CHAPTER – VI

CONCLUSION
VI. CONCLUSION

In the preceding chapters, the origin and antiquity of the cult of Mahiṣaśūramardini, descriptions of Mahiṣaśūramardini in Literature and the iconographical features of the sculptures and images of Mahiṣaśūramardini from the Early Čalukya and to the Vijayanagara period have been studied in a detailed manner. In this chapter, an attempt is made to discuss the various modes of representations, dynastic characteristics, iconographic peculiarities, similarities and dissimilarities and also the local divergencies in the depiction of Mahiṣaśūramardini in the temple art of Andhra Pradesh.

Mahiṣaśūramardini is one of the most popular goddesses of the Hindu pantheon. The origin and antiquity of the cult of Mahiṣaśūramardini can be traced back from the Kushāṇa period. The earliest representation of Goddess in the form of terracotta art datable to 1st Century A.D. comes from Rajasthan. Evidently this cult was widely prevalent during the Kushāṇa period. A number of figures of Mahiṣaśūramardini with two, four or six arms of the Kushāṇa period in the Mathura art mostly housed in the Local Archaeological Museum at Mathura testify to the popularity of the cult of Mahiṣaśūramardini at such an early period. This cult became so popular in the Gupta period. The advent of Markandeya Purāṇa including Devimahātmya, a work of 5th – 6th Century A.D. however added to the popularity of the cult in the early Gupta period, which increased in the centuries that followed. The early specimens of the goddess depict her as having only two arms and the demon in buffalo form. The lion, the mount of the goddess is conspicuously absent in the early specimens. But with the passage of time, the theme gained more and more popularity and it gradually became the cult of the masses with the result that the goddess began to be represented in multiple arms with different attributes and postures. The cult was in fact, not only popular with the nobles and rulers of the time but also with the masses. The popularity of the cult of Mahiṣaśūramardini inspired the artisans who made images of the goddess in various forms and sometimes deviating from the sculptural description.
Regarding the origin and antiquity of the cult of Mahiṣāṣuramardini in Andhra Pradesh, we may trace its origin from a stone plaque of 5th - 6th Century A.D. of the Vishnukundin period found at Peddamudi village in Kañcana district (Plate-1). This is the earliest specimen from Andhra Pradesh and it depicts the goddess as having four arms, standing in pratyāśīdhā pose, placing the left foot over the buffalo and killing the buffalo with her trident. This plaque represents the earliest iconography of Mahiṣāṣuramardini in Andhra Pradesh during the 5th - 6th Century A.D.

This study reveals that from 6th century A.D. onwards, the successive dynasties such as the Early Chālukyas, Eastern Chālukyas, Nolambas, Eastern Gāngas, Chōlas, Kālīyani Chālukyas, Telugu Chōlas, Kākatiyas and the Vijayanagara rulers also patronised the cult of Mahiṣāṣuramardini and contributed their mite for the growth of the cult of Mahiṣāṣuramardini in Andhra Pradesh. The discovery of a number of sculptures of Mahiṣāṣuramardini in Andhra Pradesh is of great archaeological significance. From the field survey, it is evident that there has been an increase in the number of Mahiṣāṣuramardini sculptures and images from 6th Century A.D. onwards up to the Vijayanagara period. The presence of a very large number of sculptures and images of Mahiṣāṣuramardini in the temples of the above said dynasties and also in the Museums enable us to confirm the inference that the cult of Mahiṣāṣuramardini was very popular and widely prevalent in Andhra Pradesh during the early and medieval periods i.e. from 6th to 17th Century A.D. A comprehensive study of the sculptures and images of Mahiṣāṣuramardini which have never been done before will make for a greater knowledge of various aspects of the goddess in temple art of Andhra Pradesh.

A careful study of the iconographical features of sculptures and images of Mahiṣāṣuramardini reveals that various modes of representations of the goddess are found depicted in the temple art of Andhra Pradesh.

The artists of the Early Chālukyan art depicted the goddess with four, eight and ten arms. In some examples, the goddess is depicted as trampling the buffalo-demon with her right leg and her left leg firmly planting on the ground. While in some other examples, she is
pressing the back of the demon with the left leg and right leg placed on the ground. In the four armed sculptures from Māramunagala, Ātmakūr, Kurnool, Būdīdapaḷi and Ālampūr (Pls.2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10), the goddess is depicted as holding the head or snout or tongue or tail of the animal with her front lower left arm and piercing trisūla or sword into the body of the buffalo with her front lower right arm. In all these sculptures, the demon is shown in animal form. However, in one of the sculptures from Ālampūr (Pl. 9) the goddess is shown seated on the head of the demon who is represented in human form. The lion, the mount of the goddess is found depicted in the sculptures of Ātmakūr (Pl. 3), Būdīdapaḷu (Pl. 5) and Kurnool (Pl. 6).

As in the four-armed sculptures, in the eight armed sculptures also, the goddess is depicted as holding the head or horn or tongue or tail of the animal with the front left arm and the front right arm holding sword or trisūla and thrusting it into the body of the buffalo (Pls. 10, 11, 14, 16, 17, 18).

In the sculptures of Ālampūr (Pl. 13), Peṅchakalaṇḍu (Pl. 14) and Ālampūr Museum (Pls. 24, 26) the demon is shown with human body and buffalo-head. The lion is found depicted to the right of the goddess. An interesting feature noticeable in the sculptures from the Birla Museum and Ālampūr Museum is that the demon is shown emerging from the decapitated trunk of the buffalo (Pls. 20, 23). This feature which the Devimahātmya of the Markandeya Purāṇa refers to as Ardhanaṅgakṛṣṇā begins to appear in the Gupta period from about the 4th century onwards2. This feature is also found in the ten armed sculpture from the Bāla-Brahma temple at Ālampūr, where the goddess is shown holding the makuṭā of the demon with her front lower left arm.

In the Early Chalukyan art, some of the sculptures of Mahiṣāsura-mardini follow the textual tradition of the Purāṇas while representing the goddess. We also find some departure from the prescribed iconographical rules. The lion figures in the Early Chīḷukyan sculptures are lifeless and inactive. The sculptures show a buffalo being disabled by being lifted up by the tail and pierced through his neck by the lance of the goddess. In the later
Early Chālukyan sculptures, the demon is shown emerging out of the neck of the buffalo which is cut off by the goddess. This feature recalls the Gupta tradition.

The sculptures and images of the Eastern Chālukyan art depict the goddess with four, six and ten arms. She is represented as Parsva-devata in the side niches in the sanctum of the temples at Bikkavolu and Bhimavaram (Pls. 29, 30). As in the Chōla images in the south, in the four armed Eastern Chālukyan images, the goddess is represented as standing in samabanga on the head of buffalo in the benevolent form with a Prabhā behind her head and in contrast to this depiction, in the sculpture from Pulakalū (Pl. 31) as in the early Chālukyan art, the goddess stands in alidha and is shown holding the tail of the buffalo with her front left arm and thrusting trisula into the body of the buffalo with her front right arm. The demon is shown in animal form. The lion is also depicted at the right of the goddess. In the six armed sculptures found in the niches of the Gōlingēswara and Rājarājēswara temples of Bikkavolu, the goddess holds trisula in her middle right arm and thrusts it into back of the buffalo or head of the human form of the demon (Pls. 32, 33) and the front left arm in abkaya or holding the end of the sword held by Mahiṣa in human form. In both the sculptures, the demon is shown as emerging in human form from the buffalo i.e. in ardhanishkrānta. Another interesting feature noticeable in the sculpture from the Rājarājēswara temple of Bikkavolu is that two celestials are found depicted above the head of the goddess, holding a crown.

The eight armed Eastern Chālukya sculpture from the Bhimeśwara temple of Drāksharaṇa, depicts the goddess trampling the demon Mahiṣa and with her front right arm thrusts trisula into the human body of the demon and catches the horns of the buffalo-head or hair of human figure of Mahiṣa. In these examples, demon is shown in human form with buffalo head (Pl. 34) and in human form emerging from the mouth of the buffalo in ardhanishkrānta (Pl. 35). In the ten armed sculpture from Traipurusha temple at Valivēru, Guntur district, the goddess stands in Pratīṣṭhādhi pose, holds trisula in her front two arms and pierces it into the human body of the demon.
The Nolamba artists depicted the goddess Mahisaṣūramardini with two, four and six arms. The two armed sculpture from the Virūpāksha temple at Hēmavati, depicts the goddess as holding trisūla and piercing it into the theriomorphic Mahisaṣūra and the asura’s neck is twisted by the other hand. It is pertinent to mention here the observation of R.P. Chanda that “two armed figures of the goddess were confined to the Pre-Gupta period”13. However, this study provides the evidence for their continuity in Andhra Pradesh by the Nolamba artists in their art during the Nolamba period (A.D. 8th to 10th Century A.D.). In the four armed sculptures of the goddess from the Hēmavati Museum (Pls. 36, 37) and Kambadūr (Pl. 38) the goddess holds khaḍga or trisūla in the front right arm and twists the head of the buffalo with the front left arm or rests the left hand on the thigh. In these sculptures, the demon is fully represented in animal form, while in the sculpture from the Virūpāksha temple at Hēmavati, the demon is represented in anthropomorphic form. In the Kambadūr example (Pl. 38), lion is depicted to the bottom right of the goddess. In the six armed sculpture from the Śiddheśwara temple of Hēmavati, the goddess is depicted as standing on her mount the lion and the asura to her left lies in decapitated buffalo form and the demon is shown as emerging fully in human form. In the Nolamba sculptures, the demon is mostly portrayed in the theriomorphic form except in the sculpture from the Śiddheśwara temple of Hēmavati wherein the demon is shown in ardhanishkarāṇī.

The examples of Eastern Gaṅga art include the images of the Goddess with four, eight and ten arms. The eight armed variety images from the Madhukēśvara temple of Mukhalingam depict the goddess in ādidha pose, holding trisūla in the lower right arm and pulling out the animal’s tongue or catching the tail of the buffalo with the lower left arm. The demon is represented in animal form. In these examples, the goddess is not shown accompanied by her mount. In the other eight armed sculptures from Jayati, Pottangi and Mukhalingam (Pls. 39, 40, 41, 42, 43), the goddess is shown in Pratyādidha and one of her right arms holds trisūla which is seen piercing through the head of the human form of the demon or body of the buffalo and the left arm holding the horns or pressing down the upturned head of the demon. A snake in one of her right arms also takes part in attacking the demon. In these examples, the demon is represented in
theriomorphic form and also in human form coming out of the cut throat of the buffalo i.e. *Ardhanishkrāniha*.

The ten armed sculptures of Mahiṣaśuramardini from Mukhalingam (Pl. 44) and Gañjavalli also depict the goddess in *Pratyālidha* posture as seen in the eight armed sculptures. In the sculpture from Gañjavalli, the demon is shown in animal form and a human demon emerges from the decapitated head of the animal. This figure is in contrast to the earlier examples of the depiction of the goddess wherein the demon below the feet of the deity is shown with a human body and a buffalo head. In the sculpture from the Somesvara temple of Mukhalingam, an interesting feature noticeable is that two female attendants are carved at the bottom on either side of the goddess and a lotus is carved in each of the top corners. The lion, the mount of the goddess, is also seen attacking the demon with its jaws and teeth.

The images of Mahisasuramardini found at Mukhalingam conform to the descriptions given in the *Silparatna* and the *Vishnudharmottara* but with slight variations in the number of arms of the goddess and the contents held by them.

In the Chōla art, four and eight armed representations of Mahiṣaśuramardini have been noticed. In one of the sculptures from Mogili, the four armed goddess stands in *ālidha* pose. She holds *trisāla* with her front right and left arms and thrusts it into the neck of the buffalo (Pl. 45). In another four armed sculpture from the same place she holds *trisūla* in the front right arm and holds the snout of the buffalo with the front left arm. In these examples, the demon is depicted wholly in the form of an animal. The eight armed sculptures from Kaṭṭamāñchi and Chilaṅkūr also depict the goddess in *ālidha* pose. She has been shown killing the demon plunging a spear with her two right and left arms into the strong body or head of the Āsura (Pls. 47, 48). Yet, in another eight armed sculpture from Kalavagunṭa, the goddess holds the human head of the demon after he is slain. Here the goddess is shown with her mount, the lion at the bottom on the left side. The depiction of the demon, both in animal and human body with buffalo-head is very interesting from the iconographic point of view.

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In the Kalyāṇi Chālukyan art, Mahiṣaśuramardini is represented with four and eight arms. In the sculptures from the Kolanūpaka and Vijayawāḍa Museums, the goddess holds khaḍga in the front right arm instead of trīṣūla (Pls. 51, 59). A peculiar feature noticeable in the sculpture from the Birla Museum (Pl. 55) is that the front right arm holds the tail of the animal which is usually seen in the front left hand of the goddess. The remaining four and eight armed sculptures (Pls. 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 56, 57, 60, 61, 62) represent the goddess holding trīṣūla in the front right arm and thrusting it into the neck or mouth or body of the buffalo and her front left arm holds the tongue or tail or head or horn of the buffalo. She is shown with her mount lion in the sculptures from Birla Museum (Pls. 50, 54, 55), Ālampūr (Pl. 52), Kolanūpaka Museum (Pl. 58), Vijayawāḍa Museum (Pl. 59), K.B. Museum (Pl. 60), and without lion in the other sculptures of Kolanūpaka Museum (Pl. 51), K.B. Museum (Pl. 53), and Kanakal (Pl. 62). The demon is depicted in the form of an animal (buffalo) and in human form with buffalo head (Pls. 50, 51, 52, 54, 55, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62). In one sculpture from K.B. Museum (Pl. 53), Mahiṣaśura is seen in full human form issuing from the cut throat of the buffalo (Ardhanishkrāntha).

The Telugu Chola artists depicted the goddess Mahiṣaśuramardini with four and eight arms and also introduced the new feature of representing the goddess with thirty arms. In the Krishnapatnam sculpture, the four armed goddess is shown holding trīṣūla in the right arm and śankha in the left arm. The eight armed sculptures from Mallam (Pl. 63) and Pottapi portray the goddess as holding trīṣūla in the front right arm and thrusting it into the head of the buffalo and the front left in katihasta pose (Pl. 63) or holding the head of the buffalo. An eight armed sculpture of the goddess from Nallacheruvapalli shows the goddess holding the trīṣūla in her front right and left arms. In all these representations, Mahiṣaśura is depicted in the form of buffalo and also in human form coming out of the throat of the buffalo. The depiction of the lion as the vehicle of the goddess is found in the sculpture of Pottapi.

Not only four and eight armed, but thirty armed sculpture of the goddess is also found in the Manumasīddhēśvara temple at Krishnapatnam (Pl. 64). The sculpture in this
temple shows the goddess in alidha pose with thirty arms well equipped with different weapons. She holds trisūla in her lower right arm and her lower left arm is kept in kātihaṣṭa pose. At the bottom right, the demon is shown emerging in human form from the animal body. This sculpture speaks highly of the artist who created this wonderful sculpture. We do not have textual reference to the goddess having thirty arms. The thirty armed sculpture of Krishnapatnam represents the goddess like Bhujavanam (forest of arms) as said by Bana in his Chandīśatāka (7th century A.D.) fighting vigorously with the demon with all the powerful weapons. The multiple arms with different powerful weapons emphasise her powerful and pervasive character. The sculpture exhibits the extreme elegance and infinite force of the goddess. This is the contribution of the Telugu Chōla artist.

The figures of Goddess Mahiṣāsūramardini in the Kākatiya art show her four (Pls. 65, 66, 67), six (Pls. 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74), eight and ten armed (Pl. 77). In all these varieties, the goddess is depicted as standing in alidha pose, holding trisūla in the front right arm and thrusting it into the neck or back of the buffalo or the head or chest of the human form of Mahiṣāśura and her front left arm holding the tail or tongue of the animal or arm of the demon. The six armed sculpture from the Victoria Jubilee Museum of Vijayawāda depicts (Pl. 70) the front right arm of the goddess in kātihaṣṭa and her front left arm in abhaya.

In the eight armed sculpture from the K.B. Museum (Pl. 76), the goddess holds trisūla in her two front right and left arms. In all the above four varieties of sculptures, the demon is depicted fully in animal as well as in human form emerging from the neck of the buffalo which the Dēvi-Mahāmya refers to it as ardhanīshkṛānta. The lion is depicted in the four (Pls. 66, 67), six (Pls. 68, 69) and eight armed sculptures (Pls. 72, 74, 75, 76). In the ten armed sculpture from the Rāmappa temple of Palampet, the depiction of two female figures on the right and left sides in anjalimudra and the terrific eyes of the goddess are the noteworthy features.
The study of the iconographical features of Mahisasuramardini in the Vijayanagara art reveals that the Vijayanagara artists depicted the Goddess with four, six and eight arms. In all these variety of sculptures, the goddess is represented in two postures (i) standing with the left leg resting on the ground and the right leg bent at knee and resting on the neck or back of the buffalo and (ii) standing with the right leg stiff and resting on the ground and the left leg bent at knee and its foot resting on the back or neck of the buffalo. The two four-armed sculptures from Animēla (Pl. 78) and Lower Ahōbilam (Pl. 82) depict the goddess holding cakra in the front right arm instead of trisula while in all the remaining four, six and eight armed sculptures, the goddess is shown holding trisula in the front right arm and piercing it into the neck or body of the buffalo and the front lower left arm holding the tongue or snout or tail of the animal (Pls. 79 to 88) or hair or head of the human form of the demon (Pls. 90 to 100).

In the four and six armed sculptures from Pushpagiri (Pl. 81) and Tāḍpatri (Pl. 88) the goddess stands on the back of the buffalo trampling on it in dancing pose with slender waist. In another six armed sculpture from Tāḍpatri (Pl. 89), the goddess is seated on her mount, the lion, holding the weapons cakra, arrow, khadga, sāṃkha, bow and resting the front left arm on her left thigh. In the Vijayanagara art, Mahisasura is seen depicted in three ways, viz.,(i) buffalo form or theriomorphic form (ii) in full human form emerging from the body of the buffalo and (iii) in full human body with the buffalo head. Lion, the vehicle of the goddess is shown to right bottom of the goddess (Pls. 78, 81, 84, 85, 89, 92, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100). Occasionally the lion is shown pouncing upon the buffalo (Pl. 92).

To sum up, a detailed study of the iconographical features of the sculptures and images of Mahiṣaṣuramardini in the temple art of Andhra Pradesh reveals that various modes were followed in the representation of the goddess. An image of a particular period bears testimony of that age reflecting the sentiment, aesthetic sense, religious fervour of the people and the authentic genius and ingenuity of the craftsmen. The artists of the Early Chaḷukya, Eastern Gaṅga, and Kakatiya art depicted the goddess with four, eight and ten arms. While in the Eastern Chaḷukya and Vijayanagara art, the artists
provided the goddess with four, six, and ten arms. The Nolamba artists portrayed the goddess with two, four, and six arms only. The Chōla and Kalyāṇī Chāluṣya artists represented the goddess with four and eight arms. The Telugu Chōla artists depicted the goddess not only with four and eight arms but also introduced the new feature of representing the goddess with thirty arms like Bhujavanam (forest of arms) as said by Bana in his Candīṣataka (7th Century A.D.). In all the schools of the art, four, eight and ten armed representations of the goddess are more common than two, six and thirty armed goddess.

From a perusal of all the sculptures and images of Mahiṣaśuramardini, it has been observed that the artists of various schools have attempted to depict all forms of Mahiṣaśura prescribed in the ancient texts. Mahiṣaśura is seen depicted (i) in the buffalo form or theriomorphic form and in (ii) anthropomorphic form (human body with the head of Mahisa) or (iii) in full human form issuing from the beheaded neck of the buffalo. The later feature which the Devi-Mahatmya refers to as Ardhaniskṛntha begins to appear only in the examples of the Gupta period from Bhitā, Bhūmāra, Udaigiri etc from the 4th century A.D onwards. The depiction of Aśura seen in the sculptures of Andhra Pradesh as coming out of the cut throat of the buffalo exactly tallies with the description of Devi-Mahatmya of the Marksandeya Purāṇa, a work of 5th – 6th century A.D. It would appear that artists of Andhra Pradesh tried to copy the details from such traditional representations as found in the Gupta sculptures in north India.

Further, this study reveals that the lion, the mount of the goddess is depicted in all the schools of art, though it is conspicuously absent in the early specimens of the Early Chāluṣya art. In Andhra Pradesh it begins to appear in the sculptures of the later Early Chāluṣya art (Pls. 13, 14) from about 7th–8th century A.D. onwards. In some sculptures, it stands by the side of the goddess as a sedent animal (Pls. 5, 6, 16, 21, 22) and in some other sculptures, the goddess rides on it while attacking the demon. At times, the lion is seen engaged in attacking the demon either from the back or pouncing upon the demon (Pl. 92). Occasionally the lion is seen attacking the human legs of the demon (Pl. 24). In many examples, the lion is seen completely stylised.
Various postures of Mahiṣaśuramardini in the act of killing the buffalo demon have very ably been illustrated by the artists in the temple art of Andhra Pradesh. In the first category the goddess is combating with a buffalo with its neck upturned under the pressure of the leg of the goddess. In the second category, the goddess is depicted raising the buffalo up from behind by pulling its tail or tongue with her front left arm and piercing its neck with her trident by her front right arm. In the third category, the goddess is shown fighting with the demon having human body and buffalo head. In the fourth category, the goddess is portrayed as fighting with the demon in human form emerging out of the decapitated trunk of the buffalo i.e. Ardhaniskrāṁtha form. In this form, the demon is seen pressed on the chest by the hand or the foot or a trident is plunged on his chest. In the fifth category, the goddess is represented as standing in axial posture upon the severed head of the buffalo.

A closer analysis of the images of Mahiṣaśuramardini would reveal that, we find some deviations by the artists from the prescribed iconographic rules in the depiction of the goddess in the temple art of Andhra Pradesh. As regards to the depiction of the contents in the arms, in all the schools of art i.e. right from the Early Chāḷukya down to the Vijayanagara period, the contents in the arms of the goddess when compared with the texts, partly tally with the prescriptions of the texts and partly differ from the texts. This shows that the artists of the respective schools of art did not strictly adhere to the stipulations laid down in the Śilpa texts. Further, we also find some local divergencies in the depiction of Mahiṣaśuramardini. For example, in the Eastern Chāḷukya sculpture from Bikkavōlu (Pl. 33), two celestials are found carved above the head of the goddess, holding a crown. Similarly, in the Eastern Gāṅga sculpture from the Somesvara temple of Mukhalingam, two female attendants are carved at the bottom on either side of the goddess and a lotus is carved in each of the top corners. In the Kalyāṇi Chāḷukyan sculpture from the Birla Museum, a peculiar feature noticeable is that the front right arm holds the tail of the animal which is usually seen in the front left arm of the goddess (Pl. 55). In the sculpture at Krishnapatnam (Pl. 64), the Telugu Chōḷa artists sculptured the goddess with thirty arms like Bhujavanam with different weapons for which we do not have textual reference.
In the ten armed Kākatīya sculpture from Pālampēt, the goddess is shown flanked by two female figures in arijalimudra which is noteworthy. In the four and six armed sculptures from Pushpagiri (Pls. 81, 88) the Vijayanagara artists portrayed the goddess as trampling on the back of the buffalo in dancing pose with slender waist. The above stated variations would suggest that the sculptors took lot of liberties in the treatment and a considerable difference in the iconographic details in the depiction of the goddess in the temple art of Andhra Pradesh.

Mahiṣaśūramardini is further more found installed in one of the main side niches of the Śiva temples of the Eastern Chālukya, Nolamba, Eastern Ganga, Chōla, Kakatiya and Vijayanagara periods. We find fine Mahiṣaśūramardini icons placed in such position in the Eastern Chālukyan temples at Bikkavōlu (Pls. 30, 32) and Bhīmavaram (Pl. 35), in the Chōla temples at Mogli (Pl. 45), the Eastern Ganga temples at Jayati (Pls. 39, 40) and Mukhalingam (Pl. 44), Kakatiya (Rāmappa) temple at Pālampēt (Pls. 69, 71) and in the Vijayanagara temples at Nāgalāpuram and Chintala Venkaṭaramana temple at Tādpatri (Pl. 89) etc. The Mahiṣaśūramardini images serving as the Pārśva-devata of Śiva temples are found placed in the northern niche of the main shrine. The reasons for these arrangements are manifold. It is said that the north direction, associated with the side image of Śakti in the Śiva temples, corresponds to the left side of the presiding deity, on which the image of Śakti is always placed in all of the composite Śiva-Śakta icons ever conceived in Hindu art, such as those representing Ardhanārīśvara, Umāmahēśvara etc.

In both the Atharvaveda and Brāhmaṇa traditions, the left (Vāma) side of Śiva is described as his lunar dark and fearful side, the one dominated by the vital, aqueous and nurturing Sōma principle-meant as female in the later Brahmanical Hinduism-whose worship, once it was assimilated to Dēvi- worship, was involved in all the later left hand (vāmācāra) Tantric rites. According to the sacred iconographic principles underlying the Hindu temple building activity, the north direction corresponds to the left side of Śiva in as much as the main entrance of the latter’s temples generally faces east, the direction of sovereignty. The northern niche of a Śiva temple is therefore the right place where the image of the goddess in her role as Mother Earth, must be installed in order that a
devotee, in his right-hand circumambulation of the sanctum before entering the temple
porch and enjoying the vision of the Sivalinga enshrined within the sanctum, may ask her
for a grace that the great God, the holder of supreme divine authority, will normally
bestow on him? However, it may be of interest to state here that in contrast to the above
said north direction, the icons of Mahiśaśuramardini are found placed not only in the
northern niche of the main shrine, but also in the east and west side niches in the temples
of the Eastern Chalukyas at Bikkavolu (Pl. 29), Paḷakollu (Pl. 31) and Drākṣarāma (Pl.
35), the Eastern Gāṅga at Pottangi (Pl. 41) and the Vijayanagara at Pushpagiri (Pl. 81).
This is yet another notable variation (feature) found in the temples with regard to the
representation of Mahiśaśuramardini in the temple art of Andhra Pradesh.

Finally, it can be said that the depiction of Mahiśaśuramardini, the war-goddess
with multiple arms holding the most powerful weapons of gods in association with
Mahiśasura and the lion greatly enriched the sculptural art tradition of Andhra Pradesh to
an extent that no other god or goddess of Hindu pantheon can claim to have surpassed her
in manifested form. During the early and medieval periods (6th to 17th century A.D.) the
goddess became so popular in Andhra Pradesh as in other parts of the country and she
was illustrated in art from two to thirty armed variety depicting in the same form of her
malevolent aspect as the annihilator of the demons and the benevolent character as the
Mother of the Universe. She is a living deity in the country and is still more popular in
Andhra Pradesh.

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