



Meeting the sacred feminine consciousness

Lina Mookerjee describes her transformational journey to find her true self

How many times have you experienced events in your life that were seemingly unrelated and yet, on reflection, were connected and offered you the chance for profound change? Well, this happened to me. In this article I intend to explore how, through a sequence of unplanned and unexpected events, I met a part of me that I had unconsciously kept in shadow. It is the part I call the 'sacred feminine consciousness'. The following is an account of my recent experience of a serendipitous weaving of events.

The first of these events took place in May 2011, when I decided to expand my spiritual experiential group work beyond the 'Meditation and Self-Healing' group I had been running for two and a half years. I was moved by a very strong intuitive desire to focus on the theme of the 'sacred feminine' and its relevance to the modern spiritual seeker. Consequently, I developed a course called 'Healing the Sacred Feminine', which comprised seven monthly sessions, each focusing on a sacred feminine archetype (from both the Eastern and Western religious/philosophical worlds), including the Fire Bearer, Initiate, Warriores, Healer, Weaver, Priestess and Crone.¹ The intention was to explore feminine qualities, including power, nurturance, wisdom, healing, creativity and holding the unconscious.

During my researches for the course, I became increasingly convinced of the significance of the sacred feminine and its appropriateness for a present-day connection to spirituality. I also began to discover that it has had a powerful influence in history; indeed, the power of this energy, it seemed to me, had been perceived as such a threat that it had been suppressed and negatively 'repackaged' by patriarchal societies and religions.

A group of 20 participants applied for the course and were due to assemble for the first session in September.

While my interest in the sacred feminine was gathering momentum, another parallel process emerged, this time on a personal level. In August, I was told I would need a hysterectomy and, in preparation, I would have to undergo three months of hormonal treatment – in effect, an accelerated menopause. I was in shock that, at 43 years of age, not only was I facing an operation I associated with a much later life stage; I was also being fast forwarded in age-time beyond my actual age. I felt myself needing to enter into a deeper reflective space, to ask myself, 'Why is this happening now?'

As the weeks progressed and my symptoms worsened, I was drawn to reflect on the significance of this operation,

and especially the removal of a female organ. I felt deep sadness and loss – the loss of a physical part of me and a sense of lost opportunities. At this point, I acknowledged my lifelong conflict with my feminine, and so began the process of reviewing its impact on my life.

Conflict with the feminine

My ambivalent relationship with my feminine self began as an infant. My early experiences were influenced by my parents and their Hindu Brahmin lineage and Indian-Bengali culture. A patriarchal culture rich in acknowledging the sacred feminine in goddess form, its limitations became clear when I realised this same level of respect and admiration was not available to the mortal girl/woman. Unconsciously, I learned early on that being a girl was going to be difficult and restrictive. I also observed how girls were judged and blamed without explanation; how cultural and religious norms denied us access and rights. I was the last of three daughters, disappointing my parents, who longed for a son. As a consequence of the negative messages from both the collective culture and my parents' sense of failure, I no longer valued and abandoned my connection with the feminine part of me. I learned to believe that it was too dangerous.

I survived by developing a stronger, compensating masculine (*animus*) presence that offered me strokes and rewards. Sadly, this was at the expense of my feminine, which by now was relegated to the depths of the shadow dimension. I excelled at school and studied for a degree in electrical/electronic engineering, and on graduation I worked as a professional engineer for a regional electricity company. As my confidence grew, so did the risks, including developing an ambition and thirst for influence as I competed with my peers for promotion. I completed further study in management.

As my popularity, abilities and responsibilities increased, so did the resistance around me from my male peers and seniors. I faced barriers to promotion and opportunities; I received little recognition of my work and was refused access to further study. I assumed it was because I was 'not good enough' or 'unable to stand the pressure'. Later I realised it was the patriarchal company's norm for professional women to reach a certain level of promotion and to go no further.

Feeling disillusioned and now searching for depth and meaning to my work, I began to plough a new furrow. I returned to my ancestral spiritual roots to train as a yoga teacher, with the intention of running my own yoga school. I gained a national reputation for teaching person-centred yoga, and my school vision finally materialised. Within five years, the Praxis School of Yoga was ready for the world to enter. Yet, even within the yoga community, I met narrow views of feminine consciousness, providing another opportunity to fine-tune my own *animus*. In both Indian and British yoga collective consciousness, I encountered attitudes (which I considered unconscious) that devalued practices and qualities associated with feminine

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consciousness. To give an example from Indian culture, only men have the right to be priests, and only men are recognised as able to teach yoga and religious philosophy. From a Western/British perspective, 'doing yoga' meant practising masculine strengthening practices, and 'being yogic' meant focusing almost exclusively on ever more demanding physical postures (*asanas*).

Self-awareness and sensitivity

During my three-year training, I struggled as I was assessed and judged primarily for my left brain skills and my capability to 'do yoga'. I concluded that patriarchy has flourished within this type of yoga, which encouraged the valuing of masculine practices above the feminine reflective practices that I had known from my own culture. These practices enable a deepening of self-awareness and the development of a sensitivity that is necessary for yoga as a spiritual discipline. Recognising the need for both these qualities, I have formulated my own yoga approach. Respecting and valuing the masculine and feminine, I have developed and integrated practice sequences that build towards true wholeness. Change is recognised as vital for healthy functioning – another quality of the feminine.

Yet, I realise now that it is therapy (my own, through my client work and spiritual meditation and healing group work) that has provided (and continues to provide) opportunities to explore sacred feminine dimensions safely, without limitations and judgment. I have been able to identify restrictions and, as they become apparent, healing



and change has happened. This is what I consider to be one of the most important qualities of the sacred feminine.

I am now two months post-surgery and, as I convalesce, I realise these events provided me with a great opportunity for healing, for moving towards a greater sense of wholeness. Three important factors have enabled me to reclaim a significant part of me and to build a conscious relationship with my sacred feminine:

1. I trusted my initial intuitive hunch to explore the sacred feminine concept as a theme
2. I used the 'healing the sacred feminine' collective experience – as I facilitated sessions, I observed the powerful effects of a group connecting with the feminine. The benefits of engagement were amplified by the group working together, collectively
3. I connected physically through my body's somatic experience of imposed menopause, gynaecological surgery and post-operative healing. Psychologically, I've reflected on my losses and, through this, I have found a crucial part of me and gradually learned my own way of being with my feminine.

As I conclude this shared reflection, I return to my question about unrelated events converging to give meaning. On a personal level, my hysterectomy experience has been a most valuable mirror. In Tantra yoga, the womb is considered the house of the unconscious feminine – a holding space of potentiality.^{2,3} For me, it was a safe space to protect my sacred feminine consciousness until the right time for it to emerge. My operation was the removal process to let the old ways (personal and cultural) become exposed and released, and to allow for my healing to begin.

As for my 'Healing the Sacred Feminine' group, at the time of writing we will shortly resume our journey together. I will attempt to facilitate the group from this new perspective, encouraging each of us to move forward to build a vital

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conscious connection to the 'sacred feminine', both on a personal and collective consciousness level.

So the next time a series of unexpected events emerges, take a step back; you might see a 'weaver' at work, creating a tapestry of connections for you to use, and possibly a springboard towards further inner and outer growth.

Biography

Lina Mookerjee is a former electrical engineer who now practises as a humanistic counsellor, meditation and workshop facilitator and is Director of the Praxis School of Yoga in Nottingham. Her spiritual approach is informed by a Jungian-yogic matrix. Current research interests include eastern spirituality in the west, Kali archetypes and the 'sacred feminine' in personal/spiritual growth. Email lina@praxis-ppd.com and visit www.praxis-yoga.co.uk.



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