



Worship Of Mother-Goddess

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The worship of Mother-goddess can be traced back to Rg-Vedic period or Indus. Valley-Civilization, the work 'Sakti' denotes 'Power'. Every human has some inherent power called Sakti. The power is a manifestation of *Para Sakti*, the Supreme Goddess worshipped as Mother *Maa*. She created God Brahma, Vishnu and Maheswar. The Devi is the manifestation of all powerful female principle i.e. the *Prakriti* or *Sakti* having associated with the male principle, *Purusha*. She became Jagadamba or *Jagatmata*, the Mother of the Universe and Creator of Gods. She is eulogized as a power of all powers and conceived by the worshipper in the form of Mahakali or Durga, Mahalaxmi and Mahasarasvati. Although the worship of *Maa Jagat Janani* is observed in every nook and corners of India, it is most devoutly celebrated in eastern states of Orissa, Bengal and Assam where the annual festival of Maa Durga had gained prominence over all other worship. In autumn the worship of Mother Goddess is performed to get peace, tranquility in this mundane world. The worship of Mother-goddess is conducted in the annals of tantric ritualistic practices, specially through *mudras*, *mantras* and *mandalas* in the *Karmakanda* of Brahmanical patheon. *Mantras* protect and redeem one who utters it. It has a tremendous power to transform from one state to the upper. It purifies and lifts us to a higher state of consciousness. The ritualistic procedure of *Tantra* is performed in an elaborative form. Acharya Sankar (788-820) also accepted the

tantric tradition through his *Bhasya* in *Brahmasutra*. In Europe the female worship is conducted through the worship of Virgin Mary. There were instances of Mother Worship in Far-East Asian and African countries.

The Sakti cult emphasizes total involvement with life, where sexual impulse is accepted, transformed and harmonized for one to attend spiritual realization. The worship of Goddess is often associated with worship of God. From the outer view the sexual act may appear to be perverse, but from the inner point of view, the same act signifies creation. The Saktas offer *Panchopachar Puja* to Maa Jagat Janani. There were two sects of *Saktas*- one sect interprets the sacraments literally which testifies worshipping of nude female as the symbol of the Goddess. The other takes the rites metaphorically with five sacraments. The five sacraments in *Panchopachara Puja* include (1) *Mansa* (meat) (2) *Maithuna* (sex-union) (3) *Matsya* (fish) (4) *Madya* (liquor) (5) *Mudra* (hand gesture). The *Saktas* maintain utmost secrecy while performing this type of *Puja*. The *Puja* is not a egoistic satisfaction, but rather an act of transcendence. Through control of sense one attains spiritual ecstasy. Thus it is evident that one of the act of faith of the people was sexual union known as act of bliss, which must be performed in true religious spirit and not as wanton indulgence to ensure spiritual welfare. The *Vedas* support this view. The five forms specially *Maithuna* is vividly engraved in the temples of



Konark. Ancient rules were constructing temples of Goddess and painted the image of Mother-goddess on the walls near their palaces for worship. The walls of Vaital temple, Sisiresvar and Markandesvar temples of Orissa contains exquisite images of Mahisamardini Durga. A good numbers of sculptures of Orissa and Mukhalingam (Andhra) depicts the Ardhanarisvara form in which the right half comprises all the iconographic features of Siva and left half, those of Uma.

B.M Barua in his article on 'Pre-Aryan Elements in Indian Culture' claims that Mother-goddess cult in India is of pre-Aryan origin. It is well known that feminine deities occupy a very prominent place in modern Hinduism. Yet they played a very insignificant role in the religion of Rg-Vedic Aryans. The divine energy (Sakti) in Rg-Vedic age (*Devi-Sukta*.R.V.X-125). It may be observed here that names like Ambika, Uma, Durga, Kalika etc, which designated the central figures of the cult of Sakti do not occur in *Rg-Veda*. In the old Pre-Aryan religion of India, a leading feature was the worship of the nude-Mother-goddess as a nude-woman which survives to this day in the representation of such in the Hindu Mother-goddesses as Kali, Sitala, Chamunda, Chinnamasta etc. Sitala we are told in *Puranas*, should always be represented in a state of perfect nudity. Indeed, She still takes that form in Jessore, Nuakholi and Khulna where She is regarded by the Pods of their main deity.² Nude-goddess worship was prevalent in western Orissa since long. Many nude figures and sculptures of Sakti cult have been discovered from Khariar area of Orissa. Historian H.D. Sankalia has written an article in an international journal *Artibus Asiae Vol-XXIII* with nineteen illustrations drawn from Europe, Asia, India and South-east Asia that the ideal position for child birth was probably borrowed from Egypt through our flourishing trade with Rome in the 1st century B.C to 12th century A.D. In the ancient world, the most realistic of such figure belong to Egypt,

where they represent the Goddess Baubo. The figure is commonly represented as seated on the ground, the legs spread out so as to display the Pudenda (the Yoni) which are strongly marked and often exaggerated in size.

There are many sculptures and terracotta figures found from various excavations which are identified as nude goddess seated with wide spread legs, flanked by a female attendant on either side in cave no 21; Ramesvar cave, Ellora. Many such figures from Alampur (Andhra Pradesh), Kolhapur, Bhita (U.P), Vadgaon (Satara), Nevasa (Maharashtra) were found which showed the nude-goddess's popularity. The village folktales from Karnataka showed that she was worshipped by women who wanted children. The idea was prompted by the desire to envisage, to increase and glorify the spirit of fertility as personified in the Mother-goddess. As the role of Indian women in the real life is very vital, female deities also got special position in the Hindu Pantheon accordingly. An Indian woman is supposed to be absolutely devoted to her husband. She is respected as the embodiment of the deity. She reigns supreme in her own domain as the Mother of her children and nucleus to her family members. Motherhood is treated with great respect in India. The sacred quality of womanhood in Indian village life is given much importance, where most of the women - folk spend a considerable time in fasting, worshipping and preparing special food for numerous Pujas and festivals throughout the year.

Worship of female spirit in some form or other (i.e. the Mother-Goddess) were existed during the days of Indus Valley Civilization, the proof of which is ascertained from the discovery of some seals and sculptures from the excavations. However, the Sakti-cult in its developed form appeared for the first time in the Epics and *Puranas*. The Mahabharat for example outlines various constituent elements underlying the principal cult-picture of the developed Sakta-Cult



i.e. the *Durgastrotras* in *Virat* and *Bhisma Parva* in *Mahabharat*. Harivamsa (4th century A.D.) mentions that the Goddess Durga is very popular since early centuries of Christian era and She is identified with all the chief deities and had the characteristic epithets. In the Gupta Period Durga was worshipped as Ambika, Simhavahini, Uma etc. The composition of *Devi Mahatmya* or *Saptasati Chandi* is an important land mark in the history of the Devi-worship in ancient India. This work was probably composed in the 6th century A.D, and was later on incorporated in the *Markandeya Puran* (81-93) its oldest extant manuscript being dated 998 A.D. (Winternitz-*History of Indian Literature*). Here *Durga Puja* is described as great autumnal worship.

In 5th century A.D., worship of Stambheswari was prevalent in southern and western Orissa under the Tungas, the Sulkies and the Bhanjas. The earliest epigraphic evidence was found in a copper-plate grant of Tustikar Deva. There is a pillar of Stambhesvari at Sonepur and one temple of Goddess at Aska in Ganjam district. The Stambhesvari is an another form of Khambesvari, the popular deity among the tribals. Viraja of Jajpur mentioned in Vayu Puran and Hari Vansa, the Vaitarani and Viraja Tirtha of Mahabharat, the Navigaya of Vishnu Puran and the Sidhapitha of Kubija tantra had flourished as a centre of Saktism from the 5th century A.d to 12th century A.D. The image of Devi Viraja now under worship is a two armed Mahisamardini engaged in killing Buffalo-demon of Gupta period. From 7th century onwards tantric worship of Mother-goddess were developed under Sailadhaba and Bhaumakara rule. The most ancient Sakti shrine of Bhubaneswar is the temple of Vaital and its sculptures clearly proves that the strange esoteric rites were being performed in it.

By the time Vaital temple was built in Bhubaneswar witnessed a peculiar blending of Saktism, Saivism and Mahayana Buddhism. Two-armed, four-armed, six-armed, and eight-armed

images of Durga had cropped up at innumerable places along with images of Tara, primordial deity of Buddhist pantheon and other deities of Sakti-cult. Afterwards the image of Durga having ten-armed, twelve-armed, sixteen-armed, eighteen-armed and twenty-armed were developed in many other places of Orissa. The seven tongues of Agni as described in Mandaka Upanisada had crystallized into Sapt Matrukas with their attributes derived from Markandaya, Agni, Matsya and other Puranas. The seven goddesses are Varahi, Indrani, Vaisnavi, Kaumari, Sivani, Brahmani and Chamunda. The deities are of two or four armed. These *Matrukas* are found at Parsuramesvar, Vaital, Muktesvar temples of Bhubaneswar, at Jajpur, Belkhandi (Kalahandi) and Markandesvar tank at Puri. Towards the 10th century A.D., with the rise of tantric Buddhism and tantric Saivism the Yogini worship became popular in Orissa. There are two Sixty-four Yogini temples in Orissa, one at Hirapur on the south bank of the river Bhargavi near Bhubaneswar and the other at Ranipur-Jharial in Bolangir district. Durga Puja celebrated in autumn has its root in some aboriginal custom prevalent in ancient India. Evolution of Sakti Cult down through the centuries indicates that worship of Mother-goddess in various forms will continue for the ages to come.

References :

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