



DIFFERENT FORMS OF GODDESSES

occur in association with a variety of other divine patrons of fertility and prosperity.¹⁵ The cult of snake was closely associated with the cult of Mother Goddess.¹⁶

In the reliefs of Sānchi and Bhārḥūt we find the portrayal of Nāgās. In one of the Sānchi reliefs¹⁷ Nāgā figure is included along with tree worship. On one of the Bhārḥūt¹⁸ railing pillars, a Nāgā is represented in the form of human being. Women folk offer milk and eggs to the serpent deity enshrined under the pipal and neem trees. An anthill or the cluster of snake holes is worshipped as the deity. Women take a circumambulation to this deity and the tree so as to get children.

Aspects of the Goddess

The concept of duality of light and darkness has impressed upon mankind from yore. Joy and gladness have been associated with the former and gloom and fear with the latter.¹⁹ Hence, the gods or goddesses are classified into benign and malign forms.

15. Hendrich Zimmer, op.cit., p.69.

16. N.N.Bhattacharyya, op.cit., p.52.

17. J.Fergusson, Tree and Serpent worship in Ancient India, New Delhi, 1971, Pl.XV.3, p.43.

18. A. Cunningham, The Stupa of Bharhut, London, 1879, Pl.XV.3, p.26.

19. A.G. Widgery, Comparative study of Religions, Baroda, 1922, p.137.

This whole world is pervaded by the forms and incarnations of the goddess. Sometimes she is present in her very pleasing form.²⁰ The similar idea is also seen in the Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa²¹. The fair coloured and benign forms of Śakti are known as Umā, Gauri, Sundari and Kāmēsvari. This goddess possesses very charming personality and graceful character. They always help the people to fulfill all their desires and treat their devotees with motherly affection.²²

One can see the ferocious and angry features in the form of Kāḷi. Durgā and Kāḷi, are generally classified under this head. Durgā is, generally shown as a sculptural representation with fearsome killer of the buffalo-demon; she is also shown riding on a lion wielding a score of weapons. Kāḷi is generally believed to dwell in the cremation ground, and is shown wearing a garland of skulls. The iconographic form of Kāḷi differs from region to region. There are some special iconographic features.

Sacrifice

Animal sacrifices are offered to the goddess Kāḷi or Durgā or even to the village deities. The act of sacrifice is

20. Vishnu Purāṇa, I.9.121.

21. Dēvi Mahātmya, 4.26.

22. Dēvi Purāṇa, 17.29.31.

intended to propitiate these deities. Goddesses of disease are generally offered blood sacrifices to appease the angry action and to ward off the evils. Sacrifices express honour and devotion to the deity whose wishes have been met. And when the sacrificer and others eat the cooked meat offered to the deity, or (sometimes) drink the animal's blood, they consume a kind of prasada containing divine power and grace, just as they do after pūja.

Most of the village goddesses have dreadful appearance. They are fond of flesh, blood and wine. Durgā is a representation of terrifying goddess and these are several forms of the same according to literature and iconography. Durgā represented as Mahishāsūramardini is seen in many of the temples.

Gauri or Pārvathi or Umā

One of the benign forms of Śakti is Gauri or Pārvathi or Umā, who is the consort of Lord Śiva. In her iconographic form, she is shown with two hands in association with Śiva and but generally shown with four hands. Umā, also known as Pārvathi, who is the daughter of Hīmavat and wife of Śiva, is mentioned in the Rāmāyana²³ and the Mahābhārata²⁴.

23. Rāmāyana-I. 36.21; III.16.43; VI.60.11.

24. Mahābhārata-III. 231.49; VII. 80.40; IX.45.53; X 7.46.

Epithets related to her, like Giriputri, Girirājaputri, Salarājaputri, Nāgarājaputri and Parvatarāja Kanya, indicate her association with Himālayan region. In the Harivamśa²⁵. Umā is found mentioned under the name Aparṇā as one of the three daughters of Himavat and Mēnaka. Umā is equated with Durgā in the Durgāstōtra²⁶ of the Mahābhārata. At first Gauri was the wife of Varuṇa, but later she became the great goddess of the mountain peak on par with Umā and subsequently with Durgā too.

Gauri is mentioned in the Sārnāth Stone inscription of a local chief Prakatāditya.²⁷ In the Māndasore stone pillar inscription²⁸ of Yasōdharman Kshitidharatanāyā is referred to as Umā or Pārvathī. Inscriptions also speak of the Mahishāsoramardhini aspect now and then.

Sarasvati

Divine Mother is everywhere triple and endowed with the three gunas namely sattwa, rajas and tamas. She manifests as will or ichcha Śakti, action or kriyāśakti and

25. Harivamsa, I.18.15.

26. Mahābhārata. IV.6; VI.23.

27. Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum III. 286.

28. Ibid., 142. 150.; IA., XVIII. 219. XX.188.

knowledge or gnāna Śakti. She is Brahma-Śakti (Sarasvati) in conjunction with Brahma, Vishnu Śakti (Laskhmi) in conjunction with Lord Vishnu, Siva-Śakti (Mahā Kāḷi or Durga) in conjunction with Lord Śiva.

Sarasvati is a consort of Brahma the creator, and hence considered the goddess of all creative sciences. She is the patroness of music and poetry. One of her names is 'vāk' meaning 'word'.

Sarasvati, holding the vīṇa in her hand²⁹ is clad in white colour. She is the goddess of speech and learning.³⁰ Goddess Sarasvati is described in one of the Upanishads as the Goddess of speech.³¹ As the mother of learning she is always shown iconographically as having a pustaka (book). The best example can be seen from one of the icons from Gangaikondacholapuram in Tamilnad. The image of Jnana-Sarasvati in the Śiva temples at this place is rather peculiar in the iconographic scheme. This is the only place where Sarasvati is shown wearing Yajnopavita like the male gods. The akshamala (rosary) and the pustaka (book) are the important tributes seen in the image. In the Vedas, Sarasvati is found

29. Dēvi Bhāgavatam, IV.31, 19.23.80.

30. Ibid., IX. 4.75.

31. Sarasvati Upanishad, V.5.

mentioned as representing the sacred river³² and a goddess. The cult of Sarasvati is mentioned in the Mahābhārata.³³ In the Rāmāyana³⁴ she is referred to as one of the eighteen deities to whom daily sacrifices are offered. One of the earliest sculpture of Sarasvati with a book as an attribute in her hand comes from the Kankāḷi Tiḷā Mathura, datable to the first half of the second century A.D.³⁵ The Nāgpūr stone inscription of Vikrama 1161 refers to her as the bestower of learning, wisdom and poetical grace.³⁶

The representation of Sarasvati became very popular in the medieval period. The goddess is shown seated in Padmāsana with the depiction of a swan, the vehicle at the Pītha. Another image of Sarasvati from the Brihadīsvara temple at Thanjavur suggests the representation of Lalitā.³⁷ The goddess playing on vīna, is also found in Madurai belonging to the Nāyak period.³⁸

32. Rig Veda, VI. 65.5; VI.70.2.

33. Mahābhārata, XIII. 31.6.

34. Rāmāyana, III. 12.17.

35. J.N. Banerjea, op.cit., p.372.

36. EI., Vol.XII, p.182.

37. K.A.N. Sastri, The Cholas, University of Madras, 1975, pp.729. 759, Pl.XXIII, Fig.54.

38. A. Goswami, op.cit., Pl.138.

Sarasvati Pūja

Sarasvati is worshipped as the goddess of learning. Therefore, educational institutions conduct the worship of this deity every year. The Agni Purāṇa prescribes the tritiya-tithi of the month of Jyēshtha for the worship of Sarasvati.³⁹ The Padma Purāṇa and the Matsya Purāṇa have prescribed the day of panchami of each paksa in a month for the observation of vrata⁴⁰. In course of time this day became the occasion for the worship of Sarasvati.

The worship of Sarasvati generally observed on the ninth day of the Dasarah festivals is conducted by invoking her presence. Students and musicians offer worship to Sarasvati on this day. Goddess Sarasvati enjoyed a prominent place in Buddhism and Jainism. In Brahmanical religion too, she is worshipped both by the Śaivites and Vaishnavites. Hence she finds a place of importance everywhere. She has been an object of worship from among the students, the writers, the scholars and the musicians from very early days and thus this cult is popular in our country even today⁴¹.

39. Agni Purāṇa, 178.27.

40. Padma Purāṇa, V.22.186.Matsya Purāṇa, 55.II.

41. A.L. Basham, The Wonder That was India, London, 1954, p.312.

Lakshmi

Lakshmi the consort of Vishnu and the goddess of wealth and prosperity, does not simply mean the goddess of material wealth. There are eight forms of Lakshmi in the iconographic concept called ashta-lakshmi. Gajalakshmi is the most popular of these eight forms⁴².

Śri Sūkta contains 15 verses in praise of goddess Śri, i.e., the goddess of wealth. In the first verse the Goddess is invoked as one who is said to be the colour of red lotus, seated on a red lotus and wearing a garland of red lotuses. Therefore she is the deity shown seated on lotus.⁴³

The Buddhist conception of this goddess is represented in the early art of Bhārhat, Sānchi, and Bōdhgaya. In the Brahmanical mythology, Kubēra is sometimes associated with Lakshmi or Śri, the goddess of fortune, who is the presiding deity of the astanidhis (eight forms of wealth).

The Gajalakshmi concept of Lakshmi generally associated with elephants as well as lotus gained currency during the period of Maurya-Kusana rulers. This concept is also called Abhisēka-Lakshmi. It became popular and hence

42. Āthilakshmi, Dhānyalakshmi, Dhairyalakshmi, Gajalakshmi, Santhānalakshmi, Vijayalakshmi, Vidyālakshmi, Dhanalakshmi.

43. Śri Sūkta, V.I. 3, 4, 12, 15.

found a place of importance in coins, seals and terracottas.

On the tribal coins also we find the portrayal of Lakshmi standing (rarely seated)⁴⁴ with the representation of elephants. One of the quadrant rail medallions⁴⁵ shows the goddess seated on a lotus with two elephants pouring water from two inverted jars. Lakshmi was a popular deity among the traders of Kausāmbi since on several moulded fragments of the Sunga period, one can find a female figure holding creeper or standing on a full blown lotus.⁴⁶ She continued to appear on the Gupta coins as well as on the post-Gupta coins. The association of Lakshmi with Nārāyaṇa is alluded to in literature and inscriptions. Since she is the goddess of fertility and wealth, she is very popular among the Vaiśya community, who were the custodians of trade and they are responsible for the prosperity of the society. She is worshipped by all sections of the society. In the Buddhist Jātakas there are a number of references and on the railings of Sānchi, Bhārhat and Amarāvati such names occur in the donative inscriptions. Whereas Sānchi

44. A.K. Coomaraswamy, "Early Indian Terracottas", Bulletin of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Vol.XXV, 1927, fig.7 on p.93.

45. Marshall and Foucher, The Monuments of Sanchi, Vol.II, Calcutta, 1940, pl.I. XXV, 9a.

46. S.C. Kala, Terracotta figurines from Kausambi, Allahabad, 1946, p.34.

inscriptions⁴⁷ that record the gift by a merchant seal from Basarh⁴⁸ mention the name of Śridāsa. The Bṛihatsamhita of Varahamihira⁴⁹ calls the bilva tree Śri Vṛiksha as auspicious for the Vaiśyas. It is also believed that Sri was associated with the northern quarter, and Śrimati or Sirimā, with the Southern quarter.⁵⁰ Sirimā is the feminine form of Śrimat.

On the day of Dīpāvali, the deity of Lakshmi is worshipped throughout the country.⁵¹ In Bengal Kāḷi pūja is celebrated with pomp and glory on this day. This place has a stronghold on Tāntricism. The prevalence of Lakshmi worship on this day suggests that the businessmen of our country give more prominence to the aspect of wealth than to any other aspect of life.

Lakshmi in Epigraphs

Śri or Lakshmi as the goddess of wealth and prosperity occurs in the invocational verses of many inscriptions. The Hāthigumphā inscription of Khāravēla throws

47. El., Vol.II, No.VIII, p.47.

48. ASIAR, 1903-04, Seal No.45, 110.

49. Bṛihatsamhita, 58.6.

50. C. Sivaramamurti, Bulletin of the Madras Government Museum, New Series, IV, p.82.

51. M.C.P.Srivatsava, Mother Goddess of Indian Art, Archaeology and Literature, Delhi, 1979, p.188.

light on the concept of this deity as early as the first century B.C. The word Śri Kadāra is found mentioned in this inscription. The early Chalukya emperors call themselves Śri Prithivi - vallabha' (i.e., the goddess of earth and prosperity). It is considered as one of the incarnations of Vishnu.⁵² The opening verses of some of the Ganga charters are confined to the adoration of Lakshmi and Vishnu⁵³. The relationship between Rājarāja and Rājasundari has been traced and compared to that of Lakshmi and Nārāyaṇa.⁵⁴

Lakshmi's epithets are Padmālaya, Padmahasta, etc., indicating her bearing on the lotus, which is her permanent iconographical symbol. She plays a significant part in the religious history of India.

Lalitā, Tripurasundari and Rājarājēsvari

Lalitā, Tripurasundari and Rājarājēsvari are the goddesses known to the Hindus. Their mode of worship is directly connected with the mystic geometrical drawings known as Chakras or Pīṭhas. Images of these goddesses are not honoured so much as the Chakras or Pīṭhas over which they are

52. D.C. Sircar, Religious Life in Ancient and Medieval India, Delhi, 1971, p.49.

53. EI., Vol.XXVIII, p.249.

54. Ibid., p.251.

supposed to preside. The worship offered consists in throwing over the Chakras a profusion of turmeric powder called kumkum. The throwing of kumkum is accompanied by the repetition of long strings of the names of Lalitā consisting of synonyms – a thousand, three hundred or one hundred and eight in number. Each name is prefaced with the sacred syllable Om. The goddesses are shown standing on a chakra embedded beneath the pedestal.

The mother who has brought forth the universe with ease and spontaneity, is known as Lalitā or Lalitāmbikā. The Lalitā Sahasranāma gives many names of Mahādēvi. She is called the root of the world (Jagatikan); she transcends the Universe (Viśvādhika); she who has no equal (Nirūpama), she is the Supreme ruler (Paramēsvari). She is omnipresent (Sarvaga), she is the ruler of all worlds (Sarvalōkēsvari) and she supports the universe (Viśvadhāriṇi)⁵⁵.

Durgā

In Mārkaṇḍeya Purāna the goddess Durgā is referred to as one with pure consciousness (chiti).⁵⁶ She is the

55. Lalitā Sahasranāma, V. 325, 334, 389, 396, 702, 758, 759.

56. Saptasati – V. 78-80, V.17-19.

omnipotent power of Vishnu or Śiva.⁵⁷ Durgā is the founder of the world.⁵⁸ She is the Supreme Goddess.⁵⁹ Durgā is the personification of knowledge (mahāvidya), great recollection (mahāmādha), great literature (mahā smṛiti), the power of Śiva (mahādēvi), the power of demons (mahāsūri), the power of great delusion (mahāmōha).⁶⁰

Durgā is credited with the destruction of many asuras such as Mahisha, Madhu and Kaitabha and brothers Sumbha and Nisumbha. By killing the demon Mahisha she came to be called Mahishāsūramardhini.⁶¹

Durgā is one who is beyond ordinary reach.⁶² She is called the Mūla Prakṛiti, and the creator, destructor and the protector of the universe; these three activities are ascribed to her, and thus she came to be called Mahāsarasvati, Mahālakshmi and Mahākāḷi.⁶³

57. Ibid., IX.25., 16; 14.

58. Dēvi Mahātmya, V.13.

59. Ibid., XI. 24.

60. Ibid., I.77.

61. Saptasati, III. 42-43.

62. Dēvi Upanishad, 19. Dēvi Mahātmya. V.10.

63. Dēvi Bhāgavata, IX. 56-60.

The goddess Durgā is one of the forms of incarnation which is in accordance with the respective yugas. She says 'whenever trouble shall arise on accounts of the Dānavas I shall become incarnate and destroy the enemies'. Thus she says that in order to destroy Sumbha and Nisumbha in the 28 yugas of Vaivaśvata Manu she came out of the womb of Yaśōda in the house of the king Nandā and resided at the Vindhya mountains. Thus she got the name Nandā and Vindhya-vāsini - Durgā. Then again to kill the descendants of Viprachitta, she assumed the form of a Raktadanta (i.e., Chāmuṇḍā). She came to be called as Satākshi in the eyes of munis. She is also known as Śākambhari. She has the celebrated name Durgā when she killed the demon named Durgamā. She assumed the form of Bhīmarūpa at the mountain of Himāchala when she protected the munis; therefore she became famous as Bhīmadēvi. Lastly, she killed the great asura Aruna causing great havoc in the three worlds by taking a bee like form comprising innumerable bees hence shall be praised by the people under the name Brahmāri.⁶⁴

Durgā is said to have assumed ten forms for the destruction of two giants, Sumbha and Nisumbha. The

64. Dēvi Mahātmya, XI. 41-55.

Markaṇḍēya Purāna describes these incarnations in the following order:

- 1) As Durgā she received the message of the giants;
- 2) As Daśabhuja (the ten armed) she slew part of their army;
- 3) As Simhavāhinī (seated on a lion) she fought with Raktavija;
- 4) As Mahishāsura-mardhini (destroyer of a buffalo) she slew Sumbha in the form of buffalo; 5) As Jagaddhātri (the mother of the world), she overcame the army of the giants; 6) As Kālī (the black woman), she slew Raktavija; 7) As Muktakēśi (with flowing hair), she overcame the armies of the giants; 8) As Tārā (the saviour), she slew Sumbha in his own proper shape;
- 9) Chinnamustaka (the headless), she killed Nisumbha; 10) As Jagadgāmi (the golden colour lady) she became famous.

The structural temple of the goddess Durgā at Aihole was erected by the Chalukya kings who reigned between A.D.550 – 642 ⁶⁵. The Aihole relief shows the eight-armed goddess piercing the upturned neck of the buffalo demon.

65. N.N. Bhattacharyya, op.cit., p.161.

Durgā Festival

Durgā pūja is an important festival observed by the Hindus all over India, particularly in West Bengal. It is, obviously, the worship of Mother Goddess. Dasarah, Durgā pūja and Navarāthiri are all one and the same. It is celebrated in the bright half of the month of Āśvina. It begins on the first day and ends on the 10th day, which falls on the day of Vijayadaśami. This festival is connected with “Rama’s worship of the Dēvī when he found that as soon as he cut off any of the heads of Rāvaṇa they came back to life again. On the eighth day, Rāma could kill Rāvana by the blessings of the divine Goddess and on the tenth day Rāma started back triumphant to his capital.”⁶⁶

On the first three nights, Durgā in the destructive form of the Mother goddess is worshipped. On the succeeding three nights, the creative aspect of Lakshmi is adored and on the last three nights, the knowledge aspect of Sarasvati is invoked. The tenth day called the Vijayādaśami day or the day of Victory is celebrated with pomp and glory as a mark of having killed the asuras. During all the ten days the festival is celebrated with all rituals, ceremonies and in all grandeur. The

66. B.A. Gupta, Hindu Holidays and Ceremonials, Calcutta, 1919, p.185.

details regarding the worship of Durgā in the Tantric form is found in some of the works like the Māya Tantra, the Rudrayamāla and the Matsyasūkta.⁶⁷

In Tamilnad the festival is celebrated in every home with the traditional arrangement of dolls (i.e., Kolu) of gods, goddesses, animals, inanimate beings and with the image of Durgā at the centre, or a symbolical representation of the Mother, who governs the entire universe. The story of Her annihilation of Mahishāsura symbolizes the removal of the darkness of ignorance by the light of knowledge, the vidyarambam (the commencement of learning of a child).

On the day of Vijayadaśami, all workmen offer worship to their materials and tools in order to get the benefit of the divine goddess. The idea behind this worship is to propitiate the goddess Śakti who is the giver of all these. They worship the Dēvī for their success, prosperity and peace during these days. Mother goddess is worshipped even from Vedic period till date.

Mahishāsūramardhini and other forms of Durgā

Mahishāsūramardhini is one of the forms of Durgā , or one of the earliest variations of Śakti form. She is also called

67. C.Chakravarty, op.cit., p.94.

Chāmuṇḍā and Chaṇḍī. In Indian mythology the most central fact about Durgā is her triumph over the buffalo-demon Mahishāsura⁶⁸. Though Devī pervades this whole universe yet she assumes the forms on difficult occasions in order to help the Dēvas in the execution of their divine work.⁶⁹ In this respect Śaktism admits the doctrine of incarnation.

Dēvi destroying demon is a repeated occurrence. In the early images, the demon is a buffalo or a buffalo headed human being; but the demon emerging from the neck of a headless buffalo and fighting with the goddess is also found in the medieval sculptures of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa.

The struggle between Durgā and Mahishāsura is one of the principal subjects of the Dēvimahātmya preserved in the Mārkaṇḍēya Purāna. The episode is also indirectly mentioned in the Matsya⁷⁰, Brahmānda⁷¹ and other Purānas. It is generally supposed that the earliest portions of the Mārkaṇḍēya Purāna were compiled during the third century A.D. or earlier while the Dēvi Mahātmya, which may rightly be

68. A.K. Sur, Dyanmics of Synthesis in Hindu Culture, Calcutta, 1973, p.60.

69. Saptasati, IV. 41-42; 1.66.

70. Matsya Purāna, 152. 17.24.

71. Brahmānda Purāna, IV. 29.75 and 78.

called the testament of Śākta philosophy is said to have been added to the text by the sixth century A.D.⁷² The story of the Devi's fight with Mahisha as found in the Dēvi Bhāgavata, Skanda Purāṇa, Vāmana Purāṇa, and some other texts appears to have been borrowed from the Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa of a later date⁷³.

Korṛavai

Sangam literature is replete with references to the glory of the Goddess of war-Korṛavai. Śilappadikāram, in a wide perspective, exposes that the worship of female deities was a common practice among the Tamils. This would have been mainly due to the importance assigned to chastity and morality of the womenfolk.

The female deities are known for their distinctive qualities. Korṛavai was worshipped in the form of Mahishāsūramardhini, the destroyer of buffalo headed demon.⁷⁴ Being a Goddess, riding the stag as the Goddess of victory⁷⁵, it

72. M.Winternitz, History of Indian Literature, Vol.II, New Delhi, 1972, pp.560, 565.

73. Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa, XI. 55.

74. Śilappadikāram, XII: 64, 88. XIII: 111, 181.

75. Ibid., XII: 16, 45, 70, 71. XXIII : 125, XX : 6.

is clear that specific mounts were associated with Gods and Goddesses. Korṛavai portrayed in terrific form is treated as the incarnation of Umā, Sarasvati and Lakshmi.⁷⁶ The treatment of Korṛavai as the younger sister of Tirumāl⁷⁷ confirms the above.

Gauri is the other name of Pārvathi⁷⁸. Korṛavai is called Gauri. The reference to Kāḷi⁷⁹ indicates the continuation of the other form of worship of that ancient Goddess. The term Samari⁸⁰ reveals the inclusion of a new tradition of amalgamating the indigenous deity with the Northern Goddess Parvathi, the wife of Śankara i.e., Śiva.

The treatment of Korṛavai as Pārvathi seems to be a unique feature for it must be remembered that even during the period of Thirumurugarruppaḍai attempts have been made to amalgamate the indigenous and the Āryan deities. More details are available with regard to the worship of Korṛavai⁸¹ and Goddess of war⁸². It was a social custom to invoke Goddess Korṛavai pleading for her grace for victory in war⁸³.

76. Ibid., XII : 54-72.

77. Ibid., XII : 7 : 3: 4.

78. Ibid., XX : 67.

79. Ibid., XX: 39.

80. Ibid., VI : 99.

81. Paripādal: 11:100.

82. Tolkāppiyam: Porul: 59: 2.

83. Silappadikāram : XIII:1.

The technique of the fusion of a folk and regional deity with the pan-Indian God is interesting. Moreover it suggests the elevation of the position of an indigenous folk deity to the status of a national deity. The Koṛṛavai worship, elaborated in detail suggests the ground prepared for the iconographic development of that deity during that age.

Kāḷi

Śakti assumes the form of Mother Kāḷi standing on the prostrate body of Lord Śiva, and is extensively worshipped in that form in the eastern part of India. Here she is worshipped in direct conjunction with Śiva whose changeless state is depicted through His lying down posture. Śakti, the principle of change, is shown as standing on Śiva signifying that all the changes in the universe are rooted in the principle of changelessness. Kāḷi is worshipped in Bengal on the day of Dipavali with pomp and grandeur⁸⁴.

Kāḷi Amman or Kāḷi is said to be the only one of the village goddesses whose name is found in the Vēdas. She is an avatāra or incarnation of the eight powers of the universe. Kāḷi

84. C.Chakravarty, op.cit., p.92.

and Bhadrakālī are old and venerable names of Pārvathi or Śiva's Śakti in elite mythology and theology. Kālī dwells in the cremation ground, and thus assumed her horrific appearance with a garland of skulls.

It is said that Kālī is “perhaps the most infamous of the deadly goddesses, the Black goddess of India, born from the wrath of her demon slaying mother Durga. Kālī's teeth are fangs; her tongue lolls forth from her devouring mouth like that of a wild dog or tiger. One of her many hands brandishes an upraised sword; another holds aloft a bowl of blood that is the sliced off cap of a human skull. She wears a necklace of human heads and a skirt lopped off human arms; sometimes she stands or squates or dances on the lifeless body of her consort, the great Lord Siva. She is time and death, but also life, and may be adored as a loving mother. She is also the illusion inherent in life's pleasures. Hence affirming her for what she is may sustain her worshipper on a liberating path”.⁸⁵

There are a number of legends about the origin of Kālī cult. According to Dēvi Mahātmya Kālī emerged from the forehead of Chaṇḍikā with the purpose of killing the demons Chaṇḍa and Muṇḍa. Having accomplished the task, she received the epithet Chāmuṇḍa, Kauśiki, Chaṇḍikā and Kālī

85. Encyclopaedia of Religion, Vol.V, p.309.

evidently adopted in the Śakta pantheon from the surviving tribal divinities. Kaḷi is Kālañjara, Chaṇḍikā in Maharāntaka and Vindhyavāsini in the Vindhyas are mentioned in the Matsya Purāna⁸⁶ as the manifestations of the supreme goddess, and her particular interest for wine and meat is found in the Vishnu Purāna.⁸⁷ Aparna, a name by which Kāḷi is sometimes identified, signifies a deity without her leaf cloth⁸⁸.

Mahābhārata gives a description of Kāḷi. When, Aśvathāma visited the camp of the Pāṇḍavās with the intention of destroying them, it is said that the warriors in the Pāṇḍavā camp saw that embodiment as representing Death-night, of black visage, having bloody mouth and bloody eyes, wearing crimson garlands and smeared crimson unguents, clad in a single piece red cloth, with a noose in hand, and resembling an elderly lady. She was singing a dreadful song standing erect before their eyes, about to lead away men, horses and elephants all bound in a rope. She appeared to take away various kinds of spirits; with dishevelled hair bound together in a chord, and

86. Matsya Purāna – XIII. 32.

87. Vishnu Purāna, V.2.84.

88. N.N. Bhattacharyya, op.cit., p.121.

also with many powerful car-warriors divested of their weapons.⁸⁹

Right from Vēdic period till date Kāḷi worship is in existence in India. Special pūjas and sacrifices were also offered to her in different types. Kāḷi is the most powerful goddess in Kolkata. The temple at Kāḷighat, dedicated to her here, is the most sacred in the country. Worship is performed on different occasions under different names and forms, all fearful and ferocious, manifesting the spirit of destruction which she represents in Bengal.⁹⁰ The worship is offered usually at mid night.⁹¹

It is interesting to state that in India, blood sacrifice is offered to Mother Goddess alone⁹². Animal sacrifice is a special feature of Śakti worship particularly of Kāḷi worship in Bengal⁹³, even human sacrifice to her is not unknown.⁹⁴ It may be mentioned that Kāḷi is regarded as the guardian deity worshipped to ward off the disease cholera and evil spirits.

89. Mahābhārata, Sauptika Parvan, 8.76-78.

90. C.Chakravarty, op.cit., p.89.

91. Ibid., p.92.

92. N.N. Bhattacharyya, op.cit., p.66.

93. C.Chakravarty, op.cit., p.93.

94. Ibid., p.93, Henry White Head, op.cit., p.28.

Such a goddess is supposed to ward off all bad and the causes for the havoc to village.⁹⁵

Pidāri

Pidāri, one of the ferocious forms of Śakti is considered as a grāmadēvata. She is associated with goddess Kāḷi. Her worship is more popular in South India rather than in North. She is regarded as the consort of Siva. She holds a noose, trident, skull cup and drum. She has flaming hair, two or three eyes, and in some cases the cup may be in rectangular shape. She is shown with snake on her breasts, either seated or carrying an elephant goad (ankusa) instead of a noose. Her fearful appearance is intended to frighten off evil spirits against which she is invoked. Inscriptions of the Chōḷa period from 850 to 1279 A.D. refer to this deity by different names, like Kala-Pidāri (i.e. Kāḷi), etc. This illustrates the combined effect of the tendency towards the proliferation of deities, and the emancipation of female deities. The Pidāri cult reached its peak during the Pāla period in Eastern India but about 750 to 1162 A.D.⁹⁶ It has some claims being an independent cult within which Śakti worship achieved its own degree of independence.

95. C.Chakravarty, op.cit., p.93.

96. D.R. Rajeshwari, Śakti Iconography, New Delhi, 1989, p.79.

The Kaṇṇagi Cult

Kaṇṇagi cult or Pathini cult is a modification of the ancient worship of the village guardian goddess regarded as an aspect of Kālī and syncretized with Draupadi, the Pathini par excellence, though the common wife of five brothers. The story of the deification of a human being called Kaṇṇagi into Pathinikadavuḷ, the goddess of chastity, is mentioned in the great Tamil epic Silappadikāram. She destroyed the city of Madurai by fire to avenge the execution of her husband Kōvalan. Kaṇṇagi cult was established by Senguttuvan and adopted by kings of Mālwa, Uṛaiyūr and Ceylon. Perunkillī, an early Chōḷa king and the Chēra king Senguttuvan erected temples and instituted festivals in her honour.⁹⁷

The Bhagavathi temple at Cranganore in Kerala, dedicated to BhadraKālī whose wrath is supposed to be the cause of all epidemic diseases, is said to have been founded between the years 115-25 A.D. by Senguttuvan Perumāl to commemorate the tragic end of Kaṇṇagi, the heroine of the Silappadikāram.⁹⁸ The goddess enshrined at Cranganore,

97. N.N. Bhattacharyya, op.cit., p.117.

98. Indian Historical Quarterly, II, 621-22.

according to the popular tradition goes by the name of Orraimulaichchi⁹⁹ i.e., the goddess with one breast. Kaṇṇagi is said to have cut off one of her breasts when she cursed the city at the death of Kōvalan. The Kaṇṇagi cult introduced by Silappadikāram later developed into the worship of Bhagavathi¹⁰⁰. However, the process of absorption of the Kaṇṇagi cult into the Kālī or Bhagavathi or Draupadi or Māriyamman cult is shrouded in obscurity. This cult has its own impact on the Tamil society even now.

Bhārathamāta

Bhārathamāta is the state deity of modern India. The worship of goddesses particularly Durgā and Kālī is especially popular in Bengal, and it was a prominent Bengali nationalist and novelist Bankim Chandra Chatterjee who virtually created Bhārathamāta as the protector of the people and land of an embryonic nation. Bhārathamāta now has a modern temple in Benares where, instead of an image, there is a large map of India. Bhārathamāta is not in fact a widely worshipped goddess, but she is the first Hindu State deity to

99. N.N. Bhattacharyya, op.cit., p.117.

100. P.L. Samy. Tamil Ilakkiyathil Thai Theiva Valipādu (Tamil), Chennai, 1976, pp. 108-109.

become Sovereign over a secular Republic with a boundaries fixed on a map.

Śakti is energy visualised in a female person. But any idea (like of nationalism centring round India or Bhārata) or the sub-nationalist fervour centring round a language like Tamil became Śakti.

During the Indian Nationalist Movement Bhārat (India) became the energizing Śakti called Bhārathamāta. In the extreme south, Tamil became the energizing Śakti which united all the Tamils became Tamilthai (Mother Tamil).

Just as Rabindranāth Tagore and Bankim Chandra Chatterjee sang the hymns for the Bhārathamāta, poets like Manonmaniam Sundaram Pillai sang in praise of Mother Tamil. The former is the National Anthem and later is the Sub-National Anthem.

What becomes clear from the study is that Śakti is symbolically female, but it is in reality neither male nor female. She is pure consciousness, one and uniform; but through cosmic nescience she assumes the form of the multiform world. She deludes all creatures with avidya and entangles them in bondage.¹⁰¹ She invests them with egoism and attachment and

101. Dēvi Mahātmya, I-53-58.

whirls them in the wheel of Sangara.¹⁰² She is in the world and transcends it, she pervades the world as pure consciousness in her form and manifestation. Śakti assumes various endless forms such as Vaisnavi and Śaṅkari¹⁰³.

Śakti is the primal force of life that underlies all existence. She vitalizes the body through the sushumna nādi and nerves. She nourishes the body with blood. She vitalizes the universe through Her energy. She is the energy in the Sun, the fragrance in the flowers, the beauty in the landscape, the Gāyatri or the Blessed Mother in the Vēdas, colour in the rainbow and intelligence in the mind. Vidya, shanti, lust, anger, greed, egoism, pride are all her forms. Her manifestations are countless¹⁰⁴.

102. Ibid., XI. 31.

103. Lingapurāna, 110-5-0.

104. Swami Sivananda, Hindu Gods and Goddesses, Garhwal, 1963, p.28.