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Introduction

AS HAZEU POINTED OUT long ago, the idea of the female as a locus of power (*śakti*) became far more pervasive in Indonesia than it ever did in India, where the concept originated (1901, 60–72). However, in Indonesia it was more of a folk notion than a formal, religious, and political concept. The reason for this may lie in the fact that throughout Indonesia, and perhaps most of Southeast Asia, there is an emphasis on the female line, even among such avowedly patrilineal peoples as the Batak. Thus on ritual occasions, especially those relating to the traditional (*adat*) areas of birth, marriage, and death, women play a major role. As FOX (1980, 12) points out for eastern Indonesia, female blood is the vehicle for "the flow of life"—it is this, in conjunction with the male semen, that produces human beings.

Women, especially those in the ascending matrilineal line, have a special connection with the souls or spirits of their offspring. The Batak believe that a person's well-being is completely dependent on the benevolence of this line (RASSERS MS, 80). There is more to this, however—not only is the ascending matrilineal line the origin of life and well-being, it is also the source of a person's spirit or "soul." This is very clear in the Batak belief that a person's *tondi* or *tendi* (spirit) comes from the *hula-hula* (wife-givers) (RASSERS MS, 35–36). Such ideas are found on Java as well. There the mother is responsible for her child's inner, spiritual aspects while the father takes care of the outer, physical ones through his maintenance of the household.

Spirit, then, seems to be considered as something female (cf. WESSING 1986, 108), and women are seen as the source of life, of well-being, and of a

person's animating spirit—or rather of the embodied spirit that is the person. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that the female spiritual entities discussed in this collection reflect these qualities. It is precisely these spirits and goddesses who deal with life and well-being that have been able to maintain themselves on Muslim Java, where, unlike Hindu Bali, Indian-derived deities have generally been suppressed. While most Indian deities are now known only from myths and shadow-puppet presentations and no longer play a part in the day-to-day lives of the people, goddesses such as Dewi Sri (the spirit of rice) and Nyai Roro Kidul (the non-Indian Spirit Queen of the Indian Ocean, also referred to as Nyai Lara Kidul and Ratu Kidul) have remained undiminished in their significance for the Javanese.

The goddess Durgā, whom Hariani Santiko, Francine Brinkgreve, and Clara Brakel discuss in the present special issue, is one of the goddesses that has retreated on Java, although she is still worshiped on Bali. Tārā, the focus of Roy E. Jordaan's contribution, has also largely disappeared from the archipelago. Even the goddesses who continue to reign on Java, however, have undergone a process of. assimilation with the preexisting local spirits. The rice goddess Dewi Sri, for instance, received her Hindu name from the Indian goddess Sridevi, even though in India Sridevi had little if anything to do with agriculture in general and rice in particular. Originally Dewi Sri was an earth spirit who became "Hinduized" as a result of the Indian influence on Java and Bali (see WESSING, in press). The connection between them is based on Sridevi's association with prosperity and good fortune (STUTLEY and STUTLEY 1977, 285), which in Indonesian agricultural communities are closely connected with the rice harvest. The Spirit Queen of the Indian Ocean, Ratu Kidul, was similarly an autochthonous spirit who received few Indian attributes.

The goddess Durgā seems at first to be an exception to the benevolent image presented by other Indonesian goddesses. Santiko points out that there are two main portrayals of her: that of a benevolent goddess concerned with human welfare, and that of an evil being involved with sorcery, disease, and general chaos. Yet even in the latter aspect she does not fully lose her benevolence. As Santiko points out, the evil aspect of Durgā spread among Javanese villagers perhaps because of their misunderstanding of certain Tantric rites in which the goddess was involved. Yet it should not be forgotten that benevolent and malevolent aspects often exist simultaneously in the same sacred being or force; one countenance is seen by devotees and followers, while the other is presented to enemies and other dangers (cf. BERG 1938, 32; LAI 1994, 34). Thus the two would have been inherent in Durgā in any case.

These two faces appear again in Brinkgreve's discussion of Balinese offerings to Durgā and Pretiwi (the earth). Offerings to Durgā actually

encompass both deities, perhaps because of her at least partial assimilation of the original Indonesian earth spirits. A similar assimilation is found in Java between Durgā and Nyai Roro Kidul—offerings to them, as Brakel points out, consist of food for Durgā and clothing for the goddess of the southern ocean; together the two make up a complete offering. Durgā here represents death and chaotic desire, while Nyai Roro Kidul (Ratu Kidul) symbolizes protection of the realm and the ruling house. Here again we see the malevolent and benevolent faces of the divine, or here the faces of destruction (Durgā) and (re)integration (Ratu Kidul). In Jordaan's paper, which identifies the previously unknown presiding deity of the central Javanese temple Candi Kalasan as the Buddhist goddess Vaśya Tārā, it becomes clear that this deity and Ratu Kidul have close affinities as well—to the point where much of the symbolism associated with them seems virtually identical.

G. J. Resink's brief paper is the first to focus solely on Ratu Kidul, the Spirit Queen of the Indian Ocean. It emphasizes her link to water and land, and as such to the realm under the rule of the king, with whom she has an alliance. This same idea is explored in my own paper, which also asks why this goddess is said to have originated in Sunda (West Java) and how her frequently emphasized sexuality functions in relation to the ruler's task of governing the realm. Noting that some of the mythology identifies Sunda as the spiritual source (i.e., the matrilineal ascendants) of the rulers of Java, I argue that an alliance with the Spirit Queen from West Java serves to legitimize their rule while sexual relations with her help to fecundate the earth and promote fertility and the general welfare.

The final two papers again deal with varieties of autochthonous Indonesian earth spirits. Rens Heringa describes Dewi Sri, identified above as the Sundanese and Javanese embodiment of the spirit of rice in Indian garb. She points out, among other things, how myths told in different villages in a particular region link together to form a whole—a mythic or spiritual geography—in which the rice spirit is associated with local protective spirits or those of deceased founders of villages who come to figure in local versions of the rice origin myth.

The motif of a spiritual geography is also found among the Karo Batak of Sumatra, as described in Beatriz van der Goes's paper on the *beru dayang*, a category of female spirits that animate essential aspects of life and society, including rice. The *beru dayang* are seen as inhabiting specific domains that, when considered together, describe the landscape, the village, and the dwellings. In van der Goes's paper they are shown to be involved in the growing of rice as well as in aspects of human sexuality and fertility.

In conclusion, these papers show how the female element is a vital

aspect of the creation and maintenance of life and all levels of society in Indonesia. While the papers cover a narrow range of the phenomena associated with the female element, leaving room for further exploration of female tutelary spirits and the spirits of female founders of territorial units, it is hoped that together they will provide a stimulus to further exploration of the role of the feminine in Indonesia and Southeast Asia generally.

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