One of the most popular goddess of the Hindu, Durga Mahishamardini is worshipped annually in the month of Asviana. She is the great Mother Goddess who appears at times on earth to destroy the evil forces, being endowed with numerous hands and weapons. She is Mahayogini who maintains the links of creation, preservation and destruction. She is worshipped as Aday because she is the beginning of all. The evolution of the Durga images was mainly due to the wide prevalence of Saktism that is the worship of Shakti under various names of which, Devi, Durga and Kali are best known. Durga becomes the supreme object of adoration in the Sakti cult and had a number of names given to her in the subsequent literature. She is also named as Brahmani (Creative Force), Vaishnavi (Preserving Force) and Rudrani (Destructive Force).

It is said in the Ramayana that Sri Ramachandra also worshipped Mother Goddess with one hundred and eight lotuses to seek her blessing to kill Ravana.

In the Mahabharata, many names of Durga are mentioned in a hymn of Arjuna. They are Kali, Kapila, Krishnapingala, Siddha-Senani, Mahakali, Chandi, Chanda, Katyani, Vijaya, Jaya, Uma, Sakambhari and so on.

In the form of the Mother Goddess she was the popular deity in the ancient period, scholar like Sir John Marshall feels that the foremost among the Indus Pantheon was the Mother Goddess. A teracotta figurine from Harappa represents a nude female figure with a plant issuing out of her womb. She is represented as Mother Sakambhari. Kautilya mentioned ‘Devī’ in his Arthasastra as a spirit of vegetables in connection with the sowing of seeds. From the Earth Goddess she was later conceived as the war-Goddess for the protection of her devotees. To the Vedic Aryan, the Mother Goddess appears in the form of Prithivi and later on it is called Aditi; Prakriti Durga, Gouri and Kali Ambika is described as the sister of Rudra and later on comes to be regarded as the great Mother Uma and Parvati occurs as name of Siva’s consort in the Taittiriya Aranyaka. She is now Durga who grants victory and Mahishamardini who killed the buffalo demon Mahishasura.

According to Ansumabhedagama, Goddess Durga is stated to have four arms, three eyes and dark complexion. The head is adorned with a Karanda Makuta and body decked with all ornaments.

The Goddess Durga as Mahishasuramardini should have ten hands according to Silpatratna which described her further as having three eyes, high breast and thin waist. Her eyes resembling the nilotpala or blue lotus and stand in the tribhanga pose. In her right hand She carries the Trisula, Khadga, Saktayudha, Chakra and...
bow, and in the left hands the Pasa, Ankusa, Khetaka Parasu and a bell. The Asura Mahishusura carries a sword and a shield. The devi plunged her trisula into his neck and he is bleeding profusely.

The Vishnudharamattara is quoted as Mahishamardini under the name of Chandika. The devi has the complexion of gold and is a very handsome youthful lady in an angry mood, sitting on the back of a lion. She has twenty hands.

The various texts differ mainly with regard to the number of arms the goddess should have. The Matsya Purana, the Silparatna and the Rupamandan assign her only ten arms. The Varahapurana, the Chandi Purana and the Visva Karma Silpa Sastra give her as many as twenty arms. The Vanam Purana, however endows her only eighteen arms. She is called thousand armed in the Devi Mahatmya. Bana’s Chandisataka refers to her Bhuja Vanam (forest of arms).

The story of Durga’s Mahishasura combat is formed in Various Purunas. According to the text of Vamana Purana; that the gods having been defeated by Mahishasura forsook their abodes and hastened with Brahma as their head to implore the protection by Vishnu. Sankara was also present there; and when the gods finished their grievances, Vishnu, Brahma Sankar and all the gods so emitted flames of anger from their eyes and countenances that a mountain of effulgence was formed. From this mountain came forth Katavani resplendent as thousands Suns, with three eyes with hair black as night and with eighteen arms.

To her Siva gave a trident, Vishnu a disc, Varuna a conch, Agni a spear, Yama an iron rod, Vayu a bow, Surya a quiver and arrows, Indra a thunder bolt, Kubera a mace, Brahma a rosary and water pot, Kala a sword and shield, Visvakarma a battle axe and other weapons, Himavan a lion and other various arms and ornaments. Being thus armed and adorned by all the gods Katayani proceeded to the Vindhyā mountain. She gave an exceedingly frightful scream, again and again engaged the enemies of the gods and their leader in a terrific battle vanquished the demons, and their leader Mahisha by pierced his body with trident.

The story of Durga Mahishasura combat is found also Devi-Mahatmaya. The battle between Durga and the buffalo demon, in which the latter was defeated by the hands of Goddess Durga.

Durga is often worshipped in the form of nine figures; one of them being set-up in the middle and the remaining eight in position corresponding to the eight points of the composes. They are all seated figures having a lotus as their seat. The image in the middle has eighteen hands, and is adorned with various ornaments and other eight figures of Durga have only sixteen hands. The central figure is named Ugra-Chandika. The names of these eight goddess are Rudra-Chanda, Prachanda, Chandogra, Chandanayika, Chanda, Chandavati, Chandarupa and Atichandika. Such is the description of Navadurga as given in the Skandayamala.

Once goddess Durga was installed as a supreme deity after her various exploits against the demon Mahishasura. She gradually outgrew the terrific character through her feminine nature and Mahishasuramardini from being the commonest type of her terrific aspect is more frequently represented in Indian art. Sculptural representation of Mahishamardini Durga found in the 1st century A.D of Kushana period in the Mathura Art. The image is two, four or six armed is seen subduing the demon.

One of the remarkably relief belonging to the Gupta period, unearthed at Bhita depicts the
Goddess subduing the buffalo-demon. A fragmentary relief at Sarnath also represents the goddess piercing the demon with her trident. Here the goddess is two armed and without her usual mount. The four armed image at Bhumara, (Madhya Pradesh) seen Goddess standing in the Pratyalidha pose and pressing demon's head with her right leg, piercing the back with her trident. In the coin of the Kumara Gupta-I, the Goddess is depicted as Durgasimhavahana. In all the early representation, the goddess is two, four or six armed, but in the Udayagiri cave the goddess has been endowed with as many as twelve arms.

There is a very interesting stone sculpture of Mahishasuramardini from Dulmi in the Indian Museum at Calcutta. It represents the ten armed goddess fighting vigorously with the demon who emerges out of the decapitated trunk of buffalo, she has in her right hands the trident, Khetaka, Tanka, Sara, Khadga and Dhanu, Parsu, Ankusa, Shild in her left hand. The demon carrying a sword and shield in his hand to fight with the goddess is represented near her right leg.

Another ten armed splendid image of the goddess in black basalt in the Dacca Museum is much akin in composition to the above relief. It however differs in certain point that the goddess has thrust a Javelin instead of a trident in to the demons bosom. Secondly she is subduing the demon by catching hold of his tuffus of hair. It bears a short inscription on its pedestal describing the goddess as Sri Mashika Chandi. It corresponds to the Agni Purana, according to which the Devi seizes the hairs of the demon by one her hands.

Rajastan has also bequeathed ten-armed figures of the goddess, one from the Nilakanthesvara temple at Alwar being highly interesting. The ten-armed goddess represented as killing the demon, is penetrating the trident into the headless trunk of the buffalo, from whose neck the human form is made to emerge with a sword in his hand. The whole composition is animated with life. The goddess is flanked by miniature female attendants on her either side. In the Amber Museum the four-armed goddess represents the act of killing the demon. She bears a sword, a trident, and a bell and the remaining left hand is placed on the head of the demon who has just emerged in human form as a result of the decapitation of his animal head. Similar sculptures have also been preserved in the Museum at Jhalawar. The depiction of the demon, both in human and animal form as early as the 8th, 9th century A.D, in very interesting from iconographic point.

There is yet another impressive eight armed image of Mahishamardini in the Ambikamata temple in Rajasthan which is assigned to the 10th century A.D. Executed between two pilasters, the goddess who holds a thunder bolt, a sword a shield and a bows, is thrusting a trident held in her front right hand into the left thigh of the demon in the human form emerging out of the decapitated trunk of the buffalo.

In the Vital Deula at Bhubaneswar, the goddess shown in the act of slaying the buffalo demon who has the body of a man and the head of a buffalo having two horns and who is seen kneeling before the goddess at her feet trying to fight her with a sword in his hand.

The eight armed goddess carries sword, trident, thunder bolt, javelin and shield, bow in the left hand and pressing the buffalo-demon by her remaining left hand. The figure of the warrior like goddess is depicted as trampling his titan force and he is breaking, sinking before her.

At Khajuraho six, eight and twenty armed representation of Mahishamardini have been noticed, she has been killing the demon king
Mahishasura plunging a strong spear with all her might into the body of the Asura.

The goddess having twenty arms has eighteen arms broken while with remaining two upper most hands, she is carrying cymbals. From the decapitated head of the buffalo emerges the real Asura whose head is smashed. The twenty-armed goddess in the Chausathi Yogini temple has a sword, a shield, a hoops in three of her hands, while the remaining hand are all damaged.

The goddess trampling upon her foe with both the legs. The defeated demon is turned upside down. The eight armed goddess is holding an arrow, a spear, a khadga, shield, bell and bow.

At Dinajpur district of North Bengal a stone image of thirty-two armed goddess have been found. The thirty two armed goddess, equipped with various weapons with a miniature lion between her legs, is depicted engaged in combat with the demons. On the top part of the stone are carved the miniature figures of Ganapati, Surya, Siva, Vishnu and Brahma.

Numerous interesting Mahishamardini image have been found in different parts of South India also. The Mahishamardini image from Badami has four armed engaged in slaying the buffalo demon.

The eight armed image from Aihole is shown with various weapons in her hands and accompanied by her lion mount.

The image of Mahishamardini in Madras Museum mark with slight difference. The goddess plant her left leg instead of right one on the ground and presses the buffalo with her right leg. The human form of the demon issuing out of the decapitated trunk has his head pressed down by his tuffs of hair being caught by the goddess.

The sculptural representation of the goddess engaged in a combat with the buffalo-demon in the Mahishasura cave at Mahabalipuram and the Kailashnath cave temple at Ellora, is the moving picture of a living battle. The scene is undoubtedly is full of life and movement and the goddess in a dignified figure. In the opinion of Coomaraswamy 'it has a decided elegance'. One of the master pieces, signifying the high water mark of the pallava art, carved in high relief on the wall of the Mahishasura cave. It does not simply represent the killing of the demon by the goddess rather it introduces two armies, one of the goddess and the other of the buffalo-demon.

The struggle of the goddess with the demon in its most intense form is also found from in the Ramesvara cave at Ellora. Another remarkable South Indian representation in the Kailasanatha cave temple at Ellora, portrays the moment of clash, its done by the artiste of the Rashtrakuta period. Having eight arms, brandishing weapons of all kinds, the Devi riding her lion is vigorously attacking Mahishasura, full scale man of her stature with buffalo horns. In the chola art, Mahishamardini has been represented as standing on the head of the defeated buffalo-demon.

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