CHAPTER - FOUR
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CULT OF MAHISAMARDINĪ DURGA

The beginning of Saktism in Orissa as discussed in the previous chapter was characterised by the worship of the Mother Goddess through the medium of a post or a pillar and in course of time it gave rise to the cult of Stambhesvarī which influenced the socio-religious life of the people of Orissa through ages. In course of the Aryanisation when Brāhmanism exercised its influence over Kaliṅga the cult of the Mother Goddess seems to have been manifested through an anthropomorphic form. Along with Vaiṣṇavism and Śaivism, Śaktism which also forms a vital aspect of Brāhmanical form of Hinduism was a popular faith in Orissa. During the Mauryan Age, when the Brāhmanical School was as important as the Buddhist order in Kaliṅga, it seems that the Mother Goddess was worshipped in a human form. Among the various Brāhmanical shrines which were repaired by Khāravela in the first century B.C. the shrines of the Mother Goddess were possibly reconstructed.

1. Rock Edict No.XIII(C.I.I., Vol.I, p.66; Barua, B.M. -Asoka and His Inscriptions, pp.189-190) indicates the equal importance of Sramaṇas and Brāhmaṇas in Kaliṅga in the 3rd century B.C.

The state of Saktism in the post-Kharavela period is shrouded in considerable mystery. However, by 3rd century A.D. it was a popular faith among the masses. This is known to us from the Bhadrak Inscription which reveals that during the reign of Surasarma, as we have discussed earlier, Parṇadevā or Parṇadevatī was a celebrated goddess for whom rich endowments were made by the devotees. With the rise of the Guptas in the 4th century A.D. Brahmanical form of Hinduism was revived almost in the whole of India. When Samudragupta launched his south Indian campaign through South-Kosala and Kaliṅga, Saktism along with Vaiśnavism and Saivism obviously influenced the people of Orissa who took up the cult of Mother Goddess along with the Pañcharātra School of Vaiśnavism and Lekulisa and Saiva Siddhānta Schools of Saivism. The earliest known center of Sakti worship in its anthropomorphic form in Orissa was Viraja (modern Jajpur in the Cuttack District) on the bank of the river Vaitarani. It is no wonder that under strong Gupta influence...

4. The author of Mahābhārata considered the river Vaitarani to be the heart of Kaliṅga (Ete Kalingān Kaunteya Yatra Vaitarani Nadi) and refers to the river as the destroyer of all sins (Tate Vaitarani gatvā Sarva papa Vimochanām) MBH, Vana Parva XXCV.6.

The Viṣṇu Purāṇa which was the product of Gupta period also refers to Viraja as Nāvigayā vide OHRJ, Vol.IV, Nos.3&4, p.43.

In the Kubjika Tantra Viraja is regarded as one of the 42 centres of Sakti worship – Sircar, D.C., The Sākta Pithas, p.19.

the first anthropomorphic form of the Mother Goddess in her aspect as Mahiṣamardini Durga was enshrined as an icon in a temple near Jajpur which on an archaeological ground is assigned to the Gupta period. The image of Mahiṣamardini Durga was originally enshrined in that temple at Kalasapur located at a distance of about one mile from Jajpur. Only the foundation of the temple can be noticed at present. However, from the ruins of the temple which are scattered at the site, it is well indicated that the shrine was flat-roofed square temple of the Gupta style. R.P. Chanda who was the first scholar to examine the icon of the Mahiṣamardini Durga at Jajpur was inclined to assign the image to pre-Gupta period. In his opinion, the two-armed Durga was the earliest form of the goddess conceived by her votaries and Viraja represents the earliest phase of the cult of the goddess. An interesting icon of Mahiṣamardini Durga enshrined in one of the niches of the Siva temple of Bhumra which is assigned by art historians to the 5th century A.D. is in many respects similar to the goddess Viraja of Jajpur. But the Mahiṣamardini Durga of Bhumra is 4-armed while that of Kalasapur is two-armed.

5. MASI, No.44, p.5.
As such we are inclined to assign an earlier period namely 4th century A.D. to the Durga of Kalasapur and the architectural features of the ruins of the flat-roofed square temple also lend support to our view that the icon belonged to the Gupta period and not to the Pre-Gupta Age. The icon of Mahisamardini Durga adored as Viraja is a two-armed figure. It is made of black chlorite stone and it is three feet in height. On examining the icon we find that the Mahisamardini Durga is represented in the posture of killing the demon which is in the form of a buffalo. The goddess is two-armed. She is in the pose of killing the animal mounting on the lion. In her right hand she is found holding a spear which pierces the body of the buffalo. In her left hand she pulls the tail of the animal. Her left foot presses the head of the buffalo. The fierce lion, the mount of the goddess, tramples the right leg of the demon. The goddess wears Kirita, Mukuta, necklace, bangles and girdle. On the top of the head there are representation of Ganapati, Serpent, Yoni, linga and moon. This two-armed Durga is earlier

8. It has not been possible to reproduce a photostat copy of the icon as it is prohibited by the rules of the temple. Kapila Sāhita gives us the Dhyana-Sloka or the invocatory verse in praise of the goddess Viraja which corresponds to the actual iconographic features is given below.

than that of the Siva temple of Bhumra\textsuperscript{9} and that of the Chandragupta cave of Udayagiri\textsuperscript{10}. Therefore, it is appropriate to assign the icon to the middle of the 4th century A.D. It may be compared with two-armed Durga in the posture of killing the buffalo demon as portraited in the Bhita Stone relief\textsuperscript{11}.

Closely resembling the Durga image of Viraja there is a fine image of the two-armed Mahisamardini Durga in black chlorite stone along with decorated sculptures, kept in the sanctum of the Muktesvara Siva temple within the compound of the Jagannatha temple at Jajpur. The association of the sculpture with image indicates that the icon was not intended to be worshipped as the presiding deity. It measures 21"x14". This type of Mahisamardini Durga (Fig.8) is very rare in the Gupta period in India. In this figure the goddess is represented on the posture of killing the demon in the form of a pure and simple buffalo. With her left hand she is shown pulling the tail of the demon (buffalo). The right hand of the icon is broken from the elbow. The deity

\textsuperscript{9} MASi, No. 16, Banerjee, R. D. - Age of the Imperial Guptas (Benaras, 1933), pp. 142-145, pl. 2 and 4.

\textsuperscript{10} Banerjea, J. N. - Development of Hindu Iconography (1956), pl. XLII, No. 4, p. 172.

\textsuperscript{11} ARASI (1911-12), p. 86, pl. XXXI, Fig. XIII & XIV.
is shown piercing the head of the buffalo with her spear between the two slightly twisted horns. The image of the goddess is ornamented with anklets and necklace and the crown of the deity is adorned with a snake, crescent moon and linga with Yoni pitha. On the basis of these features the icon which is a prototype of the two-armed Durga of the temple of Virajā, is to be assigned to the Gupta period.

The cult of Mahiśamardini Durgā is also popular in another centre of Sakti worship at Kakatpur in the Puri District of Orissa. In the compound of the temple of Someśvara near Kakatpur there is another significant icon of the two-armed Mahiśamardini Durgā. The deity is represented in the pose of killing the demon with her right foot placed upon the head of the buffalo which lies kneeling on the ground. The divine mother pierces a long spear with right hand into the neck of the animal while she holds the tail of the animal in her left hand. In this icon the loin is conspicuous by its absence. The mother goddess wears a Sārī on her lion and a scarf on her shoulder. She wears Jaṭā Mukuta on her head. These iconographic features indicate that the Mahiśamardini Durgā of the Prāchī Valley like that of Virajā belongs to the earliest known epoch of the worship of Sakti in her anthropomorphic form in Orissa.

Another figure of two-armed Durga is found engraved on a stone plaque now preserved in the Sambalpur University Museum (Fig.9). The plaque was collected from the Prāchī Valley. The iconographic features of the figure indicate that the cult image also belonged to the Gupta period.

Towards the later part of the age of the Mātharas it seems that Mahiṣamardini Durga was worshipped with her four arms. During the same period in the Śiva temple at Bhumra¹³ we notice a representation of a four-armed Mahiṣamardini Durga in one of the niches of the shrine. The temple is usually assigned by the archaeologists to the 5th century A.D. In the same century in Orissa the Mother Goddess was worshipped with her four arms in the Prāchī Valley in Orissa. In the said period the four armed Mahiṣamardini became popular in the Prāchī Valley. At Motiā located in the Prāchī valley we notice an impressive image of four-armed Mahiṣamardini (Fig.10). In her upper hand she holds Śaṅkha and Chakra while she pierces the trident on the breast of the demon with her lower hand. Images of this variety are also found in the temples of Mādhava at Niali and the Western wall of the temple of Charchikā at Banki. An interesting specimen of this variety is found in the compound of Markapḍesvara temple (Fig.11) at Bhubanesvara. Here the

¹³. MASI, No.16, pl.XIV.
demon is theriomorphic in the shape of a buffalo. The deity is four-armed. In one of her hands she lifts the buffalo by its tail and pierces the trident through the demon's body in the other. There is no doubt that this image marks a significant transition of the iconography of Mahiṣamardinī Durgā from the Gupta to the post-Gupta period. Except the four-armed representation all other features of the icon are similar to those of the Mahiṣamardinī Durgā at Virajā.

POST-MĀṬHARA PERIOD

The rise of the Sailodbhavas in the post-Māṭhara period richly contributed to the development of Saivism, Vaiṣṇavism and Saktism. They were devout worshippers of Śiva but they also paid their obeisance to their tutelary deity along with Uma or Pārvatī. In the preamble of the Sailodbhava charters the grace of this divine couple has been invoked. The Mother Goddess Uma or Pārvatī who was worshipped along with Sambhu or Mahesvara in Koṅgoda under the Sailodbhavas was also worshipped independently near the capital of Kongoda at Banpur. She was worshipped as Bhagavati as mentioned in line 44 in the Banpur plate of Dharmaraja alias Śrīmaṇabhīta. In

15. The Capital of Koṅgoda was situated at Bankāda on the bank of the river Sālimā (modern Saliā) Vide Behera, S.C. -Rise and Fall of the Sailodbhavas (Calcutta), p.
the said line of the epigraph the queen of Dharmarāja, 
Śrī Kalyāṇa Devī donated several timpiras¹⁷ of land in the 
village of Suvarnaralondi to the Jain saint Prabuddha 
Chandra and two timpiras of land of Madhuvaṭaka grāma to 
the Mother Goddess Bhagavatī for the performance of offering, 
sacrifice and oblation¹⁸. In the Inscription of Orissa 
this is the earliest reference to goddess Bhagavatī¹⁹ who 
seems to be worshipped at Banpur at least from the age of 
Sailodbhavas. Bhagavatī, as mentioned in the Banpur plates, 
has been for the first time identified by us with the well 
known Bhagavatī whose image is enshrined at Banpur.

In the Chronology and development of the 
iconography of Mahiṣaṁardini Durgā the next notable example 
is to be seen in the temple of Parasurāmasvāra (Fig.12). 
The temple is usually assigned to the later part of the 7th 
or the beginning of the 8th century A.D. At this stage of 
the iconography of the Mahiṣaṁardini Durgā the deity seems 
to have been represented with six arms. The six-armed images 
of Mahiṣaṁardini Durgā are rarely found in Orissa. Towards 
the decline of the epoch of the Sailodbhavas it seems that 
the particular representation of the Mother Goddess was 

¹⁷. A timpire is a unit of measurement. It is a Prākrit 
word, the exact equivalence of its measurement is not 
known.

¹⁸. "Vali,Satra,Charu Pravartaṇāṇy Bhagavateyi" - Vide E.I., 

¹⁹. Photostat copy in not allowed according to the sacred 
tradition of the temple.
popular. Till to-day we notice only three examples of this variety. One of them is located at Astarang in Puri District of Orissa. Here the deity presses the mouth of the demon with one of her right hands and she holds sword, arrow, bow, shield and trident in her other hands. One such representation of Mahiṣamardini is to be noticed at Parasurāmesvara which is little later than the temple of Satrughnesvara in the chronology of the temples of Bhubanesvara. On the northern wall of the temple carved just above the lintel is the image of Mahiṣamardini with six arms. Here she holds a sword in her upper most right hand brandished over the head while in other hands she holds a thunderbolt, bow, Khetaka. She pierces the throat of the buffalo-headed demon with the trident in the middle right hand and in her lower most left hand she presses the head down. An interesting specimen of this variety is also to be noticed in the collection of the Sambalpur University Museum. This variety has been collected from Belkhandi (Fig. 13) in the Kalahandi District of Orissa. It seems that the Belkhandi specimen of the Mahiṣamardini Dūrgā was a product of the epoch of the early Paṇḍu-Vaṁśis of South-Kośala.

**EPOCH OF THE BHAUMAS**

In the iconography of the Mahiṣamardinī Dūrgā in Orissa, the epoch of the Bhaumas ushered in a new era when eight-armed Mahiṣamardinī became widely popular for about two
centuries, i.e. in the 8th and 9th centuries of the Christian era. The most representative Śākta shrine of the epoch is the temple of Kapālinī, more popularly known as the temple of Vaitāla at Bhubanesvara. Although Chāmunda is the presiding deity of the temple, Mahiṣamārdini Durgā finds a significant place as a parsva devatā in the shrine. The temple is undoubtedly a product of Tāntric Śaktism which gained popularity and patronage in the 8th century A.D. The inscription "ॐ Sri Chandra Udah"\(^{20}\) engraved on a wall, closed to the right door jamb seems to be a mystic formulae of Tāntricism. Palaeographically the inscription may be compared with the image inscription of Subhākaradeva\(^{21}\) and as the temples may reasonably assigned to 8th century A.D.\(^{22}\). In the Bhauma epoch the cult of the seven mothers or Sapta Mātrkās centering round the ferocious Mother Goddess Chāmunda was widely accepted in the far flung territory of Utkala. In the history of Śaktism in Orissa the first anthropomorphic worship of the deity was done through the icon of Mahiṣamārdini Durgā who was accepted as the presiding deity in the Śākta shrines in the 4th century A.D. The same aspect of the Mother Goddess continued to be accepted as presiding deity in the 6th and the 7th centuries A.D.

But with the rise of Tantric form of Saktism the ferocious deity Chamunda was installed as the main deity in many Sakt shrines in Orissa. Thus in the temple of Kapalinī or Vaitāla Chamunda is the presiding deity. However, the cult of Mahiṣamardini Durgā continued to be a living faith among the people down to the present time. In the northern central niche of the Vaitāla temple there is a beautiful icon of eight-armed Mahiṣamardini Durgā (Fig.14). Here the deity holds a sword, a śūla, a trisūla and a vajra in her right hands; she holds a Khetaka with a loop handle, a bow and a snake in her three left hands while she presses the buffalo head of the demon with her remaining left hand. It may be pointed out here that the deity tramples over the chest of the demon in her right leg while the demon is represented in a sitting posture. The same representation of the eight-armed Durgā is also noticed in the southern niche of the temple of Sīśīresvara. It is, in fact, a prototype of the one noticed in the southern niche of the Vaitāla temple.

At Virajā itself which was the capital city of the Bhauma-Karas and a well-known Tantric centre of India is noticed a similar representation of eight-armed Mahiṣamardini Durgā in the Hanumanesvara temple in Jajpur. Here the deity is shown pressing the shoulders of the demon with her upper left hand and thrusting the trident through the chest of the demon with her upper right hand. In her other hands she holds
other weapons namely sword, Chakra, shield, bow and arrow and snake. The demon which is represented here as a human figure with the head of a buffalo. The lion which is the mount of the goddess attacks the demon. The image thus closely resemble those of Mahisamardini of the temple of Vaitāla and Sisiresvara. There is no doubt that all the representation of the eight-armed Mahiṣamardinī Durgā are the artistic creation of the epoch of the Bhauma-Karas.

In the development of the iconography in the Mahiṣamardini Durgā in the Bhauma epoch itself there was one significant noticeable change. Towards the 9th century A.D. although the eight-armed Durgā was still enshrined as Pārśva Devatā the demon associated with the deity was no more the buffalo headed demon. Here after, in the representation of Mahiṣāsura we notice the human head issuing out of the decapitated body of the buffalo. This change is remarkable in the icons of Mahiṣamardinī Durgā noticed in the Kichakesvarī temple at Khiching (Fig.15), on the back wall of the Bhagavati temple, Banpur (Fig.16) and the Lingaraj temple compound, Bhubanesvar. Khiching was a Sākta centre under the Bhaṇjas of Khijjingakota and it was also a place which witnessed prolific development of Śaivite and Sākta shrines and sculptures. At Khiching the Mother Goddess is represented in a standing pose trampling on the body of the buffalo in her right leg. In her upper right hand she holds
a Khetaka; two other right arms are broken. In her lower right hand she holds a weapon. All the left arms except one which is placed on her thigh are broken. The decapitated human figure is shown coming out of the body of the buffalo. The lion is shown attacking the demon. The Bhañjas who ruled over Khiijingakota in 9th century A.D. are contemporaries and feudatories of the Bhauma-Karas and under them tántric form of Sāivism and Sāktism developed in their territory.

The image of Mahiṣamardinī in the Lingaraja compound belongs to the same period i.e. c.9th century A.D., although the temple of Lingaraja belongs to 11th century A.D. So obviously the Durgā icon indicates that Bhubaneswar was also a centre of Sāktism by that time. In the pre-Somavâmi period under the Bhauma-Karas as we have noticed earlier Chāmundâ and Mahiṣamardinī Durgā were widely worshipped at Bhubaneswar in the 8th and 9th centuries A.D. The image of Mahiṣamardinī Durgā in Lingaraja compound has been nicely preserved and no part of it is broken. Here, the deity is shown with a sword, trisūla, vajra and sūla in her right hands and a Khetaka, a bow and a snake in the left. The decapitated human figure emerges out of the body of the buffalo and the lion is shown biting his left knee. A similar eight-armed Durgā has been noticed by us in the back side niche of the Bhagavatī temple at Banpur in the Puri District of Orissa. In her eight arms she holds the traditional weapons namely sword, trisūla,
vajra, sula, khetaka, bow and snake. Here too, the decapitated human figure of the demon emerges from the body of the buffalo, but the lion instead of biting the knee is shown in a standing pose. A votive inscription\textsuperscript{23} engraved on the left side of the image also reveals that the image belongs to c.9th century A.D.

In the growth and development of the iconography of the Mahiśamardini Durgā in ancient Orissa the temples of Mukhalingam provide interesting examples of the four-armed, six-armed, eight-armed and ten-armed deities. A very interesting figure of eight-armed Mahiśamardini Durgā found in a niche on the south wall of the Jagamohana in the temple of Madhukesvara at Mukhalingam which was capital of Kalinga under the Early Gaṅgaśa. There the deity is represented in a standing pose trampling on the back of the demon with her right leg. She holds a club, a sword, a vajra and a trident, a wheel, a bell and a bow in her hands. The buffalo headed demon is being pierced at his back by the goddess with the trident. This iconographical representation seems to be a prototype of the one at Vaitāla temple with slight variation in the pose of the demon.

The image of ten-armed Mahiśamardini Durgā becomes most expressive in the temples of Orissa from c.10th century

\textsuperscript{23} The inscription on the left side of the image on the slab may be assigned to the 9th century A.D. on palaeographical ground. It cannot be read with any amount of certainty as it is blurred.
unwards. A very beautiful representation of Dasabhuja Mahisamardini (Fig. 17) is found in one of the niches of the temple of Someswara at Mukhalingam. Here the Mother Goddess is shown with her smiling lips and open eyes. In her five right hands she holds a sword, a trident, a wheel, a club and a rosary and she holds a snake, a thunder bolt, a conch, a vase and an indistinct object. The perfect human body holding a dagger in his right hand emerges from the body of the buffalo and the head of the buffalo is noticed severed from its body. This depiction of the ten-armed Mahisamardini is a perfect model of Dasabhuja Mother Goddess and it seems to have laid the standard for centuries to come. Infact, Dasabhuja Mahisamardinī became most common and most popular in Orissa in late mediaeval period. Such representations of the Dasabhujā Mahiṣamardini Durgā are found at various places like Pitapur, Lataharana, Nivarana, Niali, Jogeswara and Kakatapur of Prāchī Valley, Bhaṭṭārikā near Baramba, Kanaka Durgā near Remuna, at Khiching, Padhuan near Basudevapur, at Bhubaneswara and at many other places.

The ten-armed Durgā was thus widely popular in different parts of Orissa and it became the universal standard. Rarely, however, we come across twenty-armed Durgā (Fig. 18), an interesting example of which has been noticed at Salebhāta in the Ang Valley of the Bolangir District. It is carved in the red sand stone. The deity holds nāgapāsa, Khetaka, Parasu,
Ankusa, Dhanu, Ghanta, Dhwaja, Gada, a mirror and a raktapātra in her left hand, while she holds sūla, khadga, saṅkha, chakra, vāna, sakti, Damaru, umbrella, and Abbayamudrā in her right hands. The depiction agrees to the view of "Viṣṇu dharmottara" in which Chandikā is described as twenty-armed and of golden complexion. This twenty-armed Durgā has been recently collected from the Chandi temple of Salebhata which is assigned to the late medieval period.

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