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## Mother Goddess as Mother Nature

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# **Mother Goddess as Mother Nature**

A Modern Interpretation of the Ancient Mother Goddess figure in the Ecofeminist  
Movement Today

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Religious Studies Senior Thesis  
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## **Abstract**

This paper analyzes the connection between the Ancient Mother Goddess and the modern EcoFeminist movement by illustrating similar traits and symbolic images that they share. I first examine how far back the mother figure was praised in human history, and how images of the feminine body connect to the nurturing aspect of our Earth in Paleolithic times. I then analyze the Mother Goddess figure through three ancient religious Goddesses; the Hindu Goddess Devi and all of her embodiments, the Ancient Egyptian Goddess Isis, and the mother goddess Gaia in Greek mythology.

In these sections, I connect common traits between these figures such as a mothering role, a connection to a cosmic or otherworldly realm, and finally an earth-bound presence with nature. I then relate the Mother Goddess figure to the current Ecofeminist movement by showing how this movement is a modern worship of the Goddess who is Mother Earth. This paper discusses how all three of these Mother Goddess figures represent nature, femininity, and life but also embody Mother Earth herself. In conclusion, I argue that the Mother Goddess worshiped in ancient times is present in today's call to mend our relationship with Mother Earth, and is invoked knowingly or unknowingly through the love and care we express for our planet.

## Introduction

As humans, we center many aspects of life around the mother figure and archetype, only one of those being ancient worship of the Mother Goddess and divine feminine energy. We enter into the world the same way and have our first experiences of consciousness in the womb, and so our first homes are our mother's bodies. It is understandable then that there is a history of humans worshiping the female body in a cosmic and otherworldly way. The Mother Goddess figure, or the Universal Mother, is a concept that many see as a religious deity; praised as something untouchable and prayed to for a prosperous future. That, however, is not entirely true as the Mother Goddess is not religious in origin.

The idea and image of the Mother Goddess goes back 30,000 years, though numerous cultures and religions have altered that image with time. The Goddess figure has ties back to the Ice Age, connecting to this famous piece of art, "The Earth Mother of Willendorf," which presents a sacred image of the feminine that emphasizes a womanly and motherly figure. The Paleolithic time has no written evidence today, but with the help of preserved art and relics, we can see that the female body was worshiped as a representation of the earth itself.

As Paleolithic people observed the natural process in a woman's body-menstruation, pregnancy, birth, lactation-the earth was understood by analogy to be the great womb out of which all life emerged. They believed that the earth was the mother, especially the mother of animals "upon whose continued presence human life depended." Just as the plants withered, died, and fell into the earth, so did animals. Humans also returned to the earth's womb at death, to be reborn again like the plants in the great seasonal round.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Gadon, Elinor W. "The Ice Age: The Earth As Mother ." *The Once & Future Goddess*, Harper & Row Publishers, New York, 1989.

Though these earliest Goddess images are not the focus of this paper, it is relevant to mention how old the comparison of the female body to nature and the earth is. It is important that the Mother Goddess figure is not only seen as a religious deity, but as a representation of the earth that we live on, as that was its original form. Before today's beloved (religious) mother figure, the Virgin Mary, the divine feminine was worshiped as something else, known as the universal Mother Goddess in many religions and cultures. Whereas the Virgin Mary or the modern mother is associated with fertility, a nurturing nature, etc., this Mother Goddess was seen as a direct connection to our earth and all living things on it.

This paper highlights three Mother Goddess figures that have all been worshiped in a religious context, but that also represent forms of nature and our earthly domain in similar ways. By analyzing the Hindu Goddess Devi (and her many embodiments), the Egyptian Goddess Isis, and the Ancient Greek Goddess Gaia, I create an image of the Goddess figure that transcends all differences of religion and culture by showing a shared connection to Mother Earth. Though it is not a common practice to worship these Goddesses in modern times, this paper presents the idea that we worship the Mother Goddess figure in many ways today knowingly or unknowingly. We do this through all connections to the earth including Ecofeminist movements, social and ecological activism, being in touch with nature, or by simply acknowledging the danger our environment and planet is in.

Given the state of our social and political world today, as well as the environmental crisis of Climate Change, we must begin to see the planet as something more than just the place we live. Ecofeminism, or ecological feminism, looks at scientific findings about our economy and environment through a feminist lens, highlighting the need to see the earth as a living thing that

takes care of us if we take care of it. This movement also argues the urgency of connecting back to our roots with the earth both spiritually and physically. Ecofeminism has made a comeback in the last decades and shows up in many forms, such as political movements to prevent Global Warming, social movements of unity and respect, and individual empowerment of the self and the human body.

While there is still time, let us fulfill our promise. Let us reclaim the trees of knowledge and of life. Let us regain our lost sense of wonder and reverence for the miracles of life and love, let us learn again to live in partnership so we may fulfill our responsibility to ourselves and to our Great Mother, this wondrous planet Earth.<sup>2</sup>

In this paper, I show how these Mother Goddesses from ancient cultures and religions appear in today's world through Ecofeminism, and how we connect to the Mother Goddess through our great mother Earth. To first show this connection, I analyze the Hindu Mother Goddess Devi and her image as the Universal Mother, as well as how her many embodiments in the Hindu tradition show that she is truly the mother of all.

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<sup>2</sup> Diamond, Irene, and Gloria Feman Orenstein. "The Gaia Tradition And The Partnership Future: An Ecofeminist Manifesto." *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism*, Sierra Club Books, San Francisco, CA, 1999.



## Devi, the Universal Mother in Hinduism

*O Mother of the Universe!  
You who provide basic sustenance  
and subtle nourishment for all creatures!  
Please feed us, Holy Mother!  
Satisfy every level of our hunger!*<sup>3</sup>

Hinduism is the oldest known religion in our history, as the vedic traditions of Hinduism date back to 1500 and 900 BCE.<sup>4</sup> Because of this long history, Hinduism is a complicated religion that has many deities that people worship, as some would say there are 33 gods while others may say there are 330 million.<sup>5</sup> The term Devi translates into English as ‘goddess’, so it is a general name used for most feminine deities worshiped in the Hindu tradition. Between the different branches of Hinduism and alterations of time, Devi has taken different definitions as well as many embodiments, including the Goddesses Parvati, Gauri, Durga, and Kali. Devi is the divine feminine energy and Hindu tradition considers her to be the Great Mother, both in light and dark energy.<sup>6</sup>

Many see Devi (The Great Goddess) as the ultimate reality and the force of life; the beginning, the end, and cosmic energy itself. Some of the earliest Hindu beliefs rely on the Goddess being the center and source of life. “*Shri* is a very ancient name of the Goddess used with particular reference to her role as the source of all life, for without *Shakti*, primal energy, the

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<sup>3</sup> Hixon, Lex, et al. “Satisfy Every Level of Our Hunger!” *Mother of the Universe: Visions of the Goddess and Tantric Hymns of Enlightenment*, New Age Books, Delhi, 2004.

<sup>4</sup> Dallapiccola, Anna L. “The Development of Hinduism.” *Dictionary of Hindu Lore and Legend*, Thames & Hudson, New York, NY, 2002.

<sup>5</sup> Rahul. “How Many Gods Are There in Hinduism?” *Hinduism Facts*, 18 Nov. 2021, [www.hinduismfacts.org/how-many-gods-are-there-in-hinduism/](http://www.hinduismfacts.org/how-many-gods-are-there-in-hinduism/).

<sup>6</sup> Dallapiccola, Anna L. “The Dictionary.” *Dictionary of Hindu Lore and Legend*, Thames & Hudson, New York, NY, 2002.

male god is dormant, lifeless.”<sup>7</sup> This Goddess figure was/is an intricate part of the Hindu tradition and way of life, as she represents *shakti* (primal energy of life), the energy that everything comes from. Devi and her many embodiments represent the earth and all of its aspects including the rivers, trees, mountains, and the mother figure who embraces every person and living thing.<sup>8</sup> It is obvious that Devi is a large part of the Hindu tradition, and that her stance as the Mother Goddess holds great power, as worship of her image is still happening in Hindu culture.

As well as being an all-powerful Goddess, Devi also represents a dualistic balance in nature, as some of her other forms are Goddesses who personify all aspects of life. Parvati, the Goddess of fertility, love, and devotion, is one of the lighter versions of Devi.<sup>9</sup> One of the darker forms, Kali, is the “personification of both creativity and destruction power of time,”<sup>10</sup> and is known for the image of her with many arms, one holding a sword while another holds the head of a man. Apart from these dualities, Devi is also the mother of the earth, and thus a connection to all of life and nature.

In the rhythmic cycles of Nature - the rising and setting of the sun, the waxing and waning of the moon, the change of the seasons, the dance of tides and the shifting fertility of women - man sensed the unending transformations of the goddess: from seductive nymph through tender matron to stern crone.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Gadon, Elinor W. “The Ice Age: The Earth As Mother .” *The Once & Future Goddess*, Harper & Row Publishers, New York, 1989.

<sup>8</sup> Harvey, Andrew. “Universal Mother .” *The Divine Feminine: Exploring the Feminine Face of God throughout the World*, Conari Press, Berkeley Calif, 1996.

<sup>9</sup> Garden, Goddess. “The Hindu Goddess Parvati.” *The Goddess Garden*, 18 Nov. 2018, [thegoddessgarden.com/the-hindu-goddess-parvati/](http://thegoddessgarden.com/the-hindu-goddess-parvati/).

<sup>10</sup> Dallapiccola, Anna L. “The Dictionary .” *Dictionary of Hindu Lore and Legend*, Thames & Hudson, New York, NY, 2002.

<sup>11</sup> Pattanaik, Devdutt. “Chapter 1.” *Devi, the Mother-Goddess: An Introduction*, Vakils, Feffer, and Simons Ltd, Mumbai, 2000.

In Hinduism, the Mother Goddess is everything; she is life, death, nature, earth, etc. and thus is an all-powerful female figure. The worship of the Mother Goddess in Hindu tradition has influenced the Goddess cult today, as these female deities created a new kind of worship of the divine feminine. The Mother Goddess cult began movements of freedom for women as it brought to light the connections between nature, the goddess, and the Earth. Many people today worship the Mother Goddess, and Devi has been a major influence to this movement. Devi and the Goddess take different forms across Asia and have influenced other religious and spiritual beliefs in other areas of the world as well.<sup>12</sup>

There is much controversy today on whether female deities and Goddesses in Hinduism should be feminist role models or connections to the Mother Goddess, as many of them are written as mere second hands to the “main Gods”: Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva. In the Vedas (Hindu sacred texts), Devi herself often appears at the side of a male God.<sup>13</sup> However, aside from this, Hinduism and other spiritual traditions in India are some of the few that worship the Divine Feminine so fully, and are still influencing this worship in modern times.

Evidence of this veneration for the feminine is widely prevalent throughout India - whether revered as nature or life force, a woman or Mother or Virgin, as Great Goddess, or as any one of her lesser emanations such as Sarasvati, Goddess of Learning, or Lakshmi, Goddess of Prosperity, or even as the supreme, ultimate, attributeless reality.<sup>14</sup>

I have begun this paper with the Great Hindu Goddess Devi, as she is a representation of how ancient the Mother Goddess figure is, and how deeply this figure connects to the rhythms

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<sup>12</sup> Husain, Shahrukh. “Liberating The Goddess.” *The Goddess: Power, Sexuality, and the Feminine Divine*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 2003.

<sup>13</sup> Dallapiccola, Anna L. “The Development of Hinduism .” *Dictionary of Hindu Lore and Legend*, Thames & Hudson, New York, NY, 2002.

<sup>14</sup> Harvey, Andrew. “Universal Mother .” *The Divine Feminine: Exploring the Feminine Face of God throughout the World*, Conari Press, Berkeley Calif, 1996.

and roots of our Earth and Mother Nature herself. As said above, feminine Hindu deities have highly influenced the cult of the Mother Goddess, and much of this influence has come from the connection of the divine feminine to nature and what the earth provides for humans.<sup>15</sup> Forests and vegetation are a large part of religious worship in India, as they symbolize sustenance and life. For this reason, the importance of harmony between humans and nature has been a prevalent ideology in India.

In Hinduism, the term *Purusha-Prakriti*, refers to the cosmic male energy and the earthly feminine energy, or “Father God and Mother Goddess”.<sup>16</sup> In Hindu Tradition, these terms together represent the balance of the cosmos and nature, as well as the connection between the universe and Earth.<sup>17</sup> This concept of balance is similar to the ecofeminist movement, as it argues that we need to connect back with Mother Earth and change actions towards all living beings. There is a connection here between the ancient worship of the Mother Goddess Devi and her many feminine faces and the modern movements that call us to connect back to our roots, both cosmic and earth-bound.

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<sup>15</sup> Crooke, W. “The Cults of the Mother Goddesses in India.” *Folklore*, vol. 30, no. 4, Dec. 1919, pp. 282–308, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0015587x.1919.9719110>.

<sup>16</sup> V, Jayaram. *The Symbolism of Purusha and Prakriti*, [www.hinduwebsite.com/symbolism/purusha-prakriti-symbolism.asp](http://www.hinduwebsite.com/symbolism/purusha-prakriti-symbolism.asp). Accessed 16 May 2023.

<sup>17</sup> Ruether, Rosemary Radford. “Toward A Feminist Eco-Theology For India.” *Women Healing Earth: Third World Women on Ecology, Feminism, and Religion*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll (N.Y.), 2002.

## Isis, Ancient Egyptian Mother Goddess

*I am Nature,  
the Universal Mother,  
mistress of all elements,  
primordial child of time,  
sovereign of all things spiritual,  
queen of the dead,  
queen also of the immortals,  
the single manifestation of all gods and goddesses that are.*<sup>18</sup>

Though Ancient Egypt is one of the most renowned civilizations in humanity's past, it is also very mysterious as most of what we know about this amazing empire comes from the few relics and texts from that time.<sup>19</sup> One of the most interesting aspects of Ancient Egyptian culture was the religious system, as it was polytheistic and highly centered around themes of death and the journey to the afterlife. Egyptian religion was similar to that of Hinduism in the way that they worshiped the divine feminine in the form of many female Goddesses. One of the most famous being Isis, referred to as the Immortal Goddess and mother of all, who was worshiped for over three thousand years and grew quite a following over that time.<sup>20</sup> As Ancient Egypt had a very unique cosmology, their deities were both cosmic and earth bound in a complex way. In Egyptian mythology, Isis was born from the earth God Geb and the sky Goddess Nut, and was the sister and wife of Osiris (the Egyptian Lord of the Underworld).<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Harvey, Andrew. "Tree of Life: Ancient Egypt." *The Divine Feminine: Exploring the Feminine Face of God throughout the World*, Conari Press, Berkeley Calif, 1996.

<sup>19</sup> "Ancient Egypt: Civilization, Empire & Culture." *History.Com*, [www.history.com/topics/ancient-egypt/ancient-egypt](http://www.history.com/topics/ancient-egypt/ancient-egypt). Accessed 30 Apr. 2023.

<sup>20</sup> Harvey, Andrew. "Tree of Life: Ancient Egypt." *The Divine Feminine: Exploring the Feminine Face of God throughout the World*, Conari Press, Berkeley Calif, 1996.

<sup>21</sup> Husain, Shahrukh. "The Triumph of Isis." *The Goddess: Power, Sexuality, and the Feminine Divine*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 2003.

Apart from familial ties, Isis had her own name as the Mother of the Universe and Queen of the Earth. Because of these titles and connections to other deities, Isis has many images and representations of who she was/is. Goddesses in Egypt are associated with the Tree of Life, a very important and sacred image in their culture and belief system. The branches of the Tree of Life represent the cosmos and sky, whereas the roots “reach down to the abyss of the Netherworld.”<sup>22</sup> In Egyptian belief, every part of life is connected, and it did not end at death but continued into the afterlife if one was to make it into that realm.

Various images of the Egyptian Goddesses depict them carrying or offering the fruit of the Tree of Life, which represents sustenance for the journey into the afterlife. They are depicted offering vases with water that would nourish and aid souls in the journey between dimensions, showing how powerful the female deities are in this religion.<sup>23</sup> Texts about the sacred Tree of Life mention three Goddesses specifically: Nut, Hathor, and Isis. This shows how significant these deities were in Ancient Egypt and to the process of entering the afterlife. Much of what we know today about Ancient Egyptian culture/religion comes from “The Book of the Dead”, the funerary text written in cursive hieroglyphs. This text mentions the Goddesses Nut and Hathor often in relation to the Tree of Life, but it does not mention Isis.

However, she is featured in many artifacts (sarcophaguses, pillars, etc.) as being in or by the tree. Marie-Louise Buhl (1947) describes an eighteenth-nineteenth century limestone stela that depicts Isis inside the Tree of Life and calls her “Isis the Great, the God's Mother”.<sup>24</sup> Buhl mentions that many people today still worship sacred trees in Egypt and that even though the meaning of this Tree of Life following is difficult to fully understand in modern terms, it is

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<sup>22</sup> “The Tree of Life.” *Tree of Life* \*\*\*, [www.landofpyramids.org/tree-of-life.htm](http://www.landofpyramids.org/tree-of-life.htm). Accessed 30 Apr. 2023.

<sup>23</sup> Harvey, Andrew. “Tree of Life: Ancient Egypt.” *The Divine Feminine: Exploring the Feminine Face of God throughout the World*, Conari Press, Berkeley Calif, 1996.

<sup>24</sup> Buhl, Marie-Louise. “The Goddesses of the Egyptian Tree Cult.” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, vol. 6, no. 2, Apr. 1947, pp. 80–97, <https://doi.org/10.1086/370820>.

obvious that there is a religious and spiritual connection between goddesses, nature, and the journey between realms. Amongst all of these roles, Isis is also called the Queen of the Earth, as she is deeply connected to nature and the earth in Egyptian mythology.

As Queen of the Earth, she was the fertility of the earth's life. "The Green One" or "The Creator of Green Things." As Queen of the Underworld she was, with her husband Osiris, one of the judges of the dead, and the wind of her great wings as vulture goddess, Nekhbet, gave them the breath of eternal life. As the Tree of Life, Isis, like Nut and Hathor, offered the food and water of immortality to the dead.<sup>25</sup>

The Goddess Isis connects the living and the dead together, as she is both cosmic, and human, as well as an image of divine feminine energy. As said above, Isis was worshiped for centuries, as her praise did not stop at the end of the Egyptian Empire. The Goddess Isis was later influential in the Christian faith, as Shahrukh Husain (2003) says, her image was blended into the persona of the Virgin Mary. In 80BC, worshiping of Isis spread to Rome where people openly worshiped her until a Christian church replaced her sanctuary, and "Many of her attributes continued to be revered throughout the Christian world, having been absorbed into the person of the Virgin Mary."<sup>26</sup> This suggests that there is some connection between Isis and the Virgin Mary, an important mother figure worshiped in Abrahamic traditions, which accounts for an estimated 4 billion people around the world today.<sup>27</sup> This forms another example of how the Mother Goddess transcends religions, cultures, and time, showing up in different ways, but always connected to the original figure of Mother Earth.

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<sup>25</sup> Harvey, Andrew. "Tree of Life: Ancient Egypt." *The Divine Feminine: Exploring the Feminine Face of God throughout the World*, Conari Press, Berkeley Calif, 1996.

<sup>26</sup>Husain, Shahrukh. "The Triumph of Isis." *The Goddess: Power, Sexuality, and the Feminine Divine*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 2003.

<sup>27</sup> Author, No. "The Global Religious Landscape." *Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project*, 14 Apr. 2022, [www.pewresearch.org/religion/2012/12/18/global-religious-landscape-exec/](http://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2012/12/18/global-religious-landscape-exec/).

Egyptian mythology presents Isis as being everything and fulfilling every role, and as said by the Greek historian Plutarch, “The female principle of Nature ... called countless names, she turns herself into this thing or that and is receptive of all manner of shapes and forms.”<sup>28</sup> The Goddess Isis is the full embodiment of the Mother Goddess archetype, and has highly influenced Goddess worship, even up to today. Her connection between the divine and the earth-bound is an example of the foundational argument in the Ecofeminist movement, as many would say that we have abandoned our ties to Mother Earth, and are neglecting our environment as well as our divine feminine powers. Yaakov Jerome Garb (1999) expresses the critical nature of our environmental crisis and suggests that maybe a new image of our Earth is necessary here:

Should we heed the call of many ecofeminists, to reclaim the image of Earth as a sacred Goddess? True, it renders the Earth into an organic dynamic entity, does not rely purely on the visual, and restores the multidimensionality of myth to our stories about the Earth and our relationship to it. But we should check carefully whether we really want to view our relationship with the Earth through genderized lenses. What baggage will carry over from one domain to another (especially in a culture whose relation to both women and mothers is as misogynous as ours is)? What are the consequences - for both Earth and women - of reinforcing this age-old alignment between them. Where does Goddess imagery leave men? The choice between identification with a fierce roaming Sky God on the one hand and an all-encompassing, nurturing Earth Goddess on the other - what a caricatured and degenerate subset of the full range of archetypal possibility! Bring on the Sky Goddesses, the Earth Gods, and all the wild and fecund creatures of psychic life - restore to both men and women those richly creative images of self-hood and earth-hood so long banished from our culture.<sup>29</sup>

There is much argument in today's world surrounding religious and spiritual beliefs, which has created a rift in humanity that has caused more harm than good. In this paper I show how the ancient Mother Goddess figures demonstrate a balance between cosmic energy and the

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<sup>28</sup>Husain, Shahrugh. “The Triumph of Isis.” *The Goddess: Power, Sexuality, and the Feminine Divine*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 2003.

<sup>29</sup> Diamond, Irene, and Gloria Feman Orenstein. “Musings on Contemporary Earth Imagery .” *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism*, Sierra Club Books, San Francisco, CA, 1999.



earth, so they naturally transcend common religious dichotomies seen today. I am not arguing that we should see the Earth as a Goddess or one of the Mother Goddesses described in this paper. Instead, I suggest that if you see the destruction we have caused our environment today and believe that humans should connect back to the earth, you are already invoking these ancient Goddesses, as in many ways they embody the Earth itself as well as every other divine energy and role imaginable.

### Gaia (Earth), Ancient Greek Mother Goddess

*To Gaia (Gaea, Earth) the Mother of All.  
I will sing of well-founded Gaia (Earth),  
mother of all, eldest of all beings.  
She feeds all the creatures that are in the worlds,  
all that go upon the goodly land,  
and all that are in the paths of the seas,  
and all that fly : all these are fed of her store.<sup>30</sup>*

Throughout this paper, I have connected two Ancient Mother Goddess figures to nature and the earth through their names and praise. The last Goddess, Gaia (Gaea, ) is a clear representation of this connection, as the name Gaia means Earth in Greek, and so, in name she is a Mother Goddess who is also Mother Earth. Today, many people see Greek mythology and the deities in those myths as folklore or characters in a story, however, these deities were very real for many people in Ancient Greece and were worshiped in the same way that people pray to the Abrahamic God now. The Greek origin story begins with Chaos, a vast darkness from which

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<sup>30</sup> “Gaia 2.” *GAEA Page 2 - Greek Mythology*, [www.theoi.com/Protogenos/Gaia2.html#:~:text=%22To%20Gaia%20\(Gaea%2C%20Earth,are%20fed%20of%20her%20store.](http://www.theoi.com/Protogenos/Gaia2.html#:~:text=%22To%20Gaia%20(Gaea%2C%20Earth,are%20fed%20of%20her%20store.) Accessed 1 May 2023.

everything was created. The primordial deities came into existence from Chaos, one of them being Gaia, the embodiment of the Earth. In this legend, Gaia became the planet Earth, as well as everything on and in it.

To the Ancient Greeks, Gaia represented the mother of all, divine feminine energy, and the raw power that came from both.<sup>31</sup> The Ancient Greeks were fully committed to the authority of their creation story and the deities they worshiped, which shows the power that Gaia had and the importance of her role in their religious tradition. In these Ancient times, people recognized Gaia as the first mother, the Earth, and the creator of all, as she “immured Chaos, her own source of creation, inside her body, along with the “great Chasm”, a primeval equivalent of hell.”<sup>32</sup> This kind of power and image gathered a large following, as Gaia has been recognized as being highly influential in the Cult of the Mother Goddess. Today, Gaia and her image represent the connection we share to Mother Earth, and a reminder that we need to grow that connection now more than ever.

Today, as we awaken to the sacredness of our planetary home, the sacredness of earth that we were once instinctively aware of, the name and image of Gaia, the Great Mother, mysteriously returns to inspire and focus our longing to respond to the planet’s need and to the urgent spiritual and ecological crisis of our time<sup>33</sup>

The roles that Gaia plays as both Goddess and Mother Earth is the inspirational image of many Ecofeminist movements arguing how we should see our planet and environment. This connection was formed around The Gaia Hypothesis, created in 1970 by research partners James

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<sup>31</sup> “The Mother Gaia: Goddess Mythology and Traditions.” *Gaia*, [www.gaia.com/article/goddess-gaia](http://www.gaia.com/article/goddess-gaia). Accessed 1 May 2023.

<sup>32</sup> Husain, Shahrukh. “Mother Earth and the Cosmic Order.” *The Goddess: Power, Sexuality, and the Feminine Divine*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 2003.

<sup>33</sup> Harvey, Andrew. “Gaia.” *The Divine Feminine: Exploring the Feminine Face of God throughout the World*, Conari Press, Berkeley Calif, 1996.

Lovelock and Lynn Margulis. The theory suggests that the earth is a self regulating and self-sufficient being that provides the same sustenance/nourishment for itself as it does for humans and animals. This idea is not just a spiritual movement, but a scientific hypothesis saying that the planet keeps every aspect of life, including the atmosphere, environment, and ecosystems in a balance of harmony. James Lovelock (1998) explains this in his essay *What is Gaia?*:

The Gaia Hypothesis, when we introduced it in the 1970's, is supposed that the atmosphere, the oceans, the climate, and the crust of the Earth are regulated at a state comfortable for life because of the behavior of living organisms. Specifically, the Gaia hypothesis said that the temperature, oxidation state, acidity, and certain aspects of the rocks and waters are at any time kept constant, and that this homeostasis is maintained by active feedback processes operated automatically and unconsciously by the biota. Solar energy sustains comfortable conditions for life. The conditions are only constant in the short term and evolve in synchrony with the changing needs of the biota as it evolves. Life and its environment are so closely coupled that evolution concerns Gaia, not the organisms or the environment taken separately.<sup>34</sup>

This theory suggests everything on Earth is alive and connected in some way, meaning that life and Gaia (Earth) are one and the same. The deity, Gaia, went from being a Mother Goddess in the Ancient Greek world to influencing a movement set in the idea that our Earth is a living being that balances all life on, around, and within it. The Ancient Mother Goddesses represent more than images to pray to for good fortune; they are the divine feminine energy connected to Mother Earth herself. Although some may see the connection between the Gaia Hypothesis and the Greek Goddess Gaia in name and metaphor alone, we must not deny the deeper relationship that these feminine figures have to our planet and the natural world. On this connection, Riane Eisler (1987) says,

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<sup>34</sup> Nicholson, Shirley J., and Brenda Rosen. "What Is Gaia?" *Gaia's Hidden Life: The Unseen Intelligence of Nature*, Quest Books, Wheaton, Ill, U.S.A. :, 1992.

But what is most striking about the Gaia hypothesis is that in essence it is a scientific update of the belief system of the Goddess-worshipping prehistoric societies. In these societies the world was viewed as the great Mother, a living entity who in both her temporal and spiritual, creates and nurtures all forms of life.<sup>35</sup>

The Gaia Hypothesis is a scientific theory showing the connection between our Earth and ancient worship of the Mother Goddess. However, instead of worshiping the Goddess with religious praise, we invoke Her through our want and need to change how we treat the Earth. This theory suggests that as Gaia (the Earth) is a fully self-sustaining life form that balances itself naturally, human action is the problem creating our environmental crisis. This hypothesis also suggests that we will eventually cause our own demise, and that after human existence, Gaia will still be alive and self-sustaining. In some ways, this idea proposes a threat to humankind; it forces us to consider the Earth as a living being who provides nourishment and sustenance for us now, but will not do so forever if we do not give the same back to her.<sup>36</sup>

The name Gaia gives us someone to imagine and relate to, rather than something to dominate and control, and restores to us the lost feeling of relationship with Earth as Mother. But Gaia was more than Great Mother as source and foundation of all that is. She was also the active and dynamic consciousness guiding and structuring the ordering of creation. She was the life ensouling it and the law directing it.<sup>37</sup>

In Ancient Greece, Gaia was everything; she was a divine figure, the mother of all, as well as the embodiment of the Earth itself. It has been centuries since Greek mythology was seen as more than folklore or legend, and yet Gaia has lived on to influence several environmental

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<sup>35</sup> Diamond, Irene, and Gloria Feman Orenstein. "The Gaia Tradition and the Partnership Future." *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism*, Sierra Club Books, San Francisco, CA, 1999.

<sup>36</sup> Anderlini-D'Onofrio, Serena. "The Gaia Hypothesis and Ecofeminism: Culture, Reason, and Symbiosis." *disClosure: A Journal of Social Theory*, [uknowledge.uky.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?httpsredir=1&article=1145&context=disclosure](http://uknowledge.uky.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?httpsredir=1&article=1145&context=disclosure). Accessed 2 May 2023.

<sup>37</sup> Harvey, Andrew. "Gaia." *The Divine Feminine: Exploring the Feminine Face of God throughout the World*, Conari Press, Berkeley Calif, 1996.

movements and Ecofeminist theories. This continued image is why we are still connected to the ancient Mother Goddess figure, as she is a Universal Mother who created and lived for us all, and this connection is still alive today if we search for it.

## Conclusion

### Mother Goddess as Mother Earth

*Mother of us all, oldest of us all, of the earth,  
The sacred ground,  
Nourishing all out of her treasures - children,  
Field, cattle, beauty ...  
Mistress, from you come our fine children and  
Bountiful harvests;  
Yours is the power to give mortals life and to  
Take it away ...  
Hail to you, mother of Gods.<sup>38</sup>*

Before people worshiped deities, they praised the Earth and the nourishment that it provides us through nature. Ancient images and sculptures show how the feminine body was worshiped as far back as the Paleolithic times. However, the context of those images suggests that the feminine figure was not a representation of women, but rather as the Earth itself and everything it provided. Humans gave praise to the Earth in the form of the divine feminine long before they prayed to any cosmic deity, which shows how far back the connection between the mother figure and the Earth is.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Diamond, Irene, and Gloria Feman Orenstein. "The Eleusinian Mysteries." *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism*, Sierra Club Books, San Francisco, CA, 1999.

<sup>39</sup> Gadon, Elinor W. "The Ice Age: The Earth As Mother ." *The Once & Future Goddess*, Harper & Row Publishers, New York, 1989.

As we shall see, Goddess religion was earth-centered, not heaven-centered, of this world not otherworldly, body-affirming not body-denying, holistic not dualistic. The Goddess was immanent, within every human being, not transcendent, and humanity was viewed as part of nature, death as a part of life. Her worship was sensual, celebrating the erotic, embracing all that was alive. The religious quest was above all for renewal, for the regeneration of life, and the Goddess was the life force.<sup>40</sup>

So, as we can see, Mother Goddess worship has been earth-centered since the beginning. Though the Mother Goddess has cosmic connections and is otherworldly in imagery, the figure itself is one that represents all living things, including our planet. Today, this connection appears through social and political activism attempting to make the Earth a better and safer place, which is very different from the ancient religious worship mentioned in this paper. I argue that today's call to aid in our environmental crisis is a modern way of enacting the worship and praise of the Mother Goddess, as she is the metaphorical and figurative form of nature and all living beings. The Mother Goddess as a cosmic and divine being came from the figure of Mother Earth, but was molded into a religious and institutionalized form which no longer symbolized a free flowing connection to earth as it did before. Throughout this paper, I have shown the connection between the ancient Mother Goddess figures in three different religions and how just as they are cosmic deities that are divinely worshiped, they are also representations of the Earth and nature.

This argument connecting the Mother Goddess figure and Mother Earth is not a new one, yet I have shown this connection through three very different Ancient Goddess figures and their nurturing yet all powerful feminine energy. In the modern world, we see this Mother Goddess as an idea from the past, but I argue that she is alive within our actions of trying to connect back to our planet in the wake of the current environment, political, and social crisis. As mentioned above, one of the ways the Mother figure is here today is through the Ecofeminist movement.

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<sup>40</sup> Gadon, Elinor W. "Introduction ." *The Once & Future Goddess*, Harper & Row Publishers, New York, 1989.

Through the last decade, this social and political lens has examined the interconnectedness of all living beings on the planet and how we are all tied to each other, through our actions as well as our spiritual roots.<sup>41</sup> Many people agree that we must change our actions in regard to the Earth. We, as a whole, are causing more harm to this planet than we are doing good and if we are to change that reality, something drastic must happen.<sup>42</sup> Ecofeminism suggests we begin that change by considering the Earth as a mother to us all. In this paper, I have attempted to connect that suggestion with the figure of the Ancient Mother Goddess, and to show how the two are more interconnected than we may think.

“Our Mother is dying” is a tragic reflection of the present ecological crisis - and out of this cry women have drawn strength. The fear of what is being done to the earth is giving women the urgent imperative to assert their connectedness with nature - their interdependence with nature. “When sister earth suffers, women suffer too”<sup>43</sup>

I am not saying in this paper that we should see Earth as a gendered, all-powerful female figure; I am simply pointing out the connection between the ancient Mother Goddess and our primordial figure of Mother Earth. These three figures differ in cultural and religious background, but are essentially the same; representatives of the omnipotent mother who was there at the beginning of our creation and will be there long after. They provide nourishment, a deep connection to the natural and cosmic world, and a presence to the birth and death of all living things. Just as the Mother Goddess figures described above share these traits, so does our planet; and so, in these ways the Mother Goddess and Mother Earth are one and the same.

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<sup>41</sup> Kings, A.E. “Intersectionality and the Changing Face of Ecofeminism.” *Ethics and the Environment*, vol. 22, no. 1, 2017, p. 63, <https://doi.org/10.2979/ethicsenviro.22.1.04>.

<sup>42</sup> Dagnon, Daniel Koto. “The Importance of Ecofeminism and Environmental Ethics.” *Earth.Org*, 6 July 2022, [earth.org/ecofeminism-and-environmental-ethics/](http://earth.org/ecofeminism-and-environmental-ethics/).

<sup>43</sup> Ruether, Rosemary Radford. “Toward A Feminist Eco-Theology For India.” *Women Healing Earth: Third World Women on Ecology, Feminism, and Religion*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll (N.Y.), 2002.

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