Chapter IV

TANTRIC GODDESS OF BENGAL

The Tantras represent, according to a school of thought, a Sastra which is largely the creation of the people of Eastern India, the stronghold of Tantricism. But, according to others, not only in Eastern India, but throughout the whole of India, the upper classes of the Hindu community are governed by the Tantric religion, because there are Saktas, Saivas and Vaisnavas all over the country. They are initiated (diksa) by their respective mantras which are exclusive property of the Tantras. The forms of worship, acaras, as prescribed in the Tantras are many, but they may be divided mainly under two heads namely, Daksinacara and Vamacara. In early times Daksinacara was looked upon with high regard, but in course of time Vamacara also gained much popularity and soon gave rise to Abhicarakarman (black magic) among the lower classes and womenfolk. In fact, it has been suggested by some that the Vamacara practices were borrowed from the pre-Aryan tribal religious beliefs and rituals. This view has been upheld by D.P.Chattopadhyay who connects Tantra with the act of propagation of family or extending the number of family-members. In the tribal religious beliefs and practices, much stress has been laid upon the fertility and productivity for which dependence on magic, sorcery, witchcraft etc. was widely recognised. Therefore, it has been argued that the pre-Aryan and non-Aryan mother-goddesses in Bengal were given recognition by the Brahmanical religious system either directly or were indirectly borrowed through the Vajrayana-Mahayana
Buddhist pantheon. This view may be challenged on the ground that the Cult of Mother-goddess could not be developed into Saktism without recognition of the cult of Siva. But the concept of Siva was not unknown in primitive times, as it was widely prevalent in the form of Linga worship.

J. N. Banerjea thinks that in the early phase of the Sakti-cult in its Tantric form, the element of fear played the most prominent part. The word Tantra is traced for the first time in the Gangadhar Stone Inscription found in Malwa and dated in the Malava year 480 (423-24 A.D.). The epigraph records the construction of a temple referred to as "this very terrible abode..., filled full of female ghouls, of the Divine Mothers, who utter loud and tremendous shouts in joy, (and) who stir up the (very) oceans with the mighty wind rising from the magic rites of their religion" (Matrinance pramuditaghahanatvyarthanihradiningam tantrodbhutaprabalapavanodvarttit-ambonidhinam ..., (portion broken) gatamidam dakini samprakirnam vasmatyugram nipatisachivo'karayat punyahetah.)

Side by side with this record found in Central India, we may take into account the evidence furnished by an epigraphic record found in Bengal. The Sian stone Inscription of the time of Kamboja-Pala King Nayapala (1027-43 A.D.) refers to the construction of temples or pinnacles dedicated to the goddesses like Carca (Carcika), Pingalarya, Sixty-four Yoginis, Nine-Candikas. The word 'Yogini' does not occur in the early Gupta inscriptions but still the Sian Inscription leaves no scope of
doubt about the existence of Yoginis as object of worship in the Tantric-Sakta religion since early mediaeval period. In the second part of the 146th chapter of the *Agni Purana* we find mention of the names of *Astagata* goddesses who belong to the line of Camunda and are worshipped in *mandalas* (V.20: *Camunda-Kulasambhuta mandala pujitajaye*).

The time-gap between the *Gangdhar Inscription* and the *Sian Record* might be bridged over, if it be assumed that Sakta-Tantricism was preceded by the emergence and development of the Buddhist Tantric religion in the forms of Vajrayana, Sahajayana and Kalacakrayana. The *Vamacari* Saktism in Bengal was influenced to a great extent by the Vajrayana school of the Mahayana Buddhism. The eighty-four *Siddhacaryas* of Bengal who were the protagonists of adoption of Tantric rituals in Mahayana Buddhism seem to have flourished sometime before the 10th century A.D.. Because, the *Carvapadas* in which we find the verses composed by the *Siddhacaryas* in mystic language are dated towards the end of the 10th century A.D. and beginning of the 11th century A.D.. Incidentally, we may refer to the goddesses of the Vajrayana pantheon referred to in the *Sadhanamala* like Janguli, Parnasabari, Ekajata, Marici and different forms of Tara who had emerged as a result of the absorption of non-Aryan beliefs and practices and served as a source of inspiration for the evolution of Hindu Tantric goddesses. It has been suggested by some that the fusion of Saktism with Tantric Buddhism gave rise to a new school of Saktism known as *Kaula* in which *Kula* is defined as Sakti, Corresponding to *Upaya* or *Karuna* of the Buddhist Tantric
school), and Akula is Siva, corresponding to Prajna or Sunyta of the Buddhist Tantras.

This chronological position of the Sakta-Tantric goddesses in Bengal, in relation to Tantric Buddhism, does in no way deny the antiquity of Tantricism. It has been observed that the pre-Buddhist phase of Tantric worship is a fact to be reckoned with. As its foundation was so widely and firmly established that, notwithstanding ceaseless efforts, Buddhism could not dislodge it, but was in turn itself swallowed up by this Tantric worship within a short span of a few centuries. This transformed Buddhism soon appeared on the arena in a new attractive garb as the Mahayana.

Tantricism is generally regarded as a mode of worship known as Vamacara or Kaula. As pointed out above, Tantricism also incorporates in itself Daksinacara in no less significant way. Those who belonged to Daksinacara were devoted to the goddesses like Arya, Tribhuvanesvari, Katyayani, Kausiki etc., whereas for the Vamacaris the objects of devotion were Kapali, Bhadrakali, Candi and other such forms evoking fear. In Bengal, however, the fearful aspects of the goddesses were more recognised than others. That indicates why Bengal is supposed to be the stronghold of Vamacara.

EMERGENCE OF THE TANTRIC GODDESSES IN BENGAL

The germs of Tantric mode of worship may be traced even in the great Epic, the Mahabharata. Various epithets are given
to Sakti, the great goddess, such as Durga, Uma, Parvati, Candi, Kali, Mahakali, Bhadrakali, Kapali, Krsna, Jaya, Vijaya, Kumari, Karali, Kausiki, Savitri, Svaha, Svadha, Brahmaidya, Maya, Mahendri etc. She has been often described as fierce 'Black-Goddess' of destruction, the sister of Krsna (Ekanamsa), the slayer of the demon Mahisa (Mahisamardini) and the dweller of the Vindhyas mountains (Vindhyavasini). In the Aryastava (veres 6-10) the association of the goddess with hills, particularly the Vindhyas, river, caves, forests and gardens, her connection with various domestic and wild animals, the fact of her being worshipped with great veneration by the non-Aryan tribes like Sabara, Barbara and the Pulindas are highlighted. This non-Aryan aspects of the Devi is further emphasised by such names as Aparna and Nagnasabari (whose Mahayana counterpart is Parnasabari). The goddess is described as "the personified death", very fond of wine, meat and sacrifice, both Laksmi and Alaksmi, Mother of the Mantras and the Gayatri of the gods, the virginity of the Young maidens and the good fortune of the married ladies. In this context the fondness of the goddess for wine, meat and sacrifice exposes the later Tantric element in herself. Again, there are two Durgastotras in the Mahabharata of which one, recited by Yudhisthira, refers to the goddess Kali (also named Mahakali) who loves wine, blood and meat offered to her. Again, in the hymns recited by Arjuna, the goddess is given various epithets and is described as fond of buffalo's blood, sow-faced, producer of edible roots and plants. So it appears that both sublime love as well as fear played their requisite parts, as it has been quite reasonably observed by Banerjea, and non-Aryan folk
elements contributed much to the development of the concept of the Tantric goddess. But no traits of the erotic sensual elements that formed one of the principal features of the Tantric-Sakti worship at a later period can be traced in the Great Epic. R.G. Bhandarkar has spoken about three main forms of the goddess based on three different aspects of her: (1) the ordinary bland form, (2) fierce form and (3) sensual form. However, the sensual form of the Devi is not emphasised at all in the Great Epic.

Some of the Puranic texts composed in Eastern India, such as the Devi-purana (6th-7th century A.D.), the Kalika-Purana (10th-11th century A.D.), and the Mahabhagavata-Purana (contemporary to the Kalika-Purana) contain symptoms of growing Tantricism. According to Dr. R.C. Hazra, the parts of the Devi-purana containing the Tantric mantras and Vidyas have a much earlier beginning and most of them have a long tradition behind them. It is said that Nandi, a disciple of Siva, learnt Tantric mantras (padamala vidya) from his preceptor. The mantras or the mystic syllables of the Devi-Purana (ch.9) are unintelligible, but the beginning "Om namo bhagavati Camunda Smasana-vasini Khatvangakapalahastemahapretasamarudhe..." leaves no doubt that Camunda, one of the Dasamahavidyas held a prominent position as Tantric female deity in the early period. The Purana recognises the Tantras as an authority and distinguishes between right-hand and left-hand worshippers. The form of worship requires the use of the Tantric mantras, Dysas and mudras. It goes to the extent of prescribing use of wine and meat for the devotees. The Devi
of the *Devi-Purana* undoubtedly contains almost all elements of *Vamacari* Tantricism. The *Kalika-Purana* also prescribes the Tantric mode of worship for pleasing Kamakhya or Kamesvari of Kamarupa, a consort of Siva, residing with the goddess in the form of *Linga*. It is said that Vasistha who was practising penances to Siva was forced to go out by the goddess Ugratara. On this occasion Vasistha cursed Ugratara with these words: "you being a woman (*Vama*) are expelling me, so you will henceforth be worshipped only according to *Vama* rites, your hosts roving about like *mlechhas* will henceforth be degraded to the rank of *mlechhas*, and Siva will receive only the worship by the *mlechhas*, being always covered with ashes and carrying bones". The *Mahabhagata Purana* deals mainly the three manifestations of Devi—(1) as daughter of Daksa, Sati, (2) as wife of Siva, Girija, Uma, Parvati and (3) as Krsna, and lastly, identifies all these with *Para-Sakti* or *Parabrahman*.

The erotic sensual element that could not be traced in the *Mahabharata* may be recognised in the above Puranas. There is a *stotra* in the *Devi-Purana* where Devi is said to be the better-half of Siva. She is prayed along with Siva. The word is said to be consisting of Siva and Sakti. In this *stotra* we find an emphasis on the union of Siva and Sakti as the basis of creation and preservation of the Universe. In the *Kalika-Purana* also there is an account of Devi's marriage with Siva. It has been said that Kali is very dear to Siva and she is half of Siva's body. The author of the Purana gives a name to both of these as *Ardhanarisvarya*. In the *Mahabhagavata-Purana* Sakti first of
all is Sati as the wife of Siva. Again, it has been said that the Devi is not only the wife of Siva but also his permanent associate in the form of Ardhanarishvara. The union of Siva-Sakti has its philosophical foundation in the Samkhya system on the one hand and is also reflected in the esoteric Tantric Yoga practices connected with awakening of Kundalini, the primeval Energy lying dormant in the microcosm (human body).

In the *Markandeya-Purana* the Devi appears as Great Goddess Candika, the embodiment of the Cosmic Energy. The fierceness of a martial goddess is the predominant note in the Devimahatmya of the *Markandeya-Purana* and we always find her engaged in killing the demons. This tradition of the fierce goddess, equipped with the sharpest weapons and revealing in her terror-striking war-cries reminds us of the mothers' description in the *Gangdhar Inscription* of 5th century A.D. In contradistinction to the Upapuranas mentioned above, the *Markandeya-purana* upholds a position of the Devi as a creator, preserver and destroyer of the universe without any dependence on Siva or any other god, for She is the personification of the energies (tejas) of all the gods taken together.

However, the study of the Puranas would indicate that much before the composition of the Tantras in Bengal the Tantric practices were in vogue in connection with the worship of the goddess. Further, the attributes of the goddess also represented the *Ishtadevata* or the tutelary deity of the left-hand worshippers.
Matrikas

In the Markandeya-purana (ch.88) it has been said that the Matrikas aided Ambika along with Camunda in causing death to the most powerful ally of the demon king Sumbha, named Raktavija. Similar was the case with Andhakasura who fought against Siva. Siva created Yogesvari out of the flame that issued from his mouth and other gods also sent their Saktis (matrikas) to his aid.

Saptamatrikas (Seven mothers) representing the Saktis of the important familiar deities are Brahmani (or Sarasvati), Mahesvari (or Raudri), Kaumari (or Karttikeyani), Vaisnavi (or Laksmi) Varahi, Indrani (Mahendri) and Camunda (or Camundi). There are, however, occasional variation in the list of matrikas with regard to their number and order of their enumeration. Varahamihira simply mentions that the matrikas are to be made with cognizances of the gods corresponding to their names. Utpala, commenting on the above passage, has named them as Brahmi, Vaisnavi, Raudri (Mahesvari), Kaumari, Aindri, Yami, Varuni and Kauveri. Then he adds that there are other Matriganas like Narasimhi, Varahi and Vainayaki. The Skanda-Purana (Kasikhanda), the Devi-Purana (ch.87) and the Brahmavaivarta-Purana (Prakrti-Khanda) mention more matrikas whereas only eight matrikas have been mentioned in the Devibhagavata (12.11.57-58) [where Narasimhi is substituted for Mahalaksmi], the Nitvasodasikarnava (8.126 ff), the Prapancasaratatntra (ch.3), the Linga-Purana (Purvarddha 82.96), [in which Mahalaksmi is given the name of Agnika], the Mntromahodadhi (3.17-18) and the
Varaha-Purana (ch.27). In a subsequent ritual literature of the Hindus, the names of as many as sixteen matrikas with Gauri in the beginning are mentioned (Gauryadi-Sodasha-matrika). The matrikas figure prominently in the Tantric ritual. From the Sadhanas in the Buddhist literature, it appears that the Tantric Buddhist literature has also incorporated the Saptamatrikas in its religious fold.

In the worship of the divine mothers, as it was intimately associated with the Tantric form of Sakti worship, primarily fear played the prominent part. Two of the matrikas Varahi and Camunda personify, to some extent, the terrific and Tantric form of the mother-goddess. It appears that the Matrgana formed in a group the associates of the Supreme goddess Durga and represented her different aspects. So the concept of Saptamatrika had its beginning in the Puranas and was later incorporated in the Tantric texts. It has been pointed out by J. N. Banerjea that the seven divine mothers have been found in a group or in separate representation in different parts of Orissa. In this connection mention is made of the Varahi temple of Gaurasi, a village in Puri district. At a later period, the number of associates of the goddess increased and were called Mahavidyas, Vidyas and Nityas, especially in the Tantric texts.

MAHAVIDYAS AND NITYAS

The Tantrasara quotes two lists of Mahavidyas from the Malini-vijaya-tantra and Mundamala-tantra of which the second one
giving ten names are very popular in Bengal.

The Tantric text, *Tantrasara* was written in the 16th century in Bengal by Krisnananda Agamavagisa. As the text appears to be an essence (Sara) of Tantricism based on long-continued tradition of religious practices in Bengal, it is of immense retrospective value. The tradition of Tantric practices appears to have remained within a limited a circle and was handed down from generation to generation in the preceptor-disciple line, maintaining thus its esoteric character. However, it may be reasonably assumed that the Tantric cult had its beginning in Bengal not in mediaeval but in the early mediaeval period.

In all the lists of *Mahavidyas* we have as a first name Kali who is considered in Eastern India to be the most important of the Sakti-deities. Kamakhya was probably the presiding divinity of Kamarupa in Assam but still gained much popularity in Bengal. The others were Nilasarsvat or Tara, Bherunda, Mahadurga, Tvarita, Pratyangira, Bala, Matangi, Saila Vasini, Sodasi, Bhuvanesvari, Bhairavi, Dhumavati, Vagala, Kamala, Mahisanardini, Dhanada, Gauri, Trtikuta, Tripura, Mahamaya, Sulini, Camunda, Katyayani. A few of these are counted among the *Nityas* who are sixteen in number. It has been suggested by Chintaharan Chakroborty that among the *Nityas* mentioned in the *Nityasadasikarnava* (ch.1,p.27-29) Tripurasundari was one of the most important and popular Sakti deities and was later known as Tripura. However, among the *Mahavidyas* Kali and Tara are very popular in Bengal. It appears from the Tantric texts that the Puranic pantheon of goddesses was gradually expanded and
incorporated various Saktis in increasing number.

DASAMAHAVIDYAS KNOWN IN BENGAL

The Sakta school had infinite ramifications of sects and cults. The Saktis bearing different names and forms seem to have been worshipped by different sects. But the variety of names and forms of Sakti have been brought under the most famous division on ten Mahavidyas, each having a distinct literature of its own.

The popular account of the origin of the ten Mahavidyas is described in different texts. When Sati expressed her desire to attend the great sacrifice arranged by her father, although uninvited, Siva, her husband, restrained her to do so. Sati, being angry, showed her dreadful forms as:

Kali Tera Mahavidya Sodasi Bhuvaneshvari!
Bhairavi Chinnamasta ca Vidya Dhanyati tatha !
Vagala Siddhavidya ca Matangi Kamalatmika !
Ete dasamahavidya siddhavidya prakirttitah, !
(Franatosini Tantra 5/6)

The Brhaddharm PURANA (MadhyaKhanda 6:12) narrates this account and the names of ten incarnations are the same. Probably the account was composed to incorporate some of the 28 female-deities worshipped by the aboriginals or to induct into Brahmanical faith some Mahayana Buddhist goddesses of Tantric character.
Most popular among these ten incarnations of the goddess was, no doubt, Kali or Kalika who has often been identified with Uma-Parvati in most of the Puranas (Kalika, 41/47-48; Varaha, 22/5; Saurva, 53/16-16; Padma, Srstikhandha, 4/625; Skanda, Avantyakhanda, 18/18-20. Siva, Purvabhag, 21/33-34). However, her emergence out of the war-goddess Candi may again be traced in the Devimahatmya of the Markandeya-Purana (85/86). It is said that Kali emerged from the frowning face of the goddess Candi, when she was fighting with Canda-Munda, the demon brothers. She is described as one "holding iron-rod, decorated with garland of humam-skulls, wearing skin of tiger, having dried flesh, much dreadful with large stretched face, fierce-looking with her lolling tongue, sunken-eyes - she emerged with filling all the sides by her roaring" (Markandeya-Purana, 87/6-8). The Tantrasara quotes the dhyana (meditation-form) of the goddess Kali from the Siddhesvara-Tantra. It seems to be much more dreadful than the Puranic description:

Savarudham mahabhimam ghoradramstram varapradam !
hasayuktam trinetranca lahalaketrkasaram !
muktakesin lalajibham vipantim rudhiram mubuh :
caturvakhyuktta devam varabhavakaram smaret,!!
(Tantrasara, p.490)

The goddess is here found as riding on a corpse and drinking blood with her lolling tongue.

Another form of the great goddess is Bhadrakali who is, however, much more fierce in appearance and attributes as portrayed in the Tantrasara, Prapancasara-tantra and Sarada-
I.e.

"Hungry, hollow-eyed, dark-sad faced, untied hair, crying, not satisfied till she could gobble the whole universe".

Camunda, an emanation of Kali, who emerged out of the body of the latter, laughing terribly, holding the severed heads of Canda and Munda in her two hands. Kali is named as Camunda:

\[ \text{vasmaccandana mundanca orhitva tvamucagata / Camundeti tato} \]

khvata devi bhavisyasi !

(Markandeya-Purana, 87:27). Camunda is one of the Asta-mātrkas:

Brahmi, Mahesvari Candi Varahi-Vaishnavi tatha !

Kaumari caiva Camunda Carciketyasta matarah !

That, Camunda and Carcika held a position of greater significance than other dreadful aspects of the great goddess Candi is historically substantiated by the archaeological findings and epigraphic records of Bengal. Both have their separate entities, although they have similar characteristics: 'fleshless skeleton body, skull-garland, wearing tiger skin, looking horrible with red-sunken eyes and smeared with blood'. In fact, there is little difference in the forms of the goddesses such as Kali, Camunda, Bhadrakali and Carcika in their textual descriptions as well as in their iconographic representations.

Various forms of goddess Kali are found in the list of female-deities found in the Jayadratha-Yamala as Kalika, Dambarakali, Raksakali, Indivarakali, Dhandakalika, Ramanakalika,
Isanakalika, Jivakali, Viryakali, Prajnakali, Saptarnakali. The forms of Kali mentioned in the Tantric works of Bengal are as follows: Daksinakalika, Siddhikali, Guhyakali, Bhadrakali, Smasanakali, Raksakali, Mahakali. Among those forms the worship of Daksinakalika is still much popular in Bengal.

Daksinakalika, according to the Svamarahasya (Vi.5), is so named because she is generous in granting boons. 'Having four hands and hideous face, dark like cloud, body smeared with blood, garland of human heads, two corpses used as ear-ornaments, protruding teeth, naked, blood trickling from her mouth and standing on the chest of Mahadeva'. This last characteristic probably is a later addition evidently to show the supremacy of Prakṛti over the inactive Purusa of the Samkhya or the predominance of the female-principle as cause of creation, sustenance and destruction.

TARA

The second Mahavidya Tara earned a great popularity in Bengal and with her name is associated the Sakti-Pitha in Bengal (Birbhum district) known as Tarapitha. Goddess Tara is also the chief female-deity of the Mahayana-Tantrayana pantheon.

Tara has two aspects like Candi, placid and terrible. The Tantric devotees used to worship her in both forms. The Tantrasara (Pp 535-36) describes her benign form as green-coloured (Svama-Varna), three eyed, two-armed, holding lotuses, smiling, ornamented with pearls and surrounded by various other Saktis. But in her terrible form she is thus described:
The similar description is found in her 'dhyana' as given in the Sadhanamala only having two variations. There is a corpse under her feet in place of Siva and she bears the image of Aksobhya on her head. It may be held that both the Brahmanical and Buddhist sects borrowed the concept of Tara from a common source from which goddesses like Kali, Camunda, Bhadrakali were derived to be incorporated in the Brahmanical pantheon. The common source appears to be the fierce and ferocious concepts of spirits and divinities upheld by the aboriginal tribes. D. C. Bhattacharyya is of opinion that the three principal aspects of Buddhist Tara, namely Ugrnatara, Vasudhara and Prajnaparamita correspond respectively to Mahakali, Mahalakshmi and Mahasarasvati aspects of the Mother-goddess known from the Markandeya Purana.

Because of her beauty and grandeur, Sodasi, the third Mahavidya, is always known as Tripurasundari, Sundari and Rajrajesvari. As she was first worshipped by Brahma, Visnu and Siva, she is known as Tripura. In other interpretations she is conceived as having three forms - Bala, Bhairavi and Sundari. She is called Vidya in the Tantrasara (P. 377) and included in Srividya (Srividya sodasi para). She is thus described:
Bhuvanesvari, the fourth Mahavidya, is considered the consort of Siva. She takes care of the three worlds and feeds them and that is why, is called Bhuvanesvari. Her marvellous radiance illuminates the universe. The fruit in her hand shows that she is the giver of the fruit of actions. She possesses a crescent on her forehead and matted hair on her head. She is three-eyed and her face is ever lit up with smile. In her two hands she holds the noose and the goad and in the other two the gestures of granting boons and giving assurance to her devotees.

The fifth Mahavidya Bhairavi manifests in many sub-forms such as Siddha-bhairavi, Tripura-Bhairavi, Caitanya-Bhairavi and so on. She is always associated with a Bhairava known as Vatuka. She is reddish like the morning sun, dressed in silken cloth and wears a garland of heads on her neck, holding rosary and manuscript in her two hands and boon and assurance are granted by the gestures of her other two hands. This is a benign manifestation of Sakti and is considered as the giver of knowledge.

Chinnamasta, the sixth of the Mahavidyas, is fiercest form among all. She herself is drinking the blood that gushes from her own throat:

Chinnamastam kare vame dharantim svamastakam;
Prasaritamukhim bhimam lelihanagrajihvikam;

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Pivantim raudhirim dheram njakantha-vinirgatam
(Tantrasara, p. 377)

She is looking thus:

Digamvari mabaghoram pratyavidhaapadasthitam
asthimaladheram devim nagajainopavitinim !!

(Ibid)

On the left and right hand side of the goddess are two attendants called Dakini and Barnini who also drink the blood streaming out of the goddess. Different Tantric texts, have dealt with this goddess as Saktisamgama Tantra, Pranatosini Tantra etc. In the Pranatosini Tantra Chinnamasta is said to be a form of Parvati.

The seventh of the Mahavidyas, namely, Dhumavati, is a peculiar manifestation of the goddess. She is a widow, dirty-clothed, pale-complexioned and rides a chariot over which sits a crow. In one of her hands she has a winnowing fan. Alain Danielou thinks that the goddess symbolises anihilation. The Tantrasara (p. 560) describes the goddess as:

Vivarna cacala rusta dirgha ca malinamvara !
vivarnakuntala ruksa vidhava viraledvija !
kekadhvajaratherudha vilamvita pavodhara /
surpanhatsatirutsaksj dhyutahasta varanvita !!

In the Narada Pancaratra (ch. XIII) Dhumavati is said to be a form of Parvati herself.

The eighth Mahavidya Vagala, seated on a throne, placed on an alter beset with gems in a mandapa bespangled with gems and in the midst of an ocean of nectar. She is of yellow countenance.
and puts on a yellow cloth and is adorned all over with garlands. The goddess holds in her four hands noose, club, tip of the tongue of the demon and thunderbolt. The Tantrasara (p. 578) describes her thus:

caturbhujam trinayam kamalasanasamsthitar !
mudgaram daksine pasam vane jihvance vajrakam !

In the Narada Pancaratra (ch. XIII) Vagala is not different from Dhumavati.

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In the Tantric religion Matangi, the ninth Mahavidya is conceived of as a form of Sarasvati, the manifestation of knowledge:

stutyanaya samkaradharamapatoim matanpinim vagadhidevatam !

The Tantrarajatantara (34 / 65) narrates har as one engaged in playing on Vinayadavantim mahavinam svasadanganaajanaiah. The Tantrasara (p. 555) described her as of dark complexion (Svamangi), three-eyed, with crescent on her forehead, seated on a jewelled throne holding sword, khetaka, noose and goad in her four hands.

The tenth Mahavidya, Kamala, is representing as an exclusive beauty, having golden colour, being adorned with jewels and wearing red silk saree. Four elephants resembling four hillocks of gold are found coronating the goddess by holding four pitchers containing nectar with their trunks. This description reminds us of Gajalaksmi.

That the Mahavidyas were well-known in Bengal is quite
evident from their account given in Bharatacandra's *Annadamangal Kavya* in Bengali.

There are innumerable number of *Vidyas*, *Nityas*, *Bhairavis* and various other Saktis in the Tantras, and different texts have different accounts and the number of names is found to be gradually increasing. Only the Tantric *Sadhakas* seem to have been acquainted with some of those *Vidyas* for their rituals as prescribed by their respective preceptors.

**GANAS OF THE MOTHER-GODDESS**

As Siva has ghosts as his followers, so also Great Mother Goddess has Dakinis and Yoginis as her followers. From the *Kularnava Tantra* (X.138-143) it is learnt that the followers or the associates of the goddess were emanations from the goddess herself and assumed different forms. Dakini has a face of a snake and colour of fire, holding in her hands *Kamandalu* and *Kartrka*. Rakini has the face of an owl and blue colour, holding in her hand *Khadga* and *Khetaka*. Lakini has high forehead and the colour of *Patali* flower, holding in her hands *Pasa* and *ankusa*. Kakini, horse-faced, has three faces and colour of jewel, holding in her hands human skulls. She is beautiful and guarantees success. Sakini is cat-faced and has black-colour, holding in her hands *Vajra* and *ganda*. She is always smiling. Hakini, bear-faced, has one, two, three, four, five or six faces and blue colour, holding in her hands human skulls, trident and *khetaka*.

The number of yoginis varies from eight to sixty-four.
We find a description of the Yoginis in the *Kalika-Purana* (chs. 60, 61, 63 & 65). Goddess Durga has eight associates known as Saktis, called Ugracanda, Pracanda, Candogra, Candanayika, Canda, Candavati, Camunda and Candika. Kausiki has eight Yoginis, namely, Brahmani, Mahesvari, Kaumari, Vaisnavi, Varahi, Narasimhi, Aintri, Camundi. Sivaduti, who emanated from the Devi on the occasion of her battle with Sumbha and Nisumbha has twelve Yoginis, namely, Ksemankari, Santa, Vedamata, Mahodari, Karala, Kamada, Bhagasya, Bhagamalini, Bhagadari, Bhagaroha, Bhagajihva and Bhaga. Likewise Bhadrakali, Uma and Ugratara have eight Yoginis each. Again, Kamesvari has also eight Yoginis. In Krsnananda’s *Tantrasara* we find a description of worship of Astayoginis, named as Surasundari, Manohara, Kanakavati, Kamesvari, Ratisundari, Padmini, Natini and Madhumati. In the Kasikhandha (Purvarda, ch.45 of the *Skanda-Purana*) we find a list of sixty-four Yoginis. On the occasion of the worship of goddess kali those Yoginis are also worshipped. The mounts (Vahanas) of the Yoginis are represented by different species of the animal-world. Of the eighty-four Yoginis one is ten-handed, nineteen are four-handed and remaining ones are two-handed. The ten-handed image is worshipped as Mahamaya. The faces of the Yoginis in some cases are those of different animals. All the Dakinis and Yoginis of the Great Goddess seem to have been imagined on the model of Marutgana and Rudragana of the Vedas.

**DURGA WORSHIP IN BENGAL**

The central object of worship of the people of Bengal is goddess
Durga in her *Mahisasuramardini* form, being accompanied by Laksmi, Sarasvati, Ganesa and Karttikeya. The representation of the accompanying figures around the central goddess seems to be a later development. Regarding her autumnal worship the *Devimahatya* section of the *Markandeya-Purana* narrates the account of King Suratha and Samadhi, a Vaisya, who fulfilled their respective desires by the worship of Durga in the autumn. Some other texts justify her worship in autumn on the ground that the practice was begun by Ramachandra for victory against Ravana.

Some Tantric texts like the *Maya-Tantra* (chapters VII, VIII, IX, XII), the *Rudrayamala*, the *Kalivilasa-Tantra* and the *Matyaa-Sukta* deal with the worship of Durga in Tantric mode. The *Tantrasara* mentions Durga-mantra, Mahisasuramantra, Jayadurga-mantra and Sulini-mantra. It also states a Durga-vantra or a diagram in which Durga is to be meditated upon and worshipped.

The *Pranatosini-Tantra* is the only published work among the Tantras of Bengal, which deals systematically with Durga-Puja. In this connection, it cites the *Matyaa-Sukta-mahatantra*, the *Devi-Purana* and the *Durga-bhakti-tarangini* as the principal authorities. The image, described in the *Pranatosini*, corresponds to the image usually worshipped at present in Bengal. The image of the goddess Durga is accompanied by those of Kartika, Ganesa, Laksmi, Sarasvati, Brahma, Savitri, demon, lion, buffalo, peacock, rat etc. A noteworthy fact about the *Pranatosini* is that, though the earlier authorities mention human beings and wine among the offerings to the goddess, the author clearly
forbids these two things for Brahmana worshippers (na-dadyad brahmano madyam manusam ca). At present Durga-Puja in Bengal follows this prohibition.

Durga Mahisamardini is associated with Nava-Durga (Nava Candika) or nine Durgas representing different manifestations of the same goddess. Those seem to have been required in different phases of her long-drawn war with the demons. The Bhavisya-Purana describes Nava-Durga or Nava-Candika thus: the central figure is named Ugra-Canda and the surrounding ones being Rudracanda, Pracanda, Candogra, Candanayika, Canda, Candavati, Candarupa and Aticandika. In the Durga-Puja in Bengal a special ritual known Nava-patrika-puja is held. Nine goddesses are represented by nine leaves or plants as the Bengal Saktas believe that the Mother-Goddess dwells in those trees. The nine leaves are: Rambha, Kaccvi, Haridra, Jayanti, Bilva, Dadimva, Asoka, Manaka and Dhanya. Each of the plants is associated with a goddess: Rambha with Brahmani, Kaccvi with Kalika, Haridra with Durga, Jayanti with Karttiki, Bilva with Siva, Dadimva with Raktadantika, Asoka with Sokarhita, Manaka with Camunda and Dhanya with Laksmi. Thus, the nine forms of the war-goddess are found to be the sustainers of the world of vegetation. The ritual of Nava-Patrika appears to be quite relevant to the agrarian society of Bengal. According to the tradition, Durga worship along with her sons and daughters came to be introduced in Bengal by Maharaja Krisnacandra of Nadia (18th century A.D.). But from the epigraphic records and sculptural remains, discovered so far, it appears that the worship of the warrior
goddess in the name of Sarvani, Durga, Candi or Ambika had its beginning in the 7th century A.D.

The Bengali Smriti-writer Jimutavahana (12th century A.D.) in his *Kalaviveka* refers to the auspicious time (month of Asvina) for *Durgotsava* and a vulgar type of merry-making called, *Savarotsava*, observed by the people on the *dasami-tithi*. Sandhyakara Nandi in his *Ramacarita* (III. 35) says that Varendri became full of festivities on account of the excellent worship of the goddess Uma. Sulapani (12th century A. D.), another Smriti-writer of Bengal, wrote three treatises on Durga-worship. Bhatta Bhavadeva (11th century A. D.), Prime Minister of the Varman King Harivarman, composed a work on Durga-worship. It appears that during the Sena-Varman period the worship of Durga was widely prevalent in Bengal.

**WORSHIP OF GODDESS KALI IN BENGAL**

The worship of Sakti in the form of 'Kali' the black-goddess, four-armed, standing on the bosom of Mahadeva, naked and wearing skull-garland is widespread in Bengal. The temples enshrining the stone, metal and earthen images of goddess Kali are found all over Bengal. For occasional or annual worship, earthen images of the goddess are made by the sculptors and thrown into water after the *Puja* is over.

In the *Mundaka Upanisad* (I.2.4) Kali is the name of one of the seven tongues of Agni. In the *Devimahatmya* of the *Markandeya-Purana* Kali's emergence has been related with the
great war-goddess Candi and thus is recognised as the Puranic goddess. In the Tantric texts, Kali is the first of the Desamahavidyas, and is the chief object of Tantric worship.

Regarding the forms of the deity, current in Bengal, and the mode of worship, the following works are authoritative: Mahanirvana-Tantra, Kali-Tantra, Tantrasara of Krsnananda and the Svamarakasva of Purnananda. Among other works mention may be made of the Pranatosini, of Ramatosana, Svanakalpalatika of Mathuranatha, Saktanandatarangini and Tare-rabasya of Brahmananda, Kalikadi-Sahasranama-stutika of Purnananda, Tare-rabasya-vrtti of Gaudiya Samkara, Abhijnana-ratnavali of Ramananda, Kalitattva-Sudhayindu of Kaliprasada, Tarabhaktitarangini of Kasinatha, Svanakalpalata of Ramachandra, Svama-puja-paddhati of Chakrovorty and many others. The number of the above works and their manuscripts preserved at various places indicate, no doubt, to the wide popularity of goddess Kali in Bengal.

The worship of kali seems to have been introduced in Bengal much later than that of Durga. According to a tradition, Krsnananda Agamavagisa, author of the Tantrasara, first introduced Kali-worship sometime in the sixteenth century. But there is no other evidence in support of the tradition. Goddess Kali has gained popularity in Bengal, as she is known to be the Istddevata of some wellknown Sakti-Sadhakas of eighteenth - nineteenth century Bengal.
Tantricism does not appear to be characterised by various manifestations of Mother-goddess, most of which may be traced in the Puranic texts. In the Buddhist Tantras emphasis is laid on an advancement of Bodhicitta, while in the Sakta Tantras awakening of Kulakundalini Sakti is all-important. The effort is made by the Tantriks to attain perfect knowledge and bliss by such advancement or awakening by the union of Bodhicitta with Prajna or by that of Sakti with Siva. The effort is yogic in nature and is known as Hathayoga having bearing upon both the physique and the psychic.

The Yogavasistha (Nirvana, Purva) refers to Kundalini and calls it a Sakti. It was written at least half a century before Samkaracarya. It can, therefore be said, that Kundalini was known to the Sadhakas or Yogins at least as early as the 7th century A.D. The aspirants for moksa (liberation from bondage) in those days were conscious about Kundalini Sakti. Although the Yogavasistha does not recommend concentration on the worship of Kundalini to arouse her, the Tantric texts emphasise upon this aspect of Yogasadhana.

It appears from the Tantric texts that there are two nerve currents in the spinal columns, called Pingala and Ida, and in between them the hollow canal called Susumna running through the spinal cord. At the lower end of the hollow canal is located the lotus of Kundalini. The lotus is described as one encircling a triangle in which the power of Kundalini lies coiled up in a
dormant condition. According to the Tantric texts, Kundalini lies in the Muladhara like a snake coiled three and half times. It has been said that all created forms are Kundalini (srstirupa); she creates, sustains and destroys the universe (srsti-attiti-lavat-mikam). She is beyond the universe (Vigvatita), and is the personification of knowledge (jnanarupa). Sometimes, Kundalini is classified as Cit (intelligence) and Acit (non-intelligence). Kundalini as Cit may be dynamic and static. In her static state no sign of energy is perceptible. When Sakti is static Siva is unmanifest. But when she is dynamic, Siva reveals himself. Acit Sakti is known as parigraha Sakti (energy that sustains), upadana-Sakti (material energy) or nitya-Sakti (causal power). Acit Sakti has two forms: pure and impure. The pure Acit Sakti, called Suddhasattva and Vindu or mahamaya by the Vaisnavas and Tantrikas respectively, is the matter out of which the 'pure world' is formed. The impure Acit Sakti reveals the entire universe of Maya.

One of the fundamental principles of the Tantras is that whatever is found in the macrocosm (Brahmanda) is also found in the microcosm (pinda). The Jivas are finite centres of Sakti. In other words, they are co-related centres of diversity. Their respective behaviour is determined by bonds (pasa) in which the Jiva is enmeshed. It should be the endeavour of every human being to cut the fetters of pasa, and realize his self. To be free from pasa, he must realise that 'existence' is Siva and 'activity' is Sakti, and that the world is a lila (sport) of Siva and Sakti.
Sakti in Kūndalini form lies in a dormant state in human body. When she awakens, she reveals herself in the form of self-cognition, which is like a strong fire and is known as Cid-agni (fire of intelligence). This Sakti can be roused by diverse means namely, the mercy of Sadguru, the grace of Isvara, the most impetuous efforts of Yogic Sadhana. When Kūndalini awakes it tries to force a passage through the hollow-canal of Susumna. As it rises step by step upwards, layer after layer of the mind becomes open. When Kūndalini reaches the brain, the Yogin is perfectly detached from the body and mind and soul finds itself free. The Tantric Sadhana consists in awakening the dormant Kūndalini in the muladhara and lead her by successive stages across the Cakras to the thousand-petalled lotus named sahasrara. The Cakras, according to Gopinath Kaviraj, are 'intra-organic' centres of the 'spiritual energy'. It is held that there are six Cakras, each Cakra consisting of a specified number of petals and representing certain letters of Sanskritised alphabets. Those Cakras (plexus) are: muladhara (at the base of the spinal cord), svadhishthana (behind the genitals), manipura (behind the navel), anahata (behind the heart), visuddha (behind the throat), and ajna (between the two eye-brows). When Sakti reaches sahasrara, the topmost position in the human body, she is united with Siva and instantaneously the Yogin has the realization of the non-dual self.

From the above it appears that the Mother-Goddess is intended to be worshipped by the devotee within the microcosm. The outer representation of the goddess in anthropomorphic form
bearing various names is actually meant for the beginners. Brahma-rsi Satyadeva in his famous text on spiritualism known as Sadhana-samara has explained the image of Mahisamardini in terms of Tantric-Yogic exercise. According to him, the image represents the struggle of Kundalini against all odds and evils to make its way to the goal of sūmmum-bhūnum, what is represented in the Tantric texts as the location of Siva. However, there is hardly any other anthropomorphic representation of the goddess in which one may trace the philosophical outlook of Tantricism or the spiritual aspect of Yogic Sadhana. So far as the evidence of the Tantric texts is concerned, there remains no doubt about the fact that Kulakundalini is a psychic representation of the Mother-goddess representing universal consciousness. In the Yogavasistha it has been said: "universal consciousness, which indwells every creature is, from the beginning of time, unlimited and unconfined; therefore, in what manner can it arise from the sheath of Kundalini?"

**MATERIAL EXPLANATION OF KUNDALINI**

In recent times, Deviprasad Chattopadhyay in his Lokavata has made an attempt to discover the material foundation of Tantricism. The vāmacāra, (left-hand practices) according to Chattopadhyay, stands for the ritual practices of women and of sex. Tantricism lays a great emphasis on the female. It is the propitiation of the female force. While propitiating the female force, one has to become a woman. Especially in Bengal, the vāmacāra appears to be more valid than other ritual practices.
While modern writers on Tantras generally hold that the seven different positions of the susumna cord are the nerve plexuses, Chattopadhyay is of opinion that Padma or the lotus found in each and every plexus is invariably a symbolic representation of the female genital organ. The seven lotuses are nothing but seven seats of feminity. It is further pointed out that the diagram of a triangle found within most of the Padmas is invariably the Tantric representation of the female genital organ. Besides, the Tantras mention the seven Saktis called Kulakundalini, Varuni, Lakini etc., each residing in every lotus. Modern scholars have rendered the word Sakti as force or energy. But Chattopadhyay thinks that in specific context of Tantricism this explanation would be inadmissible and Sakti in the Tantras essentially means the female. Therefore, there are seven seats of feminity on the central nerve-cord. "The essence of the Tantrika Yoga-sadhana consists in arousing and vitalising the female principle residing in her nethermost centre and then transmitting her to the highest centre, the seat of consciousness, after piercing all the intermediary positions. It is, thus, nothing but an effort towards a total transformation of the personality into feminity". When the Kundalini Sakti reaches the Sahasrara, everything dissolves into a kind of non-duality, that is the pure all-absorbing feminity which is aroused within.

In this connection the question may be naturally raised as to why so much importance was attached to the effort to be a woman. According to Chattopadhyay, Tantricism consisting of
giver of protection to the human beings as well as the vegetation world. There is no doubt that human life is dependent upon the vegetation world and the productivity is the sole foundation of living on this earth. From that point of view, the energy which sustains that productivity and fertility is invoked by the people who are dependent on Nature. In this context, the question may be raised as to why the energy is associated with reproductive function is associated with feminity. The reason is not far to seek. Firstly, researches all over the world carried out by the anthropologists have left no scope of doubt that the agricultural operation was first begun by woman. Secondly, woman who gives birth to children is ever recognised as mother. Woman is thus represented as the agency of reproductive function in all countries. That might have served as a foundation on which the belief in female energy in divine form gradually developed. In other words, womanhood was associated with the divine energy responsible for creation and sustenance. But if we superimpose this view on the Tantric-Yogasadhana it might prove to be far-fetched, because the Yogic exercise as enjoined in the Tantric texts has its philosophical foundation that co-relates between macrocosm and microcosm, that is related to duality and non-duality of existence, separation and unity of Siva and Sakti. As the Yogic pattern of the exercise in the Tantric texts is not uniform and is varied in nature, it is the duty of a guru to show the path to his disciple on the basis of his or her propensities and nature. It is, therefore, difficult to ascertain precisely the mysteries of the Tantric Sadhana which is mystic in nature.
Referring to the Buddhistic conception of the female force, S.B. Dasgupta has observed, "In the Carva-songs we find frequent reference to this female force variously called as the Candali, Dombi, Sabari, Yogini, Nairamani, Sahajasundari etc. and we also find frequent mention of the union of the Yogin with these personified female deities". So it appears that the female force, according to the standpoint of the Carva songs, does not remain outside the body of the Yogin but remains within the body. Following this line of argument, it has been observed by Chattopadhyay that the aim of Yogasadhana is to rouse the female principle within and to establish its non-duality.

In fact, the so-called identification of the Yogin with the female force within may also be traced in the spiritual ideals of the Vaisnavas who hold that without being identified with Radha one cannot realize Krisna. This identification is exclusively spiritual and has hardly any connection with the material life. Again, it may be said that the identification of the female force which is required in case of a Yogin is attained at the personal level and has hardly anything to do with his social life. Therefore, it would be rather confusing if on the ground of the stress given on the attainment of feminity in the Tantric Sadhana, the entire spiritual exercise and attainment of the Tantrikas is invariably related to a particular material condition of life.

From the above we may derive some reasonable inferences. First, the Puranic-Tantric goddesses with their different manifestations and various names stand for various
aspects of Mother-goddess, the aspects which are based on some philosophical concepts. Second, the Tantric Sadhana centering round Kulakundalini is, in fact, the Yogic way of invoking the spirit of Mother-goddess for the purpose of attainment of higher intelligence (Prajna). Third, the stress on feminity or female-principle or vamacara in the Tantric texts might have had some connection with the archaic magical belief in the reproductive function of the woman. But it had no relevance in the context of the society where agriculture was technically much advanced and dependent upon mostly on the labour of the male-sex. Fourth, the emphasis given on the identification of the Yogi with the female force within him is to be viewed at a level which is not directly related to the material life. The identification concerned leads to inner realization of the Yogi. Therefore, the materialistic explanation of the Kulakundalini power and its different forms that has been given in recent times appears to be one-sided and has got its own limitation. The explanation might have been required in connection with the origin of Tantricism, in general, and of vamacara in particular.
References


4. Bagchi, P.C., (Trans. & Ed.), *Pre-Aryan and pre-Dravidian in India*, Cal., 1929, p. 15


8. Banerjea, J.N., op.cit., p. 129


10. *Mahabharata*, Virataparvan, ch. 6; Vanaparvan ch. 39, V4,72; Bhismaparvan, ch. 23

11. Banerjea, J.N., op.cit. p. 120

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14. *Devi-Purana*, Ch. 9

15. Ibid., ch. 50, III, 18, 28, 30; 118. 6.; cf. P. Kumar, *Sakti Cult in Ancient India*, Varanasi, 1974, p. 122

16. *Kali-Purana*, Ch. 85

17. *Devi-Purana*, Ch. 83

18. *Kalika-Purana*, Ch. 47

19. *Mahabhadragata* p. 3. 7-8; 4. 24-27

20. Ibid. 22. 57-58

21. *Varaha-Purana*, ch. 27; *Matsya-Purana* ch. 179, 2 ff, 9 ff

22. *Brhat-Sambita*, ch. 57, V. 56

23. DHI, p. 504

24. *Sadhanamala* II, p. 130

25. Banerjea, J.N., op. cit., p. 130


27. CHI, vol. V, p. 135 ff


30. CHI, Vol. IV, p. 29

31. *Kali-Tantra*, I, 27 ff. quoted in the *Tantrasara*

32. *Varahi-Tantra*, quoted in the *Tantrasara*, p. 337


35. Ibid., p. 464; *Sakta Pramoda*, p. 203, 207,

36. *Sakta Pramoda*, p. 262

37. Danielou, Alain, op. cit., p. 465

38. *Sakti-Sangam Tantra*, Tara Khanda 30. 25-26


40. *Saradatilaka Tantra*, p. 166; *Kalika-Purana*, 62199

41. *Sakti-sangama Tantra*, Tara Khanda, 30. 21-22a

42. Manuscripts of *Devicarita* and *Navadurgapujaretasvya* sections attributed to this Tantra are in the Library of the Asiatic Society. RASB, VIII, 5879, 5885.
43. The Asiatic Society has a manuscript of the work complete in 25 chapters.

44. The Pranatosani Tantra quotes details of the autumnal festival from this work which refers to the worship of different forms of the deity in different parts, e.g., eight-handed form in Odra, Kalinga and Madhyadesa; eighteen-handed in Ayodhya, Surastra, Srihatta and Kosali; twelve handed in Mahendra, Himalaya, Kuru, Mathura, and Kedarnath; ten-handed in Makaranda, Virata, Karmara, Gauda and Paripatra; four-handed in Marahatta, Nepala, Kaccha and Kankana; two-handed near sea.

45. Worship of Nava-Durga was at once prevalent in Bengal is evident from the image found from Porsha, Dinajpur district. HAB, p. 552; Navacandika finds mention is the Sian-Stone Inscription of 11th century A. D. from Bolpur, Birbhum district.


47. Bhattacharya, N. N., Indian Mother Goddess, Calcutta, 1970, p. 32; Rambah Kaccvi Haridra Jayanti Bilvadarimau / Asoka Manakascaira Dhanvance Navanatrika !.


54. Ibid.

55. "Dvipatradala-madhyastha lalata-tala-vasini!
dakini rakini caiva lakini Kakini tatha!!
sakini-hakini caiva satcakra vinivasini!
srsti-sthiti-vinasa ca srsti-sthity-antakarini"!!
   - Sritattvacintamani, xxv. 66.

"visuddhae dakini devi anahate tu rakini:
lakini mandurastha lakini lipoascare!!
adhara sakini devi ananam hakini tatha!!
sakini brahmarandhrastha sarva kama-phala-prada!!
   - Saktanandatarangini.


58. Ibid., p. 282.

59. Ibid., p. 286.