

**THE GODDESS IN ASSAM: A STUDY OF SANSKRIT
AND ASSAMESE KĀLIKĀ PURĀṆAS**

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that this dissertation entitled, “**The Goddess in Assam: A Study of Sanskrit and Assamese Kālikā Purāṇas**” submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy has not been previously submitted for any other degree to this or any other University and is my original work.

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To my parents

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Abbreviations

KP	Kālikā Purāṇa
SKP	Sanskrit Kālikā Purāṇa
AKP	Assamese Kālikā Purāṇa
TS	Tripura-Sundarī

Introduction

The Goddess in Assam: A Study of Sanskrit and Assamese Kālikā Purāṇas.

The central concern of this work is to study the cult of goddess Kāmākhyā of Assam. This is a part of my larger project to be taken up during my Ph.D. which is a historical-ethnographic study of the cult of Kāmākhyā based on temple records, oral evidence from the Pandas (officiating priests of the temple) and the devotees, and other records hitherto unknown, thus studying the living history of the cult in an attempt to locate the cult in the cultural history of Assam. This is a preliminary work in that direction. It is an exercise to know what the texts have to say on goddess worship in Assam; it is a kind of prehistory of the cult of Kāmākhyā. It is also an attempt to place the goddess in the larger cultural complex of Assam. It is a thematic study of the Sanskrit and the Assamese *Kālikā Purāṇas* for an understanding of the socio-religious processes that led to the formation of the cult of Kāmākhyā. In short, my M.Phil. Dissertation will be an attempt to see how the ritual and mythology of the cult of the goddess, as recorded in the Sanskrit and Assamese *Kālikā Purāṇas* and its various manuscripts, reflect Assam's unique culture through numerous layers of contact between different peoples, sects and cultures.

The goddess Kāmākhya is an interesting cult centre. The main centre of the cult is at the Kāmākhya temple atop Nilācala hills in the Kāmarūpa district of Assam. The system of worship connected with the goddess Kāmākhya is unique to Assam, reflecting a distinct regional tradition. The cult is also synonymous with Hindu religious practice in Assam, cutting across sectarian divides. The universality of the goddess makes her one of the most popular deities in India. It is a striking example of a deity of tribal origin, taken over by brahmanical religion, which resulted in the creation of a goddess cult that retained the crucial features of both the traditions. The brahmanical tradition not only assimilated the goddess but the form of her worship too. Tantrism was accommodated and recognized as the method of propitiation of the goddess, but some of the ritual facets that brahmanism could not come to terms with were relegated to the background, but was not altogether abandoned.

Researching Kāmākhya is both engaging and challenging because very little work has been done on it. Dr Banikanta Kakati's *The Mother Goddess Kāmākhya* is one of the very few works on the goddess. My larger project intends to overcome this lacuna.

On the Upapurāṇas

The *Kālikā Purāna*, the major source of my study, is an Upapurāṇa. The Upapurāṇas were written by the brāhmaṇas in areas where they wanted to enter into a dialogue with the local\indigenous population. Kunal Chakrabarti writes, “The success of brahmanical hegemony depended on the acceptance of their normative prescriptions and the internalization of their cultural assumptions by the local people.”¹ However, these prescriptions had to be in consonance with the local beliefs, and at the same time they had to reiterate the fundamental principles of brahmanism. On certain issues, the Upapurāṇas display unanimity of opinion, such as the infallibility of the Vedas, or the centrality of the varṇāśramadharmā, while in other matters the local people were given a margin of choice as brahmanism picked up elements of local worship to create a composite religion suitable for the region.

The cult of the goddess was the medium of assimilation of local cultural forms in eastern India. It is unanimously agreed upon that the basic impulse behind the worship of the goddess is a non-sanskritic, indigenous one². This indigenous goddess is usually a virgin and a warrior deity residing in inaccessible mountains and is propitiated with animal sacrifice. Then the goddess is embellished with brahminical attributes which justifies her inclusion into the brahminical pantheon

¹ Kunal Chakrabarti, *Religious Process. the Purānas and the Making of a Regional Tradition*, OUP, Delhi, 2005, pp 23.

² Ibid, pp 33.

without necessarily subverting her original identity or mode of worship. The goddess is both an instrument and symbol of assimilation. This process of cultural interaction led to the formation of distinct regional traditions that are recorded in the Upapurāṇas³. The Upapurāṇas are overwhelmingly regional in their concerns and they can be identified with a particular locale with a fair degree of certainty.

R.C.Hazra, in his *Studies in the Upapurāṇas*, states that there can be little doubt regarding the fact that the Kālikā Purāṇa (hereafter KP) was composed in eastern India. In his own words, “the present Kālikā-p. was composed either in Kāmarūpa [in Assam] or in that part of Bengal which was very near to it.”⁴ As far as the dates of the KP are concerned, Hazra says, “The large proportion of Tantric elements in its rituals, as compared with those contained in the other Purāṇas, tends to show that the present Kālikā-p. is a work of the tenth or the first half of the eleventh century A.D.”⁵ Here, K.R.Van Kooij argues, “More important than establishing a date for the latest redaction of KP is to consider the stages of development of the various stories and rituals related in the work within the story of Hinduism on the grounds of a thorough analysis of them and a careful comparison with similar parts

³ Kunal Chakrabarti, *Religious Process*, OUP, Delhi, 2005, pp 33.

⁴ R.C.Hazra, *Studies in the Upapurāṇas, Vol.II, (Śākta and non sectarian Upapurāṇas)*, Sanskrit College, Calcutta, 1963, pp 232.

⁵ Ibid, pp 245.

in other works”⁶ The Assamese manuscripts of the KP can be dated to as late as eighteenth century.

Tantra

To engage with the KP, one has to understand the principles of Tantra, which is the method of worship recommended in the KP to propitiate the goddess. Tantra is primarily a set of techniques of worship involving mechanisms of the body and the assumption that the body is the seat of divinity in which philosophical doctrines occupy marginal position.⁷ Most importantly, Tantrism is a set of practices which assume the shape of the vessel in which it is contained. When these techniques came in contact with popular Buddhism, the interaction gave rise to Buddhist tantras. The Hindu Tantras came into being in a similar fashion. Thus, a conglomerate of religious traditions is subsumed under Tantrism- Śāktism, Śaivism, Vaiṣṇavism, Jainism and Buddhism.

There is a recognizable pattern in the regional distribution of Tantrism, i.e., there are areas which can be identified with this practice- the territories adjoining the Himalayas, beginning with Kashmir in the north to Nepal, Tibet, Bhutan, Bengal and Assam. These were regions where Tantrism was popular and where Tantras

⁶ K.R. Van Kooij, *Worship of the Goddess According to Kālikā Purāṇa*. Leiden, E.J.Brill,1972, pp 3-4.

⁷ Kunal Chakrabarti, *Religious Process*, OUP, Delhi, pp 186

were composed and codified. Tantrism offers the right of initiation to women and sudras and neither accepts the infallibility of the Vedas nor the social supremacy of the brāhmaṇas. Thus, for the brahmanical religion, Tantra was a different tradition. However, wherever Tantrism was popular, brahminical religion had to make adjustments with it. Techniques of propitiation that were not acceptable were clubbed under the left method or Vāmabhava. This included ritual acts unacceptable to the brahmanical tradition. However, some of these were eventually accepted with qualifications, as we shall see later.

The goddess was completely assimilated into the brahminical religion whereas Tantrism was not. The very complexity and multiformity of the goddess presented a number of possibilities of adjustment with brahmanism at different levels. Tantrism, in comparison, being primarily a set of rituals, was less flexible. The right to decide which aspects of the Tantras were in agreement with or opposed to the *Vedas* were left to the local brāhmaṇas to decide. Thus nothing was firmly fixed and the whole question was conveniently open to interpretation.

The KP engages with the religious history of early medieval Assam. Apart from being the most important regional work in Sanskrit on Kāmākhyā, it has local variations. This makes it worthwhile to use the KP as a significant source on goddess worship in Assam with Kāmākhyā at its centre. There are Bengali and Assamese manuscripts of KP, apart from the Sanskrit ones. Though the Sanskrit

KP is a regional text with pan-Indian affiliations, it will be worthwhile to see what local level vernacular texts carrying the same name have to say on the prehistory of the cult. I will use the Assamese manuscripts of KP as supplementary evidence and see how the two KPs engage with each other. Like all Upapurāṇas, the KP records and is also a product of the cultural interaction between brahmanism and indigenous cultures, leading to a distinct regional tradition in Assam. It bears witness to the puranic process of choosing a cult or a cult object by brahmanism, modifying it, giving it a new meaning to suit the conditions and needs of the time. But what is striking here is that Kāmākhya retained both her name as well as her symbol. Perhaps this shows her popularity, which could not be tampered with by the brahmanical religion even while appropriating it. The KP appropriates her by explaining it as one of the Śāktā pīṭhas which originated from the one of the organs of Satī. According to the story, found in various texts and in the KP, that after the death of Satī, Śiva embraced her corpse and carried her over his shoulders as he wandered the world. To put an end to the destructive potential of Śiva's grief, Viṣṇu took his discus and dismembered Satī's corpse. Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty writes, "As it fell away piece by piece, a shrine arose in each place, and where the vulva (*yoni*) fell, in Assam, Śiva remained in the form of the phallus (*linga*). The implicit sexual union in this myth takes place after the death of Satī; shrines are born from her body; and the myth ends with the union of their sexual organs."⁸

⁸ Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, Śiva Erect and Supine, in Michael Meister (ed.), *Discourses on Śiva*. Vakils, Feffer & Simons, Bombay, 1984, pp 293.

The concept of pilgrimage is also crucial to the understanding the KP. Pilgrimage was an important part of the puranic religion. The *Puranas* praise a pilgrimage site by asserting that a mere visit to the holy place, would grant a devotee all his wishes and even lead to the ultimate goal of release from samsara. This could be seen as a way of including regional centres such as Kāmākhya in the pan-Indian map of brahmanical religion. It is widely believed that the goddesses associated with the Śākta pīṭhas and the Daśamahāvidyā's were perhaps originally independent local deities, admitted into Puranic Hinduism through the myths of the dismemberment of Sati's body and her visit to her natal family. This has been called an "open-ended process"⁹ where, if a local goddess, through a combination of factors, becomes sufficiently popular, she could be accommodated within the brahmanical tradition without difficulty.

The KP also bears witness to the tension inherent in the process of the introduction of brahmanism into a region where indigenous religious traditions are fairly well developed. This process of negotiation is seen in the KP. This work will highlight the problems in the process of religio-cultural assimilation in Assam and how a compromise was reached specially with reference to Tantrism.

Thus can we argue that the Puranic process led to the formation of a regional identity around the cult and cult centre\temple of Kāmākhya? A temple or a cult

⁹ Kunal Chakrabarti, *Religious Process*, OUP, Delhi, 2001, pp 201

centre integrates diverse local elements into a common bond over a period of time. B.D. Chattopadhyaya,¹⁰ while discussing the historical process of appropriation and integration of cults, says that cult assimilation does not necessarily imply a harmonious syncretism, but it does imply the formation of a structure which combines heterogeneous beliefs and rituals into a whole while transforming some elements. Thus, the local and tribal cults in different regions came to be controlled by the brāhmaṇas. The process involves the integration of various local cults under one goddess, such as Kāmākhyā, or as the case may be, and results in the creation of one of the recognizable symbols of the region. Kāmākhyā was seen as the overarching regional cult centre under whom local and independent deities came together as her local manifestations. These local and peripheral deities come together to shape the regional society leading to the formation of a distinct regional tradition.

Problems

While handling the KP, one needs to understand that what has been made available to us as the purāṇa is a text put together as by the editor or the translator. The purāṇa has been altered by his understanding and we should consider the concepts and boundaries, thus presented, as being more fluid. Also that a lot may be concealed according to the times and orientation of the editor, for e.g. when

¹⁰ B.D.Chattopadhyaya. *The Making of Early Medieval India*. OUP, Delhi, 1994, pp 30.

Tantrism was considered to be unacceptable, the volumes would be structured in such away that it would conceal the undesired parts.

Historical context

It is widely believed that the earliest trace of any brahmanical religion in ancient Kāmarūpa was Śaivism.¹¹ Śaivism, which was the religion of the ruling dynasties of Kāmarūpa up to the twelfth century, bears certain resemblance to the Bodo tribal deity Śivray-Bathau, who is represented by a cactus shoot. The resemblance to the symbol of the lingam is clearly discernible. It is interesting to note that the Koch kings of Western Assam claimed that their ancestors were Śiva, though they were devotees of the goddess Kāmākhyā as well. It was the Koch king Naranārāyana who built the present temple of Kāmākhyā in 1565. This was also the time when the religious reformer Śankardeva was preaching his brand of Vaiṣṇavism in Assam. He was known to be a strong critique of Śaivism and Śāktism. The Koch kings patronised both the Śakti cult and the Vaiṣṇava scholars and saints. Interestingly, most manuscripts of the Assamese Kālikā Purāṇa have been found in the *satras*, the monasteries and the bastion of Śankardeva's Vaiṣṇava religion. The Śankaris, as they are known locally, were opposed to Śāktism but they studied their scriptures for the purpose of critically looking at them, and this way they preserved the manuscripts. The two Assamese manuscripts that I have looked at in this work

¹¹ S.N.Sarma, *A Socio-Economic and Cultural History of Medieval Assam*, (1200-1800 A.D.), Satyendra Nath Sarma, 1989, pp 190

have been found from two *satras*. This highlights the complex relationship between the brahmanical sects in Assam and also points to the fluidity of the sectarian boundaries. This is where the overwhelming presence of the goddess Kāmākhyā becomes crucial. Devotees, irrespective of their sectarian beliefs, come in large numbers to worship the goddess. S.N. Sarma states, “the Kālikā Purāṇa, though predominantly a Śakta purāṇa eulogising and glorifying the worship of mother-goddess Kāmākhyā, nevertheless exhibits an exemplary instance of religious tolerance in respect of vaiṣṇavism and Śaivism”.

History of the Present Temple

As far as the history of the present standing temple of Kāmākhyā goes, there is one inscriptional record. This was inscribed by the Koch king Naranārāyana to commemorate the victory of his brother. Part of the inscription in the temple of Kāmākhyā, which exists even today, reads¹²:

.....he (naranarayana) is as bright as kandarpa, he is a worshipper of Kamakhya. His brother sukladev built this temple of bright stones on the

Nilā hillock for the worship of the goddess Durga in 1487 *Sak* (1565).

¹² Hem Barua, *The Red River and Blue Hill*. Lawyer’s Book Stall. Guwahati. 1984. pp 194

The Structure and the Contents of the KP

There is a frame story in the KP, where Śiva explains the complicated ritual procedures to propitiate the goddess to his two sons Bhṛṅgī and Mahākāla, who were reborn as two monkey faced human beings bearing the names Vetāla and Bhairava. They fell into the low state on account of a curse and could regain their original form through the worship and appeasement of the goddess who is Śiva's consort and their mother.

Then the KP talks about the mythical King Naraka, the foster son of Janaka of Videha, who is said to have introduced the cult of Kāmākhyā in Kāmarūpa. He was the son of Prithvi and the boar incarnation of Viṣṇu, i.e., Varaha. Naraka is said to have set up the first kingdom in Kāmarūpa and was the mythical ancestor of most of its ruling dynasties. He is described as an ardent devotee of the goddess, but later changed his allegiance to Śiva.

The text then describes the myth of the marriage between Śiva and Pārvatī. This is often reproduced in the Purāṇas, for it represents the ideal marriage between the divine couple. This myth assumes importance as there are many Assamese variations of this myth which are included in the Assamese KP.

The myth of the dismemberment of the various limbs of Satī has been used to explain the worship of the *yoni* symbol of goddess Kāmākhyā. Śiva is said to have turned into the mountain Nīlācala to receive the *yoni*. The qualities she is endowed with in this incarnation are: the remover of the enemies of god and the destroyer of all forms of impurity. She brings welfare to her devotees and makes them wise and prosperous, grants fame and cows to them and destroys all impediments.¹³

The KP aims to glorify Kāmākhyā by identifying her with Kālī. This can clearly be seen as an attempt to justify her inclusion into the brahmanical tradition by her assimilation into an already brahmanised goddess figure. It was assimilation of two comparable forces into one composite form of Kāmākhyā. Dr. Banikanta Kakati says that goddess Kāmākhyā could easily be brought into alignment with other forms of the goddess like Kālī and Durgā because of the similarity in their nature. The assimilation was perhaps easier because of the shared characteristics between Kālī and Kāmākhyā.

Wendy Doniger¹⁴ has categorized the Hindu goddesses into goddesses of the ‘tooth’ and goddesses of the ‘breast’, the former category indicating the fierce, blood drinking goddesses like kali and the latter indicating goddesses who are

¹³ SKP. 62.138.

¹⁴ Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty, *Women, Androgynes and other Mythical Beasts*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1980.

benign, loving mothers, such as Lakṣmī. Lynn E. Gatwood¹⁵ similarly terms the benign goddesses as 'spouse' goddesses, who undergo spousification, a term employed by her to designate goddesses who marry gods and hence are rendered subservient to their husbands. Kālī, though married to Śiva in some myths, retains her image as the goddess of the tooth. Kālī has a very strong and attractive imagery. She is almost always described as having a terrible frightening appearance dark, usually naked, wearing severed arms and heads. Her favourite haunts include the battlefield and the cremation ground.

Kālī's initial appearance as a goddess in the Devī Māhātmya section of the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* is dated to about the sixth century A.D. Here, Kālī appears from Durgā's forehead to kill the demons Canda and Munda. Again Kālī is summoned to kill the demon Raktabija, who had the ability to reproduce himself instantly whenever a drop of blood happened to fall on the ground. Kālī defeated the demon by sucking the blood from his body and taking thousands of Raktabijas into her mouth. Here, in the Devī Māhātmya, Kālī appears as Durgā's fury.

Kālī also appears with Pārvatī, who is generally considered a benign goddess. In the *Linga Purāṇa*, Śiva asks Pārvatī to destroy the demon Daruka, who has been given a boon that he could only be killed by a female. Pārvatī then enters Śiva's body and transforms herself into Kālī and defeats Daruka. In the *Vamana Purāṇa*,

¹⁵ Lynn E. Gatwood. *Devī and the Spouse Goddess: Women, Sexuality and Marriage in India*. Manohar. New Delhi. 1985.

Pārvatī is called Kālī, the black one, because of her complexion. Hearing Śiva call her Kālī, Pārvatī undergoes austerities and is renamed Gaurī, the golden one.

When in association with Śiva, Kālī always seems to be the dominant one. At least most iconographic representations of Kālī seem to suggest so. Although she is sometimes tamed and softened by him, at times she incites Śiva to dangerous destructive behaviour. In relation to Śiva, she appears to play the opposite role of Pārvatī, who calms Śiva, counterbalancing his destructive tendencies.

Kālī is associated with blood and death, and these are the two most polluting factors in the brahmanical religion. Then, how does Kālī fit into Hinduism? According to David Kinsley¹⁶, Kālī puts the order of *dharma* into perspective; she reminds the Hindus that certain aspects of reality are untamable and unpredictable. Also, the society's attempt to order what is essentially disorderly, i.e., life itself, can be dangerous.

Kālī assumes central importance in Tantrism. In the Tantras, Kālī is a great goddess in her own right and not simply an appendage of Durgā. In the Tantras, Kālī's face is commonly described as 'smiling with two streams of blood oozing from the

¹⁶ David Kinsley, 'Blood and Death out of place: Reflections on the Goddess Kālī', in J.F. Hawley and D.M. Wulff (ed.) *The Divine Consort. Rādhā and the Goddesses of India*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1984.

corners of her mouth.¹⁷ Kālī's tongue¹⁸ assumes special importance in the Tantras, as it consumes blood and provokes horror. It also signifies the goddess's sexual arousal. However, there exists a different image of Kālī, also seen otherwise from her usual fierce, drinker of blood image. The Karpuradi Stotra¹⁹ sees Kālī as young and beautiful: she is the supreme mistress of the universe and the spouse of Śiva.

Sources and Plan of Work

My plan of work involves the study of the Sanskrit Kālikā Purāṇa. The primary text that I have used is the Kālikā Purāṇa (text, introduction and translation in English) by Prof. B.N.Shastri, which has III volumes, published by Nag Publishers, Delhi in 1991. I have used K.R.Van Kooij's text, Worship of the goddess according to the Kālikā Purāṇa, part I, a translation with an introduction and notes of chapters 54-69 published by E.J.Brill, Leiden, in 1972 along with the above mentioned. I have done a comparison of the Sanskrit Kālikā Purāṇa with the Assamese Kālikā Purāṇas. The Assamese Kālikā Purāṇas are three in number. One of them has been critically edited by N.C.Sarma, Chandra Prakash publishers, 1997. The other two are in manuscript form. One has been found in the possession of P.C.Chowdhury of Sapaha satra, Titabor in old Assamese. It is now presently with the Narayani

¹⁷ Jeffrey J. Kripal, *Kali's Child, The Mystical and the Erotic in the life and teachings of Rāmākṛṣṇa*. University of Chicago Press. Chicago. 1995. pp 249

¹⁸ ibid

¹⁹ Quoted by David Kinsley, *Hindu goddesses, Visions of the Divine Feminine*. Archives Publishers. Delhi. 1987. pp 124

Handique Historical Institute, Guwahati. The third is written by Koibalanda Das in old Assamese found in the possession of U. Goswami of North Guwahati's dihing satra, in old Assamese. This one is also housed in the Narayani Handique Historical Institute, Guwahati.

The main body of the work consists of three chapters. In the treatment of the sources discussed above, the first text that I am going to deal with is the Sanskrit version of the Kālikā Purāṇa. Then I present a study of the three Assamese manuscripts of the KP and a comparison with the Sanskrit one. I have reserved the last and fourth chapter for a discussion on the Assamese KP. This is not to say that the Sanskrit version is the original or the earliest text of all the manuscripts of KP. But it is arguably the most elaborate of the various linguistic variations of Kālikā Purāṇa. It will be interesting to see how these various versions overlap, borrow and contest each other regarding their content which will lead to a greater understanding of the cultural development in Assam and its neighbouring areas. It is crucial to remember that the KP talks about the subsuming of the local traditions by Brahmanism. It represents the Puranic process²⁰ i.e. the assimilation of cults and practices to bring in more and more people within the ambit of Brahmanism, a process that the writing of the KP's attests. An analysis of the variations provides the answers to what are the compulsions behind the development of the cult of Kāmākhyā.

²⁰ Kunal Chakrabarti, *Religious Process*, OUP, Delhi, 2001, pp52.

I have divided my work into four chapters. The first chapter discusses the rituals laid down by the Sanskrit KP (hereafter SKP). Rituals, as described in the KP are crucial for an understanding of goddess worship in Assam. The process of acceptance and incorporation of Tantric rituals by the brahmanical tradition is indicated in the SKP. The SKP not only gives a detailed account of the rituals for the propitiation of the goddess but also indicates the process of inclusion of Tantric rituals by the brahmanical tradition.

My second chapter discusses the nature and character of goddess Kāmākhyā and her various manifestations. She has different faces with different names for each. First, she is the centre for the ritual procedure followed by her sect, and second, she is the deity of the Vāmas. She is the mother to all her worshippers and also fulfills the philosophical role of Mahāmāyā in the brahmanical pantheon. She has two aspects to her character, a friendly one and a terrifying one. Her friendly nature includes the erotic aspect of her personality. In the S KP the goddess is said to have five faces – Kāmākhyā, Mahotsāhā, Tripurā, Kāmeśvarī and Śāradā, with Tripurā-sundari being her most prominent form. I shall look at her essence as Tripurā-sundari in the second chapter.

The third chapter discusses Śīva, the narrator of the KP and the spouse of Kāmākhyā. Śīva acts as a unifying factor in the text. It is crucial to discuss the role

of Śiva in Assam's religious complex, as Śaivism was the one of the dominant religions in the region when the SKP was being composed. As mentioned earlier, most kings of Assam patronised Śaivism up to the twelfth century. I go on to discuss the myths surrounding Śiva, the rituals and the role assigned to him in relation to goddess worship in the KP.

My fourth chapter is devoted to the Assamese Kālikā Purāṇa. The SKP has been dated to the tenth/eleventh centuries A.D. and the AKP is as late as the eighteenth century. No dates have been established for the AKP. Here I discuss the contents of the AKP and do a comparison with the SKP to see the extent of similarities and differences between the two, as the cult evolved through the centuries.

Chapter 1

Rituals in the Kālikā Purāṇa

The system of worship is the most important characteristic feature of the cult of any deity. Every god\goddess has his\her own ritual peculiarities according to their regional differences, religious temperaments and sectarian affiliations. It defines the nature of the deity to be propitiated. It also defines her role in the brahmanical pantheon. The worship of the goddess is one of the most elaborate and complex, and the *Kālikā Purāṇa* (hereafter KP) contains one of the most detailed accounts on *Devī* worship. The nature of her worship, however, reflects various systems of worship and this is reflective in the texts of KP. K.R.Van Kooij, in the introduction of his book, *Worship of the Goddess According to the Kālikā Purāṇa*, holds “The nature of her worship, however, is by no means of a uniform character and does not reflect one special either.”²¹ Here KP discusses the Great Goddess and her various forms with special emphasis on *Kāmākhya*. As I have discussed earlier, the KP has been located in Assam or its neighbouring areas. The KP, thus, is a valuable source for my work providing me with the background of the formation of the cult of *Kāmākhya*, a kind of antiquity of the goddess.

²¹ K.R.Van Kooij, *Worship of The Goddess According To Kālikā Purāṇa*, E.J.Brill, Leiden, 1972, pp 10.

Kāmākhyā is the most popular goddess worshipped in present day Assam. She is said to be a tribal deity assimilated by the brahmanical tradition owing to her popularity. This perhaps led to her acquiring a cult status and institutionalized her worship under the *brāhmaṇas*. In this chapter, I look at the system of worship of the goddess *Kāmākhyā*- the daily rituals, the *mantras*, rules for sacrifice and meditation among others.

Why are rituals crucial to this study of the KP? The rituals in the KP act as a marker of the process of cultural interaction between the Brahmanical tradition and the local/tribal practices. They, by their Tantric nature, attest the process of assimilation by the brahmanical tradition. The brahmanical tradition had to come to terms with the popularity of the Tantric tradition in peripheral areas and had to make adjustments with it. Being a set of techniques, some Tantric rituals could be brought within the ambit of Brahmanism without any difficulty. Some which were completely antithetical to the brahmanical tradition was accepted as a separate tradition, i.e., the *Vāmabhāva*. Thus, the study of rituals becomes crucial to understanding the process of interaction between the brahmanical tradition and the Tantric tradition.

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Goddesses that the SKP is looking at are primarily Tantric goddesses, and David Kinsley²² in his work *Tantric Visions of the Divine Feminine* argues that they are

²² David Kinsley. *Tantric Visions of the Divine Feminine: The Ten Mahavidyas*, University of California Press, Berkeley, pp 50

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typically approached by means of Tantric rituals and their worship is to be interpreted according to Tantric principles. Kinsley argues that Tantrism is generally oriented towards ritual. By means of the practice of certain rituals the *sādhaka* or religious adept seeks to gain *mokṣa*. The rituals of KP are so important and central to the text that some translations only include the worship of the goddess, such as the translation of the Sanskrit Kālikā Purāṇa by K.R.Van Kooij²³. In fact in the present day celebrations of Durgā pūjā, prayers from the KP form an important segment of the worship.

In the KP, all rituals are accompanied by *mantras*. In fact, the *mantra* forms the crux of the Tantric ritual. Agehananda Bharati, in his work on Tantra named Tantric Traditions,²⁴ refers to *mantra* as the chief instrument of Tantrism. D.F. Brooks, in his book, The Secret of the Three Cities,²⁵ says Tantrism involves elaborate speculations on the nature of sound and specifies the ritual use of *mantras* to fulfil worldly and other aims. According to Bharati, mantras are cryptic, clandestine utterances, unintelligible to the non-initiate. Thus, in texts such as the KP, there are enormous amount of instructions and directions about the correct formation of *mantras*. According to him, a *mantra* is "a quasi-morpheme or a series of quasi-morphemes, or a series of mixed genuine and quasi-morphemes arranged

²³ K.R.Van Kooij, *Worship of The Goddess According To Kālikā Purāṇa*. E.J.Brill, Leiden, 1972.

²⁴ Agehananda Bharati, *Tantric Traditions*. Studies in Sociology and Anthropology, Hindustan Publishing Corp, Delhi, 1993, pp 101.

²⁵ Douglas Renfrew Brooks. *The Secret of the three Cities: An Introduction to Hindu Śākta Tantrism*. University of Chicago Press. Chicago. 1990, pp 60.

in conventional patterns, based on codified esoteric traditions, and passed on from one preceptor to one disciple in the course of a prescribed initiation ritual.”²⁶ It is thus, considered as the nuclear element, the basic unit in Tantric worship. Bharati considers the *mantra* as the atomic constituent of initiation as well as of the further practices and consummation of Tantric discipline. According to him, mantras are meant for propitiation, for acquisition of things and identification or introjection i.e. the identification of prakṛti with Brahman. Bharati further argues that though *mantra*, mystical diagrams (*maṇḍala*), pilgrimage, circumambulation and initiation are parts of non-Tantric traditions also, these are central to the Tantric tradition. Thus *mantras* are often identified with Tantrism itself, and are classified as ‘mantra-śāstra’.

Brooks has discussed the principal generic features of Hindu Tantrism. Apart from mantras, some of the crucial elements are the worship of symbolic elements called maṇḍalas, which are diagrammatical representations of the goddess. There is also an extraordinary emphasis on the authority of the teacher (guru). Tantrics use conventionally prohibited substances in rituals such as liquor and meat, and engage in practices like sexual intercourse outside the legitimate, dharmic boundaries of marriage for spiritual and material ends.

²⁶ Agehananda Bharati, *Tantric Traditions*, Studies in Sociology and Anthropology, Hindustan Publishing Corp, Delhi, 1993, pp 101.

More than half of the KP, especially the Sanskrit version deals with the ceremonies and rites in which the goddess, in her various shapes, play the central part. All the instructions laid down here are meant for her worship, with some passages meant to appease Śiva.

The rituals need to be discussed in detail to understand their nature and meaning, and as put by K. R. Van Kooij, they are hard to summarize. Kooij makes three distinctions²⁷ in his study of the rituals and divides them in the following manner: A general kind of worship as practiced in large parts of India among all sectarian groups. This is what he calls common worship (also called *sāmānyā pūjā*), which is valid for the worship of all goddesses. The *sāmānyā pūjā* rituals are followed by what are special rituals. These can be said to be outside the brahmanical sphere and belonging to the left method or Vāmabhāva. Then come the rituals for popular calendrical festivals associated with the goddess, such as the Durgā Pūjā. We can also include a fourth kind – the rituals to propitiate Śiva which can be contrasted with the rituals meant for the goddess.

In this chapter, I will examine whether the ritual procedures laid down in the KP keep to this model, and if there are variations, what are they and why are they different. It is interesting to note that there are numerous divisions within the text.

²⁷ K.R.Van Kooij, *Worship of The Goddess According To Kālikā Purāṇa*, Leiden, E.J.Brill, 1972, pp 6.

The divisions within the texts, corresponding to the mantras, are called Vaiṣṇavī Tantra, Uttarā Tantra, Devī Tantra, Tripurā Tantra, among others.

It appears that the first category on common rituals covers the greater part of the portion on *Devī* worship underscoring the fact that the main concern of the text was to propitiate the goddess according to rituals practiced in most other parts of India and thus to draw the region of Kāmarūpa into the fold of Brahmanism. This also can be seen as an attempt to make Kāmākhyā a part of the pan-Indian religious geography and present it as an important place in the pilgrimage map of the Indian sub-continent. Another important point is that these rituals of common worship contain many Tantric elements, such as the drawing of the *maṇḍala* and the use of specific *mantras* used point to a Tantric origin and suggest the level of interaction between the brahmanical religion and the local beliefs and practices. The Tantras essentially being a set of rituals could be accommodated within the brahmanical system without any real problems. What could not be compromised with was clubbed under a different tradition that was to be followed with qualifications i.e. the left-handed method or Vāmabhava. We shall see what these qualifications were in this chapter.

According to David Kinsley²⁸, goddess worship takes place primarily in two contexts: the temple served by priests and for the public and in temporary places

²⁸David Kinsley, *Tantric Visions of the Divine Feminine: The Ten Mahavidyas*, University of California Press, Berkeley, pp 49.

marked off by individual aspirants where worship is usually undertaken in the Tantric way either left-handed or right-handed. In the SKP, we find mention of rituals in the second context only. K.R.Van Kooij argues that the chapters pertaining to the rituals for the goddess look like an amalgamation of cults and practices current at the time of the final redaction of the text.

David Kinsley²⁹ argues that Tantrism describes two paths i.e. the left and the right handed way as a means of achieving spiritual fulfilment. The left-handed way is restricted to those 'of heroic nature' and is described as dangerous, employing the famous *pañca tattva* ritual in which the adept indulges in five forbidden things: meat, fish, wine, some particular type of grain and illicit sexual intercourse. Goddesses who are usually associated with the left-handed path are Kālī, Tārā, and Tripura-sundarī, among others.

This chapter is an attempt to document the varied nature of goddess worship and an analysis of the different systems of worship which were legitimized for the propitiation of the goddess. As I have mentioned before, it would be instructive to see how the KP is in its treatment of the worship of the goddess. Here it is important to remember, as Kinsley³⁰ says that each Mahāvidyā should be understood as a symbol of the stages of consciousness as experienced by the

²⁹ David Kinsley, *Tantric Visions of the Divine Feminine: The Ten Mahavidyas*. University of California Press, Berkeley, pp 46.

³⁰ *ibid.*

Tantric aspirants in their progressive spiritual development and that each goddess confers a certain type of perfection, blessing or awareness.

The KP does not describe Tantric worship of the Mahāvidyās; it provides a detailed outline of the stages of Tantric worship which can be adapted to any deity³¹. Kinsley describes and analyses the rituals of the KP on the basis of K.R.Van Kooij's translation of the SKP in great detail. Kinsley dates his source to about fourteenth century A.D. The text, as read by Kinsley³², recommends sites where the rituals are to be performed, such as mountain tops and caves, but it is said to be most potent when done in a place considered sacred for goddess worship. What is crucial is that it requires no priest and can be performed by an individual for himself. It does not specify the duration of worship, nor does it require the physical image of the goddess. Kinsley, like K.R.Van Kooij, talks about the continuous set of actions described in the KP as having four parts: preparation, meditation, worship of the goddess, and the concluding rites³³. The opening rites of the *sāmānyā pūjā* primarily aim at purification of the adept and the delimitation of an appropriate place within which the adept is to perform the ceremony. The adept bathes and sips water, which signifies internal purification, and prays to the goddess to clean his mind of all impurities. The *sāmānyā pūjā* is to include purification of the place of worship, inspection of items to be used in the *pūjā*, such

³¹ *ibid.* pp 52.

³² *Ibid*

³³ *Ibid.*

as flowers which should not have insects in them, and the drawing of the *yantra* i.e. a schematic diagram (also called a *maṇḍala*) representing a particular goddess to be worshipped. In the second phase of the ceremony, the adept performs a series of acts involving the mind to further purify himself. These acts, Kinsley³⁴ holds, aim at the symbolic death and dissolution of the adept. The adept's symbolic death is followed by his mental re-creation of the world and is followed by the appearance of the goddess. This is followed by inward worship i.e. the adept imagining the goddess and her attendants dwelling in his heart. This involves procedures which "are similar to temple pūjā, but in contrast to elaborate and costly temple pūjā, in this ceremony the adept offers the goddess little more than purified water and flowers."³⁵ The final offering is usually that of rice or some other grain. The adept may also make a blood offering.

Kinsley summarizes *sāmānyā pūjā* in the following words "Sāmānyā pūjā is a ritual through which the worshipper is deified. After ritually undertaking one's own death and dissolution, one re-creates the world and oneself. In this act of re-creation, the goddess is identified with the worshipper. The two are declared essentially one. In this sense, sāmānyā pūjā is worship of one's own inner sacred essence as well as of a superior divine being. Or perhaps one could say that in sāmānyā pūjā, which is essentially tantric in nature, one reveres one's highest or

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ David Kinsley, *Tantric Visions of the Divine Feminine: The Ten Mahavidyas*. University of California Press, Berkeley, pp 53.

most essential nature, which is identified with the goddess.”³⁶ He adds: “During *sāmānyā pūjā*, then, which is the likely setting for the worship of the *Mahāvidyās*, the emphasis is upon individual meditation and identification with the goddess in question. Unlike temple worship, the goal is to inwardly realize the presence of the goddess in the aspirant. Although *sāmānyā pūjā* perceives the goddess in question to be both a superior being who exists outside the *sādhaka* and an inward dimension or aspect of worshipper, the emphasis, particularly in comparison to temple worship, is on the latter”³⁷

As for the left-handed path according to the KP, the *sādhaka* must partake of five things that are ordinarily forbidden or are highly polluting: meat, fish, wine, *mudrā* (a type of grain that may have hallucinogenic properties), and sexual intercourse with a woman who is not one’s wife (the ritual is described from a male point of view).³⁸ The ritual is performed under the guidance of a *guru*. Kinsley holds “By partaking of forbidden things, one affirms that ultimately there is nothing that is not the goddess, that nothing is polluting, for she pervades all. Such distinction as “pure” and “polluting” impose artificial qualifications on the manifestation of the goddess as the physical world. The *pañca tattva* ritual seeks to abolish a mentality that perceives the world according to artificial human constructs, that perceives the

³⁶ Ibid. pp 54

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ *ibid*

essentially unified world that is the goddess(or Brahman, with which the goddess is often identified) as fractured and divided.”³⁹

Common worship

The ritual procedure for the worship of the goddess begins with what is called *sāmānyā pūjā*. By *sāmānyā pūjā* I mean the rituals which have greater general acceptability and are considered a part of the right-handed way of propitiating Gods and Goddesses in brahmanism. However, Tantric elements in this kind of ritual procedure are also clearly discernible. These are those Tantric rituals that could be assimilated with the brahmanical tradition without difficulty.

The rules for worship of the goddess begin with Śiva instructing his sons Vetāla and Bhairava on how to propitiate their mother: “O my sons! I am satisfied with you. If you desire that I should grant you your choicest boons, two of you should propitiate my consort Pārvatī, the goddess.”⁴⁰ Śiva clearly mentions that by performing the rituals for the goddess “everything could be achieved”⁴¹

³⁹ David Kinsley. *Tantric Visions of the Divine Feminine: The Ten Mahavidyas*, University of California Press, Berkeley, pp 55.

⁴⁰ SKP, 51.212 - 213a.

⁴¹ SKP, 52.3.

To begin with, Śiva discloses the knowledge of the Vaiṣṇavī *mantra* which is meant to be a secret and hence crucial for a goddess worshipper. The ritual procedure is very elaborate. It begins with what has been termed by K.R. Van Kooij as preparatory acts which are to be accompanied by mantras. This includes bathing (for purification of self), cleaning of the sacrificial place, expelling of demons, and drawing of the maṇḍala according to precise specifications and measurements, without which it remains incomplete. The need to follow the directions is strongly emphasized – “who makes her powerful maṇḍala otherwise than the prescribed one, devoid of its characteristics and(incomplete) in parts, does not gain any result, nor gets his desires fulfilled , therefore only this maṇḍala should be drawn(as prescribed).”⁴² •

K.R.Van Kooij is of the opinion that the preparatory acts are to be accomplished with meticulous care. They have the psychological function of preparing the adept’s mind so that he pays continuous and undivided attention them. All the rituals are rendered powerful and effective by pronouncing the proper *mantras*.

At first, Śiva, the narrator, recited the Vaiṣṇavī *mantra* which he designated to be the secret of all the *mantras* used to acquire all that is desired. The same *mantra* is used by the adept to make his body identical with the goddess. It involves all the elaborate preparatory acts like that of bathing, drawing the *maṇḍala*, worshipping

⁴² SKP, 52.30.

one's seat, the removing of sins, the cleaning of the spot, expelling the demons, the fencing of the quarters of the sky, preparation of the jar for the guest-water, the transformation of the water in the jar into *amṛta*, the preparation of the adept's own seat, self-worship of the adept and the purification of his hands. A purificatory act leads to the most decisive phase of the ritual, i.e., the worship proper, during which the deity comes down out of the adept's heart and takes her seat in the *maṇḍala* pictured before the adept. The adept goes on to worship the deity's figure in all its finery- ornaments, attributes, garments, its vehicle. etc, and then proceeds to the secondary deities belonging to the goddess's circle. After the final oblation, the deity is dismissed to her original home i.e. in the cave of Mt. Nilācala in Kāmarūpa or the adept's heart. This part of the ritual is to include- the sprinkling of water, inward worship, installing the deity into the *maṇḍala*, invocation, reception of the deity as high guest and presentation of offerings, homage to the deity's figure, homage to the minor gods and goddesses belonging to her circle, prayer with rosary, the hymn of praise, the offering of a final oblation and finally the dismissal of the deity.

This need for absolute perfection in the technicalities of the *pūja* can be ascribed to Tantrism. So also the need for secrecy, which can also be described as one of the important features of Tantrism. Evidently *sāmānyā pūjā* was influenced by Tantrism, which the brāhmaṇas in eastern India had to accommodate in order to establish their socio-religious order. Thus the most acceptable form of worship i.e.

sāmānyā pūja found itself peppered with Tantric elements. This explains why the KP was written in the first place. It was meant to reconcile two distinct systems of worship – the *dakṣiṇa* and the *vāma* for the introduction and perpetuation of the brahmanical way of life in north-east India.

Some of the ceremonies that follow are crucial to the *pūjā* such as the washing of the inside of the adept's body by a mental process. There is another to cleanse the mind. It is also supposed to do away with desire.⁴³ Then there is the *pāṇikacchapa mudrā* to be made by the hands of the adept of which a careful description follows. The above mentioned rituals are clubbed under what has been called as purificatory acts.

This is to be followed by meditation upon the goddess. The adept is to conceive the cosmos in his mind and meditate upon the imagined cosmos. The purpose of the meditation part of the ritual is to make the adept experience his own death, where his life principle leaves his own body and the body itself is destroyed. Afterwards a new divine body is created in which the deity is believed to be present. The adept identifies himself with his deity and becomes God himself, who alone is entitled to meet the deity during worship. This clearly is a Tantric technique of locating God within oneself.

⁴³ SKP. 53.8.

He is to create the image of the goddess in his mind and place her on a lotus on the *maṇḍala*. A vivid description of the goddess follows which is the first of many such descriptions. It goes: “the adept should with undivided mind meditate upon mahāmāyā sitting on that lotus, who resembles the hue of the red lotus, whose disheveled hair hang down, adorned with a pair of bright earrings shaking like the mountain ebony, who wears two diadems beset with gold and gems, who is lovely, adorned with three eyes, white, red and black; whose cheeks possess the splendour of the moon in the twilight.....who is with big eyes, who dazzles like the myriad of ten million suns, who is with four arms, without clothes,.....”⁴⁴

The mount of the goddess is described as a lion.

The ritual to follow is meant to achieve the process of making the goddess identical with the adept. The adept is now deified with the divinity present in his heart. Then the adept is to perform the ritual acts of *karanyāsa* and *aṅganyāsa* by which his particular body parts are rendered divine. This is clearly a Tantric practice of identification of the divinity with the self. This is one of the primary techniques to locate the divinity within oneself, as advocated in Tantrism.

Meditation is to be followed by worship of the goddess. The worship is to begin with the purification of all offerings and implements of worship⁴⁵. It is to be followed by the worship of the door-keepers of the goddess like Nandin and

⁴⁴ Long description of the goddess follows. SKP, 53.24-35.

⁴⁵ SKP. 54.2.

Gaṇeśa, among others, and the seat of the goddess, i.e., the middle of the *maṇḍala*. Then it is said –“the adept should worship all those who are renowned in all the tantras beginning with ādhāraśakti and ending with hemādi.”⁴⁶ The *guru* is to be worshipped and the various *pīthas* associated with the goddess. The worship of the cosmos is to follow. It is important to remember that every ritual act is to be performed with *mantras*. The goddess to be installed on a lotus and various offerings are to be made to her. They are to include-“sandal paste, flowers, lamp, incense sticks etc and also sweet meat, milk- rice, white sugar, molasses, curd, ghee, various kinds of fruits, red flowers, garlands of flowers, gold and silver; silk garment of red colour is to be given to the goddess, and never a blue one.....whoever presents the goddess with a garland of thousand of bakula flowers or oleander or of jasmine, he shall obtain all his desires”⁴⁷

This is to be followed by the worship of all the attendants of the goddess, i.e., the sixty four yoginīs such as “Kameśvari, Durgā, Bhairavī, Śivā, Aparṇā, Damanī”⁴⁸ They are the attendants of the goddess who also represent her myriad forms.

This is to be followed by *balidāna*. “An adept should always satisfy Gaṇeśa with sweet meat, the sun with ghee, Śiva with music, dancing and instrumental music,

⁴⁶ SKP. 54.4.

⁴⁷ SKP. 54.17-27

⁴⁸ SKP. 54.34-35

Viṣṇu with observance of austerity and Candika with *balidāna*⁴⁹ Items for *balidāna* include “birds, tortoises, alligators, and nine species of deer such as the he-goat, the boar, the buffalo, the big lizard, the Śoṣa, the yak, the spotted antelope, the hare and the lion; fishes, the blood of one’s body; and in the absence of these sometimes horses and elephants- these eight variables to be regarded as bali to the goddess. He-goats, śarabhas (the man-lion form of Śiva) and men are respectively counted as bali, mahābali and ati-bali”⁵⁰.

Then the sacrificial animal is to be given a bath and the sword is to be worshipped. Śiva should also be worshipped as the one who drinks the blood offered along with his spouse. The sacrificial animal is to be cut into two pieces and the blood is to be offered to the divine couple. This completes the sacrifice and the text clearly states that this procedure is to be always adopted in offering *bali* to the goddess Durgā.

Bali is to be followed by prayers with rosary (*japa*).⁵¹ The adept is to reflect on Śiva and his own guru. Then the adept is to meditate upon the goddess. This is a complicated procedure. The adept must realise the oneness of the identity of his *guru*, the *mantra*, of the deity whose nature is expressed by the *mantra*, and of himself. The oneness of all the four is highlighted which is the ultimate reality and this is to be placed on the six centres of the human body called *ṣaṭcakras*. It also

⁴⁹ SKP. 55.1-2.

⁵⁰ SKP, 55.3-6a.

⁵¹ SKP. 55.21-22

stands for one spot in the throat. Then he should concentrate on what is called the *ādiṣoḍaśacakra* or the heart because this is the place of contemplation, of repetition of *mantras*, of meditation, and of prayer. Hence it is called first (*ādi*)⁵².

The prayer with a rosary is to continue. There follows a long description of the types of rosary that should be used for the *japa* (meditation). And *japa* is always to be of a prescribed number. It is at this stage that the adept has to specify the object of his desire and the reason for his worship of the goddess. The ritual procedure comes to an end with the adept bidding farewell to the goddess by creating the *yonimudrā*, i.e., a formation of the fingers of the adept's hands.⁵³ A number of actions which stand outside the worship proper are carried out here that remain indispensable to a successful end. They are- blotting out of the *maṇḍala* and making a mark on one's forehead with the powder from it, propitiation of the goddess dwelling in the remains of the offerings and a guest-offer to the Sun.

Some general rules for worship of the goddess are laid down. These include specific days when particular rituals should be performed for maximum results, and the kind of offerings to be made to the guru as his fee.⁵⁴ This should consist of gold, cow and sesame, among others.

⁵² SKP, 55.33

⁵³ SKP, 55.59-62a

⁵⁴ SKP, 55.75-77

There are specifications regarding *gurus*. Those who are cursed, without sons, indulge in gambling, not proficient in their religious duties, ignorant of the ritual practices, dwarf or who condemns his own *guru*, are to be avoided.⁵⁵ The adept is to be initiated into goddess worship only by a *guru*, otherwise he is to face the consequences of being consigned to hell and being re-born in a sinful clan.⁵⁶ This is one of the most important requirements of Tantrism. The position of the *guru* is supreme in the Tantric tradition. Without the *guru*, there is no other means of acquiring knowledge of this technique of worship. It has to be handed down to the initiate by his *guru*.

It is also said that the knowledge of the *mantra* must not be imparted to the rogue, the cruel, the stupid, the deceitful, the one devoid of devotion and the corrupted.⁵⁷

The best place to worship the goddess is a lonely place. A block of stone is recommended for worshipping the goddess in a lonely place.⁵⁸

Regulations are laid down regarding when one can pray to the goddess and what essential rules of cleanliness are to be followed. If blood is oozing out from the adept's body, he is prohibited from praying to the goddess. There is stress on

⁵⁵ SKP. 55.78-80a

⁵⁶ SKP. 55.80b-82a

⁵⁷ SKP. 55.82b-83a

⁵⁸ SKP. 55.86-87

maintaining personal hygiene and a number of things are considered polluting. This is one of the most distinguishing features of brahmanism. It is known for the maintenance of a distinct demarcation between purity and pollution. It is said in the text –“An adept should not perform the daily rites if he bleeds above the knees, while occasional rites must not be observed on the event of bleeding below his knees. On the events or oozing out blood in the process of shaving, sexual intercourse, similarly when an adept passes gastric wind or vomits, he should avoid all daily rites; when after something is eaten that is not digested, and after eating something a person must not perform the daily rites, so also on the occasions of child birth and death.”⁵⁹ There are instructions for a devotee not to touch objects which have previously been touched by low caste people.⁶⁰ The KP has emphasized a great deal on the need to keep away from polluting conditions and objects, including low caste people. It will be worthwhile to see whether the other texts such as the Assamese Kālikā Purāṇas agree or disagree with such propositions. A crucial point to remember here is the co-existence of Tantric aspects of a ritual along with the traditional brahminical aspects in this system of common worship.

The text goes on to discuss the *kavaca mantra*, literally meaning, the armour.⁶¹ The goddess is said to provide virtual/magic armour or extend protection to her devotee. The *mantra* is spelt out in great detail. It is to extend protection to the devotee in all

⁵⁹ SKP. 55.90b-93a.

⁶⁰ SKP. 55.102b-103.

⁶¹ SKP. 56.1

aspects. The different forms of the goddess are to protect the devotee in different directions and also protect the different parts of his body. He who recites the *kavaca mantra* is said to overcome all diseases, turn virtuous, live for a hundred years and even conquer death.⁶² There is a prayer for protection which can be added to any ritual in the KP. This is for magic armour (*kavaca*)⁶³ to free the adept from any kind of evil influence. This grants the adept, *siddhis* or supernatural powers, e.g., the power to see buried treasures, the power to be invisible etc. K.R.Van Kooij⁶⁴ says that these are to be found in the Buddhist Tantras and familiar to the Tantric literature only.

It is after this that the text specifically mentions goddess Kāmākhyā. It goes on to explain the *angamantra* which is said to be-“suitable to all kinds of worship”⁶⁵ If the mantras are recited in front of brāhmaṇas, the adept is sure to enjoy the fruits of his labour. ⁶⁶ K.R.Van Kooij holds “besides the goddess the other gods also can be worshipped in this way e.g. Viṣṇu, Śiva, Brahma, and Ganeśa according to the KP and that the author is perfectly right as to this can be inferred from the purāṇas Where similar rites are found for the worships of the gods mentioned..... It is indeed a common worship practiced not only in large parts of India but even

⁶² SKP. 56.60b-62

⁶³ SKPII. 58.7-8.

⁶⁴ K.R.Van Kooij. *Worship of The Goddess According To Kālikā Purāṇa*. Leiden, E.J.Brill, 1972, pp 25

⁶⁵ SKP. 57.12.

⁶⁶ SKP. 57.192

outside.....”⁶⁷ He only drives home the point that the common worship is also crucial to legitimize the position of the goddess in the brahminical pantheon. It is an acceptance measure on the part of the brahmanical tradition which assigns an important position to the local\tribal goddess by bringing her at par with the other brahmanical goddesses.

Vāmabhāva

Then the text refers to the special rites called ‘left method’ or *Vāmabhāva*. It is very different from the rites followed by the traditional brahmanic way. As I have already mentioned, the *vāmabhāva* is a Tantric practice. The characteristic feature of *vāmabhāva* is the use of wine and meat as well as sexual intercourse. K.R.Van Kooij⁶⁸ argues, “Although both methods [common worship and the left method] can be followed, the one after the other, the two forms can never be blended and seem to be mutually exclusive.” The text mentions-“This is special and different from the common one, which has been already stated to you.”⁶⁹ It is worth noting that the text itself makes the above mentioned distinction.

⁶⁷ K.R.Van Kooij. *Worship of The Goddess According To Kālikā Purāṇa*. Leiden, E.J.Brill, 1972, pp 23.

⁶⁸ K.R.Van Kooij. *Worship of The Goddess According To Kālikā Purāṇa*. Leiden, E.J.Brill, 1972, pp 29.

⁶⁹ SKP. 58.2.

It is clearly stated that nothing should be enjoyed without it being offered to the goddess- be it fruits, flowers, betel- nut or drinks. The text categorically mentions- “whenever an adept beholds a pot full of intoxicating liquor, a woman in red colour (indicating a menstruating woman), a lion, a tiger, an elephant, his preceptor, or a king, he should bow his head to the Mahāmāyā.”⁷⁰ The text further states- “Whenever an adept is having sexual intercourse with his devoted wife during her periods, he should, in order to acquire prosperity, have that after meditating upon Caṇḍikā”⁷¹

The rituals which find mention in this section can easily be distinguished from the ones mentioned earlier. There is a stark difference between the two systems of worship. The difference is most clearly discernible in the context of sacrifice. Here it is said-“On the event of offering a sacrifice, the adept should put a tilaka on his forehead with the blood.”⁷² In the *sāmānyā pūjā*, association with blood was kept to the minimum, whereas the left handed method revels in the use of blood and other substances which are considered polluting by brahmanism.

There is a complete chapter devoted to the offering of blood to the goddess. It is mentioned in the KP that the blood from the worshipper’s keeps the goddess

⁷⁰ SKP, 58.7-8a.

⁷¹ SKP, 58.8b-9a.

⁷² SKP, 58.17.

pleased for a thousand years. This attests the relative importance of offering one's own blood vis-à-vis the sacrifice of any other animal.

The following drives home the aforementioned point that, "If a human being is sacrificed following the rules laid down, the goddess remains pleased for a full one thousand years, and when three men are sacrificed, for one hundred thousand years."⁷³ The goddess is said to partake the head and the flesh of the sacrifice. The use of bare hands to kill an animal as a sacrificial offering is forbidden. The use of bare hands is said to be equal to the crime of killing a brāhmaṇa. A sword is considered mandatory for the beheading of the sacrificial offering. An interesting aspect of *bali* is the manner in which the SKP justifies the killing of an animal in a sacrifice. Here again, the secrecy of the *mantras* used is to be strictly maintained

Then comes the offering of liquor to the goddess—"The pumpkin, the sugarcane, spirituous liquor and fermented liquor are looked upon as equal to animal sacrifice and please the goddess as much as the meat of a he-goat."⁷⁴

Both with regard to the offering of blood sacrifice as well as liquor, a social distinction sharpens the difference between the two methods of worship—"A brāhmaṇa should never offer a lion or a tiger, or a man and also the blood from his own body and spirituous liquor to the great goddess Durgā. If a brāhmaṇa sacrifices

⁷³ SKP, 67.18.

⁷⁴ SKP, 67.23.

either a lion or a tiger, or a man, he goes to hell; and lives but a short period of his life in this world suffering misery and misfortune. Should the brāhmaṇa offer blood drawn from his own body he becomes guilty of killing a brāhmaṇa.”⁷⁵

Similarly, the KP goes on to say “If a brāhmaṇa offers intoxicating liquor to the goddess, he is no longer a brāhmaṇa”⁷⁶ However a sort of compromise is reached when the KP states, “Where it is absolutely necessary to offer intoxicating liquor, a brāhmaṇa should offer coconut water in a vessel of brass metal or honey in a container of copper. Even in a time of calamity a brāhmaṇa should not offer spirituous liquor, except made of flowers and that of red turnips.”⁷⁷ Here it is seen how the brahmanical tradition compromised with the Tantric tradition and incorporated qualifications for their acceptance and incorporation into the text. In the KP, according to this system of worship, the goddess is to be worshipped at all times. Any occasion that comes up, the goddess is to be remembered. We can draw a contrast with the rules for the performance of *sāmānyā pūjā*; there are strict rules regarding when to pray and which times are to be avoided to enjoy the complete fruits of one’s worship of the goddess. The concept of purity and pollution comes in here which forms the basis of Brahmanism. The factors considered polluting by orthodox Brahmanism find easy acceptance in the left-handed tradition of worship.

⁷⁵ SKP, 67.48b-50

⁷⁶ SKP, 67.51-52a.

⁷⁷ SKP, 67.114-115.

This is followed by special ritual procedures laid down for the worship of the sacrificial offering. It is important to point out that all these offerings are to be male including the human offerings.

The text contains a list of places where the goddess resides apart from her usual residence in Kāmākhya. However the text clearly states that-“the worship of the goddess Mahāmāyā in Kāmarūpa, the abode of gods, is recommended to be the best of all. Kāmarūpa is the sacred land to the goddess; there is no land equal to it. The goddess is rare elsewhere; in Kāmarūpa she is present in every household. The merit that accrues from the worship is said to be hundred times more when done on the top of the mount Nilakūtā.”⁷⁸

Then there is mention of the *yoni*, i.e., the form of the goddess which is the main cult object of Kāmākhya. It is interesting to see that the *yoni* finds mention only in the rituals pertaining to the left handed way of worship.

Mahāmāyā is described as Kāmākhya because she came to the mountain *Nilakūta* for sexual pleasure. She is seen as a fierce divinity who sheds her violent image only to enjoy sexual pleasure and after that puts on her fierce image once again.

⁷⁸ SKP. 58.40-42.

Her association with Viṣṇu and the Madhu-Kaiṭabha myth continues from the *Devī Mahātmya* of the sixth century AD. The dismemberment of *Satī* myth is used to place Kāmākhyā in the religious map of the sub-continent. The writers of the KP draw upon various myths to embellish the cult of Kāmākhyā and place it in the pilgrimage map of the region.

Conclusion

What do we get after a careful analysis of the SKP? Rituals pertaining to the left-handed way of worship co-exist with the right-handed way, though the *sāmānyā pūjā* comprises the bulk of the ritual procedure. However, it is important to remember that the KP advises the practice of both methods of worship. The *sāmānyā pūjā* rituals were recommended to integrate the goddesses of the eastern Indian region, who were essentially propitiated in the Vāmabhāva way, into the pan-Indian system.. The left handed method finds acceptance in the KP, though its extreme form such as the rituals pertaining to sacrifice and its association with blood, never really received brahmanical favour. It also goes on to show the popularity of the Tantric method in the regional complex of worship, which brahmanism could not ignore.

Another crucial point about the rituals prescribed in the *Kālikā Purāṇa* is that these allow the adept to establish direct connection with the goddess without any

mediation. The text seems to suggest that anyone can perform these rituals and no individual or group has any special access to worship, least of all the brāhmaṇas. However, the brāhmaṇas are allowed to participate in the common worship rituals, though not in the left-handed method of worship.

The text contains an exclusive segment on the worship of the goddess according to the unorthodox way, the overt Tantric elements find themselves integrated into what is ostensibly the orthodox brahmanical way. We observe how even the method of common worship imbibes Tantric influence. Some Tantric rituals, which supposedly do not stand in direct conflict with the brahmanical way, are accommodated without any qualifications, thus overlaying even the *sāmānyā pūjā* with Tantric rites.

Thus, the KP represents the historical process of bringing together of two different systems of worship centering around the cult of Kāmākhyā.

Chapter 2

Tripura-sundarī: The Essence of the Goddess Kāmākhyā

The nature, role and essence of the goddess Kāmākhyā can be discerned in the form of the goddess *Tripura-sundarī*. The SKP attests the relationship between them and recognises *Tripura-sundarī* as one of the prominent faces of the goddess.

In this chapter, I will discuss the characteristics of the goddess Kāmākhyā and the nature of her relationship with the form of *Tripurā*. Kāmākhyā has different faces with different names for each. Firstly, she is at the centre of the ritual procedure followed by her worshippers, and secondly, she is the presiding deity of the *Vāmas*. She is the mother to all her worshippers and she also fulfils the philosophical role of *Mahāmāyā* in the brahmanical pantheon. She has two aspects to her character, a friendly and a terrifying one. Her friendly nature includes the erotic aspect of her personality. These characteristics also form the essence of *Tripurā*. At the same time, *Tripurā* is identified with *Kālī* and perhaps this identification connects Kāmākhyā with *Tripurā*.

The SKP describes the nature of Kāmākhyā thus “She accumulates in her the quintessence of what has been accumulated in the Vedas, she is the remover of the enemies of gods, she destroys all forms of impurity, brings welfare, causes bliss, makes (her devotees) wise, and prosperous, grants fame and cows, she is the

embodiment of whole auspicious things on this earth, who destroys all impediments.”⁷⁹ This, we shall see, is almost identical with the goddess, as she has been envisaged in the SKP.

Tripura-sundarī in Tantric Literature

The name Tripura-sundarī means one who is lovely in the three worlds. She is considered the most important manifestation of Kāmākhyā. David Kinsley⁸⁰ mentions that his informants identify Kāmākhyā with Śoḍaśī which is another name for Tripura-sundarī. According to Kinsley, Tripura-sundarī appears under the names of Śoḍaśī, Lalitā, Kāmeśvarī, Śrīvidyā, and Rāja-rājeśvarī in the lists of the Mahāvidyās. Kālī and Tārā, along with Tripura-sundarī, are considered *ādi* or the primordial *Mahāvidyās*. Kinsley says that Tripura-sundarī is often depicted iconographically as seated on a lotus that rests on the supine body of Śiva, which in turn lies on a throne whose legs are the gods Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Śiva, and Rudra.

According to Kinsley, Tripura-sundarī (Śoḍaśī) was a very well-known and important Tantric goddess before she was grouped with the *Mahāvidyās*. She is identified by her *yantra*, i.e., the *Śrī cakra*. According to her mythology, Tripura-sundarī defeated the demon Bhaṇḍa, who was created from the ashes of Kāma by

⁷⁹ SKP. 62.138.

⁸⁰ David Kinsley, *Tantric Visions of the Divine Feminine: The Ten Mahavidyas*. University of California. Berkeley, 1997. pp 17

one of the gaṇas of Śiva. Śiva granted Bhaṇḍa the rulership of the world for sixty thousand years. Bhaṇḍa had built a city like that of the gods and, to their dismay, attacked Indra, the leader of the gods. In desperation, the gods appealed to Tripurā-sundarī and propitiated her with the offering of their flesh and blood. In the meanwhile, sixty thousand years expired and Śiva and Tripurā-sundarī were married to each other. Bhaṇḍa was ultimately killed by Tripurā-sundarī and she created various manifestations of herself to counter the varied forms of the demon. According to Kinsley, this myth establishes certain central characteristics of Tripurā-sundarī (hereafter TS). Her primary role is to protect the gods and ensure cosmic stability. She is the source of several of her manifestation, whom she creates to battle the demons.

Kinsley has studied the different qualities attributed to TS in various sources. According to Kinsley⁸¹, in the KP, TS is said to be Bālā-tripurā-sundarī, meaning a young girl who is beautiful and is said to be a symbol of beauty and sexuality. She is to be worshipped by adoring a living girl in either the right or left-handed Tantric method. Kinsley describes the goddess TS in the following words, “For the most part, TS is characterized by names and features that emphasise her beautiful, auspicious, pure, fertile, and gracious nature and that associate her with wealth, royal power, the protection of the order of dharma, and the defeat of demons. She is

⁸¹ David Kinsley, *Tantric Visions of the Divine Feminine: The Ten Mahavidyas*, University of California, Berkeley, 1997, pp 118

often described as the patient, obedient wife of either Śiva or Viṣṇu.”⁸² This, however, is not the only image that is found of TS. Kinsley states that there are texts where she is said to be frightening, wild and dangerous. Kinsley further says, “In many ways she resembles Kālī, with whom she is sometimes identified.”⁸³

Perhaps this could explain the association of Kāmākhya with TS.

Kinsley goes on to enumerate the various names and meanings of TS. Kinsley says that the texts dealing with TS often reflect on the significance of her names which are usually believed to hold hidden or mystical meanings. The most speculated is the name TS itself. Kinsley says, “The name Tripura-sundarī, whose most obvious and apparent meaning is ‘she who is beautiful in the three worlds,’ typically prompts speculation concerning various triads known to Hindu philosophy, mythology, and sādhanā (spiritual practice). In the process of associating TS with these triads, the texts often imply that she is identical with the ultimate, essential, or complete reality in one way or another.”⁸⁴

Kinsley looks at the KP which offers several interpretations of the nature and meaning of TS. According to him, the KP refers to her being identical with the triangle that symbolizes the *yoni* and forms her *cakra*, hence the name TS. There are other meanings that the KP mentions, such as her mantra which has three clusters of syllables. She also expresses herself as Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Śiva in her

⁸² Ibid. pp 119.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ David Kinsley. *Tantric Visions of the Divine Feminine: The Ten Mahavidyas*. University of California. Berkeley. 1997, pp 120

roles as creator, preserver, and destroyer of the universe and the subject (*mātā*), instrument (*māna*), and the object (*māyā*) of all things. Other texts also speculate on the meaning of TS. It is said that TS represents three kinds or colours of *bindu*, i.e., seed or essence: red, white and mixed. Kinsley holds, “this probably refers to sexual fluids: red being female sexual fluid; white, semen; and mixed, the union of the two. The meaning here is that the goddess represents both of the sexual polarities in the universe and their ultimate union.”⁸⁵

Kinsley considers TS as triple natured because she embodies the three principal powers of *icchā śakti* (will), *jñāna śakti* (consciousness, knowledge), and *kriyā śakti* (doing, action).⁸⁶

Kinsley has also looked at Bhāskararāya’s commentary on the *Lalitā-sahasranāma* which believes that the goddess TS is called so because she is older than Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Rudra and because she is identified with the three main channels of the subtle body in *kuṇḍalinī yoga* that represent cosmic totality. Kinsley quotes Bhāskararāya, “there are three Devas, three Vedas, three fires, three energies, three notes (*svaras*), three worlds, three sacred lakes, three castes.....Whatever in the

⁸⁵ David Kinsley, *Tantric Visions of the Divine Feminine: The Ten Mahavidyas*. University of California, Berkeley, 1997, pp 121

⁸⁶ *ibid.*

world is threefold, such as the three objects of human desire, all these, O divine one, really belong to your name.”⁸⁷

As for the name *Ṣoḍaśī*, Kinsley says that the name literally means “she who is sixteen.”⁸⁸ Kinsley argues that it is common for deities to be described as eternally sixteen years old, which is considered the most beautiful and vigorous human age. He further speculates that it could mean one who has sixteen good qualities or it could stand for the phases of the moon i.e. the lunar tithes which are fifteen in number and are personified as goddesses, *Ṣoḍaśī* being the sixteenth, hence the one that is beyond the phases or rhythms of time and regulates the cosmos. As for the name *Lalitā*, it also has universal, cosmological, or mystical significance.

In conclusion, on the meaning of TS and her nature, Kinsley says, “It seems clear that commentators on the meaning of TS’s names begin with the assumption that she is the highest reality, or reality itself, and find in her epithets mystical meanings that affirm this. Whether she is called *Lalitā*, *Ṣoḍaśī*, *Tripura-sundarī*, or one of the several other common names, she is the cosmic queen from whom everything originates, in whom everything inheres, and by whom everything will be dissolved.”⁸⁹

⁸⁷ *ibid.*

⁸⁸ *ibid.*

⁸⁹ David Kinsley, *Tantric Visions of the Divine Feminine: The Ten Mahavidyas*, University of California, Berkeley, 1997, pp 122.

Douglas Renfrew Brooks has analysed the text *Tripurā Upaniṣadbhāṣya* and Bhāskararāya's commentary on it to arrive at the meaning and nature of TS. Bhāskararāya explains TS according to her three functions: theological, cosmological and soteriological. Brooks explains how, for Bhāskararāya, divinity assumes the shape of the manifest universe. Thus, Brahman's modification is not bifurcation but a trifurcation where Śakti appears as will (*icchā*), action (*kriyā*), and knowledge (*jñāna*). Brooks says, "Brahman's incipient devolution from primordial unity is most appropriately called by the feminine gender term the "Three Cities," or Tripurā, the name of the goddess."⁹⁰ Brooks says Bhāskararāya's commentary offers several different types of explanations for divinity's expansion into a triadic form, one of them being that "the goddess is called Tripurā because she is the measurer, the measuring and the thing measured, or more directly, the knower, the process of knowing, and the object of knowledge."⁹¹

Brooks describes the nature of the goddess TS as benign and she is often portrayed as a caring mother or a devoted wife. Brooks says, "Tripurā, for all her encompassing power and physical beauty, is a figure that instills feelings of security and stability rather than danger and enticement. Unlike the terrifying Kālī, who is sometimes pictured dancing on the corpse of her husband, Tripurā is a goddess whose inherent Śakti is under control. Submissive in her role as wife to

⁹⁰ Douglas Renfrew Brooks, *The Secret of the Three Cities: An Introduction to Hindu Śākta Tantrism*, University of Chicago, Chicago, 1990, pp 97

⁹¹ *ibid.*

Śiva, she is capable of righteous anger in her role as defensive and nurturing mother. Her mythological character rarely deviates from the picture of a less than perfectly ideal embodiment of conventional values. Lalitā Tripurāsundarī is the Queen of the Universe; she is a loving and stern mother to her children and the beautiful and cooperative wife of her husband. In short, she is the archetypal sumangalī: the wholly dharmic embodiment of the feminine. Yet we should not see her as submissive or weak; rather, as the supreme Śakti, she is life-giving and capable of expressions of anger and power.”⁹² TS’s common anthropomorphic image is that of the divine queen of kings (*Rājarājeśvarī*) where she is depicted sitting on a lion’s throne like a great queen, shining like a thousand suns, and Śiva, the lord of desire is said to be drowned in the fullness of her smile.

As for her cosmological functions, Brooks holds that TS is said to be the very shape of the manifest universe as it originally unfolds in the form of the *Śrīcakra*. The *Śrīcakra*, according to Bhāskararāya, is essentially triadic. Brooks discusses Bhāskararāya’s comments on the *Śrīcakra*: “It is a representation of the emergence of the One into Three. The yantra is not only a representation of the universe as it has emerged from its divine source, it is the very macrocosmic form of the universe. On the microcosmic level, the śrīcakra is paralleled in the human form, which is also understood as triadic in all its essential aspects. The yantra’s triangles, lines, and lotus petals are identified ritually with various parts of the physical body

⁹² Douglas Renfrew Brooks, *The Secret of the Three Cities: An Introduction to Hindu Śakta Tantrism*, University of Chicago, Chicago, 1990. pp 98.

which, in turn, are correlated to mantras. Just as the goddess is macrocosmically a three fold physical (sthūla) subtle (sūkṣma), and transcendent (parā) form corresponding to her physical, mantric, and yantric manifestations, so microcosmically she is threefold as will, action, and knowledge.”⁹³

Brooks also looks at how Tripurā is interpreted with reference to her soteriological functions. This involves the understanding of concepts such as *ātman* and *karma*, among others. Her *mantra* remains an important symbol or a living embodiment of the ultimate truth; it is a subtle and powerful emanation of the goddess. Liberation is understood as three levels of attainment, as suggested by the name of the goddess.

Tripura-sundarī in the KP

Now we shall look at the SKP and what it has to say about the goddess Tripura-sundarī.

The forms of the goddess as mentioned in SKP are five in number – “O best of men Vetāla and Bhairava! Listen to the five forms of the goddess, which are forever

⁹³ Douglas Renfrew Brooks, *The Secret of the Three Cities: An Introduction to Hindu Śākta Tantrism*. University of Chicago, Chicago, 1990. pp 103.

even secret to gods. These are Kāmākhyā, Tripurā, Kāmeśvari (Śiva), Śāradā and Mahālokā, who are endowed with the quality of assuming shape at will.”⁹⁴

The text further mentions – “O father Śankara! We have listened to the series of sacred pīṭhas and also the ritual procedure of worshipping the goddess; now we desire to hear the form of her five fold images and also hear all the mantras completely, prescribed for the five images. O Vṛsadhvaja! Now tell us those mantras and tantras belonging to them.”⁹⁵

The section on the five forms of the goddess in the KP begins with the procedure of worshipping the goddess Tripurā-sundarī. The ritual is to begin the same way as the *Vaiṣṇavī-tantra-mantra*, but the procedure has special features, “different from the usual ones”⁹⁶. Offerings to her are to include water mixed with rice and white mustard seeds, flowers and sandal paste. The seat of worship is to be cleansed followed by the worship of all the deities in their respective *pīṭhas* in the middle of the *maṇḍala*. This is unique to the complex of the goddess worship as it is not a part of the *sāmānyā pūjā*; it reflects the nature and the forms of the goddess.

After the initial procedure, the *yoginīs* are to be worshipped, the *yoginīs* being the female attendants of the goddess. In Tantrism they are the attendant deities of Śakti

⁹⁴ SKP, 62.80b-82a.

⁹⁵ SKP, 62.130-131.

⁹⁶ SKP.63.5-5a.

as they preside on her behalf over various parts of the *yantra* or *maṇḍala*. The *yoginīs* are, in fact, aspects of Śakti embodying specific powers, principles, and concepts which are identified with the adept's own spiritual and material achievements. Here the numbers of *yoginīs* given are sixty four. This is the standard number and does not denote anything specific. The adept is to then worship the door-keepers of the goddess. They include- Gaṇapati, Nandin, Hanumān, Bhṛṅgī and Mahākāla and are to be worshipped at the gates of the *maṇḍala*.

The *kāma mudrā* is to be performed to turn the water in a jar into nectar. This was to be preceded by the act of expelling the ghosts. These rituals are said to be a part of the Uttaratantra. The goddess is to be bathed with honey, milk, ghee, cow's urine, cow dung mixed with water, and water with gold and gems dipped in it, among others. Now the adept is to offer water mixed with rice to the goddess on the stone near the *yoni*. The *yoni* mentioned here is the seat of the goddess Kāmākhyā. This is one of the unique features of the goddess that it is worshipped in the form of a *yoni*, the female reproductive organ. Sixteen items are mentioned to be offered to the *pīṭha*.

The goddess is to be invoked with what has been called the *kāmāgāyatṛī mantra*. This is said to be a secret and divine prayer. It begins with "O Kāmākhyā! Come here to my presence, in proper way; O Kāmini! Please be present here at the

ceremony of worship; let Kāmākhyā be our aim, our knowledge, let us meditate upon Kāmeśvarī, let the great goddess grant this and inspire us”. The adept is to then worship every part of his body to render it divine. He is also to worship the river Lauhitya, also called Brahma Putra, and the *Manobhava* stone, i.e., the *yoni* of Kāmākhyā. The text says, “A devotee should honour the deities of the seat here, he should worship the graceful goddess Kāmeśvarī, the presiding deity of the pīṭha, and the goddess Tripurā, the tutelary deity of the pīṭha, in the middle, and the goddess Śāradā and Mahotsāhā are also to be worshipped in the middle.”⁹⁷

The text mentions that whoever worships the goddess Kāmākhyā in this prescribed method inside the *Manobhava-guha*, i.e., the cave which contains the *yoni*, the seat of Kāmākhyā, attains salvation. The *yoginīs* find mention again, whose number varies from eight to sixty four. Here the sixty four *yoginīs* are mentioned by name and it is said – “A devotee should worship all these sixty four *yoginīs* inside the maṇḍala for achieving all round success in artha and kāma.”⁹⁸

The text now devotes completely to the worship of the Tripurā-sundarī form of the goddess. It says, “O dear Vetāla and Bhairava! Listen to the method of worshipping the goddess Kāmākhyā when she assumes the form of Tripurā. Her mūlamantra has been completely expounded to you earlier in proper order in Uttara-tantra. These are vāgbhabīja, Kāmabīja and also ḍāmara; this triad along with kuṇḍalinī is the

⁹⁷ SKP, 63.31b-32.

⁹⁸ SKP, 63.44.

means of achieving all forms of dharma, artha and kāma.”⁹⁹ There is some contemplation in the text about why she is referred to as Tripurā. Since Kāmākhya grants *dharma*, *artha* and *kāma* before anything else, she is called Tripurā. Besides, “Her maṇḍala is a triangle, her three cities comprises of three lines, her mantra consists of three syllables, and her shape is also three-fold, her kuṇḍaliśakti is three-fold, which is meant for creating three gods. As all these are repeatedly three (tri) she is called Tripurā.”¹⁰⁰

A triangle is to be drawn in the midst of the *maṇḍala* for the worship of the goddess. This triangle is to be regarded as the abode of the three gods: the north-east angle is to represent Śiva, the south-west angle is for Brahmā, and the north-west angle is for Viṣṇu. Some rituals that follow are common to the *sāmānyā pūjā*. Then the devotee is to perform *prāṇāyāma* by means of inhaling, holding and exhaling of his breath and he is to meditate upon the goddess in her Tripurā form. This form is described in great detail: “Tripurā resembles a heap of vermilion: she has three eyes and four arms, holds in the upper hand a bow of flowers and in the lower hand a book, and in the upper right hand five arrows of flowers and a rosary in the lower one; she stands on samapada posture on a ghost which has been laid on four other ghosts; her head is long with twisted hairs, which is decorated with the crescent moon fastened to them; she is completely naked, her waist is lovely with dividing three-fold lines, she is attractive, beautiful, in all her limbs and bedecked

⁹⁹ SKP. 63.51-52.

¹⁰⁰ SKP. 63.55b-57.

with all kinds of ornaments. She is provided with abundance of riches, and possesses all auspicious signs.”¹⁰¹

The goddess Tripurā is said to have two other images: “The goddess Tripurā in her second image resembles a bandhūka flower, is adorned with a cluster of matted hair, to which the crescent moon is studded, she possesses all the auspicious signs, and are adorned with all kinds of ornaments, she is radiant like the rising sun, rests on a couch of lotuses, adorned with a string of pearls and jewels, has fully developed and uplifted breasts, looks very smart with threefold wrinkles, she is delighted with liquors, is a source of delight to the eyes, is of white hue, she also makes the world to agitate, she has three eyes and smiles a little when the yonimudrā is exhibited to her; she is in the prime of her youth, has four arms resembling lotus stalks; in her upper left hand she wears a book , and in her right upper hand a rosary, her left lower hand is in the posture of providing security, and the right lower one in the boon-granting posture, she shines like the sun by the stream of blood that comes forth, she bears a wreath of human heads reaching unto her feet, she sits reclining on a wishing tree, resides in a garden belonging to Kandarpa, causes delight to Kāma, is auspicious and ravishing. A devotee should meditate upon the second image of Tripurā in this form.”¹⁰² In her third image, Tripurā is said to resemble a China rose. She is said to be sitting on the bosom of

¹⁰¹ SKP. 63. 86b-90.

¹⁰² SKP. 63.159-165.

Śiva, wearing a garland of human heads mixed with red lotuses, and she is said to indulge in drinking blood.

The adept is to offer sacrifices to the goddess Tripurā. Apart from sacrifices, other offerings are to be made as well. Interestingly the offerings are meant to reflect the social/economic position of the adept. The text says- “The adept should present offerings in order of the caste to which he belongs; a brāhmaṇa should offer cow’s milk, a kṣatriya melted butter made of cow’s milk, a vaiśya should offer honey and a śūdra flower juice (honey) etc.”¹⁰³ The different forms of the goddess are associated with different colours which are reflected on their face such as Maheśvari supposedly has a white face, Kāmākhyā ,a red face, and Tripurā, a yellow face.

It is interesting that the text explicitly states that the goddess can only be worshipped by a native and not a foreigner. It tones down this stricture by adding that if the foreigner wishes to propitiate the goddess, he is to do so with the help and under the instruction of a native. The text says, “If a person comes from a country other than Kāmarūpa he should worship the goddess following the instructions given by an adept of that country, and then only he shall obtain the full result.”¹⁰⁴ The text further adds, “If, however, the deity is worshipped by a person in a different way than the stated one, even by offering abundance of riches and

¹⁰³ SKP. 63.197-198.

¹⁰⁴ SKP. 64.35.

also as per prescribed rules, he shall not obtain the full result.”¹⁰⁵ These injunctions denote two things. First, this is a way of bringing in more and more local people within the ambit of brahmanism and second, this also legitimizes the method of worship of the goddess followed in the Kāmarūpa country and is made generally acceptable. It now becomes the only method of propitiating the goddess.

Besides her three images, TS is said to have three distinguished forms which are Tripura-bālā, Madhyā-Tripurā and Tripura-bhairavī. Each of them has a different set of *mantras* for their invocation and propitiation. The Tripurā-bhairavī form is considered to be the most powerful among the three. The description of Tripura-bhairavī is as follows: “The goddess Tripura-bhairavī is of reddish complexion, she wears red garments, she is with four arms, holds a rosary in her upper right hand, and the best book in her lower one, her left hands are in the posture of providing safety and granting boons; she resembles the rays of a thousand suns, she has three eyes, and her gait is like that of an elephant, she has a pair of full and uplifted breasts, is seated on the seat of a white ghost, her face is radiant with a pleasing smile, she is bedecked with all kinds of jewellery, wears a three-fold garland of human heads on her neck, heart and waist, wrapped thrice on every spot, her eyes are rolling due to taking of intoxicating drinks, both her lips are highly reddish; the goddess Tripura-bhairavī, who grants boons, is to be meditated upon this form.”¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ SKP. 64.37.

¹⁰⁶ SKP,74.93b-98a.

Needless to say that there is considerable overlap between the images of TS, described above and her three forms.

The goddess Tripurabālā is said to wear flowery arrows, a noose, a bow of flowers and is said to be standing on a corpse. The Tripurabalā form is reminiscent of goddess Soḍaśī which is said to be the other name of Tripura-sundarī. The rituals accompanied by *mantras* are supposed to be different for Tripurabālā and Tripura-bhairavī. The goddess Tripura-bhairavī is described differently. There is a change in the complexion. Now the goddess assumes a white complexion and the adept is asked to contemplate on that form.

The text enjoins upon the adept that if he sees a vessel full of liquor or a woman in red garment, or the head of a man, he should meditate upon the goddess Tripura-bhairavī. If the adept meets a number of young maidens, he should offer his salutations to them, thinking of Tripura-bhairavī. The marriage of an adept is to reflect the marriage of Bhairava with Bhairavī, and he should reflect: “I am Bhairava, the taker and I am taking Bhairavī, who is in the form of this maid.”¹⁰⁷ The father of the bride, at the time of giving his daughter in marriage, is to pronounce: “Today I am giving the goddess Tripura-bhairavī to Bhairava.”¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ SKP, 74.120b-122a.

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.*

Now we come to the method of worship of the different forms of TS. The text says, “An adept may worship Tripura-bhairavī following the heterodox method, while the goddess tripura-bālā should be worshipped by both orthodox and heterodox methods.”¹⁰⁹ The Tripura-bhairavī is thus considered to be a form outside the pale of orthodox brahmanism and should be propitiated by substances and methods considered polluting. She perhaps represents a goddess out of control who could not be rendered benign through spousification. The name Bhairavī itself suggests a violent image, reminiscent of Kālī, and the counterpart of Bhairava, the violent form of Śiva. Tripura-bālā, on the other hand, is her much milder form, which can be propitiated by both the orthodox and heterodox ways. In the context of Tripura-bhairavī, the text mentions categorically that the people of the “śūdra caste and others should offer the best quality drink to the goddess Tripurabhairavī.”¹¹⁰

The text further says, “Śmaśāna-bhairavī, Ugratāra, Ucchiṣṭa-bhairavī, Caṇḍī and Tripura-bhairavī should be worshipped by heterodox method only, the orthodox method need not be followed.”¹¹¹ However, there is some tension in the acceptance of the heterodox way of worship of the goddess. The text says that the goddess takes a portion of the sacrifice before all gods and other goddesses, and hence she is called *Vāmā*. And because she takes a share of worship offered to others, the adept never manages to clear the debt to ancestors, sages, gods and to the human race.

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.*

¹¹⁰ SKP. 74.124-125a.

¹¹¹ SKP.74.125b-126.

This is clearly contrary to the orthodox method of worship, and the text is subtly critical of vāma though it says that both the methods of worship lead to the attainment of *siddhi* for the adept. However, “If a worshipper follows only the heterodox method he excludes himself from worshipping others (except those deities meant to be worshipped by the heterodox method). The person who follows the orthodox method he affords to worship all, hence, the orthodox method is the best.”¹¹² Thus the primacy of the orthodox method is unquestionably upheld. Though the heterodox method can be followed and the text makes us familiar with its rules and procedures, it maintains that the best way to propitiate the gods and goddesses is the orthodox way.

There is a prominent erotic side to the goddess Tripurā and her three forms and that erotic nature is acquired by the adept who worships her. The text says, “He becomes happy and prosperous in this world and popular everywhere, he shines with his handsome body resembling Madana, subdues kings, kingdoms and subjects, allures all women, who are in a state of excitement on him.”¹¹³ The text further says, “Whoever worships the goddess Tripurabālā, Tripurā- madhyā, and Tripura-bhairavī with devotion, he resembles Madana in his body.”¹¹⁴ Here the adept is compared to *Kāma* or *Madana* who is said to induce love and lust in gods and goddesses. The *mantra* for the process of rendering the body parts of an adept

¹¹² SKP, 74.142b-144a.

¹¹³ SKP, 74.135b-138a.

¹¹⁴ SKP, 74.138b-139a.

divine, called *nyāsa* of Tripura-bhairavī, leads to the fulfillment of *kāma* and *artha*. *Dharma* and *mokśa* do not figure in the list of the ultimate aim of human existence. The left image of every god is discussed in detail, for example, Śiva's is Bhairava, Brahmā's is Mahāmoha, Viṣṇu's is Nārasimha, among others. These left images are said to consume meat and liquor, and enjoy sexual relations with women.

The text extolling the glory of TS says, "The group of mantras belonging to Tripurā enables an adept to obtain the supreme permanent seat of Tripurā. Brāhmanas should never impart the knowledge of these mantras. These mantras remove fear, instill the poetic skill in the mind of the adept, and enable an adept to achieve the aim of trivarga (dharma, artha, and kāma), these are of three forms tridiva (heaven) where gods reside, these are three. The knowledge of these mantras yields auspicious result; this is called the glory of Tripurā."¹¹⁵ Tripura-sundarī is also said to grant to her devotees a life free from disease and a life of a virtuous king. The text says, "These auspicious mantras possess all virtues, they always cause all demerits to disappear, remove all sins, and bring prosperity. Whoever knows all about the mantras of Tripura-bhairavī and Vaiṣṇavī, he conquers his enemies, and he remains free from disease and sorrow."¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ SKP, 75.27.

¹¹⁶ SKP, 74.236.

Conclusion

Thus, TS combines all the desirable qualities in her three forms of Tripura-bālā, Madhyā-Tripurā and Tripura-bhairavī. This captures the essence of the goddess Kāmākhyā. The negotiation between the orthodox and heterodox way of worship is also evident in her worship Tripura-bhairavī is worshipped only by the heterodox way whereas Tripurabālā is worshipped by both the orthodox and heterodox ways. Kāmākhyā is worshipped both by the left and the right-handed method of Tantric worship. These are some of the reasons why it is easy to identify TS as the essence of Kāmākhyā.

Chapter 3

Śiva, the Spouse of the Goddess.

This chapter discusses the narrator of the KP, who also happens to be the spouse of the goddess Kāmākhyā. It is crucial to discuss Śiva as there is more to him than just being the spouse of the goddess. Śaivism was the one of the dominant religions in Assam when the KP was being composed. It was the religion of the ruling dynasties of Kāmarūpa up to the twelfth century, and it bears certain resemblance to the Bodo tribal deity *Śivray-Bathau*, who is represented by a cactus shoot which resembles the lingam. The Koch kings of Western Assam trace their ancestry from Śiva, though they were devotees of goddess Kāmākhyā as well. It was the Koch king Naranārāyana who had built the present temple of Kāmākhyā in A.D.1565. So, was there a contradiction in being a devotee of the goddess as well as of Śiva at the same time? Was this acceptable to the devotees and the ritual specialists alike? This chapter seeks to address these questions.

Ludo Rocher observes in the Purāṇas that Brahmā is invariably the creator, Viṣṇu the preserver, and Śiva the destroyer. He says, "In a number of Purāṇic passages, however, a new element is added to this: the three deities are at the same time presented as manifestations of only one of them. Although this still amounts to a subordinate status for the other two, the subordination also implies an element of

inclusion and, in a way, of identity.”¹¹⁷ The KP as we shall see in this chapter accords due status to Śiva as the spouse of the goddess but it also shows great respect to Viṣṇu. This suggests a spirit of sectarian accommodation and then attempt to integrate the followers of Viṣṇu within the Śāktā-Śaiva fold.

By the time the KP became an influential text, Śiva was already an established brahmanical god in Assam. In the text, he is seen in the role of a narrator as well as the consort of the goddess and it attests the importance of Śiva. Nayanjot Lahiri, on the basis of the testimony of the inscriptions of Assam concluded that in Kāmārūpa the most significant deity was Śiva, between the fifth and the thirteenth centuries A.D. She says, "From the fifth century till the twelfth century AD the rulers of Kāmārūpa from all dynasties, begin their records with a propitiation to Śiva, known alternatively as Rudra, Śāmbhu and Śāmkara.”¹¹⁸ Lahiri adds, “Apart from the incantations addressed to Śiva at the beginning of the epigraphs, there are a large number of references to Śiva worship.”¹¹⁹ The inscriptions of Kāmārūpa betray deep familiarity with the myths related to Lord Śiva. It is also crucial to remember that there are very few references to the goddess in the inscriptional records of the period studied by Lahiri. These references, according to Lahiri, are ambiguous.

¹¹⁷ Ludo Rocher, Śiva in the Purāṇas, in Michael Meister (ed.), *Discourses on Śiva*, Vakils, Faffer and Simons, 1984, pp 208.

¹¹⁸ Nayanjot Lahiri, *Pre-Ahom Assam*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt Ltd, New Delhi, 1991, pp 124.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp 124.

K.R.Van Kooij points out that unlike the Tantras, which are written in a dialogue form between Śiva and Pārvatī, the KP has Śiva as the sole narrator. The idea perhaps was to draw upon the popularity of Śiva while maintaining the centrality of the cult of the goddess.

In the KP Śiva has been identified with the supreme *Purūṣa* with a five syllable *mantra* addressed to him. Thus, the rituals for the goddess are more technical, elaborate and detailed compared to those for Śiva. The rituals for propitiating the goddess are given more importance than her spiritual, mythic or cosmic role while Śiva is conceived more in terms of a cosmic spiritual entity.

Śiva: The Erotic Ascetic

The conception of Śiva in multiple, and at times contradictory terms is not unprecedented. C. Sivaramamurti writes, “Kālidāsa has drawn attention to impossible contradictions in the case of Śiva: he is himself the source of all wealth and confers prosperity on those who pray to him for it. yet he is clad in elephant hide, a beggar, and is the acme of asceticism, leading a whole galaxy of sages who have renounced the world. He is free from all passions, yet one half of his body is that of his beloved. He is one who, inspite of holding up the universe in its entirety (through his eight perceptible forms), is nonetheless unamazed at his own prowess,

is little aware of it. He is the one deity who is the glowing light to brighten the path of righteousness, removing all approaches to gloomy and sordid acts....”¹²⁰

According to Wendy Doniger, Śiva became a great sectarian god much after his first appearance as Rudra and his worship is characterized by many non-Vedic practices like the worship of the phallus (linga) and the cult of asceticism. Doniger says, “The earliest mythology of Rudra-Śiva reveals a process of assimilation well under way; the dark outsider is already beginning to be included in Vedic ritual, but he is still regarded warily, worshipped more in fear than in the spirit of devotion which came to characterize the later cult of Śiva.”¹²¹

Doniger as discussed the paradox of Śiva- the erotic ascetic.¹²² He stands for the conflict between spiritual aspirations and human desires. He is considered the god of excesses, both ascetic and sexual. Doniger says, “In many myths, Śiva is merely erotic or merely ascetic, as a momentary view of one phase or another. But in the great myths, transcending the limits of mundane causality, he participates in cycles of cosmic dimensions which melt into a single image as they become ever more frequent, making an almost subliminal impression in their brief symbolic appearances, creating an infinitely complex mosaic. The conflict is resolved not

¹²⁰ C. Sivaramamurti, Forms of Śiva in Sanskrit Sources. in Michael Meister (ed.), *Discourses on Śiva*. Vakils, Feffer & Simons, Bombay. 1984. pp182.

¹²¹ Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty. *Hindu Myths: A Sourcebook Translated from Sanskrit*, Baltimore, 1975. pp 116.

¹²² Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty, *Asceticism and Eroticism in the Mythology of Śiva*, OUP, Delhi, 1975. pp 318.

into a static icon but rather into the constant motion of the pendulum, whose animating force is the central paradox of the myths”¹²³

Śiva, in all his appearances in texts, is in conflict either with Brahmā, or with Kāma, and even with his wife Pārvatī. Kāma is considered his alter-ego and hence the conflict with Śiva. Doniger says that as the great ascetic Śiva is opposed to Kāma, the god of desire, but as the god represented as the linga, Śiva competes with and ‘overreaches’ Kāma¹²⁴.

Nilima Chitgopekar draws our attention to the tension in the husband-wife relations where “Pārvatī and Śiva represent the perennial tension between the ascetic ideal and the householder ideal. Śiva is the god of excesses, both ascetic and sexual. Pārvatī plays the role of the modifier. As the representation of the householder ideal, she represents the ideal of controlled sex, namely married sex which opposed to both asceticism and eroticism. This theme of conflict, tension, opposition, somewhere yields to a vision of reconciliation; interdependence and symbiotic harmony which can be seen in different images, the linga, yoni, Ardhanārīśvara and Śiva-Śakti.”¹²⁵

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Wendy Doniger, *Hindu Myths: A Sourcebook Translated from Sanskrit*, Baltimore, 1975, pp 154.

¹²⁵ Nilima Chitgopekar, *Encountering Śivaism, The Deity, The Milieu, The Entourage*, Munshiram Manoharlal, Delhi, 1998, pp 89.

I will mention below the opinion of scholars on some Śaiva myths which find mention in the KP. The following episode occurs in the KP. Here Doniger holds that in certain episodes male dominance is maintained though even in the Śākta Purāṇas the goddess is supposed to be more powerful. This is true of the Candraśekhara and Tārāvātī myth narrated in the KP. Doniger says, “After the Goddess becomes incarnate as Pārvatī to marry Śiva, she consents to descend further to be born as the princess Tārāvātī, married to king Candraśekhara, an incarnation of Śiva. She does this in part to keep an eye on Śiva (who has been cursed to become incarnate as a mortal king as a result of trying to rape the goddess Sāvitrī, whom, he lamely insists, he had mistaken for Pārvatī); in part to do him a favour (for he begs her to become Tārāvātī so that he can fulfill the second part of the curse- to beget children of a mortal woman-without being unfaithful to Pārvatī, a possibility that suddenly seems less attractive than it did when he was chasing Sāvitrī, but that Pārvatī magnanimously takes at face value); and in part to do a similar favour to two of her immortal stepchildren (Bhṛngin and Mahākāla, who had been cursed to be reborn as monkey-faced mortals in punishment for having inadvertently caught sight of Pārvatī naked; as Tārāvātī, she will fulfill their curse as well as Śiva’s, by giving birth to them.)”¹²⁶

¹²⁶ Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty, *The Shifting Balance of Power in the Marriage of Śiva and Pārvatī*, in J.S.Hawley and D.M.Wulff (ed.) *The Divine Consort, Rādhā and the Goddesses of India*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1984, pp 135.

Here Doniger says that the goddess appears on three levels as *Devī*, as *Pārvatī* and as *Tārāvātī*. As *Devī*, she is the supreme divinity above all other gods and goddesses. As *Pārvatī*, she pretends to serve her husband Śiva docilely but in reality controls the event through her higher aspect *Devī* and knows that she is *Devī*. And finally as *Tārāvātī*, who as Doniger puts it, “experiences a confrontation with *Pārvatī*. She does not communicate with *Devī* at all and immediately forgets even her identity with *Pārvatī*. *Pārvatī* is therefore the mediator between the omniscient *Devī* and the ignorant *Tārāvātī*, who have no contact with one another except through her.”¹²⁷

Again, *Tārāvātī* is cursed by a sage that she will be raped by Śiva in his terrifying form. *Pārvatī* entered the body of *Tārāvātī* and Śiva bore her two monkey-faced sons. *Tārāvātī* saw her two sons and thought that she was unfaithful to her husband Candraśekhara. It was left to sage Nārada to explain that they were incarnations of Śiva and *Pārvatī*.

Doniger says, “just as the Goddess appears on three levels, so too there are three men involved with *Tārāvātī* on the same three levels: Śiva (on *Pārvatī*’s level), Candraśekhara (on *Tārāvātī*’s level) and the sage, who, by instigating the curse that

¹²⁷ Ibid. pp 136.

is the counterpart of the curses set in motion in heaven, is the male figure in control of the event on earth, just as Devī arranges and disposes the curses from above.”¹²⁸

Another point made by Doniger is that it is dangerous for a mortal to become immortal or to have sexual contact with an immortal. She gives Tārāvati’s example who is reminded of her divine nature again and again but she chooses to be in denial. Doniger says, “On one level this is an instance of metaphysical ignorance, lack of enlightenment; but on another level it is an instance of the human preference for humanity over divinity, of the human fear of contact with the divine, the human inability to accept those moments when the dividing line between mortal and immortal dissolves or is revealed as mere illusion.”¹²⁹

Doniger points out that in traditional Sanskrit literature, with its strong philosophical emphasis, the ascetic Śiva is more prominent and Śiva is famed as the chastiser of the incestuous Brahmā. Under the influence of Kāma, Brahmā is said to have desired his daughter Sandhyā. Brahmā, on being chastised by Śiva, cursed Kāma that he would be burned by Śiva and Śiva would himself fall prey to Kāma’s arrows. Doniger says, “Kāma is sent by Brahmā to attack Śiva out of spite and in revenge against Śiva (for opposing Brahmā’s incestuous behaviour) as well

¹²⁸ Ibid, pp 137.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

as against Kāma (for causing this behaviour).”¹³⁰ She adds, “Śiva often acts in place of Brahmā, and his opposition to Brahmā is frequently based upon similarity of purpose. In many of the later myths sexual creation is personified by Kāma, and just as Brahmā opposes Kāma and curses him, so Śiva brings about the realization of that curse partly as the ascetic in opposition to Brahmā (resisting the attacks of Kāma that Brahmā has directed) and partly as an extension of Brahmā (chastising Kāma as Brahmā cursed him to be chastised). Moreover, just as Brahmā both curses Kāma and restores him, so Śiva too destroys Kāma but simultaneously participates in Kāma’s nature and increase in power. In this way, the complex identity\opposition relation between Brahmā and the various aspects of Śiva underlies much of what appears to be paradoxical in the later mythology of Śiva.”¹³¹

Śiva is the natural enemy of Kāma because he is the epitome of chastity. Because of his chastity, he is considered one man in the universe who can resist Kāma. Doniger points out that even when Śiva expresses strong anti-erotic sentiments, he is forced to acknowledge Kāma’s value, to act against his better judgement and restore Kāma to life. “In spite of his anti-erotic reputation and sentiments, Śiva ultimately acknowledges the power of Kāma. Throughout the Purāṇas, the meaning of the conquest of Kāma by Śiva is undercut by qualifying episodes and even

¹³⁰ Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty, *Asceticism and Eroticism in the Mythology of Śiva* OUP, Delhi, 1975, pp 141.

¹³¹ Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty, *Asceticism and Eroticism in the Mythology of Śiva*, OUP, Delhi, 1975, pp 140

complete reversals: Śiva burns Kāma but is nevertheless sexually aroused; Śiva burns Kāma only to revive him in a more powerful form; Śiva burns Kāma and is therefore a desirable lover; and, the final Hindu complication, Śiva is Kāma.”¹³² Doniger says that the very act of burning Kāma betrays Śiva’s vulnerability and his innately erotic nature. The burning of Kāma is seen as the last resort by a thoroughly conquered ascetic. Then again, by causing Śiva to marry her, Pārvatī aids Kāma and is responsible for his revival. Now, after his revival, Kāma enjoys power over Śiva that he did not enjoy earlier. In the next section, we shall discuss what the KP says on the role of Śiva vis-à-vis the goddess.

Myths and Rituals associated with Śiva in the KP

The SKP begins with the question how could Kālī induce love in Śiva, the greatest of all ascetics. The KP narrates the myth about Brahmā’s desire for his own daughter. He was ridiculed by Śiva for this improper desire and this led to the curse of Kāma by Brahmā. Brahmā said that Kāmā would be burned by Śiva’s fiery glance and he could regain his original shape only when Śiva takes a wife.¹³³ The problem was who shall Śiva take as his wife: “Who shall be his wife? Who is in his mind? Who is that woman, who shall cause his infatuation by distracting him from

¹³² *ibid*, pp 145

¹³³ SKP, 3.15.

the path of Yoga?”¹³⁴ This is clearly the ascetic Śiva who has everyone worried about his future bride.

The KP says, “Śambhu is indifferent to the worldly affairs and averse to taking a wife.”¹³⁵ Śiva’s nature as an ascetic is thus established. Brahmā then takes recourse to praying to the Great Goddess to be the one to enchant Śiva and compel him to marry her, completing the cosmic functions assigned to them especially the killing of Tāraka. Mahāmāyā agrees to Brahmā’s proposal and says, “Hara shall be more hen-pecked than any other living being under the influence of a woman in this world.”¹³⁶ Thus, from the beginning, an element of ambiguity was introduced into their relationship with the subversion of the image of the dominant male Śiva.

This is followed by the marriage of Satī and Śiva. The next myth is on the observance of the great sacrifice by Dakṣa and the self-immolation of Satī. This is followed by the narrative of the disruption of the sacrifice by Śiva to avenge his wife. Śiva is said to have carried Satī’s body to “the eastern countries”¹³⁷. Gods enter the Satī’s body at the time of its dismemberment by Viṣṇu and made different parts fall at various places which came to be regarded as holy. This is the myth of

¹³⁴ SKP. 4.3.

¹³⁵ SKP. 4.7

¹³⁶ SKP. 6.11

¹³⁷ SKP. 18.36

the origin of the Śākta pīthas. This also draws Kāmākhyā into the holy map of the Indian sub-continent.

The next in sequence is the re-birth of Satī as Pārvatī\Kālī to assume her role as Śiva's consort, the burning of Kāma by Śiva for distracting him during his penance, and finally the assumption of the *Ardhanārīśvara* form by Śiva. The text says, "Then Satī, the daughter of the mountain, in her deep attachment to Śambhu, had acquired half of his body with his consent."¹³⁸ "Since then Samkara had become Ardhanārīśvara. He did not take any other woman for his wife."¹³⁹

The other cycle of Śiva-Pārvatī myth that finds mention in the KP relates to Śiva's description of Pārvatī as dark which caused her immense irritation. She resolved to undergo rigorous penance to acquire a fair complexion. The myth contains descriptions of Śiva and prayers to him. Pārvatī addressed Śiva thus: "O Lord of the world, O Keśava! Thou art indeclinable, I salute thee, Thou art above pradhāna (primordial force) and puruṣa (the passive entity) and the cause of the three causes"¹⁴⁰ Pārvatī further refers to Śiva as, "Thou art Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Hara, Mahendra, Sūrya, Soma, Vāyu, Kubera, Varuna, Śamana, and the (lord of) rākṣasas; and neither Śeṣa nor anyone else is different from thee."¹⁴¹ Her prayers

¹³⁸ SKP, 45.21

¹³⁹ SKP, 45.22

¹⁴⁰ SKP, 45.85.

¹⁴¹ SKP, 45.88

pleased Śiva and he granted her a boon. Pārvatī said, “Let my body turn into golden white complexion just at this moment. O Hara! You also must not have any other woman, save me, for your wife.”¹⁴²

This brings us to the frame story of the text, i.e., the story of Bhṛṅgī and Mahākāla. Śiva, acting as the unifying factor, explains the complicated procedure to propitiate the goddess to his two sons Bhṛṅgī and Mahākāla, who were reborn as two monkey-faced human beings bearing the names Vetāla and Bhairava. Their current status was on account of a curse and it was stipulated that they would regain their original form only through the worship and appeasement of Śiva and Śiva’s consort - their mother. This is connected to the Candraśekhara and Tārāvātī myth which we have discussed in detail earlier. Both Vetāla and Bhairava are told how to propitiate Śiva, “I am telling you about that secret place openly where Hara always resides, and becomes gracious to the devotees when propitiated.”¹⁴³

The first of the secret places that is mentioned is Vārāṇasī. Then the SKP mentions a *pīṭha*, “It (Vārāṇasī) causes liberation to one only after one practiced extreme austerity for a very long time; (on the other hand) this holy pīṭha (Kāmākhyā) is credited with the capability of fulfilling the desire within a short time.”¹⁴⁴ The SKP further says, “.....that place is praised by ancient seers as the great pīṭha of

¹⁴² SKP, 45.103

¹⁴³ SKP, 51.60.

¹⁴⁴ SKP, 51.71

Kāmarūpa, the secret most of secret places, where Śamkara, in the company of Pārvaṭī, always resides.”¹⁴⁵ It is here that the KP mentions the centres of Śiva worship in eastern India: “Śamkara got established six beautiful hermitages for him in six places in different directions of that pīṭha, Kāmarūpa, such as in the north-west, in the south-west, in the midst, in the north-east, in the south-east, in the middle and in the side; in those hermitages he lives by indulging in dalliance with Pārvaṭī. There, in the middle part, lies the residence of the goddess where Śamkara is subordinate to her. Pārvaṭī the goddess resides there in the best of the mountains, called Nīla. The big hermitage of Śamkara stands on the mountain, named Nāṭakaśaila situated in the north-eastern direction, the lord always resides there, and there Pārvaṭī is subordinate to him. There are many more permanent hermitages of Hara and Gaurī, but none of the hermitages of Śamkara is equal to the above mentioned two.”¹⁴⁶ This listing of the various centres of Śiva worship is perhaps a measure of his popularity in eastern India. The goddess worshippers had to contend with the presence of Śaivism and one does feel a certain tension in terms of comparative popularity of Śiva.

The KP says, “The god Mahādeva turns gracious when he is meditated upon for a long time, but if he is propitiated by both meditation and worship he becomes

¹⁴⁵ SKP. 51.72-73.

¹⁴⁶ SKP. 51.79-83.

pleased within no time.”¹⁴⁷ The mantras to propitiate him are given in detail. They are five mantras which include *Sammada*, *sandoha*, *nāda*, *gaurava* and *prasāda*.

The text describes Śiva thus: “Mahādeva is the embodiment of light, always pure swelled by the nectar of knowledge, the embodiment of the world, the manifest one, the joy itself, exists in the form of Brahmā and Viṣṇu, he has great image, and always is in deep meditation, whose manifestation is the entire world. Who shall ever be able to describe him?”¹⁴⁸ A more iconographic description follows, “Mahādeva is with five faces with a very huge body, adorned with cluster of matted hair, charming crescent moon studded on his head, decorated with serpents, having the mark of *kāla-kūṭa* on his throat, shining with the necklace of serpent, with serpents as the tie of his crown, and as ornaments on the arms, wearing serpents all over his body, his body shinning the rays of the moon, the entire body besmeared with ashes, with three eyes on every face and thus shining with fifteen brilliant eyes, wearing elephant hide and is seated on the bull.”¹⁴⁹ Michael Meister holds that though religious experience is beyond vision, writers/devotees constantly strive to provide god with a form so as to give their devotion a visible expression.¹⁵⁰ This probably accounts for the glorious and detailed description of Śiva and particularly the goddesses in the text.

¹⁴⁷ SKP, 51.123

¹⁴⁸ SKP, 51.124-125

¹⁴⁹ SKP, 51.137b-141

¹⁵⁰ Michael Meister, “Introduction”, in Michael Meister (ed.) *Discourses on Śiva*, Vakils, Felfer and Simmons, Bombay, 1984, pp xvii.

What is interesting in the frugal ritual prescription for Śiva is that though not subordinated, he is clearly second in importance to his spouse. Here is what on being satisfied by the ritual penance performed by Vetāla and Bhairava, Śiva tells them: “O my sons! I am satisfied with you. If you desire that I should grant you your choicest boons, two of you should propitiate my consort Pārvatī, the goddess.”¹⁵¹ We see how the goddess is established as more active in the ritual context vis-à-vis Śiva. The text further says, “With a view to serve Śiva you should always take refuge in her.”¹⁵²

While offering sacrifice to the goddess, the text asks the devotee to worship the extreme form of Śiva, who is referred to as Bhairava. The text says, “Then an adept should worship the dark piṅākapaṇi (Śiva) who is in the nature of Kāla-rātri, terrible, who wears red garment, and red garlands. applies red sandal paste, and with red eyes and mouth, with a noose in his hand accompanied with his spouse drinking the blood along with raw meat.”¹⁵³ Bhairava is considered the male counter-part of the fierce goddess who is the presiding deity of the Vāmas. He is said to be the consumer of blood along with his spouse, the goddess. The adept, after offering the sacrifice to the goddess, is to meditate upon Śiva and his *guru*, the *mantra*, and the goddess, and reflect upon the oneness of all four. These are

¹⁵¹ SKP. 51.212-213a

¹⁵² SKP. 52.213b-214

¹⁵³ SKP. 55.14b-16a

considered crucial to the success of a Tantric ritual. Here, Śiva is one of the important components to be meditated upon.

Many a times the goddess has been referred to as Śivā i.e. the female counterpart of Śiva, and sometimes she is addressed as Śivadūtī because on occasions Śiva acts as the messenger of the goddess.¹⁵⁴ The importance of being the goddess's husband is also repeatedly asserted.

While working out the complex relationship between the goddess and her spouse, the KP, however, establishes the supremacy of Śiva over the other male gods. It says that when the other important male gods such as Brahmā and Viṣṇu are to be worshipped, Śiva is to be accorded prime importance. Śiva should be considered the first one among them who is to be worshipped.¹⁵⁵

Conclusion

The goddess evidently shares a very difficult relationship with her spouse Śiva. They, to begin with, represent the two poles of the spectrum. Śiva representing the ascetic ideal and the goddess representing the householder ideal. They are brought together to fulfill larger cosmic roles assigned to them.

¹⁵⁴ SKP, 61.104-108; SKP,80:27b-28

¹⁵⁵ SKP, 86.82-83

In the KP, Śiva plays spouse to the goddess Kāmākhya. He was already popular in north-east India. In the text, a number of hermitages\places of worship of Śiva have been mentioned. This attests to the importance of Śaiva worship in the eastern part of the sub-continent. This suggests that goddess worship had to contend with the presence of Śaiva worship and hence their union was imperative.

As far as the role of Śiva vis-à-vis the goddess is concerned, he is rendered almost benign by the attribution of cosmic functions for most part in the KP. He is seen as the *Puruṣa* of the *Samkhya* ideal of *Puruṣa* and *Prakṛti*. The goddess, on the other hand, has many other dimensions to her role. But if one does a comparison of sorts, Śiva is seen as an indifferent high-god in relation to the most hyperactive goddess.

However, the goddess also draws a lot by being the consort of Śiva. She draws on his popularity to widen her reach among the people of all social groups. She is also defined by her association with Śiva. Wendy Doniger puts it: “The positive effect of the goddess upon Śiva is made explicit by the tantric texts, which point out that she is the vowel “I” that turns a corpse (śava) into a god (Śiva).”¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁶ Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty, Śiva Erect and Supine. in Michael Meister (ed.), *Discourses on Śiva*, Vakils, Feffer & Simons, Bombay, 1984, pp 294.

Chapter 4

The Assamese Kālikā Purāṇas

My search for Assamese KPs yielded satisfactory results. I found three versions of the KP in Assamese. The find places of the manuscripts turned out to be crucial for my purpose. Two of them were in the manuscript form, i.e., unpublished, and one was a published and edited text. One of the manuscript versions was from the Dihing *Satra* of North Guwahati and the other one was from Sapaha *Satra* of Titabor. They both were preserved at the Narayani Handique Historical Institute, Guwahati.

The important point to note is that both these manuscripts have been found in the *Satras*, the monasteries and bastion of the Vaiṣṇava reform movement initiated by Śankardeva. Śankardeva was the founder of the Neo-Vaiṣṇavite movement in Assam. *Satras* or Vaiṣṇava monasteries were set up following the popularity of the movement and these had set in motion a new direction in the socio-cultural and intellectual life of Assam. The Śankaris, the name by which the followers of Śankardeva are locally known, were strongly opposed to Śaktism but they studied their scriptures and thus preserved the manuscripts. Śankardeva is known to have rewritten many religious scriptures extolling the virtues of devotion to Kṛṣṇa and this led to the creation of a corpus of vernacular literature in Assam. In the *Satras* too, the disciples of Śankardeva took to writing scriptures, chronicles and

biographies, which not only formed a new branch of Assamese literature but also provided insights into the socio-economic history of the region. Thus, they engaged with other sectarian groups, influenced each other and preserved their scriptures. This highlights the complex relationship between the sectarian groups in Assam and the fluidity of their boundaries.

S.L. Baruah holds that the Assamese people were oblivious of the sharp sectarian and cultural divides that existed elsewhere in India. She writes: “Assamese people are very liberal in their religious outlook and a sharp distinction amongst the followers of these cults is not discernible. Vaisnavas offering homage to Śiva and Śakti, and Saivites or Saktas holding or taking part in the Nama-prasangas (recital of prayer songs by the Vaisnavas) is a common feature in Assam.”¹⁵⁷

In the inscriptional records of Assam, as I have mentioned in the previous chapter, Śiva stood out as the dominant god between the third and the fifteenth centuries AD. The evolution of Viṣṇu, from a comparatively insignificant position to a dominant figure is of extreme significance in the light of the subsequent religious trends in Assam. This was aided by Śankardeva, the sixteenth century neo-Vaiṣṇava apostle of Assam, who popularized the worship of Viṣṇu through the propagation of the simple method of *Namasamkirtana*.

¹⁵⁷ S.L.Baruah, *A Comprehensive History of Assam*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publication Pvt. Ltd., Delhi, 1985, pp 11.

The three Assamese texts of the KP describe the union of Śiva and Pārvatī, i.e., Hara and Gaurī. The edited KP has the title ‘Kālikā Purāṇa (The marriage of Hara and Gaurī).’ While the SKP is a large text containing 90 chapters, this is a relatively small text consisting of twelve chapters only. Why did the Assamese version choose to reproduce the marriage of Śiva-Pārvatī episode only? In the SKP the sages expressed happiness on hearing the story of the union of Hara and Gaurī which is said to yield merit. The text says, “O Brāhman! You have narrated the story of the union of Kāli with Hara, which is wonderful, virtuous and always pleasing to the ears.”¹⁵⁸ The Assamese manuscript also mentions the same (from now on I shall refer to the critically edited AKP). Describing the text, S.N.Sarma writes, “The anonymous poet of Kālikā Purāṇa, a small narrative kāvya dealing with the marriage of Śiva and Pārvatī, composed in the eighteenth century, elaborately describes the marriage ceremony with popular local practices of Assam.”¹⁵⁹ K.R.Van Kooij mentions, “A Vāma devotee has to bear in mind that when he marries a young woman, this marriage should be a replica of the divine marriage of Śiva and Pārvatī.”¹⁶⁰ Interestingly all the Ahom coins right from Gadadhara Singha bear the legend of Hara-Gaurī¹⁶¹.

¹⁵⁸ SKP, 45.1

¹⁵⁹ *ibid*, pp 227

¹⁶⁰ K.R.Van Kooij. *The Worship of the Goddess According to Kālikā Purāṇa*, Leiden, E.J.Brill, pp 29.

¹⁶¹ S.N.Sarma. *A Socio-economic and Cultural History of Medieval Assam (1200-1800)*. Guwahati. 1989. pp 194

However, the Assamese KP is not without similarities with the Sanskrit one. Some features of the AKP also stand out in stark difference to the SKP. We shall see what these similarities and dissimilarities are and what they tell us about the culture of the region and the historical processes at work. It would be worthwhile to study the reason and motive behind the rewriting of the KP in Assamese and their location in Vaiṣṇava centres of learning.

The three Assamese texts of KP are different from each other in terms of language. The two unpublished ones are written in somewhat archaic Assamese, whereas the edited, published one is more refined. It is in verse form, more like a narrative poem, and has been critically edited by Dr. Nabin Chandra Sarma. However, the names of the author\authors are unknown. I shall look at their content and compare these with the SKP.

The AKP begins with the myth of Tāraka, i.e., the demon who terrorized the gods and could only be killed by the son of Śiva. This explains why an ascetic like Śiva agreed to marry. Initially Śiva refused to marry, stating that he was poor. This perhaps points to the tension between the householder ideal and the ascetic ideal. But soon enough, he agreed to marry a suitable bride, “beautiful and chaste”. This is in complete contrast with the SKP where Śiva remained reluctant till the end.

The marriage was arranged with Pārvatī, the daughter of Himavat\Himavanta and Menakā, who aggressively disapproved of the union. Here, Pārvatī does not have to go through the rigours of penance to propitiate and please Śiva to take her as his wife, as in the SKP. Menakā refuses to allow her daughter to marry Śiva, who she refers to as a “hermit” and criticizes him for being poor. She derides Śiva as being the owner of only one ox without any other possession to call his own.

However, the wedding was arranged and Śiva sent his attendants to go to Himavat for the completion of the traditional rituals such as the offering of betel-nuts. This is clearly an Assamese ritual. The wedding day was graced by all gods. Viṣṇu, Brahmā and others were present for the festivities which went on for ten long days. This again is a reflection of local Assamese customs where traditionally the marriage festivities last for ten days.

The received gifts by Śiva at the wedding makes an interesting reading. His father-in-law presented him with money in thousands, horses, elephants, and male and female servants. Viṣṇu, Indra and Brahmā presented him with crores of gold coins. The description of the gifts presented is quite elaborate and detailed. Śiva could not have remained poor any more. When he has to leave with his newly wedded wife at the end of the ritual of *Aṭh-mangala*, i.e., the eight day, Himavat again offered him riches. Interestingly, Śiva refused to accept these gifts and left these with Himavat.

This is a clear reflection of the Assamese society where dowry is usually not accepted. The AKP clearly acquires traditional Assamese aversion to dowry.

The text ends with the chanting of the names of Śiva and Kṛṣṇa and the ultimate verse says, “At the end, let us all recite the names of Kṛṣṇa.” This is perhaps due to their association with the Vaiṣṇava monasteries, where the texts were preserved and perhaps rewritten.

Though the AKP does not contain explicit reference to have tantric rituals, the union of Śiva and Pārvatī is a clear indicator of Tantric influence in the region. Tantrism eulogizes the union of Śiva and Pārvatī, where the creative powers of the goddess are celebrated. This may partly explain the choice of this particular episode from the SKP for reproduction in vernacular.

Many important writers of Assam belonging to the fifteenth-sixteenth centuries wrote about the marriage of Śiva and Pārvatī. Mankara (1496-1533) was a well known poet of the region. Hem Barua comments: “The secret marriage of Hara and Gaurī is an episode of great erotic possibilities to catch the popular imagination at its riotous best and Mankara has made full use of it.”¹⁶² B.K. Barua is also of the opinion that there is a large corpus of narrative poems of the sixteenth century that

¹⁶² *ibid*, pp 51.

describe in detail the creation myth, i.e., the popular story of the marriage between Hara and Gaurī.¹⁶³ This must have captured the popular imagination of writers and common people.

Let us get back to the find spots of the Assamese texts. As I had mentioned earlier the texts were found in the *Satras*, the institution of Vaiṣṇava learning which prides itself on its complete opposition to the ritual riddled and brāhmaṇa dominated Śākta religion. The fact that the Śākta Purāṇas are found in the *Satras*, where these are critically studied and eventually preserved, point to a complex socio-religious culture. In the process, the texts were perhaps altered too, as many texts of the brahmanical religion were translated into vernacular in these institutions. It would be impossible not to incorporate their beliefs in the texts thus translated.

Śankaradeva, the founder of Neo-Vaiṣṇavism in eastern India and the *satra*, was himself from a family of Śiva and Śakti worshippers. Maheswar Neog says about the SKP, “It is probable that the purāṇa (actually a upapurāṇa or tantra) was written before 1200, that is by the end of the period of copper plate inscriptions of the Kāmarūpa kings. The writing of this purāṇa thus preceded the age of Śankaradeva by a lapse of centuries, although many of the forms of worship, especially those relating to the goddess, Kāmākhyā, the chief centre of interest in the work, and enshrined on the Nīlācala hill at Gauhati, have been assiduously followed up till

¹⁶³ B.K.Barua, *Studies in Early Assamese Literature*. Guwahati. 1952.

recent times. The purāṇa was discussed in scholarly circles in Śankara's days as is evident from references to it in the guru-caritas."¹⁶⁴ He further states that the SKP finds mention in the works of Śankaradeva, his contemporaries, and his biographers.

A few crucial points emerge here which help us understand the compulsions behind the writing of the AKP. The AKP was even further localized than the SKP, which had its origin in the same region. Local customs were incorporated into the marriage rituals of a divine couple of pan-Indian reach. The marriage of Śiva and Pārvatī was important not only because of its Tantric association but also because it seemed to capture the imagination of the poets and the common people since the fifteenth century. The religious importance of the event cannot be ignored, as the marriage signifies the union of the male and female principles which is considered holy by the preachers of the brahmanical religion. Lastly, the AKP pays homage to Viṣṇu and Kṛṣṇa, which reiterates the Vaiṣṇava influence and points towards the importance of the location of these texts in the *śatras*. Thus, the differences between the sects as well as the brahmanical and indigenous religions are not particularly stark in Assam. Indeed, differences existed between the sects and consequently a degree of hostility towards each other. But they read each other's scriptures, rewrote them in their own light, and in the process preserving them for posterity.

¹⁶⁴ Maheswar Neog, *Early History of the Vaisnava Faith and Movement in Assam (Śankardeva and His times)*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, pp 38.

The summary of the AKP

(The text used here is the AKP which has been critically edited by Dr. Nabin Chandra Sarma, Professor and Head, Department of Folklore Research, Guwahati University, 1997. Prabhat Ch. Das helped me in translating this work into English. In preparing this summary I have also kept the perspective of the Sanskrit KP in mind).

The AKP begins with the Tāraka myth. Indra and the other gods and goddesses appeal to Brahmā for a saviour who would bring an end to their oppressor Tāraka. Brahmā proclaims that Tāraka has a boon by which he will die only at the hands of the son of Śīva. Śīva was an ascetic and he could not have a son unless he agreed to marry. Brahmā requested them to go to the abode of Śīva to persuade him to help the gods in this crisis.

Śīva was enjoying cannabis at his abode surrounded by his retinue. Indra and the other gods requested Śīva, who they addressed as Śūlapāni or the bearer of the trident, to protect them from the tyranny of Tāraka. Śīva expressed his amusement and told them that he could not beget a son when he was unmarried. However, he finally agreed to marry without much fuss. Here, one gets the impression that Śīva

was actually eager to marry, unlike in the SKP, where he remained reluctant but considering the cosmic requirements, had to eventually succumb.

Śiva then asked the gods to look for a suitable bride for him but imposed a condition that the bride chosen for him “must be beautiful and chaste”. Both, Śiva’s request for a bride and the search for a beautiful and chaste maiden are alien to the SKP.

The gods, in turn, requested Brahmā to look for a bride for Śiva. Brahmā then put the sage Nārada on the job of finding Śiva a suitable wife. Nārada went to the kingdom of Himālaya to ask for the hand of the daughter of the king Himavat. Nārada is seen leaving for the Himalaya singing in praise of Viṣṇu. The SKP also refers to Viṣṇu, especially the myths on his boar incarnation, his dalliance with Prithvi and the birth of a son Naraka from their union. The reference to Viṣṇu in the SKP hints at the presence of the Vaiṣṇavas in the region, and the text possibly made an attempt to integrate the followers of Viṣṇu into the cult of the goddess through the weaving of Vaiṣṇavite myths into a Śākta Purāṇa. In the case of the AKP, the mention of Viṣṇu and his epithets can be attributed to the fact of the text being reworked in the Vaiṣṇava *Satras*.

Nārada conveyed Brahmā's request to Himavat. Himavat expressed his joy at this proposal and acknowledges the unity of the trinity Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva. He added that it would be a matter of greater satisfaction if his daughter too would welcome Śiva as her husband. The SKP completely differs from the AKP at this point. The SKP presents Pārvatī as the one who was born with the knowledge of Śiva and who underwent rigorous penance to gain him as her husband. The AKP implies that Pārvatī was unaware of the cosmic role she was to fulfil as Śiva's wife and the mother of his children. Can the difference in the AKP be considered a reflection of women having a say in their marriage in late medieval Assam? Pārvatī seems to have the freedom to choose her husband.

Nārada then rushed to Pārvatī. He addressed her as the mother of the three worlds and informed her about her father's consent to Brahmā's proposal. He requested her to agree to her marriage with Śiva which according to Nārada, would make her the happiest woman in the three worlds. She said that being a daughter she was bound by what her father wished her to do and if this is what he desired, she would gladly accept Śiva as her husband.

Nārada now proceeded to meet Menakā, the wife of Himavat and the mother of Pārvatī. She was aghast at the proposal for she considered Śiva unworthy of her daughter. She lamented his lack of wealth, she described him as the owner of one ox, and generally despaired at the thought of the fate of her daughter. She was also

critical of Śiva's appearance and lifestyle. There is a long description of Śiva's poverty and his habits, such as addiction to cannabis. Menakā went on to say that her daughter would never forgive her if she consented to this marriage. In short, Menakā was determined to stop the union of Śiva and Pārvatī. However, her husband Himavat consoled her and told her about Śiva's status as the lord of the universe and how it was their good fortune to have him as their son-in-law. He requested her not to oppose what was destined for them and accept Śiva for the good of all, and especially for their future. This seems to represent the conventional marriage negotiations in traditional societies where both the wealth and status of both parties are crucial to a marriage. In the SKP version, there was no scope for this discussion.

Nārada returned triumphantly after accomplishing the task assigned to him by Brahmā. Śiva expressed happiness on being told about his marriage to Pārvatī. Nārada described Pārvatī to Śiva as the most beautiful and charming maiden in the three worlds. Nārada, however, requested Śiva to meet Pārvatī before he decided to marry her.

Śiva then asked his attendants Nandi and Bhrngī, who are mentioned in the SKP as Śiva's sons to go to Himavat to complete the traditional rituals, such as the offering of betel-nut to the father of the bride and her family. This offering was symbolic of the groom's acceptance of marriage and represented the traditional Assamese way

of clinching the matrimonial deal. However, Menakā continued to disapprove of Śiva and questioned how an ascetic could be considered worthy of marriage to her daughter. She criticized her husband for being blind to Śiva's faults and his blatant disregard for Śiva's unworthiness to be a husband to their daughter. She resolved to prevent the wedding and threatened that if her husband chose to go ahead with it, she would commit suicide. She said that her daughter's life was dearer to her than her own and that she wanted to spare her daughter the shock which she would receive on discovering Śiva's addiction to cannabis. Himavat consoled her again by appraising her about Śiva's true identity as the ultimate reality. She remained unconvinced but said that if Śiva came personally and the relatives approved of him, she would agree to the match. Śiva's messengers were informed about Menakā's decision and they duly conveyed the same to Śiva.

Śiva made arrangements to leave for the kingdom of Himālaya. He smeared himself with ashes, wore his snakes around himself, and left riding an ox. All the gods and goddesses arrived to witness the union of Śiva and Pārvatī.

The text goes on to say that one who hears the auspicious story of the marriage of Śiva and Pārvatī, attains one's desires. It attests the oneness of *Hari* and *Hara* and declares that the names of both Śiva and Rāma are to be chanted to get rid of one's sins. As I have mentioned earlier, the sectarian boundaries in Assam were not well-

marked. Also, we have to remember that the AKP might have been rewritten in the *Satras*.

Śiva reached Himavat's kingdom with his large retinue. Lakhs of divine personalities came to grace the occasion. Viṣṇu arrived with his attendants. Śiva welcomed Viṣṇu and everyone paid respect to him. Both the SKP and the AKP mention Viṣṇu and attest the presence of his followers in large numbers.

The wedding took place over ten days. There were great festivities at the wedding with sumptuous food for all. Himavat offered his daughter to Śiva along with thousands of rupees, horses, elephants, and servants. Viṣṇu, Brahmā and the other gods presented Śiva with thousands of rupees as well. It seems, Śiva and his bride did not have to live in penury again. This probably set Menakā's mind at rest. AKP has attested, time and again, the importance of wealth and it is interesting how finally Śiva came to acquire it after repeated references to his poverty by Menakā.

Śiva remained at his in-laws till the completion of all rituals including the ceremony on the eight day when the bride and the groom dine publicly. These ceremonies are typically Assamese and show how the AKP replicates the Assamese marriage ceremony for Śiva and Pārvatī. Interestingly, when Śiva was ready to take his wife back with him, Himavat offered him horses, elephants and servants which Śiva refused. This is in contrast to what had happened during the wedding

ceremony when Śiva received gifts and wealth from Himavat and the other gods. The text does not mention whether he accepted those or not.

The text ends here with the chanting of the names of Śiva and Pārvatī. It reiterates that there is no difference between Hara and Hari and that the names of Śiva and Kṛṣṇa are to be recalled together. The ultimate verse says that in the end the names of Kṛṣṇa are to be recited. This ending unquestionably puts the stamp of the *śāstras* on the text. The central theme of the SKP is propitiation of the goddess. In the AKP the presence of the goddess is marginal and unlike in the SKP, there are no elaborate prayers to the goddess.

Conclusion

We are a land of three hundred and thirty million gods and goddesses.¹⁶⁵ Interestingly, each goddess has her own historical, social and regional factors which gave rise to their cults or forms, as the case may be. Some are drawn into the brahmanical tradition by the historical process of continuous accretion, acculturation and accommodation. My endeavour was to do a preliminary study of one such goddess: the goddess Kāmākhyā of Assam. The aim of the study was to locate the goddess Kāmākhyā in the larger cultural complex of Assam. It was an attempt to study the history of the formation of the cult and understand the historical processes behind rise of the goddess. My entry point into the antecedents of the goddess was the Kālikā Purāṇa, a text that has been located in Assam and its neighbouring areas. The KP is an Upapurāṇa which is the product of an interaction between the brahmanical and the local traditions, particularly in the peripheral areas, such as the north east. The brāhmaṇas had to extend their social base by bringing into their fold people who followed other mostly indigenous tribal religious systems. They had to incorporate local beliefs and methods of worship for people to be able to relate to them. I have done a comparison between the SKP and the AKPs to get an overview of the long term historical process even though the AKPs have very little to do with the formation of the cult of Kāmākhyā. What the

¹⁶⁵ Nilima Chitgopekar. (ed.) *Invoking Goddesses. Gender Politics in Indian Religion*, Har-Anand Publications, 2002. pp 11.

AKPs do point to is the fluidity of the religious groups and the porous sectarian boundaries in Assam as late as the eighteenth century.

To begin with, I have looked in detail at the ritual aspects of the goddess. This forms an important part of the cult. It is of even greater significance in relation to the goddess Kāmākhyā. The goddess rituals can be categorized into two distinct divisions and requires the use of two methods of propitiation. One is the *sāmānyā pūja* and the other is the *vāmbhāva*. The *sāmānyā pūja* is to accord the goddess brahmanical acceptance as most brahmanical gods and goddesses are worshipped in accordance with this widely accepted ritual mode. The *vāmbhāva* is a pure Tantric method of worship using elements often considered polluting by brahmanism. These include liquor, meat, and sexual intercourse. This method found grudging acceptance in the KP in that the rituals of the *vāmbhāva* are recommended with qualifications for the brahmanical worship in the SKP.

Brahmanism had to contend with the centrality of the goddess and Tantric worship mostly in the areas peripheral to the Indo-Gangetic valley, the traditional stronghold of brahmanism. Their popularity made it necessary to assimilate the two into the brahmanical tradition. The goddesses were easier to accommodate, and they eventually became one of the most important symbols of brahmanical assimilation. The Tantric practices were often so blatantly anti-brahmanical that it was far more difficult to assimilate these, and it is a measure of their popularity in Assam that

even the extreme *vāma* form was recommended by the Purāṇa with necessary reservations.

My second chapter deals with the Tripura-sundarī, considered the essence of Kāmākhyā. Kāmākhyā's strong association with Kālī connects her to the form of Tripura-sundarī. The TS assimilates three distinct forms, i.e., Tripura-bālā, Tripura-Madhyā, and Tripura-bhairavī. Each of them has distinct qualities, specific mantras and methods of worship. The Tripura-bhairavī is the fierce one, who is strictly to be worshipped in accordance with the *vāmathāva* method. The dual way of approaching the worship of TS is similar to that of Kāmākhyā. These are some of the reasons for the close association of Kāmākhyā with TS.

In my third chapter, I discuss the spouse of the goddess, who also happens to be the narrator of the KP, i.e., Śiva. I have analysed the different aspects of his personality, as reflected in his personality. He has been variously described as the erotic ascetic and reluctant householder. There is a clear dichotomy in his nature where the ascetic ideal clashes with the householder ideal. Śiva's marriage with Pārvatī, despite his reluctance, ends in a lasting companionship of cosmic significance. This union is eulogized by the brahmanical tradition as well as the Tantric one. Brahmanical sanction is acquired by placing Śiva and Pārvatī as the Samkhya ideal of Puruṣa and Prakṛtī. At times Śiva emerges as the dominant god in

the SKP and sometimes he becomes second in importance to the goddess. Śiva complements the goddess's role as the mother of the cosmos.

In my fourth chapter, I look at the three Assamese KPs, two of which have been found from *Satras*, the vaiṣṇava monasteries of Assam. Śankaradeva, the founder of the neo-vaiṣṇavite movement in Assam and his disciples, especially Mādhavadeva were critical of Śāktism and propounded devotion to Kṛṣṇa. This form of worship, primarily based on the chanting of the name of the beloved god had no idols and temples. There were only congregational prayer halls where devotional songs were sung in praise of god. The location of the AKPs in the *Satras* highlight a complex relationship between sectarian affiliations in Assam. The sectarian boundaries were evidently fluid.

The Assamese KPs reproduce only a part of the mythology contained in the SKP, i.e., the union of Śiva and Pārvatī. What is crucial is the difference that emerges between the SKP and the AKPs. Some of the most important difference for our purpose is greater coexistence and social groups and sects and the unmistakable presence of Assamese rituals in the AKPs.

Thus I have tried to study the cult formation of Kāmākhyā and its contribution to the distinct regional tradition of Assam. This is a part of a larger project which I will undertake in my PhD. The project proposes to document the daily rituals of

Kāmākhyā, the economic basis of the cult, the official history of the temple and the position and role of the pandas (preists) and the devotees in the proliferation and sustenance of the cult. The aim is to study the cult based on sources which have never been explored before, such as temple records, inscriptions within the temple precincts and oral evidence from pandas and devotees. This dissertation was an attempt to trace the prehistory of Kāmākhyā from a known Purāṇa and one of its obscure variants.

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