkubā, meanwhile, was getting *pavan* in her husband's home. This prompted her to travel from Kotha back to Angoli. Here, much like Rāmo and Pārabo, she fasted in Haḍakṣā's name. This fast went on for a week, and Kaṅkubā accumulated some potent *tapas* (ascetic power or "heat"). With this ascetic power and the *pavan* of the goddess, Kaṅkubā managed to dislodge Jhapaḍ from her place of birth, much to the benefit of Angoli. Once vanquished, Jhapaḍ saw the error of his ways and got himself under control, ceasing his black mesmerism. Jhapaḍ's role in this foundational tale has not gone unrecognized at the Angoli temple, within which there is at present a small *derī* in his honour.

The point of the story, as with the origin narratives before, is clear: Haḍkāī will not stand for *tāmasik* practices such as non-vegetarian rites and the use of alcohol. Working through Kaṅkubā, the goddess manages to purge these practices with a combination of Sanskritic and village means—that is, *tapas* and *pavan*, respectively. The *sāttvik* practices defended by Kaṅkubā and Haḍkāī also left a lasting mark on the Angoli temple. While sacrifice is not unheard of here, it is only performed in the entrance area of the temple. Moreover, it is only offered to the subsidiary Melaḍī and Kālī shrines. While these sacrifices are being carried out, the shrine to Haḍkāī Mā is closed with a curtain. This is a custom that has, in the estimate of the *pūjārī* with whom I spoke, "always been." In contrast to other *mātās* who crave live offerings, Haḍkāī Mātā cannot even bear witness to *tāmasik* rites.

In addition to establishing a sacred geography of the major Haḍkāī sites, making the goddess synonymous with rabies, and connecting her to specific groups such as the Devipujaks, a central objective for these and other origin stories is to attest to Haḍkāī's unequivocal purity. While Haḍkāī is pure enough for a Brahmin, she is a goddess of Devipujaks and Dalits, reiterating the conflicting but not irreconcilable values of elite and non-elite groups. At Angoli, this reconciliation of upper- and lower-caste purity is inscribed within the purportedly mixed Brahmin and Devipujak stock of the villagers (if not all Haḍkāī worshippers). Ultimately, Haḍkāī proves to be a goddess fit for both elites and non-elites, and embodies the possibility of Brahminic values within the Devipujak community. Indeed, Devipujaks often do consume

alcohol, eat non-vegetarian food, and perform animal sacrifices to goddesses. Nonetheless, they are unanimously adamant that they do none of these things for the benefit of Haḍkāī.

Biting the Bark: Prevailing Perceptions of Haḍkāī Mātā

If Haḍkāī's foundational narratives held dear by her devotees envisage the goddess as purely *sāttvik*, then the popular perception among her non-worshippers stands in stark contrast. Like other *mātās*, Haḍkāī is considered by many elites and middle-caste groups to be a goddess of low castes, non-elites, and untouchables. Pocock did not mince words when he characterized the goddess based on his fieldwork experience in the 1970s: “[t]his *mātā* is in most cases located in the Untouchable quarter and her *bhuvo* is also an Untouchable” (Pocock 1973, 51). Alongside her connection with depressed caste groups, Haḍkāī is also synonymous with rabies, a disease associated with filth and squalor in the popular imagination. For many non-worshippers, it is hardly a stretch to extrapolate Haḍkāī's associations toward the impure and the *tāmasik* as well. Again, the links with sacrifices and alcohol, chiefly the latter, are commonly made by those familiar with Haḍkāī only in passing. These assumptions appear to be made mostly on account of whom worships the goddess and where she is worshipped. They also stem from her canine *vāhana*, which is unbecoming to some elite and “properly Hindu” discriminations.

That Haḍkāī should be conceived outside of her base of worshippers as impure is to be expected, considering the pan-Indian negativity toward dogs over a wide swath of history. In the Vedas, any *agnihotra* sacrifice that was not offered in the liminal spaces of twilight or dawn was supposed to be thrown to the dogs of Yama, god of death (White 1989, 286). These dogs are named Śyāma and Śabala, and together they stand watch over the path into the afterlife. At the time of cremation, ritual injunctions were made such that the deceased could pass quickly over this path, preventing the dogs of death from tearing him or her apart and thereby permitting safe arrival in the abode of Yama. With this in mind, dead ancestors were cremated along with a “sop” so as to divert the hellhounds. As White has vividly phrased it, the dog's “notorious battlefield and burning ground necrophagy should account, to a certain extent, for its symbolic connection with death in India” (1989, 286). In short, dogs connote mortality from very early on in the Sanskritic tradition. Fittingly, Śiva's fierce manifestation, Bhairava, who is himself no stranger to funerary grounds, also has a dog for his *vāhana*.

In regional contexts across India, dogs also bear predominantly negative symbolism, and Gujarati folklore is no exception. I was told, for instance, that a special Bhairava is associated with a specific kind of baying (not barking) that dogs indulge in at night. This particular keening sound portends the death of a family member or some other misfortune of this magnitude.²¹⁶ As is the case elsewhere, Kāl-Bhairava has been closely associated with the black arts in Gujarat, and accepted offerings of live animals (Enthoven [1914] 1989, 70). After these sacrifices were presented to the god, they were to be given to black dogs for consumption (*Ibid.*). Keeping with the theme of sacrifice, it was reported in *The Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency* that some Broach Kolis would actually kill a dog and offer it to a goddess instead of a goat, though the author did not specify which goddess (Kirparam 1901, 377). In Gujarat, as in much of the rest of India, there has been a prevailing belief that dogs are unclean, their touch capable of defiling a Brahmin (*Ibid.*). Furthermore, people who died of rabies were believed to become unfriendly spirits or *bhūts* (1901, 416). Relatedly, it was thought that dogs—especially black dogs—were one of the primary forms in which malevolent male and female spirits manifested themselves, along with goats, fire, whirlwinds, and snakes (Enthoven [1914] 1989, 132). Paralleling the Vedic and Sanskrit traditions, middle- and low-caste Hindus were known to give provender in the form of sweet balls to street dogs before a dead body was taken to the burning ground (Kirparam 1901, 377). Also alive and well in this Gujarati context has been the belief that dogs possessed divine vision of Yama and his messengers (*Ibid.*).

Dogs were not entirely detestable in Gujarati lore, though. They were, of course, worshipped alongside Bhairava. It was also believed by some that a dog was due to become a man in its next life (Enthoven [1914] 1989, 150). Some people also offered bread to dogs in the belief that canines could provide testimony to the divine regarding their merits ([1914] 1989, 152). Moreover, seeing a running dog at the time of starting out on a journey was considered to be lucky (Kirparam 1901, 377). Dog feces were also sometimes used in spirit-scaring rites (*Ibid.*).

If dogs were more bad than good, then the hounds affiliated with Haḍḍkāī were some of the worst. A prevailing image in rural and urban Gujarat is that of dogs roaming around Haḍḍkāī's *derīs*, hoping to eat some of the *prasād* left by her *bhaktas* (Jadav n.d., 312). The vegetarian

²¹⁶ This seems to indicate the lasting resonance of a folk belief mentioned in the *Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency*: “[t]he barking and howling of a dog with its face turned downwards or towards a man’s house foretell the death of one of the occupants” (Kirparam 1901, 377).

temple offerings, however, were not typically thought to be satisfactory for the dogs' appetites. On the contrary, Pocock has reported that the dogs frequenting the Devipujak and Dalit areas were usually held to be fiercer than dogs in other areas, as they had an acute taste for meat that had been sharpened by the discarded leftovers of non-elites, who were presumed to be non-vegetarian (1973, 51).

Much like dogs, Haḍkāī Mātā also bears associations with death. It is quite often in the area behind her *derīs* where the Devipujak funeral grounds are located (Jadav n.d., 312). The funeral ground is also the location of Divāso, a major yearly July or August gathering involving ceremonial weeping performed at ancestors' memorial sites. Haḍkāī figures into this ceremony prominently. Joravarsinha Jadav, whose quasi-scholarly book *Divya Mandir Mārā Devnā Re* contains some of the limited material published in Gujarati on Haḍkāī Mātā, has described the ceremony as follows: "On the day of Divāso, people of the Vaghri [Devipujak] caste make worship of Haḍkāī, then after having gone into the charnel grounds, weep with many loud cries making remembrance of their dead kin. This sight gives a tremble to anyone's heart" (Jadav n.d., 312).²¹⁷ This stirring festival is well-attended by Devipujaks, particularly in the Patan area.

Haḍkāī's connection with Devipujaks has also further solidified her more general association with low-caste and Dalit people and the areas in which they live. At present, Devipujaks remain a distinctive caste group who work at a variety of professions, though most often they are cultivators or vegetable vendors. Paul D'Souza has classified Devipujaks among Gujarat's "middle backward castes" (2002, 173), and to my understanding they are, technically speaking, Shudras. Nonetheless, Devipujaks are often dismissed by elite castes as tantamount to Dalits. Correspondingly, the Indian government recognizes Devipujaks as a scheduled tribe, and Harald Tambs-Lyche has characterized the group somewhat unsparingly as "arch-untouchables" (2004, 22). These sorts of prevailing attitudes have shaped what is by and large a subjugated identity for Devipujaks. This subjugation is encoded in some of their customs. For instance, some Devipujak men wore their hair in pigtailed such that they could be readily identified by upper castes (Tambs-Lyche 2004, 22). From their own perspective, Devipujaks consider themselves to have originally held an upper-caste identity, namely that of Rajputs who stumbled downward in social position (Kirparam 1901, 510). Questions of origins aside, one inarguable fact of the Devipujak lifestyle is that it is most often a harsh one. Devipujak sectors, both rural

²¹⁷ This translation and those to follow from Jadav's *Divya Mandir Mārā Devnā Re* are mine.

and urban, are often plagued by poverty, crime, and alcoholism (Sheth 2002, 52). These are not areas of cities to which elites generally travel. As a primary goddess of these communities, then, Haḍkāī's domain has been established in the popular imagination as one of dog-infested disorder. Despite that, the profile of the Devipujaks is evolving. Some Devipujaks, principally women, have adopted symbols of middle-classness, such as higher quality household goods and minor luxury articles, and have also begun to accumulate savings (Sheth 2002, 52).²¹⁸

Haḍkāī worship is almost as common among members of the Valmiki Samaj, the archetypal Melaḍī devotees formerly known as Bhangis. The Valmikis have often been glossed as “sweepers,” though they were often entrusted with latrine cleaning and other unenviable professions. Franco, Macwan, and Ramanathan (2004) have offered the following reflection on the Valmikis' relationship to Haḍkāī:

The worship of Hadakai Mata is [...] very suggestive of the work they do. Wandering from one place to another as they go about their jobs of cleaning, they are especially vulnerable to attacks from stray dogs and often get bitten. Going to a doctor every time is expensive; and often they do not have faith in the doctor; instead, they prefer to go to their Goddess in whom they have placed their faith. As in the case of the worship of Meladi, lack of education and resources both play their part in the continuance of such worship” (Franco et al. 2004, 270).

These statements about the resonance between the goddess and the lifeways of her worshippers can also be extended in some measure to Devipujaks.

While Haḍkāī bears these negative connections with death, dogs, disease, and depressed castes, she can, of course, also cure. Given the paucity of historical materials, it is difficult to know how long she has served in this role as healer of rabies. Jadav has placed the Mātā's benevolent capacity for healing in a remote past: “In ancient eras when the quest for a vaccine making opposition to the disease of rabies had not yet begun, at a time when anyone had the misfortune of being polluted (bitten) by a rabid dog, such people used to come to the temple of this Mātā. Touching on the foot of the Mātā, they made *prasād* of jaggery and rice” (Jadav n.d., 312). This practice has persisted into modernity: “Even in the scientific age of today,” Jadav went on to explain, “people come to the *mandir* of this Devī for the purpose of a rabies remedy.

²¹⁸ Sheth has attributed this evolution to the influence of movements such as Swadhyaya, a religious and philosophical movement founded by Marathi-speaking Brahmin Pandurang Shastri Athavale (affectionately known as “Dādā”). This movement attempts to cultivate lifestyles of hygiene, temperance, love, fraternity, hard work, and religious consciousness among the western Indian underclasses (Sheth 2002, 51). Swadhyaya has been taken up by some Devipujaks.

Making a fragrance of incense sticks and consuming *prasād* of jaggery, oil, and rice, they experience bliss. It is said that when a rabid dog bites, by touching on the foot of Haḍkāī Mā, the disease of rabies will thereafter be no more” (*Ibid.*). This curative technique has not changed drastically over a considerable span of time, at least in Jadav’s reckoning, which appears to date back to the mid-eighties or early nineties. Haḍkāī’s role in curing rabies does not, however, necessarily soften her image for non-worshippers. As both cause and cure of the disease, she embodies a capriciousness comparable to that of the South Indian goddess Māriyamman, bringer and remover of poxes.²¹⁹ Moreover, the Gujarati folk-healing process for rabies, as with other diseases, was and is invariably mediated by *bhuvās*. *Bhuvās* have notoriously been shady figures who themselves periodically took on vicious, ecstatic states that resembled the symptoms of the disease from which Haḍkāī takes her name and *raison d’être*. Jadav has expressed just this sort of sentiment: “If this *avatāra* of the *mātā* comes in the body of a *bhuvā*, then rabies swells up in the *bhuvā*” (Jadav n.d., 313). To have *pavan* of Haḍkāī, then, is not just to feel a “breeze”; rather, it is perceived as being akin to an out-and-out rabid state. To the outside commentator, rabies may seem like a fitting precis for *bhuvā*-based religion and the states of *pavan* in which it is largely grounded.

Apparently, these rabid *bhuvā*-based rites to Haḍkāī became, on certain occasions, intensely ecstatic and even *tāmasik*. In his *Divya Mandir Mārā Devnā Re*, Jadav has provided an evocative description of the consecration and procession of the Haḍkāī *māṇḍvo* culled from a number of sites. I cite my translation of Jadav’s account here at length:

The consecration of the Haḍkāī Mātā *māṇḍvo* is also done in remarkable fashion. In the *māṇḍvo* event, after making the Mātā’s *bhuvā* free from guilt by causing him to bathe and to clean, he is kept in partition. In his company, a sixteen-year-old unmarried girl, also having been made to bathe and clean, is protected in partition in a different room. At this time, a *bhuvā* of Śaktmātā, sister of Haḍkāī, is also made clean, and also sits in a room.

Three days afterward, a test of the honesty and purity of the three people is taken in public. Having put a big pan above the fire pit, the oil in it comes to a boil. Having put *bhākhri* [a hard type of bread] in the boiling oil, the two *bhuvās* and the unmarried girl are said to take the hard breads by hand. The three people, having placed both hands in the frying pan, take out the *bhākhri*s. If someone is hurt from this, then he is exchanged with a

²¹⁹ Māriyamman is a goddess of *ammai*, referring to several kinds of poxes and also the measles. These illnesses are thought to be initiated when Māriyamman “arrives” upon the body of the sufferer, who usually makes a debt-vow to the goddess so that she will then “descend” from the body in short order, relieving their ailment (Srinivasan 2009, 4).

second person free from guilt, someone having kept three days partition, in his place, and this consecration is done once more and the festival is pushed forward any number of days after. In this severe test, the three participants offer great self-sacrifice; in this very highly prepared way, they establish relation with her [Haḍkāi] (Jadav n.d, 313).

Purity, unmistakeably, is a great concern, as is evidenced by way of this exacting public test, which closely resembles *tāvo*, the hand-removal of *pūrīs* from boiling oil we observed in Chapter Four. The assessment of purity has not finished, though:

After the end of the first severe test of taking hard bread from the big pan has arrived, the three people keep partition in rooms far, far away. Afterward, having done *pūjā* at the ceremony place, a pillar of the *śamī-khīj* tree and, similarly, the big plant of the banana tree are brought and planted in front of the Mātā enclave.

The enclave is decorated with festooning and pillows. At the place under the festoons, on four sides, several small erected pillars are made fixed; no one is allowed to enter in this place.

The inauguration of the ceremony begins and for the first three days the *bhuvā* sits in the enclave of the Mātā making an uninterrupted lamp-flame in front of the Mātā. He makes a strict fast for three days. Not even a drop of water is put in his mouth. The door of the enclave is kept closed from the outside for up to three days before people can enter (Jadav n.d, 313).

Soon enough, the atmosphere changes:

At a fixed time, the *bhuvā* of Śakt Mā and the unmarried girl present themselves in the garden of the *maṇḍapa*. Both people bring a dagger, sword, and large broom of peacock feathers in hand and stay standing pressing on the right side of the door of the Mātā's enclave. After this, the *ḍhol* drum, *ḍāklū*, and cymbals rise to a high tempo. A forest song [*āranya*] of the Mātā is sung. Encouragement spreads through the atmosphere. The door of the Mātā's enclave opens outward. The *bhuvā* of Haḍkāi comes outside from the enclave. By this point in time, saliva begins to fall in drops from his face. His tongue hangs out. His eyes are rubbed red. He makes a horrible face.

The Mātā's *bhuvā*, arriving on the scene and coming outside in this miserable condition, circumambulates around the banana tree and the *khījḍānā* pillar. Having completed two circuits, he circumambulates a third time, and after the *khījḍānā* tree trunk fills up with his bites, its scraped-off bark pieces are set out. The drawn-out pulp-filling of the bite-filled banana tree pillar is also set out. Then and there, becoming unconscious, the *bhuvā* falls on the ground and lies down there. His tongue juts out and saliva starts to drop incessantly from his mouth (Jadav n.d, 313-314).

Like the jackal in the origin story of Haḍkāī, or the goddess herself, the *bhuvā*'s rabid *pavan* has him biting at trees. Like a mad dog, he foams at the mouth with the presence of the goddess. He desperately needs to be calmed down from this state:

At this time, the *bhuvā* of Śaktmātā comes in the *māṇḍvo*. He brings a large broom of peacock feathers in hand to move above the body of the Haḍkāī *bhuvā* who shakes and shakes. After, the unconscious *bhuvā* is made to drink water. The *bhuvā* regains consciousness. With great joy, the pacification of the Mātā begins, and the festival ends with much pomp and circumstance. In this manner, the festival of Jalna village²²⁰ ended with propitious bliss, but in the time of the *māṇḍvo* festival of Patan, it is said that the goddess took enjoyment [*bhog līdho*] of the two *bhuvās* and the unmarried girl (Jadav n.d, 314).²²¹

At this point, the already eventful consecration could potentially take an overtly *tāmasik* turn:

But if the Haḍkāī *bhuvā* is not regaining consciousness from the revolving feather, and the pacification of the Mātā has not begun, then the girl of sixteen years, holding a sword in her hand, makes a wound on her own body and sprinkles her own blood on the *bhuvā*. In this very same manner, the *bhuvā* of Śaktmātā also makes a wound on his own limb with a sword and sprinkles his own blood on the *bhuvā*. Doing as such, both people make an offering of their own body to the Mātā. But if the pacifying of the Mātā has not begun from these two enjoyments, then, in the end, the *bhuvā* of Haḍkāī Mātā also offers a sacrifice of his own self. Five hundred years previous in Patan, this enjoyment was taken; afterwards, the *māṇḍvo* of this Mātā was seen to occur only rarely.

After the pacification of the Mātā has begun, gifts of a dinner, gold and silver ornaments, and garments are made to the two *bhuvās* and the unmarried girl, creating jubilation. In that way it is said that favour of the Mātā remains from donning the *māṇḍvo* (Jadav n.d, 314).

This account would seem to suggest that the *māṇḍvo* ceremony of Haḍkāī Mātā in Patan of centuries past, among other areas, sometimes culminated in a ritualized bloodletting to mark the end of the goddess's *pavan*. On top of that, it involved overtures of human sacrifice. Such a ceremony would be highly out of character for a strictly *sāttvik* goddess. So while Haḍkāī followers, as we will see, insist that the goddess has never taken sacrifice and alcohol oblations, ceremonial self-mutilation and blood offerings may have at one point been a part of her rituals.

²²⁰ Presumably, this refers to the city in Maharashtra.

²²¹ This probably refers to a possession-like state, though the construction "took enjoyment" may also have a sexual connotation. If it does, the meaning of the passage becomes even more complex.

Jadav's sources are not clear, and the historicity of the account he has provided remains up for debate. That said, that these ideas have been put into print ensures that, to at least some extent, the supposedly *tāmasik* trajectories of Haḍkāī Mātā circulate in public discourse. These kinds of accounts likely inform some of the unconvinced attitudes elites and other non-worshippers hold toward the goddess at present.

Whether or not such elements of Haḍkāī's history have any bearing on present-day perceptions of the goddess, non-worshippers are often skeptical of her power and influence, particularly as it relates to biomedicine and healing. Speaking with some social workers employed at a women's outreach centre in Ahmedabad in March of 2015, I heard several horror stories about Haḍkāī from the field, wherein the goddess was not without some notoriety. One such story revolved around a family that did not go to a hospital when their one-year-old child was suffering from a dog bite. Instead, they sought out the goddess. The family hailed from a relatively well-off Devipujak community on the outskirts of Ahmedabad, and it was widely agreed that they could have afforded medical care. As a result of their decision, the child narrowly avoided pneumonia. A grislier story involved a two-year-old child in Surendranagar who was similarly bitten by a dog. When Haḍkāī Mā was consulted by a *bhuvā*, the goddess apparently advised against medical care, and the child eventually died. Though these stories may be no more than urban legends, they confront the tenuous encounter between biomedicine and traditional healing methods that Haḍkāī encapsulates. They also catalogue the risks that devout worshippers may still be taking, even in the face of modernization, Westernization, and, more specifically, increased affluence and proto-middle-classness. Certainly, the well-heeled family in the first story, whether real or legendary, exemplifies this clash between modernity and tradition. As they are retold by social workers, these stories index non-worshippers' discomfort with the ostensibly backward-looking lifestyle that Haḍkāī represents.

In her capacity as a rabies goddess, then, Haḍkāī has occupied an ambiguous position whereby she can heal bites from the most vicious, pollutant dogs, but is also surrounded by them. Her chosen animal mount, her environs, her followers, and the vicious nature of the disease she protects against have all marked Haḍkāī as a precarious goddess embodying non-progressive religiosity, at least from the perspective of her non-worshippers. For this reason, Haḍkāī is widely considered as one among the *tāmasik*, non-elite *mātās*, and some non-worshippers readily assume that her ritual repertoire bears all the hallmarks of other divinities of this sort. These

include animal sacrifice and alcohol, especially the latter considering the stereotyped habits of her Devipujak followers. Indeed, Gujarati-language accounts such as that composed by Joravarsinha Jadav connect her to offerings of blood. A.M. Shah, the prominent Gujarati social theorist, drew similar conclusions about Haḍkāī's past, as he passingly lumped her in with Khoḍīyār and Śikotar as goddesses who "were propitiated with non-vegetarian offerings" (2006, 155).²²² And moving beyond strictly religious sensibilities, social workers see Haḍkāī as an affront to modern medicine, epitomizing depressed-caste backwardness.

All that being what it is, Haḍkāī's worshippers remain undeterred in the belief that their goddess is unfailingly pure. This may be with verifiably just cause, as I have found little compelling evidence that Haḍkāī ever took sacrifices, either recently or historically. In the *Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency*, for instance, Haḍkāī was not listed among goddesses who take blood offerings (Kirparam 1901, 406). In recent times, Franco et al. have also observed as much, noting the purely *sāttvik* nature of her offerings: "Hadakai is called a pure Goddess because only rice and ghee are offered to her" (2004, 270). In fact, this concern for purity is fairly hardline at some Haḍkāī sites, as Franco et al. have further elaborated: "[w]omen can go to the temple only when they are not menstruating and are pure; drunkards are not allowed to enter" (*Ibid.*). I saw signs indicating similar rules regarding women's entry at a number of Haḍkāī sites, including the shrine near V.S. Hospital in the Ellis Bridge section of Ahmedabad, as well as at the famed Delhi Darwaj *derī*.²²³ At this latter site, it was not uncommon to see upper-caste people in attendance. On one occasion in May 2015, I met a Brahmin man who had hopped off his motorbike to salute the goddess en route to another temple. On the same day at the same site, I saw a stray dog dotted with a *tilak*, having received *darśan* from the goddess. Such images in apposition—that is, Brahmins and dogs receiving the same forehead marking—aptly capsulize a significant part of the Haḍkāī experience. Haḍkāī apparently has the power to enable the Brahminic and the lower-caste, as well as the *sāttvik* and the pollutant, to coexist in close

²²² With regard to these goddesses and others deities, Shah would go on to qualify this statement: "[h]owever, mythology described them as forms of some great deity or other of Hinduism, and over a period of time non-vegetarian offerings were replaced by vegetarian ones" (2006, 115). While I certainly agree that such a shift did occur for Khoḍīyār (and likely Śikotar), and while Shah's overall argument for Sanskritization in such cases is congruent with a key component of my own argument throughout this dissertation, I do not see compelling evidence that such a drastic movement toward vegetarianism took place for Haḍkāī. She appears to have been by and large vegetarian all along.

²²³ This temple has, for instance, received treatment in Esther David's 2010 novel *The Man with Enormous Wings*. David has characterized the site as a place where any person, Hindu or Muslim or otherwise, could pray and be healed—at least before the Godhra carnage.

proximity. Hence, Haḍkāī's earlier twentieth-century iconography, which was usually presented on cloth hangings and limited to a dog-mounted female figure, has given way to modern lithograph prints depicting her as a youthful, lustrous young woman in the style of a universal, pan-Indian goddess.²²⁴ It is precisely this pristine, pan-Indian imagining of Haḍkāī that prevails at her contemporary sites, the incongruous canine *vāhana* notwithstanding.

Ethnography of Haḍkāī Sites

Unlike other modern-day *mātās*, Haḍkāī has not seen a wellspring of prominent temple complexes built in her name in Gujarat. Whether rural or urban, her sites are generally smaller and date back farther. Often they are no more than a single *derī*, having not yet seen the modern architectural elaborations or “gentrifications” that have transformed other goddess sites. While Haḍkāī shrines easily accessible to a diverse public do exist, such as the one at Delhi Darwaj mentioned above, some of the most pivotal sites are tucked away in rural areas or within Devipujak or Valmiki sectors. Despite this association with lower castes and non-worshippers' negative perceptions, the consensus is clear across the representative Haḍkāī sites I visited: firstly, the goddess is reckoned as having always been unambiguously pure and *sāttvik* and Brahminic by her worshippers, making her unique even amongst the most gentrified of *mātās*. Secondly, she is still implicated—at least in theory—in instigating, preventing, and curing rabies, and for this reason many of her followers consider her superior to medical science in overcoming the ailment.

PATAN

The district and town of Patan in northern Gujarat is a haven of Haḍkāī worship due in large part to its high Devipujak concentration. The Patani Devipujaks, as they refer to themselves, are a prominent sub-population in Patan; by one estimation I heard, there are 185 families from this subgroup in the region. Local legend posits Patan as the origin place of the Devipujak's former title of “Vaghri.” As the story goes, there was once a king who had a tiger, or *vāgh*, which was infected by rabies. A Devipujak man named Apaṅgiyo Bhūvo—as his name

²²⁴ According to Fischer, Jain, and Shah (2014), Haḍkāī at first appeared most commonly on contemporary *candarvo* hangings. Their research, originally carried out in the 1980s for an earlier German-language publication, has suggested that no printing block exists for Haḍkāī among the fabric manufacturers in Ahmedabad (2014, 185). On a few of these pieces, the seated goddess is depicted with one or two dogs accompanying her. There are very few stone icons of the goddess, and up to the 1970s, no modern prints of Haḍkāī were available (*Ibid.*).

would suggest, a *bhuvā*—was able to cure the tiger by sprinkling it with water from a pot supposedly bearing cosmic power. While this power is not explicitly labelled as that of the goddess Haḍkāī, the connection with rabies strongly implies as much. Certainly, Haḍkāī features centrally in the religious outlook of Patani Devipujaks, as she is considered to be their *kuldevī* (Jadav n.d., 312).

At present, the main Haḍkāī temple in Patan is located outside the town proper at the end of a narrow, sinuous dirt road that winds past a Kālī shrine and a Devipujak burial ground. For many devotees here and elsewhere, this temple is considered the central Haḍkāī site. The temple itself sits under an expansive tamarind tree. This tree is identified in Patan's local lore as the place where Haḍkāī Mā originally self-manifested to provide refuge to humanity (Jadav n.d., 312). The shade of the surrounding foliage played host to my chats with various members of the local Devipujak community, two of whom were particularly prominent. Firstly, there was Dineshbhai, who proclaimed himself to be a “self-made social worker” within his community, and was currently serving in the capacity of town councillor for the opposition in the municipal government. An advocate for depressed classes, Dineshbhai had just recently overseen a one million rupee grant that would enable local members of the Valmiki Samaj to fence their quarters. Secondly, I met Mr. Joshi, the presiding *bhuvā* of the Haḍkāī temple. Normally, the pair informed me, they did not tell the stories of Haḍkāī to any local journalist. Further, with a nod to orality, both men qualified the information they provided me with the proviso that there is no written history of Haḍkāī—in fact, there cannot be, as printed material of the goddess inevitably wears away. Nonetheless, Dineshbhai and Mr. Joshi were forthcoming with answers to my questions.

Mr. Joshi and Dineshbhai traced the origins of the temple back to the remote past—the year 1065, specifically—making it contemporaneous with the glory days of the Chaulukya Empire, which had its capital in Patan. Devipujaks, they explained, were valued by rulers in the area, since they were able to catch and train monitor lizards. These lizards, both Mr. Joshi and Dineshbhai explained, were considered auspicious not only because they were purely vegetarian, eating no ants or insects, but also because of their tactical uses.²²⁵ Devipujaks could throw these

²²⁵ The monitor lizard's vegetarianism appears to be largely an emic conceit. Zoological research has suggested that the diet of monitor lizards is almost entirely non-vegetarian. The *varanus griseus koniecznyi*, a subspecies common to Gujarat, is carnivorous (Stanner 2004, 127). Various subspecies of *varanus bengalensis*, another species of monitor lizard found throughout parts of India including Gujarat, are strict carnivores and feed mostly on small

lizards against walls and make them stick there, which was of great advantage for military operations. With ropes attached to these lizards, warriors such as the Thakors could then climb up into enemy fortresses. For this reason, Patni Devipujaks formed a special bond with Thakors. Moreover, these sorts of efforts won Patni Devipujaks the admiration of their *mahārājas*, who rewarded them with land. For that reason, Devipujaks stayed loyal to the rulers of Patan through the centuries.

In its earliest form, this Patan temple was small- to medium-sized, according to Dineshbhai. Now, however, the temple is relatively elaborate, at least compared to other Haḍkāī shrines and *derīs*, with its outdoor pillared hall and sandstone *vimāna* above the *garbha-grha*. Still, by the standards of urban temples, including those to *mātās* such as Melaḍī and Khoḍīyār, the Patan Haḍkāī temple is by no means extravagant. The *mūrti* within the Patan *garbha-grha* stood out on account of its beauty. Unlike most sites we will encounter throughout the rest of the chapter, which have metal, stone, or lithograph renderings of Haḍkāī as their central icon, Patan featured a large *mūrti*. This rendering of the goddess has four arms and is perched atop a white, panting dog. Two puppies were situated beneath them. This was a newer addition to the temple, having replaced the original sculpture, which was wrought from stone. When I visited in 2015, this original stone sculpture still sat beneath the main *mūrti*. In addition to this current temple site, there is also another Haḍkāī site on the very next lot that had been undergoing expansion for two years as of my 2015 visits. These renovations would continue for a minimum of two more years, by Mr. Joshi's estimation. Taking into account these extensive upgrades to both ritual spaces and the *mūrti*, the Patan temple is the single Haḍkāī site that approaches what Joanne Waghorne has referred to as "gentrification." Moreover, the "gentrification" at the Patan Haḍkāī site is taking place almost solely in the architectural sense.

Despite its medium-sized ritual space, the temple still draws a steady following, with 500 or 600 people showing up regularly on Sundays. While a good portion of the devotee base is made up of local Devipujaks, attendees also journey from Ahmedabad, Baroda, and even Jaipur and Delhi. The devotees also span a variety of caste and religious groups, including Thakors, Patels, Bharwads, and Mols, in addition to a few Muslims. Weekly ceremonies culminate in an evening *ārati*, during which the *jyot* kindled with *gūgal*, charcoal, and sesame is offered with a

invertebrates (Pianka 2004, 159). For more on the monitor lizard, see Eric Pianka, Dennis King and Ruth Allen King (2004).

metal or earthenware vessel. With the blessing of Haḍkāī Mā, Dineshbhai explained, the person offering the flame holds it against the palm of their hand, and no one gets burned. On special occasions, the temple bursts at its seams. At Caitrī Navarātri, for instance, a fair is held that brings in a staggering number of visitors ranging anywhere from 50,000 to 100,000, by Mr. Joshi's estimate. This time of the year also draws a large number of Haḍkāī *bhuvās* to the Patan temple. Under the supervision of these assembled *bhuvās*, various Devipujak families bring bones of kin to the graveyards in the area. The burial ground near the temple is just one of four such sites in the vicinity, each of which is claimed by a specific family. The graveyards are also a crucial arena for Divāso, the weeping tribute to ancestors that is Patan's major summer gathering and is still observed faithfully in the region. Curing rabies is a central theme of another of the largescale Patan festivals, which takes place on the fourth day after Diwali. Having rung in the New Year, all the people who made wishes upon Haḍkāī Mā for rabies cures or other needs during the year return to the temple to worship the goddess and make *prasād* in gratitude. Dineshbhai and Mr. Joshi serve as the *pūjārīs* on this day, and the rituals performed at this time are thought to ensure continued success in alleviating rabies.

Indeed, both Mr. Joshi and Dineshbhai maintained that people still come to the Patan temple when suffering from dog bites and rabies symptoms. A person with such an affliction may be avoiding food, light, and water, symptoms of rabies that are taken to signify that Haḍkāī Mā has entered into the human body. The infected person then undertakes a vow in hopes of a cure. At Patan, this vow involves Mr. Joshi or another officiant tying a string around the wrist of the sufferer. The vow dictates the avoidance of cooked food for five weeks after the time of the dog bite, and a strict observance of *brahmacarya*. As Dineshbhai described it, the husband and wife "live like brother and sister" once their wish has been made. After the five weeks of dietary and sexual restraints have passed, the vow is concluded with an offering of *prasād*, which in this situation is sweet rice. If properly performed, the rabies will be cured. Mr. Joshi and Dineshbhai noted that their wristlet-and-vow method is not universal. At many other Haḍkāī temples, as we will see, the vow is performed with offerings of oil lamps. Nevertheless, the Patan temple is prominent among Haḍkāī sites, as it can also provide insight into the viability of vows made in the goddess's name at other locations. One of these places is the Haḍkāī temple at Mira Darwaj in the Banaskanth district to the north. After patrons have fulfilled a rabies-related wish at Mira

Darwaj, it is not uncommon for them to travel to Patan to calculate whether or not they have made any mistakes in keeping up their end of the vow.

It is understood that Haḍkāī—particularly in her origin spot at Patan—is eminently capable of sniffing out any blunders or wrongdoing committed by someone bound by a vow. To characterize her as a goddess of justice is commonplace on the part of her followers at various sites, and Patan is no exception. Here, her divine jurisdiction is very much thought of in legalistic terms. Mr. Joshi provided one such metaphor: in his view, Haḍkāī is equivalent to the police, and the Patani Devipujak *bhuvās*—among whom he is included—are the lawyers, mediating between the law enforcer and the potentially guilty party by way of the *pāṭlā* seeds. Although not a connotation familiar to standard Gujarati, Joshi insisted that his name itself, literally “astrologer,” also denoted in some sense “lawyer,” referring to his function as a Haḍkāī *bhuvā*.

The very first time I walked onto the grounds of the Patan temple in June of 2015, Mr. Joshi was sitting *pāṭlā* with members of the Patani Devipujak community under the shade of the tamarinds. This scene proved to be representative, as *pāṭlā* readings were constantly taking place at the site. The Patani community has intense faith in their Haḍkāī *bhuvās*, consulting them for a variety of wishes and concerns familiar at other *mātā* temples. Many of these are health-related matters unconnected to rabies. At this Patan site, I was told, the team of the *bhuvā* and the goddess was highly effective in allaying addictions. In the seeds, Mr. Joshi explained, he and other *bhuvās* are able to read a person’s dependencies, whether for drinking, marijuana, or womanizing. From here, they take steps to potentially assuage these compulsions. Mr. Joshi’s consultations also deal with problems caused by *bhūts* and black magic. On one of my visits, a young man was sitting *pāṭlā* to diagnose some problems pertaining to a property he owned. The property could not be rented out because of a malevolent spirit that was terrorizing tenants with frightening dreams and overall restlessness. After Mr. Joshi read the seeds, dark forces were strongly suspected. For this and other instances of black magic, I observed as Mr. Joshi employed village-styled methods for warding off the evil influences. These included utilization of the ever-versatile sliced lemon, which he orbited around the head of the languishing landowner to entrap the malicious wraith. Haḍkāī’s white magic evidently counteracts the black.

Though these customary village practices continue to be essential components of the ritual repertoire at Patan, Haḍkāī’s purity is framed here in terms that turn toward the Sanskritic. Dineshbhai described Haḍkāī as a clean goddess, contrasting *bhuvās* of Mr. Joshi’s ilk with those

who worked with “dirty” goddesses, such as Cuḍel Mā and Melaḍī. *Bhuvās* of these less-than-immaculate goddesses are, by Dineshbhai’s estimation, obsessed with forecasting futures and attempting to “control the world.” This again speaks to the self-serving and grandiose motivations presumed of *mātā* officiants—that is to say, the officiants of *other mātās*. Because Haḍkāī is a clean goddess, the Patan temple is *sāttvik*, and Mr. Joshi assured me there is nothing *tāmasik* on its grounds. *Prasād* consists only of rice, jaggery, oil, and sometimes coconut, and animals are never offered. Goats are not even subjected to the symbolic cut on the ear that is sometimes made at other temples in place of sacrifice. It has always been this way at the Patan temple, according to Dineshbhai, who was apparently skeptical of the possibility of *tāmasik* aspects in Haḍkāī’s past. The *sāttvik* nature of the goddess, he explained, influenced the choice of the colour white for both the goddess and her canine mount that together constitute the main *mūrti*. Much like at V.S. Hospital and at Delhi Darwaj, there are also rules barring women from entering the niche in which the *mūrti* is housed, once again illustrating stringent concerns for purity.

According to Dineshbhai and Mr. Joshi, there is much more to Haḍkāī at Patan than can be encapsulated in the *mūrti*, however. Originally, they explained, before the initial stone monument that predates the current statue, there was no idol of Haḍkāī. Rather, she only manifested in the bodies of dogs and rabies patients.²²⁶ And originally, before the monuments of stone and marble, Haḍkāī was only represented in the temple by way of the *jyot*. This goddess-as-flame conceptualization seems to connote Haḍkāī’s universality beyond any iconographical rendering, and moves toward a Vedāntic understanding of her scope. It is not uncommon to hear Haḍkāī devotees describe the goddess in such a way. Despite the assertion among devotees that the Patan temple is the place where Haḍkāī first appeared, no one can claim a creation place of Haḍkāī, according to Dineshbhai. This is because she is everywhere, especially within the bodies of dogs. It is for this reason that her worldly manifestations are limited. Dineshbhai and Mr. Joshi explained that Haḍkāī only stays in physical form for a maximum of just three days—a period of time, interestingly enough, roughly equivalent with the prodromal stage of rabies infection. In addition to affording her this kind of omnipresence, Dineshbhai also touted Haḍkāī as a supreme, all-encompassing deity. In fact, he described her as not often acting personally in the lives of devotees, but rather enlisting other goddesses to do her work for her. Her *pavan*, therefore,

²²⁶ In this way, she is not unlike Māriyamman, who manifests primarily as pustules (Srinivasan 2009, 33).

provides a chance to commune with not just Haḍkāī Mā, but to give invitation to 330 million deities, since she ultimately controls them all. These imaginings of Haḍkāī afford her a large or even limitless jurisdiction, such that she is best characterized by a decidedly neo-Vedāntic vocabulary. Village aniconography can double as Vedāntic transcendence, it would seem.

At Patan, then, Haḍkāī Mātā represents a confluence of village and Sanskritic elements. The goddess is consulted regarding concerns with black magic, and has also held fast in her role in dispelling rabies, the cure for which I was assured people still regularly come to Patan seeking. Meanwhile, she is put forward as clean and *sāttvik*, absolutely opposed to *tāmasik* offerings and practices throughout the entirety of her history. Not only does she spurn alcohol oblations, but she actually helps fight the alcoholism that persists in the Devipujak community. Moreover, her rabies-curing vow demands *brahmacarya*. On account of the purity and justice she embodies and expects, Haḍkāī is worthy of treatment as a Great Goddess in the Sanskritic idiom. She has received just that through the Advaitic omnipresence and omnipotence she is afforded by her Patani Devipujak devotees, who frame her as nothing less than the highest goddess.

SHAHPUR

The Devipujak section in the Shahpur district in old Ahmedabad is not the site of any one major Haḍkāī shrine. Rather, it is the home of dozens of little *ḍerīs* to Haḍkāī and other *mātās*, which are scattered throughout the community. By some estimates, there are approximately 30 goddess shrines in the area, many of them dedicated to Haḍkāī. The sheer amount of Haḍkāī *ḍerīs* is hardly surprising, considering the concentration of Devipujaks in the area. The Shahpur Devipujaks generally subsist as rug and kite dealers, though they also trade in firecrackers and mangos. While some have begun to aspire toward middle-classness, such a standard of living is far beyond the means of most Shahpur residents. Shahpur Devipujaks live a coarse life, and the subdivision that they inhabit is by and large a slum. Crime is not uncommon, and the district has from time to time been a hub of bootlegging.

The Shahpur slums are swarming with stray dogs, which can be found cantering through the narrow, garbage-littered alleyways at all hours of the day. Dog bites are a very imminent risk in this area, and with the affordability of medical treatment remaining a perennial issue, cases of rabies are not unheard of. When such cases are reported, Haḍkāī is still consulted for treatment,

at least according to Govindbhai, a *bhuvā* who lives on the edge of the Shahpur Devipujak quarter. A thickset, serious man, Govindbhai wore his reddish-dyed hair in the braided lock traditionally mandated for Devipujaks by upper castes. As he described it, the usual method for dealing with dog bites at Shahpur involves the application of snuff powder to the wound, and then a subsequent wish made at the Haḍkāī shrine to either the presiding *bhuvā* or to Haḍkāī herself. In a time period ranging from two days to a month, the wish will be fulfilled. This means that no further symptoms will have presented themselves over this span of time. With the bite healed and the cure established, the rehabilitated person is expected to make an offering of an oil lamp, a sacrificed coconut, and 1.5 pounds of *sukhḍi*. After the *sukhḍi* has been offered to the goddess, it is then distributed to dogs and also consumed by devotees.

Govindbhai professed his absolute conviction in this method of healing. According to him, the power of the goddess's blessing can defend against the strongest attack of rabies. Very resolutely, he claimed that, to his knowledge, there has not been a single case of rabies that has persisted after such a wish upon Haḍkāī has been made. Essential to the whole healing process, he added, is the bite victim's faith in the goddess, and that of the *bhuvā* as well. This level of faith is not limited to members of the Devipujak community, and Govindbhai reported that people from a variety of other caste groups come for treatment after suffering bites from dogs and other animals. These groups included relative and patent elites such as Patels, Brahmins, and Baniyas.

While Govindbhai gives the impression of being a traditionalist, there are also younger, potentially upwardly mobile members of the Shahpur Devipujak community who have comparably intensive faith in Haḍkāī's healing powers. In my early visits to Shahpur in March 2015, I met a well-spoken young man by the name of Dinesh who was in the twelfth secondary and planning on going to college to study psychology and sociology. When I asked what he would do in the case that he were bitten by a dog, he said he would go to the temple. He went on to stress that *all* people would go, leaving it open as to whether he meant all Devipujaks or all people of all castes.

Though their Haḍkāī shrines accommodate a variety of caste groups, the Shahpur Devipujaks are not unacquainted with ecstatic or *tāmasik* forms of religious expression. As we have seen from Jadav's account above, the barehanded removal of *pūrīs* from oil sometimes took place at Haḍkāī festivities, and similar practices are presently conducted on special occasions in

Shahpur. For instance, just such an undertaking of *tāvo* was performed in Shahpur in March of 2015 at Caitrī Navarātri. This coincided with the inauguration of pilgrimages to various goddess temples in the spirit of the season. These pilgrimages included those that travel between crucial Haḍkāī sites such as Angoli and Kotha. For this occasion, one lane within the Devipujak area was occupied by an elaborate *pūrī*-making setup: a row of 40 or more pans (or *tāvo*) with *svastikas* drawn inside sitting overtop open fires. Much like at the Melaḍī temple in Kheda, men from the community cast handmade *pūrīs* into the pans as the oil inside came to a boil. All the while, drummers beat *ḍāklus*. The rhythm was accompanied by a *śahnāī*, the sound of the double reed instrument helping to evoke *pavan* for the *bhuvās* as they prepared to arrive on the scene. Eventually an assemblage of *bhuvās* surfaced, each of its members dressed in *candarvos* bearing the more antiquated image of Haḍkāī. They had already entered into an entranced state, looking deeply relaxed and almost somnambulant. In this condition, they had to be led in a half-embrace by assistants through the mass of people that lined the alley. From pan to pan, the *bhuvās* moved bleary-eyed, putting their fingers in the hot oil and flipping over the *pūrīs*. Each time they extracted a *pūrī*, trembling with the presence of the goddess as they did so, the onlookers would voice their approval, shouting loudly and pounding on pots and pans. Clanging and shouting resounded throughout the community with each successful turn of the *pūrī*. Soon enough, the fervour began to manifest itself throughout the crowd. Women of the community also started flipping the hot *pūrīs* with their fingertips. Some of the onlookers began to get *pavan*. One man shuddered wildly over a *pūrī* pot, smiling all the while. The scene bubbled with kinetic, raucous joy, powered by the presence of *bhuvās* and non-specialist devotees with *pavan*.

Pavan-powered ceremonies such as *tāvo* aside, other village aspects, most notably sacrifice, do not appear to be a part of Haḍkāī's worship in Shahpur. There is for Haḍkāī, unlike Melaḍī and Jogaṇī, no firm evidence that sacrifice takes place at present, if it ever did. On the eve of this *tāvo* celebration, there was a rumour moving through Shahpur that a sacrifice of some variety was about to occur. I first heard this from Govindbhai, and tidbits of information floated around the area. I thought I had caught word that Haḍkāī was to be the recipient, but the specifics were foggy; indeed, I heard varying details within and between my various sources. I was quoted times of 8 p.m., midnight and 2 a.m. The issue of *where* was even dicier. To be sure, there was some degree of reticence among my conversationalists in giving out information. As the midnight hour loomed, I gave up waiting for the sacrifice and called it a night. Later on, I learned

from Govindbhai that the sacrifice did happen around midnight on the evening in question. The repeated time changes, I suspect, were part of an effort to keep the authorities off balance. The Devipujak community has to stay ever-mindful of animal cruelty laws, which Govindbhai attributed to the efforts of Indira Gandhi's daughter, Maneka.²²⁷ Moreover, there is a solid police presence in the area, with a small constabulary located right within the Shahpur Devipujak quarter. The threat of the authorities has often had direct consequences on the animal sacrifice rituals of the Devipujaks. Govindbhai cited an earlier instance at a shrine in Shahpur during which a sacrifice of 145 goats took place. This sparked a fiery debate within the community, and some social reformers ended up phoning the animal cruelty department of the city police. There was no response from police control, though, as all affiliated personnel were, by Govindbhai's reckoning, scared at the possibility of angering the goddess and did not want to make a raid. Here Govindbhai did not mention Haḍkāī explicitly, referring instead to "the goddess" in general. This appears to keep with colonial and scholarly suggestions that Haḍkāī has not typically taken sacrifices. There is little evidence to substantiate that Haḍkāī receives sacrifices at Shahpur, or anywhere else, for that matter. Stopping through Shahpur one morning about a month later, I saw more evidence of sacrifice at a shrine nearby the lane in which the *pūrī*-flipping had taken place. Four *bhuvās*, some among whom had got *pavan* at the *pūrī* ceremony, were seated nearby five goat heads that had been lined up against a wall. I was told the goats had been sacrificed the previous day along with three buffaloes. The shrine I was in, however, was dedicated to Kālī. This supported a hypothesis that developed throughout my fieldwork: while sacrifices commonly happened in the Devipujak section of Shahpur, they were not done for Haḍkāī.

At Shahpur, Haḍkāī is imagined as wholly pure and *sāttvik*. One woman from Shahpur explained this to me in terms of *prasād*: while Mahākālī likes offerings of goat meat, and Jogaṇī Mātā receives goat and *cavāṇu* (the latter referring in this case to a mixture of *barphī* and meat) because of her dual *tāmasik* and *sāttvik* nature, Haḍkāī, by contrast, only takes *barphī*. Govindbhai confirmed this sentiment. While he had no grievances with people who did make sacrifices to certain goddesses, he delinked his own ritual dealings vis-à-vis Haḍkāī from any

²²⁷ Here Govindbhai was referring to Indian politician Maneka Gandhi's activism regarding animal welfare. Gandhi, a minister in Narendra Modi's government, is founder and chairperson of People for Animals, an organization coordinating animal rescue initiatives. One such initiative has championed the implementation of sterilization rather than euthanasia for stray dogs. These efforts, among others, have kept animal rights in the public eye in India.

such *tāmasik* practices. There was no drinking of alcohol and no sacrifice involved in his ritual, and he claimed to be strictly *sāttvik* (the *tāmasik* snuff powder used in the rabies vow notwithstanding). Staying *sāttvik* also pertains to averting black magic, and for that reason Govindbhai described himself as a “positive” tantric. So while Devipujaks are not averse to *tāmasik* practices, they do spurn such endeavours when Haḍkāī is involved. In this way, Haḍkāī and her shrines demarcate a space in which members of the community can and must attain to a *sāttvik* lifestyle.

This *sāttvik* approach to religion that Haḍkāī embodies appears to be of critical importance for a significant (and quite possibly growing) portion of the Shahpur Devipujak community. In congruence with N.R. Sheth’s (2002) report that more Devipujaks have been moving toward middle-class lifestyles, I met a number of upwardly mobile individuals and families during my time in Shahpur. Haḍkāī’s *sāttvik* qualities, as well as her ability to heal rabies, came to the forefront in these upwardly mobile individuals’ descriptions of the goddess.

Take for instance Rajubhai, a middle-aged banker born and raised in Shahpur. At one point, he had been employed by the Indian Reserve Bank, and as of 2015 he was working for the State Bank of India. When I met him, he had just recently moved up to a higher profile position, which saw him performing inspections of banks in the corporate sector. He was also working in the cash department, and claimed to be responsible for transfers of up to 50 crore. Rajubhai described himself as hailing from a family of bankers: indeed, his brother, a Haḍkāī *bhuvā*, also works at the State Bank. Rajubhai’s adult son, who lived with his father in Shahpur at the time I visited, was also well-employed. The two form an inseparable pair, and stood out among their neighbours on account of their Westernized clothing and the commodities they own. These commodities included a big-screen TV and an elaborate stereo. Though they live as a somewhat non-traditional dyad, Rajubhai having been estranged from his wife, the two still very much represent a “progressive family,” and are clearly seen as exemplary for their Shahpur neighbours. Rajubhai’s son’s wedding featured an extravagant procession, exhaustive rituals, and an extensive guest-list that included not only the majority of Shahpur’s Devipujak community but also people from outside it (myself included). By all indications, the wedding cost an exorbitant amount. Rajubhai’s prosperous middle-classness has not obstructed his lifelong worship of goddesses, and if anything his dedication to Haḍkāī in particular and the *sāttvik* values she symbolizes has intensified through the years. His lifestyle, he openly acknowledges, was not

always as *sāttvik* as it is at present. He claimed that when he was embroiled in quarrels with his former wife, he was drinking two to four litres of hard alcohol per day. It was Haḍkāī and also Śanidev, the dark-skinned deification of the planet Saturn, that helped initiate Rajubhai's turn away from liquor. The two deities represent a sort of *sāttvik* tandem in Rajubhai's life by virtue of what he described as their "positive *pavan*." And despite his economic success and the access to advanced medical care that it could presumably afford him, Rajubhai still reserves for Haḍkāī her role as goddess of rabies. In fact, he framed the disease as a function of Haḍkāī's enduring capacity to mete out justice. For example, if someone swears an oath and does not fulfill it, Rajubhai explained, the goddess will punish that person with rabies. For their transgression, the tongues of rabies sufferers will grow long like that of a dog, Rajubhai said. I took this to connote that tongues assumed an anatomically-localized affliction given their complicity in the origin of broken vows. Though Haḍkāī fit with Rajubhai's newfound *sāttvik* lifestyle, her powers still applied in the realm of rabies, and more than a little capriciously at that, in that she both healed and spread the disease. This is just one highly individualized example, but it suggests the persistence of Haḍkāī in her role as goddess of rabies, even for the more financially secure, middle-class Devipujaks.

This link between Haḍkāī and rabies goes on strong among younger, upwardly mobile Devipujaks as well, as does the goddess's propensity for bringing hard justice. This was certainly the shared belief of Yogeshwar and Sundeep, two young men of Shahpur Devipujak origin, both of whom have bright futures ahead of them. Yogeshwar and Sundeep were both in their early twenties when I met with them in April 2015, and they had followed very similar life trajectories to that point. Each young man has a bachelor of commerce in accounting, and they were both pursuing law at Gujarat University. They dressed in Westernized clothes and sported hale physiques, likely a result of their heavy involvement with a Shahpur gym. Both were well-known in their community. Their successes were evidently the product of hard work and initiative, as they each hail from modest backgrounds: Yogeshwar's father is a chai seller, and Sundeep's father runs a rickshaw. These young men have been lifelong followers of Haḍkāī, who they described as the universal *kuldevī* of all Devipujaks. In this way, she is held above their own immediate *kuldevīs*—Kālī in the case of Yogeshwar and Melaḍī in the case of Sundeep. In their view, all final decisions are taken by Haḍkāī. Echoing ideas suggested by Rajubhai, and in consonance with their own concerns as students of law, they described Haḍkāī as a

“constitutional deity” (*bhandāraṇ*). By that token, she was therefore a goddess of justice *par excellence*.

Yogeshwar and Sundeep cited numerous stories in which Haḍkāī’s capacity for justice was demonstrated for the benefit of the Shahpur community. One of these involved the 2002 communal riots, during which Shahpur proved to be a critical site, given its location in Old Ahmedabad with its heavy Muslim population. The young men also attributed the violence to the area’s reputation for bootlegging. During the chaos, 30 to 40 Devipujak families in the area were forced to vacate their houses, which included some homes containing *māḍhs* or niches to the goddess, strongholds of Haḍkāī’s divine power. According to Yogeshwar and Sundeep, Muslims burned down houses of Devipujaks, *māḍhs* included. As for some of the Devipujak houses that were left standing, Muslims allegedly came to occupy them. This did not last for long. One by one, Yogeshwar and Sundeep claimed, there was a downfall of the community of invading Muslims because the power of Haḍkāī presented itself in their dreams. This prompted a number of political and religious leaders to visit this community and request that the goddess be called off. Apparently, seeing what they were up against, the Muslims apologized and promptly compensated the supplanted families. These Muslims went so far as to pay for *pūrī* ceremonies like the one described above—a considerable sum—in hopes of cooling down the angered goddess. Through Yogeshwar and Sundeep, this story lives on like a newly-fashioned folktale unto itself. Given what would have been their very young age at the time of the 2002 riots, they no doubt originally heard the tale as it was shaped by adults, and the story has subsequently gained folkloric momentum and verity through its retellings.

A comparable story told by Yogeshwar and Sundeep took place during another communal riot involving Muslims. On this occasion, a Haḍkāī temple was allegedly damaged by Muslim rioters. The miracle power of the goddess immediately took action, and the persons responsible once again ventured over to the Devipujak community to apologize. On account of such occurrences, Muslims have made certain to respect this goddess. Indeed, Muslims living within the surrounding area, the two young law students reported, take great pains not to damage the Haḍkāī *derīs*. In the context of religious strife, Haḍkāī is a force to be reckoned with like none other. Yogeshwar and Sundeep suggested that if a church or some other religious place is the subject of assault by any given religion, this usually results in police action. But here in Shahpur, Haḍkāī (or else Jogaṇī Mā, in some cases) acts the part of the judge and gives the verdict and the

punishment to offenders, reporting them to their village heads. Thus, Haḍkāī brings justice that is both rapid and thoroughgoing. The young men agreed that, whether a politician or a community member, no innocent person will ever be penalized by Haḍkāī. In fact, she has commonly rewarded the victimized, often ensuring reparations for plaintiffs. As a case in point, Yogeshwar and Sundeep cited the fact that all those members of their community who forcibly migrated during previous communal struggles have since become quite wealthy. In fact, these displaced people have become so affluent that they now want to build a largescale temple with their newly-gained wealth. The goddess, however, only wants small *derīs*, according to Yogeshwar and Sundeep.

Thus, Haḍkāī is imagined as a conservative force, at least in terms of worship and the space where it takes place. Because she wants to keep her profile low-key, she spurns luxurious temples regardless of the recent wealth she has supposedly brought to some members of the Shahpur community. This modesty or conservatism bucks the trend we have identified time and again in the present study whereby the financial success of groups of people manifests itself in the expansion of temples. At the same time, Haḍkāī also embodies a more politically conservative agenda, ruling on the side of the Devipujaks. In this case, Devipujaks are decidedly part of the Hindu fold in what is framed as an ongoing struggle with Muslims. While Yogeshwar and Sundeep did not state any Hindutva affiliations explicitly, I strongly suspect there were some right-wing political influences helping to frame the “justness” the two young men attributed to Haḍkāī.

Despite Haḍkāī’s righteous anger and intense vengefulness, Yogeshwar and Sundeep follow other Shahpur residents in asserting that Haḍkāī is not bloodthirsty and never takes a live sacrifice. At her temples, only fudge, sweets, and coconuts are offered. This puts her into contradistinction with Melaḍī, to whom goats and sheep are given. As was the general consensus, these boys characterized Melaḍī as dirty and Haḍkāī, by contrast, as clean. The boys assured me that sacrifices *do* take place in Shahpur in order to meet the needs of Melaḍī and Kālī, but they never happen for Haḍkāī. When I alluded to the sacrifice Govindbhai had mentioned back in March of 2015, both Yogeshwar and Sundeep seemed familiar with what I was referring to, and they confirmed that the offering had been given to Melaḍī and Kālī only, upholding my aforestated hypothesis.

On the matter of dog bites, Yogeshwar and Sundeep insisted that Haḍkāī was their go-to solution. Like college-bound Dinesh before them, their educational attainments had not altered this belief. These boys said that the moment they have a dog bite, they make a wish upon the nearest Haḍkāī temple for its cure. Their use of the present tense made it somewhat unclear whether they were speaking from past experience or hypothetically; nonetheless, their rabies response protocol was well planned-out. Their preferred place to go for a cure is the temple in Kotha, the town north of Ahmedabad we will visit in the next section. If, for whatever reason, they were unable to travel there, then they would go on the same day to the nearby Delhi Darwaj site. The wish takes three and a half days to fulfill, and if there is no rabies-like reaction in this 84 hour period, then they promptly go to offer fudge and coconut to the goddess. All told, the upward aspirations of Yogeshwar and Sundeep have not shaken their fairly traditional understanding of Haḍkāī. She is still a goddess of rabies with capricious but uncompromisingly just power, and she is still entirely *sāttvik* in spite of the forceful punishments she deals out. In this intensely *sāttvik* capacity, she does not hinder in any way their upwardly mobile ambitions.

Haḍkāī Mātā, as envisaged by her Devipujak devotees in Shahpur, is primarily a rabies goddess, not only healing the disease but also meting it out. In this punitive capacity, the hydrophobia she causes is a means by which she wields her dominion over justice. While she is sometimes harsh in her anger, as was the case when dealing with Muslims in communal riots, she never compromises her pure, *sāttvik* character. While sacrifices are offered to other goddesses at Shahpur, they are not given to Haḍkāī, and her *prasād* is strictly vegetarian. In this way, Haḍkāī and her shrines demarcate physical and conceptual spaces in which Devipujaks can cultivate the *sāttvik*, whether they are traditionalistic *bhuvās* or upwardly mobile community members who are (or soon will be) making their way in white-collar professions. Through these kinds of imaginings of Haḍkāī, Devipujaks of Shahpur and elsewhere may also be asserting themselves as “proper” Hindus in an upper-caste or Brahminic sense, at least politically speaking. Indeed, the goddess’s particular brand of justice has resonated on several occasions with pro-Hindu or Hindutva policies, allowing her devotees some degree of participation in that ever-expanding right-wing milieu.

KOTHA

On *pūrṇimā* days at Delhi Darwaj, a long line of rickshaws forms adjacent to the popular Haḍkāī shrine. It usually stretches about three to five vehicles long. Gradually, the rickshaws fill up, as people pair up so as to share a ride to their destination. Sometimes as many as six or seven people, often complete strangers, will pack into a rickshaw to make this trip, because they are all going to the same place. These people are making a mini-pilgrimage to Kotha, a tiny village on the periphery of the Kalol region north of Ahmedabad that is the location of an important Haḍkāī shrine. The site has benefitted from recent intercontinental prosperity that has graced the Kotha area. This prosperity has likely influenced the *sāttvik* emphases on the temple grounds as well. It has not, however, altered Haḍkāī's role as rabies goddess, as the site's healing power is purported by some to be more effective than even biomedical interventions.

Kotha does not claim to be the origin place of Haḍkāī, nor does it claim to have the largest temple. Nonetheless, it is certainly among the most popular of her sites. Bigger than a *derī* but fairly small by the standard of urban temples, *mātā* or otherwise, the present site has a history that can be traced back about 55 years, its current *pūjārī* having presided over the temple for three decades. The temple itself is squat and somewhat weather-beaten with a worn-down, blackish-grey exterior, its front open to the outside. Dogs pass freely around the grounds, making their way in and out of the temple. The temple's interior and exterior are well-stocked with dog *mūrtis* of all varieties—two dimensional, three dimensional, and even colourful stuffed plush toys. Images of puppies are packed tight overtop the entrance into the main *mandir*, giving the impression that they are spilling outward from the ledge from overcrowding. There are a number of compelling pictures inside the temple, including several prints of Haḍkāī Mātā piloting a chariot being pulled by dogs numbering seven, ten, or eleven. In this depiction, Haḍkāī is not unlike Kṛṣṇa the charioteer. Also, there are *pacheḍīs* bearing depictions of the goddess in the style of *candarvo* temple hangings. Naturally, I wanted to photograph these, but I was told by the *pūjārī*'s junior assistant that I was not allowed to do so. At Kotha, as at other Haḍkāī sites, the image of the goddess is closely protected by her Devipujak faithful. The temple affiliates at Kotha were, on the whole, less forthcoming with conversation, and only provided scraps of information. Nevertheless, the image of the goddess was still widely available at Kotha in a variety of different mediums, as a number of merchants nearby the temple had devotional items on sale for those with some money to spare. These items included CDs and VCDs with *bhajans*

and performances by locally-known singers and other entertainers who have dedicated their talents to Haḍkāī bhakti.

Evidently, there are more than a few temple visitors with disposable income. While many of those in attendance at Kotha appeared to be of modest means, there were also among those filtering in and out some better-off patrons who had travelled a fair distance by car to get there. The Kotha Haḍkāī temple apparently holds appeal for devotees sufficiently middle-class such that they can afford vehicle ownership. Many of the women among the long-distance attendees wore exquisite saris. The higher clientele appeared to reflect, in part, the successes of the town. A number of people I met in Kotha described the achievements of various local youths who went to North America for their post-secondary education, suggesting that Kotha itself, if not the Devipujak community therein, is doing very well. Kotha is yet another Haḍkāī temple where Devipujaks form a significant portion of the attendees. They are not necessarily the majority, however, as there are a considerable number of Thakor people involved with this temple as well.

It was a Thakor groom from Kotha, of course, who figured in Haḍkāī's arrival in the town when he married the Angoli-born Kaṅkubā. As such, the Kotha site serves as a good illustration of the stake that Thakors presently have in the goddess. One of the Kotha faithful was an electrician who could be frequently found at the temple on account of the electrical work he periodically did for the site. In April 2015, he shared a story from the past few years that illuminated these Thakor connections. The ordeal began when a local Thakor girl was sexually assaulted by a higher-ranking Rajput man. The day after the assault, the Rajput returned with intentions of inflicting more harm on the girl. The girl promptly summoned Haḍkāī Mātā for help. Immediately, the Rajput became afflicted with rabies, and was told by the goddess that there was only one way he could get his absolution: by going to the temple with shoes in his mouth, an extremely dire expression of supplication. This story demonstrates Haḍkāī's active presence in Kotha and her sustained connection with rabies, again in the context of serving justice and providing punishment. These are duties she undertakes not just for Devipujaks but also for Thakors as well.

Much of Kotha's fame has been generated by its indispensable place on the Haḍkāī pilgrimage itinerary. This spot on the pilgrimage route is largely based on Kotha's link with Angoli that was forged in the narrative detailing Kaṅkubā's marriage to the Thakor boy from Kotha. Kaṅkubā, as we have seen, brought Haḍkāī from Angoli to Kotha, and now the Caitrī

pilgrimage follows a corresponding route. During Caitrī, pilgrims set out from Angoli bearing a white flag representing Haḍkāī, which is then processed to Delhi Darwaj. Here it stays for four or five days, and then it is taken to Kotha, its start and endpoint linked by the mythical matrimony. This pilgrimage inspires individual pilgrims or groups thereof to embark upon the trek, oftentimes in modified or abbreviated form. Throughout Caitrī, people from all around northern and western India come by train or by car to Ahmedabad, often at great personal expense, to initiate a pilgrimage, often by foot, from that city's Haḍkāī shrines to Kotha. The Caitrī celebrations I attended in Shahpur, for instance, were linked to Kotha pilgrimages, as it is customary to inaugurate such a journey with a procession on the night before its start. Thus, we see that Haḍkāī sites are closely intertwined, constituting one another's significance through pilgrimage and through narrative. Kotha represents a consistently crucial node in this interconnected network. Upon arriving at Kotha, pilgrims generally bring wishes to be made upon the goddess, especially at Caitrī, which is considered to be an optimal time to make request-related vows. During Caitrī, even earlier-made promises that were not kept can still be forgiven, so long as a pledge to Haḍkāī is fulfilled at this time (Fischer et al. 2014, 185). Needless to say, Caitrī is a very busy event at Kotha.

While Caitrī links up a number of Haḍkāī shrines, at Kotha it culminates in an event unique to the site. Every year during the month of Caitra, there is a Haḍkāī Mā festival that takes place exclusively in Kotha over the course of a three-day weekend. This festival is specifically for Devipujaks, and it sees the assembly of many temporary shops, stalls, and eating places. In addition, an entire carnival grounds was set up for the occasion in April 2015, complete with roller-coasters and Ferris-wheels. The rides, however, seemed fairly rickety, and there was no one on any of them while I was there. The festival is busiest on its final day, during which people come from all over Gujarat and beyond bearing their white flags and marking completion of their pilgrimage. This brings many thousands of Haḍkāī worshippers together. In the spirit of this major pilgrimage event, many others make impromptu, informal pilgrimages to the site on other days of the year. Such is the inspiration behind the rickshaw pilgrimages from Delhi Darwaj on days such as *pūrṇimā*.

Pilgrimages aside, the Kotha Haḍkāī temple receives a steady stream of daily visitors, and many of these, I was assured by a junior *pūjārī*, still come for the purpose of healing dog bites. At Kotha, the treatment process proceeds in a number of steps. The first involves the customary

practice of tying a band around the wrist of the bite victim. The second involves the actual drinking of lamp oil. After this, the sufferer is ordered to go straight home, wait 40 days, and then return to the temple once the dog-bite has been cured so that *prasād* can be made to express thanks. Apparently, this method is highly effective. One of the most fascinating aspects of Kotha is the high praise that the healing powers of its Haḍkāī temple have garnered. The electrician, for instance, claimed that doctors from Ahmedabad's best hospitals regularly refer dog bite victims to the temple. Such recommendations do not, however, represent some sort of last ditch attempt in dire circumstances. Rather, the electrician insisted that doctors often directed dog bite victims to Kotha *before* all other possible rabies remedies had failed. Thus, Haḍkāī's help with healing was posited as being on par with that of medical professionals *by* medical professionals, at least according to this electrician. Here biomedicine actually vouches for Haḍkāī's healing power, suggesting her persistence—and effectiveness—in her traditional role. That said, not everyone who came to Haḍkāī in Kotha was seeking a dog bite cure. While I was on the temple grounds, people most commonly arrived with the usual wishes brought to *mātā* sites, such as fertility and the birth of sons. I also saw a number of people seeking cures for other maladies, including metal poisoning in one case. Regardless, I would hesitate to say that Haḍkāī has assumed a role here as a general goddess of health. While I witnessed no dog bite victims seeking a remedy during my visits to Kotha, Haḍkāī was, first and foremost, conceptualized as a goddess of rabies.

Whether or not Kotha's Haḍkāī had always been strictly *sāttvik* was, however, up for some debate. Because the temple's history stretched back several decades, three or four villagers suggested that a previous *bhuvā* had practiced *tāmasik* rites. One villager claimed that, in the past, there was a sacrifice every Saturday and Tuesday. A few years before, however, with the inception of a new *bhuvā*, such practices had stopped. This allowance that sacrifice may have taken place in the past differs considerably from what I heard from *pūjārīs* and patrons at all other Haḍkāī sites, who maintained that killing had never been undertaken for the benefit of their goddess. At present, everyone visiting the Kotha temple transacts with Haḍkāī in strictly *sāttvik* fashion, offering the goddess *sukhḍī* and sacrificing only coconuts. If indeed sacrifice has been discontinued at the Kotha shrine (if it ever went on at all), it may be due to animal cruelty laws. The heightened non-violent sensibilities may also have something to do with the recent surge in foreign interests and investments in the town of Kotha. A cadre of Non-Resident Indian (NRI) persons and organizations is listed, for instance, among the donors who in recent years helped to

construct an elaborate gate welcoming vehicle traffic into the town. The gate itself is named for a Patel. In front of this gate during my 2015 visits was an ICICI bank advertisement welcoming NRIs to the Kalol area. Thus, there appears to be some influx of corporate and foreign money into Kotha. Whether it has trickled down to the local Devipujaks or not, the narrative of sacrifice having been discontinued at the temple to the supposedly capricious rabies *mātā* fits with the ascendant trajectory of the Kotha community at large.

Irrespective of when or if sacrifice had to be banned at the Kotha Haḍkāī shrine, the goddess worshipped at the popular pilgrimage site is unimpeachably *sāttvik* at present. In this spirit, images at the temple picture her in Kṛṣṇa-esque fashion, piloting an ornate chariot driven by a multitude of dogs in what amounts to a curious twist on visual Vaiṣṇavization. The temple patrons, whether local Devipujaks or Thakors or more affluent visitors from afar, come not to make goat sacrifices but to address more pressing needs of fertility and health. Even with that being the case, Haḍkāī still remains a goddess largely responsible for rabies, at least in the estimation of temple regulars, suggesting she has held fast in her familiar role. For these regulars at Kotha, medical science has not usurped Haḍkāī in this capacity. Rather, for treating rabies, the circulating narratives attest that the goddess based in Kotha is equal to or greater than physicians in her ability to cure hydrophobia. Purportedly, she is lauded as such by physicians themselves.

KODAVA

Kodava's fundamental link to the Devī is, according to folk etymologies, embedded in the name of the town itself. Local legend has it that, from the very inception of the village, oil lamps would light up miraculously within its boundaries. The implement used to make a lamp is called a *koḍiyu*, and since lamps were constantly self-lighting in this area, the town was subsequently referred to as such. In time, the name Koḍiyu evolved into "Kodava." It is also said that the original cluster of houses in this town formed around an oil lamp. The original lamp, some say, was part of a small *derī* of Haḍkāī Mātā, the existence of which stretches back beyond living memory. Reading these two folk narratives side-by-side, it would appear to be the power of the Devī—specifically Haḍkāī—that kindled both the first flame and the town. Such a reading seems fitting, as the town of Kodava is a major hub for Haḍkāī worship and features not just one important temple to the goddess, but two.

Kodava is located on the northern edge of the Cambay region just over 100 kilometres south of Ahmedabad. After taking the designated turn off the main highway, one ends up on a winding road lined with palm trees. This road leads into the sleepy village and then eventually comes to a fork at the two Haḍkāī sites. The original temple sits to the onlooker's left, with its newer counterpart situated on the right. Between the temples stands a row of vendors stocked with ritual and devotional accoutrements that can be purchased for use at both sites. While over half of Kodava's population is Rajput, the town still carries a significant Devipujak and Valmiki sector. The co-existence of the two Haḍkāī temples is essentially predicated on a historical split between the latter two groups. Franco et al. (2004) have taken up these temples in passing and have summarized their fragmentation in brief:

Hadakai Mata was actually a Goddess of the Vaghri community, worshipped by them for curing dog bite. But this created a difficult situation for Valmiki who had no right of entry into Vaghri temples. Whenever a dog bit a member of the Valmiki community, the family had to take the person to the Vaghri's temple and stand outside the temple. To circumvent this situation, the Valmiki also built a big temple to Hadakai Mata in Kodva village of Khambhat taluka. Whenever anyone is bitten by a dog, they can now take that person to the temple (2004, 270).

This is a fairly accurate assessment of the divide, insofar as it is in fidelity with accounts I heard. That said, the Valmiki temple hardly qualifies as "big." And while the temple affiliations are sometimes parsed in terms of "Vaghri" and "Valmiki," the two shrines are more often understood as being separated on the basis of "upper-caste" and "Valmiki" membership. More generally, the shrines were distinguished by way of non-Dalit and Dalit patronage. Although I was told that the Valmiki temple was forged out of an initial fracture owing to harassment of Valmiki by Devipujaks, the members of each temple are not necessarily alienated from one another at present. In fact, I witnessed considerable crossover participation between the sites during major events. To be sure, they are united in large part by their faith in Haḍkāī and her healing power. These two Kodava temples each demonstrate aspects of Haḍkāī's historical continuity and also her unique encounter with modernity, though their respective emphases differ in proportion. That is, the "upper-caste" temple accentuates the goddess's ostensible immemorial Brahminic associations, while the well-heeled Valmiki temple displays the upwardly mobile and middle-class aspirations of its patrons, indexing the local and regional prosperity of their community.

We begin with the Jayśrī Haḍakmānuṃ Mandir, the “upper-caste” site that is, in Franco et al.’s account, the original, Devipujak temple. Devipujaks still form the majority members of this site, though they are accompanied by a fair number of Thakors, Rajputs, and a few Brahmins. Some of these visitors travel a great distance to make wishes at the temple, and I was told by a *pūjārī* that Valsad, Surat, and Baroda are among their most common points of origin, as is Mumbai. Just like at other Haḍkāi sites, Caitrī Navarātri is a prominent celebration at the Jayśrī Haḍakmānuṃ Mandir. In what seemed to be a competitive tone, a man affiliated with the temple assured me that the eighth day of the Navarātri festivity was much bigger than the festivals at the neighbouring Valmiki temple, including the Śubh Muhūrat celebration (to be discussed below). During Navarātri, the temple apparently draws 25,000 people from a variety of communities. To accommodate this expansive Gujarati and western-Indian following, what once began as a small *ḍerī* has now evolved into a medium-sized *mandir* with some of the trappings of pan-Indian, Brahminical temple architecture. Haḍakṣā, for instance, is depicted at the very pinnacle of the entranceway in the style of Durgā or Ambā, riding a dog and carrying a long sword. This is presumably a nod to both her Rajput and Brahmin supporters in Kodava.

The Kodava temple gets its “upper-caste” reputation from its Rajput and Brahmin involvement. Especially crucial to this reputation is the sustained role that Brahmins play in temple upkeep. *Prāṇapratiṣṭhā* of the main *mūrti* of Haḍkāi is performed periodically by a Brahmin priest, said the *pūjārī* I spoke with, and Brahmins are also responsible for the regular cleaning of this statue. In accord with this Brahminic participation, the temple is *sāttvik*, its *prasād* consisting of fresh *sukhḍi*, which is served to every guest. Located in the very centre of its interior is a *havan* pit. Ritually speaking, however, Brahmins are less prominent, and virtually all of the everyday rites are carried out by *bhuvās* of Devipujak origin. According to two local Rajput men with whom I spoke at length, it is only these *bhuvās* who get *pavan* at the Jayśrī Haḍakmānuṃ Mandir, and not the Brahmins. By their estimation, the Brahmins are only present for about 20 minutes, four or five days a week, depending on the week or the festivity. Nonetheless, this Brahmin presence is enough to afford the temple an at least partially “Brahminic” character.

The Jayśrī Haḍakmānuṃ Mandir’s “elite” or “Brahminic” status belies its modest interior and somewhat roughshod atmosphere. Moreover, the temple does not spare on folk and village elements. The *mūrti* itself is fairly simple, adorned with many garlands of white flowers,

accentuating the *sāttvik* nature of the goddess. Those in charge of the temple do not seem particularly concerned with orderliness, and dogs stroll in and out while flies circle about. Dogs in statue form flank the main *mūrti*. To the goddess's right is a small Kālī *derī*, and to her left is Tāvḍo Dādā, a local hero. Not too far away is a subsidiary shrine to Balajī Mahārāj, another local warrior, underscoring the influence of the Rajput community. Along with these local hero-saints, village rituals factor heavily into the temple's daily affairs, right alongside the Sanskritic. When I first set foot in the temple in May 2015, I saw a *pūjārī* throwing seeds for *pāṭlā* for the benefit of a well-dressed young couple. The couple had just finished up a *havan* in the still-smouldering fire pit. Both the *pāṭlā* and the *havan* were geared toward bettering the couple's chances for a favourable married life and future procreative success. Other elements were more exclusively rooted in the folk tradition. Most strikingly, I saw a woman and a man prostrate themselves on the stretch of ground in front of the entrance where people had left their footwear before entering the temple. The man and woman eventually picked up the shoes and touched the soles to their heads. Shoes are, of course, impure on account of their contact with one of the most polluting parts of the body, and this custom, I was told, symbolized beating oneself with shoes. In this way, it followed after other footwear-related supplications, such as that which was prescribed in Kotha for the Rajput rapist. In the case of this man and woman at the "upper-caste" temple in Kodava, the practice served as a self-inflicted punishment for failing to fulfill promises made to Haḍkāi, or certain conditions thereof.²²⁸

Curing dog bites and rabies remains one of the goddess's major functions at Jayśrī Haḍakmānuṃ Mandir. When someone is suffering from a bite, the *bhuvās* first utilize the seeds to try to discern the reason why the dog bite has occurred. Reasons can range from the anger of the goddess to black magic, among other possibilities. Much like at Kotha, the *bhuvās* at this temple site put drops of oil from the lamp into the mouth of the dog bite sufferer, and then rub oil on their wound. While I was not able to witness this with respect to a dog bite, specifically, I did see something comparable. Around the same central *havan* pit, I watched as the upper arm of a young woman in affluent garb was being rubbed in oil so as to treat an abrasion (which was not a

²²⁸ One of the temple *pūjārīs* explained that touching shoe-soles to the head can also be done as a demonstration of gratefulness to the goddess for a fulfilled promise. If a child or grandchild is cured of an ailment, for instance, family members will put shoes in their mouths at the entrance gate, and then proceed to the temple. In cases in which an apology is being made, a relative will sometimes beat the guilty party with footwear. R.E. Enthoven noted much earlier that shoes also play a role in curing malevolent possession: "[i]f a woman is believed to be possessed by a *dākan* she is made to hold a shoe in her teeth and is taken to the village boundary, where the shoe is dropped, and a circle is drawn round it with water from a bowl carried by the party" ([1914] 1989, 83).

dog bite) located there. This may indicate some expansion of Haḍkāi's domain from healer of bite wounds into that of flesh wounds as a whole, in some limited sense moving the goddess toward the role of a more generalized health deity. That said, curing dog bites is still an integral part of Haḍakṣā's function in Kodava, especially at the "upper-caste" temple. Of the two temples in town, the two Rajput men I spoke with said that such cures mainly happened at Jayśrī Haḍakmānuṁ Mandir. Were someone to be bitten by a dog, they said that this would be the temple to which they would refer the case.

The Valmiki Haḍkāi temple proper, the Jay Śrī Haḍkāi Mātāy Nāmaḥ Mandir, is smaller than its "upper-caste" counterpart but no less significant in profile. Even though my initial visit came on an off-day in May of 2015, there was still a steady stream of people making its way through the site. The temple grounds consist of a narrow strip of courtyard, featuring a *havan* pit with its own *triśūl*. It billowed with smoke as I first stepped onto the grounds. At the end of the courtyard is a rectangular shrine room featuring the central image. As I made my way toward the shrine, I passed a sizeable tree under the shade of which a drummer sat, leisurely tapping the *ḍāḱlu*. The *mūrti* in the shrine looked more life-like than that of the other Kodava Haḍkāi temple, the goddess's features etched out of white marble in an almost photorealistic fashion. Multi-coloured lights circled around the *mūrti*. As in the "upper-caste" temple, the *mūrti* was again flanked with images of dogs, as well as a statue of Tāvḍo Dādā. Though the local hero is housed within both Haḍkāi temples, this *mandir* lays claim to Tāvḍo Dādā's origin based on the belief that he is an ancestor of a more recent *bhuvā* at the site. At one point, Tāvḍo Dādā was a *bhuvā* himself. Accordingly, he continues to be venerated as a hero, and his statue was added here about 30 years previous.

The marketplace between the two Kodava shrines faces Jay Śrī Haḍkāi Mātāy Nāmaḥ Mandir, an orientation that would appear to unwittingly point toward the considerable wealth of the temple and its pilgrims. The temple's establishment is as much a story of Valmiki socioeconomic growth in the area and abroad as it is about issues of caste affiliations and untouchability. The two Rajput men filled me in on the local history. About three or four generations previous, there was only one household of Valmikis in the Kodava area. These Valmikis were very poor, and the patriarch had to go around to all the other houses begging for handouts in order to support his family. With great devotion to Haḍkāi, however, he was able to prosper within the course of about 60 years. By this point, neither he nor his family needed to

work for their survival. The Kodava Valmikis are still well-to-do today, as has been the case for the past 30 years. Many of the Valmikis are currently well-employed in government jobs, and so members of the group in the surrounding 40 kilometres have come to feel that they have received a very strong and lasting blessing of Haḍakeśvarī Mātā (the Sanskrit-styled appellation they often use to refer to the goddess). In view of this success story, Dalits come to worship in large numbers at the Jay Śrī Haḍkāī Mātāy Nāmaḥ Mandir. A significant portion of these worshippers are affiliated with Haḍkāī temples flourishing in Maharashtra. Many of the villagers I spoke to—most often not Valmikis themselves—characterized these depressed-class devotees, both visiting and local, as having good jobs and profitable businesses.

The shrine started off as no more than a small room for the *pūjārī*, but as the locals accumulated wealth, they also elaborated the temple structure and added amenities for pilgrims. A key to the expansion of the temple that Franco and his coauthors neglected to mention is the investment of capital from the Valmiki community in its construction. By the report of the two Rajput men, Valmikis bought the temple land from local bodies, not before receiving permission to build from the local Rajputs. The panchayat then sold land to the Valmiki community, who initiated construction of the temple. In the 1990s, with some help from the generosity of the Rajputs, a guest house was added. Local Valmikis figured heavily among the donors, as did wealthy members of a Dalit group based in Mumbai. This allowed the Mumbai group to have a prevailing voice in the temple's management. As a nexus of Valmiki wealth based in and outside of Gujarat, the Jay Śrī Haḍkāī Mātāy Nāmaḥ Mandir mini-complex gives every impression of being the more affluent of the two Kodava temples. As of 2015, it was better developed than Jayśrī Haḍakmānuḥ Mandir in terms of amenities, orderliness, and perhaps even profile. Beginning as just a single room, it has become the host of impressive spectacles that draw huge turnouts, with Gujarati celebrities standing out amongst the crowds.

One such example of the Valmiki temple's accelerating rise to prominence is the festival surrounding the temple's Śubh Muhūrat ("auspicious time"), which I was able to attend in late October 2015. On this day, Kodava was anything but sleepy, its narrow streets jammed with Haḍkāī devotees and vendors in roadside stalls. Standing out from the crowd was a company of Dalit men distinctively dressed in pristine white shirts and pants and pink turbans, many of whom had travelled from Mumbai and surrounding area to attend (Figure 24). These devotees were to a man primly shaven, their wives wearing vibrant saris. These Dalits appeared to be

mostly Valmikis, but also included Chunaras, another backward-caste group.²²⁹ For the occasion, various glossy banners had been hung throughout Kodava, including one that spanned the entranceway to the Jay Śrī Haḍkāi Mātāy Nāmaḥ Mandir temple grounds. This particular image had been provided by the Sorathni Sarkār Haḍakṣāmā (that is, the “government of Saurashtra Haḍakṣā”), and it featured a lithograph-worthy drawing of an eight-armed Haḍkāi. With her lowest left forearm, she leaned lazily on a snapshot of a fluffy, pure-white malamute over which she had been Photoshopped. Her white sari was even brighter than the dog’s snowy pelt. All told, the large, glossy image bespoke a discernible sensitivity to production values.



Figure 24: Gathering of Dalit Haḍkāi worshippers from Mumbai at the Śubh Muhūrat in Kodava, October 2015 (Photo by Vimal Shukla)

²²⁹ Chunaras are a Gujarati ethnic group known for working with lime kiln. According to their emic historiography, Chunaras were originally warriors in the Gaekwar army, though they eventually lost status to become OBCs.

Throughout the event, thousands of people congregated in a massive tent set up facing the two Haḍkāi temples. Under the canopy, an outsized stage had been assembled, with a red carpet leading up to its edge so as to welcome dignitaries. An armada of singers performed *bhajans* on the stage over the course of the day. Perhaps as many as 20,000 people passed through the area; certainly, food was prepared for approximately this amount. In the area adjacent to the party plot designated for food preparation, more than a dozen gigantic pots of *sabji* vegetables and rice simmered overtop open fires. Thousands of visitors were fed continuously. In due course, a number of prominent Gujarati-language film stars took the stage, much to the delight of the crowd. When one among the Gujarati glitterati decided to venture over to the Jay Śrī Haḍkāi Mātāy Nāmaḥ Mandir temple for *darśan*, he had to be led by the police. The officers shielded him from the hub-bub as hundreds of devotees converged to follow him through the Kodava streets. The sheer number of people accommodated at the Śubh Muhūrat suggests the largesse of the Jay Śrī Haḍkāi Mātāy Nāmaḥ Mandir trust. The presence of celebrities, meanwhile, speaks to the collective reach of the temple, the town of Kodava, and Haḍkāi Mātā. In some measure, the Valmiki temple seems to attract a higher clientele than its “upper-caste” counterpart. The star power Haḍkāi is able to command advertises a social cachet and elevated profile that is more than likely attributable to Jay Śrī Haḍkāi Mātāy Nāmaḥ Mandir’s prosperity.

Inside the Jay Śrī Haḍkāi Mātāy Nāmaḥ Mandir grounds, the “Vedic-vernacular” ritual repertoire continued uninterrupted throughout the celebration. *Sāttvik* sacrifices of the *kōḷu*, a pumpkin-like vegetable, had been taking place in the temple courtyard all day. The fire pit was lit, and dozens of people were crowding around it. Onlookers left only to be replaced immediately with others waiting to get close. There was a Navcaṇḍī *havan* ongoing, featuring chanting from the *Devī Bhāgavatam* and *Caṇḍīpāṭh*. The Sanskrit incantations were barely audible over the drumming, however. Once again, as per my initial visit, there was a drummer in the smoky, crowded courtyard, and today he was keeping up a frantic pace on the *ḍāḱlu*. Around the fire pit, numerous people started getting *pavan*, including *bhuvās* and non-specialist devotees alike. One well-dressed young man cried out with his eyes closed, rocking forwards and backwards. He kept his fingers interlocked in front of him and waved his clasped-together fists atop the *jyot* while casting his face up to the sky. An older man, who turned out to be a *bhuvā* from Mahemdavad (a town outside of Ahmedabad), was also showing signs of *pavan*. He wore the standard pink turban and white shirt, but stood out on account of his handlebar moustache

and aviator shades. Even more distinctively, he donned a hand-sewn shawl depicting Haḍkāl atop her dog (Figure 25). In the robe, he shuddered smilingly in front of the shrine while others gathered around him, cheering. For this man, like many other Haḍkāl *bhuvās*, attendance at the Śubh Muhūrat was mandatory, as Kodava on this day represented something of a confluence for the goddess's operatives.



Figure 25: The Mahemdavad *bhuvā* at the Kodava Śubh Muhūrat, October 2015, draped in his Haḍkāl shawl, front and back (Photos by Vimal Shukla)

In order to find out more about the perspective of upwardly mobile persons frequenting Kodava, I made something of a case study out of the *bhuvā* from Mahemdavad. We met on two occasions in November 2015, once in Ahmedabad and once at his Mahemdavad shrine. The Mahemdavad *bhuvā* told me he had received long-term *pavan* of Haḍkāl at an early age, and that this had saved his life on a number of occasions. As a child, for instance, he had the misfortune of falling into deep water. Quickly, he found himself on the verge of drowning. While this was

happening, his maternal uncle was visited by Haḍkāī in a dream. She warned the uncle that his nephew was about to die, and this set in motion a prompt rescue. On another occasion, the *bhuvā*-to-be and a close friend fell into a storm drain, and the goddess Haḍkāī came again, this time to his father. The goddess informed the father of the location of his son, and instructed him not to put anyone else at risk by bringing them along. The Mahemdavad *bhuvā* and his friend were eventually rescued by his father alone. Now the Mahemdavad *bhuvā* tends his own small goddess shrine attached to his house, sitting *pāṭlā* and channeling Haḍkāī, among other goddesses, to help remedy local people addicted to liquor or dealing with family problems. In some cases, he has transferred his *pavan* momentarily to his visitors. The Mahemdavad *bhuvā* sees upwards of 200 people on any given Sunday, which is his busiest day. During the week, he is employed as a ward-boy in the intensive care unit of the V.S. Hospital in downtown Ahmedabad. Here he is responsible for administering the “treadmill test,” whereby a patient runs on a stationary device so as to aid in diagnosing heart blockages. Despite the biomedical nature of his employment and the upwardly mobile lifestyle it has afforded him, the Mahemdavad *bhuvā* still advocated for Haḍkāī as the best treatment for rabies. In the event that someone is bitten by a dog, he claimed that they are allowed to come to his place at any time, with no questions asked. At this point he ties their wrist and guides them through a wish upon the goddess. This involves abstaining from non-vegetarian food, alcohol, and other pollutants. Additionally, in a unique twist, a brass bell is placed on the ankle of the bite victim. If nothing happens furthering the infection after 72 hours, then the sufferer makes a *prasād* of *lāpsī*. Plainly, Haḍkāī’s traditional healing capacities prevail for this upwardly mobile, urbanized Kodava devotee employed in a paramedical role.

Despite their purported caste-based differences, the two temples at Kodava complement one another with respect to their ascendant aspirations. That is to say, an upper-caste or Brahmin-inflected vision of the goddess is emphasized at the original Devipujak temple, while a glossier, prosperity-driven imagining of Haḍkāī appears to be a primary objective of the Valmiki site. All told, the Kodava Haḍkāī seems to be capable of bearing traits from both conceptualizations. Certainly, there is overlap observable between the sites: middle-class wishes are made at the Devipujak temple, and Sanskritic trimmings such as Navcaṇḍī are far from absent at the Valmiki temple. And again, Haḍkāī persists in Kodava as a rabies goddess. While this role is somewhat more obvious at the “upper-caste” Devipujak temple, it is championed by

proponents at both sites. Thus, the Kodava Haḍkāi maintains her village-styled identity alongside elite elements drawn from middle-class and upper-caste sensibilities. She has assimilated all these diverse elements rather smoothly, much as she has done at the other sites we have visited.

Along with these diverse village and Sanskritic elements, Haḍkāi may be incorporating tantric elements as well. On one of the glossy banners festooning the party plot at the Śubh Muhūrat celebration, I spotted an image of the goddess captioned as “Rājarājeśvarī.” No one that I talked to could shed much light on this epithet. The title may very well have something to do with the goddess’s royal associations, which are not entirely unforeseeable given the Rajput predominance in Kodava. That said, the name Rājarājeśvarī could also speak to a subtle tantric undercurrent for Haḍkāi Mātā. Our final ethnographic destination lends more than a little credence to this conjecture that Haḍkāi has tantric ties.

KARADRA

The tendency we have observed at virtually every Haḍkāi Mātā site to characterize the goddess as having always been “*sāttvik*” or “Brahminic” may not be wholly reducible to a Sanskritizing strategy. There is some evidence suggesting that Haḍkāi worship has not been exclusive to Devipujaks, or, for that matter, Valmikiis, Thakors, and other non-elite groups. As is the case at the “upper-caste” temple in Kodava, Haḍkāi has in fact been connected to Brahmin worshippers in certain contexts. This would seem to substantiate folkloric claims regarding her “Brahminic” undercurrents. A more pronounced example can be found in the tiny village of Karadra. Just a short jaunt outside of Ahmedabad, the Karadra temple holds Haḍkāi in consubstantial company with a number of Sanskritic, tantric goddesses familiar from the Śrīvidyā tradition. Moreover, the temple is operated by a Brahmin. Hence, the temple draws in a significant number of Brahmins, among other castes, classes, and species of devotees.

Karadra’s outskirts are home to a number of goddess temples in close proximity to one another. One of the more striking of these is a temple that sits on a wide-open plot of land behind the tree-lined roadside outside of town, its interior hosting *mūrtis* to multiple goddesses. The temple’s main images are of the goddesses Lalitā, Gaurī Mā, and the latter’s *svarūpa* Śūlinī. All of these goddesses seem to be in an Advaita-styled monistic relationship with one another as iterations one Śakti. The major focal point of the temple is Lalitā, a goddess representing yet another epithet for Tripurāsundarī, much like Bālātripurāsundarī or Rājarājeśvarī. Lalitā is

specifically a “*saubhāgya*” imagining of the great Śrīvidyā goddess, meaning she is “prosperous” or “bountiful,” her wifely and motherly status conferring on devotees the blessings of fortune and auspiciousness (or *śrī*). Though she is capable of destruction, she retains her benevolent aspect even when slaying demons (Brooks 1992, 61). In short, she is an archetypal Sanskritic goddess. Accordingly, her Karadra temple is completely Brahminic. This is hardly surprising, as the lot upon which her temple is located belongs to a Brahmin man, Mr. Vaidiki (a pseudonym), who serves as its *pūjārī*. His house and its outlying buildings sit in the middle of the wide-open plot, perhaps 50 feet away from the temple. On the far side of the lot there is a small *derī* consisting of a *havan* pit, two small statues, and ceramic tiles bearing the image of Haḍkāī. This *derī*, Mr. Vaidiki informed me, is considered a major site of Haḍkāī Mātā. In fact, a movie about Haḍkāī/Haḍakṣā Mā, as of yet unreleased during my visits to Karadra in the autumn of 2015, had been filmed on this plot on account of its significance to the goddess. Apparently, Mr. Vaidiki’s spacious yard can house both Haḍkāī and Lalitā comfortably. Indeed, their apparent differences may be ultimately fleeting.

The plot on which Mr. Vaidiki lives has a storied past, and he traced it back to an ancient *ṛṣi* by the name of Rikhab Muni (from the Sanskrit *Rṣabha*). Rikhab Muni was a Brahmin, and he had a good number of followers clustered throughout what would become modern day Bhavnagar and Ahmedabad. Doing meditations at this site, the *ṛṣi* entered into a dream-like state and received a vision of the Devī in the form of Bālātripurāsundarī, whom Mr. Vaidiki confirmed is also Lalitā. According to Mr. Vaidiki, it was the twelfth-century Chaulukya ruler Jayasimha Siddharaj (1092-1142 CE), vanquisher of the *yoginīs*, who founded the Lalitā temple at this site and mandated its *prāṇapratiṣṭhā* ceremony. Though the temple has since been reconstructed and rebuilt, the main *mūrti*, Mr. Vaidiki claimed, still sits at the same place it always has. The temple has always been considered highly *sāttvik*, a facet chronicled in a tale involving Jayasimha Siddharaj’s mother Minal Devī. Minal Devī had always been a supporter of female divinities, and she was responsible for the construction of several goddess temples. These temples are sometimes said to be 64 in number, by Mr. Vaidiki’s reckoning, and one may have been dedicated to Melaḍī. The queen was fond of performing *pūjā* at a banyan tree nearby the Lalitā temple, under which there was a small *havan* pit. To undertake these *pūjās*, she used a plate of various different ingredients, many of them taking the form of white powders. One day while she was performing these rites, a dove landed on one of the plates of ingredients and

caused it to fall, dirtying the various offerings. In the aftermath, a Brahmin boasting about his cosmic power sacrificed the dove in the *havan* pit. This sacrifice prompted criticism, most notably from King Siddharaj, who was very unhappy with the developments. The offending Brahmin made amends by chanting mantras and *ślokas*, resurrecting the dove and allowing it to fly anew. Minal Devi's narrative would appear to address an interchange between *tāmasik* and *sāttvik* ritual at the site. It involves, after all, the corruption of the white (and therefore *sāttvik*) powder by the white bird that becomes the victim of sacrifice (*tāmasik*) performed by the Brahmin, who defies his stereotypical coding as a force of purity. The Brahmin's sacrifice is condemned, but then it is essentially reversed by the Brahmin's own efforts. This development appears to convey the inevitable triumph of *sāttvik* rituals over *tāmasik* practices at the Karadra site right from the time of its inception. Though the story criticizes the work of Brahmins, it still underscores their pre-eminence, as it is only the offending Brahmin who possesses the ritual apparatuses required to cancel his sacrifice and correct the mortal effects of his earlier *tāmasik* offering.

The *sāttvik*, Brahminical concerns of the temple have at times played a role in excluding lower castes and untouchables such as Devipujaks and Valmikis, though this has changed of late. Harkening back to his early lifetime, Mr. Vaidiki can remember when there was a statue of Haḍakṣā near the main Lalitā temple. Fashioned from dark earthen clay, the statue depicted the goddess with her dog *vāhana* and was venerated by non-elite groups. Prior to Independence, these non-elite groups were not allowed to enter the temple, and so they worshipped outside. So while the temple was the focus of the upper castes' worship, the little *derī* currently bearing the Haḍkāī tiles served as the devotional site of the Devipujaks and Valmikis. In Mr. Vaidiki's estimation, the upper castes worshipped the goddess as Lalitā, while the non-elites worshipped her as Haḍakṣā Mā. Despite the caste segregation, the goddesses were, to his mind, essentially one. Mr. Vaidiki's reflections on a calamity that befell the main Lalitā temple several decades ago illustrate the homology between these goddesses. By this point in time, located on the temple's front steps was a statue of Haḍkāī Mā upon her customary dog. Unfortunately, a cyclone came along causing a margosa tree to fall, smashing the statue. This did not deter the worship of Haḍkāī, however, as the images of Gaurī and Lalitā housed inside are, by Mr. Vaidiki's description, also generally considered Haḍkāī. This essentially marks all three goddesses as variations of the same Śāktādvaitic oneness. That being the case, Mr. Vaidiki

declared that for the last 25 to 30 years, the consensus among patrons has been that the main Lalitā/Gaurī site on his property is also a Haḍkāī temple.

Mr. Vaidiki is not just the keeper of these Haḍkāī shrines, but he is also a devotee himself. His positive opinion toward Haḍkāī stems in large part from a frantic night much earlier in his life, when a series of misfortunes gave way to more than one *camatkār* involving assistance from the goddess, among other deities. On this dark and rainy night, Mr. Vaidiki was driving home with his family from a function in Rajasthan when a fuse box blew in the engine of his car. He had no knowledge of how to fix the car's wiring, and was growing frightened for himself and his family, as they were in a hilly tribal area in which Dacoits may have been lying in wait. In the pitch black, rain pounding against the window of his stalled car, he prayed to Śanidev. Soon enough, a man came along with a torch that was burning strong despite the rain. The stranger had a dark complexion, much like Śanidev. This gave Mr. Vaidiki the feeling that a positive power was on his side, though he was still far from completely relieved. All at once, he was overcome by a dreamlike feeling, and he heard the sound of a temple bell clanging. He searched around for the origin of the sound and found no one, though he did come upon a temple with a swaying bell. Soon after, he heard the baying of a dog, and again he checked in proximity. There was no dog to be found. He took this as an indication that Haḍkāī was roaming somewhere nearby, guarding over his family. He prayed to Śanidev again and then plugged the problem fuse into another socket. The fuse box began to smoke, and then the car came on again. Mr. Vaidiki and his family were able to drive out of the area and finish their journey home. All in all, he interpreted this incident as a collaborative blessing of both Śanidev and Haḍkāī.

On account of Haḍkāī's positive influence in his life, Mr. Vaidiki upholds the Mātā as an integral element of the Lalitā temple on his property. Mr. Vaidiki's avowal that Haḍakṣā Mā and Lalitā are respectively lower- and upper-caste versions of the same goddess is not merely an excursion into Advaitic paternalism—in fact, far from it. Mr. Vaidiki did not simply reduce Haḍakṣā to an iteration of the Great(er) Goddesses Lalitā or Gaurī. Rather, he advocated for Haḍakṣā's equivalency or interchangeability with these goddesses. This interpretation, he said, reflected the general perception of temple followers regardless of their caste. Indeed, he described Lalitā in no uncertain terms as a “Brahminic Haḍakṣā.” Furthermore, he often referred to Gaurī as Śūlinī, an epithet that may suggest more than just a Vedāntic unification of all these female divinities. Śūlinī (“she who holds the *śūla*”; *śūla* here referring to the *trisūla*) bears

linguistic resemblance to “Hulan”—one of the many names for Haḍkāī—and may lend some philological credence to the close association between all of these goddesses and their theonyms. The notion that Lalitā is a “Brahminic Haḍakṣā” is not just an idea circulating among traditional Haḍkāī worshippers such as Devipujaks, Thakors, and Valmikis, Mr. Vaidiki assured me, but it is also held up by Rajputs, Patels, and other middle- and upper-caste visitors to the temple. These visitors also include Brahmins. The idea that Haḍakṣā is Lalitā and/or Gaurī, then, should not be dismissed as a non-elite fancy. Haḍkāī appears to be cognate with the Brahminic goddesses Lalitā and Gaurī/Śūlinī, at least for Mr. Vaidiki and the upper- and lower-caste devotees at the Karadra temple.

The equivalencies between the aforementioned goddesses open up additional possibilities. Take for example the links Mr. Vaidiki elaborated between Lalitā and Bālātripurāsundarī, the form of the goddess who manifested in the ancient vision of Rikhab Muni that inaugurated the Karadra temple. Bālātripurāsundarī is, of course, the child image of Tripurāsundarī. Further, in Mr. Vaidiki’s assessment, Bālātripurāsundarī is also equivalent to Lalitā. Given the equivalency drawn between Lalitā and Haḍakṣā, the latter would by extension bear connections with Tripurāsundarī as well. Tripurāsundarī, as we have seen over and over again in this study, is an all-important epithet of the goddess in Śrīvidyā tantra (as is Lalitā, for that matter). A vocabulary of Brahminic tantra seems to infuse itself within Haḍakṣā at Karadra, then, not unlike that which has crystallized around Bahucarā Mātā at Becharaji and in her devotional texts. Another variant of the name Tripurāsundarī (or Lalitā Tripurāsundarī) is the oft-cited Rājarājeśvarī, which we have seen variously applied to *mātās* such as Melaḍī, Khoḍīyār, and Kodava’s Haḍakṣā. In view of Karadra’s connection to Lalitā/Tripurāsundarī and also its royal history, I asked Mr. Vaidiki whether or not there were any connections between Haḍkāī and Rājarājeśvarī. I was hoping he could shed some light on the glossy banner I had seen in Kodava purporting just such a link. He told me he had “no idea” about this connection, and did not offer any further speculations. All told, I suspect his personal connections to Śrīvidyā were negligible, at best. That said, the Lalitā-(Bālā)Tripurāsundarī-Haḍkāī homology he delineated does speak further to the way Śrīvidyā-inflected language gets attached to goddesses in Gujarat, particularly *mātās* negotiating their historically village-centric identity. Though Mr. Vaidiki did not give any indication of an explicitly Śrīvidyā background, he did make repeated references to the *Lalitā Sahasranām*. This poetic composition listing Lalitā’s 1,000 epithets is held to have mantra-like power by Śrīvidyā

practitioners (Brooks 1992, 45). Mr. Vaidiki claimed that he chants the 1,000 names every single day. While Mr. Vaidiki's chanting does little to sturdily confirm Haḍḍkā's Śrīvidyā connections at Karadra, it does affirm once again her applicability to (and parallels with) a Sanskritic, Brahminic ritual repertoire.

The Sanskritic or Brahminic virtues attributed to Haḍḍkā/Lalitā have not compromised her role as a goddess of rabies at Karadra. Here, Mr. Vaidiki explained, she is still a part of the healing process for dog bites. At the main temple, the usual *prasād* for Lalitā is a special *lāpsī* consisting of dal, rice, and vegetables, but when someone is afflicted with a dog bite, the *prasād* is changed to rice, milk, ghee, and jaggery. It is the change in *prasād* that establishes the rabies-curing nature of the request, rather than a change in the *mūrti* or shrine to which the *prasād* is offered. The rabies offering is still given to Lalitā, underscoring the transposable nature of her relationship with Haḍḍkā. Once *prasād* has been made, the sufferer of the bite makes their wish for a cure, which is binding for five weeks. During this time, there are strict regulations on the person undertaking the vow: no alcoholic drinks, no consumption of any addictive or toxic thing, and no non-vegetarian food. In sum, the sufferer keeps a strict, *sāttvik* diet much like that which is required at other Haḍḍkā temples. Mr. Vaidiki reported that this vow is undertaken by people from all castes and communities. He also noted that medical professionals, including senior doctors from hospitals in Ahmedabad, have referred patients here when they are in the early stages of rabies symptoms.

While the allusions to these endorsements reiterated testimonials made at other sites championing Haḍḍkā's power over and above biomedicine, Mr. Vaidiki did not make them without circumspection. He assured me that sufferers of dog bites who come to Karadra have typically undertaken their medical injection alongside the traditional faith-based treatment. Mr. Vaidiki has long encouraged this dual-pronged program of action. In fact, he has come to insist upon it, and with good cause. Mr. Vaidiki told me a story that was comparable to the cautionary tales that circulated among the social workers and other non-worshippers regarding the dangers of reliance on Haḍḍkā for treating rabies. This one, however, took place at his own temple site in very recent memory. Approximately six months before my meetings with Mr. Vaidiki in November 2015, there was a twelve-year-old boy from the Patel community who suffered a minor dog bite. The child hid the wound from his parents, and rabies entered into his body. A local doctor provided him with conventional medicine, but the rabies would not go away. Rather,

it only worsened. The child was eventually brought to Karadra on the advice of doctors in Ahmedabad. The ritual protocols for the cure were undertaken, and the boy was offered a drink of water in front of the Lalitā Mā statue. This would test whether or not the rabies had exited his body. After only a few drops, the child reared back in a hydrophobic frenzy and fell down the temple steps. This led to the child's death. On account of these sorts of tragedies, this one hitting particularly close to home, it is clear why Mr. Vaidiki has come to insist that patients incorporate both medical and spiritual avenues toward a cure. As he puts it, he advocates “both *davā* and *duā*.” Because he is a Brahmin, he said, and respectful of both systems of knowledge as such, he does not allow anyone to take the rabies vow in Haḍkāi's name without prior medical consultation.

Despite persistent concerns about rabies and the *sāttvik*, Brahminic nature of the grounds, dogs are welcome in the Karadra Lalitā temple. In fact, one pooch in particular has been revered as Karadra's superlative devotee. While there were 30 or 40 dogs roaming the area, many of which commonly passed in and out of the temple, there was a certain dog that appeared every Tuesday and Sunday at *ārati* as soon as the devotional music began to play. Ciṇṭu (“little cutie”), as he was affectionately referred to by Mr. Vaidiki's family, would routinely make his way up the temple steps, position himself in front of the Lalitā statue, and start into a program of barking, much to the delight of the people in attendance. Having witnessed the display on one occasion, I can attest as much. Tail wagging ardently, Ciṇṭu circled the temple and barked along with the ringing bell as if rallying the temple goers in their *bhajan* singing. Ciṇṭu has been known to be in an especially jolly mood at bigger gatherings, when scores of people are clapping and dancing. On these occasions, Mr. Vaidiki explained, Ciṇṭu's barking almost starts to sound like a song, as if the dog himself is chanting *ārati*. When I asked whether or not Ciṇṭu's chanting is a *camatkār*, Mr. Vaidiki answered judiciously. He conjectured that there was probably a connection between this specific dog and the goddess—perhaps some good karma in his last incarnation linking him to Lalitā Mā. If we had any doubts as to whether or not the Brahminic Lalitā temple was also a Haḍkāi temple, the exalted presence of Ciṇṭu dispels them. Unprecedented though it may be to have a dog as an honoured guest in a Brahminic temple, just such an occurrence was taking place twice weekly in the autumn of 2015 at Karadra.

The Lalitā temple in Karadra provides evidence that Haḍkāi Mātā can be Brahminic, Sanskritic, and possibly even tantric. Truth be told, she is not just Brahminic in nature here, as

per other sites such as the “upper-caste” temple at Kodava, but actually *worshipped* by Brahmins. Throughout the ethnographies in this section, we have encountered again and again the idea put forward by Haḍkāī’s mostly non-elite devotees that their goddess, contra other *mātās*, is *sāttvik* or even Brahminic, and always has been. On first blush, this tendency may give the impression of being a Sanskritization strategy among depressed-class groups, and it surely is in part just that. Karadra, however, would suggest that when any of Haḍkāī’s worshippers emphasize the goddess’s unquestionably *sāttvik* nature, they are actually making a substantive claim to the Mātā’s demonstrable Brahminic associations. Whether or not Karadra is consciously what is being referenced in these claims, the fundamentals of the site seem capable of informing or fuelling a shared, *sāttvik* conceptualization of the goddess among her non-elite worshippers. The source (or sources) of this well-circulated *sāttvik* imagining likely extends beyond Karadra. Indeed, Haḍkāī’s theological and linguistic homologies with more universalized goddesses such as Lalitā, Gaurī/Śūlinī, and Tripurāsundarī suggest that a larger interchange between the village, Sanskritic, and tantric traditions may be at play here. This postulation is mostly speculative, however, and warrants further investigation. One detail of which we can be fairly sure, though, is that at every single Haḍkāī site we have visited, the goddess has held fast in her capacity for curing rabies.

Conclusion

Colonial commentators once assumed that biomedical treatments and cures would render obsolete South Asian goddesses related to disease (Nicholas 1981, 22).²³⁰ The effect of medical treatments upon goddesses, however, has not been so straightforward. Several decades ago, there emerged a trend in scholarship pointing out just how inaccurate the colonial assumptions had been, considering how disease goddesses have remained relevant, their roles having adapted to accommodate biomedical interventions. For instance, Margaret Trawick-Egnor argued that, with the eradication of smallpox in the 1970s, the South Indian goddess Māriyamman became a “changed mother.” That is, she came to be symbolized by diseases other than smallpox, one such example being tuberculosis. As Egnor wrote, “the demise of a particular disease did not, in

²³⁰ With the advent of vaccination, missionaries and colonialists saw little hope for smallpox goddesses such as Māriyamman and Śītalā. Drawing on materials from colonial-era writers such as Abbe Dubois and Rev. Robert Caldwell, Perundevi Srinivasan has summed up the Western opinion toward Māriyamman as follows: “*the drug preempting smallpox is here, and, therefore, the smallpox goddess has no more role to play and is redundant*” (2009, 54; emphasis in original).

essence, effect the goddess at all” (1984, 40). Rather, Māriyamman persisted as a sort of “generalized” health goddess, and became related to a disease not entirely dissimilar from smallpox in its symptomology. In North India, the smallpox-related goddess Śītalā Mātā also persevered in the face of similar changes, and her domestic worship continued even after the eradication of the disease. In this context, Ralph Nicholas reported that while Śītalā was more commonly worshipped for the benefits of village residents as a collectivity, families did occasionally call upon her when a child was suffering from measles or chickenpox, diseases that resemble smallpox (1981, 40). In Gujarat specifically, Śītalā has also been popularly considered an incarnation of measles and, so long as she is kept pleased, plays a lasting role in keeping children safe from this infectious disease, among other poxes (Gopalan 1978, 117). This again marks a move from specificity to generalization regarding a disease goddess whose disease disappears. Admittedly, these studies are dated, and more recent scholarship calls into question whether the goddesses that form their subject matter were ever strictly related to a specific disease.²³¹ Either way, the goddess in question outlives the ailment over which she presides and still relates to health, in some sense.

Like Māriyamman and Śītalā, Haḍkāi Mātā has remained relevant, yet she injects further doubt into this scholarly narrative that would have goddesses of disease undergoing a generalization or repurposing of their role when faced with biomedical modernity and the remedies it offers. Although Haḍkāi is, like other Gujarati *mātās*, approached for a variety of desired outcomes including general health needs, temple affiliates told me time and again that the healing of rabies has endured as one of the express purposes for which people visit her sites. I should qualify this by acknowledging that rabies is, of course, a much different disease from smallpox, and so this comparison I am attempting here is somewhat strained. The rabies virus is

²³¹ In the case of Māriyamman, Perundevi Srinivasan has re-evaluated Trawick-Egnor’s assumption that the relationship between the goddess and *ammai* (a Tamil term used to refer to poxes in general) has disappeared (2009, 23). Since *ammai* is not limited to smallpox and can refer to a variety of ailments involving pustules such as poxes and measles (15 by Srinivasan’s count), most or all of which “materialize” Māriyamman, the goddess has not really “changed” in the face of the eradication of smallpox. Her connection with *ammai*, rather, is alive and well (2009, 33-36). Still, Srinivasan has posited (not unlike Trawick-Egnor) that the interaction between “scientific medicine” and Māriyamman’s discursive practices did not undermine the pre-eminence of the goddess in Tamil Nadu (2009, 39). In the case of Śītalā Mātā, Fabrizio Ferrari has argued that the lion’s share of scholarship on the goddess has promulgated the notion that she is a “fierce” smallpox deity, when in fact she has only ever been a protective deity. This imagining of Śītalā as a fierce smallpox goddess is, according to Ferrari, the result of “interpolation of textual material associated with other, *ugra* [fierce], goddesses” (2015, 19). These associations were then, in Ferrari’s opinion, elaborated by foreign colonial and scholarly influences (2015, 120). That said, Ferrari’s argument is somewhat compromised by scenes from his ethnography in which devotees of Śītalā make explicit references to the goddess causing illness (2015, 95).

treatable through biomedical means, among them post-exposure prophylaxis, but unlike smallpox, it has not been eradicated. In fact, rabies is widely prevalent in India, which has one of the highest rates of human infection in the world, largely on account of the sheer number of stray dogs. According to the *Times of India* of June 14, 2017, rabies was responsible for 16 deaths in Gujarat between 2014 and 2016, fifth highest total among the 29 states and 7 Union Territories (Chauhan 2017). Though that figure may seem small in a state of 60 million people, the threat of rabies is very real in Gujarat, especially in Devipujak areas where stray dogs abound. Moreover, post-exposure prophylaxis is an expensive procedure, and far from affordable for many who live in areas that put them at the greatest risk for dog bites. For these reasons, Haḍkāī's blessing represents for many the most accessible form of rabies treatment. And so, much as is the case with all the aforementioned goddesses, the existence of effective biomedical intervention for the disease under discussion does not supplant the Mātā. In Haḍkāī's case, the Mātā remains rooted in her specific role as healer of rabies, and is held to be on par with (or even superior to) medical procedures for dealing with this disease. We have seen that Haḍkāī is often consulted in conjunction with medical treatment: some of her officiants urge devotees to see doctors, and some doctors purportedly refer devotees to her temples.²³² For her faithful, including upwardly mobile Devipujaks and Dalits with increasing access to biomedical treatments, the latter scenario bears further testament to Haḍkāī's unmatched power and prestige. As such, ascendant members of these groups continue to swear by the goddess's rabies-healing ability, at least hypothetically.

Also testifying to the goddess's auspiciousness is another continuity from Haḍkāī's village past: the unfailing purity she personifies. Haḍkāī's devotees characterize her as *sāttvik* not only in the present, but from time immemorial. For other *mātās*, elements such as sacrifice and liquor oblations are considered vestiges of a bygone era, but for Haḍkāī worshippers, they simply never were. That said, it is difficult to describe the consistent reiterations of Haḍkāī's *sāttvik* or Brahminic character among her Devipujak and Valmiki Samaj devotees as anything other than Sanskritization. This Sanskritization process works against other popular associations that still plague the goddess: firstly, her questionable past that involved *bhuvās* (who are still integral to Haḍkāī shrines at present) and possibly even *tāmasik* undertakings such as bloodletting; secondly

²³² Comparably, Srinivasan has noted how traditional healing involving Māriyamman is often used in conjunction with biomedicine. Srinivasan has recorded instances of persons materializing *ammai* who take antibiotics and antihistamines, sometimes even referring to them as "margosa leaves" in accordance with the goddess's preferences (2009, 435). Certainly, the biomedical and goddess-based healing approaches are not mutually exclusive.

(and more palpably), her abiding association with a disease common to the slums inhabited by her worshippers and spread by an animal considered ritually and medically hazardous. Intriguingly, Haḍkāī's Brahminic aspects so readily asserted by her worshippers have plausible historical roots, as Haḍkāī Mātā does bear associations with a number of Sanskritic goddesses and upper-caste, Brahmin-run sites. These goddess associations also demonstrate Haḍkāī's resonances with classical, Śrīvidyā-styled tantra. These resonances serve to a similar Sanskritizing and universalizing effect while affirming Haḍkāī's "positive" tantric orientation. Altogether, these strenuous Sanskritization and universalization efforts work to defend and elevate Haḍkāī's profile alongside the profiles of the communities that worship her, most prominently the Devipujaks. Haḍkāī's overarching purity necessitates that her shrines and temples are spaces in which Devipujaks can and must uphold the idealized, *sāttvik* lifestyle corresponding with that of the perceived elites of mainstream, upper-caste Hinduism. Indeed, the Devipujak and Brahmin spheres seemed highly reconcilable at places such as Kodava and Karadra, among others. At certain critical junctures, Haḍkāī has also afforded Devipujaks access to participation in mainstream Hinduism, albeit with dark political overtones. This was the case in Shahpur during the communal riots of 2002, in which Devipujaks took the Hindu/Hindutva side in the process of defending the goddess's supposedly imperilled temples. More benignly, the unfaltering emphasis on the *sāttvik*, the Brahminic, and universal elements of Haḍkāī Mātā ensures that she stays agreeable to upwardly mobile sectors of her worshippers—among them Devipujaks striving toward middle-classness—so that they may keep their accustomed goddess close by no matter how drastically their lifestyles are transformed by economic advancement.

Conclusion

The Gujarati *mātās* are, by and large, goddesses under negotiation. While some, most notably Khoḍīyār and Bahucarā, have gradually settled into more mainstream roles in contemporary Gujarat due to their associations with specific groups and prominent sites, others embody a fundamental ambivalence. These ambiguous goddesses include village *mātās* such as Melaḍī, Jogaṇī, and Haḍakṣā. These *mātās* have become more prevalent in urban public spaces as the groups that customarily worshipped them have traversed new socioeconomic territory, and as a broadening base of devotees from a variety of castes has turned toward these goddesses' sleek new iconographies and temple spaces. Given their increasingly diverse audiences and upwardly mobile followers, these *mātās* have undergone pronounced transformations. They have even come to resemble pan-Indian goddesses. Some Gujaratis remain unconvinced, however, assuming that even though animal sacrifices, liquor-oblations, and *pavan*-centred, *bhuvā*-based practices have receded from the foreground, *mātā* worship is still at its core unrestrained, offputtingly ecstatic, and attributable to “mass hysteria.”

The ambivalent profile and contested identity is not new for Gujarati *mātās*. Rather, there is a traceable genealogy of suspicion surrounding female divinities in this region that became particularly pronounced in the colonial period. In the vast history preceding colonial intervention, goddesses clearly had some currency in Gujarat and Saurashtra, predominantly in royal contexts. Bahucarā, Kālī, and Ambā Mātā all came to be associated with *śakti-pīṭhas*, each of which grew steadily in popularity throughout the Mughal period. All of these sites had salient tantric components. These were evidenced by the early prominence of yantras at the *śakti-pīṭhas* and later reiterated in the devotional poetry of Mithu Maharaj and others. These *pīṭhas* were the sites of animal sacrifices and liquor oblations, and for this reason occasionally faced criticism from Sanskritic elites. The Jain poet Gunavijaya, for instance, documented fifteenth-century movements to eliminate violence at the Becharaji shrine. Even litterateurs in the devotional traditions that formed around these goddesses took measures to soften their capricious characteristics. This was the case with Vallabh Bhatt, whose poetry attempted to make Bahucarā more agreeable to restrained, *sāttvik*, Vaiṣṇava tastes. With the arrival of the British, scrutiny of the three central goddesses of the *śakti-pīṭhas*, among other *mātās*, intensified in Gujarat.

Colonialists and missionaries regularly put into print discourses that depicted goddesses, especially those of the village, in a darker light. This rendered the Mātā as a locus of repugnance.

Colonial commentators counted Bahucarā, Melaḍī, and Jogaṇī among a horde of female spirits who were the beneficiaries of bloody, intoxicated rites. Christian missionaries also fixated on these ecstatic ritual elements related to village goddesses and came to imagine the Mātā more pointedly as a demonic entity whose worship epitomized the “downward tendency of human nature.” Colonialists and missionaries saw in the *mātās* justifications for intervention, namely in the form of programs of civilization and conversion, respectively. Nineteenth-century Gujarati reformers also promulgated analogous disapproval of “left-handed” goddess worship. Some of this sentiment was inspired by British writers, and some of it was a continuation of earlier criticisms made by indigenous figures such as Sahajanand, who unmistakably had goddesses in his targets when he spurred the Swaminarayan movement. A rising tide of abstemious, anti-superstitious beliefs would inspire later Swaminarayan followers such as Dalpatram Daya, who in turn influenced his employer Alexander Kinloch Forbes. In 1849, Forbes brushed aside Melaḍī Mātā as one among the many “filthy night birds” worshipped by what were, in his view, benighted sectors of the Gujarat population. Three decades later, Monier Monier-Williams arrived at a similar dismissal of Khoḍīyār Mātā in his observations culled from travels in Gujarat. For Orientalists, missionaries, and elite, reform-minded Gujaratis alike, Melaḍī, Khoḍīyār, and other *mātās* were corrosive forces that compelled a constellation of ecstatic ritual acts that had to be approached with caution or altogether left behind. Maligned though they were, the village Devīs were also capable of providing the impetus for reform from *within* subaltern communities. Such was the case during the Devī movement that swept through southern Gujarat in the early 1920s, wherein the goddess helped articulate an ethos of sobriety and vegetarianism for a number of Adivasi communities. The village Devī, then, could be both the subject of reformers’ revulsion and the driving force behind reform, which marked her as a highly contested conceptual site in Gujarati religion. This characteristic ambivalence continues to be negotiated at present for many *mātās*.

The identities of Bahucarā and Khoḍīyār have each been under negotiation for a considerable period of time. Each is held to have originally been a Charan girl deified after a violent death, and, on account of the Charans’ bardic function, each goddess became associated with influential Rajput groups. Khoḍīyār gained additional ties with the low-caste but economically powerful Leuva Patels, and Bahucarā also came to be linked with a number of decidedly non-Brahmin groups, such as the transgender Pavaiyas and the Muslim Kamalias. For

centuries, Bahucarā and Khoḍīyār sites played host to sacrifice, liquor oblations, and *pavan*. Furthermore, Bahucarā's major *pīṭha* at Becharaji has for much of its history accommodated the Pavaīyās' non-heteronormative, non-procreative lifestyle. At present, however, non-Brahminic elements have receded at the major Bahucarā and Khoḍīyār sites, and both goddesses have become refined Devīs in the pan-Indian idiom. Their most prominent sites are major pilgrimage spots attended by a range of caste groups and economic backgrounds, including the middle class and upwardly mobile. For Bahucarā, commentators past and present have followed in the footsteps of Gunavijaya and Vallabh Bhatt in order to render the goddess *sāttvik* and to extend her appeal beyond her non-Brahmin followers. These commentators' endeavours to solidify her roots in Sanskrit scripture and accentuate her Vaiṣṇava resonances are currently ongoing. Toward a similar goal, Bahucarā's *śakti-pīṭha* at Becharaji is staffed exclusively with Brahmins and has recently been renovated with careful consideration for middle-class tastes. Comparable sensibilities have driven refurbishments and constructions at Khoḍīyār temples old and new. While some Khoḍīyār shrines such as the one in Bapunagar retain vestiges of earlier village worship, sites such as Rajpara and Khodaldham, with their sprawling, prosperous, and orderly confines, seek pan-regional or pan-Indian bourgeoisie appeal. As such, their trustees shine a spotlight on the goddess's Sanskritic, Vaiṣṇavic, and universal connections. Bahucarā and Khoḍīyār have each to some degree seen tantra play a role in their ongoing reimaginings. This is most apparent for Bahucarā, who is still worshipped at her major *śakti-pīṭha* by way of a concealed yantra, and is still homologized with the goddess Bālātripurāsundarī of the Śrīvidyā tradition. These elements are openly emphasized in Bahucarā's devotional pamphlets as a means to health, prosperity, and magical abilities. Khoḍīyār is also no stranger to yantras, which can be found behind her main image at major and minor shrines alike. In their development of modern identities that are *sāttvik*, Sanskritic, and safe for middle-class tastes (and yet still tantric), Bahucarā and Khoḍīyār can be viewed as prototypical for the ongoing reimaginings of Melaḍī, Jogaṇī, and Haḍkāī.

Melaḍī, literally a dirt goddess, has perhaps undergone the most pronounced changes of the modern-day *mātās*. In effect, she has been cleaned up at many of her contemporary sites. Melaḍī has long been synonymous with *tāmasik* practices and the "dark arts," and variations of these customs are still active at some rural and depressed-class Melaḍī sites, such as the Vadi settlement at Dhrangadhra. However, this vision of the goddess has for the most part been

eclipsed by a tidied-up reimagining that has gained momentum in recent decades. At present, Melaḍī's lithographs depict her like a pan-Indian Devī. Now the goat-mounted goddess is framed in vernacular devotional literature as being as much *sāttvik* as she is *tāmasik*. Modern Melaḍī sites have come to highlight her solely *sāttvik* character, prohibiting sacrifice and liquor oblations and making concerted efforts to curb ecstatic displays such as *pavan*. In place of these practices, Brahminical and Sanskritic elements—among them Vedic chanting, *havans*, and officiating Brahmins—have moved to the forefront. To the same effect, certain aspects of Vaiṣṇavism have also been included at Melaḍī sites. These nods to refined, restrained sensibilities and the ritual performances that enact them dovetail with a heightened concern for orderliness and cleanliness within Melaḍī's temple spaces, all of which satisfy the tastes of a gaining middle-class base of devotees. At present, Melaḍī's dirty significations have largely been inverted, for now the goddess is a champion of cleanliness. In 2016, for instance, her image could be found overtop waste disposal cans in public spaces in Rajkot, urging devotees to pick up after themselves (Parmar 2016).²³³ Likewise, the expanded and elaborated temple spaces and the success stories that proliferate among their patrons both in India and abroad repeatedly demonstrate the prosperity Melaḍī Mātā can generate. All of the above holds appeal to the upwardly mobile individuals in attendance. Middle-class aspirations show through plainly in the kinds of requests visitors bring before Melaḍī involving vehicles, career opportunities, and international visas, among other attainments. Woven fairly seamlessly within the fabric of Melaḍī worship are numerous tantric threads. Yantras, for instance, commonly appear inside her temples and on her lithographs. They are also expounded within devotional publications alongside their accompanying mantras. The various mantra-yantra combinations can offer fertility, pacify enemies, and ward off spirits in the customary folk-tantra idiom, though they are framed in a wholly *sāttvik* mode. Moreover, at many of her sites, Melaḍī bears the epithet Rājarājeśvarī, underscoring her identity as a royal, Sanskritic, and tantric goddess.

More explicitly infused with tantra is Jogaṇī Mātā, whose iconography is practically identical to that of the self-decapitated Mahāvidyā Chinnamastā, although many of her ritual officiants may be disinclined to acknowledge it. Evocative imagery aside, the goddess's followers include among their ranks upwardly mobile, middle-class patrons who are not limited to the pastoralist and Patel groups that worshipped Jogaṇī historically. While some of these

²³³ See the *Times of India*'s February 18, 2016 article "Fear of Meladi Maa's Wrath Helps Clean up Talaja Town."

Jogaṇī sites have maintained village elements such as *pāṭlā* and *pavan*, most of them have strived concertedly to meet the terms of elite Sanskritic or Vaiṣṇavic moralities. As in the case of Melāḍī, this can be seen in their emphasis upon vegetarianism and symbolic sacrifices and their deployment of Sanskrit texts and ritual apparatuses, as well as their employment of Brahmins. Brahminic imaginings of Jogaṇī Mātā abound in her widely-available devotional pamphlets, which situate the goddess in the timeless, Sanskritic past. This preference for the Sanskritic among texts and personnel also informs universalistic, Advaitic theological imaginings of Jogaṇī Mātā that figure her as interchangeable with the Mahādevī (if not encompassing Mahādevī completely). With their refined connotations, these Sanskritic ritual modalities and universalized theologies coincide with middle-class sensibilities, which are readily identifiable in the demonstrations of material prosperity and intercontinental ambitions that thrive at urban Jogaṇī sites. As with other *mātā* temples, middle-class values have also inspired the sites' advocacy of inclusivity, as well as more subtly gentrified considerations such as cleanly confines and orderly queues. Jogaṇī's unambiguously tantric elements do not alienate this audience, however, as the Mātā exemplifies a positive tantra that satisfies a middle-class need for fast access to otherworldly power. The esoteric, tantric aspect does not run contrary to middle-class and upwardly mobile tastes so long as it presents itself in the context of a relatively respectable religiosity, which a Mahāvidyā such as Chinnamastā epitomizes. By way of the Chinnamastā imagery, Jogaṇī incorporates a safe, *sāttvik* tantra that is disassociated from black tantra and *bhuvās* to such an extent that it does not preclude middle-class participation. If anything, the rapid material benefits promised by the *sāttvik* tantra Jogaṇī represents make the ambitions of the ascending classes seem all the more attainable.

The rabies goddess Haḍkāī is not so easily describable as upwardly mobile and, in view of the underprivileged state in which many of her followers live, is not a middle-class goddess in any sturdy sense. The goddess is nevertheless polarizing. While beloved by Devipujaks and Valmikis, she is objectionable to many non-devotees on account of her popular associations with impurity and poverty. For her faithful, though, Haḍkāī is not *melī*, and never has been. Rather, she personifies purity not only in the present but all throughout her history, and historical records, while limited, do not suggest otherwise. This backward-looking Sanskritizing process undertaken by Haḍkāī's devotees countervails elite suspicions concerning abiding associations with *bhuvās*, *tāmasik* undertakings, and a disease common to slums. This retroactive

Sanskritization has been aided by Haḍkāī's associations with some upper-caste, Brahminic sites and a number of Sanskritic goddesses. These goddesses include classical, Śrīvidyā-styled Devīs such as Lalitā, affirming that Haḍkāī's real or perceived tantric aspects are positive. These strenuous Sanskritization efforts not only defend and elevate Haḍkāī's profile, but they also do the same for the communities that worship her. The unimpeachable purity embodied by Haḍkāī demarcates her shrines and temples as spaces in which her traditional devotees can and must attain to the goddess's exacting standard. This standard is perforce the idealized, *sāttvik* lifestyle of the very same perceived elites of Gujarat who cast aspersions upon Haḍkāī devotees.

Moreover, the accentuation of Haḍkāī's Brahminic and universalized elements keeps the goddess amenable to the emergent middle-class element of the Devipujak community. Much like her purity, Haḍkāī's role as a goddess of rabies has gone mostly unquestioned for her faithful, including those approaching middle-classness. For many devotees, her eminently accessible blessing in the wake of a dog bite is equal to—or better than—medical intervention. In this way, Haḍkāī injects further doubt into the scholarly narrative that South Asian goddesses of disease necessarily undergo a repurposing of their role when faced with biomedical modernity.

Despite variances in their iconographies, narratives, and the groups that worship them, the *mātās* are linked not just by their maternal title or their transformations toward tidied-up images. They are also connected by the component mechanisms through which these transformations have been accomplished. Sanskritization has been identifiable at virtually every contemporary *mātā* temple we have visited. Sometimes it takes the form of actual Sanskrit texts that are either chanted aloud or pre-recorded. Sometimes it involves Brahminization—that is, the inclusion of Brahmins as full-time or periodic temple employees to oversee Sanskrit-styled ritual performances such as *havans*, *prāṇapratiṣṭhās*, and *Caṇḍīpāṭh* recitation. The spirit of Sanskritization also informs the ubiquitous preference at metropolitan *mātā* temples for *sāttvik* ritual repertoires that proscribe animal sacrifice and liquor oblations. In this spirit, *mātā* complexes serve only vegetarian food and non-alcoholic beverages within their confines.

This *sāttvik* lifestyle of abstinence and teetotalism intersects with stringent Vaiṣṇava mores, particularly those of Swaminarayan Hinduism. More than occasionally, *mātā* temples draw on elements of Gujarati Vaiṣṇavism, as the Puṣṭimārg and Swaminarayan folds continue to wield pronounced cultural cachet in the state. Vaiṣṇavization is, for instance, evident in the decorum many *mātā* temples afford to their goddesses. This can be found in gestures as simple

as veiling the *mūrti* at mealtime, which may follow from Puṣṭimārg aesthetic sensibilities. More generally, Vaiṣṇava values likely inform the standard of self-restraint expected of visitors to many *mātā* sites, which has dictated that *pavan* and *bhuvā*-based rituals are to be de-emphasized or outright decried.

These *sāttvik*, Sanskritized ritual spaces befit goddesses such as Durgā and Sarasvatī, and so *mātās* have settled into iconographies characteristic of those very same Devīs. So too have *mātās*' theologies moved toward those of the Great Goddess, and it is not uncommon to hear a *mātā* described as equivalent to a pan-Indian deity such as a Durgā or a Kālī. Often enough, it is the Mātā who is figured as the supreme feminine principle from which these and any other goddesses (and gods, for that matter) emanate. In this way, the Mātā proves capable of assuming the kind of Advaitic or Vedāntic theological scope so recurrently modish in mainstream and elite-caste Hindu circles. This burgeoning, boundless theological jurisdiction increasingly afforded to *mātās* parallels their expanding geographical range as they attract pilgrims from different states and different continents. In this sense, we can say that many *mātās* have undergone universalization.

The universalized Vedāntic theology, the Sanskritized ritual, and the Vaiṣṇava decorum are all conducive to the progressively sophisticated temple visitor. With the middle-class demographic in mind, many major *mātā* complexes have refurbished their temple spaces, or else built up new complexes from scratch. These ambitious architectural endeavours serve to expand space and elaborate the splendour of the Mātā, all the while exhibiting temple prosperity that can be experienced and potentially shared in by the visitor. This retooling of ritual space also involves a gaining concern for neatness and organization. This concern is apprehensible in the insistence upon queues for *pāṭlā*, *darśan*, and donations, as well as overall cleanliness. Indeed, staff, trustees, and signage are routinely put in place to ensure that temples stay pristine and orderly. These renovations and re-orderings are congruent with the values cultivated by devotees who are seeking out reaffirmation or realization of middle-classness, the driving force behind the gentrification of the Gujarati *mātās*. Even for Haḍkāi Mātā, whose devotees are mostly impoverished, the touchstones of upwardly mobile sensibilities—celebrity cameos, ostentatious festivals, multimedia commodities, and other indicators of good fortune—are starting to appear with greater frequency as more devotees approach middle-classness.

In sum, Sanskritization, Vaiṣṇavization, universalization, and gentrification have each played major roles in shaping modern-day *mātās*, though their proportions relative to one another vary in the case of each goddess in our present study. For any given goddess, moreover, the proportion of each of these transformative components varies in prevalence from site to site. Nonetheless, all of these processes of adaptation are oriented toward the same end of fashioning the image of a goddess that is progressive and prosperous, rather than backward and disadvantaged—in effect, quite the opposite of the stereotypical elite vision of a village *mātā*. In this way, Sanskritization, Vaiṣṇavization, universalization, and gentrification are bound up in a polythetic category we can call, for lack of a better term, “upward mobility.” Alterations enabled by these processes are all applied to the goddess so that her worshippers can follow in her image, the devotee and deity intertwined in a relationship of mutual reimagining. On that note, it goes without saying that the development of any given goddess is a corollary of the above processes of cultivation and upward-mobility operating consciously and unconsciously in the lives of devotees.

But upward mobility is not limited to the aforementioned processes. It seems very apparent that tantra has also been a part of the transformation of *mātās*. All the *mātās* we have detailed in this study have some elements related to tantra. The most notable among these are the connections with tantric goddesses that are affirmed within the temple spaces, publications, and/or iconographies of *mātās*. The tantric component is most salient for Jogaṇī and Bahucarā, as both have connections to the Mahāvidyās. The former is interchangeable with Chinnamastā (albeit with some regionalized traits), and the latter is homologized with Bālātripurāsundarī. Melaḍī is also regularly referred to by the epithet Rājarājeśvarī at several sites throughout Gujarat, some of which we have visited here, and yantras and mantras feature consistently in her lithograph iconography and devotional texts.²³⁴ Relatively mainstream tantra of this sort may provide a more positive, Sanskritic frame for the one-time “dirty” goddess’s well-established association—and synonymy—with the ill-reputed *melī vidyā*. Similarly, Khoḍīyār sites also house yantras, and the goddess also bears the Rājarājeśvarī moniker. We have also seen Haḍkāī affixed with this “Queen of Kings” label, and at Karadra she is transposable with Lalitā.

²³⁴ I am hesitant to hazard an estimate for the exact number of Melaḍī temples that connect their patron goddess to Rājarājeśvarī. That said, it is worth mentioning that at Kaiyal there are plaques lining the interior perimeter of the Quonset-like main hall that recognize a number of prominent Melaḍī temples. Of these 30-plus plaques, four of the temples listed thereupon are dedicated to Melaḍī as Rājarājeśvarī.

Bālātripurāsundarī, Rājarājeśvarī, and Lalitā are all epithets for Tripurāsundarī, Śrīvidyā goddess extraordinaire and, additionally, a Mahāvidyā. Thus, four of the five *mātās* under study here tie back to Śrīvidyā goddesses in some form. This raises questions as to the extent of Śrīvidyā's influence in Gujarat, a line of inquiry that surely deserves a future study of its own. For now, however, we can speculate that, even if these goddesses' worshippers do not have solid links with, say, established Śrīvidyā temples such as the one currently operating in Kadi, the sect still wields some degree of influence, at least nominally, upon the imaginings of *mātās*. We may hypothesize that Śrīvidyā's prominent theonyms such as Rājarājeśvarī, Bālātripurāsundarī, and Lalitā provide solid referents for grounding *mātās* with village origins in the tradition of Sanskritic tantra. For Jogaṇī Mātā, the imagery of the Mahāvidyā Chinnamastā seems to serve a parallel function. Considering these modern-day *mātās*, then, the pithy prosaicism to the effect that tantra “died in Gujarat” is in need of some concerted re-evaluation. Tantra is not “dead” in Gujarat. Rather, it is interwoven into the lives of many goddess worshippers, confirming what Padmaja (1986) posited three decades ago in her studies of major Mātā *śakti-pīṭhas*.

Tantra does not impede any given goddess's movement toward broader, mainstream audiences. The tantra of modern-day *mātā* sites has become so bound up in homologies with safe, Sanskritic goddesses of Mahāvidyā and Śrīvidyā fame that it goes largely unrecognized by everyday worshippers (to say nothing of *pūjārīs* and other officiants). At one time, the spectres of “black magic” and the *melī vidyā* may have been prohibitive to the regular participation of elite and ascendant Gujaratis in *mātā*-related rites. This, however, is quickly changing now that the Śaktic power involved is framed in terms of *sāttvik*, Sanskritic, “white tantra.” Expounding upon this trend, it might be helpful to think of tantra as being capable of mediating between localized village practices, which are often enough ecstatic and *tāmasik*, and the Sanskritic/pan-Indian. That is, tantra can sustain the sense of accessibility, immediacy, and efficacy that village rites offer, while also furnishing a Sanskritic ritual grammar in accord with mainstream and elite (that is, “properly Hindu”) traditions. In this way, tantra patterned after the widely-accepted pan-Indian idioms of the Mahāvidyās and Śrīvidyā may offer something of a mechanism for dealing with disesteemed elements of highly localized village goddesses. As we have seen, there is a recurrent sentiment that Melaḍī, Jogaṇī, and other goddesses who bear a lingering association to black tantra can be steered toward a more constructive tantra—a variant so positive and practical that it does not even have to be labelled as tantric. Tantra, then, is far from the scourge of

Hinduism that colonialists imagined it to be. By now, it may even be capable of serving as a sanitizing agent in itself. Therefore, to the list of all the components parts I have identified throughout the study as aiding in upward mobility for goddesses and devotees alike, I would suggest adding this brand of “white tantrification.”

Tantric elements are almost second-nature at Gujarati *mātā* temples. This illustrates just how appealing and influential a strain of popular, anodyne, and commercialized tantra (not unlike Khanna’s “*bāzārī* tantra”) has become in contemporary Gujarat, and perhaps in India as a whole. By virtue of its pervasiveness in Indian popular culture and its compatibility with consumerist middle-class tastes and aspirations, tantra hardly hinders the *mātās*. By all indications, tantra is a critical aspect of their appeal. The rapid, constructive benefits transacted through the yantras and mantras associated with *mātās*, even if they are not explicitly labelled as tantric, are a part of the drawing power of these goddesses. These speedy benefits are particularly appealing for the upwardly mobile and established middle classes. The imminent realization of class mobility is not necessarily bound up in the types of prosperity—quite often luxury commodities—that are sought after in these rites, but is perhaps more immediately and importantly tied to *how* they are asked for. Participation in this kind of safe, *sāttvik*, Sanskritic tantra may very well be able to affirm, in and of itself, the nascent or established middle-classness of an individual, family, or group participating in *mātā* worship. Whether they are labelled as tantra or not, yantras, mantras, and other tantric apparatuses are all tools that middle-class Indians can and do utilize. Thus, partaking in religious activities involving these tantric apparatuses is, in effect, a way of performing middle-classness and upward-mobility. That tantra could mark participation in mainstream Hinduism and, at that, the ascendant sectors of that fold, casts further doubt on the outmoded but persistent notion that tantra has to be intrinsically peripheral to South Asian societies.

Hindutva values have also come to mark mainstream status insofar as they can enable participation in Indian majoritarian politics. This makes “Saffronization” a means for ascendance that must also be included in our polythesis of upward mobility. Scholars have already established that the cultivation of reactionary agendas, as well as the politically-charged *sāttvik* lifestyle choices related therewith, has been a means by which Dalits and other disenfranchised populations have participated in what is “properly Hindu.” Whether initiated from inside or outside the disenfranchised groups in question, Saffronization of this sort has been a strategy for

improving the social position of Dalits, OBCs, and tribals. On account of Gujarat's status as what Howard Spodek (2010) has called a "laboratory of Hindutva" at the forefront of the Hindu right, the potentialities for Saffronization in this state are ample. On occasion, this sort of upwardly mobile Saffronization showed up at *mātā* temples. This was most obvious at the Melaḍī temple in Beherempur. Here, an upper-caste trust fronted by an RSS-affiliated Brahmin appeared to be working with a receptive Dalit *pūjāri*, Dasharathbhai, in order to lead a largely working-class, lower-caste population toward a more refined vision of Melaḍī. While these collaborations may simply speak to a productive cross-caste encounter, they give the impression of being patterned after "upliftment" movements spearheaded in other contexts by Sangh Parivar associates. At certain critical junctures, Haḍkāi has also made participation in mainstream Hinduism possible for Shahpur Devipujaks. Though elite right-wing Hindus do not seem to be as directly implicated in this context (if they are involved at all), communal riots saw Devipujaks align themselves with Hindu/Hindutva forces as they defended the goddess's endangered temples. Indeed, stories about the goddess taking revenge on specific Muslims who allegedly ruined her *māḍhs* and *derīs* further underscored the idea that a divinely-ordained, righteous victory was being won for Devipujaks. Also being upheld is a communalist vision of Hinduism that incorporates Devipujaks as part of the majority. That the Jogaṇī temple in Naranpura welcomed Prime Minister Modi's family as guests could also suggest some Hindutva ties. That said, the pride the trustees took in the visit probably has more to do with their guests' relations to India's highest political office than it does to party affiliation. The Naranpura temple openly welcomed Muslims and other religious minorities, as did Beherempur and many other *mātā* sites I studied in depth. For the most part, this sort of inclusiveness trumped communalism at *mātā* sites, outwardly countervailing the fundamentals of Hindutva. In my estimation, places where Hindutva values did present themselves, such as Beherempur and Shahpur, are mostly exceptions. Intensely right-wing, communalist tenets, if they are at all present at the other temples I visited, are highly veiled. That said, while I did not see much in the way of Hindutva, I also did not often see or hear Hindutva being openly decried. This may have been the result of efforts on the part of temple trusts to avoid seriously offending Hindutva sensibilities, even if trustees did not themselves support Hindutva. Certainly, a middle-class audience brings middle-class values, within which BJP support often plays a major role. Furthermore, the vegetarianism and

teetotalling promoted at the sites I visited may be as much the results of Hindutva as they are products of Gujarat's deep-rooted ethos of self-restraint conditioned by Jainism and Vaiṣṇavism.

We are left to conclude, then, that the ongoing and imbricated processes of Sanskritization, Vaiṣṇavization, gentrification, universalization, and white tantrification, as well as (in some instances) Saffronization, have all played a role in the reimagining of Gujarati *mātās*. No one of the abovementioned terms suffices on its own, as they are all interwoven in their applicability to upward-mobility. For instance, to treat these changes simply in terms of the class mobility of gentrification or the “caste mobility” of Sanskritization would be problematically reductive, especially considering how difficult it is to tease apart economic status and social rank in Gujarat. And although Brahmins may not enjoy the unequivocal high status in Gujarat that they do in other areas of India, upper-caste religious sensibilities and signifiers ranging from *havans* to Vedāntic philosophies evidently wield sustained symbolic power in the state. As such, these sensibilities and signifiers still serve as central components of overall status. In view of these points of overlap between the processes of upward-mobility we have encountered, it strikes me as futile to seek out a singular, all-encompassing concept. Cachet created through each of these processes has transformed individual village *mātās* into Great Goddesses fit for worship by cosmopolitan, urbanized, upwardly mobile Hindus. Thanks to these processes, *mātās* have gained an amplified public profile. And even though there are still some unconvinced elites, the perennial suspicion toward these goddesses that was promulgated by colonial literati and carried on by Gujarat's ascendant classes has begun to recede in some measure. It is not, after all, unheard of to find Brahmins and other traditional upper-caste elites at modern *mātā* temples as devotees.

In presenting this multiplex of factors constituting upward mobility, it may appear as if we have drifted far afield from Bourdieu, darling theorist of commentators on class in India, but we have not. Bourdieu's approach still very much applies, though we have expanded our frame of reference—our field—beyond “class,” strictly speaking. The Sanskritic, the Vaiṣṇavic, the universal, the middle-class, the tantric, and the saffron all represent resources for upward mobility that agents can utilize at *mātā* temples to cultivate prestige that encompasses—but is not limited to—class status. The kind of status of which we are speaking entails a complex of progressive (and yet in many cases classically-bound) characteristics and capabilities. Modern-day *mātās* and their temple spaces are being constructed in such a way that they become

repositories of symbolic capital. That is to say, *mātās* and their shrines are replete with multifarious avenues by which their devotees may generate prestigious competencies. These temples and the goddesses housed therein are spaces where an individual, family, or even a caste group can engage with a plurality of resources for social ascendance. Any given agent passing through the door of a *mātā* temple, regardless of caste status or income or place of origin, has at their disposal a vast economy of potent signifiers with which they can interact. These include Sanskrit chants, Brahminic ceremonies, wide-ranging Vedāntic-styled theologies, pan-Indian iconographies, powerful mantras, tidily organized spaces, cosmopolitan co-worshippers, and the very palpable presence and possibility of prosperity. This dizzying array of symbolic resources is made less daunting by the fact that said resources are all swaddled in the accustomed trappings of the *Mātā*. This environment provides devotees adapting to a rapidly modernizing, post-liberalization world with an opportunity—an agency—to draw from this variety of resources so as to transform their own lifestyle and self-perception. As such, their lifestyle and self-perception become more congruent with those presumed of perceived elites such as Baniyas, Brahmins, and Jains. This is not, however, mere mimicry of the upper castes and classes, as this ascendant transformation is still attainable without leaving behind the abiding figure of the *Mātā*. Through repeated participation in Sanskritic, Vaiṣṇavic, universal, gentrified, and constructively tantric elements (as well as, in some cases, Hindutva), the modern-day *mātā* devotee can potentially develop a *habitus* of higher status, all within the reassuring frame of reference provided by a familiar goddess. *Mātās* and *mātā* shrines, then, have become integral to the performance of upwardly mobile status.

The performative element of ascendance should not be underestimated. Modern *mātā* sites, as we have seen, often tout their ability to aid in the attainment of middle-class prosperity. But what is all the while equally important is that these sites make it possible for a diverse array of visitors to participate in a *performance of aspiration* toward such an elevated status. What goes for tantra seems to be applicable to *mātā* temples at large: it is not *what* is sought after in the wishes made upon *mātās* that is so essential to ascendance, but perhaps more importantly *how* it is asked for. Making wishes for immediate practical benefits has typified *pāṭlā*-styled interactions at village *mātā* shrines for centuries, but making similar wishes for luxury commodities in an environment stocked with the trappings of Sanskrit, Vaiṣṇavism, Vedānta, middle-classness, and benign tantra, I contend, renders the request itself an affirmation of

potential status mobility. A *habitus* takes time to cultivate, as does generating material wealth, for that matter. *Mātā* temples provide agents with a numinous space in which to rehearse, so to speak, in the meantime.

Hopefully, I have made it clear that participation in these performances of upward-mobility and ascendance at modern-day *mātā* temples should by no means be taken as strictly an individual or family-based concern. While the nature of the ethnography here has focused largely on the experiences of select individuals and their immediate kin, *mātā* temples have also enabled the collective enactment or reiteration of upward mobility for a variety of lower caste and Dalit groups. At many temples, the Sanskritic, Vaiṣṇava, universal, and gentrified components incorporated into the iconographies, rituals, theologies, and physical spaces all converge to combat stigmas that endure in elite Gujarati sectors against relatively non-elite groups. For the the Dalit Valmiki and Chamars, Melaḍī complexes bear witness to the kinds of *sāttvik*, dignified, and prosperous lifestyles to which members of their communities can attain. Much the same goes for the pastoralist Rabaris, Bharwads, and Barots who have traditionally worshipped Jogaṇī. Likewise, Haḍkāī shrines, with their intensive focus on purity, demarcate a space where Devipujaks (and anyone else, for that matter) have to be *sāttvik* and sober, lest the goddess herself chastise them for their indiscretions. *Mātā* temples serve a comparable role for Patels. Although Patels' economic success has won them a spot among Gujarat's most influential and ascendant sectors, they still have not always been treated as elites with regard to their caste status. Thus, several Patel-influenced temples to Melaḍī, Jogaṇī, and Khoḍīyār alike not only reaffirm the acclaimed financial successes of Patels in India and abroad, but also substantiate the group's progressively cultivated Sanskritic and Vaiṣṇava sensibilities.

I should also underscore that it has not been the goal of this study to assert some kind of unidirectional, causal link between the economic or urbanizing trajectories of worshippers and the increasingly mainstream reimagining of village goddesses. This is a nigh impossible determination to make in the absence of statistics on migration, income levels, and so forth. Even if these statistics were compiled and calculated, they would still sorely lack with regard to ethnographic richness and narrative texture. This study should not be interpreted as asserting that the alteration of goddesses and temple spaces necessarily make people upwardly mobile, or, alternatively, that it is solely upwardly mobile people who shape temples and goddesses. The driving force behind transformations, if discernible, has to be parsed out on a case-by-case basis

grounded in the particular narrative of the person, family, or group being transformed. This case-by-case, narrative approach also has to take into consideration the Mātā (or Mātās) being worshipped and the specific temple (or temples) at which the worship is occurring. In this study, we have seen instances of both kinds of transformation: in some cases, upwardly mobile attendees or trustees modify goddesses; in other cases, particular goddesses bring change into the lives of devotees. In most cases, bi-directional aspects of change are apprehensible: devotees reimagine *mātās*, but at the same time *mātās* also help devotees reimagine themselves, and so forth the cycle goes. For this reason, I am content with a more general characterization of Gujarati *mātās*, and see little need for agonizing over causative trends. Historically, we see that goddesses have played a polarizing role as the subject of repugnance and also reform in Gujarat, and this persistent crisis suggests that goddesses endure as critical, contested sites right up to the present day. But this also renders them as potent, vital, and potentially restorative symbolic spaces, pliable enough to be capable of stimulating and embodying tangible social change. In the process of negotiating the identity of the Mātā, then, various individuals, families, and caste groups in contemporary Gujarat have been able to simultaneously negotiate their own shifting identities vis-à-vis social and economic changes that have come with modernity. In Gujarat, as in the rest of post-liberalization India, spiritual and economic transformations go hand-in-hand, not only for devotees but for divinities as well. Many *mātās* write this process large.

In moving toward these conclusions, the present program of research has endeavoured upon a broad range of methods and physical sites. This has come at the expense of depth in some areas. While attempting to blend textual, historical, and ethnographic components, this study has leaned most heavily on fieldwork. The Gujarati language passages we have included really only scratch the surface of the available literature. No doubt, an entire close-textual study could be devoted just to the oft-cited economically-produced devotional pamphlets dedicated to *mātās*. Moreover, the specific question as to whether or not such a literature exists for Haḍḍkāl remains unanswered. Just because devotees denied the existence of such publications, and just because my best efforts to track down these materials proved fruitless, it does not mean that the goddess is without devotional writings. Similarly, the historical component of this research is far from exhaustive and could also be greatly expanded. My searches in the archives of the British Library, the Forbes Institute in Mumbai, and Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda did not turn up an abundance of materials dedicated to the *mātās*, but there is undoubtedly much more

buried deeper in the archival record. Due to practical limitations of time and conceptual limits of space, I admittedly dedicated most of my inquiry to English-language historical materials. To be sure, early Gujarati-language print materials should factor more significantly into future studies of the *mātās*. In particular, the missionary literature on *mātās*, both in Gujarati and in English, deserves further scholarly heed and, again, warrants a study in itself.²³⁵

Another limitation in the present study is a lack of any sustained, programmatic gender-based analysis. On account of the femininity and maternal associations of the *mātās*, as well as the prominent roles women play at their shrines, the gender element presents itself as a necessary line of inquiry. Unfortunately, an involved treatment of gender would have overextended the scope of the present study. While I have attempted to make comments here and there about the roles available to women at some of the temples I visited, chiefly in the contexts where female officiants preside, we are left with few specifics of women's subjectivities as they relate to *mātā* religion. As Loes Schenk-Sandbergen has observed, a lack of communication with female informants is a typical difficulty faced by male ethnographers working in India (1998, 275). Western female researchers are allowed greater freedom in crossing local gender boundaries, and therefore are often afforded superior access to both men and women in a given community (*Ibid.*). While I was able to talk to numerous women at *mātā* temples, it was far more often men who were eager to communicate and disseminate knowledge about their goddesses. Certainly, in my conversations with women, it was rare that issues of gender and sexuality were broached directly, if at all. Thus, further studies of the *mātās* will have to focus in greater depth upon gender and the role of women at their sites. Male *bhuvās* and *pūjārīs* are by all indications the standard at *mātā* complexes, though there are cases where women assume leadership roles. In our present study we met Manjuma at the Khoḍīyār temple in Bapunagar, and Tambs-Lyche has earlier on noted the case of a woman from the Chunvalia caste who was a Melaḍī medium (1997, 134). These few sparing examples of female officiants bear witness to the norm that ritual authority relating to many *mātās* is almost wholly vested in men. Jogaṇī temples mark an exception to this rule, with women such as Ma Laadchi and Anitabahen taking on prominent roles and, by all accounts, etching out spaces of agency for themselves in the process. Why is the role of women more central in the context of Jogaṇī? This may be attributable to the higher

²³⁵ J.F. Fuller's 1908 *Catalogue of the Library of the India Office, Volume II, Part V: Marathi and Gujarati Books*, for instance, contains on pages 250-252 a mini-bibliography of early missionary works in Gujarati.

status that women in Jogaṇī-worshipping pastoralist groups such as Bharwads and Rabaris enjoy relative to males, at least when compared to other castes (Tambs-Lyche 1997, 158). This, however, remains a hypothesis, just one among many others that can and should be scrutinized in future studies of *mātās*.

We have only begun to trace the vast potentialities for future inquiry that the Gujarati *mātās* leave open to us. The dissertation has only briefly touched upon the politics of Melaḍī and Haḍkāī temples as they relate to upward-mobility, and so a more dedicated political study vis-à-vis a variety of *mātās* is surely in order. Only a few temples we visited had outward ties to Hindutva and right-wing communalism, and most prided themselves on welcoming religious minorities, including Muslims. Occasionally, one or two Muslims would appear on site, receiving *darśan* or saying a few words about communal harmony. Further research should determine whether or not these sorts of inclusions stem merely from tokenism—that is, a superficial pluralism masking a deeper sensibility attuned to mainstream majoritarian, Hindu-centric politics and its attendant discriminations. Furthermore, what does the Mātā mean to these Muslims? Answers to this question could likely be found at several robustly syncretic Melaḍī sites throughout Gujarat (heretofore mentioned only in footnotes) that are regularly attended by substantial numbers of Muslims. One such site is located in Nandasan near Kaiyal, and another is on the edge of Bhavnagar. In 2015, I was able to make two preliminary visits to the latter site, which is operated by a Muslim man who described his little temple as a stronghold of communal harmony. In this way, he claimed, the site is a microcosm for Bhavnagar itself. Indeed, he characterizes violence such as that of the 2002 riots as a symptom of Ahmedabad and other communally polarized areas outside of his home region. Saurashtra, by contrast, is relatively harmonious, in his opinion.

The syncretic possibilities at Melaḍī sites do not end with Hinduism and Islam. Remarkably, in the small town of Sara in central Gujarat there is a Melaḍī temple operated by Jains. When I visited the site in April 2015, there was a hall of immaculate white marble pillars under construction, with a goddess carved (or in progress) on every support. Here Melaḍī could be found among mainstay Jain goddesses such as Padmavatī, suggesting that the “dirty” village *mātā* has been so well-scrubbed that she can now interface with the rigidly *sāttvik* epitomes of

Jainism.²³⁶ This might be the single best index of Melaḍī's sanitization. Nonetheless, the temple is well-attuned to non-elite concerns. Its ritual repertoire still involves village hallmarks such as *pāṭlā*, and the Jain trustees report that income from the *dāna* goes to rural Devipujaks. Reportedly, these Devipujaks have come to be very wealthy themselves on that account.

These fascinating Jain and Muslim-styled temples relate just to Melaḍī Mātā, and certainly many other idiosyncratic sites can be found dedicated to Bahucarā, Khoḍīyār, Jogaṇī, and Haḍkāī. But these are just the goddesses we have dealt with in this dissertation. Momāī, Harsiddhī, Śikotar, and Āśāpurī Mā all immediately come to mind when pondering Gujarati goddesses that have yet to be studied in any serious depth. So while this study has spanned various methodologies, communities, and historical periods, it is far from comprehensive, and still little more than an initial exploration. Considering the popularity and ubiquity of the *mātās* throughout Gujarat, we have encountered nothing less than an ocean and have come back with not even so much as drops. Rather, we have little more than a few molecules. If nothing else, the present study has opened up a fertile area for future investigation.

More broadly speaking, it may be in the interest of scholars of South Asia to take up the question of why in India at large, as in Gujarat, it is so often goddesses that are the locus of such comprehensive reimaginings (or at least the academic treatments thereof). No doubt some of the emphasis on Śakti stems from a persistent scholarly fixation on the feminine divine. This fascination is understandable, as goddesses throughout India frequently feature vivid iconographies and back-stories, in addition to tantric trajectories and enduring feminist potentialities. Moreover, the significance of Śakti recurs throughout the history of the subcontinent. The intensive academic attention has led to a surplus of schemas for categorizing goddesses—namely dichotomies such as tooth and breast,²³⁷ *saumya* and *ugra*, and so forth. Few of these schemas have held much value beyond the heuristic. This goddess preoccupation has

²³⁶ Needless to say, the *itihās* of this temple is compelling. The story begins centuries ago with a Devipujak who could not pay his debts to a Jain merchant. The Devipujak attempted to escape from the village with his family under the cover of night. The Jain merchant crossed paths with the fleeing Devipujak and demanded payment. The only capital the Devipujak could come up with to offset his debts was a *mūrti* of Melaḍī. The Jain merchant took this payment, and decorated the statue with a tricoloured (red, yellow, and white) fabric he had in his possession. However, he came to the conclusion that he could not (and would not) appease the goddess through sacrifice. From that point on, Melaḍī was worshipped at Sara in a *sāttvik* way. It was also from that point on that the people affiliated with the temple came to enjoy increased prosperity.

²³⁷ Here I cite Wendy Doniger's juxtaposition between goddesses of the breast, who are gentle and nurturing, and goddesses of the tooth, who are ambiguous and potentially dangerous (1980, 90-91). Doniger's proposed dichotomy maps onto the emic *saumya/ugra* distinction fairly directly.

also left us with an overabundance of terms attempting to characterize the processes by which female divinities undergo alterations—among them, universalization, domestication, gentrification, and saumyaization, to name a few. Why do we not puzzle to the same extent over male divinities? Are male deities in Gujarat and India sources of upward-mobility and symbolic capital to the same extent as goddesses? Could we perhaps dedicate some efforts toward male deities as the loci of alteration and reimaginings, eventually comprehending a domestication, universalization, saumyaization, or gentrification of the *god*? This is worth some rumination, even if these terms and the categories on which they are predicated hardly seem applicable to masculine divinities. Indeed, these foundational scholarly categories barely encompass goddesses, many of which, as we have seen very palpably in our study of *mātās*, do not lend themselves so easily to classification. Perhaps it is the unique ability to bridge these categories of *saumya* and *ugra*, *sāttvik* and *tāmasik* (and for that matter, *rājasik*), and even village and urban, that imbues goddesses with so much power. Perhaps it is this capacity to embody the powers and privileges of both sides of their attendant dichotomies that makes goddesses so galvanizing, pliable, and adaptable in a variety of contexts. Ergo, they can be Sanskritic, village-styled, or tantric. Or, like many Gujarati *mātās*, they can embody some proportion of all three at once. Perhaps the “identity crisis” posited from the outset of this study, then, is better understood as the product of an all-encompassing flexibility that provides a vital source of the power that is attributed to Devīs, setting them apart from other types of divinities. And while goddesses, as we have seen in the case of the *mātās*, are on account of their flexibility capable of undergoing profound transformations, they are also, above and beyond that, fundamentally *transformative*. Just as they collapse conceptual categories, they are also able to narrow the gaps between social distinctions, such as those between classes and castes. Where Śakti prevails, there is always potential for her devotees’ rapid spiritual and material advancement.

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