THE CULT OF ŚAKTI IN TAMILNAD
CHAPTER IV

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The cult of Śakti in one or other of her different manifestations and forms has been widely popular in India through the ages. The cult as such has always exercised a profound influence and fascination for mankind. Śakti has two aspects, the benign and malign. In the former aspect She is variously called Bhavāni, Vijayā, Dēvi, Umā, Gauri and Annapūrṇa and in latter form she is referred as Chaṇḍi, Chamunḍā, Kaḷi, Kapālini and Śati. However, in course of time all of them fused into a single goddess, the consort of Śiva. But people attributed many epithets to the Goddess Śakti but she is one.1 This process or coalescence of different elements into one great goddess was neither sudden nor sweeping but a gradual one that took many centuries for completion.2 The existence of a sort of disparity among the different elements of the goddess prevalent even so late as the Gupta period is evident from the

1. Dēvi, Śakti, Ambāl, Ammā, Ammaṇ, Thāi, Mother Goddess, Mother, Pārvathi, Kāli, Durgā, Lōgamāta, Ėswari, Paramēswari and so on.

Devi Māhātmya. In the process of coalescence of various local goddesses into a homogenous goddess, the Tamil country in the extreme south played a vital role. The benevolent presence of Kanyakumāri stands testimony to this. She is the personification of all pervasive power enshrined by a composite religious practice (acara) of Vaidika or Tantrika. In the development of Śakti cult, Tamilnād contributed much from Sangam period till date.

The worship of the Mother Goddess as the presiding deity of one of the five physiographic divisions of the land is well recorded in Tamil Sangam literature. She was known as Kaṇṭhi (Durgai) or Koṟṟavai, the presiding deity of the Palai land (Waste land, mountain or forest parched by summer). Generally hill and forest tribes were her worshippers, but later all had deified the female principle and developed cults of the Mother Goddess, around each of them to the level of each settlement and associated her with battles and wars. Basically the localization of the forms of Mother Goddess is due to the association of the

3. The Devi Māhātmya (the Glorification of the Great Goddess) is a part of the Markandēya Purāṇa and assignable to about the fourth century A.D.


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deity with the heroic acts of protection of the people from enemies.

In the Sangam literature, references to Vedic ideas, customs, sacrifices, habitations, forms and attributes are found. Names of Śakti mentioned in the Sangam classics are Amari, Kumari, Gauri, Samari, Sūli, Nili, Aiyai, Seyyaval, Koṭṭavai, Nallāl, Kaṇṇi, and Saṅkari. Of these, the name Kumāri may be taken to indicate her virgin character. She is much more powerful as a maiden. Her independence from males gives her great power. She is also called as Bhagavathi. Bhagavathi stands as the protectress of the Indian southern tip where the Arabic ocean, the Bay of Bengal and the Indian ocean meet. This place is famous from ancient period. The Sangam epics, like Silappadikāram, have mentioned Kanyakumāri – unmarried goddess. Kanyakumāri is identified with the Śakti the counterpart of Śiva in Taittirīya Aranyaka. The Indians worship rivers and lakes as Mother Goddess; the Tamils are not an exception. The Sea is considered as a Goddess.

Koṭṭavai, the war goddess is worshipped by the warriors. The concept of Durgā as the dweller of the hilly areas

6. R.Nagasami, Tantric, Cults of South India, New Delhi, 1982, pp.5-10.
8. Ahanānūru, 370.
is first indicated in her original role as Koṭṭavai or Verrimadantai (Goddess of Victory) with her abode at the vākai (albizia) tree in Padirruppatu and in Kurunthogai in which she is referred as sūli the wielder of the sūla (trident). Koṭṭavai has been recognized as the consort of Śiva; and this is apparent from reference to her in the Perumpanāṟṟuppadai and Thirumurugāṟṟuppadai. The former calls her the great mother of Muruga while the latter describes Muruga as the son of Malaimagal (i.e. Parvatakanyā or Pārvathi). Koṭṭavai is described as Kānamarselvi, the great goddess, the denizen of the forest in Ahanānūru, as Kāduraikadavul in Porunāṟṟuppadai, in the Pattupāṭṭu collection and as Tunangaiyan-selvi in Perumpanāṟṟuppadai.

In Ahanānūru, Umaiyōl is stated to have be part of Śiva. Kollippāvai was carved on the ranges of Kolli

15. Perumpanāṟṟuppadai, 459
mountain. It seems she has been worshipped at other places also. From Ahanānūru, it is evident that the images of pāvai were in the niches of the halls and they were adorned with strings of pearls.

In Tolkappiyam, Koṟṟavai is referred to as the goddess of the pālai region. The Eyinar of pālai worshipped her and sacrificed buffaloes. Silappadikāram states that peacocks and parrots, fowls, sandal, grains and oblations of rice with flesh and blood were offered to her. Her hair was dressed in the form of jata (mat) and ornamented with a small silver snake and a crescent like semi circular tooth from a wild hog which had destroyed tender plants in well guarded fields. Her āṭi was a necklace made of white teeth of a strong limbed tiger and her girdle was a cleaned tiger skin with mingled spots and stripes on its other surface. The bow in her hand was of hard wood. She was seated upon a stag with twisted horns. On one occasion when the doors of her temple at Madura remained closed, and could not be opened, the Pāṇdyan king believed that it was her displeasure. So he fell prostrate before her shrine and prayed for the mercy. Moreover, to appease the goddess he

17. Ibid., 209, 62.
18. Ibid., 361.
20. Ibid., canto XII, 20-50.
granted the revenue of two fertile villages to meet the expenses of her worship\textsuperscript{21}. Koṟṟavai has been invoked as Gauri, Šamari and Šūli. The goddess indicates the alignment of this cult with that of Vishnu.

The Nägas who were largely employed as soldiers under the Tamil kings worshipped the dread goddess Kāli as their goddess who in course of time became the patron deity of the warrior class. The kings, soldiers and military officers made offerings before undertaking any military expedition.

The literary work \textit{Manimēkalai}\textsuperscript{22} refers to the temple (Kōttam) of Kādamarselvi with the sacrificial altar in its front yard and surrounded by tall posts with severed heads suspended from them. The same Kādamarselvi occurs in another context in \textit{Manimēkalai}\textsuperscript{23}. Another work \textit{Paripādal} mentions about her as Kādukāl. According to the later commentaries of Iraiyanar Ahapporul and that of Pērāširiyar of Tolkāppiyam Kādukilal and the commentary of Takkayāgapparani\textsuperscript{24} the deity is referred to as Kānanādi or Vana Durgā.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{21} Ibid., XX37-40 and XXIII 113-125.
\item \textsuperscript{22} \textit{Manimēkalai}, VI: 50-53.
\item \textsuperscript{23} Ibid., XVIII: 115.
\item \textsuperscript{24} Takkayāgapparani, 54, Urai.
\end{itemize}
In the Porulathikāram of Tolkāppiyam she is mentioned as Kādukeluchelvi in connection with the celebration of Paranināl on the second day of the lunar month and honoured with tunangai dance. The idea that Lakshmi, Sarasvati and Pārvathi represent different aspects of the same power is also evident. The cult and iconography of Durgā or Koṟṟavai is found in Silappadikāram.

The cult and iconography of Durgā or Koṟṟavai is also found in the Vēttuvavari of Silappadikāram. She is described as “having a body, the colour (dark blue) of which resembles that of a flower of the kāvā (Memecylon edule), with lips red like the coral, teeth white and the neck dark, with a third eye on the crescent like forehead, holding the discus and conch, sword and Śūla (spear) and the bow which was the mēru (nedumalai) strung with the snake Vāsuki as its nān, wearing the skin of a tiger and a belt (mēkalai) of lion’s skin, a Kalal (hero’s calf band) on one leg and Šilambu (woman’s anklet) on the other, with the coiffre of jata adorned by a serpent and the crescent moon, covering herself with the hide of the elephant as Uttariya (eka’sam), wearing a snake as her breast band (Kaccu), carrying a standard of lion (alnumkodi).” It also describes her

25. Silappadikāram, Canto XXII.
fight with the *asuras*, her killing of Dāruka and Mahisāsura, kicking 'Sakata and walking over the marudam (Arjuna) tree. *Silappadikāram* speaks of a particular type of her dance called *marakkālāttam* during which she assumed legs of wood and fought with the *asuras*. She is said to have swallowed poison with immunity and described as occupying half the body of the three eyed Siva as *mangai* (Uma) and making him dance. This is also mentioned in *Silappadikāram*. All these aspects of the deity clearly indicate that she combined in her the concepts of Siva, Vishnu and Uma and her attributes the three *gunas*\(^{27}\).

In the post-*Sangam* Age, the influence of *Śakti* cult had a new impact on other sects. By a silent revolution, Thirugnānasambandar in Tamil country, had established a unified *Śaivism* of *Vedic* and *Āgamic* practices during 6\(^{th}\) – 7\(^{th}\) century A.D. In a larger sense, the same result was achieved by Ādi Sankara by establishing *šanmata*. Both of them could not reconcile the force of popular *Śakti* cult that was deep rooted through its origin in all strata of the society\(^{28}\). Ādi Sankara had recognized the *Śakti* as the supreme divine force, and placed it as one of the six *mātas* of *vēdic* pantheon.

\(^{27}\) Ibid., p.153.

\(^{28}\) T. Satyamoorthy, "Śakti cult – Its impact on Art and Architecture", 9\(^{th}\) session of Indian Art History Congress, Hyderabad, 2000, p.3.
The arrival of the Pallavas and the Pāṇḍyas on the political scene heralded a new epoch in the history of temple architecture. The earliest sculptural representation of Durgā in south India can be traced to the Pallava period. Durgā images have been found at Mahabalipuram (Draupadiratha, Varāhamanaḍapa, Mahishāsura-mardhini, Trimūrti and Ādivarāha caves). One of the most beautiful and delightful Pallava specimens is the Mahishasuramardhini of Mamallapuram assigned to the seventh century A.D. It shows the eight-armed goddess Durgā mounted on a lion.

The form of Durgā standing on the severed head of a buffalo is described in the Śilappadikārāma. While in the story of Sakkaravālakkōttam in Manimēkalai, we hear about a temple of Durgā. From this it appears that even in the pre-Pallava days, temples for Durgā were built. Of the Pallava monuments, kōdikālmanḍapam at Mahābalipuram, stylistically assignable to the period of Māmalla Narasimhavarman I (630-668 A.D.) and his son Paramēśvaravarman I (670-690 A.D.), appears to be intended for Durgā as may be gleaned from the bas-relief sculptures of dvārapālakas flanking the shrine.

29. N.N. Bhattacharyya, op.cit., p.162.
30. Silappadikāram, XX. 34-35.
entrances. The yālimandapam (Tiger cave) at Sāluvankuppam near Mahābalipuram appears to be intended for Durgā in view of the facade of the cave. Of the cut out monoliths at Vyāla frieze in the Mahābalipuram the Draupadiratha was clearly intended for Durgā as is evident from her carved image in the hind wall of the shrine. Besides her own temples, Pallava sculptures of Durgā are found in the rock-cut caves. Durgā is standing either on the severed head of a buffalo as at Singavaram, the Ādivarāha and Trimūrti caves, or on a padmapītha as in the Varāhamandapa and in the hind wall of the shrine in the Draupadiratha.

The most note worthy sculpture showing Durgā on a deer, found originally from the Tanjore District, is now in the Madras Museum (9th century A.D.). It indicates that deer served as a mount of Durgā. The stag as the mount of Durgā is also mentioned by Sambandar in his Tēvāram. Her other and more usual mount, the lion is also mentioned as Sengan-arriman-Singavidai. The terrific aspect of Durgā is also found in the conceptions of Durgā and Kōrṭavai.

31. N.N. Bhattacharyya, op.cit., p.162.
Koṟṟavai with her stag or lion mount seems to have an independent existence earlier, although in later times the manifestation practically got merged with Durgā. However both reflected a common trend of ideas.

Mahishāsuramardhini is one of the forms of Devi in one of the earliest variations. It is mentioned in the Sangam literature. She is Koṟṟavai the goddess of victory. In the sculptures of Pallava and Chōla period, the stag accompanies Durgā along with the lion.

Durgā was considered to be the younger sister of Māl (Vishnu) and called Mālavār-k-kilangilai. She carries Śankha and Chakra (conch and disc) in her hands which are the symbol of Vishnu. In this context the close association of Anantaśāyi Vishnu with Durgā, in many caves and structural temples of the Tamil country from the middle of the 7th century to the 9th centuries is significant. The combinations of Mahishāsuramardhini with Anantaśāyi in the Mahishāsuramardhni cave at Mahābalipuram and the Ranganātha cave at Śingavaram, the proximity of Durgā to the shrine of Vishnu in the Trimūrti cave, the depiction of her images in closeness with Trivikrama in the Varāhamandapa, and Bhūvarāha in the

34. Silappadikāram, VI, 59.
Adivarāha cave temple, all again at Mahābalipuram, appear to have some significance. The same norm has been followed in the Pāṇḍya and Muttaraiyar caves, of Pudukkōttai region.\footnote{K.R.Srinivasan, "Dēvi cults", Journal of the Madras University, Vol.XXXII, No.1, Madras, 1960, p.154.}

Durgā is shown as Śimhavāhini (Vehicle of lion) in the structural temple of Kailāśanātha at Kānchipuram and in a rock-cut cave at Panamalai both belonging to the period of Rājasimha Narasimhavarman II. In some places the lion is shown standing by her side.

The Āgama and Śilpa texts\footnote{T.V. Mahalingam, Studies in South Indian Temple Complex, Dharwar, 1970, p.12, 25.} assign to the Durgā figure a place in the devakōṣṭha outside the northern wall of the ardhamandaḍapa of a Śiva temple and called Vindhyavāsini. It becomes a common feature from the close of the 8th century onwards. Thus this Śakti Goddess finds a place as an integral part in all the Siva temples.

The Mahishāsura episode, together with the slaying of Chaṇḍā, Muṇḍā, Sumbhā, Nisumbhā had provided sufficient theme for multiplying the forms of Śakti. The Tiruvāḷangādu plates of RājendrāChōla\footnote{SII., Vol.III, No.205.} states that Vijayālaya built a temple
for Nisumbhasūdani at Tanjore. Nisumbhasūdani is one of the aspects of Durgā, in which she is said to have triumphed over the demon Nisumbhā. The adoration of Dēvi as the Supreme Goddess whose blessings were sought by even the mighty emperors for their conquests and well being is pointed out by this inscription. Nisumbhasūdani representations are profusely found in temples at Punjai, Puḻamangai and Tirukkarugāvūr in Tanjore District. This aspect of Durgā appears to have been popular during the early Chōla period. The installation of Mahakalāṭṭu Bhatāri (obviously Chandikā) at Nēmam in Tanjore District, by the Muttaraiya Chieftain Perumbidugu Muttaraiya in first half of the 9th century is recorded in a pillar inscription now at Sēndalai. The Pallava ruler Tēḷḷāreṅinda Nandi and the Pāṇḍya ruler Māraṇ Śadaiyan visited this temple of Bhatāri and donated gold to the goddess. This speaks of the popularity of the Śakti cult in the 9th century A.D.

Śakti assumes both benign and malign forms. The Aryastava, a hymn to the Dēvi in the Harivamśa, similarly juxtaposes the Dēvi's auspicious and terrible characteristics.

There are many examples from all over India of goddesses who are worshipped with blood sacrifices. A peculiar form of Durgā worship in the Tamil country during the Pallava and early Chola
period was the offering of navakandam i.e., flesh from nine parts of the body. This was a sort of self mutilation.

An inscribed slab in the Subramania temple in Mallam (Guddur Taluk, Nellore) dated in the 20th year of Kampavarman Pallava (968 A.D.) contains a sculpture of a decapitated man, his right hand holding a sword and the left holding his own severed head by its locks. The lithic record refers to him as Okkanadanaga Okkatinda Paṭṭi Pottaṇ and that he severed his own head as the final offering and placed it on the altar, after offering navakandam, i.e. flesh from nine parts of his body, and an endowment of lands was made to his relative Paṭṭai Pottaṇ in recognition of the act and a stone monument (nadukal) was erected as a memorial. Hundreds of memorial stones in several parts of South India revealed the widespread nature of this peculiar practice. The Kalika Purana describes the rituals connected with human sacrifices. This representation is completely dispensed with in the later Cholas and Vijayanagar carvings of the goddess.

Archaeological and Numismatic evidences also reveal the great popularity of the Śakti cult. Various epigraphs refer to the profuse endowments, made by the king and the

38. Ibid., Vol.XII, No.106.
public to Durga shrines in Tamilnad. The following are the different types of endowments made by the King and the public to the Durga temple – the construction of vimāna\(^{39}\), gift of gold\(^{40}\), flower garden\(^{41}\), gift of a garden\(^{42}\), twilight lamp\(^{43}\), perpetual lamp\(^{44}\), endowments of the entire village for offerings and worship\(^{45}\).

All the above mentioned lithic records clearly establish the fact that the Śakti cult in Tamilnad in the form of Durgā/Mahishāsuramardhini, the offerings of the ruler and the ruled in the form of lamps, flower gardens to the goddess, constructing tanks, performing special pūjas and so on to the deity in different parts of Tamilnad have been in practice from the ages past.

**Sapta Mātrikās**

The Sapta Mātrikās are a group of goddesses whose worship was in vogue in Tamilnad. They are Brāhmi,

Mahēswari, Kaumāri, Vaishnavi, Indrāni and Chāmuṇḍā. The Varāha Purāṇa46 mentions eight mothers including Yogēsvāri in the list. It says that Yogēsvāri is the symbol of lust, Mahēsvāri of anger, Vaishnavi of greed, Kaumāri of attachment, Brāhmi of pride, Aindri of jealousy, Chamundā of depravity and Varāhi of envy.

**Brāhmi**

Brāhmi has four faces whose body is as bright as gold. In two of her four hands she carries sūla (trident) and aksamala. The other two hands are in varada and abhaya poses. Her seat is red lotus and her vāhana (mount) and banner is the hamsa (swan). She has a karanta makuta and wears a pitambara (fine silk cloth) Vishnudharmottara attributes six hands to the goddess.

**Mahēswari**

The vāhana of Mahēswari is a bull. Sometimes five faces are ascribed to this goddess. Besides two hands showing varada and abhaya they carry an akṣamāla and sūla.

**Kaumāri**

Kaumāri, the Sakti of Kumara has a makuta bound by a snake. Her vāhana and banner is a peacock. She carries

in her hand śakti ayudha (spear), vajrāyutha (thunderbolt) and varada and abhaya postures.

**Vaishnavi**

Vaishnavi has a lovely face, though dark in complexion. Two of her hands are in varada and abhaya poses while the other two carry sankha and cakra (conch and disc). The banner and vahana of the goddess is Garuda (eagle).

**Vārāhi**

Vārāhi has a bear face. Her colour is that of a storm cloud. She wears a karanda makuta. Her ornaments are made up of coral. In addition to varada and abhaya poses she carries a hala (a plough which stands for prosperity) and Sakti. Her banner is elephant.

**Indrāṇi**

Indrāṇi has three eyes and four arms which carry besides abhaya and varada poses, vajra and Sakti. The goddess is of red complexion and wears various ornaments. Her vahana and banner is white elephant.

**Chāmuṇḍa**

Chāmuṇḍa wears a garland of skulls and is seated over spread tiger skin in padmāsana. She has plenty of hair. Red in complexion, her four hands carry in addition to abhaya and varada mudras, kapala and sūla. Vishnudharmottara
attributes a dead body of a human being as the seat of the goddess whose countenance is fierce with protruding tusks. The vahana of the goddess is an owl and her banner an eagle.

The growing importance of Saktism brought the Sapta Matrikas into greater prominence and spread their cult far and wide. The first sculptural representation of the Sapta Matrikas is found in the Kailasanathar temple at Kanchipuram. Subsequently their sculptures are noticed in the Panchya and Muttaraiya cave temples at Tirugokarnam, Malayadippatti, Kunittur and Tirukkojakkudi.

A separate temple was built and dedicated to the Sapta Matrikas during the time of Pallava Dantivarman (796 – 846 A.D.) at Alambakkam in Tiruchchirapalli District and the place is called Dantivarma chaturvedimangalam in one of its early inscriptions of the time of early Chola Rajakesari (Aditya I). The fact that there was a temple of Sapta Matrikas at Velacheri in Chinglepat District in the middle of the 10th century A.D. is clear from an inscription of Parthivendravarman. From the ninth century onwards, it became an established fashion to construct small shrines of the Matrikas in the temple.

47. N.N. Bhattacharyya, op.cit., p.174.
48. ARE., 705 of 1909.
enclosures. The last of the Pallava series of the 10th century A.D., is to be found in the Vīrattanēšvara temple at Tiruttani built during the reign of the last Pallava king Aparājita (903 A.D.).

The cult seems to have lost its prominence in the Tamil country after the close of the 11th century. Reference to Sapta Mātrikās comes from a record on the 31st year of Chōla Rājadhirāja dēva-I (1049-50 A.D.). It refers to the endowments made to the temple of Sapta Mātrikās for the conduct of their worship. The Sapta Mātrikās have been included in the list of Parivāradēvatās till the 11th – 12th centuries. The last appearance of the Mātrikās in the art of Southern India, seldom references to these goddesses in the literature of the time, and their sudden disappearance in the 12th century A.D., cannot be explained.

Jyēsthā

Jyēsthā is another Śakti form found nurtured in Tamilnad. She is seen at first in the structural temple of Kailaśanātha at Kāñchipuram. She came to be considered as

50. ARE., No.700 of 1909.
one of the Parivāradēvatās prior to 11th century A.D.

The panel of Jyēstha consists of three deities. The main deity is represented with hanging lips, stunted nose, pendant breasts and a big belly. She has two hands one resting on the left thigh and the other holding a lotus. She is accompanied by her bull-faced son to her right holding a club in his right hand and by her daughter to her left whose arms are shown in the same way as her mother's. There is a crow perching on an ornamental stand to her right apparently standing for her banner. There is another similar stand to her left. The object on it is not clear. Another panel reported to have been found at Mylapore, is almost identical with the other at Tiruvellavayil in the following respect. Jyēstha’s right hand is in abhaya pose. Her son’s left hand points to her, while in the other it rests on his left thigh. Generally Jyēstha image is installed outside villages with the hanging belly, attended by women in red garb on either side. She is the elder sister of Lakshmi, known as Alakshmi. Generally she is associated with misfortune and mainly worshipped for warding off evil.

53. H.Krishna Sastri, op.cit., Photographs on p.217. The image described here is from Thiruvellavayil now preserved in the Madras Museum.

The worship of Jyēstha is known from the records of the Tamil country. An inscription found in the Subramaṇya temple at Thirupparāṅkuṇṟam near Madurai refers to the excavation of a cave temple by Sāttan Gaṇapati, the minister of the Pāṇḍya king Māraṇ Sadaiyaṇ for Jyēstha in the year 773 A.D.55. A Chōla inscription from Tirupparāythurai (Tiruch-chirāppalli)56 enumerates the ashtaparivāra concept including Jyēstha called Tirukkēṭṭai-k-kiḻathi. Also the inscription at Erumbūr57 dated in the 27th year of Rājendra I mentions this. A hymn of Thondaradippodi Ālvār, describes the followers of Jyēstha58. The Bodhāyana Grihya Sūtra refers to the worship of Jyestha and the Vishnuḍharmottara mentions eight kinds of Jyēstha images. The Śendan Divākaran, the earliest Tamil Lexicon dating back to the 10th century A.D.59 enumerates eight Tamil names of Jyēstha viz, Mugadi, Thauvai, Kalati, Mūḍēvi, Kakkai-k-kodiyaḷ (the one with the crow as banner) Kaluḍai Vāhini (She, of the donkey mount), Šettai (Jyēstha) and Keḍalaṇaṇgau (Ālakṣhmi or goddess of evil).

57. ARE., No.318 of 1919.
58. Divya Prabandham, 880; Thondaradippodi Tirumālai, 10.
59. S.Vaiyapuri Pillai, History of Tamil language and Literature, Madras, 1956, pp.164-165.
A study of the South Indian temple architecture and cult icons reveals that the disappearance of the cults of the Māṭrīkas and Jyēṣṭha in Tamilnad was closely preceded by the rise of a separate cult of Amman. With the development of the cult of Śakti, there was a conscious attempt to erect separate shrines for her near the main sanctum but within the temple complex. Different varieties of Durgā referred to in the Chōla inscriptions. The need for raising a separate shrine for Śakti (Dēvi) during the later Chōla period, is evident from the elaboration of temple complexes and rituals. During this period, the worship of Māṭrīkās and Jyēṣṭha gradually declined and conception of Dēvi cult gained momentum.

Amman shrines

The earliest reference to a shrine for goddess Pārvathi, comes from the Ennāyiram inscription of Rājēndra Chōla. As against the scanty reference to the Pallava and

64. ARE., No.335 of 1917.
early Chola inscriptions regarding the later Chōla records allude to the existence of considerable number\textsuperscript{65}. The reference to a separate shrine for goddess Kāmākshi during the middle Chōla period is quite interesting. This introduction confirms a separate entity for goddess as Tirukkāmakkōttam. In these inscriptions the Amman shrine is mentioned as Tirukkāmakkōttam. Amman Shrines for Śakti constitute a characteristic feature in Tamilnad temples. Devi shrines came to be constructed as adjuncts in the temple precincts. In the Saiva temples, the Devi shrines use to find a place facing south sometimes with a common mandapa for both, contrary to the Lakshmi shrine built separately in the south west corner facing the same direction as that of the main shrine\textsuperscript{66}. In the post Vijayanagar period, the depiction of Śakti as icchā, kriyā and gñāna in the same temple complex is a significant addition. The Icchā Śakti can be seen in the temple complex from Chidambaram, Tiruvaṇṇāmalai etc.\textsuperscript{67}

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{65} Ibid., 307, 308 of 1901; 469, 577, 586 and 589 of 1905; 530 of 1908; 429 of 1912 etc.
  \item \textsuperscript{66} T. Satyamoorthy, “Śakti Cult – Its impact on Art and Architecture”, 9\textsuperscript{th} session of Indian Art History Congress, Hyderabad, 2000, p.5.
  \item \textsuperscript{67} K.R. Srinivasan, Temples of South India, New Delhi, 1971, pp.167-189.
\end{itemize}
Uma or Pārvathi, as goddess, was seldom allotted a separate shrine with in the main temple. She was evidently worshipped as the consort of Siva only. Ulagamadēviyar is mentioned as the consort of Periaperumāl. Thus each temple whether of Śiva or Vishnu, separate shrine for the Dēvi was added in accordance with the principle of plan and practice as observed at Brihadēsvvara temple, Rāganātha temple, Viśvanātha temple, Sundarēsvvara temple etc.

The name Kāmakōttam (popularly called ‘Tirukkāmakōttam’ also) meant for the Dēvi shrine was evidently after the name of the most important shrine for Śakti as seen at Kāñchipuram where the presiding deity is called Kāmākśi. Tradition ascribes to Sankara, the installation of Śrichakra in important temples. In the Kāmakshi Amman temple at Kāñchi, the goddess Piṭha is known as the Kāmakōtipitha. The earliest epigraphical reference to Kāmakōti of Kāñchi comes from an inscription from Gothagattu in Nellore district and another from Tripurāntakam in Karnool District, both mentioning a chief, Pallava-Irumādi Bāsava Śankara dated 1259 A.D., the lord of Kāñchipurā. There are a number of

68. SII., Vol. II, Part II, No.38 (L.17)
69. Nellore Inscriptions, No.16.
70. ARE., No.217 of 1905.
recipients of boons from Kamakötyāmbikā. The three Nayanmārs viz., Appar\textsuperscript{71}, Sundarar\textsuperscript{72} and Sambandar\textsuperscript{73} refer to the Kāmakkōttam and Kāmakkōti in their hymns. Goddess Kāmakshi is the consort of Śiva in the temple at Kāñchipuram.

**The symbolic significance of red colour**

Woman is the potential symbol of fertility. The symbolism of red is also clear in the festival of Holi which is a ritual of fertility connected with the theme of death and resurrection\textsuperscript{74}. The various modes of Śakti worship may be viewed on the basis of this fact. From the excavations of Mohenjadaro it is found that the images of Mother Goddesses had been painted in red colour. This is so in the case of Greek and Roman paintings of Mother Goddesses also\textsuperscript{75}. Even today the folk deities are decorated with red dress, garlands of red flowers and reddish powder paints. The uniform of Mēlmarvathūr Adi Parāsakti worshippers is in red colour. Red stands for freshness and newness of life\textsuperscript{76}.

\textsuperscript{71} Appar – Tevāram, 6285; 6\textsuperscript{th} Tirumurai, 4\textsuperscript{th} decad, verse 10.
\textsuperscript{72} Sundarar, Tevāram, 7271; 7\textsuperscript{th} Tirumurai, 5\textsuperscript{th} decad, V.6.
\textsuperscript{73} Sambandar, Tevāram, 1855, 2\textsuperscript{nd} Tirumurai, 36\textsuperscript{th} decad, V.4.
\textsuperscript{74} N.N. Bhattacharyya, op.cit., p.9
\textsuperscript{75} R.A.S. Mecalister, Text Book of European Archaeology, Cambridge, 1921, p.447.
\textsuperscript{76} A.N. Perumal, “Sakti Cult in Folk Culture”, “Philosophical Heritage of the Tamils”, Madras, 1983, p.275.
Recently an inscription has been discovered on a pillar behind the Shrine of the Goddess in the northern part of the prakara of the great temple of Tanjore. The inscription for the first time shows that even from the time of Rājarāja, a separate shrine for the Goddess was built in the Śiva temples. However, from the end of the 11th century, i.e., the reign of Kulottunga Chōla I, such shrines assumed greater importance and thus came to be called Kāmakkottam-Udiyanachiyār.

**Inscriptions on Tirukkāmakkōttam**

The word Tirukkāmakkōttam is mentioned in the epigraphs of Chōla, Pāṇḍya and Sambuvarayar kings. It revealed the fact that the rulers of these dynasties generously gave endowments to Tirukkāmakkōttam alias Amman shrine. It proves that Śakti cult was wide spread in Tamilnad under the various Tamil kings.

77. R. Nagasamy, op.cit., p.214.

78. ARE., No.136 of 1932-33.
    Ibid., No.93 of 1933.
    SII., Vol.V, 408.
    ARE., No.262 of 1939-43.
    ARE., No.387 of 1918.
    ARE., No.23 of 1950-51.
    Ibid., No.156 of 1920.
    Ibid., No.61 of 1916-1918.
Apart from the major strands of the Śakti cult a few minor aspects of the goddess like her numerous proliferations into village deities are also worshipped by the people. “Tanjore inscriptions mention incidentally other minor deities, worshipped in several outlying villages; these village deities comprised many forms of Pidāri, Sēttaiyār (Jyēstha) and others for whom temples tirumurram distinct from the sri-koyil79, were raised. The following are the different varieties of Pidāri known from the epigraphs. They are Kāla Bhatāri80, Pidāri81, Tirukkettaikilatī-Bhatāri82, Tiruppārkadaldevar and Bitāriyār (Bhatāri)83, Pidāri Amman called Nānādēśa Nangai84, Pidāriyār Periyancchchiyar85, Pidāriyār Sāttanūr Nangai86.

According to the commentator of Silappadikāram three Goddesses Pidāri, Bhadrakāli and Kāli - are the different forms of Kāli symbolizing the aspect of Śakti. Like Māriyamman.

80. ARE., 317 of 1911.
81. Ibid., 426 of 1902.
82. Ibid., 154 of 1939-40.
83. SII., Vol.XIX, No.452.
84. ARE., 158 of 1920
85. Ibid., 466 of 1916-17.
86. Ibid., 307 of 1908.
she has been considered to possess the powers of healing. Her worship is popular in Tamilnad especially among the rural folks.

**Esakki Amman**

Esakki Amman one of the village goddess is still popular in the southern districts of Tamilnad. According to a villupattu, or bow-song recited in her temples, she is the spirit of a whore with unfulfilled passions belonging to the Chola period. She belongs to the early phases of history\(^{87}\) and known for her grace and righteousness. Naccinärkiniyar in his commentary to Civaka Chintāmani stated that just as Śakti becomes Saktiamman, Esakki is called Esakki Amman\(^{88}\) seated under mārgosa tree. She is said to have got in Her the traits of Śakti.

The worship of Mantai Amman in former Ramnad district and Pētchi Amman in Madurai district seems to have stemmed from the worship of the Earth Goddess. Of these village goddesses Māriyamman in Tamilnad and Poleramma in Andhrapradesh are goddesses of small pox and are considered

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88. *Civaka Chintāmani*, V. 504.
to be responsible for cattle diseases, drought and sickness. It is also considered that Māriyamman is a goddess of rain; the Tamil term ‘māri’ means shower.

Goddesses were also regarded as tutelary deities of certain cities. Madurāpati was the goddess of the city of Madura. The goddess of Puhar was known as Champāpati. Surprisingly her temple was situated, next to the cremation grounds and was consequently known as the sudukāttukottam – the temple of the burning ghat.

**Śakti concept in Tamil culture**

The early Sangam period is known for the innumerable tribal gods or folk deities. The Sangam poets evolved a tradition of five major divisions kurinji, mullai, marudam, neydal and pālai each with a presiding deity such as Seyōn, Māyōn, Vēndan, Varuṇan and Koṭṭavaikai respectively.

The step of uniting all the Tamils in the name of a single god seems to have come from the sources of the post Sangam era. Śilappadikāram of Ilango and the Thirumurugāṟṟuppaṭai of Nakkirar tried to project Kaṇṇagi as

89. *Silappadikāram*, Numerous references to Madurāpati in Canto XXII.
the focal point of unification of the Tamil culture and Murugan respectively.

Attempts made by Ilango and Nakkirar failed to give the desired effect since the Bhakti movement from the end of the 6th century onwards began to focus Śiva and Vishnu as two major gods. The whirlwind tours of the Saiva Nayanmārs and Vaishnava Ālvars paved way for a great unprecedented and unique religious revolution in the history of the Tamil country. All the major kings of the Tamil country viz., Chēra, Chōla, Paṇḍya and Pallava built huge temples in honour of the above mentioned two gods. Thus Tamilnad is studded with thousands of Śiva and Vishnu temples.

The Śaivism gives great importance to the Mother-Goddess i.e., Pārvathi in the Pan-Indian tradition. She became the receptacle to integrate many of the innumerable folk goddesses as part of her being by means of local myths, the best example being the integration of Kāli, an eternal blood thirsty spinster goddess as a major form of the benign consort of Siva called Pārvathi. In this process of amalgamation, the little goddesses who were integrated into the major deity gained two different or two opposite identities, which make them very ambiguous. Such ambiguities help augmenting their stature.
On one side they maintained the blood thirsty nature and on the other side they gained the stature as a benign cosmic Mother. Thus they have a local identity and the newly acquired cosmic identity. We can cite a number of examples to prove this concept. Thādagai, the local deity becoming Meenākshi, the cosmic Mother is the best example of this. As a local deity with limited area of operation, she had a Tamil name. The moment she was integrated with the great goddess through a myth she was given a Sanskrit name.

As a local deity she received blood sacrifices, which was the religious custom all over Tamilnad. After emerging as a major goddess she is disassociated from blood sacrifices – and she is offered only vegetarian food92.

In her earlier form her field of activity was confined to the local village only. After the amalgamation she became the queen of heaven also. All the dévas (Celestials) became her subordinates.

As a local deity she had no textual form of prayers93. Now she gets long prayers either in Sanskrit or in

92. According to the popular tradition, the Goddess Kāmākshi of Kāñchi was originally blood-thirsty, but it was Sankaracharya who propitiated her and since, then her character was changed.

93. Information gathered through field study made while visiting local, rural goddess temples.
Classical Tamil. However for the common people, she is known through her earlier Tamil names and titles and the folk still affectionately call her in Indian style “Athā” (Mother).

Three terms associated with the goddess by the Tamils are Athā, Amman and Ambāl. The first one is from folk Tamil, the second is slightly evolving towards classical Tamil and the third one is from Sanskrit. The first title shows her intense affinity for the local tribes but it also indicates the confinement of the power to the locality or the local people. The love of the people for her is intensive – but her fame or power is not extensive, whereas the last one denotes a slight distance from the people, like that which prevails between the common man and local ruler or queen. But her power is supposed to be very extensive.

**Tamil Literature on Śakti**

Symbolizing the powers of the Divine in the form of a woman and worshipping it, has been in vogue from the prehistoric days. In the Tamil country Śakti concept developed in two ways as the goddess of war and as the goddess of energy. It is also being held that courage is the evolutionary product of the abounding grace of Parāśakti\(^4\). That Śakti was seen to

have revealed in different manifestations like 'grace pervasive' (Kārūnỳapurāṇī), 'beauteous alive' (Lāvanyasalini) 'inspired wisdom' (Thārāmbiga) and valour supreme' (Mahākālī) merits deep reflection. According to Tamil conception all the good qualities and human values are personified as female deity.

The cult of Śakti in Tamil land in the early centuries of Christian era is indicated in early Tamil literature, particularly the Sangam Classics. The following are the different names of Koṭṭavai in Tamil classics. Malaimagal95, Palayōl96, Sūli97, Thuṇangaiyan Selvi98, Kāṇamarselvi99, Amari100, Gauri101, Kumari102, Samari103, Pāykalaiappāvai104, Kalaiamarselvi105, Seyyava106, Seyyōl107.

95. Thirumurugāṟṟuppaṉ, 257. (daughter of the mountain)
96. Ibid., 159. (old goddess)
97. Ibid., 259. (the possessor of Sūlam)
98. Perumpanāṟṟuppaṉ, 459. (the demoness)
99. Ahanānūru, 345 : 4. (the resident of forest)
100. Silappadikāram, 12 : 1: 67. (war goddess)
102. Ibid., 12 : 1: 21, 1: 72, 1: 74. (the youth)
103. Ibid., 12: 1: 67. (the war goddess)
104. Ibid., 12:1:70, 7:1. (goddess of arts)
105. Ibid., 12:1 : 16, 23:125. (goddess immanent in arts)
106. Ibid., 12: 1: 62. (the wicked goddess)
107. Ibid., 6: 61. (Lakshmi)
The story of the deification of a human being called Kaṇṇagi as Pathinikadavul 'the goddess of chastity', is narrated in the great Tamil epic Silappadikāram. She could burn the city of Madura to avenge the execution of her husband Kōvalan. The Chēra king Senguttuvanā erected temples and instituted festivals in her honour. The worship of Kaṇṇagi is related to Bhadrakāli (a manifestation of Bagavathi) in Kērala. The cults of Kaṇṇagi and Māriyamman appear to come nearer. However, how and when Kaṇṇagi cult was assimilated and finally absorbed into the form of Kāli or Bhagavathi is not clear.

Thirumoolar's Thirumandiram gives importance to the concept of Śakti. According to Thirumoolar, Śakti a vital power in all human bodies, gives many siddhis to mankind. Thirumoolar looks upon Parāśakti as the embodiment of universal wisdom and as the symbol of the state of supreme joy. Upapurāṇas praise the glory of the goddess Śakti.

Thayumānavar speaks of Mother Paraśakti as being the living blend of the mode of musical ecstasy and the rain bearing cloud that could water and nourish the blooming plant of religion. She is the abode of inspired truth.

108. Ibid., 29:2:2.
Thiruśakti Murṟam

A shrine for Śakti was called Thirumurram. Later it was popularly known as Thiruśakti Murṟam. Saiva saints went to Thiruśakti Murṟam and sung in praise of Śakti. Thiru-nāvukarasar went to Thiruśakti Murṟam and worshipped Śakti at Pālaiyāru. Thirugnana Sambandar also worshipped Śakti at Thiruśakti Murṟam \(^{111}\).

Paraṇi Literature

Paraṇi literatures are the Mahāpurāṇas of Śakti in Tamil literature.

Pillai Tamil works on female deities are also the literatures on Śakti. (E.G.) Meenakshi Amman Pillai Tamil, Gōmathi Amman Pillai Tamil, Sarasvati Antāti, Sakala Kalā Valli Mālai, Abhirāmi Antāti are popular works on Śakti. These works shed light on the different stages of the Goddess from Her childhood to adulthood, different forms of Goddesses, various methods of worship, description of the beauty of the Goddesses and so on. Abhirāmi Bhattar listed the different names of Śakti\(^{112}\), described her seat, beauty and her other aspects in


\(^{112}\) Abhirami Antāti, V.50.
Abhirami Antati. The importance and outcome of Sakti worship are given in Abhirami Antati. It speaks of Sakti as both the illness and its cure.

Bharati was a great devotee of Sakti. He composed several Devi 'stotras' which speaks well of the Sakti cult in Tamil land. He calls himself as Saktidasan, 'Siddhar', etc. 'Omshakti' was the first word of most of his verses on Sakti. By this one can understand how much he remained an ardent devotee of goddess Parashakti. He wrote on the greatness of Parashakti, the forms of Sakti worship and the effects of Sakti worship in his composition. He calls Parashakti as the 'Lokamata' (Mother of world). His ambition was that he should be blessed to write a poem on 'Parashakti' which should be no parallel in the world previously\textsuperscript{113}. He appeals to Sakti to bless him with all things he is in need of\textsuperscript{114}. Through bhakti, Bharati thought that one can attain anything. Bhakti will give new ideals, benefit will come in action, knowledge will be acquired, philosophy will develop, difficulties will vanish, truth will

\textsuperscript{113} P.Thooran (ed), Bharati Tamil (Tamil), Madras, 1986, p.40.

\textsuperscript{114} Subramania Bharatiar, Kavithaigal (Tamil), Madras, 1982, p.95.
prevail, fear will be removed, aims will be achieved, bravery will increase. By bhakti one will earn popularity.

Kaviyōgi Suddānandha Bharati’s Bhāratha Śakti Maha Kāvya is no doubt a Purāṇa on Śakti. India, the Mother land is personified as Bhāratha Śakti. This is an important work which gives the glorious features of our land i.e., the land of Bharatha Śakti.

Kavirāja Paṇḍitar’s Tamil translation on Saundaryalahari of Śankara is also an important piece of literature on Śakti cult.

‘Devi Mahatmyam’ a mantra work consisting of 700 mantras is a portion from the Mārkandēya Purāṇa. It explains the glory of Chaṇḍikā who is also mentioned as Sapta Sati which means that Chaṇḍikā is an embodiment of Seven hundred mantras. It has been transliterated with commentaries by Anna, a well known scholar of Ramakrishna Mutt, Mylapore.

The above mentioned Tamil literatures from Sangam period till date, give a vivid account of the cult of Śakti, the different names, the forms and the manifestations of Śakti, ways of worship and the resultant effects.

A number of Śakti Shrines existed in Tamilnad. Temples of Tamilnad dedicated to Dēvi received considerable patronage under the kings. Dēvi shrines became separate from the main temple during the eleventh century A.D. In the above short survey it has been seen that Śakti as the principal deity of a particular (pāla) land had penetrated deeply into the brāhmanical system and ramified into the culmination of providing female counterparts for every male or purushātāra. Such local concepts blended into the entire system but still they retained their individuality. The adaptation of their faith into the elite system in greater temples had not diminished their

original conceptional ideas and Tantric rituals. It continued and many local heroines were worshipped like Ešakki Amman and Pillāittinni Amman¹¹⁷ (the one who eats child). Śakti cult, has thus, penetrated into all other systems, but still retains its original identity throughout.