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# A Trans-Religious Experience

By Jennifer Gann

## 1. Religious Background

My beloved mother raised my baby sister and I as non-denominational Christians. As a kid, I attended Sunday school at Calvary Chapel, in both Riverside and Costa Mesa, California. I fondly remember Bible stories and children's songs, and even had a crush on a couple of teachers!

However, as a transgender person of Scots-Irish, German, and Cherokee ancestry, I've always found the Judeo-Christian misogyny and patriarchy to be a completely foreign concept.

In the 1990s, while fighting my criminal case, and picking up new ones for Prisoner Resistance actions, at Folsom and Pelican Bay, I became interested in the pre-Christian, Indo-European cultures, mythology, and philosophy. I delved into Odinism, history, the Amazons, the Greeks,

2

the Druids, Nietzsche, and the Aryan religion of ancient India.

On July 21, 1998, nearly thirteen years ago, I enrolled in the Siddha Yoga Home Study Course, which is offered free of charge to prisoners by the SYDA Foundation Prison Project. At the same time, I was studying Hare Krishna literature from the ISKCON Prison Ministry.

As a transgender woman, I have always believed in the sacred Feminine and the divine Mother Principle, which was the basis of ritual Goddess-worship and matriarchy in ancient civilizations — such as the Amazons, or the gender-variant Galli priestesses of the Roman Empire.

## II. The Siddha Yoga Path

The Siddha Yoga course is over 15 years long. It explains in simple, everyday language the basic concepts of Kashmir Shaivism and Vedanta — which is the Hindu belief that the all-pervasive and formless Shiva

(God) manifests as the Universe. The course helps students to begin and sustain a disciplined practice of meditation.

A couple of years into the course, I was sent a book by Swami Kripānanda, "The Guru's Sandals". I was blown away! I determined right then and there to seek Shaktipāt initiation as a full-time Siddha Yoga student, and to become a devotee and disciple of Gurumāyī Chidvilasānanda.

Swāmī Chidvilasānanda, affectionately known as Gurumāyī to her devotees,



is the current Siddha Guru. She received the authority of the Siddha Yoga lineage, after taking vows of monkhood, in 1982, from Baba Muktananda before he passed away, in Ganeshpuri, Maharashtra, India.

When I wrote to

Swāmi Kripānanda seeking shaktipāt initiation, I received a personal reply from India that Gurumāyī herself imparted to me the mantra — Om Namah Shivāya!

The Hindu scriptures revere the Guru's feet, which are said to embody Shiva and Shakti, divine consciousness and energy. Powerful vibrations of Shakti flow from the Guru's feet, which are a mystical source of grace and illumination. Thus "The Guru's Sandals", are objects of the highest veneration and worship.

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"The merging of Shiva and Shakti is the energy of bliss from which the entire universe comes into being, a reality beyond the Supreme and the non-supreme. It is called the Goddess, the essence, and the glorious heart. This is the Creation, the supreme Lord."

— Tantraloka 3.68cd-69

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Siddha Yoga is a Goddess-centered spiritual path, and Gurumāyī is seen as Mahādevī incarnate — the very embodiment of Goddess Chiti Shakti. Therefore, I strive to perform my sādhanā (spiritual discipline), and to integrate Her teachings into my daily

life. I constantly meditate on the Guru and the various forms of the Goddess, repeating the mantra, and studying the scriptures and books.

In India, transfolk are referred to as "hijra" and are recognized as a third gender. Ardhanārīshwarī (Half Woman Goddess) is one of the principle forms of Shiva and Shakti, merged into one androgynous deity. Thus, the concept of gender-variance and transsexuals are integral to Indian culture and spirituality.

### III. Conclusion

Bo Lozoff, of the Prison-Ashram Project, has written in "Just Another Spiritual Book, (Human Kindness Foundation, 1990), page 13, that:

"The most revolutionary political act, the most revolutionary social act, and the most revolutionary moral, personal act, is simply learning how to sit still and shut up. We call that meditation"

The Hindu saint, Śrī Aurobindo, was a revolutionary imprisoned in the early 1900<sup>s</sup> for actions against British

6

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Rule in India.

As Lozoff also states in "Deep & Simple: A Spiritual Path for Modern Times", (Human Kindness Foundation, 1999), page 45, "But as agents of the Divine, as characters in the never-ending 'Play of God', we are heroes and heroines grappling with good and evil... the classic universal forces which naturally oppose each other in each of us, and in the Universe as a whole."

As an Amazon transgender woman, a Maoist, and revolutionary feminist, I find that Siddha Yoga appeals to me as one of the oldest, surviving, indigenous, goddess-centered religions in the world. Additionally, the fact that it's headed by an Indian woman, it bears a close resemblance to the matriarchy of the Amazons, who were devoted to the goddess Artemis and to their Queen.

Therefore, I bow to the lotus feet of Shri Gurumāyī Chidvilasānanda.  
Sadgurunāth Mahārāj ki Jai!  
Om. Shanti.