



Goddess Durga, Banei

## Durga Worship in Upper Mahanadi Valley

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We find the traces of the worship of goddess Durga in her Mahisasuramardini aspect as early as the sixth century A.D. This is evident from the discovery of the ruins of a collapsed brick temple containing a two-handed Mahisasuramardini Durga image in the *Alidha* posture in the *Garbhagriha* and having an inscription on the pedestal in the box-headed Brahmi alphabets of the sixth century mentioning goddess Mahesvari. The temple was unearthed by the noted historian, late Prof. N.K. Sahu, in 1983, during excavation in the Maraguda valley of the Nuapada district. A *Sakta Math* (Monastery), said to be the earliest of its kind was also unearthed near this temple during this excavation.<sup>1</sup> The discovery of the two-handed Mahisasuramardini

Durga image in the *Garbhagriha* of the Maraguda temple ruins as well as the Sakta monastery testify to the existence of the Mahesvari cult as early as the sixth century A.D.

We find another two-handed Durga image at Dharapgarh village of Balangir district, which can be dated to the same period. The textual references to the goddess with two arms

is quite rare, though *Suprabhedagama*, *Purvakarmagama* and *Uttarakarmagama* describe Durga as having two hands.<sup>2</sup> R. Chanda has suggested that the two-armed figures of the goddess were confined to the pre-Gupta period.<sup>3</sup> But as the Brahmanisation process seems to have started in western part of Orissa only after the subjugation of this area by the Gupta monarch Samudragupta during his military expedition to the *Daksinapatha* in the middle of the fourth century A.D., both the two-handed Durga images of Western Orissa



Goddess Durga, Lalei, Sundargarh District

can be taken to be of the post-Gupta period. Another unique image of two-handed Durga, sitting on Her mount lion holding two swords in both Her up-raised hands is found fitted in a niche



Ten-handed Durga,  
(Goddess Kusangei)

of the exterior wall of the Bahari Gopalji Temple at Sonapur, situated in front of the destroyed palace of the erstwhile feudal ruler of Sonapur Ex-Princely State. Four-handed Durga images are found at Belkhandi and carved on a monolithic rocky escarpment at Ranipur

Jharial alongwith figured panel of *Saptamatrka*, Uma-Mahesvara and standing Ganesa. Noted historian Dr. J.K. Sahu takes the four-handed Durga images to be of the seventh century.<sup>4</sup> Six-handed Durga images are found at Belkhandi, Gandharadi and in the *Parsvadevata* niche of the Ramesvara Siva temple at Sonapur, as central deity in the Durga temple at Bausuni and enshrined as Vindhyaasini Durga at Narsinghnath. The six-handed Durga images can be taken to be of the eighth/ninth century when the Bhanjas and other local dynasties were ruling this region.

The worship of the Mother Goddess or the female principle can be traced in India as in other regions of the world to the most ancient period. In India the worship of Mother Goddess has been traced in the archaeological findings from Indus Valley. An oblong terracotta seal from Harappa depicts a nude female figure upside down with her legs wide apart, and with a plant issuing from her womb.<sup>5</sup> Marshall has further mentioned that such figurines have been found in various regions situated in a wide belt of the ancient world from the Indus to the Nile. He is of the opinion that they are 'effigies of the great Mother Goddess.' Such depiction of the goddess with the similar position, but with a lotus issuing

from her neck instead of from her womb has been found on a terracotta sealing of the Gupta period (circa 4th-5th century A.D.)<sup>6</sup> Ringstones and discs found from sites of the Maurya and Sunga periods (300-200 B.C.) were probably associated with the cult of Mother Goddess symbolising the *Yoni*. Ringstones, popularly known as *Pandka Pathar* is found in many places of archaeological importance in the rural area of the upper Mahanadi valley. One carved *Yoni* has been discovered during digging of the spill way of the Jonk Dam at Patora in the Maraguda valley in 1982, which is in the private possession of the noted historian Jitmitra Prasad Singhdeo of Khariar. In the meantime four more stone *Yonis* have been found in places like Dangrital, Chuipain, Soseng and Mundapada village, all in the Nuapada district.<sup>7</sup>

The Mother Earth in the shape of *Yoni*, the female organ of generation, in the opinion of the learned scholar O.A. Wall, still very widely worshipped in the Asiatic religions, and the worshipper of *Yoni* are called *Yonicitas*.<sup>8</sup>

*Yoni* is worshipped as goddess *Duarseni* at Patalganga in Nuapada district and at Sindhekela in Balangir district in shrines built for the goddess by the local populace.

Even much before the Vedic period or even the time when the Indus Valley civilisation flourished, *Yoni*, the origin of the mankind and other living world, was worshipped in the rock-shelters by the pre-historic cave-dwellers of the upper Mahanadi valley.



Goddess Durga,  
Vaidyanath, District Sonapur





Rock-cut figures of Four-handed Durga and Ganesh,  
Ranipur Jharial, District Balangir

Learned scholar Dr. Pradeep K. Behera while doing exploration work in the dense mountain ranges of Hemgir belt of Sundargarh district in 1987-88 encountered hundreds of small and large rock shelters, out of which six yielded evidence of pre-historic occupation and artistic activities. In two of those rock shelters out of the six discovered by Prof. Behera, peculiar triangular engravings were found, which have been identified by him as stylised depiction of female genital organs (*Yoni*). Dr Behera is of the opinion that pre-historic people were somehow connected with the process of procreation among the human beings, which has been subsequently referred in the religious literatures as fertility cult.<sup>9</sup> In Western Europe also we get evidences of the prevalence of the stylised of Mother of Venus<sup>10</sup> in the Upper Palaeolithic and subsequent pre-historic cultures.<sup>11</sup>

The Fertility Cult or the worship of the Mother in the child-delivering postures has been emphasised in the Lajjagouri or the Aditi Uttanapada images found all over eastern, western, southern and central India. Two such images carved on stone plaques, depicting Lajjagouri has been discovered in the Nuapada district. One was discovered by the learned scholar J.P. Singh Deo in the Kotipadar village, situated at a distance of 10 kms from Khariar

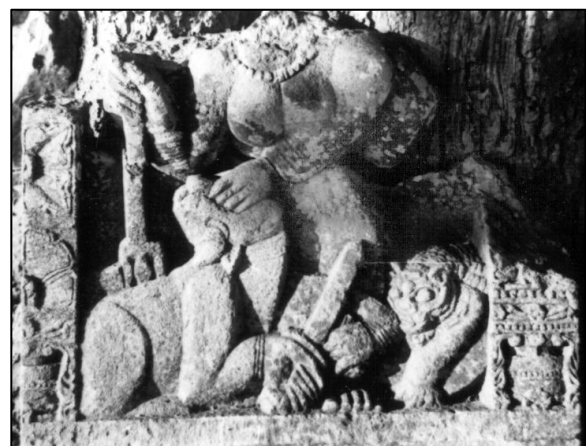
and the other one was found during digging of the plinth of the Panchayat College Building at Komna.

In this images, the goddess is depicted as headless and instead of head, a full-blown lotus is issuing from the neck. This goddess has been identified with Aditi Uttanapada by Stella Kramrisch.<sup>12</sup>

H.D. Sankalia has identified her with Lajjagouri.<sup>13</sup> The prominent exhibition of vulva in this images emphasize the *Yoni* type of the fertility figurines.<sup>14</sup> The sprouting of vegetation or lotus from her throat, thereby forming her head, allure scholars to identify her with goddess Sakambari.<sup>15</sup>

In Parvati legend, her sexual aspect, nourishing nature and headless figure is meet with in her Sakambari aspect. In the *Laksmi Tantra* we find mention of the blue coloured goddess Sakambari who was produced from the body of Parvati during the fourteenth cycle of *Vaivasvata Manvantara*.<sup>16</sup>

Learned scholar Dr. Baba Mishra has rightly pointed out that the evolution of Durga-Parvati and Sri Laksmi cults have the same cardinal traits like headlessness, amorous aspect



Two-handed Goddess Durga,  
Sarsara, District Sundargarh



Eight-handed Durga,  
Rampur (Patnagarh)

and fertility /  
nourishment  
features.<sup>17</sup>

Therefore in the Brahmanical culture, although Durga-Parvati and Sri Laksmi appear to be different, yet, they are considered as one. They both as the manifestation of a single Universal Mother Goddess has been mentioned

in the Durgastotra of Mahabharata<sup>18</sup> at least since the later Vedic period. In a Gupta coin, Laksmi has been depicted as seated on a lion, the vehicle of goddess Durga.<sup>19</sup>

In this context the story of Renuka, the wife of sage Jamadagni can be cited. She is worshipped as goddess Matangi, Yellama and Prthvi etc. for procuring offspring by barren women even today.<sup>20</sup>

In this context it is important to be noted that during the *Baliyatra* at Sonepur, religious rituals of esoteric nature are performed during Dussehra in the Khaulgad, (most probably symbolising *Yoni* or vulva), in a place called *Renukapitha*, near the Suresvari temple.

The nourishing mother aspect of mother goddess Parvati is emphasised on an unique image of mother-son (Parvati and her son Karttikeya), fitted to the northern *Parsvadevata* niche of Dhavalesvara temple at Mohangiri in Kalahandi district. It is the standing figure of a heavy-breasted female wearing a flat *Mukuta*, *Makara-kundala* in both ears and a broad neck-lace. This lady is calm and while her right-hand is in *Abhaya-*

*mudra*, the left hand is put around the shoulder of a youth whose mouth is near her left breast. This youth is holding a Kartri in his left-hand. The lady-figure is wearing long cloth hanging from waist below up to her feet while the youth is wearing cloth from waist upto knee-portion and *Uttariya* hanging from their shoulders in both cases. It seems to be the mother-son figure of Parvati and Karttikeya.

The association of vegetation with the goddess has been described in her Sakambari aspect in the *Markandeya Purana*.<sup>21</sup> This concept is given much emphasis even during the present time, in the *Navapatrika* ceremony of the autumnal Durga worship, associating nine plants. 'She is the mother *par excellence* sustaining her children, the men and animals of the universe, with food produced from her body.'<sup>22</sup>

Although we donot find mention of goddess Durga in the *Rg Veda*, Her name occurred for the first time as Ambika in the *Taittiriya Aranyaka* as the consort of Rudra.<sup>23</sup> She has been mentioned as Durga Vairocani, Katyayani and Kanyakumari in the same work also.<sup>24</sup>

The names of the Supreme Goddess as Bhadrakali, Bhavani and Durga etc. are mentioned in the later Vedic texts like the *Sankhyayana* and *Hiranyakesin Grhyasutras*, and also in the *Taittiriya Aranyaka*. The two *Durgastotras* of the *Mahabharata*<sup>25</sup>



Saumya Durga, Bausuni,  
District Baud



Goddess Durga,  
Kumari Temple, Banei

and the *Aryastava* in the Supplement of *Mahabharata* have vividly outlined the constituent elements underlying the development of the Sakti Cult.

The *Devimahatmya* Section of the *Markandeya Purana* is the most authoritative text,

which contains *Devistutis* elaborately presenting various multi-farious strands that contributed to the formation of the concept of the composite Mother Goddess Durga. The last couplet of the *Narayani-stuti*<sup>26</sup> describes the glory of the Great Goddess, who will so often incarnate herself to kill the *Danavas*. The *Stuti* express the ideas of the divine power and energy centering around the Supreme Mother Goddess Durga, the central deity of the Sakti cult. In the 82nd Chapter of the *Markandeya Purana* we get vivid description about the Great Goddess, who emerged as the accumulated fury of the Great Gods Brahma, Visnu and Siva (the Creator, the Preserver and the Destroyer of the Universe) and endowed with all the accumulated power of many other major and minor gods of the Hindu Pantheon. Then she set herself in the war path to the kill the demon king Mahisasura and his retinue.<sup>27</sup> She is taken as the most powerful Shakta Tantric goddess, revered by all sections of people. 'Durga in her perfect nature represents a consolidated idea of different aspects of truth as divine power. She is described as the most powerful martial goddess, equipped with the sharpest weapons and making terrifying sound and as the omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent creator, preserver and destroyer of the Universe.'<sup>28</sup>

In the upper Mahanadi valley, mention about the worship of the Mother Goddess in the form of Stambhesvari is found in the Teresingha copper-plate grant of king Tustikara,<sup>29</sup> who was ruling from Tarabhramaraka in the 5th century A.D. He was a devout worshipper at the feet of Stambhesvari (the Goddess of Pillar or Post) - '*Stambhesvari Padabhakta*.' Stambhesvari worship also flourished in the later period and was such a popular cult among the local populace that to appease their subjects, who were predominantly tribals, the later ruling family like that of the Sulkis (circa 700-900 A.D.) of Kodalaka Mandala, corresponding to the present Dhenkanal-Angul-Talcher region, made goddess Stambhesvari their tutelary deity, the *Istadevi*.<sup>30</sup>

B.C. Majumdar has rightly pointed out that Stambhesvari was an aboriginal goddess worshipped by the non-Aryan tribes of the hinterland of Orissa and in course of time she was like many other tribal deities given a place in the Hindu pantheon.<sup>31</sup>

Devi Stambhesvari, "The Goddess of the Post or Pillar" till the present day is widely worshipped in the hilly tracts of the undivided Sambalpur, Balangir, Phulbani, Kalahandi, Dhenkanal and Ganjam districts of Orissa in the form of a post or pillar of wood or stone. It might have been worshipped either in this form or in the form of a figure carved on pillar in the early days also. Learned scholar J.P. Singh Deo has taken the four-handed Devi figure holding a sword



Two-handed Durga,  
Maraguda, District Nuapada





Goddess Durga, Banei

and a club in her right hands and a shield and a severed human head in her left hands, carved out in the top-portion of a ten-feet high cut-rock pillar found at Dumerbahal village of Nuapada district to be the earliest image of goddess Stambhesvari and further put forth his opinion of this deity being Hinduized from Stambhesvari to Samalesvari.<sup>32</sup>

This goddess Samalesvari, otherwise known as Samalei became the family deity of Raja Balaram Deva, the first Chauhan king of Sambalpur line, who carved out an independent kingdom out of the Balangir-Patna state sometime in the sixteenth century and even built a temple at Sambalpur where the goddess is enshrined. Most probably Balaram Deva by accepting Samalei, the goddess of tribals of the Sambalpur region as his family deity tried to win over his subjects.<sup>33</sup> The image of Samalei, enshrined in the Samalei temple at Sambalpur is certainly a deity of tribal origin as it does not conform to any of the icons of the Hindu pantheon iconographically. Such icons are enshrined in all three places like Sambalpur, Barpali and Patnagarh in the Samalei temples. The temple of Samalei at Sambalpur, the earliest of these three, is said to have been built by Balaram Deva (Circa 1575 A.D.), while that of Barpali was built by Zamindar Vikram Singh in around 1690 A.D.<sup>34</sup>

Although the Chauhans of Sambalpur accepted Samalei as their tutelary deity, the early Chauhans of this line continued the worship of

their tutelary deity, Patanesvari at Patnagarh in the Balangir district, the capital of their Balangir-Patna kingdom. For the worship of goddess Patanesvari, which is actually an image of ten-armed Mahisasuramardini Durga, Ramai Deva, the founder ruler of the Chauhan kingdom of Balangir-Patna sometime in the later part of the fourteenth century, built a temple at Patnagarh, the capital of his kingdom.<sup>35</sup>

In their copper-plate grants, the Bhanja kings of Khinjali Mandala, and the Tungas of Yamagartta Mandala have also mentioned themselves as the devout worshippers of goddess Stambhesvari. The Bhanja king of Khinjali Mandala, Ranabhanja who ruled Baud - Sonapur region for long 58 years some time in between 790-850 A.D. has mentioned in his copper-plate grants that he was blessed by goddess Stambhesvari (*Stambhesvari Lavdha Vara Prasada*). As mentioned above, a Mahisasuramardini Durga image was discovered by late Prof. N.K. Sahu, the then Advisor in Archaeology to Government of Orissa in June 1983 during excavation of a mound in the Maraguda valley of Nuapada district, on the pedestal of which is a stone inscription deciphered as '*M a h e s v a r i Bhaveidam*' (From This Grows Mahesvari) by learned epigraphist late Dr. Satya



Goddess Durga, Somesvar Temple, Sambalpur



Goddess Durga, Belsara Gad

N a r a y a n Rajaguru.<sup>36</sup> Dr. Rajaguru has further stated through his correspondence with this researcher that it is the Mahesvari aspect of goddess Durga. He has dated the inscription to the 6th century A.D. palaeographically.

A n o t h e r epigraphical reference to

Durga worship is found in the Jatesingha-Dungri plates of the Somavamsi king Mahasivagupta Yayati-II Chandihara, in which it has been mentioned that goddess Bhagavati Sri Panchambari Bhadrabika was enshrined at Pattana Suvarnapura, the present-day Sonapur.<sup>37</sup>

The temple ruins at Sarsara in the Sundargarh district is of considerable importance, due to the two-handed Durga image found here which can be dated to the 6th-7th century A.D. In this image, the demon Mahisa is depicted in a complete buffalo form, but very peculiarly holding a sword in its proper right foreleg which is designed like a hand. The goddess is standing in *Dvibhanga* posture, putting her proper left hand on the head of the buffalo and pressing its head which is looking up. In the proper right hand Devi is holding a long *Sula* piercing it on the neck of the demon. Her *Vahana* lion is seen in the right side of the pedestal near her proper left foot. It is an unique image of goddess Durga, but unfortunately the head is missing.

A four-handed Durga image in profile is worshipped by the villagers of Ranipur in Balangir

district. This sculpture is kept under a tree near the collapsed pillared *Jagamohana* of a Siva temple to the west of the village. As the bottom portion of this sculpture is buried underneath the earth, Her *Vahana* lion is not visible. The goddess is wearing *Hara*, *Aksamala* on her wrists, arms and waist-portion and anklets on her feet. Both her lower hands are placed on the knee-portion of her left leg, which is raised and placed on the chest of the demon, Mahisasura. A snake (*Sarpa*) is attacking the demon from the back portion of his head. This *Sarpa* is most probably hold by Devi in her upper left hand, which is broken. The upper right hand is raised, but the object in it is not clear. The peculiarity of this sculpture of Mahisamardini Durga is that the *Trisula* (long trident) is not there in the hands of the goddess.

Another four-handed Durga in her Mahisasuramardini aspect is enshrined in a separate shrine to the north of the brick built *Jagamohana* of the Kosalesvara temple at Vaidyanath in Sonapur district. In her up-raised proper right hand is a *Khadga*, while in the lower left hand is a *Dhanu*. She is holding a long trident in her upper left hand which is pierced into the month of the demon. In her lower right hand she is holding the tail of her *Vahana* the lion. The *Jatabhara* adorning her head is specifically suggesting the P a n d u v a m s i feature, i.e. of the 7th-8th century A.D.

In the temple enshrining



Goddess Parvati and Kartikeya, Mohangiri, District Kalahandi



Kevala Narasimha at Podagad in Nawarangpur district, four images; two of Durga, one of Uma Mahesvara and one of four-handed Ganesa are worshipped by people. Among two Durga images, one is four-handed, while the other one is six-handed. In both cases Durga is in the conventional *Alidha* posture of an archer. The four-handed image is of the goddess in her Mahisamardini aspect, as the demon is depicted in the buffalo form. Durga is lifting the entire body of the animal by holding its tail in her lower left hand, and piercing the long *Sula* (trident) by her lower right hand deep into the neck of the buffalo. Objects in her upper left and right hands are *Pasa* (Noose) and *Gada* (Staff) respectively. Her hair is forming a *Jatabhara* on her head. *Patrakundalas* are in her ears and a *Hara* is around her neck. This image is of the breadth of around eight inches and height of fifteen inches. It can be dated to the fifth century A.D. iconographically, because four-handed image of Durga is a quite earlier representation of the goddess in the sculptural art of India. Another image of Durga kept inside this temple is a six-handed one and of the same dimension. In her left upper and middle hands are spear and *Sakti* respectively, while in her lower left hand she is touching the tail of the *Mahisa* (buffalo). In her right lower hand is a *Sula* which she is piercing into the neck of the *Mahisa*. In her upper right hand is a *Sarpa*. A *Karanda Mukuta* is adorning the head of the goddess. She is also wearing *Patrakundalas* in both her ears and a *Hara* around her neck. Garment is flowing between both

her legs. In the top-most corners of the stone-slab in both left and right sides, front-faced *Vidyadharas* (male and female) with garlands in hands are carved, which depiction assign a slightly later date, i.e. Circa 8th century A.D. to this image, because by the 8th century A.D. flying *Vidyadharas* appeared in the sculptural art of the upper Mahanadi valley. A four-handed Durga image, holding *Chakra* and *Trisula*, engaged in fierce battle with the theriomorphic buffalo-demon Mahisa by riding on it is fitted to the southern

*Parsvadevata* niche of the Bad Jagannath temple, situated in the Gopalji Math precinct at Sambalpur, which is an excellent piece of early Chauhan art of the 17th century A.D. As the *Trisula* is hold vertically it is the latest form of Durga, associating Vaisnavism in Her Cult.

In another place i.e. Banei in Sundargarh district also, we find a rare four-handed Durga image in the *Alidha* posture amidst loose sculptures found in the Kumari temple precinct, on the right bank of river Brahmani. Here Devi is seen to be putting her uplifted left leg on the back of



Fourteen-handed Saumya Durga,  
Khambesvari Temple, Sonapur

the beast *Mahisa*, while pressing its head with her lower left hand so that the head is turned to one side by that pressure and simultaneously piercing its neck with the *Trisula*, which is in her lower right hand. In the up-raised upper right hand of goddess Durga is a *Khadga*, while there is a *Sankha* in her upper left hand. Her *Vahana* lion is seen to be seated crouching, while biting the tail of the *Mahisa*. Here the human figure of Mahisasura is absent. This image can be dated to





the 7th-8th century A.D. also. Another Durga image, six-handed but all hands broken except one right hand, is also found amidst this temple ruins. The moustached Mahisasura with sword and shield in hands is lying right on the back of the lion. His head is slightly raised and Devi is seen piercing the *Trisula* on his waist portion rather than on the chest or neck. The body of the goddess is heavily bedecked with ornaments like *Katimekhala*, *Udara-bandha*, *Kankana*, *Keyura*, *Hara*, *Mukuta*, *Kundala* and many others. Her *Mukuta* deserves special attention. It is a *Jatamukuta*, behind which there is an oval-shaped *Sirascakra* formed by the design of lotus-petals. This *Jatamukuta* is adorned with *Kirtimukha* heads on the top. Strings of pearls are coming out of the mouth of the *Kirtimukha* heads from both the left and right sides and swallowed by the central *Kirtimukha*. From the mouth of the central *Kirtimukha* is hanging a rectangular-shaped flower-design pendant in a string of pearls. This image of Mahisasuramardini Durga can be placed in the 10th century A.D.



Goddess Durga,  
Banesvara Temple, Deogaon (Banei)

The Mahisamardini Durga image of Bausuni in Baudh district about which noted historian late R.D. Banerji has written is a six-handed figure of Devi, exquisitely carved on red stone. Very peculiarly enough, her *Vahana*, the lion is absent. The cut-head as well as the body of the buffalo is lying below and the kneeling Mahisasura is looking up holding a sword and a shield. Goddess Durga is seen in an archer's pose

(*Alidha*), putting her right raised leg on the Mahisasura and piercing the long trident (*Trisula*) by holding it in her right middle hand into the head of the demon. In her left upper, middle and lower hands Durga is holding a shield (*Khetaka*), bow (*Dhanu*) and snake (*Sarpa*) respectively, while a sword (*Khadga*) and a wheel (*Cakra*) are in her right upper and lower hands. This image is enshrined and worshipped in a separate temple, constructed in the Siva temple complex at Bausuni, on the right bank of river Mahanadi.

An exquisitely carved image of eight-handed and three-eyed Durga image is found amidst loose sculptures in the Chandi temple site at Lalei, situated on the left bank of river Brahmani, just opposite Banei town in Sundargarh district. It is carved on a stone-block measuring around thirty inches both in height and breadth. *Vidyadhara* couple (in the proper left side female and right side male) with garland in hands is carved in both sides in the top-corners of the stone slab.' The theriomorphic composite figure of demon *Mahisa* in the human form with the head of a

buffalo is lying below. Goddess Durga is seen putting her left foot on the body of the demon. In her upper-most left hand she is pressing the horn of the demon, while piercing the *Sula* hold in her lowest right hand on his neck. Here goddess Durga is depicted in a warrior pose, bringing out one arrow from the quiver hanging on her back in her upper-most right hand. The long *Khadga* of her lower-most right hand is also penetrated into



the neck of the buffalo head. In her second upper right hand is a *Sakti*, while in the second, third and lowest left hands are *Khetaka* (Shield), *Ghanta* (Bell) and *Dhanu* (Bow) respectively. Two lions are biting the body of the demon in both left and right sides of the pedestal. There is a lotus-petalled *Prabhavali* behind her head on the back-slab. A beautifully carved *Karanda Mukuta* is on her head. The goddess is heavily bedecked with all ornaments. The iconographic features date this image to the pre-Somavamsi period, i.e. 8th-9th century A.D.

Another exquisitely carved image of the eight-handed Mahisasuramardini Durga is adorning the northern *Parsvadevata* niche of the Banasvara temple at Deogaon, near Banei also. Devi is seen holding *Ankusa*, *Dhanu*, *Sarpa* and *Khetaka* in her four left hands, the *Sarpa* seems to be strangling the Mahisasura by going around his neck and biting the demon on his face. The right leg of the Mahisasura has not come out fully from the cut-neck of the *Mahisa*, while the fully-exposed left leg is bitten by the lion in the knee-portion. Devi is in her usual *Alidha* posture, seen putting her left foot on the back of her *Vahana*, the lion, while the slightly raised right foot on the back of the Mahisa, lying below. In her raised upper-most right hand is a *Khadga*, while in her second upper right hand she is pulling out one arrow from the quiver hanging on her back from the right shoulder. The broken top-portion of the long *Trisula* is still in her third right hand and in her fourth right hand is a *Cakra*.

Her body is bedecked with all sorts of ornaments and a peculiar *Jatabhara* is adorning her head. On the pedestal are foliage-designs with a bud in the central portion. This image is having all the iconographic features of the Somavamsi period, i.e. 11th century A.D.

In 1990, a beautiful eight-handed Durga image, of the size of around fourteen inches in height and ten inches in breadth was discovered at Salebhata in Balangir district from underneath the earth in a mound situated to the left of the state highway behind the Dak Bungalow on the

right bank of the river Ang, a major tributary of river Mahanadi. This image is exquisitely carved on red stone, with a thin layer of stucco pasted on it. It displays the beauty of the plastic art that prevailed during the period of the Panduvamsis and their successors, the early Somavamsis. The goddess is in the usual *Alidha* posture with her right leg on the back of the buffalo stumbling below and left leg on the back of a diminutive figure of her *Vahana*, the lion. The lion is seen biting the right foot of the demon Mahisasura who is looking up while trying to give a tough resistance in the



Ten-handed Durga,  
Dadpur, District Kalahandi

fight. A long trident held by the goddess in her third right hand is pierced right into the face of the demon. A long sword is held by Durga in her first upper right hand over her head. She is holding an arrow in her second upper right hand over her shoulder, while the object in her fourth right hand (the lowest one) is not clear. In the left hands, from top to below, objects held by the Devi are *Pasa* (noose), *Dhanu* (bow), *Ankusa* and



*Khadga*. The *Khadga* (sword) held by Devi in her fourth (lowest) hand is very peculiar in shape. It has a long handle which is fixed to her wrist with the help of two rings in it. She is seen piercing this sword in the naval-portion of the Devil. Goddess Durga has a smiling face. She is wearing a *Jatamukuta* on her head. A long garment which goes around her shoulders is hanging upto her knee-level. The cut head of the buffalo is lying below near the right foot of Mahisasura. This image is heavily bejewelled. At present, this image is kept in the Siva temple of Salebhata and can be iconographically dated to the 9th century A.D.

An unique image of eight-handed Mahisamardini Durga, of the height of around two feet and a half and breadth of eighteen inches was unearthed a couple of years back on the back of a rivulet named Suvarnarekha (Mayabati) at Rampur, situated on the outskirt of Patnagarh town of Balangir district. Objects hold by the Goddess in her proper right hands from top to bottom are *Khadga*, *Sula*, arrow and the lowest one in *Abhaya mudra*, while objects in proper left hands are *Khetaka*, *Dhanu*, *Kunta* and *Nagapasa*. In the proper right side of the pedestal demon *Mahisa* in the theriomorphic buffalo form is already beheaded, as a result of which trembling down on its fore-legs, and the anthromorphic form of the demon coming out from the cut neck of the buffalo.

The demon is depicted in the kneeling down position and being attacked by the goddess,

who has plunged the long trident deep into the face of the Mahisasura while strangulating his head by putting the serpent-noose around his neck. Her *Vahana*, the lion is seated in the left side of the panel, which seems quite unusual. The heavy ear-rings hanging from her ears and the *Karanda Mukuta* on Devi's head as well as absence of the *Vidyadhara* couple on both the top-most corners of the back-slab suggest an early dating, i.e. 7th-8th century A.D. for this image.

This image was for the first time reported by learned scholar Dr. Jadumani Mahapatra.<sup>38</sup>

Another eight-handed Mahisamardini Durga image is worshipped as Chandi in a small dilapidated temple of the *Triratha* order at Dekhala near Bijepur village, in the Titilagarh subdivision of Balangir district and also at Durgeikhol near Narsinghnath.

Besides this eight-handed Durga image another image of Durga in the *Alidha* posture is fitted to the proper left of the doorway to the inner sanctum of the Siva temple at Salebhata. It is a six-handed image of Durga. The left leg of the Devi is on the back of the diminutive figure of a buffalo, while the right leg is slightly

raised up and placed on the profiled figure of her *Vahana*, the lion. No weapon is held by Mahisasura, which is in a running posture in between both legs of the Devi, just below. In her upper right hand, which is touching her hair, tied as one *Jata* in a round shape. In her left middle hand, she is holding a *Kapala* with *Agni* in it.



Kusangei Temple, Kusang, District Balangir (Circa 11th Century A.D.)





Both the lower hands of Devi are put in a dancing posture. Durga is seen wearing a *Hara* with a bell hanging from its centre as pendant. It is a peculiar form of Durga iconographically, so far found in this region. This image is of the height of around ten inches and breadth of six inches. This image can be iconographically dated to the 7th century A.D.

Ten-handed Durga is worshipped as goddess Kusangei in a temple of the 11th century, at Kusang in Balangir district, which temple is a proto-type of Lingaraj temple of Bhubaneswar, most probably built by the Somavamsi king Yayati II (circa 1024-1060 A.D.). Patanesvari, enshrined in a temple at Patnagad is none else than ten-handed Durga in her Mahisasuramardini form.

Another ten-handed Durga image in her Mahisasuramardini aspect is found carved on a rectangular stone-block, having an *Asthadalapadma* (eight-petalled lotus) symbol carved on the pedestal, which denotes its relationship with *Tantra*. It is found in the southern side of the Somesvara temple at Balibandha in Sambalpur town.

Goddess Suresvari is worshipped in the Vana Durga *Mantra* in the Suresvari temple at Sonepur. Images of ten-handed dancing Durga and four-handed Devi sitting in *Lalitasana* (Bagala of the *Dasamahavidya* group) on the *Visvapadma* pedestals are fitted to the *Parsvadevata* niches of this temple. In the *Parsvadevata* niches of Khambesvari temple at Sonepur images of fourteen-handed Durga, standing in the Samabhanga and eight-handed Durga dancing in the *Lalita* mode are found. The eight-handed Durga is depicted as dancing with her right heel raised and all hands arranged symmetrically. The goddess is holding *Vajra*, *Sula*, arrow, *Khadga*, small *Khetaka*, *Dhanu*,

*Parasu* and an unidentified object in her hands. She is wearing *Naramundamala*, a long garland of skulls. *Sarpas* are coiled around her ankles and wrists as *Nupura* and *Kankana*. She is wearing ornate ear rings and her hair is arranged in a *Jatamukuta*. The ends of a scarf is hanging upto her feet-level. A profiled figure of her *Vahana*, the lion is carved on the pedestal just below her feet. It is an unique image of goddess Durga in the pacified form belonging to the Chauhan period, i.e. 18th century A.D.

A four-armed standing figure of pacified Durga is adorning the northern *Parsvadevata* niche of the Siva temple of Bausuni. The goddess is holding a *Sarpa* and an *Ankusa* in her upper left and right hands respectively, while the lower right hand is in *Varada Mudra*. In her lower left hand is a *Padmanada*. She is seen wearing a *Dhoti*-type garment, *Kuchavandha*, *Katibandha*, *Keyura*, *Kankana*, *Hara* and also a big garland of rosary beads hanging upto Her thigh-level. It is a *Saumya* aspect of the Devi with a smiling face seen wearing a *Karanda Mukuta* and beautiful ear rings. Her *Vahana*, a roaring lion is sitting near her right leg.

Another four-handed standing figure of Saumya Durga is of the height of about one feet and a half is found inside the *Jagamohana* of the Nilakanthesvara temple at Dadpur in the Kalahandi district, which can be dated to the Ganga period, i.e. 12th-13th century A.D. wearing a *Karanda Mukuta*, *Patra-kundala*, *Hara* and *Katibandha* etc. She is seen holding an *Ankusa* and a *Nilotpala* flower in her upper right and left hands respectively while keeping lower hands in *Varada* and *Abhaya Mudras*. Her *Vahana*, a roaring lion in profile is seen to be standing behind her figure. A ten-handed Durga image is also found at Dadpur in the Bhawanipatna sub-division of Kalahandi district.



With the rise of the Somavamsis in Western Orissa, the eight-handed and ten-handed Durga images were installed and worshipped in the temples as central deities. An eight-handed Durga image is worshipped as Chandi in the Chandi temple of Saintala, where Visnu images as well as temple pillars depicting scenes from the childhood of Krsna are kept. Both these Durga images can be taken to be of the Somavamsi period, i.e. the ninth-tenth century A.D. The most excellent of all these Durga images is the one having twenty hands, which has been collected from Salebhata and now preserved in the Sambalpur University Museum. The *Visnudharmottara* as quoted in the *Vachaspathya*, describes the twenty-armed Mahisamardini under the name of Chandika.<sup>39</sup> This Salebhata image can be taken as a rare one. We get another twenty-armed Durga image at Bheraghat in the Jabbalpur district of Madhya Pradesh. The twenty-armed Durga can be dated to the 11th Century A.D. The ten-armed and twenty-armed images can be taken of the period in between 10th-12th century A.D.

During the time of the Chauhans also, Mahisamardini Durga was worshipped as a principal deity. We get four-handed Mahisamardini image in the *Jagamohana* of the Samlei temple of Sonapur, and another in the Gokarnesvara temple precinct of the same town.

An image of a four-armed Parvati but seated cross-legged in *Padmasana* is kept in the northern *Parsvadevata* niche of the Siva temple at Ramgarh in Baud district situated on the right bank of river Mahanadi. A long garment is around her neck which is hanging from both shoulders upto the feet-level. She is holding *Sakti* and *Dhvaja* in her raised upper left and right hands respectively, while the lower left and right hands

are in *Abhaya* and *Varada Mudras*. The *Vahana* lion in profile is carved in the centre of the pedestal in the running posture.

From the above evidences it can be surmised that from the pre-historic age till the present days the worshipped of the supreme Mother Goddess is prevailing in the upper Mahanadi valley of Orissa.

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Cowards die many times before their deaths; the valiant never taste of death but once. – *Shakespeare*