

CHAPTER - II

DEVELOPMENT OF SAKTI CULT IN MEDIEVAL PERIOD

Shakti cult is a subject of observing interest. In India it goes back to the pre-vedic times. The subjects discovered on the valley of the Indus show that Śakti was worshipped both in iconographic and symbolic forms¹³⁰. In Orissa the origin of this cult, however, can be traced to the pre-Gupta period since the two armed Mahisamardini image known as Virajā is the earliest form of such images in India¹³¹. There is a reference to the Goddess Virajā in the Mahābhārata¹³², and as such, the place of Virajā, at present known as Jajapur, is one of the oldest Śakti Pīthas of the Hindus. Virajā is also mentioned in the Kubjikā Tantra¹³³, which is considered to be a fairly early work. The Napalese Tāntrik traditions contain a phophecy in which the Buddha assures Sāriputra that he would in future be born as Padmaprabha and that he would attain enlightenment at

130. J. Marshall, Mahanjodaro and Indus Civilisation Vol.I, P.52.

131. R.P.Chanda, Exploration in Orissa, P.27.

132. Vanaparva, p.83.

133. Pranatosani Tantra, p.234 (Quoted).

Virajā¹³⁴. Thus Virajā was a famous place of Pilgrimage of Hindu Tāntrikas as well as Buddhist Tāntrikas. We may not be out of place to state here that the difference between these two sects was next to nothing, which perhaps the one important exception that the former resorted to human sacrifices whereas the latter did not resort to any such practice.

In this connection a discussion on Oddiyāna will not be far-fetched, since it was a prominent place of Śakti cult in ancient and medieval times. The Hevajra Tāntra¹³⁵ mentions oddiyāna as a reputed centres of śāktism. The Sādhanamālā¹³⁶ and the Rudrāyamālā¹³⁷ also refer to Oddiyāna as one of the four famous seats of śāktism in India. The Brhannīlā Tāntra¹³⁸ states Oddiyāna as the abode of Bhairavī, the consort of Jagannāth a Bhairava. Hiuen Tsang seems to have noticed

134. R.L. Mitra, Sanskrit Buddhist Literature of Nepal, P.204.

135. P. Bagchi, studies in the Tantras, p.38.

136. B. Bhattacharya, Sadhanamala, p.453.

137. P. Bagchi, studies in the Tantras, P. 6-7(quoted).

138. D.C.Sarkar, Sakti Pitha, p.21, (quoted).

the prevalence of sakti worship in oddiyāna when he says that "the people of oddiyāna made the acquisition of Megical formulee their own"¹³⁹. We may state here that magic and charms formed some of the elements of śakti cult. According to the Tibetan source¹⁴⁰ a number of Tāntrik scholars seem to have associated themselves with this territory. They were Sarala, Kembala, Padmavajra, Lalitavajra, Gambhirajra, Luipā, Pito etc. Besides, Indrabhuti and Laksmīkarā, great expononets of Tāntrik Buddhism, hailed from this place¹⁴¹. Thus oddiyāna was the fountain head of all Tāntrik knowledge.

The Kālikā Purana¹⁴² an authentic work on Tāntrikism, mentions Odra (i.e. Orissa) as one of the Śakti Pīthas along with Kāmarupa, Pūrnagiri and Jaladhara. As such, oddiyāna can be equated with Odra and we agree with N.K.Sahu, in his

139. T.Watters, on Yuan Chuang, 11-225.

140. B.Bhattacharya, Sadhanamala, XIII.

141. IHQ, I, 469.

142. Kalika Purana, 410.

####Ph.D.Thesis in Utkal Univ.####Ph.D.Thesis in Utkal Univ####
identification of Oddiyāna with Orissa. This is attested to by the existence of innumerable Tāntrik temples on the coastal belt of Orissa.

D.C.Sircar has aptly pointed out that Jajpur, (which for several centuries remained their capital of Orissa in ancient and medieval times) was a great centre of Tāntrik worship and was the place of Vatsa gotra. Brāhmaṇas, who appear to have been Śakta Tāntrikas and spiritually preceptors of two glorious dynasties (Bhaumakaras and Somavamśīs) of Orissa. They were adept in performing such miracles as bringing back dead people to life. According to a tradition, after ten-horse sacrifice by the Somavamśī king Yayati Kesari at Jajpur the Vaitaraṇī turned into a river of wine (Surā). The tradition proves that Jajpur was a seat of śākti cult.

In this connection we may recall the legend of Dakṣa Yajña to account for the origin of Śāktism in Orissa. Dakṣa Prajāpati was celebrating a great sacrifice for which neither Satī, his daughter nor Śiva, his son-in-law was invited. Satī, however, went to her father. As a result of this humiliation, she died of broken

heart. Śiva became inconsolable at the death of his wife. He wandered over the earth in mad once with Satī's dead body, on his head. The Gods made a plan to free Śiva from his infatuation and to deprive him of his wife's dead body. There upon Brahma, Visnu and Sani entered the dead body and disposed of it bit by bit. The places where pieces of Satī's dead body fell are said to have become holy seats of mother Goddess, in all which she is represented to be constantly living in same form together with Bhairava, a form of Śiva. It was Oddiyāna where the two things of Satī fell. Therefore, Orissa became a great centre of Śakti cult.

The capital city of Virajā, i.e. Jajpur became a reputed centre of Śakti worship in the medieval period. A number of mātrkā images belonging to the eighth and ninth centuries A.D. have been discovered at Jajpur and its environs. Of the mātrikās, Chāmundā appear to be in special favour here and her images are very often met with scattered here and there. One such image was installed in a temple at Jajpur by a Bhauma-queen named Vassādevī¹⁴³. The Sapta Mātrkā images at this place are

143. EI, XXVII, 184.

also assigned to the eighth century A.D.¹⁴⁴. Eight armed Chāmundā images are noticed at Bhimagiri in the Dhenkanal District. They are worshipped at present by the name Ramachandi and can be assigned to the eight Century A.D.

Ekāmra, i.e. Bhubaneswar became another seat of Śakti worship in the medieval period. The notable Śakti shrines constructed in this period are Vaitāla and Mohini temples. Chāmundā is the principal deity in both these temples. We can imagine the terrible form of the Goddess in the Vaitāla even though she is always covered with a piece of cloth, as she has a corpse beneath her feet and head of a snake above her head. Her counter part in the Mohinī temple closely resembles the dreadful form of the goddess depicted in the Svarnādri Mahodaya¹⁴⁵. Its belly is sunken and emacipated its breasts are lean and pendulous, its smile is ghastly and its body is garlanded with skulls. The Mahisamardini

144. OHRJ, II, 2,39.

145. Svarnadri Mahodaya, Ch.27.

image of the Vaitāla temple, is in the words of D.C.Sircar, "one of the finest representation of the goddess belonging to the post Gupta period¹⁴⁶. The temples of Kapalini, Uttarāyanī and Gouri situated in Bhubaneswar and assigned to the eighth century A.D.¹⁴⁷ are also notable Śakti Pithas. Chāmundā is the principal deity in each of these temples. In the Kapalini temple, besides the presiding deity, we notice seven matrkas and four yoginis. The Parsurāmeśvare temple at Bhubaneswar assigned to seventh Century A.D.¹⁴⁸ also contains Sapta Mātrkā images. The sixtyfour yoginī temple at Haripur in the vicinity of Bhubaneswar has been assigned to the eighth century A.D.¹⁴⁹. Among the figures of yoginis some belong to the Sapta Mātrkā group.

The number of mātrkaś, various manefestations of Śakti vary from Purana to Purana. The Varaha Purana¹⁵⁰ and the Brahmānda Purāna¹⁵¹ enumerate eight mātrkās where

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146. D.C.Sircar studies in the religious life of Ancient and Medieval India, p.281.
 147. OHRJ, 11, 2, 39.
 148. K.C. Panigrahi, Archaeological remains at Bhubaneswar, 28-29.
 149. OHRJ, 11,2,23.
 150. Varaha Purana, Ch.26.
 151. Brahmanda Purana, Ch.2.

as the Skanda Purana¹⁵² and Devi Purana¹⁵³ enumerate mātrkās. In course of time, the number seven became auspicious to Brahmanas for which the number of mātrkās became seven. Saptamatrka images, that are noticed in Orissa either in group or as presiding deity, are usually Chāmundā, Varahi, Indrani, Kaumari, Mahesvari, Brahmani and Vaisnavi. The early group of Saptamātrkās is seen on the the northern wall of Parasurameswara temple. The figures are four-armed, holding weapons of war in two of their hands and aksamala or Vijapuraka or flower or conchshell in the other two hands. In the Jaganamohana of Muktesvara temple the saptamatrka images hold babies in two of their hands and war weapons in other two hands. The Dasasvamedha Ghata at Jajapur contains a set of saptamātrkās, quite gigantic in size. The edge of Markandeya tank of Puri also has a set of saptamātrkās. The saptamātrkā images preserved in the State Museum at Bhubaneswar closely resemble their counter-parts at Puri. They hold weapons of war in two of their hands and hold baby as well as exhibit Varadamudra in the other two

152. Skanda Purana, Ch.13.

153. Devi Purana, Ch.9.

hands. As such, they depict both malevolent and benevolent aspects of the deities.

Individual members of Saptamātrkās are seen in isolation as presiding deities. Chāmundā is worshipped as Vetali and Mohini at Bhubaneswar Kichakesvari at Khiching. Jagulai at Chaurasi and Chandaghanta at Niali. At all these places she is depicted with emaciated body, dropping breasts, protruding teeth, sunken eyes etc. She sits on a corpse, wears a garland of skulls, holds a spear and a sword. Varahi, noticed at Chaurasi, holds a fish and a skull and sits on a buffalo. She is pot-bellied. The above two images look quite terrific.

The terrifying aspect of saptamātrkās is illustrated in the Chandi¹⁵⁴. It mentions how they annihilated the demons. In the early medieval period they were associated with the tantrik form of worship. The eight erotic composite reliefs depicted in the Varahi temple at Chaurasi illustrate tantrik association of the matrka. The emaciated male figure seated on a corpse in the posture of urdhalinga shown in the Vaitala temple

154. Sri Sri Chandi, Ch.8,vv. 33-40.

2253/8

#####Ph.D.Thesis in Utkal Univ.#####Ph.D.Thesis in Utkal Univ#####

of Bhubaneswar suggests tantrik connection of the matrka. The entrance wall of the Chausat Yogini¹⁵⁵ temple near Bhubaneswar contains two male figures with long hairs and beards, sunken eyes and in the posture of urdhalinga. They are followed by two jackals carrying bones of human victims in their mouth. This indicates the tāntrik relationship of mātrkās inside the said temple.

The aboriginal background of saptamātrkā cult is suggested by horrible practices involving sacrifices of human beings.¹⁵⁶ In fact, the yupa or sacrificial post in front of and the intense darkness inside the Vaitāla temple at Bhubaneswar reveal the sacrifice of human beings in this mātrkā shrine. We may state here that this shrine was a place of Kapalikas, who resort to the sacrifice of human beings for the worship of their deity¹⁵⁷. The Vedic origin of saptamātrkā cult as

155. Some of the Yoginis have been identified with mattkas; for details see B. Das, "Yogini Cult in Orissa", PIHC, Vol.XI, P.94; OHRJ, Vol.II, p.26.

156. R.N. Nandi, Religious Institutions and Oults in the Deccan, P.142.

157. B.Das, "Kapalika Sect in Early Medieval Orissa", JOH, Vol.II, No.1, p.3.

#####Ph.D.Thesis in Utkal Univ.#####Ph.D.Thesis in Utkal Univ#####

#####Ph.D.Thesis in Utkal Univ.#####Ph.D.Thesis in Utkal Univ#####
suggested by some scholars, is not tenable, because in the Vedic literature we do not come across the sacrifice of human beings. That none of these goddesses, who are mothers, has a male consort, indicating thereby their origin in the matriarchal society, proves their aboriginal origin¹⁵⁸. We mention here that the Mahabharata, the Harivamsa and the Kujjika Tantra refer to the Vindhya as the abode of matrkas, worshipped by non-Vedic tribes¹⁵⁹.

The migration of brahmanas to Orissa mainly from the north started in the middle of fourth century of the Christian era and continued till the middle of Ganga rule. The kings mostly assigned lands to them in forest regions and made them settle in forest tracts¹⁶⁰. But they soon discovered themselves in the midst of hostile population, since the brahmanas could not put their hands to plough, the assigned lands could not be cultivated. So they gave

158. D.D.Kosambi, Myth and Reality, p.90.

159. N.N.Bhattacharya, Indian Mother Goddess, p.58.

160. B. Das, "Migration of Brahmanas to Orissa", JHR, Vol.XX, No.1, p.37.

up their superiority complex and made some sort of reapproachment with forest tribes in order to engage them for the cultivation of their fields and for other menial work. This reapproachment resulted in an interaction of their respective cultures in which many blood-thirsty goddesses of the tribal culture found their way into the brahmanical fold and became associated with different benevolent gods of the brahmanical pantheon¹⁶¹. The attitude of malevolence and benevolence depicted by the saptamātrkās justify the amalgamation of tribal and brahmanical cultures. Again, the worship of these mātrkās in temples as well as in open spaces also indicates the intermixture of these two rival cultures.

It is significant that the Kalika Purana does not consider a brahmana eligible for being sacrificed before the mātrkās - a fact, which suggests their aboriginal character¹⁶². This restriction, however, disappeared in a subsequent literary text like Yogini Tantra - a fact, which suggests the gradual assimilation

161. (a) R.S.Sharma, Material Melieu of Tantrism.

(b) R.S.Sharma (ed) Indian Society - History *real*
Probings, p.193.

162. R.N. Nandi, O. Cit. p.145.

of aboriginal characteristics of mātrkā cult into brahmanical forms of worship¹⁶³. It is interesting to note here that though the saptamātrkās did not find mention in the Vedic literature, they occurred in the Puranic literature.

The saptamātrkās for the first time appeared in Orissan temples in the Sixth Century of the Christian era and continued to appear in Orissan temples till the advent of the Gaṅga rule. This was the time when the brahmanas migrated to Orissa on a large scale. As such, the migration of brahmanas and the appearance of saptamātrkās may not be regarded as accidental. The saptamātrkās were housed in temples, which, in course of time, grew into nuclei of saptamātrkā cult. The temples being nerve - centres of all activities in a locality¹⁶⁴, played a major role in popularising the said cult. We may mention here that the construction of temples gathered a great momentum in Orissa in the early medieval period. As such, the construction of temples

163. R.N.Nandi, O.Cit. p.145.

164. K.Veluthat, "Temple base of Bhakti Movement in South India", PHIC, Vol.XL, p.185 ff.

and the popularity of saptmātrkā cult may not be taken as isolated events.

The discussion reveals that the brahmanas brahmanised the tribal goddesses and invented a mode of worship for them, which in course of time emerged into a system of religious belief known as the saptamātrkā cult.

There is an interesting image of Chāmūṇḍā worshipped as Jagulāi in Chaurasi. She sits in Ardharyāṅka pose on a corpse and holds "dambaru" sword, skull, dagger in her four left hands as well as Khatvāṅga, trident, rosary and human head in her right hands. She exhibits abhaya and vardā mudrās in her left and right hands, respectively. The Chāmūṇḍā images in Orissa range from four-armed to ten-armed. This bears testimony to the wide popularity of this goddess in medieval Orissa.

Varāhī was another popular goddess in Orissa in the eighth century A.D. Generally images of Varāhī are

to be found among the saptamātrkā groups. But we notice a peculiar image of the said goddess at Chaurasi as the presiding deity of a temple. She sits in lalitāsana on her mount buffalo and wears ornaments of various designs.

The yaginī pīthas became centres of Tāntrik Brahminism and counteracted the popularity of Tāntrik Buddhism in society in the eighth century A.D. Hirapur near Bhubaneswar in the Puri District as well as Ranipur, Jhariwal nor Titlagarh in the Bolangir District certain Yoginī Pīthas. The sixtyfour (Chausat) Yoginī temples at these two places assigned to the eighth and ninth centuries A.D.¹⁶⁵ were great centres of Śaktism. In this connection it is interesting to note that shrines of sixtyfour Yoginīs are very few in India. C.L.Fatri has aptly remarked, "It is thus not of mean interest that the little state of Orissa possesses two shrines entirely devoted to the sixtyfour, godlings called Yoginī cult consist of at the present state of our knowledge. The Yoginīs were attendants on Durga and in a sense, were considered to be various forms of the goddess herself. As such there probably existed close connection between

165. K. Veluthat, "Temple base of Bhakti Movement in South India", PHIC, Vol.XL, p.185 ff.

####Ph.D.Thesis in Utkal Univ.####Ph.D.Thesis in Utkal Univ####
the Yoginī cult and śakti cult. Thus the śakti cult, which originated in the coastal regions of Orissa, gradually spread to the adjoining highly tracts of Orissa.

The different forms of Mahisamardinī were worshipped in Orissa through ages. We have discussed earlier about the two armed Mahisamardinī, worshipped as Virajā at Jajpur. A very beautiful image of four-armed Mahisamardinī is being worshipped in a village in Govindpur. She holds chakra and conch in her upper two hands while her two lower hands are engaged in piercing the trident into the heart of the demon. An image of six armed Mahisamardinī is noticed at Astarang where she is worshipped as grāmadevatī. She holds sword, arrow, bow, shield in four of her hands. She pierces the trident in the heart of the demon and presses the mouth of the demon, in two of her other hands. The Mahisamardinī images discussed above are very rare in comparison with other forms of the said goddess. They can be assigned to the period in between the Gupta rule and the Bhauma rule in Orissa.

#####Ph.D.Thesis in Utkal Univ.#####Ph.D.Thesis in Utkal Univ#####

Eight armed Mahisamardini images came into existence in Orissa in the eighth century A.D. These images were worshipped according to Tāntrik rites, due to the prevalence of Tāntriksim in Orissa during the said period. We find an image of eight armed Mahisamardini at Haripur in Mayurbhanja district. Her trident pierces through the shoulder of the Demon. She closely resembles her counterpart at Aihole though the feeling of anger is more prominent in the former than in the later. Other such deities are found at Kanakpur and Devidol in the Cuttack district. They are at present known as Sarala and Kutam Chandi respectively. Both the images are similar in so far as they hold sword, bow, trident, discus and bell in six of their hands. Both of them differ from each other in so far as the former hold book and lyre whereas the later holds shield and Kharpara in two of their hands. There is Varani image on the entrance of Kutam Chandi temple, holding a pot (of wine) and resembling closely her counterpart in the Varāhī temple at Chaurasi, holding a fish in one hand and a pot (of wine) in the other. The Varāhī temple is assigned to the eighth century A.D.¹⁶⁶. Hence we can

166. OHRJ, XI,128, XXI, I,3.

#####Ph.D.Thesis in Utkal Univ.#####Ph.D.Thesis in Utkal Univ#####

also assign the Kutām Chandi temple to some period.

Eight-armed mahisamardini images are also noticed at Kangalpur near Kakatpur and Amarkuda ner Niali. We notice a very interesting eight armed Mahisamardini image near the Brahmeśvara temple (under a banyan tree) at Bhubaneswar. The goddess is engaged in a fierce sea-battle, with the demon issuing out of the decapitated trunk of a buffalo. She holds discus, shield, snake and arrow in four of her hands whereas her other four hands are badly damaged. Scene of such naval war between the goddess and demon is extremely rare. The image can assigned to the ninth century A.D..

The whole of the Prachi Valley abounds in ten armed Mahisamardini images. They are installed in the temples of this region. Either as presiding deities or as side deities. This proves the popularity of this goddess in the said region. The most beautiful representation of this goddess is noticed at Ambapara near Chaurasi. She holds in her five right hands sword, arrow, trident piercing through the head of the demon,

#####Ph.D.Thesis in Utkal Univ.#####Ph.D.Thesis in Utkal Univ#####

discuss and Śakti striking to the back of the demon. She holds in her five left hands bow, dagger, shield, pasa and snake. There is a small inscription just below the pedastal, indicating that the image was carried out by the sculpture Yubaraka. On Palacographical grounds this image can be assigned to the tenth century A.D. We may mention in this connection that the ten hands represent four hands of Brahma four hands of Vishnu and two hands of Śiva¹⁶⁷. In other words, she combines in herself the powers of the aforesaid deities.

All these temples are spectacular examples of the prevalence of the Śakti cult in Orissa medieval times. These temples must have exerted tremendous influence on the social life. It is quite plausible that the sacrifices of human beings were resorted to in them. The awful esoteric rites, that were once performed, are evident by the presence of some images in their dreadful forms in these temples. We notice the figure of Bhairava, the terrific form of Siva, carved in the inner wall of the vāital temple. It was a garland

167. R.C.Mujumdar, Age of imperial Kanuj, 339.

#####Ph.D.Thesis in Utkal Univ.#####Ph.D.Thesis in Utkal Univ#####
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of skulls, sits, in a fighting posture, and holds a large dagger in the right hand and Kharpana in the left. It has sunken eyes, open mouth, protruding tongue and hollowed belly.

Besides there sculptural representation of various Śakta divinities we have at our disposal innumerable literary and inscriptional references about these divinities. The kalikā Purāna¹⁶⁸ declares god Jagannāth and goddess Kātyāyanī as the presiding deities of Orissa.

Kātyāyanī is also stated in the Prāchi Māhātmya¹⁶⁹ as a fearful goddess of Orissa, who take delight in meat and wine. The popularity of this goddess in Orissa is borne out by the fact that Tribhubana Mahādevi, a Bhauma queen compares herself with Kātyāyanī at the time of her accession, to the throne in her own character¹⁷⁰. We bare

168. Kalika Purana, 410.

169. Prachi Mahatmya, Ch.6.

170. JBORS, II, 419.

tempted to believe the goddess was no other than Virajā, the presiding deity of the Bhauma Capital. D.C.Sircar on the basis of the Bhākti Bhagabata Mahākavya by Kavi Dindima Jivadevāchārya is inclined to believe that the Bhaumas were devoted to the Goddess Virajā¹⁷¹. Besides a number of Tāntrik works, both Brahmanic and Buddhist that were composed in the medieval period, have come to light and have been preserved in the manuscript gallery of the Orissa State Museum. These throw flood light on the Śakti cult in Orissa during the said period.

A number of rulers of Orissa also worshipped Śakti in her various manifestation. The sulkis were devotees of Stambhesvari their family deity¹⁷². Some of the Bhañjakings were also staunch worshippers of this goddess¹⁷³. Another female deity called Lilesvavadrā Durga also appears in the charter of a Bhañja ruler named Satrubhañjadeva¹⁷⁴. The Marañjamvra charter of the

171. JAS, IV, 1, 12.

172. JBORS, II, 404, EI, XXVIII, 112,
JASB, LXIV, 127.

173. JBORS, VI, 482.

174. OHRJ, VI, 179.

####Ph.D.Thesis in Utkal Univ.####Ph.D.Thesis in Utkal Univ####
 Somavamśī king Mahāśivasivagupta Yayāti oxtols Bhagavatī
 Panchamvarī Bhadrāmvikā of Pattana Suvarnapur¹⁷⁵. The
 Jatosinga and Dunguri plates¹⁷⁶ of the same king further
 indicate that the goddess was the istadevi of Yayāti.
 According to the Brahmeśvara inscription¹⁷⁷.Yayāti-II's
 Second name was Chandihara. Since Chandī (Śakti) precedes
 Hara (Śiva) is his name we presume that he was more śakta
 than Śaiva. The Madala Panji¹⁷⁸ states Yayāti Kesari
 built a temple for the goddess Vimalā at Puri. The Śakta
 Tāntrikas conceive her as Bhairavi and Jagannāth as
 Bhairava. The Somavamśīs of Orissa were followers of
 Śaivism. We may state here that Śakti is Śiva's creative
 energy and is spoken of as his feminine aspect. The
 menifestation of the universe is effected through the
 power (Śakti) of Siva. And power is not different from
 the possessor thereof. As such, the Somavamśīs of Orissa
 also paid great reverence to Śakta divinities.

Some of the Gaṅga kings were also followers of
 Śakti. The Pattali-grant of Rajendravarman records the

175. OHRJ, 11, 52.

176. S.N. Rajguru, Inscription of Orissa, IV, 222.

177. Ibid, 391 Fn.

178. Madalapanji.

grant of a village in favour of the goddess Kāñchi potti Bhāttarikā in order to provide for her offering¹⁷⁹. The Gaᅅga king Anantavarma Chodagaᅅgadeva is mentioned in a charter to have donated lands for the worship of goddess Bhagavatī¹⁸⁰. It is interesting to note in this connection that Bhagavati is a popular name of Śakti and that the name of Bhāttarikā is applied as Mahisamardini, particularly to her Daśabhujā form. We have stated earlier that many of the Bhauma queens viz. Vatsa devī, Tribhuvana Mahādevī, Mohinī and Gouri, also worshipped Śakti from time to time.

The above discussion leads us to a conclusion that, in ancient & medieval times Śaktism flourished in Orissa and exercised remarkable influence on the social life of Orissa.

179. EI. XXXII, 205.
180. JAHRS, VII, 1, 64.