ŚĀKTA AND ŚĀKTA PĪTHA
CHAPTER III

ŚĀKTA AND ŚĀKTA PĪṬHA

In India a devotee of Śakti is known as Śakta (Goddess worshipper). Śaktam is a development of ancient Mother Goddess cult, which was one of the six cults established by Sankara. Śakta worships the mantra and yantra of Śakti. He worships Śakti as the Divine Mother, the Supreme power which creates, sustains and withdraws the universe. All women are forms of the Divine Mother. Another form of the Śakti is recognised as the istadēvata or chosen deity by the Śakta. A glorious feature of the Śakta faith is the honour which it bestows to women. It makes provision for all castes and both sexes. The aim of the Śakta is to perceive the universe within himself and to become one with the goddess.

3. Six cults are Servam, Saktam, Kaumāram, Ganapathyam, Souram and Vaishnavam.
The idea of Śakti as the Mother who creates, sustains and destroys and bestows grace as well, was developed by Śāktas. Their code of conduct is called Śaktadharma, their doctrine, Śaktivada or Śaktidarshana, even though Śakti had important roles in the Tantras of the Saivas, the Vaishnavas and the Buddhists.

The Vaishnavites personified Śakti as Lakshmi or Mahālakshmi whereas the Saivites personified her as Pārvathi, Bhavāni, Durga or Kāli. Even Sarasvati enjoys some hommage, much more than her Lord Brahma. Of all the varied forms, the manifestation as the bride of Śiva is the most popular in Bengal and in the places along the Ganges. Mother is in all manifestations says the Svetaśvatāra Upanishad.

Śākta philosophy

Closely allied to the philosophies of Saivism is the Śākta tradition which regards Śakti (Power personified as the consort of Śiva) as the supreme deity. According to the Śāktas Śiva is the unchanging consciousness and Śakti is its changing

power appearing as mind and matter. Śiva-Śakti is therefore consciousness and its power. The former is God as He is, and the latter is God as He appears to the devotees. This, then, is the doctrine of the dual aspects of Brahman acting through its threefold powers will, knowledge and action. In the static, transcendent aspect (Śiva) the one Brahman does not change and in the kinetic immanent aspect (Śakti) it does10.

The Śakti 'goes forth', in a series of emanations or transformations which are known in the Saiva and Śākta Tantras as the 36 Tattwas as against the 24 Tattwas of Samkhya. There are twenty eight Agamās for Saivism, eight Agamās for Vaishnavism and seventy seven Agamas for Śāktam11. The ‘Hymn to Beauty’ called Saundaryalahari (an elaboration of the endless Beauty of Śakti and Her unification with Śiva) of Sankara opens with these words. “When Śiva becomes united with Śakti, he is able to exercise his lordly power, if it be not thus, the God does not, indeed have the power even to move”12. This is in keeping with the Rig Vedic idea. ‘I am the empress of the whole universe’13. The basic text

13. Rig Veda. X, 125.3.
for this school are the Śākta Āgamas, also called Tantras. Tantra, by definition, is that scripture by which knowledge is spread. The orthodox view about the Tantras is that they are founded on the Vēda, and that there is no divergence of doctrine between Vēdas and Tantra. In the Kulārnāva - Tantra, Śiva addresses Pārvathī and says that Kuladharmā, i.e. the religious philosophy of the Tantras, is based on and inspired by the truth of Vēda. According to Chintaharan Chakravarty14, in the most popular sense the Tantra, in the present days, ‘is to denote a class of literature dealing with mystical and magical worship of various deities’. The number of Tantras belonging to the Śākta tradition is twenty seven15.

Śakti cult represents the universal motherhood of God. It is an ancient heritage of Hinduism. It has always been preserved as a secret treasure by their seers and their disciples. Śākta Āgamas are in the form of dialogue between Lord Śiva and His consort Pārvathī. It may be assigned to seventh century A.D.16. An essential feature of the Śākta-Sadhana is the ritual worship of women and girls. The Śākta Tantras prohibit

15. T.M.P. Mahadevan, Invitation to Indian Philosophy, New Delhi, 1980, p.345.
inflicting injury on women and speaks of the restriction on such practices as the sati (self immolation). Even in sacrifices, they insist, female animals should not be immolated. The Śākta Tantras allow women to be Guru or Spiritual Director. Initiation by a Mother bears eightfold fruit. Indeed to the enlightened Śākta the whole universe is Strī or Śakti.

The philosophy of Śaktism is a kind of monism (Advaita), similar to that of Kāshmir Saivism. In both the systems the highest reality is styled Śiva-Śakti. Śiva and Śakti are not different; they are one. In this system of Śakti philosophy, Śiva is omnipresent, impersonal and inactive. He is consciousness. Śakti is dynamic. Śiva and Śakti are related as prakasa and vimarsa. Śakti or vimarsa is the power that is latent in the pure consciousness. Vimarsa gives rise to the world of distinctions. Śiva is Chit (Stasis). Śakti is Chidrupini (dynamis). Brahma, Vishnu and Śiva do their functions of creation, preservation and destruction in obedience to Śakti. Śakti is endowed with iccha (will) gnāna (knowledge) and kriya


18. As Advaita Philosophy has “Aham Brahmasmi” (I am Brahman) as the major mantra, the Śākta philosophy has ‘Aham Strī’ (I the spirit is woman) as its mantra, according to Advabhavana Upanishad.
Šiva and Šakti are one. Šakti Tattwa and Siva Tattwa are inseparable. The Kashmir Saivism gives more importance to Śiva aspect than Šakti aspect; whereas Šaktism lays emphasis only on Šakti aspect. At the philosophical level, a close relationship can be found between Śiva and Šakta as well as Advaita and Vedanta philosophies. Advaita establishes the non-duality between the ultimate Reality and the prakriti. The omnipresence of the pure consciousness is believed. The world is ‘māyika’ (māya) an illusory appearance. The theory of world appearance is called vivartavada. The corresponding doctrine of the Saiva and Šakta school is known as abhasa-vāda. The whole universe is an appearance, yet an indispensable part of the Absolute Reality. The Advaitins name the Divine omnipresence as Brahman whereas the Šaktas refer to the same as Šakti.

**Method of worship (Different forms of worship)**

As with every godhead, Šakti is also conceptualised at three levels. a) ‘Para’ (nirguna level) too difficult to be realised by ordinary devotees; b) Sukshma (subtle or transcendentai

level) realised by seers; c) sthula (gross or human form) taken up invariably by all devotees for meditation. However, Śakti the Mother with Her infinite grace is being worshipped by all. Bhairavi Stotra$^{20}$ speaks of these forms. Śakti has been variously meditated on as the sthula form or the sukshma form or she is sought as the guardian of speech; the causes of the universe depending on the spiritual maturity of the devotee. But for all the devotees, she is the ocean of infinite grace which is to be realised through one’s own experience.

Every concept is clothed with a sound symbol and a form symbol. The conceptual reality is known as Dēvata, the sound symbol is Mantra and the form-symbol as Yantra. Mantra and Yantra are the important forms of worship of Śakti. Sound variations created by the rhythms of the creative evolution are the constituents of the Mantra. The Yantra is the diagrammatic or symbolic representation of different manifestations of the Mother. The Sri Yantra is called the Mother’s body, as the worship through the Yantra enables a Sādhaka to realise the Mother as the soul and body of the universe. The Yantra in the worship has also a symbolic significance. It is an instrument designed ‘to curb the psychic

20. Bhairavi Stotra, sloka.5.
forces by concentrating them on a pattern\textsuperscript{21}. Regarding Sri Yantra, Zimmer suggests, that among the nine triangles five are pointing downwards symbolising Yoni and rest upward symbolising Lingam (upward triangles are called Vāhini and downward ones, Śakti), thus ‘the Vāhini triangles denote the male essence of the god and the Śakti – triangles the female essence of his consort\textsuperscript{22}. The conscious energy of the Mother particularised in Her manifestations is called Dēvatās.

\textbf{Śakti – Yoga sādhana}

The Śakti cult preaches ‘monism’ as the final goal of sādhana. It prescribes worship through dualism to achieve monism. It guides the Śakta to follow the middle path of susumna by withdrawing himself from the two extreme paths of subsidiary channels of ida and pingala. Śaktism is not a mere theory or philosophy. It prescribes systematic sādhana of yoga, regular discipline according to the temperament, capacity and degree of evolution of the sādhaka. Sādhana means unfolding, rousing-up or awakening of the power of Śakti. Śaktism helps

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{21} H.Zimmer, \textit{Myths and Symbols of Indian Art and Civilization}, New York, 1947, p.141.
\item \textsuperscript{22} Ibid., p.146-147.
\end{itemize}
the aspirant to arouse the kundalini and to get united with Her and to enjoy the supreme bliss of Nirvikalpa Samādhi\textsuperscript{23}.

The Śāktas claim the highest place for their method of sādhana in the Kaliyuga\textsuperscript{24}. Śāktas have four sampradāyas, viz.: Kērala, Kāshmirā, Gauda and Vilāsa. Each sampradāya has separate systems – suddha, gupta and ugra – according to the gunas viz. sattva, rajas and tamas. The Śākta Tantras classify the sadhakas into three groups: pāsu, vīra and divya. Pāsu is the soul in bondage. Through Sadhana one can reach the grades in succession, the heroic (vīra) and the divine (divya) forms. There are different acharas or rituals which are mainly seven, vaidika, vaishnava, saiva, dakshina, vama, siddhanta and kaula. These are the successive stages in the ascending order. In the siddhanta stage the sādhaka has realisation, but he is fully established in that in the kaula stage which is the highest stage as the Kulārnava says, ‘there is none higher than a kaula’\textsuperscript{25}. Kaula is verily Śiva. Kaulāchāra is the essence of the Vēdas and Āgamas\textsuperscript{26} and is considered as the fifth āshrama

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Swami Swahananda, op.cit., p.140.
\item Ibid., p.142.
\item Kulārnava, II.8.
\item Ibid., II.10.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
by the Śāktas. To a Kaula all action is the play or līla of Śiva – Śakti. In this realisation nothing remains secular, everything is spiritual, and the expression of the Mother.

The first three ācharas are designed for the pāsu jīva, while the next two for the vīra and the last two for the divya. The first āchāra represents karma, bhakti and jnāna mārgas. The emphasis in the Vedic discipline is on ritual, in the Vaishnava on devotion, and in the Saiva on knowledge. The fourth āchāra which is called daksīna seeks to conserve the results gained in the first three. So far, the process is one of going forth. It is at the next stage, vāmachāra, that the return current commences (vāma means opposite). At this stage with the help of a guru he undergoes special initiation called abhīṣēka and tries to conquer his desires – not by renunciation – but by means of sublimation and consecration. He has to rise by the very things by which the ordinary man falls27. For the correct understanding of the mystic rites, he requires proper training from a Guru (preceptor). Now he has the right to disregard the social conventions about sexual purity and defy taboos about food and drink, since he has to look upon all

27. Ibid., V.48.
women as manifestations of Śakti and to be free from all sorts of social prejudices28.

Certain aspects of vämachāra involve the use of ‘wine’ and ‘woman’. It is these that have brought on calumny to Śakta-Sādhana. The ritual connected with these aspects is called pañca-tattwa, as it involves the offering of five objects to the deity. As the Sanskrit names of these objects begin with ‘m’, the ritual is also known as pañca-makāra-pūja. The five objects are: wine (madya), meat (māmsa), fish (matsya), grain (mudrā) and woman (maithuna). Sexual rites related to fertility magic are common to all forms of primitive religion as Frazer and Briffault have wonderfully demonstrated29. Erotic practices associated with the goddess cult are older than the Tantric and Taoist texts themselves. This also holds good in the case of the rites of wine and fish. Fish is also closely associated with matriarchal beliefs as a fertility symbol30. Aphrodite, the fish goddess, ‘was worshipped as the bestower of all animals and vegetative fruitfulness, and under this aspect especially as a

29. Ibid., p.224.
goddess of women. The relation between fish and the Mother Goddess is a very common feature of primitive religion.

The Tantras state that there are three ways in which this ritual may be performed, each subsequent way being superior to each earlier one. The first which is the lowest is the ritual in its gross form. The significance of the ritual is the sublimation of all life-functions including those of eating, drinking and mating. The principle underlying the ritual is that one must rise by which one falls. The second way of performing the pañca-tattwa ritual involves substitution. Here instead of meat, for instance ginger is used, and instead of wine coconut water. It is not the original object indicated by the five m’s that are offered, but their substitutions which are non-objectionable.

The ritual of pañchamakra—wine, fish, meat, diagram and coitus—performed in the proper ways under the spiritual guidance of a guru elevates the aspirant to the divya or divine standard. In this stage he is free to get himself initiated in the kaulachāra. An important sadhana of the pañca-tattwa worship is purely an


internal process. It depends on no outside material\textsuperscript{33} but on Yoga practices.

The use of \textit{pañca tattwa} in the literal sense is made only at the lowest level of \textit{sādhana}. But the aim of the aspirant is to achieve self-control. Due to that only the Tantra \textit{sastras} state that the \textit{pañca-tattwa} is for the \textit{vīra}. The last two stages in the tantrika discipline, viz., \textit{siddhanta} and \textit{kaula āchāras}, complete the process of making the soul divine. \textit{Siddhānta} means arriving at a final position as a result of reflection upon the relative merits of the path of enjoyment and that of renunciation. In the final stage which is \textit{kaula}, he pursues the path of renunciation to its conclusion, and realises Brahman which is termed \textit{kula} in the Śakta system. The term \textit{kula} stands for \textit{Śakti}\textsuperscript{34}.

The process of ritual worship is elaborative. The worshipper has first to purify his body composed of five elements\textsuperscript{35}. This is known as \textit{bhuta - suddhi}. Then he has to perform \textit{nyāsa} which means touching the various parts of the body with the tips of the fingers and palm of the right hand, to

\textsuperscript{33} T.M.P. Mahadevan, \textit{op.cit.}, p.354.
\textsuperscript{34} N.N.Bhattacharyya, \textit{op.cit.}, p.228.
\textsuperscript{35} The basic five elements are earth, water, fire, air and ether.
the accompaniment of the appropriate mantra. After this, he has to invoke the presence of the deity in the image and thus enliven it. This is called prana-pratistha. Then the worshipper has to make gestures with his hands indicating thereby the different intentions and wishes he has in mind. These gestures are the mudras (special position of the fingers)\(^\text{36}\). After these preliminaries, he has to worship the deity by bathing and adorning the image. The objective of all these acts is to make the mind pure so that it may direct its attention constantly towards God. Thus the Śākta forgets his ego and gets merged with the Mother.

**Śākta Literature**

The Śākta literature is concerned with the female divine principle. The Dēvi Sūkta appears in the tenth mandal of the Rig Vēda. In this Rig Vedic hymn addressed to the Divine Mother, Vāk speaks of her realisation of God as Mother who pervades the whole universe. Sri Sūkta, Durga Sūkta, Bhu Sukta and Nila Sūkta and the specific Śākta Upanishads such as the Tripurasundari Upanishad, Sitopanishad, Dēvi Upanishad, Santhagya Upanishad, Sarasvati Upanishad,

\(^{36}\) N.N.Bhattacharyya, op.cit., p.225.

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Bhavanopanishad and Bhavrichopanishad emphatically declare the Mother aspect.

**Purāṇas and Upapurāṇas**

Śakti aspect is well explicated by various Purāṇas like Mārkandēya Purāṇa, Vāmana Purāṇa, Varāha Purāṇa, Kūrma Purāṇa and Brāhmānda Purāṇa in which a few chapters on the praise and worship of the different forms of Dēvi are found.

Dēvi Purāṇa, Kālikā Purāṇa, Mahābhāgavata, Devi Bhagavata. Bhagavathi Purāṇa, Chandi Purāṇa, Devi Rahasya and Kālikā Purāṇa (second) are some of the Śākta Upapurāṇas. These Upapurāṇas relate very often to the central goddess Dēvi—and sometimes to one or other of her principal forms such as Durga, Kāli, Chaṇḍi, Sati; nevertheless the growing popularity of the conception of Śakti in India inspired people to look upon every female deity as Śakti (active energy) of a particular male god, to whom She was associated very often as a wife.

Epics

In the age of great epic Rämâyana Śakti or Mother Goddess is depicted in a very high position. The knowledge (vidya) names Bälā and Atibälā are said to be the mother of all knowledge. They are the vidyas of Superhuman efficacy and remind us of Śakti literature which contains elements of Śaktism.

The Śakti cult reached the zenith of its glory in the age of the Mahābhārata. The Mahābhārata says that Goddess Durga is worshipped by the gods for the protection of three worlds. It is said here, “those who bow to you in the morning, would get everything such as progeny and riches.

Sanskrit Literature

In Sanskrit Literature, there are references to the union of Śiva with Umā. For instance, Raghuvamsa of Kālidāsa refers to Kāli, while the Kumārasambhava of the

42. Raghuvamsa, XI – 15.
43. Kumārasambhava, VII. 39.
same author, describes her as the Divine Mother. Bāna in his Kādambari refers to the worship of the Mother Goddess by the Śavaras, Bhavabhūti’s Mālati – Mādhava (8th century) speaks of Aghorarghānta, a Kāpālikā ascetic, who happened to be the priest of the Goddess Chāmuṇḍā at Śri Śaila was worshipped with regular human sacrifices. Śankarāchārya (9th century), in his bhāshya on the Bhagavad-Gītā states that he seems to have been influenced by the Śākta philosophy.

Tantras and Āgamas

The Śākta school had infinite ramifications, such as the Kādi – Māta, the Hādi Māta, the Kahādimāta, the Kāli-Māta and the Kaula – Māta. Similarly, their forms of worship, acharās were also numerous, such as the daksinacāra, vāmacāra, divyācāra, virācāra, pavācāra, kulācāra, samayācāra and cinacāra. The divergence of the Śākta deities and the different schools of thought have contributed much to the Śākta literature.

In addition to Tantric and Agamic works\textsuperscript{45} there is a large number of works available on various Tantric rituals belonging to different schools of Śaktism. The Jnānārānava Tantra mentions about the various forms of worship, discusses, and attaches great importance to kumāripūja, the worship of maiden as Dēvi herself.

\textbf{Śakta Upanishads}

Śakta Upanishads contain references and glorification of the goddess as well as Śakti cult. Sumukhi Upanishad\textsuperscript{46} states how the goddess Śakti should be meditated upon as a beautiful young girl of sixteen seated on a corpse, and is adorned with garments as well as ornaments besmeared with blood.

The Guhyakāli Upanishad contains a very splendid description of the macro-cosmic meditation on the great Goddess, Māhadēvi\textsuperscript{47}. Tripura Tapini Upanishad is entirely

\begin{itemize}
\item 45. The Tantras are usually in the form of dialogues between Śiva and Parvathi, when Parvathi asks questions like a pupil and Śiva answers like a teacher, they are called Agamas, and when the order reverse i.e., Parvathi as the teacher answers Śiva’s.
\item 46. Sumukhi Upanishad.1.
\item 47. Guhyakali Upanishad. V.42-76.
\end{itemize}
Tantric in its character. The symbolical terms of the Tantras are the Bindu, Nāda, Rajas, Bija, Sthana, Śakti, Mantra, Yantra, Chakra and Taraka. The Tripurā Tāpini Upanishad gives a detailed account of Srīchakra, Kāma, Kāla Mudra and Kaula.⁴⁸

In the Tripurā Tāpini Upanishad⁴⁹, the first portion deals with the meditation of Dēvi. The names of Dēvi such as Tripurā, Trīkūṭa⁵⁰, Māyā, Vaisnāvī, and Mahālakṣaṁhī are mentioned. He who realises the Dēvi enjoys absolute bliss.⁵¹

Kaula Upanishad is regarded as the Bible of the Kaula sect of the Śāktas and its doctrines are held to be the prime authority. It deals with the left hand path (vāmamārg) of Śaktism.

The characteristic features of Śāktadharma are its monism, concept of the Motherhood of God, unsectarian spirit

⁴⁸. Tripurā Tāpini Upanishad, V.14.
⁴⁹. Ibid., II.3.
⁵⁰. Ibid., I.39.

The second Upanishad is a short exposition on the vyakti of the Tripuram and the composition of the various chakras with mudras. The third Upanishad is a further elaboration of the mudras and mode of worship. The fourth Upanishad begins with Tripurastaka in honour of Trayambaka. The last Upanishad purports to be an exposition of kriya kanda section of Tripura Upanishad, where a good number of Pithas are given.

⁵¹. Ibid., II.34.
and provisions for Sudras and women, to the latter of whom it renders high honour, recognising that they may be even gurus, and lastly its Šādhanā skillfully designed to realise its teachings\textsuperscript{52}. Thus the Vedic literature, Purānas, Upa Purānas, Upanishads, Epics, Kāvya literature, Tantrās and Āgamās give a detailed account about the different forms of Šakti, mode of worship, the Hindu religious ceremonies, the sacrifices and the observances. Due to that Šākta literatures are regarded as one of the most popular branches of Indian religious literature.

History is replete with illustrations for Šakti worshippers from various avenues of life. Saints like Sri Ramprasad and Sri Ramakrishna, heroes like Šivaji and Gurugovinda Singh, poets and writers like Bankimchandra and Bharati and Saint philosophers like Sri Sankara and Swami Vivekananda were all worshippers of Šakti. Our country is Matrubhumi, we worship her with the mantra, 'Vande Mataram'. The whole atmosphere is saturated with this Mother-idea. This is the contribution of the Tantrikas, the Mother-worshippers of our Mother country\textsuperscript{53}.

\textsuperscript{52} Sri John Woodroffe, \textit{op.cit.}, p.111.
\textsuperscript{53} Swami Swahananda, \textit{op.cit.}, p.47.
Sākta Pīṭhas

The places where Sati's body fell to the earth are known as Śakti Pīṭhas. These are sacred pilgrimage sites associated with the goddess. Many of the Pīṭhas mentioned in the Purāṇas do not exist today. The number of Pīṭhas varies from 52 of 108 in different sacred texts. These sacred places are scattered throughout south Asia, forming the focal points in the sacred geography of Indian mother worship.

India abounds with sacred places which are often affirmed to possess sacred power or to enable one to make contact with the divine. These sites are usually called Tīrthās, a term that means a place which gains its sanctity through its water. The term refers to two aspects; 1) it indicates that rivers themselves are often, the site of sacred power, and 2) such places or sites where one may cross over from the realm of the profane to the sacred, from the human to the divine, from this world to another world54. In many cases these sites are associated with deities of Hindu tradition. It seems that the object of sacredness, that which lends the site power, is the

place itself and not so much the deity who is associated with the place.  

The Vanaparva of Mahābhārata mentions various places called Devi Tirthas, to which pilgrimage is suggested. The famous Kāmākhya Tirtha, Sri Parvata, place of Bhima, Dēvi, Kālika Samgam, Gauri Sikhar, a very important Sakti Pithas named Sākambhari, peace of the goddess Dhūmavati, Sri Tirtha, Dēvi Tirtha and the last of all Mātritirtha are mentioned here.

The wide popularity of the Sakti cult is evident from the Tirthayātra section of the Vanaparva of the Mahābhārata. It mentions holy places associated with the yoni (sexual organ).

56. Mahābhārata, III, 82-105.
57. Ibid., III, 85-119.
58. Ibid., III – 82 Index of the Mahābhārata, p.133.
59. Ibid., III 84-56.
60. Ibid., III 84-51.
61. Ibid., III 84 13-18.
62. Ibid., III 84 21-22.
63. Ibid., III 83-46.
64. Ibid., III 83-51.
65. Ibid., III 83-58.
and sthana (breast) of Dēvi. Those holy places are Yoni-Kunda at Bhimasthāna near pañcanada (Punjab) and on the hill called Uḍḍyotaparva and the Sthanakunda at the peak known as Gaurisikhara. This affirms the belief that the sexual organs of the Mother Goddess are regarded as sacred in Indian tradition. (E.G) Kāmakhyā in Assam. The Mahābhārata also mentions the story of Sati’s death, Śiva’s wandering with her dead body and cutting off her limbs by the Gods and flinging them to different Śākta Tirthas. The Dēvi Bhagavatam and the Kālikā Purāna reiterated the story and explains that the parts of Sati’s body fell at different places which came to be known as Pithas.

According to this myth, then the Indian sub-continent has been made sacred by the remains of Śati. India is in effect her burial ground. The subcontinent is sown with the pieces of Sati’s body, which make the land especially sacred.

67. M.C.P.Srivastava, op.cit., p.179.
68. In much the same way when the remains of the Buddha were enshrined in stupas they sacralized and other countries to which Buddhism spread.
The myth also stresses that the numerous and varied Pithas and goddesses worshipped are part of a larger, unified whole. Each Pitha represents a part of Sati's body or one of her ornaments. Pithas if considered as a whole, symbolises or implies the Goddess as the transcendental deity underlying, encompassing and harmonising all the apparent discordant forms in the Indian continent. In short, the Indian subcontinent is the very symbol of Goddess Śati.

Kālikā Purāṇa mentions Devikūta where the feet of Sati's corpse fell. It also enumerates 8 Devi shrines. The Devi Bhāgavata refers to numerous Śakti Tirthas. In the Skanda Purāṇa and the Padma Purāṇa large number of holy places enshrined by different Devi images. Idols or symbols have been described. Kamarūpa or Kāmākhya is a very important Devi shrine to be identified on par with Nilachala. The glory of the place has been described in the Devi Bhāgavata. According to the Kāmākhaya-Tantra the goddess

71. Kālikā Purāṇa, XVIII, 41.
73. Padma Purāṇa, I 8, 63, VI, 19-20.
74. According to Kārika Purāṇa (LXIV 59) the mountain represented Śiva and when the organ fell it turned blue.
is worshipped in five different forms, Kāmākhya, Tripūrā, Kāmēśvarī, Sārāda and Mahāmāya.

The Śākta Pīthas are essentially the pilgrim centres. Goddess is known in different names. All these Mother Goddesses are connected with Śiva as his spouse. We have also a tradition of one hundred and eight such Tirthas referred to in the Matsya Purāṇa associated with the Goddess. But originally these Pīthas appear to have been used as objects of aniconic form of Śakti worship76.

According to the Mārkandēya Purāṇa goddess Bhimādevi belonged to the region of Himāchala77. In the Siyuki of Yuan Chwang, there is reference to this goddess. It mentions about Mahēśvara's spouse Bhimādevi of dark blue stone78. So this Tirtha has a long and well established history.

The Purāṇas enumerate 108 names and holy resorts of the great goddess. Some of these names are mythical but many of them indicate local goddesses later identified with the supreme being of the Śaktas. A complete list of 108 names of the goddess with specifications of Her association with

77. Mārkandēya Purāṇa, 91, 45, 45.
particular holy places is found in the Matsya Purāṇa\textsuperscript{79}. Devi Bhāgavata\textsuperscript{80} refers to the holy places, associated with different manifestations of the goddess, as Pithas. Mukundarama's Chandimangala gave a detailed account about the Śakti worship, including the legends of Daksa's sacrifice and of Sati's death, the conception of the ten Mahavidyas, the tradition of the Pithas and other allied subjects.

It is essential to mention here the Purānic account of the origin of these Śakti Pithas. The Pithas are connected with the limbs of Śati, wife of Śiva and daughter of Daksa Prajapati. The Indian system refers to the female aspect of divinity as Śakti or the manifestation of energy. Pārvathi, the consort of Śiva, or Lakshmi the consort of Vishnu, are enshrined in temples all over India. Some of these shrines are referred to as Śakti Pīthas (or the sites where the parts of Śati's body fell as in the legend of Daksha yajna). All others are ancient shrines closely related to local legends and beliefs.

The Indian system of beliefs worships the primeval source of energy Śakti in the form of the Mother Goddess Dēvi.

\textsuperscript{79} Matsya Purāṇa, XIII – 26-53.
\textsuperscript{80} Devi Bhāgavata, VII, 3-55-83.
Various forms of this worship are seen in the different regions throughout our sub continent. Kāmākshi Amman temple at Kāñchi, Kālikāmba temple at Chennai, Bhagavathi temple at Kanyakumari, Karumāri Amman temple at Tiruvērkādu near Chennai and Mariyamman at Irukkankudi are the important centres of Śakti worship in Tamilnad. The Bhagavathī temple at Chottanikkara in Kērala is dedicated to Rājarājēśvari, a manifestation of Kāli, Mahāsarasvati and Mahālakshmi.

The Mahālakshmi temple at Kolhapur in Mahārāşhra is one of the Śakti Pīthas. The Mangala Gowri temple at Gaya is the centre of Upasakti Pīha enshrining Dēvi at Gaya in Bihar.

Kāmākshi is considered to be present in Kāñchi. Legend says that Kāmākshi offered worship to a Sivalingam out of sand under a mango tree and gained Śiva’s hand in marriage. It was believed that Kāmākshi was originally Ugraswarūpini (fierce form). After that Ādi Śankarāchārya establishing the Srichakra personified Her as the Shantāswarūpini (calm-posed form).
It is believed that during the days of Adisankara, the presence of Ugraswarūpini was felt outside the temple precincts and that Sankarāchārya had requested her not to leave the temple complex. Symbolic of this, the festival image of Kāmākṣhi takes leave from Sankarāchārya at this shrine in the inner prakāra each time she is taken out in procession.

According to the versions of the Deī Bhāgavata and the Kālika Purāṇa, Daksa did not invite Śiva to his sacrifice, and this humiliation led Sati, the wife of Śiva, to destroy her body. Other sources relate that Śiva became so inconsolable at the death of his wife that he took her dead body on his shoulders and travelled aimlessly. This created anxiety among gods. Therefore Vishnu with his Chakra cut the corpse into pieces and scattered the limbs all over India. And all those places, where the limbs fell, became Śakti Pithas. It is further said that Śiva was mad after his wife that he transformed himself into the form of Bhairavās and settled in their vicinity to keep a watch over the parts of his wife’s body. This story shows that primarily these Pithas were concerned only with the

81. Ibid., VII - 30.
83. J.N.Banerjea, op.cit., p.495, Fig.2.
aniconic form of the Śakti worship but Bhairavas were worshipped in anthropomorphic form.

Originally there were only three Pithas connected with the worship of Mother Goddess (in aniconic form). In some early Tantras we get reference to four Pithas (Chatus Pitha conception) which may have been associated with a conception of the Sahajayana school of the Buddhism according to D.C. Sircar. The Hevajra Tantra of the Buddhists which was composed about the middle of the 8th century A.D. enumerates the following holy regions as Pithas or resorts of the Goddess: 1) Jalandhara 2) Odiyana 3) Purnagiri and 4) Kāmarūpa. The Kalika Purana locates them in west, north, south and east respectively.

Jallandhara in the Punjab region seems to have been recognised as one of the four Pithas even down to the late medieval period. Jallandhara is a hill sacred to the Pithas and the goddess on it is called Viśvamukhi. According to the Kālikā Purāṇa, the breast of the goddess fell at Jallandhara.

84. D.C. Sircar, op.cit., p.11.
86. Kālikā Purāṇa, 64, 43, 45.
87. Matsya Purāṇa, XIII, 46.
where Śiva carried her corpse and the goddess was Chandi. The city of the same name on the Sutlej is mentioned in the Vayu Purāṇa and this place is indicated in the Brahmāndā Purāṇa and the Padma Purāṇa as one of the Pithas of the Goddess Lalita. Odiyāna or Uḍḍiyāna is located in the Swat valley. Yuan Chwang had not only noticed the prevalence of Śakti worship in Gāndhāra, but left an account of the Tantric practices among the peoples of Uḍḍiyana. According to the Kālikā Purāṇa, at Uḍḍiyāna the two thighs of Sati's corpse fell. In the beginning the location of Pūrṇagiri was uncertain but later its location in Uttar Pradesh was affirmed.

Kamarūpa or Kāmākhya is a very important east Indian site of the Mother Goddess cult. Here the temple of Tripura Bhairavi stands on the beautiful Nilacala hill, overhanging the Brahmaputra river. It is about three miles from Gauhati and was famous even in ancient times. The glory of Kāmākhya has been described in the Dēvi Bhāgavata, and

88. Vayu Purāṇa, IV. 80.
89. Brahmāndā Purāṇa, IV. 44-95.
90. Padma Purāṇa, VI. 4-19-20.
91. Kālikā Purāṇa, XVII. 42.
In the Kālikā Purāṇa it is said that on Kāmagiri in Kāmarūpa, the private parts of Sati fell when her corpse was carried by Śiva, and the Dēvi is known there as Kāmākhya. The goddess seems to be called Mahāgauri in the records of Vānamala (10th century) and Indrapala (12th century) – Kings of Kāmarūpa.

The goddess Kāmākhya was originally of tribal origin. There is no image in her temple. Only a Yonishaped stone, smeared with vermillion, is set up to represent the goddess. The worship of this goddess is said to have been introduced by Asura Naraka, the king of Kāmarūpa. She is a blood thirsty Goddess. When her new temple was consecrated in 1565, the occasion was celebrated by offering to Her the heads of 140 persons. A large number of goats and doves are sacrificed just outside the temple. Rituals are done at the temple each month to signify the Dēvi's menstruation. The temple is completely close during those days.

The number of Pithas went on increasing day by day, perhaps due to the

94. Ibid., XVIII. 42-50.
growing popularity of the cult of Mother Goddess. One section of the Kālikā Purāṇa mentions seven Pithas. A Tantra work entitled Rudrayāmala, which seems to have been composed considerably earlier than 1052 A.D. mentions ten holy places as the ‘Principal Pithas’. These ten Pithas, which included the celebrated four discussed above are 1) Kamarupa, 2) Jalandhara, 3) Pūrnagiri, 4) Odīyana (Uḍḍiyana), 5) Vārānāsi, 6) Jvalanti (probably Jualemukhi of later texts), 7) Māyāvati (near Haridwar), 8) Madhupuri (Muttra), 9) Ayodhya (Near Fyzabad, U.P.), 10) Kāñchi (Conjeevaram in Tamilnad).

97. D.C. Sircar, op. cit., p.17. The seven Pithas as mentioned in the Kālikā Purāṇa.

1. Dēvikūta where Sati’s two feet fell here Dēvi is known as Mahabhaga.
2. Uḍḍiyāna – where two thighs fell and where the Dēvi is Kātyayani.
3. Kāmagiri in Kāmarupa where the Pudendum muliebre fell and the Dēvi is Kāmākhya.
4. A locality on the eastern border of Kāmarupa where the naval fell and where the Dēvi is Dikkaravāsinī.
5. Jālandhara where the two breasts fell where the Dēvi is Chandi.
6. Pūrnagiri where the neck and shoulders fell where the Dēvi is Purnesvari.
7. A locality on the borders of Kāmarupa where the head fell Dēvi is Lalitakanta.

98. Ibid., p.67.
Kiñchi was one of the seven holy cities of India. According to the Purānas it was a celebrated dēvīsthāna with Annapūrṇā as the presiding goddess. In the Barhaspatyasutra it is mentioned as Śaktiṣṭhāna. In another work some eighteen Pithas are mentioned and they show their geographical distribution throughout the length and breadth of India. A fairly large number of Pithas known as Siddha Pitha, has been mentioned in the Kūbjikā Tantra, which further adds more places as seat for Mother goddess worship.

In other Tantras the number increased to fifty (according to the Jnānarnava Tantra) and the Tantrasastra made fifty one by splitting Mērugiri Pitha into Mērupitha and Giri Pitha. The Pithanirnaya or the Mahapīthaniṇīprapana adheres to this number of the Pithas but the list itself is independent of the earlier list of the Pithas.

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99. Padma Purāṇa, VII, 110.5.
Bhahmanda Purāṇa, IV, 5-6-10, IV, 39-15.

100. Barhaspatyasutra, III, 124.
102. Ibid., p.23.
103. Ibid., p.23.
further reached to 108 in some of the Purānas. Sircar sees in this number an attempt to endow the deity with 108 names\textsuperscript{104}. A section of the devotees of the mother goddess is known to have endowed their cult deity with 108 names attempting thereby to identify her with various goddesses and with the female (Śaktis or energising powers) of many gods worshipped in different parts of India\textsuperscript{105}.

An early list of this nature can be traced in the Mahābhārata, but a complete list of the 108 names of the mother goddess with the specification of her association with particular holy places probably is to be found for the first time in the Matsya Purāṇa\textsuperscript{106}. When Daksa asked Śati about the Tirthas connected with Her and the names by which the Ādyā Śakti (Jagañmātā) could be prayed, Sati enumerated Her 108 names associated with different places, though she also said that she was omnipresent\textsuperscript{107}. The list of the 108 names of the mother-goddess and those of as many holy places in different parts of India was given by D.C. Sircar\textsuperscript{108}.

\textsuperscript{104} Ibid., p.24.
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid., p.25.
\textsuperscript{106} Matsya Purāṇa, XIII, V.26-64.
\textsuperscript{107} Ibid., V.24-25.
In every living she lives as Śakti Deśi. The names are actually more than 108 in number but that a number of the holy places are only imaginary. The fact that even in an attempt to find out the 108 actual Tirthas that could be associated with Śakti rather arbitrarily the author does not refer to Kāmarupa and Uḍḍiyana. This may point to the author’s aversion for these out and out Tirthas. It cannot possibly be held that the text was composed before Uḍḍiyana and Kāmarupa attained to eminence. The Kalika Purāṇa gives other variations of the goddess Kamākhya e.g., Kāmāda. The lists of the Pithas and those of the Dēvis and Bhairavās connected with each of them are variously prepared by different authors and have a great deal of discrepancy among them.

One interesting feature of the lists is that a good number of Pithas are situated in the rural areas of Bengal. The spread of Tantricism further necessitated the establishment of Pithas in different areas. The presiding deities of the Pithas were originally local goddesses. In the Purāṇas we find an

110. Kalika Purāṇa, LXIV, 2.
111. D.C. Sircar, op. cit., p.32.
attempt to enumerate all possible goddesses known in different localities and to identify them with the AdyaŚakti (Jaganmāta).

Many sacred sites are specially associated with, identified with and presided over by a goddess. The pervasiveness of sites sacred to goddesses is suggested by the number of towns and villages that have names associated with different goddesses. Referring to the Punjab region Prof. Niharranjan Ray\textsuperscript{112} observed.

"Very few people pause to consider this social phenomenon, or to consider the significance of such toponyms in these regions as for instance, Āmbālā which is derived from Ambā, one of the many names of Durga, Chandigarh which is named after Chaṇḍi, Panchkula (a growing village between Kalkā and Chandigarh) a technical term of unmistakable Tantric significance, Kālkā which is vulgarization of Kālikā, Simlā which is Śyāmalā Devī in its anglicised version. A careful and close look at the postal directories of Punjab, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh would yield a long list of such toponyms from which one may draw one's own conclusion. Besides, throughout these regions one still finds countless number of

\textsuperscript{112} N.N. Bhattacharyya, \textit{op.cit.}, pp. 139-140.
small shrines with all but shapeless or crude form placed on their altars which worshippers describe as Manasā, Chaṇḍi, Kāli, Naynā and Durgā”.

The truth of the above statement can be easily understood if we take into account the Śākta Pīthas scattered throughout the country and the place - names found in the Purāṇas, associated with the Mother Goddess.