CHAPTER - III

MAHIṢAŚURAMARDINI IN LITERATURE
Once goddess Durga was installed as a supreme deity after her various exploits against the demons including Mahishastra, she gradually outgrew the terrific character through her feminine nature, and Mahishamardini form, being the commonest type of her terrific aspect, is more frequently represented in Indian art. Numerous texts, differing only in minute details, furnish the iconographic data of the Mahishastramardini images. The various texts differ mainly with regard to the number of arms the goddess should have and the different kinds of weapons she should be wielding by them.

Details regarding the iconography of Mahishastramardini are to be found in selected Sanskrit literature which may be classified into the following categories:

(i) Puranas
(ii) Agama Literature and
(iii) Other Texts

(i) Puranas:

(a) Agni Purana:

The Agni Purana describes the goddess as Chandika. According to this Purana, she is to be represented as having twenty hands, out of which, ten situated on the right have a celestial trident, a sword, a spear, a cakra, a pāsa (noose), a khētaka, Āyudha, Abhaya, ādamaru, Śakti and the remaining ten hands on the left should have, a nāga-pāsa (snake noose), a kheṭaka, an axe, aṅkuśa, a bow, a bell, a banner, a gada (mace), a mirror and a mudgara. The buffalo should be represented below, with its head entirely severed, and Asura should be sculptured rushing out of the severed neck, beaming with rage and brandishing his sword in the air and vomiting blood- his hair clotted with blood and blood streaming out of his two eyes, and dripping down round his breast like a garland. The goddess is to be represented in a standing posture, with her right foot resting on the
lion, and the left on the shoulder of the demon, round whose neck is twisted a serpent noose of the goddess and who is pounced upon by her celestial lion biting his arm. The image of Chandika is to be made as possessing three eyes, fully armed and crushing the enemy of gods, and is to be worshipped in mystic diagram containing the images of nine lotus flowers known as Navapadma placed at the commencement, centre, the eastern and others of the same forms of the representation of the goddess, with nine tatvas in turn.

The image with eighteen arms should have on the right side carrying human head, a khêta, a mirror, tarjanimudra, a bow, a banner, a damaru and a noose. The left hands should have a spear, a club, a trident, a thunderbolt, a sword, a pike, an arrow, a cakra and a salaka. The image with ten hands should have a sword, a trident, a cakra and a spear in right hands, and a snake noose, a shield, an axe and a bow in the left and riding on a lion with her trident firmly fixed into the breast of the buffalo demon.

(b) Bhavishyat Purāṇa:

Bhavishyat Purāṇa presents the description of the goddess with the eighteen armed goddess, having fully developed breasts, bedecked with all the ornaments, grants all the boons. In her left hands she has a skull, a shield, a bell, tarjani-mudra, a bow, a flag, a damaru, a noose, and a mirror, while in her right hands, she holds a śakti, a club, a trident, a vajra, a conch, an aṅkuśa, a cakra, a śālaka and an arrow. The seekers of victory and the sages adore her. When she has sixteen hands, the śālaka and arrow are to be omitted. She has the terrible appearance. She has Śyāma, whitish and sometimes yellow like complexion. She stands on Mahiṣa fully armed, who tries to attack the goddess with her fist raised upward.

(c) Dēvi Bhāgavata Purāṇa:

According to Dēvi Bhāgavata Purāṇa, the goddess has beautiful appearance, with eighteen arms, bedecked with all the jewels and ornaments and holding different types of arms in her hands, she rides on a lion.
(d) Kālika Purāṇa:

The Kālika Purāṇa describes that the goddess has a head-dress of matted hair bedecked with a crescent on the top of it. She has three eyes and the face like a full moon. She has the complexion of the shining gold, beautiful eyes, well built and youthful body. She wears all the ornaments. She has sharp features, full breasts and is beautiful to look at. She, the goddess Mahiśasuramardini stands in tribhanga posture. She has ten arms resembling the lotus stems. In her right hands, she holds a sword, a cakra, sharp arrows, a śakti and a trident, while in left hands she holds a bell, an axe, a khēṭaka, a bow and a noose. She should be shown in combat with the Mahiśāsura whose head should be shown as severed in buffalo form. The asura in human form, with a sword in his hand should be shown as emerging out of the severed neck of the buffalo. The goddess’s trident should be shown piercing through the chest of the Mahiśāsura who may be bound with Nagapāsa, with blood gushing out of his body. In the left hand the hair of the asura who should be vomiting blood should be held by the goddess. The lion vehicle of the goddess should also be shown. The right foot of the goddess should be perched over the back of the lion, while the great toe of the upraised left foot should be placed over Mahiśāsura.

(e) Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa:

Goddess is eighteen armed here, having a rosary an axe, a gada, an arrow, a vajra, a lotus, a bow, a kundika, a danda, a śakti, a sword, a shield, a conch, a bell, a vase or honey. a pāsa (noose) and a cakra. She is seated on the lotus with a smiling face, as Mahālakshmi the killer of Mahiśāsura.

(f) Matsya Purāṇa:

The Matsya Purāṇa describes the goddess as Kātyayāni. The image of the goddess Kātyayāni should be made of ten hands holding the weapons that are seen in the hands of Brahma, Vishnu and Śiva with matted hair on her head and a crescent, with
three eyes, face like moon, shining like the atasi flowers, having beautiful eyes, youthful in appearance, adorned with all the ornaments, having fine teeth and full breasts; standing with her body carved in three directions.

The destroyer of Mahiṣaśūra is armed with a cakra, a trident, a sharp pointed arrow, a javelin, a sword in right hands and a bow, a noose, a goad, a bell and a battle axe in the left hands. Below her image should be made the figure of the monster Mahiṣaśūra with his severed head, holding a sword in one hand, soaked in blood, ferocious looking, tied in the noose, ejecting blood, his breast being pierced by the javelin of the Dēvi and his intestines coming out. The conveyance of the goddess in the form of a lion should also be made. The right foot of the goddess should be placed on the back of the lion and the toe of the left foot should be made touching the body of Mahiṣaśūra. Mahiṣa is made as encircled by a snake and Durgā Dēvi as holding the hair of the demon with her left hand. Such a form of the goddess should be made and Devas should be placed all round in praying posture.

(g) Vāmana Purāṇa:

The version of the Vāmana Purāṇa relates that the goddess Katayani was born with wavering eyes, and the body purified by yogic exercises, obtained three eyes from lord Siva which shine like fire. She has curly hair, eighteen arms, and delightful pair of breasts and proportionate anatomy of body.

(h) Varāha Purāṇa:

According to Varāha Purāṇa the goddess is born out of the three-fold vision of Vishnu, Śiva and Brahma; is dark complexioned like blue lotus, has black curly hair, beautiful nose ending in a pretty forehead and a well formed handsome face. The features, to which Tvastic gave the definition of the toung of fire, were all blended in her.
(i) Vishnudharmottara Purāṇa:

Describes Mahiṣāsūramardini under the name of Chanḍika thus: the Dēvi has the complexion of gold and is very handsome, youthful woman in an angry mood, seated on the back of a lion, she has twenty hands; the right ones carry respectively the sūla, khadga, śaṅkha, cakra, bāṇa, śakti, vajra, abhaya, damaru and an umbrella, while the left one are seen to hold the nāgapāsa, kheṣaka, parāśu, ankuśa, dhanus, ghanṭa, dhvaja, gada, a mirror and a mudgara. The buffalo part of the āśura is lying decapitated with the real āśura proceeding from out of the neck. His eyes, hair and brows are red and he vomits blood from his mouth. The lion of the goddess mauls him and she herself thrusts the trīśūla into his neck. The āśura who is bound down by the nāgapāsa carries a sword and a shield.10

(ii) Āgama Literature:

(a) Amśubhēdāgama:

The goddess Mahiṣasuramardini as described in the Amśubhēdāgama is a four armed goddess. She has three eyes and is syāma in colour. She wears pitāmbara and has well proportioned and strong limbs.11

(b) Pūrvakaranāgama:

Pūrvakaranāgama states that the goddess wears a karaṇḍamukāta, has two arms, and two eyes, a smiling face, and is bedecked with all the ornaments. She wears two garments and has beautiful limbs, fully developed body and has syāma colour. In her right hand, she has an ankuśa while the left hand hands down. Sometimes she has a lotus in her right hand and the left hand falls down.12

Durga has tilakam on the forehead with beaming eyes and a mani decorating the hair. She wears kriṣṭamukṣa with a crescent moon and kundalas in other ears bedecked
with jewels. She has eight or four arms. The right ones have a *sula*, a *khaḍga*, an arrow, and a *cakra*, while the left hands have a *pāsa*, a *khetaka* and a conch. One of the left hands is raised in *varadamuḍra*. She has two eyes, a lovely face, and stands over the head of Mahiṣa.

(c) *Suprabhādāgama*:

In *Suprabhādāgama*, the goddess is named as Ādiśakti. She has four arms holding a *sāṅkha*, a *cakra*, a *dhanus*, a *khaḍga*, besides a *sula* and a *pāsa*. She is of back colour with a charming face and seated on a lion in *padmāśana*, bedecked with all the ornaments, with the head of the Mahiṣa held at her feet. 

(iii) Other Texts:

(a) *Mayadīpika*:

*Mayadīpika* refers to the goddess as Kātyāyani adorned by the three Dīvas, should have ten arms; should have a *jatamakuta* as a headdress with symbol of a half moon and three eyes. Her face should be like the full moon, with a complexion of *atasi* flowers. She has a good looking, youthful and well built body with charming eyes. She is bedecked with all the ornaments; she has bright lips, and is having *tribhanga* posture. She is killing the demon Mahiṣaśūra. In her right hands she should have a *trisūla*, a *khaḍga*, a *cakra*, a *bōna* and *sakti*, while the left hands should carry a *khetaka*, full vessel, a *pāsa* and an *ankuśa*, the bell, a *paraśu*, and finally the *chamara*. The body of the Mahiṣa tied with *nāgapāśa* should be shown with a severed head, from which the blood gushes out. The asura should come out of the buffalo’s body with a shield and a sword in his hands in an angry mood. The trident of the goddess pierces into the body of the asura holding the asura from the hair.
(b) Pratima Vijñāna:

The goddess Kātyāyani- who rules the universe has ten arms. In the right five arms, she holds a śūla, a sword, a vajra, a cakra and an arrow, while in the left hands she carries a bow, a khetaka, a pāśa, a bell and an ankuśa. Her right foot is placed firmly on the body of Mahiṣaśūra and the left foot is placed over the invisible lotus. Out of the severed head of the Mahiṣa which is held by the goddess by the hair, flows the blood. The śūla of the goddess stands pierced in the heart of the demon. The lion that is the vehicle of the goddess attacks over Mahiṣāśūra15.

(c) Prapanchasāra Sanghara:

The goddess has a beautiful appearance and is adorned with crest over the head, having ear-ornaments and crest jewel. She has blazing eyes and her hair is black like clouds. She holds a cakra, a conch, a dagger, a bow, an arrow, a trident, and tarjani-mudra in her six hands16.

(d) Śrī Prapanchasāraatāntam:

Kātyayani has in her hands a shining cakra, a conch, a sword, a trident and a shining bow which was the cause of subjugating many demons. She has three eyes beaming with light17.

(e) Rūpamandana:

Kātyayani- who pleases the Devas, stands in tribhānga pose, is the destroyer of Mahiṣaśūra and has ten arms. The right hands carry trisūla, a khadga, a cakra, a bāna, and śakti, the left hands have a khetaka, a dhanus, pāsa, ankuśa and ghanṭa- the bell. The body of Mahiṣa is to be shown lying down with his head cut and the dānava emerging out of the neck of Mahiṣa holding a sword and a shield in each of the two hands. The goddess
pierces the *trisūla* in the heart of the dānava and blood gushes out of him. The right foot of the goddess is on the lion, while the left one rests on the Mahiṣaśura.\(^\text{18}\)

\textbf{(f) Silpa Ratna:}

\textit{Śilparatna} mentions that the goddess Durga Mahiṣaśuramardini should have three eyes; should wear on head a *jaṭāmakuta* and in it there should be the Chandra-kala-the digit of the moon. The colour of her body should be like that of atadī flowers and the eyes should resemble *nilotapala* or the blue lilly. She should have high breasts and a thin waist and there should be three bends in her body. In her right hands she should carry the *trisūla*, a *khaṭga*, a *śakti-yudha*, and a stringed bow. In her left hands, she should have the *pāśa*, an *ankuśa*, a *kheṭaka*, a *pārāśu* and a bell. At her feet should lie a buffalo with its head cut off and with blood gushing out of his neck. Form within this neck should be visible the half emerged real āśura, bound down by the *nāga-pāśa* of the goddess. The āśura should be made to carry a sword and a shield, although the goddess has already plunged her *trisūla* into his neck and he is bleeding profusely. The right leg of the goddess should be placed on the back of her lion and her left leg should touch the buffalo body of Mahiṣaśura.\(^\text{19}\).
REFERENCES:


3. Ibid., p.185.

4. Ṛṣṭi Bhāgavata Purāṇa, Book 5, Ch.9, vs. 45-46.

5. Kālika Purāṇa, Ch. 59, vs. 12-21.

6. Ṛṣti Mahātmya, Ch.2.


8. Vāmana Purāṇa, Ch. 19. 8-10.

9. Varāha Purāṇa, Ch.90, vs. 17-19.


14. Ibid.


17. Śrī Prapañchasārataṇḍram, Ch.32.

18. Rūpamāṇḍana, Ch.17.