

WORSHIP OF THE MOTHER GODDESSES: AN ETERNAL JOURNEY OF RITUALS IN GODDESS WORSHIP AND HUMAN QUEST FOR SERVING FERTILITY

SEEMA PARIHAR

Department of History, H. P. University, Shimla, Himachal Pradesh, India

ABSTRACT

From ancient times, various forms of nature worship demonolatry and polytheistic beliefs have existed amongst the world communities. In this belief, the belief in different types of gods and are generally pervading and manifesting till today as continuous journey as a part of one's religious belief. The people used to worship objects of the nature as rivers, springs, trees, rocks, hills, planets and dead souls. However, Hindus are the worshippers of different cults in which *Saiva*, *Visanava* and *Sakta* are the most important. However, multitudes of Hindus, especially inhabiting remote regions of the country, such as in the Himalayas, still worship host of local *devis* and *deotas*, with dubious history, on whose benignity alone depends their freedom from pestilence and welfare and prosperity in general.¹ Early civilizations of the world have exhibited that fertility was one of the early phenomenon, which got veneration from the human beings. This beginning led to the origin of the worship of female being symbolic of and synonyms with fertility as also the multiplication of the race finally being associated with the concept of Mother Goddess.

KEYWORDS: Divine, Supremacy, Fertility, Worship, Rituals, Eternal, Religion, Society, Culture

INTRODUCTION

The concept and reverence for goddesses appears in the Vedas of Hinduism composed in 2nd millennium B. CE, however they do not play a central role in that era. Goddesses such as Saraswati and Usha have continued to be revered into the modern era and both are worshipped as a form of *Sakti*. Usa is a goddess worshipped in temples and Sarsvati is a river goddess. The medieval era Puranas witnessed a major expansion in mythology and literature associated with *Devi*, with texts such as the *Devi Mahatmya*, wherein she manifests as the ultimate truth and supreme power, and she has inspired the *Sakti* tradition of Hinduism in India and the world. She is the Supreme women and has been considered as the most powerful in the supremacy of God's belief.

The divine feminine, has the strongest presence as *Devi* in Hinduism, and among major world religions, from the ancient times to the present. She is the loving Venus, the bold Brigit, the fiery Pele, the wise Athena, the nurturing Madonna, and the furious Kali. She is the goddess, a presence of feminine divinity, who has been the focus of spiritual seekers, feminists, anthropologists and historians around the world. She has been considered the source of energy. She is "Maa" the "Mother."

Though some people consider goddesses long-gone symbols of an ancient civilization, they are worshipped and revered by many people in the present day. Sometimes Anglo-Americans feel drawn to goddesses because they do not have access to the goddess tradition in their own culture, Jenks says. Alternatively, some people find a goddess connection as they explore their ethnic roots.

The energy of the Divine is still viable; it just needs to be activated by a human 'receiver.'" This is strongly indicated by the archaeological evidences of pre-historic and historic period from around the world. Numerous female figurines have been found and discovered from various sites of ancient India and the world. The Stone Age female figurines have been reported from a number of sites in Europe, This support the prevalence of the mother goddess cult in that age and they came to be known as 'Venuses.'ⁱⁱ To the *Śaktas*, *Śakti* is Divine; it is called pure consciousness (*Caitnya*) and Supreme Power (*Para Śakti*) that lies in and out and regulates the world –mechanism making it felt in every movement through all our efforts physical and mental. The *Tantras* have exalted *Śakti* in the highest possible terms and have personified *Śakti* in the shape of the Great Mother. The *Śakta* creed as postulated by the *Tantras* tends to make the world an embodiment of *Śakti*. *Śakti* is said to be the ultimate reality that lies at the background of all phenomena. It is held that things have their origin in *Śakti* and dissolve into the same on destruction of their finite forms. Therefore, *Śakti* is eternal and infinite, having neither beginning nor end. It is often styled as *Adya Śakti* i.e. the primordial power out of which the world has evolved.ⁱⁱⁱ To the *Śaktas*, *Śakti* is not only the creative principle of the universe, but one that takes back everything unto itself. (*doyh d`r fu%`ks`krRoxzke Lo:fi.kh*) at the stage of utter annihilation.

There are several myths, legends behind the emergence of traditions of Sakti worship, and each sphere has its own history. Worship of the divine deity is a norm of each society and due to the respect for the virtue of fertility and creation, each society has given much respect to the female pantheon.

- **Manuchh Devthiye (Human Divine)** or the Gods who were human beings at one point of time and are worshipped as pious spirits in the villages.^{iv}
- **Upneore Deothiye (Self Originated)** or the deities who emerged from natural phenomena, without being in body form, earlier to their manifestation and people gave them human shape and started to worship them according to their cultural belief.^v

Most cultures have goddesses in their pantheon. A few of the better-known examples of Feminine Divinity:

INDIAN

Lakshmi

Goddess Lakshmi is the Hindu goddess of good fortune and material wealth ensures human well-being, prosperity, and luck. Worshippers lavish her altars with gifts of oil, milk and flowers. Lakshmi is shown riding on the lotus.

Kali

The goddess Kali is the fierce, black goddess and is depicted with her tongue lolling from her mouth, dripping blood. She wears a necklace of skulls, brandishes a sword, and wears the corpses of infants as earrings. She is the bringer of death and the giver of ultimate truth.

PAKISTAN

In Pakistan Durga is worshipped as *Sakti* and it is said that a pilgrim's journey is incomplete until he travels to Hinglaj, a renowned of the 51 *Sakti Peethas*. Every year in the month of March, many Hindus visit to Hinglaj and pray. The people from both Hindu Muslims visit one of Durga's *Saktipitha* situated in Pakistan too. Muslims call Goddess Hinglaj as Nani (maternal grandmother) and her Hajji. Muslims and Hindu become one in this *Sakti Peetha* and treat each other's as family. They together worship Goddess Durga here. Hingla River flows from this

Saktipitha. According to ancient *Puranas*, when Lord Vishnu had cut Devi Sati's head with his *chakra*, it had fallen here. Since then this place is believed to be miraculous and very powerful. There are also several female deities worshipped by the people in their folk traditions.

NEPAL

Nepal is a country where living goddesses are worshipped with different rituals. There in the country Unika Vajracharya could be standing on the brink of divinity, about to become one of Nepal's most celebrated figures. According to the tradition of the simple school, young girls are chosen as goddesses. A girl is chosen to be a *kumari*, or living goddess, a role that will bring people to their knees before her.

A girl after chosen as goddess used to live at home, study from home and worshipped by the people with different types of rituals whole the day, where people gathered for religious rituals and festivals and where the first part of the selection will take place. Before becoming the living goddess, she can wear her favorite dress like a fleece hoodie with "Snoopy" on the back. However, after becoming goddess, she will not be able to wear it. A living goddess can wear only red—the color of creative energy, usually reserved for married women.

Kumaris are revered in the Newar community. In medieval times, almost every town in the Kathmandu Valley had its own *kumari*. In the cities of Kathmandu, Bhaktapur, and Patan there was one for almost every locality, as well as a special "royal" *kumari*, worshipped by the former Hindu kings. They're believed to have powers of prescience and the ability to cure the sick (particularly those suffering from blood disorders), fulfill specific wishes, and bestow blessings of protection and prosperity. Above all, they're said to provide an immediate connection between this world and the divine and to generate in their devotees *maitri bhavana*—a spirit of loving-kindness toward all.

BANGLADESH

Hinduism is the second largest religious affiliation in Bangladesh, covering more than 8.2% of the population. In terms of population, Bangladesh is the third largest Hindu state in the world after India and Nepal.

In nature, Bangladeshi Hinduism closely resembles the forms and customs of Hinduism practiced in the neighboring Indian state of West Bengal, with which Bangladesh was united until the partition of India in 1947.

The Goddess (Devi)—usually venerated as Durga or Kali—is widely revered, often alongside her consort Siva. The worship has generally found adherents among the higher castes in Bangladesh. Worship of Vishnu (typically in the form of his *Avatars* or incarnations Rama or Krishna) more explicitly cuts across caste lines by teaching the fundamental oneness of humankind in spirit. Vishnu worship in Bengal expresses the union of the male and female principles in a tradition of love and devotion. This form of Hindu belief and the Sufi tradition of Islam have influenced and interacted with each other in Bengal. Both were popular mystical movements emphasizing the personal relationship of religious leader and disciple instead of the dry stereotypes of the Brahmins or the Ulama. As in Bengali Islamic practice, worship of Vishnu frequently occurs in a small devotional society (*shomaj*). Both use the language of earthly love to express communion with the divine.

In Bangladeshi Hinduism ritual bathing, vows, and pilgrimages to sacred rivers, mountains, and shrines are common practice. An ordinary Hindu will worship at the shrines of Muslim *pirs*, without being concerned with the religion to which that place is supposed to be affiliated. Hindus revere many holy men and ascetics conspicuous for their bodily

mortifications. Some believe that they attain spiritual benefit merely by looking at a great holy man.

SOUTH KORIA

The female goddesses are the worshipped almost every society. Yuwha was known as the mother of king Dongmeyong, the first king and the founder of the northern-most of the three kingdoms in Korea and was the daughter of the Hebeak, the river God. Yuhwa is the goddess of willow trees, this daughter of the river- god Habaek was desired by the sun god Haemosu. The sun god trapped her by causing a copper palace to grow from some lines he drew on the ground. Yuhwa and her sisters, intrigued by the sudden appearance of the magnificent structure, ventured in and were lavishly entertained by Haemosu and his attendants.

Then come to the Halmang. She is the goddess of Jeju Island, often depicted embodying the island the way Earth goddesses are often depicted embodying the entire planet. She could also assume giantess form and roam the island at will and much of her mythic cycle deals with her activities in that mobile form. Her diahorea after having eaten millet porridge resulted in 360 of the hills and mountains of Jeju Island. Halmang also arranged all the valleys and rivers of the island to her liking, too. Her urine caused the channel between Jeju Island and mainland Korea, or the channel between Jeju Island and nearby Udo Island, depending on the version.

When the people of Jeju Island wanted the goddess to cease walking around naked in her giantess form she told them that if they could make clothing large enough to fit her she would build them a bridge to the mainland. The people exhausted all of the material on the island but still the clothes they made were not large enough to cover Halmang, so she stopped her own efforts, leaving the bridge half-finished. (This is similar to many Philippine myths about giant gods or goddesses partially completing bridges between islands) Another myth involves her out-doing her husband, the god Halubang, at fishing by lying in the ocean and swallowing all the fish into her vagina. (This is similar to one of the Vietnamese myths about Giat Hai outdoing Khong Lo) With that husband, the god that the large, ancient stone phalluses on Jeju Island are dedicated to, Halmang spawned Koeulla, Puella and Yangeulla, the progenitor gods of The Three Clans of Jeju Island.

EGYPTIAN

Sometime *Isis*: According to myth, Isis, the faithful wife of Osiris, diligently searched for his body after he was murdered, returned him to Egypt and impregnated her with his dead body. She is the Goddess of Water, Earth, Corn, Stars and the Underworld, and she possesses healing powers. She created the Nile from her tears.

ANCIENT GRECIAN AND ROMAN

Aphrodite (Venus)

The goddess of love is associated with sexuality (Eros) and fertility but also embodies the qualities of mother love, love between friends (agape), and spiritual love.

Athena (Minerva)

She is known as the goddess of war and wisdom. She is known for giving birth to the world agriculture, the arts and is a warrior.

Gaia

Born of Chaos, Gaia is the goddess embodiment of the earth. She gave birth to the sky and the ocean as well as the Titans, among them Chronos, father of the Olympian gods.

CHINESE**Kuan Yin**

She is the goddess of mercy and is popular throughout Asia. She helps childless couples to conceive, heals the sick, is a patron of travelers and farmers, and protects souls in the times of travail.

CELTIC**Epona**

This Celtic goddess is portrayed with a horse and worshipped as a warrior, guardian of the dead, a healer and the Earth Mother.

Brigit

The goddess of language and metal smith. She creates shields and spears. After the Roman conquest of the British Isles, Brigit became associated with Minerva, the Roman artist/warrior goddess.

NATIVE AMERICAN**Spider Woman**

She is the creator and weaver of life; the sacred guardian and teacher to peoples of many Southwest Native American cultures. She appears as both a spider and an old woman.

SUMERIAN**Inanna**

The Queen of Heaven, she descends into the underworld to experience her own death and regeneration. There her sister Ereshkigal hangs Inanna's denuded and dead carcass on a hook for three days. To return to life, Inanna must appoint a sacrifice in her place— her husband Dumuzi.

In Indian mythological belief, she is known as goddess or the Devi. Devī is the Sanskrit word for “goddess”; the masculine form is “god”. Devi – the feminine form, and Deva – the masculine form, mean "heavenly, divine, anything of excellence", and are gender specific terms for a deity in Hinduism all over. Almost all the societies in the world have preserved their faith in female Divinity more than the male Divine. As by nature, women are considered the symbols of love, kindness and virtue, and from the centuries back, human quests lies in preserving this nature of humanity. Moreover, female are considered as the symbol of fertility and creation. Further, understanding the concept of *Śakti* or the female worship we find a happy blending of two elements, one empirical and the other speculative. On the empirical side, the idea of *Śakti* is associated with the idea of cosmogony. The man believed that there could not be any creation without the union of the two i.e. the male and the female. Thus, man formulated the idea of the Primordial Father and the Primordial Mother. In the primitive stage of the human society, the mother held important position and thus the cosmic mother became the most important deity or the ‘Mother Goddess.’ In all the primitive societies of the world all cultural traits, norms of behavior, inherited traditions were formed by and transmitted through the females and they had been considered the actual

producer of life. Eric Neumann, who finds that the archetype of the Great Mother can take form in a patriarchal society rare as the Father God can take form in a matriarchal society.^{vi} It is quite plausible that the early men used muscle power for survival that was required in primitive acts like hunting for food and production, yet he found women as possessed of super natural power of reproduction besides her competence to bring up children and manage the family in a masterly fashion.

On the other side, woman is the embodiment of God's creative power, *Sakti*. Woman embodies the feminine aspect of God, through which he created this universe. God placed within women divine qualities of strength, virtue, love, and the willingness to sacrifice to raise future generations of his spirit children. Women by divine nature have the greater gift and responsibility for home, children, and nurturing there and in other settings.

Thus, the *Sakti* and the women in general contains same nature of love and virtue, but are respected at the different levels. Former is considered as the Supreme Force and full-flagged constitution of the universe herself and the later required to be empowered through making strict rules and constitutional amendments. Former, is the source of energy and later is the weaker section of the society.

In their spiritual and personal growth search, women especially find that honoring a goddess is fulfilling because she nourishes our feminine side. "We're raised in a culture where the highest form of godhood is male, so women have developed a sense of being diminished psychologically and spiritually."^{vii} "It's as if we can't find our own voice or spiritual maturity until we can find within us the call of the divine feminine. Goddesses can be creative and nurturing like good mothers, but they can also invent a plow or wield a spear," warns Jenks. "A goddess may be a nice warm mommy figure when that's needed, but she's really about honoring the full, mature depth of what it is to be human." From the ancient period till today the earth which is the producer and source of all types of fertility is considered as Mother. That is why in the society, people give preference to worship female divinity, and women are considered one-half of the man in general. In India, no rituals of Divine worship are considered complete without the presence of wife with husband. After the rituals of *navratra* (Nine Nights) worship of Durga the *kanjaka* (virgin girl of one to twelve years old) *pujan* is essential. Even each ritual is completed after ritualistic ceremonies of feeding either Brahmin or virgin girls. This tradition is followed by everyone belongs to The Hindu community. In Nepal, a virgin girl is chosen as living goddess and worshipped with rituals to get rid of fears from disasters, epidemics and other natural and manmade calamities. This is the symbol of human quest of serving and respecting

REFERENCES

1. H. A. Rose, *Hindu Gods and Goddesses*, Amar Prakashan, Delhi, 1986, p. vii
2. M. C. P. Shrivastava, *The Mother Goddess*, Agam Kala Prakashan, Delhi, 1979, p. 14
3. Ibid. p. 9
4. B. R. Sharma, *Gods of Himachal Pradesh*, Indus Publishing Company in association with Institute of Integrated Himalayan Studies, H. P. University, Shimla, 2007 p. 272
5. Ibid, p. 272
6. P. K. Agrawal, *Goddess in Ancient India*, New Delhi, 1984, p.p. 3-4.
7. Kathleen Jenks, who teaches in the Mythological Studies department of Pacifica Graduate Institute in Carpinteria, Calif.