

KALI(काली): THE BLACK LIBERATOR

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'Kali is understood to represent unfettered, complete knowledge of self and of ultimate reality, fully enlightened consciousness that has transcended all limitations of egocentricity. She is symbolic of the ultimate goal of tantric sadhana (spiritual exercise).' (Kinsley,1997; 47-52)

Atrocities of oppression, white supremacy, and ignorance of Blackness are quite common in my everyday life as well as the history of my family. These factors can be traced to colonization. I find it crucial to note that forgiveness is indeed required, however, once offensive things are forgotten, they risk being repeated. From the stance of an Indian African Black body, I provide the example of British induced suffering from the colonization of my motherland India, namely 'the Bengal famine of 1943' in which 4.3 million people starved to death. The colonial rule of the British had violently enforced ideals of supremacy over the textile industry leading to famine, patriarchy, 'civilization', and reinforced caste systems. Indians were condemned by colonialists; to servitude; violence; and death, based on their dark complexion. As a practitioner of Kali-kula (family of Kali) Tantra, I find it appropriate to use Tantra as a way of perceiving, becoming aware of, and letting go of the impact of colonialism which enforced 'stains' of racism, ignorance, and white supremacy. I refer to Tharoor and Kingsley to support my claims. The main texts of which I reference to in this essay, the *Inglorious Empire: what the British did to India* (2018) by Dr. Sashi Tharoor (2018). However, my main literary source is *Visions of the Tantric feminine* (1997) by David Kingsley. By reflecting on past oppression using the research by Dr. Sashi Tharoor, I am using ancient ancestral Tantra (technology), as well as my contemporary practices of fine art, to create an installation which is intended to be accessible to individuals of all castes, creeds, races, languages, and nationalities through which I believe Tantra could achieve liberation (Moksha) through self-realization.

I acknowledge my existence as absolutely "nothing". And 'the existence' as a walk in the dark of nothingness. A 'nothing' seeking liberation in the dark. Here I sit as self-proclaimed artist, here I sit in this black room, my spine as erect as a disturbed cobra awaiting union with the cosmos. In the complete darkness I lit a

simple clay lamp with sweet oil and a wick of pure cotton. I lit the tip of the wick saying:

“OM KALI!”

I used the flame as a medium of contact to Kali. I had also lit sandalwood incense and encircle her now illuminated black form. A sculpture I had made using the hands I believe ‘she’ had ‘gifted’ me.

Her fiery eyes glisten as the flame vigorously ‘licks’ the air like her lolling tongue. I ask like a child would approach his/her mother. Whilst gazing into the flames in line with her eyes, I beg on my knees asking:

“Amma! How can I affect the world with my art? Solladi(answer me) Amma!”

I had then closed my eyes and experienced visions; it was of an awful memory. The visions began with a racist and white supremacist I had encountered making dreadful remarks to me with a smile. In the same vision, flames engulfed his face as I saw various tantric forms of Kali emerge. Ones I recognized in great visual detail. It was ‘her’ forms; Dhumavati; Bhairavi; Bagala Mukhi and Matangi emanating from darkness. As soon as the vision ended, I had realized that the conceptualization of my exhibition *KALI: The Black Liberator* (2020) was ‘conceived’.

What is liberation?

Common definitions are as follows:

‘ 1. the act or process of freeing a country or a person from the control of somebody else

2. the act or process of freeing somebody from something that limits their control over or pleasure in their own life’ (Oxford Advanced learner’s dictionary,2020)

In the context of *Kali: The Black Liberator* (2020), both definitions are of relevance. One pertaining to the physical cruelty of colonization, while the other touches on an aspect that is beyond the physical. I would describe liberation as a feeling of ecstasy or bliss. In Tantra, it is believed to be the greatest experience in human existence. In my exhibition I attempt to turn wounds from the past into wisdom(vidya) to the betterment of humanity. These are extremely difficult topics to bring to light, but I find it imperative to reflect on the past, no matter how painful or triggering it may be. I hope my artwork has an impact on the possibility of future atrocities. As Ndebele (2007) claims that:

‘if the past is gone, there can be no safety from the future’ (Ndebele, 2007)

In reference to my family lineage, colonialism which was the source for many sadistic influences on the present day. My ancestors along with my grandparents, worked on tea, rice and sugar plantations. My ancestors arrived in 1860 on ships (namely, the SS Truro and SS Belvedere) which carried them as slaves to attend to the sugar plantations across waters from India to Durban, South Africa. They were mere ‘tools’(yantra) used to till the soil for monetary gain for their oppressors (Tharoor,2018). In reference to an artwork called ‘Payday’(2020)(fig.1) reflects upon conversation with my 87-year-old grandmother who worked in the fields of Africa as an indentured labourer for decades beginning at age 7. With only a formal education of up to grade two, she is a beacon of the history of the Indian Diaspora in Africa and the effects of white supremacy. Her knowledge about the world during difficult times is fascinating. Her knowledge on aspects concerning spiritual foresight and ritual is vast. I clearly remember her stating “The White boss will come on his white horse” which was a sign that they were going to be paid (very poorly) in grain and a few cents.

In a contemporary setting of monuments of countless racists and white supremacists on pedestals and in Bronze which I have come across is quite ridiculous. No racist and/or white supremacist should be on a plinth. In Tamil folk music: a hero, hailing from war would ride a white horse, we sing hymns of Madurai Veeran(Hero of Madurai) at Kali rituals in Africa, a spirit who is charged to protect our temples as stated by many local gurus. Please note that almost all information provided has been **verbally** communicated to me throughout my childhood and life. In Tamil, the lyrics are:

Tamil: “Ipoh Vellai Gudarai yellaligiama” [sung with an hourglass shape drum(Udakkai)]

In English: (On a white horse he comes)

In this artwork a found white horse is placed on a pedestal representing white supremacy and the mental pain it has brought to my life. The pedestal is boxes of my anti-depressants which I have to continuously take, that’s a month’s supply, as my grandmother with get paid a salary, on the first of every month I have to collect my coping mechanisms, my ‘pay day’.



Figure 1 Pay Day, 2020, Mixed Media, H:23,3cm L: 23cm W: 13cm

The endless detailed stories of abuse, oppression and racism I was told, greatly enforces the relevance of this exhibition to my life. Found and recycled objects pay tribute to the deceased victims of colonization. The graveyard (Mayanna), which I mimic in the exhibition is a place I use for homage, nostalgia and reflection. This setting leads to *Kali(2020)*, the awakener of liberation (moksha). Mayanna Kali is believed to prefer rituals in the graveyard in which we offer ‘Mayanna Kollai’(a tantric ritual involving sacrificial animals and graveyard soil). As a spiritual aspect to ritual, I use mayanna bhumi (graveyard sand) in my paintings. Mayanna boomi is believed to be charged with energy when invoked with Kali. The graves in the installation symbolize the deaths relating to the Bengal Famines from 1943.

The first and most essential step in my process of painting is meditation, this involves tantric chants aimed at the specific form of Kali being depicted. I offer fruit, food, water, fire and soil (from a graveyard) in honour of the energy form being depicted. I discovered that my practice of artmaking and theory regarding the conceptualization of the artwork are complementary in conveying meaning. An analogy that seems fitting is the notion of the cyclical nature of time. The past, present and future exist harmoniously without necessarily constantly coming into our consciousness, like the teeth on the gears of a wheel (chakra) functioning like a well-oiled machine (tantra), this machine can be interpreted as the human body. I have found that the highest order of tantra is that which is

felt or experienced as it may not be possible to be conclusively documented. From personal experience, tantric meditation and worship of Kali largely involves 'feeling', the chakras energy can be felt in the body, yet chakras are not visible physical organs. The energy centres in which tantra refers to as chakras, manifest as 'Chakra Lingas'(2020)(fig.2) along the spectrum of colour. In my exhibition I attempt to document the personification of the energies or 'Goddesses' in my aforementioned vision. Ideals of colonialism I believe to be 'broken' in the imagery of Kali.



Figure 2 Chakra Lingas, 2020, Mixed Media (clay, cement, turmeric, oil, acrylic, glass, pure brass, black soot, blood and rice)

Kali (काली) means 'the Black one' (refer to Appendix) she is the personification of time (past, present and future). These three elements of time and consciousness are constantly represented in my exhibition by three brass eyes. These three eyes are used in my ritual to conduct energy which assists in the invocation of Kali. These are attached to all of the eyes of my paintings as well as the seven 'Chakra Lingas'(2020)(fig.2). In my view, Kali's blackness is that which is space (Akash), this can be viewed as the darkness of outer space. The manifestations of Kali in tantric practice, worship and meditation are called 'Maha Vidyas', meaning great knowledge' (Kinsley, 1998), they are a collective of ten tantric Goddesses (refer to Appendix).

The importance of materiality and colour of my work are essential in the conceptualization and significance. Rice was used as an offering to Kali but it holds many significances in my installation, for instance the famines. People had no access to the grain they cultivated; very little rice was used as payment to my grandmother when she laboured in the plantations. Henna, neem leaves, turmeric, jynanjana, recycled candlewax, clay, recycled plastic, cotton, linen. My exhibition, *Kali: The Black Liberator* (2020) enshrines several lingas strategically positioned as a yantra, a symbolic tool I use in tantric sadhana. Each linga emerges from rice, an offering to Kali. The sacrificial blood to Kali, signifying Kali's activating quality in nature a metaphoric reflection of the bloodshed caused by colonization. Each sculpture represents each manifestation envisioned and the chakra I feel that they resemble. I associate the red complexioned 'Bhairavi Kali' with the Root Chakra (Muladhara Chakra), the yellow complexioned 'Bagala muki Kali' with the navel (Manipura) chakra, the green complexioned 'Matangi Kali' with the heart chakra (Anahata Chakra), an array of blue is used in 'Bhuvaneshwari Kali: Her body is the Universe', with throat chakra (Vissudhi) and third eye (Anja) chakra, and lastly Dhumavati Kali (purple hue) with the crown (sahasrara) chakra. The orange hue of the cosmetic organic henna used in *Dancing in the Ecstasy of Kali* (2020) (fig2.) represents the sacral chakra (Svadhishthana Chakra), I relate to the human experience of ecstasy, usually felt during meditation when there is a union (yoga) between the person and the rest of the existence (refer to Appendix).

Once one gets a realization of the reality of existence, it helps build the foundation of spiritual liberation by letting the muladhara (root) chakra effortlessly 'open'. In which the path to liberation begins... Kali wears the [...] moon as a crown, emphasizing her control over all of existence, "she blazes like a million rising suns and fills the world with earth-shattering laughter" (Kinsley, 1997; 23). I employed warm yellow light on this artwork, mimicking the warm hue of the sun. To attain this liberation, one must activate or 'touch' the seventh chakra known as sahasrara (the crown chakra) located above the body perpendicular with the crown on one's head. The path to this 'region of bliss' is referred to as Kundalini in which all seven chakras must be activated. I use a number of ancient traditional mediums of spiritual awakeners used within my practice and that of my family, like turmeric, neem. Kungu/Kumkum (red turmeric, rice, jynanjana (Black cosmic eyeliner) (Agama). Other mediums used are an array of recycled materials obtained during the with great difficulty due to the restrictions of the coronavirus pandemic like recycled candlewax, clay, and recycled plastic.

As mediums I make use of rice (burned-offered to Kali through fire- a tantric practice), jynanjana (ritualist black smoke soot), oil, turmeric, Kumkum (red turmeric), cotton, glass, pure brass, bhasma (sacred white ash), incense ash, wood glue, enamel paint, impasto and liquin. The degradation of Tantra, Hinduism and Kali are prominent among the atrocities caused by the British. Since 'India became a mere exporter of raw materials and foodstuffs, raw cotton, as well as jute, silk, coal, opium, rice, spices and tea' (Tharoor, 2018), I decided to use some of these materials within my financial means. Tharoor had found that:

'British racism was accentuated by convictions of Christian superiority: as William Wilberforce, Britain's most famous evangelical Christian, put it: 'Our religion is sublime, pure, and beneficent. Theirs is mean, licentious, and cruel.' For many Britons, imperialism was principally justified as a moral crusade to liberate Indians from 'ignorance, idolatry and vice' (Tharoor, 2018). Whilst In 1837, Kali-worshipping 'thugs' were murdered by the British for being 'savages' and uncivilized which strengthened their colonial rule and increased the fear of colonialists' (Tharoor, 2018). As stated by an individual who lived through the colonial experience; Jawaharlal Nehru, who wrote in a 1936 letter to an Englishman, that:

'British rule [was] based on an extreme form of widespread violence and the only sanction [was] fear. It suppress[ed] the usual liberties which are supposed to be essential to the growth of a people' (Tharoor, 2018).

The Lion (sun) and Jackal (Moon) sculptures with no arms while Kali is depicted with four indicate the symbolism of the necessary elements of human life is symbolic and present in my exhibition. 'In the Branaadharmapurana the Mahavidyas as a group are said to cause trouble and conflict among people, but also to give spiritual liberation (moksa) [...] The Branaadharmapurana also says that when Brahma creates the world and Visnu maintains it, they use the powers of the Mahavidyas "like two arms."' (Kinsley, 1997; 25). Kali "walks" alongside her tantrics, with 'knowledge (vidya) that "she pervades the entire cosmos" and that wherever one (the devotee) goes, Kali is there in one of her forms. (Kinsley, 1997; 29- 38). My ancestors believe that the human body is greatly affected by the lunar phases hence my paintings of Kali and her attendee (which represent the moon) are associated with the Lunar phases (Kinsley, 1997; 45-54) (refer to Appendix) as well as Stages of consciousness (Kinsley, 1997; 46) (refer to appendix).

All paintings are painted on primed cotton and pure linen. This refers to the Indian Textile industry which colonialism systematically destroyed. Another definition of Tantra is a 'loom'. I continue to wear traditional Indian clothing from India to attend all prayers, especially esoteric Kali rituals in Durban. Usually extravagantly designed garments of pure Kashmiri silk, pure cotton, pure linen and many organic fabrics. Once in contact with my skin I believe that it makes my physical body more receptive, attentive and focussed on the ritual being performed. It is well known that for centuries the handloom weavers of Bengal, India, had produced luxurious fabrics which was the main source of income for Indians. In *Inglorious Empire: What the British did to India (2018)*, Dr. Shashi Tharoor claims:

‘Britain’s Industrial Revolution was built on the destruction of India’s thriving manufacturing industries. Textiles were an emblematic case in point: the British systematically set about destroying India’s textile manufacturing and exports.’ (Tharoor, 2018)

The amount of violence that has ensued by colonist soldiers of Black artisans are horrific and sadistic. The soldiers of the East India Company smashed the looms and, according to at least one contemporary account, breaking their thumbs so they could not weave and create art which would be atrocious for a contemporary visual artist such as myself (Tharoor, 2018).

‘In power, the British [...] stopped paying for textiles and silk in pounds brought from Britain, preferring to pay from revenues extracted from Bengal, and pushing prices still lower. They squeezed out other foreign buyers and instituted a Company monopoly. They cut off the export markets for Indian textiles, interrupting longstanding independent trading links [...] [while] British manufacturing grew. The imposition of [high] duties and tariffs of 70 to 80 per cent on whatever Indian textiles survived, making their export to Britain [...] impossible. A grim and diabolical view of India had emerged due to the systematic destruction of the Indian Textile industry. The stalwart administrator of the time, Lord William Bentinck, wrote:

‘the bones of the cotton weavers were bleaching the plains of India’ (Tharoor, 2018)

A scene of death which are evident in my paintings, i.e. *Dhumavati Kali*, *Bhairavi Kali* and installation of graves which make references to these grim descriptions of a postcolonial India, a once powerful nation. Artisans in the form of master weavers became beggars after being oppressed (Tharoor, 2018).

Tharoor (2018) expresses that the destruction of artisanal industries by colonial trade policies did not just impact the artists. The British monopoly of industrial production drove Indians to agriculture beyond levels the land could sustain. These imposed taxes were not affordable by Indians who were then tortured. British, especially since the Company exacted payments from Indians were beyond what they could afford, the rest had to be obtained by bribery, robbery and even murder (Tharoor, 2018). Durant writes that:

[tax] defaulters were confined in cages and exposed to the burning sun; fathers sold their children to meet the rising rates'. Unpaid taxes meant being tortured to pay up, and the wretched victim's land being confiscated by the British. The East India Company created, for the first time in Indian history, the landless peasant, deprived of his traditional source of sustenance. (Tharoor, 2018)

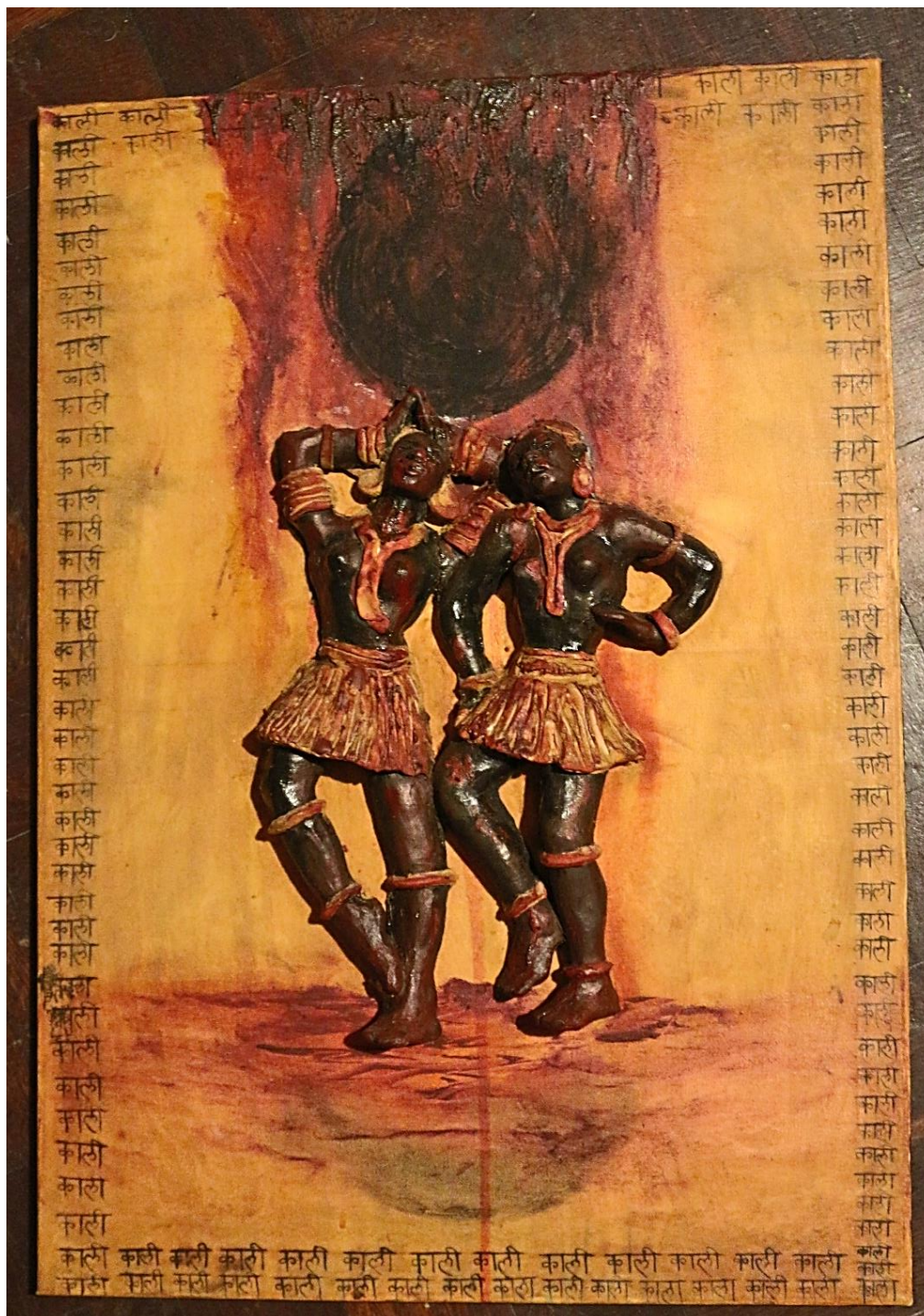


Figure 3 Dancing in the Ecstasy of Kali, 2020, mixed media(found objects,clay,fountain pen,Indian ink,Kumkum,turmeric-manjal,jyananjanna, blood and oil), 59,5cm x 42cm.

This mixed media painting(fig.3) is associated the naked, bare breast which has been evident in the depiction of Kali over centuries. As a summary of the colonial cruelty, Burke accused the East India Company of: “cruelties unheard of and devastations almost without name...crimes which have their rise in the wicked dispositions of men in avarice, rapacity, pride, cruelty, malignity, haughtiness, insolence.” He described in colourfully painful detail the violation

of Bengali women by the British-assigned tax collectors—'they were dragged out, naked and exposed to the public view, and scourged before all the people...they put the nipples of the women into the sharp edges of split bamboos and tore them from their bodies.[...] The caste system had been given a badge or label in which the lower caste was bare breast whilst the higher caste was not. Southern Indian women, whose breasts were traditionally uncovered, found themselves obliged to undergo the indignity of conforming to Victorian standards of morality; soon the right to cover one's breasts became a marker of upper caste respectability and efforts were made to deny this privilege to lower caste women.' (Tharoor, 2018)

With reference to the tantric unbridled nature of Kali, in relation to what was considered 'uncivilized'. I depict all my figures as bare breasted wielding weapons in defence or defiance of paradigms and injustice. The dancing figures in the artwork 'Dancing in the ecstasy of Kali' are naked. They are in a state of ecstasy and are liberated. They dance in blood, the vital representative of the activating quality of Kali, a sacred offering to Kali in tantric practices. In my view, Kali's appearance dismisses and ridicules patriarchal shackles as the 'correct' and 'moral' way of living.

Kali-kula tantra does not need to be 'evolved' or changed to remain relevant to contemporary life. My practice is ritualistic in nature however not confined or restricted by religion. Origins of Kali and Tantra are essential in an individual living in union (yoga) with the existence. By doing so, race, caste, creed, ideals of supremacy, colonial constructs become irrelevant. In the eyes of Kali, conflicts will have no significance as the inevitability of it being consumed by Kali is uncovered internally. With reference to historical suffering, elaborately documented by Dr. Shashi Tharoor (2018), alongside the illumination of tantra and the postcolonial view of the divine nature of blackness, in context of Black divine feminine, expressed by David Kinsley (1998), through the self-realization of Kali; racism, white supremacy and ignorance become irrelevant.

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Appendix

1. In an extraordinary confession, a British administrator in Bengal, F. J. Shore, testified before the House of Commons in 1857:

‘The fundamental principle of the English has been to make the whole Indian nation subservient, in every possible way, to the interests and benefits of themselves. They have been taxed to the utmost limit; every successive province, as it has fallen into our possession, has been made a field for higher exaction; and it has always been our boast how greatly we have raised the revenue above that which the native rulers were able to extort.’ (Tharoor, 2018).

2. A claim by Dr. Sashi Tharoor states that: ‘if weather or drought reduced their agricultural work, there was no back-up source of income from cloth. Rural poverty was a direct result of British actions. (Tharoor, 2018)
3. such puja takes on a somewhat different meaning in a tantric context, as we shall see. In tantric worship, which is generally referred to as sadhana, or spiritual exercise, the aspirant seeks to achieve an awakened or enlightened state of consciousness through techniques that are physical, mental, ritualistic, and spiritual at the same time. A central theme in tantric sadhana is the identification of the macrocosm with the microcosm, which is represented by the human organism, specifically by the sadhaka, the practitioner or adept. Through meditation techniques, rituals, images, mantras, yantras, and mandalas (schematic diagrams), the adept systematically identifies parts, aspects, or dimensions of himself or herself with parts, aspects, or dimensions of the cosmos. The deities are thought of as aspects of the cosmos that correspond to aspects of the human organism— mental, physical, or both. The aim of tantric sadhana is to establish identity with the deity worshiped, to appropriate that deity, or to awaken that deity within oneself, and then to offer it puja, which in effect means worshiping the divinity within oneself. Or, conversely, one worships the deity residing within in the hope of awakening in oneself the reality that it represents. The self-divinization of tantric sadhana may have several results. The adept may acquire an expanded self-awareness, that is, the wisdom of selfknowledge, which is often said to be tantamount to achieving moksha (mukti or "liberation"). That is, tantric sadhana may result in redemptive transformation. Or such sadhana may lead to heightened sense perception, the acquisition of siddhis through which the adept excels at one of the senses or even transcends the limitations of sensory perception. These siddhis, in turn, may lead to enjoyments impossible before achieving such perfections. Or tantric sadhana may result in an intensified or expanded mental capacity or power that enables the practitioner to achieve feats of selfcontrol[...]. The Kalika-purana describes a continuous set of actions, but we can think of the ceremony as having four parts: (1) preparation, (2) meditation, (3) worship of the goddess herself, and (4) concluding rites. The opening rites of sadhana aim primarily at purification of the adept

and the delimitation of an appropriate place within which to perform the ceremony. SA The adept bathes, sips water (signifying internal purification), and asks the goddess to rid his mind of any impurities. He also recites certain mantras at this point to expel potentially harmful spirits. The adept next purifies the place of worship by sprinkling water on the ground. He carefully inspects the items to be used in the ritual to ensure that they are unblemished. Flowers to be offered, for example, should be free from insects. Items are also purified by means of mantras and water. The adept then draws a yantra (a schematic diagram) representing the particular goddess to be worshiped. [...] [Kali] has her yantra or mandala. In the second phase of the ceremony, the adept performs a series of acts that are primarily mental to further purify himself. In general, this part of the rite aims at the adept's symbolic death and dissolution. The text says that the body is composed of impure elements—mucus, feces, urine, and so on—and as such is unfit to be an instrument of worship. The adept's symbolic death is followed by his mental re-creation of the world and, most important, by the appearance of the goddess herself. Assuming the correct posture and practicing breath control, the adept begins a ritual that releases his life force, his *jiva*, from his body. He imagines his *jiva* passing through different stages, each connected with an element: earth, water, fire, air, and sound. Finally, identifying himself with space, he imagines his life force leaving his body through the top of his head. This signals his symbolic death.

4. ¹ “Kali is black, which in fact is what her name means. She has a fierce countenance, stands on the supine body of the god Siva, and has four arms. Her upper left hand holds a bloodied cleaver and her lower left hand a severed head. Her right upper hand makes the sign "fear not," and her lower right hand makes the gesture of bestowing boons. She is naked, apart from a garland of severed heads and a girdle of severed arms; her hair is unbound and disheveled; and she is often standing in a cremation ground or on a battlefield. She is almost always mentioned as the first of the Mahavidyas and occupies a preeminent place in the group. In some texts and in some settings, the other Mahavidyas are understood to arise from her and to be her different forms. 2. Tara is usually given as the second Mahavidya, and in appearance she is similar to Kali. She is dark; her left foot is placed on a corpse or on Siva; she wears a tiger skin; her hair is tied in a long braid; she is potbellied and has four arms. In her left hands she holds a knife and a severed head, and her right hands make the signs of giving favors and granting fearlessness. She often stands in the midst of a cremation fire. 3. Sodasi (also known as Tripura-sundari, Lalita, and Rajarajesvari) is a beautiful young girl of sixteen with a red complexion. She is sometimes shown astride Siva in sexual intercourse. They are on a pedestal or couch supported by the gods Brahma, Visnu, Rudra, and Indra. Some descriptions say that the four gods who support her pedestal are Brahma, Visnu, Rudra, and Yama. Sometimes she is said to sit on a lotus that emerges from the navel of Siva, who is reclining below her. Her four arms hold a noose, goad, bow, and arrows. 4. Bhuvanesvari, who is said to nourish the three worlds, holds a piece of fruit in one of her four hands, makes the sign of assurance with another, and holds a goad and a noose in the other two. Her breasts are large and ooze milk. She has a bright, light complexion and smiles pleasantly. 5. Chinnamasta has cut off her own head with a sword. Her left hand

supports her head on a platter, and her right hand holds the sword with which she cut it off. Three jets of blood gush from her neck: one stream enters the mouth of her severed head; the other two jets enter the mouths of two female companions. Chinnamasta stands on the copulating bodies of the goddess Rati and her husband Kama, the god of sexual lust. They in turn are lying on a lotus or sometimes a cremation pyre. Sometimes Chinnamasta (with her head chopped off) is shown astride Siva, copulating with him as he lies beneath her. Her hair is loose, and she is naked. 6. Bhairavi has a fierce appearance; her primary role in the cosmic process is destruction. Her complexion is said to be as bright as thousands of rising suns. She wears a garland of skulls and clothes made from the skins of demons she has killed; her feet and breasts are covered with blood. Her four hands hold a rosary and a book and make the signs of fearlessness and granting wishes. The Kalika-purana says that her eyes roll from intoxication and that she stands on a corpse. 7. Dhumavati is tall, with a pale complexion and a stern, unsmiling face. She is dressed as a widow, in white clothes with noadornments. Her clothes are dirty and her hair disheveled. She is toothless, her breasts long and pendulous, and her nose large and crooked. She is hungry and thirsty, has a quarrelsome nature, and rides a crow or is seated on a chariot. She holds a winnowing basket and sometimes a trident. 8. Bagalamukhi, "she who has the head of a crane," usually sits on a throne of jewels, which is sometimes in the midst of a body of water. She is dressed in a yellow sari. In one hand she holds a club, with which she Fig. 4. Left to right, top to bottom, the Mahavidyas Tripura-bhairavi, Dhumavati, Bagala, Matangi, and Kamala. THE MAHAVIDYAS AS A GROUP is about to beat a dark-complexioned enemy. With another hand she is pulling his tongue. Sometimes she sits on a corpse, and in some cases she has a crane's head, or a crane is her vehicle, or vahana. 9. Matangi has several different forms. Usually she is a beautiful young woman with a dark or black complexion. The moon adorns her long hair, and she sits on a jeweled throne. She wears a beautiful robe and a garland of flowers. Her four hands hold a goad, noose, sword, and club. Her eyes are described as intoxicated from passion. 10. Kamala is a beautiful young woman with a golden complexion. Two elephants flank her and pour pitchers of water on her while she sits on a lotus and holds lotuses in her hands. She is clearly a form of the goddess Lakshmi [...]⁴ The number of Mahavidyas also varies. The Niruttara-tantra lists eighteen Mahavidyas,⁵ while the Nradapancardtra says that there are seven million Mahavidyas."

5. ¹ using a colourful metaphor as Secretary of State for India in the 1860s and 1870s, said: 'As India is to be bled, the lancet should be directed to those parts where the blood is congested... [rather than] to those which are already feeble for the want of it.' The 'blood', of course, was money, and its 'congestion' offered greater sources of revenue than the 'feeble areas'
6. ¹ 'She is the terrible one who has a dreadful face. She should be meditated upon as having disheveled hair and a garland of freshly cut human heads. She has four arms. In her upper left hand she holds a sword that has just been bloodied by the severed head that she holds in her lower left hand. Her upper right hand makes the gesture of assurance and her lower right hand, the sign of granting favors. She has a bluish complexion and is lustrous like a dark cloud. She is completely naked, and her body gleams with blood that is smeared all over it from the garland of bleeding severed

heads around her neck. Her ear ornaments are the corpses of children. Her fangs are dreadful, and her face is fierce. Her breasts are large and round, and she wears a girdle made of severed human hands. Blood trickles from the corners of her mouth and makes her face gleam. She makes a terrible sound and lives in the cremation ground, where she is surrounded by howling jackals. She stands on the chest of Siva in the form of a corpse. She is eager to have sexual intercourse in reverse fashion with Mahakala. She wears a satisfied expression. She smiles. She is lustrous like a dark cloud and wears black clothes. Her tongue lolls, her face is dreadful to behold, her eyes are sunken, and she smiles. She wears the crescent moon on her forehead and is decorated with serpents. She drinks wine, has a serpent as a sacred thread, is seated on a bed of snakes, and wears a garland of fifty human heads that hangs all the way down to her knees. She has a large belly, and the thousand-hooded serpent Ananta looms above her head. Siva is present as a boy beside her. She makes a loud, laughing sound, is very dreadful, but bestows the desires of the aspirant.- 68 KALI She is like a mountain of collyrium, and her abode is in the cremation ground. She has three red eyes, her hair is disheveled, and she is awful to look at because of her emaciated body. In her left hand she holds a jar full of liquor mixed with meat, and in her right hand she holds a freshly severed head. She is eating raw flesh, she is naked, her limbs are adorned with ornaments, she is drunk on wine, and she smiles.'

7. ¹ The British introduced Christianity and its ideals violently which began the degradation of ancient practices (like Tantra) and ancient religions. This led to conflict within India causing death and violence. This played in role in what would then be considered 'civilised' oppressing ancient traditions, religions and cultures. Tantric art was destroyed as it was seen as obscene and savage. This included images, paintings and stone sculptures of Kali. [...]In1828 Rammohan Roy(influenced by colonists) who had founded an organisation(Adi Brahma Samaj) in Calcutta which was aimed at reforming the Hindu religion and a way of life. This 'way of life' is arguably Tantric practices and spirituality, whilst other religions denounced polytheism, "idol worship" and esoteric Kali rituals.(Tharoor, 2018) 61.]
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10. 'A tantric scholar suggested to me yet another approach to explaining the interrelationships of the Mahavidyas, one that identifies them with the different lunar tithis (the thirty days of the waxing and waning moon). According to this scholar, Kali is identified with the new moon (amavasya) and Sodasi with the full moon (purnima). These two goddesses represent completeness of knowledge, according to this scheme, in two different ways, both equally valid. Kali represents complete knowledge in terms of transcendence. Like the new moon, she is beyond what can be perceived and circumscribed. Or perhaps one could say that Kali represents knowledge gained by getting rid of all false knowledge, by shedding ignorance, while Sodasi represents knowledge gained by acquiring increasing amounts of knowledge until one is filled with wisdom. The former would be suggested in the tithis of the waning phase of the moon, while the latter (Sodasi) would be suggested in the tithis of the waxing moon. Sodasi, whose name means "the sixteenth," represents complete knowledge or wisdom in terms of being all-inclusive. As the sixteenth, she includes all the other fifteen tithis. The other Mahavidyas are associated with the waxing and waning lunar tithis according to which of the poles they most resemble. The tantric scholar suggested that Chinnamasta, who is close in nature or meaning to Kali, would represent the first and second waning lunar tithis, while Bhuvaneshvari and Kamala, both of whom are associated with abundance, would represent the last four tithis prior to the full moon.(Tharoor,1997;45)
11. , 'the Mahavidyas might be understood as symbols of the stages (or types) of consciousness experienced by tantric aspirants in their progressive spiritual development. Each goddess confers a certain type of perfection, blessing, or awareness. These perfections (siddhis) or types of

consciousness, meditative states, or moods (bhavas) 72 might be understood as progressive, some presupposing or being more inclusive than others. Several informants independently of each other suggested this approach to the Mahavidyas, and it has some textual support.⁷³ In this approach, Kali is understood to represent unfettered, complete knowledge of self and of ultimate reality, fully enlightened consciousness that has transcended all limitations of egocentricity.⁷⁴ She is symbolic of the ultimate goal of tantric siddhand (spiritual exercise). Tara, who is very similar to Kali in appearance, symbolizes a high or expanded state of awareness, but a state that has not entirely transcended physical and personal limitations. Bagalamukhi represents a state of sharply focused consciousness, an intensified will that is capable of directly influencing people with whom the adept comes in contact. Kamala and Bhairavi symbolize lower states of consciousness, in which the adept is preoccupied with satisfying bodily and mental needs. The other Mahavidyas symbolize states of consciousness that arise between the adept's preoccupation with worldly, bodily, or personal needs and desires and the eventual dawning of the fully enlightened consciousness represented by Kali. In tantric religion, the progressive nature of siddhand is often described as the awakening, arising, and ascent of kundalini'sakti. This female power or energy is depicted as a coiled and slumbering serpent at the base of the spine in a cakra (center), pictured as a lotus. Through meditative techniques, the aspirant awakens this power and causes it to ascend by way of the central channel, the sushumna nadi, which traverses the body along the line of the backbone. As the kundalini rises, it passes through six other cakras, also represented as lotuses, and awakens or invigorates them as it reaches them. Different bhavas, "spiritual moods" or states of consciousness, are sometimes associated with the awakening of each cakra. According to one adept, when kundalini'sakti awakens in the muladhara cakra, one experiences a feeling of dissatisfaction with ordinary life. That is, kundalini siddhand represents a desire to go beyond or to expand normal consciousness.⁷⁵ Ultimately, the siddhanta (aspirant) seeks to have the kundalini rise to the topmost cakra at the crown of the head, where she unites with Siva and creates the bliss of awakening (mahasukha). In interpreting the Mahavidyas as states of consciousness, meditative states, or mental perfections (siddhis), one might think of them as symbols of the nature of the mental states associated with the seven cakras of kundalini yoga. 76 There is, in fact, evidence that the Mahavidyas are associated with the cakras, and with the kundalini generally. It is said of Bhuvaneshvari, for example, that she sleeps in the muladhara cakra, the lowest cakra, where the kundalini sleeps.⁷⁷ It is also said that Bhuvaneshvari cuts the knots of (or awakens) the cakras and rises to meet Siva, which means that she is equated with the kundalini. 1 * Another example is Tripurabhairavi, who is called Sat-cakra-kramavasi (she who abides in the six cakras). 79 Lending credibility to this approach to the Mahavidyas is the tantras' ranking of different paths. Many tantras name seven (sometimes nine) different paths and describe and rank them, usually from inferior (in which the aims are worldly) to superior (in which the aims are transcendent). A standard list of the seven paths, in ascending order, is: Vedacara, Vaisnavacara,

Saivacara, Daksinacara, Vamacara, Siddhantacara, and Kaulacara. The Saktisamgama-tantra says that the highest path, the Kaulacara, comprises the kula, the family of worshipers, who know the truth that reality is comprised of s'akti and Siva. 8 0 The Mahdnirvdna-tantra says that the Kaulacara path includes the performance of the panca makdra (five essentials) ritual and is only entered upon after the aspirant has been initiated by a guru. 8 1 A good example of goddesses representing progressive states of perfection is found in the Srividya cult. In ritually and meditatively moving from the outward parts of the Srividya cakra, which represents the entire cosmos, to the center, the adept acquires different siddhis, or perfections. The outer siddhis are less powerful and more worldly in nature, while the inner siddhis are both more spiritual and more powerful. These siddhis, furthermore, are personified as goddesses.⁸² There is even a tradition that associates particular goddesses with each of the seven cakras. Dakini is associated with the muladhara cakra, Rakini with the svddhisthdna cakra, Laksmi with the manipura cakra, Kakini with the andhata cakra, Sakini with the vis'uddha cakra, Hakini with the djnd cakra, and Nirvana-sakti with the sahasrdra cakra^P For the most part, these goddesses are hardly known outside this context, and of the seven, only Laksmi, whom we may identify with Kamala, is a Mahavidya. What is missing in order to make the association of the Mahavidyas with the cakras and ascending states of consciousness a convincing interpretation of the interrelationship of the Mahavidyas is a clear tradition that asserts a hierarchy or progressive ranking of the ten goddesses⁸⁴ and consistently identifies each one with specific paths, siddhis, or cakras. Although a certain Mahavidya may sometimes be identified with a particular path, siddhi, or cakra, there is seldom a consistent pattern, except, perhaps, in the case of Kali, who is often identified with the Kaulacara T HE MAHAVIDYAS AS A GROUP 4 « path, which is considered the highest. Although we find Mahavidyas associated with kundalini s'akti, the muladhara cakra, or the cakras generally, it is rare to find Mahavidyas assigned to each of the other cakras in a predictable way. It is also curious that there are ten, not seven, Mahavidyas if they are meant to be symbols of the progressive stages of consciousness experienced by aspirants in kundalini yoga' (Kingsley, 1997; 46-49).