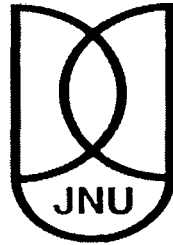


DEVIANT IMAGES OF GODDESSES
THE CULT OF LAJJĀ GAURĪ AND RENUKĀ

Dissertation Submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University in
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the
degree of

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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DECLARATION

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled "*DEVIANT IMAGES OF GODDESSES: THE CULT OF LAJĀ GAURĪ AND REṆUKĀ*" submitted by Miss Divya Khattar in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy** of this University has not been submitted for the award of any degree of this or any other university and is my own work.

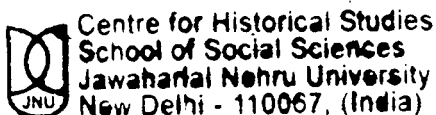
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CERTIFICATE

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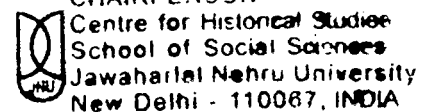
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This study has stemmed from an interest in the Goddesses tradition. It attempts to look at two *deviant* images of goddesses, namely Lajjā Gaurī and Reṇukā.

Incorrectly seen and misunderstood as a ‘self-displaying’ woman, a ‘shameless woman’, a ‘nude goddess’, this goddess now popularly known as Lajjā Gaurī is a fertility goddess. In a tradition, where goddesses neither in iconographic representations, nor in textual traditions, are never depicted pregnant nor physically giving birth, and if they do give birth, it takes place through immaculate conception (perhaps because the physical act of giving birth is considered polluting, and thereby relegated to humans), this *deviant* image of a goddess is shown in a birth-giving posture. Not only is she in a birth-giving posture, in many of her early images, she is neither depicted with a head nor arms, or for that matter a body, for her creative powers lie in her *deviant* posture, in her ability to bless those who worship her with similar creative powers. Further, even when a body and hands are added to her birth-giving posture, significantly not multiple hands, but only two hands are added, which when held attributes do not have a bow, arrows, mace, disc, or veena, but lotuses. Also, it is noteworthy that the majority of her images do not have a head. A head is seen as a marker of identity. The lack of it renders one anonymous. However, the lack of a head in this goddess’s image does not render her as an anonymous deity, for her identity comes from her birth-giving posture. Thus, even when a head is added to her image, she doesn’t lose her basic identity, for her unique posture continues to be sculpted in the same way. She is, also, depicted as naked, but is generally seen as wearing jewellery.

The second image taken up in my dissertation is the many representations of Reṇukā. In a tradition, where chastity is upheld as the highest virtue for a married woman or a spouse goddess, where a pativrata is expected to be

devoted to her husband in speech, body and mind, Reṇukā is the *deviant* wife. The Mahābhārata and some of the Purāṇas portray her as the wife, who *deviated* from the path of a pativrata, and was thereby punished for the same. The ‘popular’ traditions, on the other hand, view her as the goddess, though significantly without deleting or ignoring her mythology, where she is the *deviant* wife. Further, some local goddesses in South India used this same mythology to associate themselves to Reṇukā, and to the Brahmanical religion.

~

The existing **readings** on Lajjā Gaurī can be categorized into three kinds of works. The first kind of works included the earliest articles written on Lajjā Gaurī. These articles attempted to understand this *deviant* image and trace its origin. They discussed her identity analyzing whether to identify her as a ‘Shameless Woman’ or a ‘Nude Goddess’. They clubbed her unique images with other female images in the Indian subcontinent, where the female’s pudendum could be seen to discuss the similarities and differences between these figures, and thereby identify the image and understand its function. These articles included: Sankalia’s *The Nude Goddess or “Shameless Woman” in Western Asia, India and South-Eastern Asia*. Vishnu Sisodia’s *A Jain Goddess from Rajasthan*. Thomas Donaldson’s *Propitious-Aprotropaic Eroticism in the Art of Orissa*.

Sankalia was one of the first scholars to acknowledge the image of Lajjā Gaurī.¹ He classified it as belonging to the category of personified yoni or Baubo, since he believed that the entire emphasis of Lajjā Gaurī figures was on the pudenda, which was displayed through the legs that were spread apart. Her figures, he argued, were influenced from the Roman west and the Baubo figures from Egypt. Sankalia’s categorization of Lajjā Gaurī figures is problematic for the emphasis and intent of Baubo and Lajjā Gaurī figures are different. Baubo is

¹ Sankalia, ‘The Nude Goddess or “Shameless Woman” in Western Asia, India and South-Eastern Asia’

represented either in a pose with legs spread as if seated in a saddle, with her hands holding up food, or seated with legs spread and her hands spreading her genitals². Lajjā Gaurī, on the other hand, is in a birth giving posture. His argument on the foreign influence of Lajjā Gaurī figures is, also, problematic, for in terms of style, technique and ornaments, she clearly seems to have an indigenous origin. Also, her earliest form incorporates a basic Indian fortune symbol, the pot.³

Vishnu Sisodia, while comparing an image of Trisālā, mother of last Tirthaṅkara, with the figure of Lajjā Gaurī, on the basis of the posture of their legs, contested the argument of Codrington, Sankalia and others and argued for an indigenous origin of Lajjā Gaurī.⁴ While the comparison between the two images is clearly unacceptable, for the nature of the two images and the goddesses represented in them is unmistakably different, one can certainly accept his argument for an indigenous origin. However, the premise on which he based his argument is problematic. He traced the origin of Lajjā Gaurī to the borrowing of nude goddesses, mentioned in the Harivamśa III and worshipped by the “primitive tribes”, by “Hindu” iconography. It is difficult to trace the origin of Lajjā Gaurī to nude goddesses, for her distinguishing characteristic is not here nudeness, but her birth giving posture. Further, his use of the categories and division of “tribal” and “Hindu” religion before the first century CE, and the argument of the borrowing of iconography from the former by the latter are problematic.

Thomas Donaldson categorized Lajjā Gaurī as one of the many Indian representations of the ‘displayed female’.⁵ Under this category, he included different kinds of female images and sculptures whose genitalia were prominently displayed. These, according to Donaldson, had an unquestionable sacral significance. They combined in themselves a dual complimentary

² Bolon Carol Radcliffe, *Forms of the Goddess Lajjā Gaurī in Indian Art*, p. 60

³ Ibid., p. 60

⁴ Sisodia Vishnu, ‘A Jain Goddess from Rajasthan’

⁵ Donaldson Thomas, ‘Propitious-Aprotropaiv Eroticism in the Art of Orissa’

symbolism of propitious and aprotropaic qualities. While one certainly can accept that Lajjā Gaurī would have been an auspicious figure, but, her function has definitely more do with her ability to bless her worshippers with fertility. Also, putting together different types of female figures, whose genitals are prominently displayed, is problematic, because the intent of all the figures is different. Last, Donaldson's argument is applicable only to the anthropomorphic figures of Lajjā Gaurī, and not to the aniconic ones.

The second kind of works included the first major book written on Lajjā Gaurī, which is Dhere's *Lajjā Gaurī*. It established the identity of Lajjā Gaurī as a fertility goddess and her indigenous origin. Other works followed from it. They accepted the basic premise of Dhere's work, reinforced Lajjā Gaurī's fertility identity using other premises; some continued to debate about her origin, while others attempted to trace the influences and sources of her indigenous origin, and development of her iconography; some brought out the possibility of other functions of Lajjā Gaurī; others identified her in the textual tradition to give her a definite name and identity; and yet others attempted to contextualize her. These works include: R.C.Dhere's book *Lajjā Gaurī*, M K Dhavalikar's article *Lajjāgaurī*, Margabandh's article *Early Historic Terracottas from Gujarat-A Study*, Stella Kramrisch's article *An Image of Aditi-Uttānapada*, J N Tiwari's work *Goddess Cults in Ancient India*, Nagaswamy's article *From Aditi to Kundalini*, Amarendra Nath's article *Lajjā Gaurī and her possible Genesis*, TVG Sastry's article *Lajjā Gaurī from Alampur and Its Symbolism*, Vasant Shinde's article *The Earliest Temple of Lajjā Gaurī? The Recent Evidence from Padri in Gujarat*.

RC Dhere's work is a historical, sociological and linguistic study centered on the cult of Lajjā Gaurī especially in the area of Maharashtra and its adjoining states in the south, but also extends to include other village gods and goddesses in the same area, all of which contribute to understand the goddess better.⁶ Dhere's

⁶ Dhere R.C., *Lajjāgaurī*

main contribution lies in firmly establishing the fertility identity of this goddess. He is the only scholar yet who has pointed out to the possibility of Śakti pīṭhas dedicated to Lajjā Gaurī in Mahākūta and Ālampur, and had also argued for the association of her cult with Śakta Tantric tradition, an association which has been explored by only a few later scholars. He was also the first scholar to argue for Lajjā Gaurī's association with Śaivism, an argument firmly established by later scholars. While he brought forth these significant arguments regarding the goddess, he left the reasons for her origin unanswered, especially in the area of Maharashtra. Further, throughout his work, he has brought forth the association between Lajjā Gaurī and other fertility goddesses found in the abovementioned region such as Reṇukā, Yellammā, Bhūdevī, on linguistic basis. However, while bringing out the similarities, he blurred the distinctions between them, which are clearly visible in their iconography, mythology, method of worship and type of worshippers, for all the goddesses are distinct cults. He, also, pointed out that most of the worshippers of these fertility cults belong to the Harijan caste, though he did not give the reason for the same. In the end, he discussed the development of Lajjā Gaurī's icon from an anthill. However, there seems to be no connection in either the shape or the symbolic meaning between an anthill and Lajjā Gaurī. Rather, the idea of the beginning of this image through a yoni, which is simply floated in this book, seems to be a more probable origin for Lajjā Gaurī.

M K Dhavalikar drew the possibility of the worship of Lajjā Gaurī to ward off draughts by drawing attention to Śākambharī, the goddess of vegetative fertility, who in the Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa nourishes the drought affected people with vegetation produced from her body; to the representation on a Harappan sealing from Mohenjodaro, where a female is depicted in upside down posture with legs apart and a plant issuing from her womb; and to a class of headless

figurines excavated from Inamgaon and dated to 1400-1000 BCE.⁷ While one can agree with Dhavalikar that Lajjā Gaurī would also have been worshipped to ward off draughts, for her identity as a fertility cult could have been extended to consider her as a fertility goddess of agriculture, but the premise on which he builds his argument is tenuous.

Margabandhu traced the antiquity of Lajjā Gaurī to Western source, and argued for its early origin and spread in Western India.⁸ While the argument against tracing the influence of the goddess to a Western source has already been contested above, it also needs to be pointed out that Lajjā Gaurī's images and plaques seem to have originated in the South, and later spread to Gujarat, though one will certainly agree with Margabandhu that terracotta Lajjā Gaurī images from Gujarat reflect local folk traditions, and represent her as a Mother Goddess in Śakti form.

Stella Kramrisch's contribution lies in identifying Lajjā Gaurī as the birth giving mother and a goddess, but most significantly in explaining her as a purely Indian phenomenon.⁹ She picked up two conspicuous elements of her sculpture, namely the depiction of a majestic female form in the throes of giving birth and the close association of lotus with it, to find archaeological and literary correspondences and to ascertain the meaning of the sculpture. She identified her with "Aditi Uttānapad" of the Ṛg Veda. The term *uttānapāda* was important to forge this identification. Kramrisch's attempt to trace indigenous origin of Lajjā Gaurī is certainly praiseworthy, but one cannot accept her identification with Aditi. Kramrisch draws the parallels on the basis of only the Alampur image of Lajjā Gaurī, and the Vedic word *Uttānapad*, which would no doubt appear as an accurate graphic description of our goddess, but does not warrant that she

⁷ Dhavalikar, 'Lajjāgaurī'

⁸ Margabandhu, 'Early Historic Terracottas from Gujarat-A Study'

⁹ Kramrisch Stella, 'An Image of Aditi-Uttānapada'

was called Uttānapad.¹⁰ To add to this, there is much ambiguity about precise meaning of the word Uttānapad in the lines mentioned by Kramrisch.¹¹ Last, even though Aditi continues in the Brahmanical Purāṇic mythology, there are no descriptions of her iconographic forms as an independent goddess, and there is no indication that she was ever actively worshipped in post-Vedic times.¹² In fact, the history of Aditi as a living goddess was confined to the Vedic period, and any identification with her, and even more, any attribution of a specific iconographic form to her, is purely conjectural.¹³

J N Tiwari's contribution lies in finding a literary reference for Lajjā Gaurī in the Matsya Purāṇa,¹⁴ and in pointing out to the possibility that Lajjā Gaurī might have survived in the figure of the goddess Chinnamastā-Vajrayoginī. He argued that even though the goddess Chinnamastā-Vajrayoginī has evidently a complex iconographic form made up of diverse elements, but since she is the only well-known example of a nude goddess without head, a continuity of ideas with the nude squatting goddess can be suggested.¹⁵ He reinforced this argument by pointing out that eventually Lajjā Gaurī took on a characteristically Tantric form. The possibility of Lajjā Gaurī's survival in the figure of the goddess Chinnamastā-Vajrayogi is thought provoking, but at the same time tenuous, for the latter's characteristic feature was her headlessness, and not her birth-giving posture. Also, even though majority of the Lajjā Gaurī images were headless, the later images had heads.

¹⁰ Tiwari, *Goddess Cults in Ancient India*, p. 193

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 187

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 193

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 193

¹⁴ Tiwari, *Goddess Cults in Ancient India*

This reference has been discussed later in the dissertation, under the topic *Lajjā Gaurī in Literary and Oral Traditions*.

¹⁵ Tiwari, *Goddess Cults in Ancient India*, p. 218

Amarendra Nath argued for an indigenous origin of Lajjā Gaurī tracing the influence to sprouted vases from Daimabad and Inamgaon that have the uttanāpada motif, though he believes that this issue requires further debate.¹⁶

TVG Sastry discussed the origin of the Lajjā Gaurī image as a yoni and its development into an anthropomorphic form.¹⁷ He, also, gave the reasons behind the same. He attributed the origin of the concept of Lajjā Gaurī to the mother cult. He argued that the folk belief of fear and death among the babies and mothers during delivery led to worship of the yoni. Thereafter, lower limbs, thighs and legs were added to the yoni, and this image was called the Nagna Kabandha. This development, according to Sastry, was a result of the realization that the children would make up the family and nation. Therefore, there was a need to protect, nourish and perpetuate the family traditions, in which the mother and the father played an important role. These concepts, according to Sastry, resulted in the worship of male and female principles, which are seen in the sculptures of Nagna Kabandha. The further developed images, particularly the anthropomorphic images with lotus over the neck, and lotuses in the hands, according to Sastry, were possibly worshipped to keep off famine conditions and to ensure the crops. In the absence of sources, the reasons provided for the development of stages of Lajjā Gaurī image can be taken as only speculative, and not conclusive.

Vasant Shinde has shown the probability of the existence of a Lajjā Gaurī temple in Padri.¹⁸ On the basis of Lajjā Gaurī images found in Padri, the structure where it is found and the context associated with the structure, he pointed out that this structure was perhaps a place of worship, probably a temple of Lajjā Gaurī. And if this was the case, then this is the earliest and only known evidence of Lajjā Gaurī temple in India. What is, also, noteworthy about the find is that the

¹⁶ Nath Amarendra, 'Lajjā Gaurī and her possible Genesis'

¹⁷ Sastry TVG, 'Lajjā Gaurī from Alampur and Its Symbolism'

¹⁸ Shinde Vasant, 'The Earliest Temple of Lajjā Gaurī? The Recent Evidence from Padri in Gujarat'

structure considered to be part of the temple structure is located almost in the central part of the habitational area, perhaps indicating the significance of Lajjā Gaurī as the presiding deity of the area.

The third kind of works included the second major book on Lajjā Gaurī called *Forms of the Goddess Lajjā Gaurī in Indian Art* written by Carol Radcliffe Bolon. The articles written after her work followed from it. Most of them can be seen as reiterating the same arguments though in a different language, while others supplement the information and analysis given in her work, and yet others critique it. These articles include: J P Bapat's article *The Lajjāgaurī: mother, wife or yoginī*, A.P. Jamkhedkar's article *Symbols, Images, Rituals of Mother in Vakātaka Period*, Krishna Kumar's article *The Cult of Aditi Uttanapada in Indo-Pak subcontinent: An assessment in the light of new discoveries*.

Carol Radcliffe Bolon studied around 109 Lajjā Gaurī images using an art-historical method.¹⁹ She proposed a schema of the iconographic forms of Lajjā Gaurī, did a cross-regional analysis with the help of this schema, investigated her symbolism to come to a conclusion about the meaning of the images. Her study is especially significant for addressing the nature of iconographic formation of images of a deity- the factors, contexts and contingencies that shape the metamorphosis on form and meaning of a symbolic image of a deity in Indian art. I have used her schema of the iconographic forms of Lajjā Gaurī to study the cult, and have brought out some of her significant arguments in the chapter on Lajjā Gaurī.

J P Bapat questioned Bolon's schema of the iconographic forms of Lajjā Gaurī arguing that the early aniconic images (form I) and the fully anthropomorphic images (form IV) cannot be included in Lajjā Gaurī images.²⁰ He argued that any conjecture develops only when a certain amount of verbal corpus is generated,

¹⁹ Bolon R Carol, *Forms of the Goddess Lajjā Gaurī in Indian Art*

²⁰ Bapat, 'The Lajjāgaurī: mother, wife or yoginī'

and it cannot be the other way around.²¹ Therefore, since the myths centered on Lajjā Gaurī discuss the heedlessness of the goddess, the abovementioned images were not Lajjā Gaurī images. Bapat's critique is problematic for he bases it on the myths of only two sites, whereas Lajjā Gaurī images are spread almost all over the subcontinent in different regional forms, and second her myths discuss not only the headlessness of the image, but also its posture, and it is the latter which is the characteristic feature of Lajjā Gaurī. He, also, raised the question whether her images are self-displaying, erotic or pornographic, and tried to answer the question, why Lajjā Gaurī images. Bapat argued against Lajjā Gaurī images being self-displaying or pornographic, but reasoned that she may be erotic, since eroticism is something that encourages and legitimizes sexual activity, leading to it being viewed as an essential aspect of prakṛti.²² To answer why Lajjā Gaurī images, he argued that this problem has to be understood and examined at two levels- at the level of archaeology and of interpretation. On the level of archaeology, it may be possible to study the archaeological evidence by examining the sites where the images have been found and to ascertain their period, type etc and then postulate the function that this goddess may have performed. Most of the works have been of this nature, yet owing to the lack of concrete historical evidence, no satisfactory answers have been found.²³ Second, on the level of interpretation, one can say that the sculpture itself is but a text, and as such the gaze of the beholder is important.²⁴ Further, on the level of interpretation, one can think of three possible ways of looking at the problem, which is largely socio-ideological elaboration, elaboration involving the Brāhmanas and the appropriate tradition they represent, and the tantric

²¹ Ibid., p. 90

²² Ibid., p. 91

²³ Ibid., p. 97

²⁴ Ibid., p. 97

elaboration.²⁵ He concludes by arguing that the basic dichotomy is between folk Hinduism and Hinduism of the learned.²⁶

Krishna Kumar reassessed the cult of Lajjā Gaurī in the light of new discoveries of bronze seals of Lajjā Gaurī in Kashmir Smast in North-Western Frontier Province.²⁷ As against Bolon's four-fold classification, he classified the Lajjā Gaurī images into ten development phases based on iconographic difference of the figures. He, also, pointed out that Lajjā Gaurī images have been found at Wyand (Kerala) and Garh Seoni (Chattisgarh), though he did not report these images.²⁸ With regard to the function of the images, he pointed out that the bronze seals discovered at Kashmir Smast may have been employed for producing clay sealings, which were carried as mementoes by the pilgrims visiting the Great Cave dedicated to Lajjā Gaurī, locally known as Acima. In Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kerala, Lajjā Gaurī figurines have been found in association with the megalithic burials. These figurines, according to Kumar, were probably deposited in the megalithic burials in expectation that by her blessings the soul of the deceased shall be born again in near future.²⁹ The last argument is difficult to accept for no Lajjā Gaurī images have found in association with the megalithic burial. His arguments regarding the Lajjā Gaurī images from Kashmir Smast are noteworthy, and have been brought out in the chapter on Lajjā Gaurī.

My work accepts the fertility identity of Lajjā Gaurī as established by Dhere and Bolon, and reinforces the same through her symbology, but views Lajjā Gaurī as the *deviant* image of a fertility goddess. It attempts to re-assess the images of Lajjā Gaurī through a regional analysis which takes into account their sculptural form, and spatio-temporal context to ascertain the regional patterns of her cult,

²⁵ Ibid., p. 97

²⁶ Ibid. p. 98

²⁷ Kumar Krishna, 'The Cult of Aditi Uttanapada in Indo-Pak subcontinent: An Assessment in the light of new discoveries'

²⁸ Ibid., p. 151

²⁹ Kumar Krishna, 'The Cult of Aditi Uttanapada in Indo-Pak subcontinent: An Assessment in the light of new discoveries', p. 152

a study not done so far. It, also, looks at her existing nomenclature, her presence in the inscriptional records, literary tradition, and the existing oral tradition to construct the history of her cult. This study along with the regional patterns of her cult is used to assess her acceptance, assimilation, distance and negotiation of her cult with the Brahmanical tradition, the royal class, and the society at large.

The existing **readings** on Reṇukā can be divided into two kinds of works. The first kinds of works concentrated on either the members of the Bhṛgu family, or the figure of Paraśurāma. Reṇukā was a minor peripheral figure in them. These works included the following books and articles: Robert Goldman's book *Gods, Warriors and Priests*, Rashmi Desai's article *When Reṇukā was not a goddess*, and Pradeep K Choudhary's book *Rāma with an Axe*. The second kinds of works were thematic. In them, Reṇukā and her mythology were used as instances to develop the themes. These works are as follows: Robert Goldman's articles *Fathers, Sons and Gurus: Oedipal Conflicts in the Sanskrit Epics*, and *Matricide, Renunciation and Compensation in the Legends of Two Warrior-Heroes of the Sanskrit Epics*; S Dange's book *Understanding the Hindu Myth*; Wendy Dongier's book *Splitting the Difference*; and Vijaya Ramaswamy in her article *Two Tales of Love, Betrayal, Revenge and Deification: The Legends of Kannagi and Reṇukā*.

Robert Goldman was one of the first scholars to comment on the episode of Reṇukā's beheading. However, since his focus was either on the Bhṛgus,³⁰ or developing the theme of oedipal conflicts in the epics,³¹ he did not concentrate on the figure of Reṇukā. He analyzed the episode as having little connection with the narrative context in which it appeared.³² He argued that it did not contribute to the development of the narrative, since all its effects were undone.³³ He concluded that the motif of Reṇukā's death was borrowed by the Paraśurāma

³⁰ Goldman Robert, *Gods, Warriors and Priests*

³¹ Goldman Robert, 'Father, Sons and Gurus: Oedipal Conflicts in the Sanskrit Epics'

³² Goldman Robert, *Gods, Warriors and Priests*, p. 80

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 80

myth from the myth of Śukra, and was evident of the significance of the manipulation of submythic elements in the generation of the Bhārgava cycle.³⁴ Reṇukā's resurrection, on the other hand, showed the power of the Bhārgavas to revive the dead. In another work, he viewed this episode as one of the many oedipal conflicts found in the epics. Reṇukā, here, was the sexual object of the oedipal rivalry, and her decapitation symbolized the destruction and renunciation of the sexual object of the oedipal struggle.³⁵

S Dange was one of the first scholars who particularly looked at the figure Reṇukā in the myths of the Mahābhārata and Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa; and from the popular accounts of South India.³⁶ With regard to the beheading myth, he argued that if we look at the myth for a special message, we would have here the reflection of the approved code of conduct for a wife.³⁷ Though, the myth actually centers round the severance of the head, and coming back to life, which is psychological, rather than actual. And closely associated with it is the complex nature of Reṇukā.³⁸ He was also one of the first scholars who brought about the association of Reṇukā's myths with local goddesses from the south such as Yellammā, Mārīammā and Lajjā Gaurī, and unlike Dhere, rightly argued that despite the identifications brought out between these goddesses, it is significant to remember that these goddesses are all different from Reṇukā.³⁹ Interestingly, he also points out that the process of identification, also, took place in the reverse order. He cites myths originally in respect of Yellammā, tucked on to Reṇukā.⁴⁰ To answer the question on why Reṇukā and her myths were used to bring out this association, he argued that in case of Yellammā and Lajjā Gaurī the

³⁴ Ibid., p. 81

³⁵ Goldman Robert, 'Father, Sons and Gurus: Oedipal Conflicts in the Sanskrit Epics'. He draws the same conclusion in his article, 'Matricide, Renunciation and Compensation in the Legends of Two Warrior-Heroes of the Sanskrit Epics'

³⁶ Dange Sadashiv, *Towards Understanding Hindu Myths*

³⁷ Ibid., pp. 385-386

³⁸ Ibid., p. 386

³⁹ Ibid., p. 392

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 401

myth of Reṇukā's severed head came handy to establish the head and headless body as a local goddess respectively.⁴¹ He, also, attributed the reason to the Pallavas and the Pandyas, who instituted a blend of the local Hindu faith and Vedic Hindu gods in a bid to unite various Hindu cults to thwart the Jain-Buddhist influence that was gaining ground.⁴²

Wendy Doniger discussed Reṇukā's mythology where she was split, and where this splitting usually involved doubling.⁴³ The myths were taken from a variety of sources that cut across space and time. Through an analysis of the myths, she raised the following issues. She pointed out that there was a complex interaction between human women, goddesses and the question of class/caste of human society. Second, she argued that Reṇukā's gaze at the king, which aroused desire in her, should not be seen as an indication of her *deviation* from the path of chastity, as the texts seemed to suggest, but as a powerful female gaze, for it was by gazing and not being gazed at that Reṇukā discovered and revealed her eroticism.⁴⁴ Further, she pointed out that one could also read Reṇukā's gaze as an indication of a female voice surviving in the text, a voice that said that Reṇukā was an innocent woman with perfectly understandable feelings and that Jamadagni was an insane monster. She felt that Sanskrit texts should be read in this way, as a subversion of the idea that women must never experience desire and that men have the right to destroy them if they want.⁴⁵ Third, she pointed out that Reṇukā was schizophrenic in her motherhood and class. She concluded with an interesting argument regarding the beheading, by comparing Reṇukā's myths with the myths of Scylla and Lucy "The fantasy of removing or bagging the head of a woman as shown in these myths denies the power of individual, reducing sexuality to pure animality. It is a way of gaining power over a woman

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 396

⁴² Ibid., p. 400

⁴³ Doniger Wendy, *Splitting the Difference*

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 209

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 209

by implying that no one particular woman has power over a man; if a man fears that he may lose his control over a woman if he loves her as an individual, he may wish to deindividualize her. The bag removes both the cultural and natural evidence of identity.”⁴⁶

Rashmi Desai has argued that Reṇukā’s myths in the Mahābhārata and Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa were used to ascertain lineality, affinal relationships with kshatriyas and lineage solidarity.⁴⁷ It was through the central character of Paraśurāma that the message was given to the readers and listeners of these texts. Reṇukā was only a minor character in the myths. She was passive and mute in them. She was only an instrument to establish the message.

Pradeep K Choudhary theorized the process of divinization of Reṇukā.⁴⁸ He argued that it was possible that while developing Paraśurāma’s lineage, a goddess popular among the pastoral tribes of Yamuna and Narmadā Valley, a stronghold of the Bhr̥gu clan, was made the wife of Jamadagni and the mother of Paraśurāma. Thus, the initial association of Reṇukā with Bhr̥gu clan may be seen as the incorporation of a mother goddess in their own cultic paraphernalia. Later, myths were constructed which presented Reṇukā as a Brahmanic personality by declaring her to be a daughter of a king and a chaste wife of a ṛṣi. To answer the question as to why there is no evidence of her deification in the Mahābhārata, Choudhary pointed out that this might be an example of humanization of a goddess. I, on the other hand, view Reṇukā as a mortal figure during the time of Mahābhārata, who is divinized in the later traditions. With regard to her cult in South India, he argued for the integration of local mother goddesses such as Bhūdevī, Yellammā and Mārīammā within the figure of Reṇukā, and her association with the cult of Paraśurāma and Dattātreya. As a

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 231

⁴⁷ Desai Rashmi, ‘When Reṇukā was not a goddess’

⁴⁸ Choudhary Pradeep, *Rāma with an Axe*

goddess, he pointed out that she has been more popular at the lower levels of society, rather than at the upper Brahmanic echelons.

Vijaya Ramaswamy, using ballads, legends, performative traditions and the oral literature in the Tamil folk tradition as sources, with regard to Reṇukā-Mātaṅgī legends, argued that a peripheral figure in the Mahābhārata, Reṇukā, emerged as a powerful goddess in the Tamil country.⁴⁹ As Reṇukā-Mātaṅgī, she combined in herself all the binary opposites like benevolence and malevolence, Brahminhood and Chandalahood, heat and coolness and finally, the fair and the dark. Her followers are drawn from all communities, rendering caste lines fuzzy. In other words, the headless Reṇukā who is neither wholly Brahmin nor wholly Chandala, becomes the bloodthirsty Mattammā of the Madiga, the benevolent cooling and curing goddess Reṇukā Devi of the Brahmins and the sexually potent Yellammā of the Devadasis. The performative traditions of the Reṇukā story, too, draw its participants and audience from Brahmins, upper caste Non-Brahmins and lower-caste 'out-caste' groups. She, thus, emerged as a signifier of a complex cultural matrix cutting through caste lines challenging perceptions of a rigid, monolithic caste structure.⁵⁰ She has, also, argued that the tales of Reṇukā-Mattammā is one of the many folk tales, which deal with various *deviant* faces of female sexuality. It demonstrates the trope of *deviant* behavior which would challenge patriarchal norms. The *deviance* could range from subtle and covert to the overt and aggressive. Through this she concluded that social anxieties regarding *deviance* were clear indicators that social dynamics were often at variance with normative registers. The resultant tensions seemed to find a partial reconciliation in the deification of these larger than life epic women.⁵¹

Unlike the existing readings, my work solely looks at the figure of Reṇukā. It views her as the *deviant* image of a goddess. Instead of looking at just a

⁴⁹ Ramaswamy Vijaya, 'Two Tales of Love, Betrayal, Revenge and Deification: The Legends of Kannagi and Reṇukā'

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 17

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 18

particular aspect of her character or cult, in a particular source, my work attempts to bring together varied aspects of her character and cult using different sources. It attempts to look at the changes and the continuities that this figure underwent over a period of time, after first appearing in the Mahābhārata. Specifically, it looks at her as a mortal figure in the Mahābhārata and the Purāṇas; as a goddess in her pilgrimage centres; and as a figure assimilating various other local goddesses in South India using varied sources.

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The primary **sources** that have been used for this study can be broadly classified as epigraphs, literary texts, iconographic data, and oral tradition. Specifically, the primary sources for Lajjā Gaurī consist of excavation reports and articles that recorded and published her images found in different parts of the subcontinent. Most of them, however, do not mention the context in which the image was found. The inscriptional records, too, have been studied though they are a few in numbers, and none of them mention her name. Sole textual reference from the Matsya Purāṇa alluding to her has been looked at. The oral tradition, which exists only for Mahākuta and Ālampur, has also been studied.

The primary sources for Reṇukā consist of the Critical Edition of the Mahābhārata, the Purāṇas, the Sthala Purāṇas and Chap books collected from Reṇukā's pilgrimage centres, District Gazetteers, and Thurston Edgar's volumes *Caste and Tribes of Southern India*.

This thesis has been divided into **three chapters**. The first chapter defines *deviance* within the Goddess tradition, particularly through the figure of Kālī in the north, and Mārīammā in the south. It defines *deviant* goddesses as stand alone figures who represent unleashed female power.

The second chapter on Lajjā Gaurī has been divided into six sections. The first section looks at the nomenclature of this fertility goddess. It begins by looking at

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the earliest references to the name Lajjā Gaurī, and how this name has been translated and understood by the scholars. Thereafter, it cites various other names used for this fertility goddess. The second section looks at the symbology of the goddess, particularly the symbology of the pot and the lotus, and argues how it adds to the fertility identity of the goddess. The third section looks at the acceptance, assimilation, distance, and negotiation by the royal class, the Brahmanical tradition, and the society at large with the cult of Lajjā Gaurī. This section is based on the sections that follow it. The fourth section looks at the extent and spread of her cult through time, space and sculptural variations. It attempts to reconstruct the history of her cult in every region. It has a regional analysis on the spread of her cult. The fifth section looks at the inscriptional record pertaining to this goddess. The last section looks at the literary and oral tradition on the goddess, and how these traditions attempt to deal with the goddess' *deviant* image.

The third chapter is divided into three sections. The first section looks at Reṇukā in the Mahābhārata, and the Purāṇas. It discusses episodes from Paraśurāma's mythology, wherein Reṇukā's presence is noteworthy, and attempts to understand them in terms of their implications on issues of gender. It is to be noted that Reṇukā is a mortal figure in these mythologies. This section ends by giving evidence of Reṇukā appearing as a deified figure in a late Purāṇa. The second section looks at Reṇukā in her pilgrimage centers, namely the Reṇukā Tīrtha (popularly known as Reṇukā Lake) in Sirmaur, Himachal Pradesh, and the Reṇukā Śakti Pīṭha in Mahur, Maharashtra. It discusses the same episodes, as discussed above, with the addition of a few new ones, but as they appear in the Sthala Purāṇas and the Chap books of the two pilgrimage centers. It again attempts to understand them in terms of their implications on issues of gender, as well as on Reṇukā as a deified figure. Thereafter, this section looks at Reṇukā's portrayal and position in the structure of the pilgrimage centers, the main temples, Reṇukā's iconography in the main temples, the daily ritual of the

main temples, and the main festival of the pilgrimage centers. It ends by comparing Reṇukā's portrayal in the Sthala Purāṇas with her portrayal in the various aspects of the pilgrimage center mentioned above. It is noteworthy that the Sthala Purāṇa of the Reṇukā Tīrtha is centered on Paraśurāma. Reṇukā is a subsidiary yet significant figure in his mythology. However, in the Sthala Purāṇa of Reṇukā Śakti Pīṭha, the mythology is centered on Reṇukā. She is the central character driving the narrative. Last, unlike the Mahābhārata, and the Purāṇas, in the mythologies of these pilgrimage centres, she is the Goddess. The third section looks at Reṇukā as a figure, whose name, identity and mythology is used by local goddesses. Various local goddesses from South India such as Mārīammā; Kolāhalammā; Ellammā; Yellammā; and Mātaṅgī, are associated with this one figure. This section shows how this association has been brought about. Also, while bringing about this association, it notes the caste of the priests and devotees that are involved in the worship of these local goddesses.

CHAPTER 2

SITUATING DEVIANCE WITHIN THE GODDESS TRADITION

This chapter attempts to move away from looking at goddesses who are situated within the familial context, goddesses who are seen as the consorts of powerful gods; goddesses who are defined by attributes which are primarily motherhood, chastity, devotion to their husbands; goddesses who are known for their quintessential beauty, defined in terms of perfect feminine bodies with golden complexions adorned with clothes and ornaments, holding rosary or lotuses in their hands, and standing on the left side of their consorts.

Rather, this chapter attempts to look at stand alone figures of goddesses, in other words independent goddess, who for difficult to slot, yet for the commonalities they share, the term *deviant*, even though a negative one, has been used. It aims to look at goddesses that represent unleashed female power.

In the north, this power is seen in the figure of Kālī, and in the south, it is seen in the figure of Mārīammā. They are stand alone figures of goddesses, in other words, they are independent goddesses, outside male dominance. They are fierce goddesses representing unleashed fierce power, which both inflicts and protects its devotees. It is perhaps their independent status, as against the consort goddesses that makes them fierce, and thereby heightens their capacity for the protection of their devotees. It is this fierceness and ambivalent power that makes them more fearful than reverential by their devotees. Therefore, perhaps, these goddesses are placed outside the village or the town, yet when their devotees move from one village to another or from the village to the town, they carry these goddesses with them, and not the consort goddesses. The latter is specifically the case with Mārīammā, and a clear attestation to the powers of these goddesses, unlike the consort goddesses.

Kālī is one of the most widely worshipped stand alone fierce goddess throughout South Asia, though she has been traditionally popular in the geographically peripheral areas of the subcontinent such as Bengal, Assam and Nepal in the northeast, and Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Sri Lanka in the south.⁵²

She probably originated as a tribal goddess, but by the **epic and early Purāṇic period**, she was assimilated within the Brahmanical Sanskrit tradition as the fierce independent goddess associated with battle and death, and propitiated with equally fierce ritual, the blood sacrifice. The Purāṇic tradition provides a fierce imagery of Kālī. She is described as one with a terrible frightening appearance. She is always depicted as dark and naked with long disheveled hair. She adorns freshly cut heads as a necklace, children's corpses as earrings, severed arms as a girdle, and serpents as bracelet. She has long sharp fangs, is often depicted as claw-like hands with long nails, and is often said to have blood smeared on her lips. She is usually shown on the battlefield⁵³, where she is a furious combatant who gets drunk on the hot blood of her victims, or in the cremation ground, where she sits on a corpse surrounded by jackals and goblins.⁵⁴ The Purāṇas portray her as bloodthirsty. The Bhāgavata Purāṇa and Devī Māhātmya depict her as drinking the blood of her victims.⁵⁵ In fact, offering of blood through animal sacrifice to Kālī is a common practice even today, for instance, animals are sacrificed to Kālī in Kālīghāt in Kolkatta.

The Purāṇas also portray her as associated with devotees who would be considered at the margins of society, for instance, in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, she is the patron deity of a band of thieves whose leader seeks to achieve Kālī

⁵² Dermott and Kripal, *Encountering Kālī*, p. 4

⁵³ Her role in the battlefield is most evident from the Devī Mahātmya. In fact, her first major appearance was in the Devī Mahātmya, where she appears as goddess Durga's incarnate.

⁵⁴ Kinsley David, *Hindu Goddesses*, p. 116

This description is found in the Agni Purāṇa and Garuda Purāṇa.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 117-118

blessings in order to have a son.⁵⁶ Further, the texts recommend the construction of her temples on the margins of society, for instance architectural work *Mānasāra-śilpa-śāstra* points out that Kālī's temples should be built far from the villages and towns, near the cremation ground and the dwellings of Caṇḍālas.⁵⁷ This perhaps indicates that her assimilation within the Brahmanical Sanskrit tradition was far from complete, and Kālī remained on the margins, in the early epic and Purāṇic period. This probably had to do with her fierce independent nature, and her association with death.

Further, the Purāṇas describe her as an independent goddess not associated with any male deity, except in some cases with Śiva. However, unlike Pārvatī, she is not the spouse goddess bringing Śiva within the domestic sphere. Rather, Kālī is seen as inciting Śiva to wild behavior and taking part in dangerous, destructive activities that threaten the stability of the cosmos. In the iconographic representations of Śiva and Kālī, the latter is always shown dominant. She is usually standing or dancing on Śiva's prone body, and when the two are depicted in sexual intercourse, she is shown above him.⁵⁸ Kinsley argues that the extent to which Kālī invites or provokes one over the threshold from order to antistructure is seen in her role with Śiva. As Dakṣinakālī, she stands or dances upon Śiva's prone body in the cremation ground.⁵⁹

The Purāṇas also associate Kālī with Pārvatī, but as her dark, negative, fierce aspect.⁶⁰

The **late Purāṇic tradition**, however, begin to present Kālī in a different light. It begins the trend of redirecting, and even muting Kālī's extremes in her mythology and iconography through bhakti or devotionalism. This trend again

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 117

⁵⁷ Ibid., pp. 117-118

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 120

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 130

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 118

The evidence for this comes from the *Līṅga Purāṇa* and *Vāmana Purāṇa*.

resurfaces in Bengal in the late medieval period, perhaps pioneered by Rāmaprasād Sen, and influences the perception of thousands of Kālī's devotees, for whom she is as much the fierce goddess, as their Mother.

In the late Purāṇic tradition, this trend becomes evident in the Mahābhāgvata Purāṇa. Patricia Dold argues that the Mahābhāgvata Purāṇa's devotion is centered on the Mahādevī, whose preeminent form is Kālī.⁶¹ This text's devotionism entails a multifaceted vision of Kālī that preserves some of her extremes, but at the same time, significantly, mutes and ignores it. Her attire and ornaments, for instance, still include a lolling tongue, disheveled hair and a garland of heads, but these are euphemistically called lovely, charming, and beautiful, and are said to complement her 'sparkling tiara' and 'full high breasts'. She becomes embodied as Satī, Gaṅgā and Pārvatī though no longer the dark side of these auspicious goddesses, but she is their very essence, thus rendering her character more complex. She argues that thus in a way she is 'tamed', but also points out that just as the early Kālī is not all violence and caprice, so the latter Kālī is not completely 'tamed'. Thus, Kālī becomes the Mahādevī, the object of worship and devotion for all beings, including the gods, though she still remains the terrific, terror inspiring, and wondrous. Her place is by the side of devotees who know her and appreciate her terrific power. The testing motif in the narrative is central to this portrayal of Kālī.⁶² This text, according to Dold, is a prototype of what later happens in eighteenth century Śakta bhakti poetry of Bengal.⁶³

In the **Tantric tradition**, especially the Vāmācāra or left-handed Tantricism, Kālī occupies the prime most position. In both the Tantric philosophy and ritual, she is seen as an expression of the Ultimate Reality, the ontological absolute, and identified with the dynamic ground of the universe. She is also the ādi

⁶¹ Dold Patricia, 'Kālī the Terrific and Her Tests'

⁶² Ibid., pp. 39-43

⁶³ Dermott and Kripal, *Encountering Kālī*, p. 11

Mahāvidyā, the primary Mahāvidyā, and lends the group as a whole her own characteristics.⁶⁴

However, unlike the Purāṇic tradition, the tantric tradition does not attempt to mute her extremes. Rather, the tradition accepts and maintains the fierceness of the goddess. The figure of Kālī conveys death, destruction, terror, fear, the all-consuming aspect of reality to them. Kālī is seen and accepted as the forbidden par excellence, for she is death herself.⁶⁵ She is associated with pancatattva ritual, which includes the intake of wine, meat, fish, and parched grains, and performance of illicit sexual intercourse, otherwise considered to be impure and forbidden. The Tantric hero or the sādḥaka, unlike the devotee in the bhakti tradition, confronts this fierce Kālī, develops an almost aggressive and fearless stance Kālī before her, and thereby assimilates, overcomes, and transforms her into a vehicle of salvation.⁶⁶

In this context, Kinsley philosophically noted, “What we experience as disgusting, polluted, forbidden, and gruesome is grounded in limited human consciousness, which has ordered, regimented, and divided reality into categories that serve limited, ego-centered, selfish conceptions of how the world should be. Kālī, in her rude way, deconstructs these categories, inviting those who would learn from her to be open to the whole world in all of its aspects. She invites her devotees, like Ramakrishna, to dare to taste the world in its most disgusting and forbidding manifestations in order to detect its underlying unity and sacrality, which is the Great Goddess herself.”⁶⁷

After being the fierce dangerous goddess associated with war and death, fed on blood through sacrifices, in the epic and Purāṇic tradition, and as the ontological absolute worshipped through esoteric rituals, Kālī developed an additional

⁶⁴ Kinsley David, *Tantric Visions of the Divine Feminine*, p. 68

⁶⁵ Kinsley David, *Hindu Goddesses*, p. 124

⁶⁶ Kinsley David, *Hindu Goddesses*, p. 124

⁶⁷ Kinsley David, *Tantric Visions of the Divine Feminine*, p. 83

dimension to her- that of a **compassionate mother**. The devotee now adopted the position of the helpless child when approaching Kālī. Even though the child's mother may be fearsome, at times even hostile, the child had little choice but to return to her for protection, security and warmth.⁶⁸ This dimension of Kālī is best exemplified in the late medieval Śākta tradition of **Bengal**, particularly in the works of Rāmaprasād Sen, and his successors. This perception towards Kālī continues to hold the imagination of her countless devotees even today.

Rachel Fell McDermott has studied this change in perception towards Kālī in the vernacular genre Śākta Padāvalī⁶⁹, and has attributed this change to **bhakti** or devotionism.⁷⁰ She argues that divine and human figures once understood to be fierce, esoteric, or inaccessible became through the perspective of bhakti (devotion), softened, elevated, humanized, and popularized in the Śākta Padāvalī.⁷¹ However, she adds that the Śākta Padāvalī was never free from Tantric elements and influence. Tantricism acted to balance the ever-sweetening tendencies of devotionism. Though, she shows that as the decades progressed, the poets become less comfortable with Tantric imagery; whether derived from the dhyānas, the language of kuṇḍaliṇī yoga, or the practice of the five m ritual. Instead, the poems began to emphasize on petition, self-abnegation and devotion of the devotees. In concert with these developments, Kālī eventually veered away from being a Tantric icon and assumed the compassionate characteristics of a mother.⁷²

She argues that Kālī is much more humanized, benevolent and attractive today than she was even in Rāmaprasād's time. Kālī of modern Bengal is rarely depicted in a completely nude, ugly, or even off-putting manner. She still wears

⁶⁸ Kinsley David, *Hindu Goddesses*, pp. 125-126

⁶⁹ Śākta Padāvalī is the vernacular genre that emerged in the eighteenth century Bengal. It contains devotional poetry centered on Kālī and Umā. It expresses an unprecedented love and intimacy towards them, and marks a radical change in Bengal Śākta worship.

⁷⁰ Mc Dermott Rachel, *Mother of My Heart, Daughter of My Dreams*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 3

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 288

the ornaments of cut heads, holds her sword, and tramples on Śiva. But the figure is beautified and brought within the realm of respectability.⁷³ But, the tension between the Kālī of devotion and the Kālī of esoteric Tantra is still evident; bhakti may have spilled the secret and brought the Tantric goddess into the open, but much of the secret remains unexplored by the majority of her votaries. In fact, the devotional perspective has pushed the actual Tantric worship of Kālī far beneath the surface of modern religious life, while at the same time spreading a superficial knowledge about Tantric matters.⁷⁴

Rāmaprasād Sen was perhaps the earliest poets who looked upon Kālī with an overtly devotional attitude and pioneered the genre of Śākta Padāvalī.⁷⁵ He portrayed Kālī in Śyāmā-saṅgīta with manifold characteristics such as the giver of bliss, merciful, savior, takes one across the sea of rebirth; at the same time, she is the enchantress and magician, who deludes her devotees. She can also inspire fear; she is the dreadful destroyer, the one with terrible face. Rāmaprasād padas alternate internally between the attractive and fearsome, though the tendency to sweeten is more pronounced. Over time, the recoverers or creators of Rāmaprasād's Kālī become less and less comfortable with a deity of blood and gore, no matter how softened she may be.⁷⁶

These descriptions were not without the Tantric imagery and elements. But, his poems attest to the fact that poems of a Tantric nature fell, whereas devotionally oriented compositions increased markedly. The biographies and the poetry collections attest to the fact that there was a slow movement away from Rāmaprasād the Tāntrika and towards Rāmaprasād the bhakta.

His successor Kamalākānta Bhaṭṭācārya was more Tantric in external presentation than Rāmaprasād. But, he too softens Kālī, much more than

⁷³ Ibid., p. 5

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 291

⁷⁵ Ibid., pp. 4-5

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 184

Rāmaprasād, by substituting offset images. There is an emphasis on Kālī's benevolent and attractive aspects, though the grim side of her character never disappears, but the tension between the two poles of her nature become less taut.

With respect to Tantra, his poetry presents a mixed picture though with explicit Tantric messages. But, majority of his padas are extremely devotional and dualistic in tone.⁷⁷

McDermott attributes these changes in the Śākta Padāvalī tradition to the influence of Vaiṣṇavism; the social and political incentives to use Kālī worship as a legitimizing tool by the landed class and their entourage in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, and by the nationalist in the twentieth century; and the impact of a popularizing, expansive urbanism on people's sense of community.⁷⁸

The attempt to disassociate Kālī from her tantric connections can also be seen in two more contexts, first, in the attempts of the priests at Kālīghāt to Vaishnavize her, and second, amongst the popular perceptions in temple town at Bhubaneshwar that interprets Kālī's icon as reflective of women's modesty and shame. These have been elucidated below.

Sanjukta Gupta has argued on the basis of her fieldwork at Kālīghat that priests at Kālīghat have systematically attempted to Vaishnavize her, by removing as many reminders of her Tantric background as possible in their ritual regimes.⁷⁹ Further, through the additions made to the temple layout, there has been an attempt to down play Kālī's connection with blood sacrifice and with the

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 118-119

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 298

⁷⁹ Gupta Sanjukta, 'The Domestication of a Goddess'

ferocious Bhairava. The only part of the temple being tied up is the sacrificial area.⁸⁰ She refers to this as 'domestication' of Kālī.

However, she also argues that her devotees perceive her as the great Goddess extolled in the Tantric and Purāṇic tradition. They believe that she is satisfied by receiving blood sacrifice, and thereby they continue to sacrifice a great number of goats to her every day seeking her favor. For her devotees contradiction is inherent in her.⁸¹

Thus, despite the attempt to 'domesticate' her, public perceptions and elite priestly motivations, even if radically different, exist alongside one another with little overt tension.

Usha Menon and Richard Sweder show how the icon of Kālī trampling on her husband Śiva with her tongue extended, an unmistakably Tantric icon with its emphatic, extreme representation of female power, and a cue to Tantric rituals of sexual hierarchy reversal, is no longer popularly understood as this.⁸² The Tantric understanding continues, but very few know it. This esoteric version is propounded only by a couple of knowledgeable specialist.⁸³

Rather, this image is now understood by most contemporary devotees as reflecting culturally approved ideals of women's modesty and "shame" (lajjā). This icon no longer highlights the potency of the female and her power to create and destroy with impunity. Rather it is used to uphold Hindu family values, especially those encouraging female self-control and self-restraint.⁸⁴ In other words, the main message appears to be that the world survives and the flow of life proceeds as it ought to when women regulate, control, and hold lajjā in their power, when they cultivate their capacity to experience lajjā, and when they

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 69

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 76

⁸² Menon and Shweder, 'Dominating Kālī'

⁸³ Ibid., p. 82

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 80

display that emotion appropriately.⁸⁵ A fifteenth-century Oriya text-*Caṇḍi Purāṇa* provided the conceptual framework for this reinterpretation.⁸⁶

Kālī is also one of the most widely worshipped goddess in Kerala. She is referred to as **Bhagavati or Bhadrakālī in Kerala**. I shall refer to Sarah Caldwell's work to discuss Kālī and her worship through the ritual of *muṭiyēttu* in Kerala.⁸⁷

Bhagavati is the predominant Hindu deity of Kerala. She is associated with both the Sanskrit goddess of the greater pan-Indian Hindu tradition, and local village goddess associated with fever diseases. She is conceived of as primarily fierce and benevolent, simultaneously a chaste virgin and a caring mother. She stands on her own, without a male consort. Every community in Kerala worships her in a distinctive way, ranging from simple costumed possession dances to elite Sanskrit operatic theatre.⁸⁸

Caldwell in her work concentrates on one of her performative styles of worship, the *muṭiyēttu*. It provides a striking combination of the ritual immediacy of possession performance and structural features of classical Sanskrit drama, but is for most part a folk dramatic form.⁸⁹ It tells a traditional story of the vanquishing of the male demon *Dārika* by the violent goddess *Bhadrakālī*.⁹⁰ *Muṭiyēttu* is almost exclusively a male domain.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 86

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 80

⁸⁷ Caldwell Sarah, *Oh Terrifying Mother*

⁸⁸ Caldwell Sarah, *Oh Terrifying Mother*, p. 10

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 12

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 12

Muṭiyēttu is a complex multimedia event. Combining elaborate rituals, art, music, dance, and theatre, the performance lasts from noon until dawn of the following day. Only men of the high-ranking *Mārār* and *Kurup* castes, who have purified themselves with strict penances and fasts, may perform the role of the goddess and the accompanying rituals. Performed exclusively in *Ernakulam* district and its environs in central Kerala, *muṭiyēttu* is a high-caste temple art rooted deeply in folk religious tradition. Its artistic complexity and beauty, worthy of study in their own right, expressed key themes of heat and coolness, power and fertility, essential to the understanding of traditional concepts of gender that still inform daily gender relations.

Caldwell studied the *muṭiyēttu* performance primarily through three lenses; first, she explicates the symbolism of the Bhagavati cult through the dimension of landscape (time and geography); second, she explores the symbolic world of Bhagavati through the dimension of psychology and gender; third, she uses the performance theory to focus upon the specific bodily and emotional features of Bhagavati rituals that lead to spiritual and psychological experiences of transformation.

This study indicates that the goddess is much more than the sum-total of all of these views. She is a multi-layered deity, and means many things to many people. Yet, the following conclusions regarding gender issues stand out. Bhadrakālī in Kerala is primarily a deity of and for men. Her perception as the divine 'dangerous' female power that needs to be controlled are male constructs of femaleness. Caldwell argues that when we look carefully at the psychological reality of the goddess for men and women, we discover that it is men who impute violent supernatural power to women's biological bodies, and men who imaginatively experience, respond to, reify this power, while women appear to experience these matters differently, if at all.⁹¹ She points out that the cult of the goddess as enacted in *muṭiyēttu*, thus far from empowering or glorifying either female qualities or actual women, is a transsexual drama of male oral fixations and regressions. Fascination and envy directed towards the female body, imagined worlds of virgin lust and anger, may come as the faintest of echoes to a woman watching from the sidelines, strange shadows on a screen behind which she can never tread.⁹² The rituals of *muṭiyēttu* are oriented around sacred power (*śakti*), its invocation, embodiment, management and control all of which are dominated by men.⁹³ Women are prevented by cultural fiat from ever experiencing the divine possession of Kālī or enacting the violent decapitation of Dārīka in *muṭiyēttu*, so that the entire discourse of power, however, conducted,

⁹¹ Ibid., pp. 188-189

⁹² Ibid., pp. 183-184

⁹³ Ibid., pp. 188-189

is by necessity a male one.⁹⁴ The supernatural śakti of the goddess becomes the property of males, who thereby compensate for their envy and fear of the mother's sexual, procreative body. By coopting this power in transvestite possession performance, males reclaim the envied feminine procreative power within their own bodies, while denying actual social, sexual, and political, power to women. By portraying those aspects of imputed feminine sexual power that they most fear and desire, males master their ambivalent feelings and assert their dominance in the social sphere. The rituals, rather than allowing women to express distress and anger, model for women their own dangerousness and need for them to continue to bind and control their bodies for the benefit of their husbands and sons.⁹⁵

Caldwell argues that majority of women, on the other hand, seemed more fearful, though respectful, and somewhat distant in their attitudes towards Kālī. There was none of the intimacy and devotion, the personal feelings for the goddess that men expressed.⁹⁶ Women did not feel any personal identification with the goddess.⁹⁷ Bhadrakālī embodied all that a Malayali woman should not be. A real Bhadrakālī is a negative characterization. Her behavior is considered disruptive, antisocial and childlike, for women are allowed to be angry or cry only in formalized ritual setting.⁹⁸ The distance between the goddess and women was also expressed in their peripheral roles in the cult itself. Women were prohibited from practicing in the public rituals of Kālī. Women cannot perform the *muṭṭiyēttu* because of menses. The predominant attitude towards the female in *muṭṭiyēttu* is hostility rather than empathy, and the actor appears to identify with the threatening Kālī only in an attempt to pacify and control her.⁹⁹ Further, female possession was devalued and differentiated from male temple

⁹⁴ Ibid., pp. 188-189

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 189

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 203

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 203

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 204

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 204

performances. Women's possession was marginalized to the demonic realm, and that of men to the divine realm.

Thus, from one vantage point *muṭiyēttu* is a propitiatory rite which aims at invoking, controlling, and converting dangerous female energy- embodied in the image of the female virgin- into benevolent mothering energy for the well-being of society. And in terms of its implications for the self-images and real lives of its spectators, while it provided a deep spiritual experience for men, the worship of the fierce goddess may actually work in subtle ways to propagate women's negative self-image and keep them under control.¹⁰⁰

In another article, Caldwell, on the basis of her case study of Kālī in Kerala, exhorts a revisioning of the scholarly portrayal of Kālī as a 'marginal' deity.¹⁰¹ She has been considered marginal in the context of being worshipped at the edges of Indian subcontinent and being associated with religious practices of 'marginal' social groups.

Caldwell argues that we can rather see Kālī as the embodiment of core cultural values that were marginalized over time, but have begun to reassert themselves. This process seems to have parallels throughout India. In the end, Kālī is neither marginal nor extreme in the places where she is worshipped. She is right at the center, the very source of life.¹⁰² For instance, in context of worship of Kālī in places considered as marginal, she points out, that "marginal" locations are relative to historical positioning of geography, invented boundaries, and social landscapes. Yet, Kālī continually seems to be associated with margins, even when those margins are constantly shifting.¹⁰³ The reality is that there are center everywhere, in every village, roadway, field, house where the Goddess dwells and is worshipped. Margins themselves have centers. They have their own

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 276

¹⁰¹ Caldwell Sarah, 'Margins at the Center'

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 250

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 259

complex contested form of knowledge in which Kālī is prominent.¹⁰⁴ Caldwell argues that marginality of Kālī may be a social and scholarly creation that needs to be revised.¹⁰⁵

Moving away from the abovementioned traditions that attempt to mute or mask the goddess's extremes or make her more 'respectable', there are **other traditions** that perceive, incorporate and use the goddess differently, in most cases maintaining her fierceness, and asserting her stand alone characteristics.

Patricia Lawrence shows that in **war-torn Sri Lanka**,¹⁰⁶ Kālī is undergoing a dramatic resurgence with Tamil devotees flocking to her oracles both for aid in embodying and interpreting the horrible injuries of war and to perform propitiatory acts of self-mutilation.¹⁰⁷ In acting under Kālī's agency, the oracles reframe the devotees' world altered by the intrusive configuration of military checkpoints, bunkers, and detention camps- and they undermine the power of the state inscribed on the Tamil body through torture by enacting vows to Kālī of fire-walking and piercing the body- vows in which bodily wounds miraculously disappear. It has become the task of Kālī, who is the angry mother goddess, in the civil war-torn Sri Lanka, through these oracles, to overcome political silencing, to embody memory, and to reconstitute a diminished world for the people suffering in the war.¹⁰⁸

To the proponents of the **feminist movements**, the fierce goddess with her unbridled sexuality is the symbol of liberation and empowerment.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 263

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 259

¹⁰⁶ Lawrence Patricia, 'Kālī in a Context of Terror'

¹⁰⁷ Dermott and Kripal, *Encountering Kālī*, pp. 11-12

¹⁰⁸ Lawrence Patricia, 'Kālī in a Context of Terror', pp. 118-119

To many in the **West**, Kālī is seen as a symbol of female empowerment, a guarantor of sexual pleasure, a recipient of ritual worship, and an object of artistic ingenuity.¹⁰⁹

The rest, as Rachel McDermott work based on the study of Kālī through the internet shows, imbue Kālī with personal, idiosyncratic meanings.¹¹⁰

II

Mārīammā is one of the most widely worshipped stand alone fierce goddess in the present day Indian states of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. She is also popular amongst the Tamil, Kannada, Telgu, Malayalam and Tulu speaking people of Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia.

Mārī means fierce and Ammā means Mother. Thus, as the name suggests, Mārīammā is the fierce mother goddess who causes diseases and epidemics. It is widely believed amongst her worshippers that she unleashes her power through her wrath and fierceness in the form of diseases, when they ignore her worship, neglect their ritual duties towards her or cause some other infraction. However, significantly, as their Mother, she is the one who cures these diseases too. Therefore, she combines in herself the ambivalent powers of being the inflictor and curer, and the contradictory aspects of and disease and health.

Since Mārī can also mean 'to change' in Tamil, some scholars associate the name Mārī with her unpredictability (perhaps in causing disease), her ability to suddenly morph, and her dangerous capacity for anger, violence and heat.¹¹¹

For Donna Jordon, Mārīammā is the polyvalent village goddess, a deity worshipped as a head sitting upon the land, since she is identified with the village and rooted in the land; she is the Earth under the village as well as the

¹⁰⁹ McDermott Rachel, 'Kālī's New Frontiers', pp. 276-282

¹¹⁰ McDermott Rachel, 'Kālī's New Frontiers'

¹¹¹ Jordon Donna, *Śakti's Revolution*, p. 201

Creatrix of the village.¹¹² Mārī can mean śakti (female power), and amman means Mother, thus she is the mother-power of the village.¹¹³ In the worldview of Mārīammā's devotees, the land of the village belongs to Mārīammā, and they live upon or inside the body of the goddess; thus all of life is sacred space.¹¹⁴ She is also the guardian of the boundaries of the village and the village protector.¹¹⁵ However, she is not all-benevolent mother, if angered; she is capable of causing destruction, disease and calamity.¹¹⁶

The last point is evident in the village of Shevgaon, Ahmadnagar District, Maharashtra, here, Mārīammā is considered as the dangerous and fierce goddess due to whom evil befalls the village. Therefore, her temple is not kept inside the boundaries of the village. It is about ten minutes walking distance from the last houses, on the top of a hill.¹¹⁷

This fierce goddess is significantly propitiated and worshipped by equally fierce rituals. These include animal sacrifice, fire-walking, hook swinging and spirit possession.

Donna Jordon argues that Mārīammā is “a fiercely protective mother who is a bloodthirsty deity who traditionally requires **blood sacrifices** from her devotees. Both explicit and implicit themes of sacrifice, sufferings, and death pervade the myths, songs and ritual activities associated with Mārīammā. These themes are closely tied to the Goddess's nature as Śakti, power. As Śakti, the Goddess embodies the power of life and death that pervades and sustains the created world. Such power is associated also with the act of sacrifice, especially blood sacrifice, along with the act of killing that it entails and the physical suffering that comes with sacrificial death. It is especially the transformative nature of this

¹¹² Ibid., p. 97

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 97

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 97

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 97

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 97

¹¹⁷ Traude Vetschera, 'Laxmiai-A Mothergoddess of the Deccan', p. 455

power that is emphasized in myths and rituals associated with the Goddess in this context.”¹¹⁸

The contexts of animal sacrifice to Mārīammā include the cyclic rituals of soil renewal,¹¹⁹ and the propitiatory ritual performed after the outbreak of an epidemic in the village.

In the former context, according to Craddock, traditionally it is generally a buffalo that is the favored sacrifice to the goddess, with a special role reserved for the head’. He interprets the buffalo as a symbol of power that is ‘transferred to the Goddess through sacrifice’.¹²⁰ Through the sacrifice, the bull’s blood is transmitted to the goddess as a fertilizing agent for the crops.¹²¹ The blood of the buffalo is sometimes drunk during the ritual to capture internally the animal’s power.¹²²

The latter context is elucidated by Whitehead through various examples in his book, *The Village Gods of South India*. In the villages of Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, animals such as sheep, goat, fowl or buffalo are sacrificed to Mārīammā after the outbreak of epidemics. In the Cocanada region of Andhra Pradesh, for instance, after the outbreak of an epidemic, Mārīammā’s image which consists only of a face is quickly carved out of a margosa¹²³ wood and is fixed in the ground with a pandal of leaves and clothes. Processions of earthen pot half filled with butter milk and rice continue to take place till the epidemic survives. Live animals are impaled. Their blood is poured over the boiled rice and curry prepared, and kept in the cart near the shrine.¹²⁴ In Tamil Nadu, blood sacrifice is substituted by vegetarian offering to Mārīammā perhaps due to the due to the

¹¹⁸ Jordon Donna, *Śakti’s Revolution*, p. 99

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 99

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 99

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 99

¹²² *Ibid.*, p. 99

¹²³ The Margosa tree is believed to have a cooling effect. Thereby, it is possible that the image of the fierce goddess is carved out of the Margosa wood.

¹²⁴ Whitehead Henry, *The Village Gods of South India*, p. 65

spread of Brahmanical ideas and forms of worship, though the practice of animal sacrifice to subordinate male deities continues.¹²⁵ However, Whitehead reports that in some villages the practice of animal sacrifice continues, for instance, in one of the villages, on its outskirts, Mārīammā is installed in the form of a square stone pillar. Buffaloes and sheep are offered to her whenever epidemics break out. Significantly, the goddess was brought to this village by some people who had migrated from another village¹²⁶ indicating the power of the goddess, for the people carry her wherever they go.

Fire-walking ceremony is yet another propitiatory ritual of Mārīammā. Devotees walk over the hot embers during Mārīammā's festivals to keep the vows they had made to the goddess during the time of trouble and in order to maintain or restore the health and wellbeing of the individuals and the community. For instance, in the annual festival of Mārīammā, goddess of Cholera, in the Bellary Town, Karnataka, fire-walking ceremony is performed. Similarly, in Siyadi village, Tanjore, Tamil Nadu, the fire-walking is performed during the Mārīammā festival by devotees who had made vows.¹²⁷

Significantly, Mārīammā is also worshipped by the Hindus of Natal.¹²⁸ Mārīammā is very popular in Natal and has many temples dedicated to her. Fire-walking ceremonies are held at the three traditional Hindu temples dedicated to her. Mārīammā and the fire-walking ceremony were brought to Natal around the 1860s, when Tamil-speaking Hindus migrated from the Madras area to Natal. Their ancestors had worshipped this goddess and practiced the fire-walking ceremony as part of their village goddess tradition.¹²⁹ Here, the fire-walking festivals are held between the months of March and August, and this time corresponds to the custom of holding fire-walking festivals in India. It is widely

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 89

¹²⁶ Ibid., p. 42

¹²⁷ Ibid., p. 106

¹²⁸ Diesel Alleyn, 'The Tradition of Hindu Firewalking in Natal'

¹²⁹ Diesel Alleyn, 'The Tradition of Hindu Firewalking in Natal', pp. 31-32

believed that the worshippers can approach her with loving devotion, but there is also a need to propitiate her, and fire-walking is one of the propitiatory rituals.

Two other characteristics of the firewalking ceremony in Natal are the trance and the piercing of the body with skewers and hooks in order to show devotion to the Goddess.¹³⁰

Such propitiatory rituals are also performed in Mārīammā festivals in India. Most Mārīammā temples have performance of *hookswinging*. The origin of hookswinging remains an enigma, but Elaine Craddock points out that this practice has explicit connections to blood sacrifice.¹³¹ People perform this propitiatory ritual in response to illness, danger, childlessness or other personal distress.¹³² The swingers are usually low-caste or dalit males, whose status is enhanced by their self-sacrifice. They dedicate their performance to the health and well-being of the whole village.¹³³

Hookswinging is emblematic of self-sacrifice to Mārīammā.¹³⁴ According to Craddock, it is self-sacrifice that the entire community participates in and derives benefit from.” “The fact that Mārīammā is praised as ‘swinging on a hook’ points to the notion that she herself models the kind of self-sacrifice that characterizes profound devotion. When a true devotee enacts the sacrifice by swinging on the hook, Mārīammā herself appears, drawn by the devotion of her worshipper.¹³⁵ It is a metaphor and ritual dramatization of the painful contraction of smallpox, and, like the disease, is emblematic of the goddess’s grace; only ‘the chosen’ are afflicted with pox.¹³⁶

¹³⁰ Ibid., pp. 32-33

¹³¹ Jordon Donna, *Śakti’s Revolution*, p. 128

¹³² Ibid., p. 129

¹³³ Ibid., p. 129

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 129

¹³⁵ Ibid., p. 129

¹³⁶ Ibid., p. 129

Brubaker argues that 'self-affliction' in South Indian village-goddess worship effects both psychological and spiritual transformation in devotees. For Brubaker, self-affliction rites, which voluntarily inflict pain, humiliation, or suffering upon the devotees, is the essential experience of the goddess's ambivalent power. This power is essentially female and pertains to both sexuality and death. It is simultaneously dangerous and liberating.¹³⁷

Mārīammā's worship during the festivals also includes oracular *spirit possession* performance acted out in frenzied dances of possession. Mārīammā interacts with her devotees via the oracles, whom the goddess 'comes down' and possesses. They tell the people the causes of displeasure of the goddess and methods to appease her.¹³⁸ It is generally women who are possessed by Mārīammā. For Fiona Bowie, the spirit possession is used by women as an instrument of temporary power in societies in which women are powerless and denied authority because of their sex.¹³⁹

At many festivals, the Mātāṅgī is the centerpiece of such an event. As a living manifestation of the goddess, she becomes possessed by the goddess, performs a wild, frenzied dance, shouts obscene language, spits at devotees, and shoves people around her buttocks.¹⁴⁰ Thus, the festival reverses social norms, Mātāṅgī's behavior, which would ordinarily be highly polluting is purifying, and people seek out her spits and insults.¹⁴¹

In her **myths**, Mārīammā represents the *deviant* female and the *deviant* female sexuality, who challenges the patriarchal structure, and the caste hierarchy.

When associated with Reṇukā's mythology, she gets linked with a *deviant* wife, and thereby suffers in an unjust manner, and faces a violent death at the hands

¹³⁷ Caldwell Sarah, *Oh Terrifying Mother*, p. 257

¹³⁸ Jordon Donna, *Śakti's Revolution*, p. 109

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 110-111

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 106

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 100

of a patriarchal figure. However, when resuscitated, she is transformed into a goddess, her deification perhaps being a compensation given by the patriarchal structure for the unjust suffering and violence against her.

According to one version of the myth, when Paraśurāma went to behead his mother, he also beheaded the Pariah woman, and when he went back to bring her alive, he transposed the head of his mother to the body of the Pariah woman, and the vice versa. The woman with Brahman head became Mārīammā, and the one with the untouchable head became Yellammā. To Yellammā buffaloes were sacrificed, but to Mārīammā, goats and buffaloes.¹⁴² Similar other versions of this myth are also known.

But, for Jordon, the primary message in these myths is the glorification of woman's self-sacrifice: through sacrifice and violent death, Reṅukā is transformed from a woman into a powerful goddess, created from the dalit woman who protects Reṅukā when her son chases her with an ax. 'Suffering is an experiential link between goddess and devotee, not only because her devotees suffer from small-pox and other diseases, but also because they, like their goddess, must sacrifice their lives to the patriarchal society.'¹⁴³ In Egnor's interpretation, Jordon points out, the Tamil women she studied did not see themselves as victims, but rather, women with śakti: 'None of these women saw a contradiction between her possession of śakti and her subordinate role as female....On the contrary, for each woman the possession of extraordinary śakti came as a consequence of her subordinate status, or more accurately, as a consequence of the suffering that subordination entailed.'¹⁴⁴

Further, with the head of a Brahmin and the body of a low caste, she combined in herself both Brahminhood and Chandalahood, thus challenging the hierarchical caste structure, and as some of the myths show, as a goddess, she

¹⁴² Whitehead Henry, *The Village Gods of South India*, pp. 116-117

¹⁴³ Jordon Donna, *Śakti's Revolution*, p. 104

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 104

could now challenge and overthrow the patriarchal structure. For instance, according to one of the myths, thus the woman with the head of Reṇukā and the body of the Paraiyar woman became Mārīammā, and as the goddess of the Paraiyars, she thwarted all the major caste Hindu deities, usurped arenas of their powers, and punished them all with disease and her dreaded curse. Her realm became the universe, including the Underworld, which she controlled without male intervention.¹⁴⁵

Significantly, Mārīammā was originally a low-caste goddess who protected villagers and their lands, though now, in both, urban and rural areas, the high and low caste forms her core devotees.¹⁴⁶ Mārīammā has entered the 'great tradition' and draws devotees from both urban and rural areas and across caste lines.¹⁴⁷

Still other kinds of myths explain her association with small pox,¹⁴⁸ and in yet others, she is the fallen form of Pārvatī.¹⁴⁹

Various similar other **stand alone fierce goddesses** also dot the landscape of South India, especially in the rural areas. Some of these disease goddesses from the region of Andhra Pradesh are Pedammā; Mutyalammā, Gaṅgammā, Aṅkammā and Mahālaksmīammā in Dharmaja-Guden near Ellore; from the region of Karnataka, Urammā (cholera or plague goddess) in the Bellary District; Suṅkalamā (goddess of small pox and measles) in the Bellary Town; Udalamā (goddess of swollen necks), Kokkalamā (goddess of coughs), Sukhajammā (goddess of small-pox and measles) in a shrine near Bangalore; from the region of Tamil Nadu, Kalumaiammā (goddess of cholera, cattle plague and epidemics) in Trichinopoly.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 108

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 97

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 100

¹⁴⁸ Whitehead Henry, *The Village Gods of South India*, pp. 115-116

¹⁴⁹ Jordon Donna, *Śakti's Revolution*, pp. 98-99

These fierce goddesses, too, are worshipped after an epidemic breaks, and are propitiated with equally fierce rituals as Mārīammā is. They are worshipped by the lower castes, particularly those who are considered to be outcastes such as Mālās and Mādigās, though the participation of the high caste is not unknown.¹⁵⁰ Thus, these fierce goddesses bring together the contraries of disease and health, pure and impure, the Outcastes and the Brahmins.

In the north, the equivalent of Mārīammā is the fierce goddess Śītalā, goddess of small-pox. She is described in the Skanda Purāṇa, and later medical treatise as nude with a white body, three-eyed and bedecked with pearls (symbolic of small-pox pustules) and golden ornaments; she carries a vessel with water in one hand and broomstick in the other; and her vehicle is an ass.¹⁵¹ She is also known as Vasantabudī or Vāsantī Caṇḍī, and is worshipped everywhere in Bengal.¹⁵² She attacks people with diseases, but at the same time cures them of it. People feel scared of her, yet at the same time worship her as their Mother, particularly during the time of epidemics, to get her blessings to cure them of the diseases. She is terrible and benevolent; destructive and creative. In words of Dimock, disease and health are both aspects of the mercy of the goddess, and her līlā.¹⁵³ It is these contraries with which make this divinity.¹⁵⁴

Thus, to conclude, the *deviant* goddesses, Kālī and Mārīammā stand alone, independent goddesses representing fierce unleashed female power. Both Kālī and Mārīammā possess ambivalent powers, the former possessing the power of death and the latter having the power to inflict diseases, yet both are perceived as Mothers by their devotees, Kālī, leading her children from death to salvation, and Mārīammā curing the diseases of her children. These fierce goddesses are

¹⁵⁰ Whitehead Henry, *The Village Gods of South India*, p. 106

¹⁵¹ Jordon Donna, *Śakti's Revolution*, p. 200

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 200

¹⁵³ Dimock Edward, 'A Theology of the Repulsive: The Myth of the Goddess Śītalā', p. 196

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 190. According to Dimock, 'It could be concluded that only by what is deviant in ordinary experience can true normality be seen; only by what is 'diseased' by human perception, or by what is called 'strange and mysterious' is reality perceived.

worshipped with equally fierce methods of worship, in other words, those that are considered to be outside the 'respectable' realm, the most prominent form of worship being the animal sacrifice. However, for the devotees, this kind of distinction does not exist, for they believe that their goddess is satisfied by receiving blood sacrifices, and so they continue to do the sacrifice and seek her blessings. Similarly, these goddesses are associated with people considered as 'marginal', such as the association of Mārīammā with the Mālās and the Mādīgas. However, during their worship and festivals, one notices a breakdown of these hierarchies and distinctions amongst the devotees, for the spit of the Mātangi is considered auspicious not only by the Mālās and Mādīgas, but also by the Brahmins. These goddesses also represent *deviant* sexuality. Kālī's iconography, her terrifying appearance, nude representation, association with children's corpses as pieces of ornaments, trampling on the body of Śiva are all evident of it. Therefore, perhaps, various attempts were made to 'tame' or mute these extremes, and bring her within a 'respectable' realm. Yet, she continued with her terrifying appearance and the same iconography, in fact, in some perceptions, such as the feminist movements, her fierceness was retained and incorporated, for Kālī stood as the powerful fierce symbol of liberation from patriarchy. In the case of Mārīammā, she gets associated with the mythology of the *deviant* wife Reṇukā, and challenges the patriarchal structure, and caste hierarchy, though without toppling these structures.

The next two chapters look at two more *deviant* images of goddesses, Lajjā Gaurī, and Reṇukā and her manifestations. Lajjā Gaurī is again a stand alone figure, yet a fertility goddess, with a *deviant* iconography. Reṇukā, even though the *deviant* wife of Jamadagni, and mother of Paraśurāma, is a stand alone figure as a goddess, like her many manifestations.

CHAPTER 3

THE DEVIANT IMAGE OF A FERTILITY GODDESS:

THE CULT OF LAJJĀ GAURĪ

This chapter looks at the *deviant* image of a fertility goddess, Lajjā Gaurī. This goddess emerged around the first-second century CE in the Indian subcontinent, and continued to be worshipped till around the eleventh-twelfth century CE. After that, she mysteriously disappeared (perhaps taken over by other goddesses, who too blessed the worshippers with fertility boons) except in some areas in South India, where she is still worshipped. Her images are found from all over the sub-continent, though majority of them come from South India. The states from which they are found are Kashmir, Smast, Uttar Pradesh, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Tamil Nadu with maximum concentration in Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. Thus, her cult was spread almost over the entire subcontinent with a concentration in the Deccan. Her figures and plaques range in size from two inches to over life size images, and are made either from molded or hand-formed terracotta or from stone carved in relief. They range in quality from extreme crudity to great refinement. Using the iconographic data, the limited written sources and oral tradition, having lost her original historical name, this chapter attempts to construct the history of this popular *deviant* image of a fertility goddess.

Nomenclature

Having lost her original historical name, this fertility goddess has been referred to variously by both the scholars and the people. Most of the names and terms of reference are either descriptive of her physical aspects, particularly her birth giving posture, state of headlessness, and nakedness, or she is referred to with the names of other goddesses, such as Pārvatī, under whom she was assimilated within the Brahmanical tradition; Aditi, Reṇukā, Yellammā with whom she is

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NĀGANĀTHA TEMPLE, NAGANATHAKOLLA, BĪJAPUR, KARNATAKA

identified on the basis of similarity some physical characteristics, and various other local goddesses. Recently, however, the name Lajjā Gaurī has been most popularly used.

The word Lajjā means shame, modesty, and bashfulness.¹⁵⁵ The word Gaurī refers to Pārvatī. Thus, the name Lajjā Gaurī would mean the shameful/modest/bashful Pārvatī, which in turn would mean this fertility goddess with her *deviant* posture, is a figure full of shame and modesty, and not shameless as has been incorrectly translated and understood in the existing historiography. In this sense, the term rightly defines the sexuality of this fertility goddess. The addition of the name Gaurī indicates the assimilation of this goddess within the Brahmanical tradition through the figure of Pārvatī.

However, the name has been variously translated and understood in the scholarly and popular tradition. The earliest references to the term Lajjā Gaurī comes from the following two accounts. During his visit to the Mahākūṭa temple, Fleet came across a Lajjā Gaurī image enshrined in the temple. He referred to her as a 'somewhat notorious and very indecent headless stone figure of the goddess Pārvatī under the name of Lajjā Gaurī.¹⁵⁶ Second, the Marathi Pandit Ganeshasastri Lele-Trymbakar in his work Tīrthayātrāprabhandha (in Marathi) gave a description of the image of Lajjā Gaurī, while describing his pilgrimage to Mahākūṭa. He referred to her as Lajjā Gaurī and pointed out that her shrine was close to the shrine of Mahākūṭeśvara. He described her image and also referred to it as peculiar and strange.¹⁵⁷

Both Fleet and Trymbakar's use of the name Lajjā Gaurī and description of the image indicates a sense of discomfort with this fertility goddess. The former's use of the terms notorious and indecent, also, shows his condemnation for her image.

¹⁵⁵ Williams Monier, *A Sanskrit English Dictionary*

¹⁵⁶ IA, Vol 10, no XCIV

¹⁵⁷ Bapat Jayant Bhalchandra, 'The 'Lajjāgaurī: mother, wife or yoginī', p. 82

Another mention of the name Lajjā Gaurī was made by Late Chappgar. He reproduced an illustration of Lajjā Gaurī from the cave at Siddhankollā in his diary, and referred to it as Lajjā Gaurī. He translated the name Lajjā Gaurī as a shy woman.¹⁵⁸ Sankalia, however, called this translation euphemistic, and argued that the name really means ‘a shameless woman’; therefore, her head is never shown. He added that nowadays women who do not get children worship her.

Sankalia’s incorrect translation of the term Lajjā Gaurī too reflects his discomfort with the image of this fertility goddess.

Dhere in his work *Lajjāgaurī* argued that the name Lajjāgaurī, or its alternative form Lañjāgaurī, must have been in use since the sixth century CE. He argued this by citing inscriptions from Badami. The Chalukyan king Maṅgaleśa, he points out, caused a rock temple to be carved at Badami dedicated to Lord Viṣṇu. The inscription of 578 CE, on one of the pillars of this temple, records the gift of the town Lañjīśvara to the Brahmans, for the dual purpose of performing the ritual of Nāgabālī, and for feeding them. Another inscription at this temple, in Kannada, also by Maṅgaleśa, records the donation of a part of the income from the town of Lañjīśvara for the regular worship of the deity.¹⁵⁹ According to Dhere, for the experts in the study of inscriptions in this area, both the names of Lañjīśvara and Lañjīgeśvara denote the present day town Nandikeśvara. Further, he notes that the Śākambharī Mahātmya states that Lajjāgaurīśvara is one of the famous shrines at Mahākūta. Both Nandikeśvara and Mahākūta are part of the present-day town of Badami.¹⁶⁰ Dhere argues that Lajjāgaurīśvara, the name by which the Śiva shrine is now locally known, is a Sanskritization of the names Lañjīśvara and Lañjīgeśvara. Since the names of Śiva shrine often incorporate the name of his consort Pārvatī, Dhere believes that Pārvatī was known by the names Lajjā, Lañjā and Lañjīkā at least in the sixth century. To him, these names

¹⁵⁸ Sankalia, ‘The Nude Goddess or “Shameless Woman” in Western Asia, India, and South-Eastern Asia’, p. 141

¹⁵⁹ Bapat Jayant Bhalchandra, ‘The ‘Lajjāgaurī: mother, wife or yoginī’, pp. 82-83

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., pp. 82-83

also suggest that Pārvatī was worshipped as the peculiar headless nude images ever since that time.¹⁶¹

Bolon believes that the name Gaurī is correct in the sense of probably being ancient because of the associations of pūrṇa kumbha, bulls, deities paired with this fertility goddess, her shrines placed by lotus ponds or springs, her association with Śaiva temples, and the Pattadakal inscription, which seems to describe Gaurī with lotuslike tresses, as the wife of Hara or Śiva.¹⁶² Lajjā, she argues, was possibly an explanatory term added, not in great antiquity, to replace the original lost meaning of the lotus culmination of most forms of this goddess.¹⁶³

Tiwari argues that a truly old tradition survives in the modern name Lajjā Gaurī. The name Lajjā, he argues, contains suggestion of the alien, “non-Aryan” nature of the Nude Goddess. It comes from the Austric word lañja, which is used in the sense of tail or harlot. Eventually, the term was Sanskritised. Thus, Lajjā in Lajjā Gaurī seems to a Sanskritised form of the Austric word lanja. Gaurī could have been added when the process of brahmanisation started.¹⁶⁴

Stella Kramrisch refers to her as Aditi Uttanāpada for she identifies Aditi of the Ṛg Veda with this fertility goddess.¹⁶⁵ Krishna Kumar in his article, too, prefers to refer to her as Aditi Uttanāpada, and not Lajjā Gaurī for the description of Aditī Uttanapāda in Ṛg Veda agrees with the extant image of this fertility goddess.¹⁶⁶

This fertility goddess is known variously in the local tradition. TVG Sastry points out that the Nāgārjunakoṇḍa image is known as Nagña Kabandā in local folk

¹⁶¹ Ibid., p. 83

¹⁶² Bolon Carol Radcliffe, *Forms of the Goddess Lajjā Gaurī in Indian Art*, pp. 65-66

¹⁶³ Ibid., p. 66

¹⁶⁴ Tiwari J, *Goddess Cults in Ancient India*, p. xiv

¹⁶⁵ This identification has already been discussed in the historiography.

¹⁶⁶ Kumar Krishna, ‘The Cult of Aditi Uttanapada in Indo-Pak subcontinent: An Assessment in the light of new discoveries’, p. 155

tradition.¹⁶⁷ In Ālampur, this figure was once called Ellammā possibly derived from patron goddess of the villages. It was also called Reṇukā Śaktī based on the legend of Paraśurāma who beheaded his mother Reṇukā.¹⁶⁸ She has also been called Śākhambharī based on identification with her descriptions in Devī-Mahātmyam.¹⁶⁹

Bolon points out the following names used by scholars or villagers for her. Ananti devī, Nagnamātā, Kumkana, Kolambika, Aditi, Reṇukā, Elamba, Yellammā, Kotvī, Pṛthvī, Belan Kallachema, Nagna kabamdha, Verul, Kamalamukhī, Kamalagaṅgāmā, Kāmakalā, Mahākuṇḍalinī, Chakrayī, Adya Śakti, Jogulamba, Mātaṅgī, Marai, Mahurama, Ekavira, Yamabai, Vyagresvari, Sang and Śākhambhari.¹⁷⁰ These names, she points out, are descriptive of her physical aspects, others are names of known goddesses that share a similar feature with Lajjā Gaurī.¹⁷¹

Pattanaik points out that the villagers, many of whom are laborers and serfs who come from the lower strata of the Hindu caste hierarchy seem more familiar with the icon of Lajjā Gaurī. They identify her as the primal mother-goddess, the life-giver, the life sustainer, the life taker. They call her Ādya Shakti (primal energy), Bhūdevī (earth-goddess), Reṇukā (soil maiden), Yellammā (everybody's mother), Śākambari (mother of vegetation), Nagna-Ambikā (naked mother). To them, the divinity of the mother goddess comes forth from her ability to bring forth life. She is a goddess because of her body, not her head.¹⁷²

Thus, the name Lajjā Gaurī attempts to explain her sexuality expressed through the *deviant* posture and indicates her assimilation within the Brahmanical tradition; the names such as Aditi Uttanāpada show attempts to find her a name,

¹⁶⁷ Sastry T.V.G., 'Lajjā Gaurī from Alampur and Its Symbolism', p. 274

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 275

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 275

¹⁷⁰ Bolon Carol Radcliffe, *Forms of the Goddess Lajjā Gaurī in Indian Art*, p. 63

¹⁷¹ Ibid., pp. 63-64

¹⁷² Pattanaik Devdutt, *The Goddess in India: The Five Faces of the Eternal Feminine*, p. 5

and identify her in the textual tradition; and the names referred above indicates her popularity, and reflects attempts made at the local level to name a goddess, give her an identity, and assimilate her within the Brahmanical tradition, and explain her *deviant* sexuality.

Symbology of Lajjā Gaurī

The images of Lajjā Gaurī have often led to an iconization dilemma. Her posture has often been misunderstood as that of a 'self-displaying' woman. But, what distinguishes her from the 'self-displaying' women, and gives her the identity of a fertility goddess are two factors. One, unlike the 'self-displaying' women, Lajjā Gaurī is never seen opening her pudendum, or touching it with her own hands. Second, and most significantly her symbology. The early figures of Lajjā Gaurī (Bolon refers to them as form I Lajjā Gaurī) draw from the symbology of a pot, and the majority of her figures show her associated with lotuses. The association with a pot and lotus combined with a birth-giving posture gives her the identity of a fertility goddess. According to Bolon, it is the incorporation of rich symbolism that differentiates the divine figure of this goddess from figures intended for erotic display.¹⁷³ In fact, according to her, they hold the key in understanding the nature of this goddess as well as its creation and elaboration in four forms.

Further, Lajjā Gaurī has not only been carved singularly as free-standing figures, but also on plaques with other figures, which are predominantly bull, *liṅga* and devotee. The association with bull, and *liṅga* and devotee indicates her assimilation within the Brahmanical tradition through Śaivism, and shows her strong association with fertility for the bull is itself considered to symbolize virility, and the *liṅga* is the symbol par excellence of fertility. The devotee signifies her divinity. Thus, the portrayal of Lajjā Gaurī with these figures that

¹⁷³ Bolon Carol Radcliffe, *Forms of the Goddess Lajjā Gaurī In Indian Art*, p. 6

symbolizes fertility and divinity further establishes her identity as a fertility goddess.

Now, to elucidate on the symbology of the pot and the lotus.

Pot- The form I images of Lajjā Gaurī show symbolic similarity with the pot.¹⁷⁴ The womb and the abdomen area of Lajja Gauri are often shaped like a pot.

The pot symbolizes fertility, well being, and the power of water as the source of life. Many references in the Ṛg Veda speak of the Kalaśa as being filled with Soma, the life juice, the essential fluid that sustains the human body. It rushes forth into the Kalaśa with all its potential powers, and while accumulating in the jar induces all kinds of beauty to come to stay therein.¹⁷⁵

In each household, on every auspicious occasion, the purna kalaśa is the nucleus of every ceremony. The purna kalaśa representing the human body, or which is the same thing as the created world, is the first to be worshipped. It is, also, the symbol of fertility, filled as it is, with the fecund water of life.¹⁷⁶

Bolon, in her work, notes that form I images of Lajjā Gaurī have a pot torso that are set with its mouth upward and holding a lotus flower. They look like the brimming vase, or purṇa kumbha with lotus flower, familiar in the Indian art as a traditional symbol of fortune, life and procreative power.¹⁷⁷ According to Bolon, “Perhaps the linguistic double meaning of pot/womb was the inspiration for the visual double entendre embodied in form I Lajjā Gaurī”.¹⁷⁸

Further, she points out that if one inverts the form I figures, the potform belly area looks very much like either a closed lotus or a phallus.¹⁷⁹ The slit seems to

¹⁷⁴ Form I images have been explained under the topic *Extent and Spread of the Cult from the first-second century CE till the present day*

¹⁷⁵ Agrawala V.S., ‘Purna Kalaśa’, p. 22

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 27

¹⁷⁷ Bolon Carol Radcliffe, *Forms of the Goddess Lajjā Gaurī in Indian Art*, p. 13

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 11

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 15

serve as the opening of the vagina and of the penis or lotus bud.¹⁸⁰ This composite image formed of the large bud and pot, or phallus and womb is an example of the visual double entendre, which embodies form I Lajjā Gaurī.¹⁸¹ Margaret Egnor notes that in ancient texts, a metaphor for the vagina is either an open flower or a ripe fruit, the womb is described as a lotus flower which opens and closes rhythmically and the womb is called the yoni, or the vessel which receives. The penis is called a closed bud, or a green fruit.¹⁸² All these associations seem to be given form in Lajjā Gaurī images. Thus, the images, according to Bolon, seem to suggest the union of the bud and the flower and the phallus and the womb.¹⁸³ Lajjā Gaurī figures not only physically, but also play on symbols and sexual meanings.¹⁸⁴

Lotus- The lotus is associated with almost every figure and plaque of Lajjā Gaurī. Most significantly, it is part of her image, for in place of her head is a lotus, and for she holds lotuses or lotus buds in her hands.

In Indian art, the lotus is the symbol par excellence of fertility, reproduction, and fertility.¹⁸⁵

Bosch sums up the following views on the lotus as the symbol of life, 'If to the results thus obtained we assign the proper place in the Indian conception of the world, conceived as a lotus with cosmic dimension, in other words if in our imagination we reconstruct the image of these things as it was conceived by the Indian and expressed in his art, then Hiranyagarbha, the germ and womb of all that lives, assumes the shape of the roots of the cosmic lotus, the padmamūla, and it is filled with the golden elixir of life that unites the essence of the two primordial principles Agni and Soma. From this root, the sap is sent forth in all

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 15

¹⁸¹ Ibid., p. 15

¹⁸² Ibid., p. 15

¹⁸³ Ibid., p. 15

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 15

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 51

directions, it rises through the central stem, spreads through the side-shoots, flows out through the nodes, penetrates into the plant's branches, leaves, flowers and fruits and wherever it appears it engenders life, the life that animates animals and men, demons and gods, that makes the earth fertile and cattle thrive, pours riches and wealth over the earth, just as we see it so vividly pictured on the Bharhut and Sanchi reliefs.¹⁸⁶

According to Bolon, the lotus symbolizes the following ideas all of which are found meaning in the images of Lajjā Gaurī. First, the lotus floating upon the water; as conceived by Indian mythologists is like, the earth floating on the waters and thereby the lotus is also a symbol of the earth, source of all life and fortune. All life originates from the waters and the earth is the absolute upon which all depends. Thereby the lotus symbolizes both the potency of life-giving water and the earth.¹⁸⁷ In many Hindu myths, after the devastating flood and between creations, the first life of a new age arises from the ocean floor in the form of a lotus, thereby symbolizing creation.¹⁸⁸ Second, the botanical characteristics of the lotus, too, are suggestive of the ideas of fertility and reproduction along with the idea of cyclic regeneration of life, as the plant is seen as carrying the potential for future generation. Third, on the microcosmic level, the flowering of the lotus is symbolic of the opening of an individual's consciousness to its full potential and macrocosmically it symbolizes cosmic consciousness or the idea of perfect wisdom.¹⁸⁹

Thus, the symbolic similarity between the pot and form I images of Lajjā Gaurī, and the addition of the lotus to her image gives Lajjā Gaurī the identity of a fertility goddess.

¹⁸⁶ Chandra Moti, 'Studies in the Cult of the Mother Goddess In Ancient India', p. 24

¹⁸⁷ Bolon Carol Radcliffe, *Forms of the Goddess Lajjā Gaurī in Indian Art*, p. 52

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 52

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 53.

Association, Assimilation, Distance and Negotiation with the Cult of Lajjā Gaurī

An analysis of this goddess in terms of her nomenclature, origin and spread over time and space, sculptural variations, inscriptional records and oral traditions shows that Lajjā Gaurī was a very popular goddess.¹⁹⁰ She existed from the second century CE till around the twelfth century CE. Almost every region of the subcontinent without changing her basic posture, and thereby possibly her basic function, and identity, assimilated her, and sculpturally changed her according to the ritual context, worshippers' perception and need, and artists' imagination. Further, not only was she popular amongst the local level, she was also accepted and assimilated by the Brahmanical tradition through Śaivism, and patronized by the royal class. This section looks at the cult of Lajjā Gaurī in terms of its acceptance, assimilation, distance, and negotiation with the Brahmanical tradition, the royal class, and society at large.

Lajjā Gaurī probably originated at a local level with a pot with attached legs serving as her original aniconic form, perhaps in Ter. With her growing popularity, she was probably given a human form.¹⁹¹ Eventually, she must have become popular enough to attract royal attention, and thereby royal patronage, and get associated and assimilated within the Brahmanical pantheon. These two factors probably worked in conjunction with each other to bring about her assimilation.

The earliest evidence of royal patronage comes from the Ikshvaku dynasty, as evident from the inscription on the Nāgārjunakoṇḍa Lajjā Gaurī image.¹⁹² Significantly, it was a form II image that was patronized, which indicates that even the basic aniconic images were so popular, so as to attract the attention

¹⁹⁰ This section is based on the conclusions drawn from the sections discussed below.

¹⁹¹ It is difficult to state the reasons for her growing popularity, for there are no sources that give us the reasons for either the emergence or the growing popularity of her cult. Scholars like Bolon and Kumar have speculated that this might have to do with the population level of every region, and unsafe maternity.

¹⁹² This inscription has been discussed under the topic *Lajjā Gaurī in History and Inscriptions*

and patronage of the royal class. Also, it is noteworthy that the image was patronized by the queen, not only giving evidence of patronage provided by the women of this dynasty, but also the fact that Lajjā Gaurī was a woman's goddess, the latter also seen from the depiction of female devotees in the multfigured plaques.

The royal patronage continued under the Chalukyas and the Rashtrakutas. The Chalukyas patronized a number of images (found from Karnataka), and even enshrined them in their temples. The fact that all the Chalukya period images are large, that is, around three-four feet, carved in relief in stone, and share an almost standardized iconography of form III reinforces the argument. Significantly, the images patronized by the Chalukyas belonged to form III, that is, the images that were anthropomorphized, and look more domesticated, and less *deviant* than the earliest ones. According to Bolon, the royal patronage of a deity of a local cult may have induced the anthropomorphization of the symbol.¹⁹³ If this is correct, this process of acceptance of a popular cult of a local level by the royal class, and the anthropomorphization and patronage introduced to the cult by them indicates both interaction between the two levels. However, the fact that none of the Chalukyan inscriptions mention this goddess (except perhaps the first inscriptional reference provided by Bolon) suggests that the deity had not been completely accepted and assimilated by the royal class to get a mention in the inscriptional records. Further, the fact that even when she was enshrined in the Chalukya temples, she was installed in a subshrine, and not in a temple dedicated to her, shows the hesitating acceptance of the goddess.

When the Rashtrakutas supplanted the Chalukyas, the patronage to Lajjā Gaurī continued. The existence of a number of Rashtrakuta-style Lajjā Gaurī images gives evidence for the same, such as the form III Lajjā Gaurī image found in

¹⁹³ Carol Radcliffe, *Forms of the Goddess Lajjā Gaurī in Indian Art*, p. 68

Galaganatha temple group at Aihole, which may once have been housed in a subshrine of a Rashtrakuta Shiva temple at Aihole, the slab with Lajjā Gaurī figure and other figures from the rim of the tank of Huchchimalli temple added by the Rashtrakutas to the Chalukyas temple, and the form III image found at the Nagesvaraswami temple in Andhra Pradesh.

Thus, through this evidence of royal patronage by three different dynasties one observes a process of both interaction and *negotiation* between the local and royal levels, which led to an acceptance, though an incomplete one of the cult of Lajjā Gaurī by the royal class. The other dynasties under which she existed such as Mallas in Kaushambi, Matrkas in Gujarat, Vakatakas and Kalachuris in Maharashtra, however, chose to maintain a complete distance from the cult for there is no evidence of any kind of royal patronage or inscriptional record mentioning this goddess.

The enshrining of the Lajjā Gaurī images by the Chalukyas happened in the Śaiva temples, thus indicating that her acceptance within the Brahmanical tradition happened through Śaivism. Lajjā Gaurī was accepted as the consort of Śiva, who himself as a liṅga, symbolizes fertility. Thus, the fertility goddess was assimilated through the consort, who himself is a symbol of fertility.

The association with Śaivism began around the fourth-sixth century as evident from the beginning of multfigured plaques from Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Andhra Pradesh. In these multfigured plaques, Lajjā Gaurī is found depicted predominantly with a liṅga, bull, lion face, and a devotee in a mixed arrangement. Unusual plaques from Andhra Pradesh such as from Kunidene, Darsi and Uppalapadu show Lajjā Gaurī depicted with the triad, Brahma, Viṣṇu and Śiva. All the figures are depicted in a single row, and all of them are of the same size. According to Bolon, these plaques suggest that after existing independently from the second-fourth century, she might have undergone an elevation in status and entered the Brahmanical pantheon at least in South India.

This, she points out, might have happened by accepting her as a Śakti of Śiva.¹⁹⁴ Further, the unusual plaques from Andhra Pradesh show that she became an adjunct to the triad coupled with Śiva, as is evident from the fact that she was represented as an equal to the other gods by her equal size.¹⁹⁵ She, also, adds that these seem to be cult images of Lajjā Gaurī that gave her prominence by giving her a central location in the plaques.¹⁹⁶ Last, the presence of devotees in plaques suggests her status as a divinity was now established.

By the time this cult reached Rajasthan and Gujarat, her acceptance and assimilation within the Brahmanical tradition was complete, since mostly multiformed plaques were found from this region. In these multiformed plaques, she is generally seen in form III and IV, that is, in an anthropomorphic form.

The association with Śaivism is also evident from the Lajjā Gaurī images enshrined in Śaiva temples made by the Chalukyas such as at Lākuliśa temple at Siddhankolla, Bāla Brahma temple, Nāganātha temple and Mahākuteśvara temple. It is significant that Lajjā Gaurī images were not enshrined in the main sanctum, but subshrines that were deliberately added to the temples.¹⁹⁷ Further, the location of these temples were at remote places, for instance, the Lākuliśa temple at Siddhankolla was outside the major temple center, Aihole. It is noteworthy that the images that were enshrined in the temples belonged to form III, that is, the figures were in the anthropomorphic form. Thus, it reflects that though the tradition provided for the acceptance and assimilation of her cult, it was never absolute or complete.

Thus, the plaques, and subshrines in Śaiva temple suggests her acceptance and assimilation within the Brahmanical tradition through Śaivism, but the temple subshrines suggest acceptance that wasn't complete, though the unusual

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 48

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 48

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 46

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 31

plaques from Andhra Pradesh suggests that prominence accorded to her was similar to that provided by the triad, therefore reflecting different levels of acceptance and assimilation within the Brahmanical tradition in every region. The acceptance of local cult by the Brahmanical tradition, though within certain limits such as acceptance of only form III or IV images, or enshrinement only in subshrines, suggests not both interaction and negotiation between the local and Brahmanical tradition.

Her association and assimilation through Śaivism is, also, seen in the oral tradition that view her as Pārvatī, the consort of Śiva, and is perhaps reminiscent in her name Lajjā Gaurī, where Gaurī is another name for Pārvatī.

But, despite being accepted and assimilated within the Śaivite pantheon, the cult of Lajjā Gaurī continued as an independent cult as evident from lack of multifigured plaques and subshrines in Uttar Pradesh and Orissa, her temple at Padri, while in other areas she became associated with different ritual context and local usage as evident from the finding of her image in a ritual context in Ter, her plaque found in Kesaragutta, and at the Munjeshwari step well at Dhank, and in some areas, she became associated with tantricism.

Kashmir Smast, however, charted its own course of development with regard to Lajjā Gaurī, though here too, she gets associated with Śaivism, and gets royal patronage. Elucidating on Kashmir Smast, the Lajjā Gaurī seals from Kashmir Smast have inscriptions one of which mentions Acimā, who dwells in the cave of the mount of Śrī Miji. Khan indentifies Acimā as Lajjā Gaurī, who he points out is, also, represented in the same seal. Krishna Kumar draws our attention to a copper plate inscription from a site in Kashmir Smast, which identifies the site as a Saivite monastic establishment. He points out that the main building in this Śaiva monastic establishment is the southern part of the complex termed as 'House of god Vardhamanesvara (Śiva)'. There is also the Great Cave (Maha Guha) to the north-east which is referred to as an abode of Mother Goddess

named 'Acima' or 'Acirma', which appears he, too, argues to be another local name of Lajjā Gaurī.¹⁹⁸ These arguments are accepted, then Kashmir Smast gives us a local name of Lajjā Gaurī as Acimā of Kashmir Smast; it gives evidence of an entire cave (sacred place) named after her; it reflects her importance as a divinity for an entire cave is dedicated to her; and gives evidence of her assimilation within Śaivism, as her cave is found within a Śaivite monastic establishment.

Further, Kumar argues that the construction of the building complex of the Śaivite monastic establishment and the Great Cave dedicated to Mother Goddess wouldn't have been possible without some sort of royal patronage, which also indicates the possibility of some sort of royal patronage given to Lajjā Gaurī's cult.¹⁹⁹

It is possible to argue this way only if one reads the inscriptions found on other seals from Kashmir Smast as indicating the name of the owner of the seal, and not the names of Lajjā Gaurī.²⁰⁰ One will be able to draw a conclusive argument for Kashmir Smast only if more Lajjā Gaurī seals and images are reported and published with the context in which the seals were found.

Thus, the cult of Lajjā Gaurī, which must have begun as an aniconic image as a local fertility cult developed into a fully anthropomorphic image of a divinity associated with the Brahmanical tradition through Śaivism, who also gained royal patronage through a process of interaction, and negotiation. However, her assimilation within the Brahmanical tradition and the royal class was incomplete. She, also, continued to exist as an independent cult in many regions, or became absorbed in varied ritual context, including tantricism, and in some regions, she charted a different course of development.

¹⁹⁸ Kumar Krishna, 'The Cult of Aditi Uttanapada in Indo-Pak subcontinent: An Assessment in the light of new discoveries', pp. 158-159

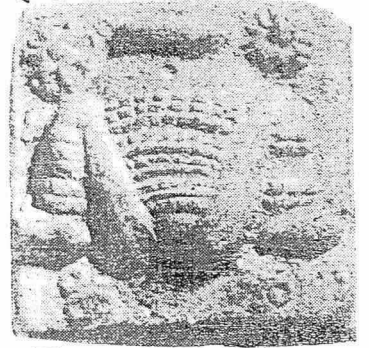
¹⁹⁹ Ibid., pp. 158-159

²⁰⁰ These inscriptions are discussed under the topic *Lajjā Gaurī in History and Inscriptions*

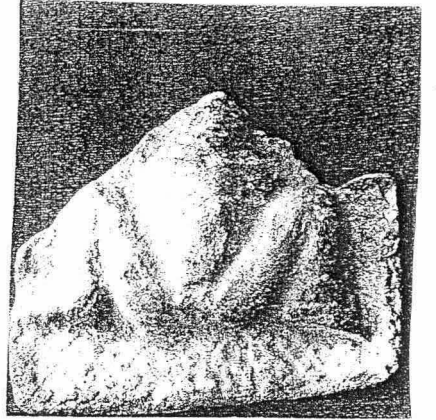
EARLY ANICONIC IMAGES (FORM I)



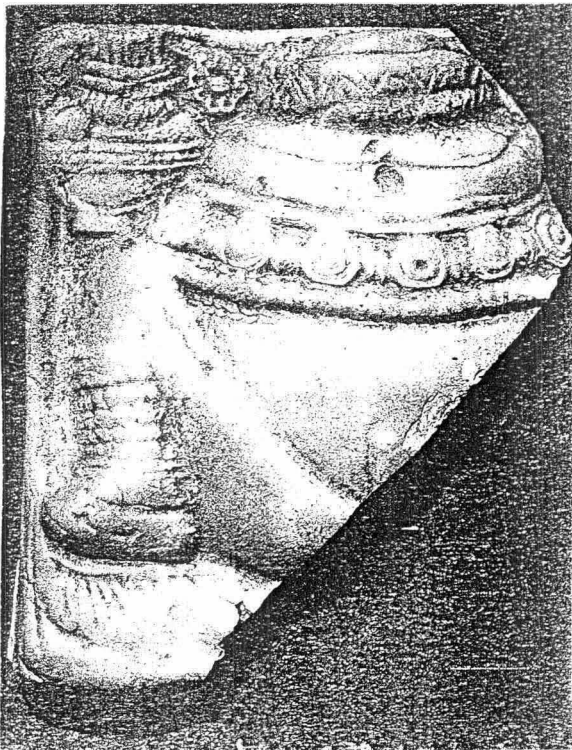
TER, MAHARASHTRA



TER, MAHARASHTRA



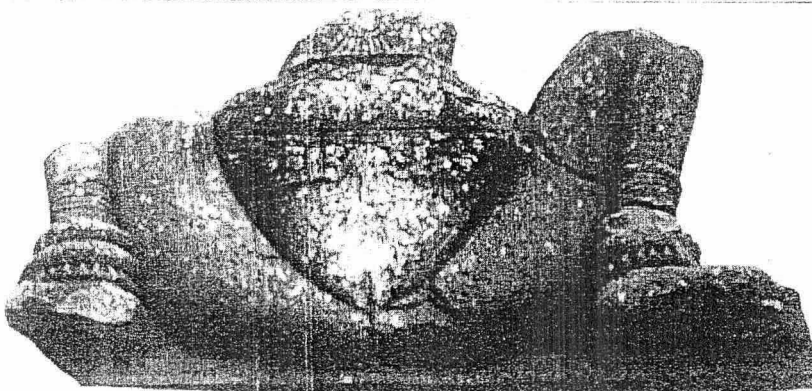
SANNATI, KARNATAKA



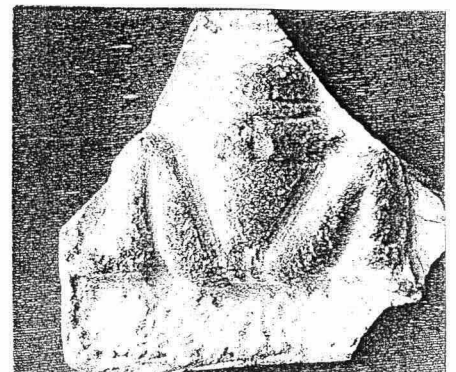
KONDAPUR, ANDHRA PRADESH



VELLESVARAM, ANDHRA PRADESH



NAGARJUNAKONDA, ANDHRA PRADESH

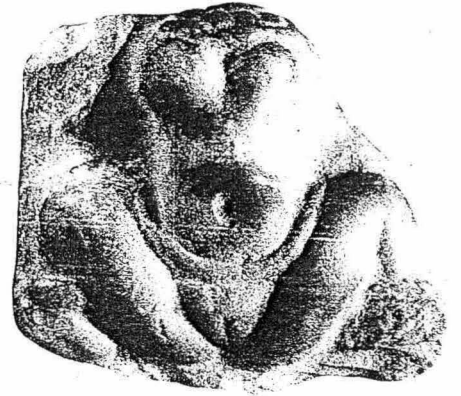


SANNATI, KARNATAKA

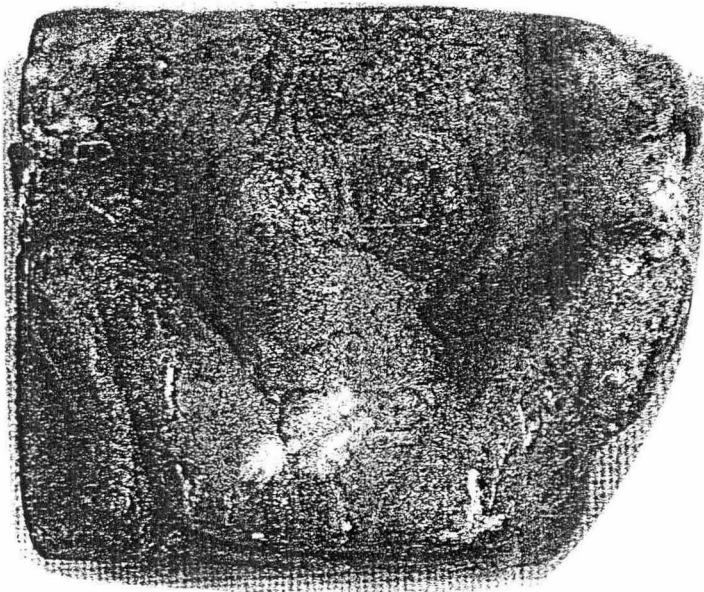
LATE ANICONIC IMAGES (FORM II)



BHITA, UTTAR PRADESH



TER, MAHARASHTRA



SANCHI, MADHYA PRADESH



PAUNI, MAHARASHTRA

EARLY ANTHROPMORPHIC IMAGES

(FORM II)



KASHMIR SMAST



BHITA, UTTAR PRADESH



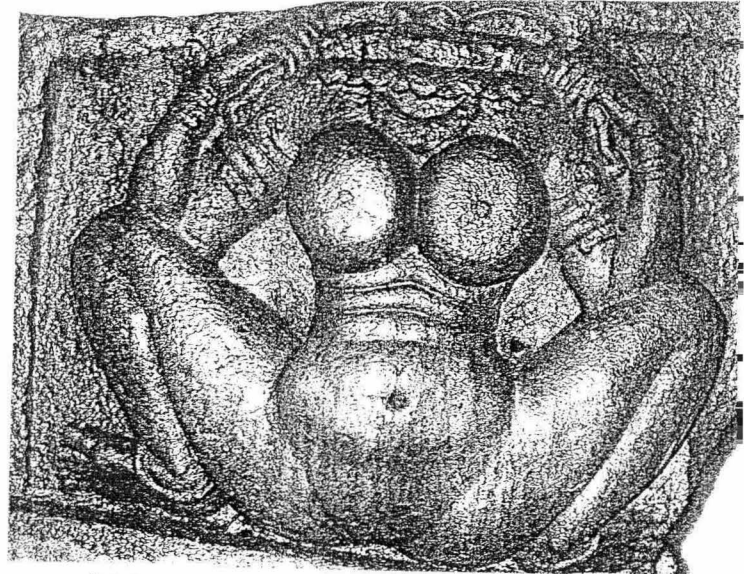
NUAPADA DISTRICT, ORISSA



YELLALA, ANDHRA PRADESH



BADAMI, KARNATAKA



DARASURAM, TAMIL NADU

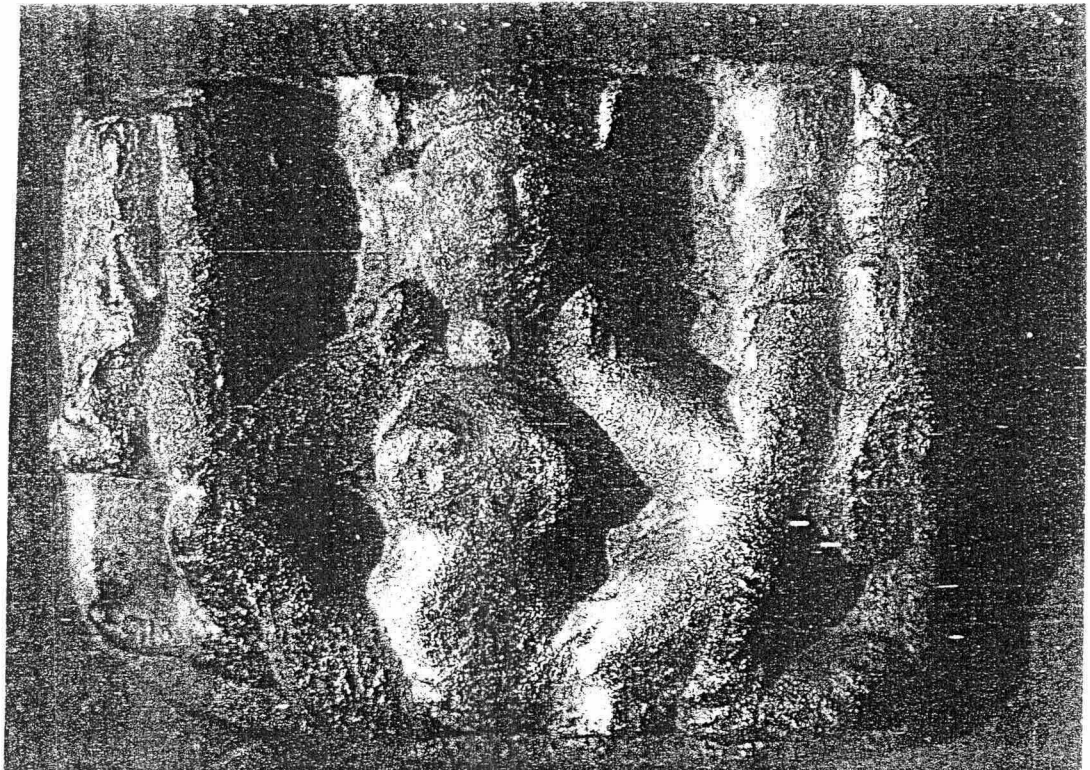
COMPLETE ANTHROPOMORPHIC IMAGES (FORM IV)



MATHURA, UTTAR PRADESH



TARSANGI, GUJARAT



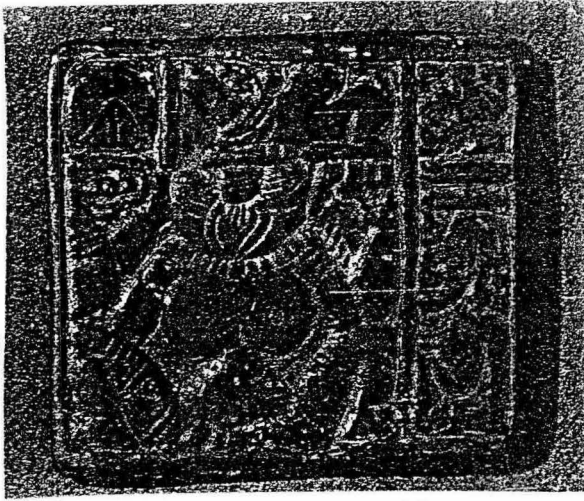
ELEPHANTA, MAHARASHTRA

COMPLETE ANTHROPOMORPHIC IMAGE (FORM IV)

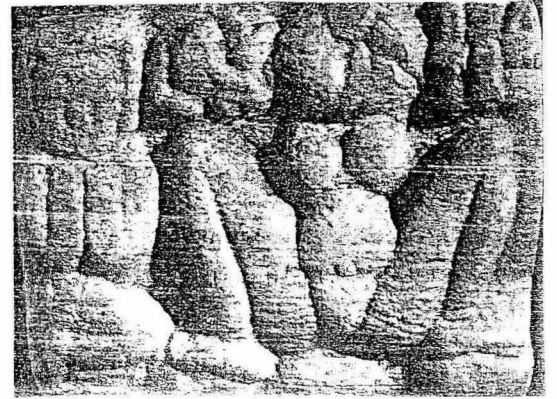


UNKNOWN SITE, CENTRAL INDIA

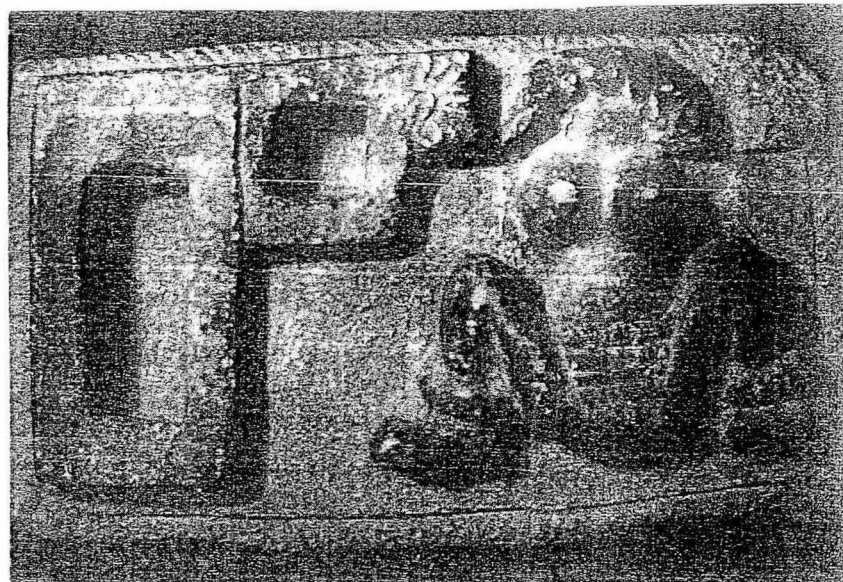
MULTIFIGURED PLAQUES OF LATE ANICONIC IMAGES (FORM II)



TER, MAHARASHTRA

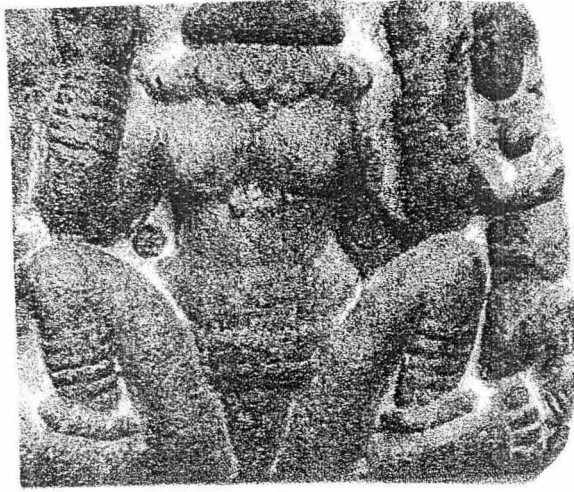


MANDHAL, MAHARASHTRA

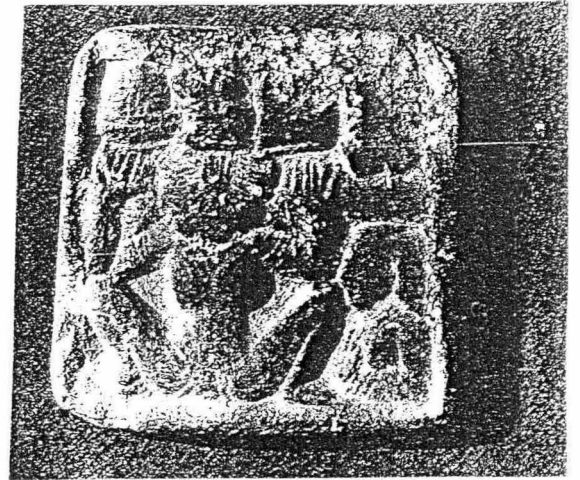


RAMATOLA, MAHARASHTRA

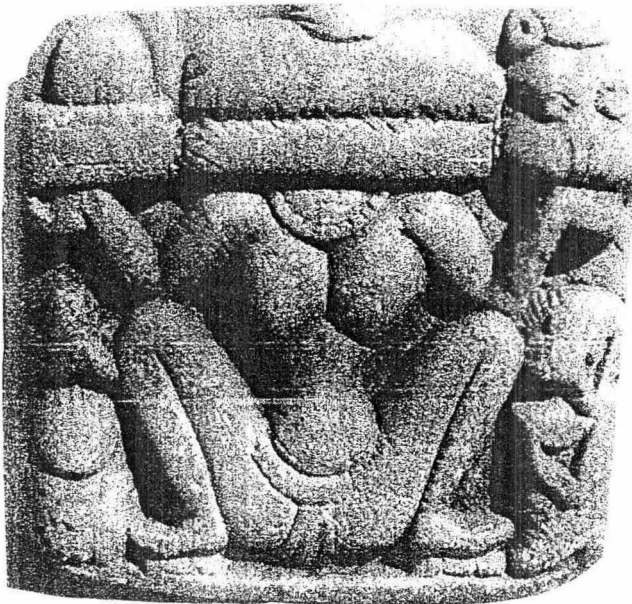
MULTIFIGURED PLAQUES OF EARLY ANTHROPOMORPHIC IMAGES (FORM I)



BAVAKA, GUJARAT



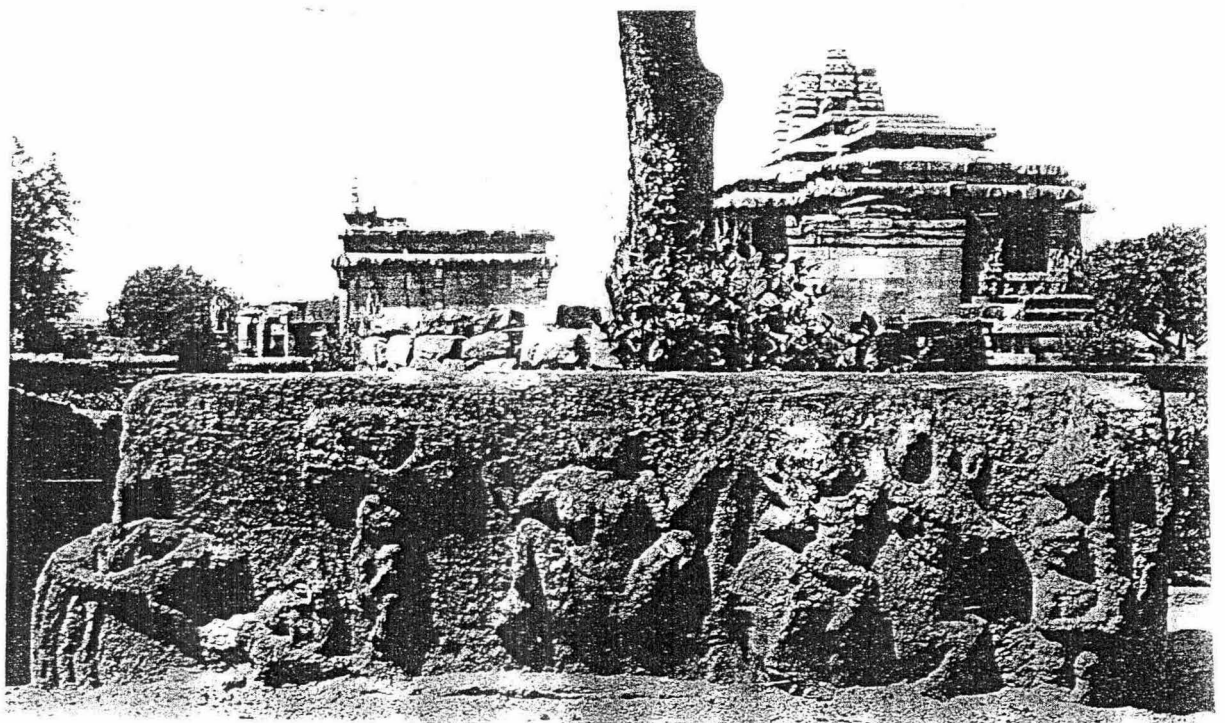
TER, MAHARASHTRA



KEESARAGUTTA, ANDHRA
PRADESH



MAJATI, KARNATAKA



AIHOLE, KARNATAKA

UNIQUE MULTIFIGURED PLAQUE OF EARLY ANTHROPOMORPHIC IMAGE (FORM III)



DARSI, ANDHRA PRADESH

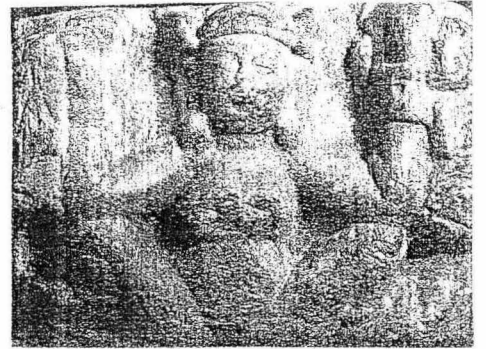
MULTIFIGURED PLAQUES OF COMPLETE ANTHROPOMORPHIC IMAGES (FORM IV)



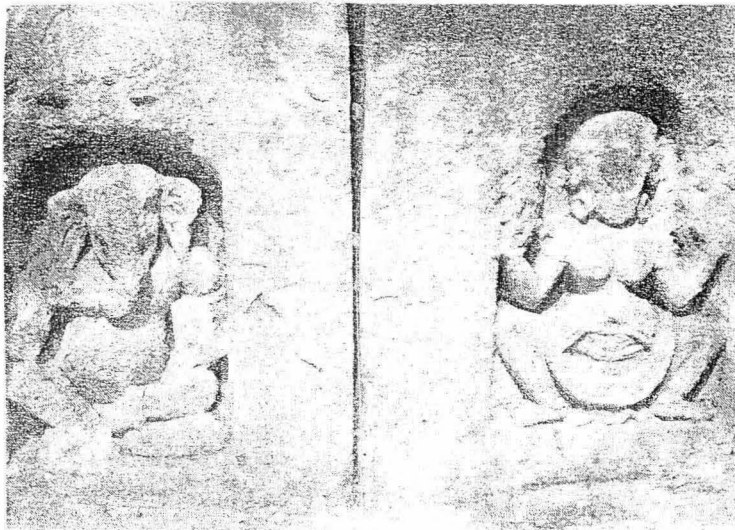
MUNJESHWARI STEP-WELL, DHANK, GUJARAT



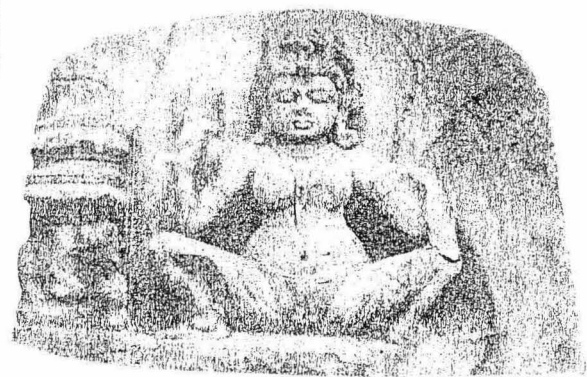
VALABHIPUR, GUJARAT



GHARAPURI, MAHARASHTRA



ARNA, GUJARAT



BHINMAL, RAJASTHAN

Extent and Spread of the Cult from the First-Second century CE till Present Day

Varied Lajjā Gaurī images are spread across time and space. To understand and analyze her widespread cult, the following study was done. A regional analysis was done to attempt to find the region of her origin; to understand and analyze her spread in different parts of the subcontinent; to observe regional patterns about her cult with regard to sculptural variations, her popularity at the local level and her acceptance, distance or negotiation with the Brahmanical tradition' and regional peculiarities in worship.

This analysis was done in the following way. First, the unique posture of Lajjā Gaurī was used to identify her images. The legs are spread and the vertical line of the pudendum is indicated. The legs make an M-shape. They are drawn up to the sides of the waist as if to serve as a "stand" for the torso. Thereafter, Bolon's four-fold classification of the images was used to divide the images into four categories that represent four different forms. The four forms are as follows. **Form I** are the basic figures referred to as "uttanāpad pot".²⁰¹ They are characterized by human legs in a birth-giving posture. The shape above the legs resembles both a pot and a female's torso with abdomen and lower rib cage. The belly portion is provided with the details such as melakhala or jeweled girdle. The figure has no upper torso. At the top is sometimes a lotus flower. Thus, the form I images lacks other female features such as breasts, arms and head. **Form II** figures have a birth-giving posture. The torso is not potlike, but more human in form. It includes the abdominal area, which is ornamented with a girdle and a carefully indicated navel. The torso now extends up to the shoulders and includes breasts. Sometimes, a necklace is also seen. There are no arms or head. Sometimes, a lotus sits atop the shoulders, in place of a head. In this form, there is a great diversity of details. **Form III** figures are all lotus-headed with otherwise anthropomorphic female bodies with breasts and two upraised arms, each hand

²⁰¹ The term uttanāpada is used by Carol Radcliffe in her work *Forms of the Goddess Lajja Gauri in Indian Art* to describe Lajjā Gaurī birth-giving posture. p. 11.

holding a lotus or lotus bud. The legs are in the birth giving posture, with the soles of their feet turn sideways. In some images, a cloth is “woven” around the thighs and behind the back. These figures wear a jeweled girdle, anklets, armlets, bracelets and a necklace. **Form IV** figures are totally anthropomorphic. They have a human head and full female torso, with raised arms, each holding a lotus bud as in Form III, with the birth giving posture. Bolon argues that the four forms of Lajja Gauri, show a broad progression from minimal, and nearly aniconic configuration to fully human.²⁰² These images were further divided into two types, first, images or plaques where only Lajjā Gaurī’s figure was sculpted, and second, multfigured plaques, where she was depicted with more figures. Further, the size of the images and plaques, and the material with which they were made was taken into account. Their chronology was also noted. Wherever the information regarding their context was available, it was taken into account. Finally, the images with the above information were divided according to contemporary division of states in the Indian subcontinent and analyzed.²⁰³

The analysis revealed that every icon and plaque of Lajjā Gaurī was unique. Keeping the basic posture uniform, each image was sculpted according to the artists’ imagination and worshipper’s perception and use. Yet, regional patterns are noteworthy. They are as follows.

Kashmir Smast has yielded somewhat variegated seals of Lajjā Gaurī, which reflect a distinct regional pattern, when compared to Lajjā Gaurī images and plaques from the rest of the subcontinent. In three of the four seals, her images seem symbolic rather than representational. Khan, who reports these images, refers to them as ‘crude’ representations of Lajjā Gaurī. Unlike the aniconic figures of Lajjā Gaurī found in other parts of the subcontinent, particularly South India, which resemble a pot/yoni, these symbolic Lajjā Gaurī figures resemble a

²⁰² Bolon, Carol Radcliffe, *Forms of the Goddess Lajjā Gaurī in Indian Art*, p. 3

²⁰³ The following account refers to the *form* of the image to avoid repetition of details. Whenever a significant variation is seen, it has been pointed out.

frog. Significantly, they are also dated to an early period, particularly the second-fifth century CE. Thus, given this early chronology of the seals and their symbolic representation, it is possible that, unlike the early aniconic Lajjā Gaurī images from South India, which were in the form of a pot or yoni, the early aniconic symbolic representation of Lajjā Gaurī from the Kashmir Smast was in the form of a frog-like image. The fact that a frog is symbolic of fertility further makes the argument plausible. The fourth seal, however, has an anthropomorphic image of Lajjā Gaurī similar to those found in the other parts of the subcontinent, and significantly dated later than the above seals, particularly to the fourth-sixth century CE. Therefore, it is possible that Kashmir Smast charted its own path in terms of the development of the icon of Lajjā Gaurī.

Other features of these seals reinforce this argument. Two of the above seals are multifigured seals. Lajjā Gaurī is depicted with a dancing figure, trident, and a pot-like object. Drawing from Bolon's work, Khan identifies these symbols as symbolic representations of Śiva, Brāhma and either Narasimha or Durgā Maḥiṣasurimardinī. The pūrṇa ghaṭa, he argues, is possibly a symbolic representation of Brāhma, who often holds a water pot, the trident represents Śiva, and a standing/dancing figure probably represents a Maḥiṣasurimardinī or a dancing Śiva.²⁰⁴ It is difficult to accept Khan's identification of these symbols, for it seems to have been borrowed and forced upon the symbols. Rather, these symbols appear to be sacred symbols peculiar to Lajjā Gaurī's cult in Kashmir Smast. Second, barring one all seals have inscriptions, one of which also gives us possibly the regional name of Lajjā Gaurī, that is Acimā. Third, these are the only Lajjā Gaurī seals in the entire subcontinent that are made of bronze.

Thus, Kashmir Smast seems to have taken its own course in the development of the Lajjā Gaurī's cult.

²⁰⁴ Khan M Nasim, 'Lajjā Gaurī Seals and Related Antiquities from Kashmir Smast, Gandhāra', p. 89

A number of Lajjā Gaurī icons and plaques have been unearthed from **Uttar Pradesh**, particularly from three sites in the Allahabad District, Bhita, Jhusi and Kaushambi. These plaques and figures are sculpted very differently in comparison to those from South India. Lajjā Gaurī is represented in anthropomorphic forms in them (predominantly in form III), though some late aniconic images and plaques (form II) have also been found. Significantly, though no aniconic images (form I) were found. This indicates that Lajjā Gaurī figures did not originate here, and her cult spread either from the North or the Deccan. However, the dating of these figures and plaques to the Kushana period, particularly to the second century CE, by the authors who report these images, negates this argument. This chronology suggests a very early origin of the cult in this area, earlier than in either Kashmir or South India. If, however, one accepts Bolon's dating of these to third-fourth century, then it is possible to argue that the Lajjā Gaurī figures and plaques emerged in South India, and spread to this area. Also, it is noteworthy that Lajjā Gaurī remained an independent cult in this region, and did not become associated with Śaivism, as in South India. This is evident from the complete lack of multfigured plaques in this region. Further, most of the figures are largely hand-modeled, and made of terracotta, though some stone images are also found. This indicates that perhaps the images were made at a village or local level. The lack of evidence for royal patronage, also, reinforces the argument.

One exception to the images from the Allahabad District is a multfigured Lajjā Gaurī object from the Mathura region. This object has Lajjā Gaurī on one side and a toad on the other. The toad's back is provided with a convenient handhold.²⁰⁵ This object has been given an early date that is, the second century CE and the origin attributed to an external influence. However, the style of sculpture shows a later dating, and an indigenous origin. If this is accepted then

²⁰⁵ Codrington K.B., 'Iconography: Classical and Indian', p. 65
The author refers to Lajjā Gaurī as Baubo-type of images.

this object show the development of the icon in Uttar Pradesh spread of the cult to other parts of Uttar Pradesh, and perhaps a different ritual use as well.

To conclude, the region of Uttar Pradesh too indicates a different path charted by this cult in this region, and a different kind of adaptation of the cult by this region.

Two plaques with Lajjā Gaurī like figure have been reported from Chandraketuragh, **South Bengal**.²⁰⁶ These figures are in a birth-giving posture like Lajjā Gaurī, but the intent of these figures seem to differ. According to Chowdhary, the size of the plaques and the perforation at the top indicates that they were meant for suspension, either as pendants or wall-hangings. It is possible that these plaques were meant as charms to be worn or carried by women desiring children or as amulets meant for the protection of one's offering by those already possessing them. Alternatively, these plaques functioned as cult objects associated with fertility, and were meant to be hung on the wall.²⁰⁷ If they are accepted as Lajjā Gaurī figures unique to this region, with their early dating of first-second century CE, then these are the earliest examples of fully human Lajjā Gaurī type of images. However, given the intent of these figures and their dating, one should not force the identity of Lajjā Gaurī on them; rather accept them as representations of fertility figures.

Two Lajjā Gaurī plaques have been found from Nuapada District, **Orissa**. These plaques are similar and contemporary to the anthropomorphic images (form III) from South India, that is, they belong to the eighth century CE. However, unlike contemporary images from Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, where such images are large and mostly enshrined in Śaiva temples, they are small in size. This indicates that, unlike the Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, where by now Lajjā Gaurī images were being assimilated within the Brahmanical tradition, and given

²⁰⁶ Chowdhury Sima Roy, 'A Group of Unique Plates from Chandraketugarh'

²⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 293

royal patronage, the Lajjā Gaurī cult in Orissa perhaps was yet to gain as much popularity and had a limited spread. It can also be argued that the Lajjā Gaurī cult in Orissa spread from South India. The fact that no aniconic images are found from here, makes this argument plausible. The use of limestone to make plaques, unlike those from South India, indicates a regional manufacture of these plaques.

Interestingly, representations of Lajjā Gaurī are also found among the Bhiyans, present-day hunting-gathering and shifting cultivators of Orissa. However, according to Deo, it is difficult to say whether they have borrowed the representation or have continued the tradition of their distant forefathers, which he identifies as the chalcolithic people.²⁰⁸

Lajjā Gaurī was a popular goddess in **Gujarat**, as is evident from the large number of her plaques discovered from this region. However, her cult spread late here. Most of the plaques are dated between the sixth and the twelfth century CE. Sonawane too argues that atleast twelve sites from Gujarat report Lajjā Gaurī images, which proves the popularity of the cult in this province, specifically in South and Central Gujarat and Saurashtra. Further, he points out that though the worship of this deity started a bit late in the beginning of the Christian era, we have evidence to trace it down to the twelfth-thirteenth century CE, following the main currents which originated and flourished more widely in Deccan. The plaques from Pavi Jetpur, Bavaka, and Gadhali in the form of actual cult objects shows the survival of the tradition even beyond the upper limit estimated earlier for its continuity.²⁰⁹ The cult spread in Gujarat, when Lajjā Gaurī was already an established deity for most of her representations are completely anthropomorphic (form IV), though anthropomorphic representations without the head (form III) have also been found. Further, in a number of representations she is sculpted with a halo or a headgear that is

²⁰⁸ Deo J.P., 'Lajjā Gaurī: The Nude Goddess or Shameless Woman-Orissan Examples', p. 138

²⁰⁹ Sonawane V.H., 'Some Remarkable Sculptures of Lajjā Gaurī from Gujarat', p. 32

mostly adorned by goddesses as in Pavi Jetpur. According to Sonawane, the depiction of prabhāvali, in one of these images signifies the attainment of divine position by this cult image.²¹⁰ Also, she is often depicted with a devotee. Moreover, if Shinde's hypothesis in his article '*The Earliest Temple of Lajjā Gaurī? The Recent Evidence from Padri in Gujarat*' can be proven, that is, the structure within which her images were found is a temple, then her worship in a temple is established.²¹¹ Though most of her plaques found in Gujarat give evidence of her being worshipped at home (for almost all plaques found in Gujarat are small), except the one installed in a niche of the Munjeshwari Step Well, Dhank, which could have either been meant for structural decoration or meant to be part of some ritual. Nonetheless, all of this evidence points to her status as an established deity in Gujarat. However, it is also noteworthy that the representations of Lajjā Gaurī in Gujarat, unlike the aniconic images, are domesticated. The pudenda and breasts are not exaggerated, but are in perfect proportion. Sometimes, a lower garment is also seen such as the image from Shamalaji. But, the basic birth-giving posture is retained in all images.

Further, her cult reached Gujarat when her association with Śaivism was well established. This is evident from the fact that Gujarat has yielded only multifigured plaques (except the one from Śāmaljī and a single plaque from Padri) where she is represented with liṅga, bull, gaṇeśa or devotee. Sonawane, too, notes that Lajjā Gaurī's association with Śiva liṅga, Nandi, Gaṇeśa and female devotee occurs sporadically in the sculptures of the early century of the Christian Era, but it becomes a regular feature in her iconography during the sixth and the succeeding centuries. These, according to him, indicate her Śaivite association, and also show that Lajjā Gaurī can be considered as a manifestation

²¹⁰ Ibid., p. 32

²¹¹ Shinde Vasant, '*The Earliest Temple of Lajjā Gaurī: The Recent Evidence from Padri in Gujarat*'

of Śakti, aspect of Śiva. The presence of an attendant or devotee suggests that she was worshipped or recognized as a regular goddess.²¹²

Last, her cult in Gujarat shows no signs of recognition by the royalty or any royal patronage. The absence of any large scale temple dedicated to her and the small size of her plaques indicates that she was worshipped by individuals at home. Sonawane, also, notes that most of the Lajjā Gaurī plaques belong to the sixth-seventh century CE, when the Maitrakas of Valabhipur were at the zenith of their power in Gujarat. But, one cannot give the existing political power credit for popularizing this cult in their respective province, as seen with the Chalukyas. The worship of Lajjā Gaurī was more or less based on an individual's personal attitude, for the cult emerged and developed out of a need to sustain a specific aim in an individual's mind, particularly with regard to womenfolk. The absence of any elaborate temples dedicated to this deity is a sign of non-availability of royal patronage, and the discovery of innumerable plaques bearing Lajjā Gaurī makes this point clearer.²¹³

Thus, Gujarat gives evidence of Lajjā Gaurī when her cult was strongly established, and became associated with Śaivism, though significantly without royal patronage.

Rajasthan has yielded only a Lajjā Gaurī multiformed plaque from Bhinmal, Jalor District and a rock-cut statue of Lajjā Gaurī in a temple dedicated to goddess Nandā at Arna, Jodhpur. Thus, it seems that the cult of Lajjā Gaurī did not gain popularity as it did in Gujarat. But, these examples suggest the same pattern as is evident in Gujarat, that is, the cult of Lajjā Gaurī spread late in this region, and that too when her identity as a divinity and association with Śaivism was well established, for these two examples are dated to the seventh and ninth century respectively, and both the representations are in complete anthropomorphic

²¹² Sonawane V.H., 'Some Remarkable Sculptures of Lajjā Gaurī from Gujarat', p. 32

²¹³ Ibid., pp. 32-33

(though domesticated) forms. In the multfigured plaques, she is sculpted with the same figure as in Gujarat, and in the temple, she is carved next to a Gaṇeśa. In the latter figure, she has also been identified with Pārvatī or Nandā.²¹⁴ This figure is also significant for it was carved in a temple, which also suggests recognition by the royal class, who built the temple. One cannot argue this conclusively for lack of information on the temple and its patron.

Madhya Pradesh, too, has yielded Lajjā Gaurī images and multfigured plaques. However, the number of these is limited compared to those found in Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat and the Deccan, thereby suggesting a limited spread of the cult here. Significantly though, her images and plaques indicate that she was worshipped here in both her aniconic and anthropomorphic forms. Bolon dates the aniconic icons to the same time period as the aniconic icons from the Deccan. The anthropomorphic form without the head (form III), too, has been dated to the same time period suggesting an early anthropomorphization of the icon. Her association with Śaivism began late sixth-seventh century CE, as in Gujarat and Rajasthan, but unlike these regions, her association with Śaivism reveals an unusual mixed pattern of Lajjā Gaurī icons and plaques and their chronology, which suggests the origin and spread of her cult peculiar to Madhya Pradesh, perhaps as a result of spread of her cult here from different regions and at different points in time.

Maharashtra has yielded the largest number of Lajjā Gaurī icons and multfigured plaques in all forms, from aniconic to completely anthropomorphic forms (predominantly form I, II and III). The site of Ter has yielded the largest number of Lajjā Gaurī icons on plaques in both the aniconic and early anthropomorphic forms. The excavation report of Ter dates them to the Indo-Roman period, that is, to the first-third century CE. However, Bolon dates them to the third-fourth century CE. If one accepts the dates given by the excavation

²¹⁴ Agarwala, R.C., 'Rock-cut statues at Arṇā, Jodhpur,' p. 251

report, then perhaps Ter was the place of origin for Lajjā Gaurī figures. The fact that the largest number of form I images are found here, which were the basic images from which fully anthropomorphic images probably emerged, further reasserts the argument. But, if one accepts the chronology provided by Bolon both for images in Allahabad district and Ter, then one will have to argue for multiple sources of origin. But, the fact that aniconic icons are found in Ter, and the fact that maximum number of icons is found here, and the nearby areas, the place of origin was probably Ter. Even now, Lajjā Gaurī icons continue to be unearthed in Ter. It is noteworthy that most of the icons are small, usually a few centimeters, which indicates that even though a popular deity, Lajjā Gaurī was mostly worshipped in houses. No shrine with her image has been found in Ter. Interestingly, a tiny bead with Lajjā Gaurī in it was discovered as a surface find, perhaps indicating that women desirous of progeny used to wear them. Thus, though a popular deity, she was probably confined to the household.

Lajjā Gaurī icons with more developed forms (form II and III) were also found in other parts of Maharashtra reflecting the simultaneous development of her form and spread in other parts of Maharashtra.

Multifigured plaques of Lajjā Gaurī have been found in Ter, and especially at a number of sites in Nagpur. Lajjā Gaurī is primarily in early anthropomorphic (form II and III) in them. These multifigured plaques are dated to the fourth-sixth century CE. It indicates that around this time she began to be associated with Śaivism. The fact that these plaques also have a devotee show that her status as a divinity began to be established. Around the sixth century CE, she became an established divinity assimilated within Śaivism, and even given royal recognition which may have come through the royal patronage to the cult. This is evident from her plaque found at Rāmeśvara Cave 21, Ellora, and at the Island of Gharapuri. In both these representations, she is in a complete anthropomorphic form, though they are domesticated. In Rāmeśvara Cave 21, she is depicted with

a halo and devotees with wisks indicating that she was well recognized as a divinity. While the Rāmeśvara Cave 21 is a Śaivite cave, attributed to the Kalachuris, her image at Gharapuri was found where some local ruler was creating an impressive Śaivite complex.²¹⁵

However, despite the association with Śaivism, Lajjā Gaurī continued to exist as an independent cult worshipped along with other deities at sites such as Hamlapuri, Nagpur, and was associated with different ritual contexts as evident from the discovery of her image in a ritual context in Ter.

Thus, the state of Maharashtra reveals the emergence of the cult of Lajjā Gaurī, its popularity, spread across the state and perhaps to other states as well, beginning of her association with Śaivism reaching its culmination by the sixth century CE with Ellora, where not only she achieved a complete anthropomorphic form, but her status as a divinity and her assimilation with Śaivism was established.

The images found in **Karnataka** reflect the later stage of the development of the icon and spread of her cult. Only four aniconic (form I) images have been reported from here, specifically from Sannati. Most of the images from Karnataka are large anthropomorphic (form III) images dated to the Chalukya and Rashtrakuta period. Significantly, they are primarily found in the temples, a number of them being Chalukya temples, and concentrated in the Bijapur District. These images were enshrined in the sub-shrines of the Śaiva temples, for instance in the Mahākuteśwar Temple, Naganathakolla Temple and Lakulīśa Temple. Thus, the enshrining of her images in Śaiva temple clearly indicates her assimilation within Śaivism. Multifigured plaques even though rare in this region reflect the same. Further, in some of these temples, specifically at Aihole and the Lakulīśa Temple, she was also associated with the Matrkas, for in the subshrines

²¹⁵ Gorakshar Sadashiv, *The Parel Mahādev Reassessed and Two Newly Discovered Images from Parel*, p. 23

added to the temples; one was occupied by Lajjā Gaurī, and the other by Matrka, thus perhaps also indicating the popularity of the fertility cults during the time of the Chalukyas. Further, the fact that most of the Lajjā Gaurī images in Karnataka are found in the Chalukyas temples, and a few in Rashtrakutas, reflects the popularity of the cult not only at the local level, but also amongst the royal class of the state, who not only patronized the images, but also allowed them to be enshrined in their temples. However, it is noteworthy that Lajjā Gaurī's acceptance and assimilation within the Brahmanical tradition and the royal class was limited, for she was installed in a subshrine and not the main sanctum, her temples such as Naganathakolla Temple and Lakulīśa Temple stood in isolation outside the Chalukyas capital, Badami and major temple town at Aihole respectively. Despite the partial assimilation, what is undeniable in Karnataka is that Lajjā Gaurī was established as a popular divinity. An unusual multiformed slab at the rim of the tank made by the Rashtrakutas by the Huchchimalli temple built by Chalukyas at Aihole shows a local usage of her cult too. The slab is a large stone piece, and measures 40 x 128 cms. Lajjā Gaurī is in form III. The slab includes a number of figures. They are as follows from left to right: a mongoose, a monkey in a tree, Lajjā Gaurī, a man riding forward on a bull or buffalo, and an umbrella bearer leading the procession. According to Bolon, this may illustrate a local story concerning Lajjā Gaurī.²¹⁶

Lajjā Gaurī's image is still worshipped in the Lakulīśa Temple. Ablutions of ghee are applied to her pudendum. Also, miniature dolmen-like 'houses' to be filled with children are built by women or couples making pilgrimage to the site along the same path that leads from the stairway across the mountain top for a mile before the temple is reached.²¹⁷ Lajjā Gaurī is still also worshipped in

²¹⁶ Bolon Carol Radcliffe, *Forms of the Goddess Lajjā Gaurī in Indian Art*, p. 47

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 25-26

Kedareśvara Temple. Here, she is locally known as Kamalagaurīmā or Kamalagaṅgāmā and worshipped vertically.²¹⁸

Thus, her cult in Karnataka shows the stage where Lajjā Gaurī was an established deity for she had an anthropomorphic form and was accepted by the Brahmanical tradition and the royal class, even though hesitatingly. However, unlike Gujarat, where Lajjā Gaurī too was an established deity, but was portrayed only in the small multicoloured plaques, here we see her in stand alone large anthropomorphic images enshrined in Chalukya Śaiva temples.

Andhra Pradesh yielded predominantly two forms of Lajjā Gaurī the early aniconic images (form I) and the anthropomorphic images (form III). The aniconic images (form I) are not as widespread as the anthropomorphic (form III) ones. Significantly, unlike other areas, it is the small aniconic (form I and II images) (from Nāgārjunakoṇḍa) from Andhra Pradesh that received royal recognition and patronage specifically by the Ikshvakus. It has been argued that perhaps the image donated by Mahadevi Khamduvula inspired the Chalukyas.²¹⁹ This argument can be extended to argue that possibly the Ikshvakus set the trend for large scale patronage provided to the Lajjā Gaurī cult by the Chalukyas later. Like Karnataka, the anthropomorphic (form III) images from Andhra Pradesh dated to the late seventh-eighth century CE are large and found in temples such as Sangamēśvaram Temple, Bāla Brahmā Temple and Panchaliṅgeshvara Temple. Again, like the Lakulīśa Temple in Karnataka, Lajjā Gaurī image in Bāla Brahmā Temple is found in a subshrine, and is related to the Saptamāṭṛkās, who are found in the opposite subshrine. The other images too are found in either subshrines or small shrines. These temples undoubtedly indicate that Lajjā Gaurī was established as a divinity in Andhra Pradesh, and was assimilated within the Brahmanical tradition, but like Karnataka the assimilation was far from complete. The Kunidene multicoloured plaques and similar ones from Darsi and Uppalapadu,

²¹⁸ Ibid., p. 30

²¹⁹ Ibid., p. 24

however show a different pattern than has been otherwise observed. These plaques dated to the fourth-fifth century CE reflect a style and portrayal of Lajjā Gaurī peculiar to Andhra Pradesh, and suggests that at some places in Andhra Pradesh she acquired a status equal to the triad, Brahma, Viśṇu and Śiva, thereby indicating complete acceptance and assimilation within the Brahmanical tradition. Last, the plaque from Kesaragutta and the context in which it is found indicates a different ritual use of Lajjā Gaurī altogether.

In the Bāla Brahmā Temple, she is still worshipped. She is visited by childless women and couples seeking the blessings of fertility. Here, she is known as Reṇukā.²²⁰

Thus, the Lajjā Gaurī images and plaques in Andhra Pradesh show various stages and spread of her cult. The early aniconic images (form I) are spread in different parts of Andhra Pradesh, a little more developed images (form II) show early royal patronage provided to the cult, the Kunidene-like plaques show her established as a deity equal to other gods, her enshrinement in subshrines of temples, however reflect a reversal, and the Kesaragutta plaque reflect her absorption and function in varied ritual contexts.

The cult of Lajjā Gaurī did not spread widely in **Tamil Nadu**. So far only two images two have been reported from here, that is, from Darasuram, Cakrāyi Temple, Tanjore District and Kāmākshī temple, Kanchipuram. While the image at Darasuram is dated to the late Chola period and attributed to the impact of the Śaktas in the royal court of Cholas,²²¹ the image at Kāmākshī temple is argued to be perhaps the originally consecrated image in this ancient śaktipītha.²²² At both the places, the images are still worshipped. While in Darasuram, the deity is called Cakrāyi by the local people, and worshipped vertically, the original

²²⁰ Ibid., pp. 25-27

²²¹ Nagaswamy R, 'From Aditi to Kundalini', p. 327

²²² Sharma I.K., *Paraśurāmeśvara Temple at Gudimallam*, p. 88

function seem to have been forgotten,²²³ in Kāmākshī temple, she is fixed in the bhadra-kōshṭha at the north-west and the people worship the image for good progeny.²²⁴ It is possible that the two images were taken from either Karnataka or Andhra Pradesh and put in these temples.

Thus, the above drawn regional patterns are dependent on various factors, such as the excavations that have taken place in the state, the method of recording, the state of preservation, and publication of data and its context. Yet, they are significant for they help to throw light on the origin, spread and extent of the cult, and help in the reconstruction of her history.

Lajjā Gaurī as a Tantric Goddess

Lajjā Gaurī has also been looked at as a tantric goddess or as a fertility goddess with tantric affiliation by some scholars.

R. Nagaswamy considers the Lajjā Gaurī images as representing Mahākuṇḍalini, and as the imagery *par excellence* of yoginis. He argues this on the basis of the dating of the images, and by comparing the image found at Darasuram to the Śākta concepts. Elucidating, first, he argues that most of the images of Lajjā Gaurī date from the beginning of the Christian era when the concept of Yoga- the Mahākuṇḍalini- had taken deep roots, and had virtually been assimilated by all subsets of Indian religion. Thus, Lajjā Gaurī is the imagery *par excellence* of yoginis.²²⁵ Second, he points out that a Lajjā Gaurī image found in Darasuram, Tamil Nadu is locally referred to as Cakrāyi. This term, he argues, is significant and clearly indicates that the sculpture represents Mahākuṇḍalini. He argues this on the basis of the concept of trikūṭa mentioned in the Lalita Sahasranāma. According to it, the Devī is the embodiment of trikūṭa, the three peaks, which are the face, two breasts and yoni. These are also represented in a subtle way by

²²³ Nagaswamy R, 'From Aditi to Kundalini', p. 326

²²⁴ Sharma I.K., *Paraśurāmeśvara Temple at Gudimallam*, pp. 88-89

²²⁵ Nagaswamy R, 'From Aditi to Kundalini', p. 326

one dot above, two dots below, and a semi-circle at the bottom. The yoni, according to Śākta tradition, stands for the generative principle, the breasts represent the protective principle by giving milk, and the lotus on reaching which the life principle is ready to release. The three combined parts represent the great yogic power Mahākuṇḍalini Śakti. While in subtler forms, these were represented in dots in a chakra; when a figurative representation was sought for in a sculpture the lotus head, the two breasts and the open yoni were portrayed. Thus, Lajjā Gaurī stands for the concept of Mahākuṇḍalini Śakti.²²⁶

Similarly, A.Sundara on the basis of his study of a multfigured Lajjā Gaurī plaque²²⁷ found in Majati, Belgaum District, Karnataka argues that Lajjā Gaurī images were meant for worship by the followers of the Tantric philosophy and the related yogic discipline.²²⁸ The plaque, he argues, is explicit in its Tantric philosophical significance. Elucidating, he argues that the kalaśa like abdomen, the downward looking lotus flower in the hands, and the prominent breasts that are common in Lajjā Gaurī sculptures. These, according to Tantric philosophy, signify conception, procreation and nourishment of the born respectively. The full-blown lotus flower, which is bi-sexual among flowers, in the place of the head, is symbolic of the eternal union of the Puruśa and Pṛakṛti, which is nothing but lasting real ānanda, the supreme goal to be achieved by the devout followers. The tiny figures in the top zone probably imply that the process of procreation and death to creatures through the eternal time goes on when Puruśa and Pṛakṛti remain separated from their union indicated by simhamukha, liṅga and śankha respectively. According to the Tantric philosophy, the eternal

²²⁶ Ibid., p. 327

²²⁷ Sundara A, 'A Unique Lajjā Gaurī plaque from Majati', pp. 56-57

This is a square stone plaque measuring 13 cms. It is divided into three unequal parts by two ridges resulting into narrow zones: top horizontal and right vertical margins. In the remaining large square, Lajjā Gaurī is displayed in form IV. She holds a stalk of lotus looking downward in both her hands. In place of a head is a full-blown lotus flower. The top marginal zone is divided into four equal compartments containing from left to right a liṅga, a figure flanked off, simhamukha and śankha. In the right vertical margin is a man (devotee) with hands in anjali looking towards Lajjā Gaurī.

²²⁸ Ibid., p. 57

release from the worldly cycle of births and deaths can be achieved by gradually channelizing the power of the Pṛakṛti from the mūladhāra chakra located in the human body to the sahasradhara chakra in the brain. This is possible by the provocation of the physical senses by certain religiously disciplined activities including the sexual intercourse, not certainly for the appeasement of sensual desires, but to release energy which is to be consolidated through certain yogic exercises to activate the dominant power of Pṛakṛti from mūladhāra for upward movement ultimately to unite with Puruṣa śakti on sahasradhara. Thus, Lajjā Gaurī symbolizes this philosophy, and therefore is worthy of worship, which is also indicated by the presence of the devotee.²²⁹ The tantric affiliation of Lajjā Gaurī is, also, established by Sundara on the basis of a liṅga found in the plaque. According to him, this liṅga appears to be made in accordance with iconographic prescriptions of the liṅgas given in the Agamic texts, such as Daivika, Ganapa and Arsha, meant for worship by the yogis.²³⁰ Further, he points out that this plaque, liṅga, and the lower cultural strata on one hand, and the sandstone hill nearby suggests that there was a Saivite Tantric cult characterized by the worship of Lajjā Gaurī practiced by yogis in this region during the seventh-eighth century CE.²³¹

I.K.Sharma, too, points out to the tantric connections of Lajjā Gaurī multfigured plaque found during the excavations at Keesaragutta, Hyderabad District. According to I.K.Sharma, the placement of earthen garbhāpātra, sacrificed human being, and stone Lajjā Gaurī plaque in the excavated context shows that they can be regarded as integral to the āgamic ritual, specifically connected to garbhavinyāsa ritual.²³² However, for Bolon, the finding of the plaque under the base of the altar, with an earthen pot bearing six female figures and a human skeleton found buried nearby, suggests the use of the plaque as an auspicious

²²⁹ Ibid., p. 57

²³⁰ Ibid., p. 58

²³¹ Ibid., p. 58

²³² Sharma I.K., *Paraśurāmeśvara Temple at Gudimallam*, pp. 88-89

ritual item, buried to consecrate the land for sacred use as according to the Vedic ritual.²³³ In the absence of the excavation report explaining the exact structure of the excavated area, and placement of the Lajjā Gaurī plaque in context of the other objects, it is difficult to conclusively establish the tantric connection of Lajjā Gaurī in this case. Nevertheless, the evidence is worth further exploration.

Lajjā Gaurī in History and Inscriptions

Despite the wide prevalence of this cult as evident from the large number of images and plaques discovered from almost all over the subcontinent, the mention of this cult is very limited in the written records. The inscriptional records are far and few between. Yet, whatever records have been found provide invaluable information on the development of this somewhat obscure cult. Four inscriptions, one from the Ikshvaku dynasty, and three from Kashmir Smast refer directly to the goddess. Three more inscriptions, from the Chalukya dynasty, a dynasty which gave royal patronage to the cult, and provided for its assimilation within the Brahmanical pantheon, have been found by Bolon, which she argues alludes to Lajjā Gaurī. S.P.Tiwari and Jamkhedkar, also, refer to inscriptions issued by the Kalachuri dynasty and a king named Pṛthvī respectively, which they argue refer to Lajjā Gaurī. These inscriptions are discussed below.

First, the bronze multfigured Lajjā Gaurī seal²³⁴ from Kashmir Smast has a one line inscription in Gupta Brāhmi, which reads as follows. 'To or of Acimā, who dwells in the cave of the mount Śrī Miji.' According to Khan, the contents of the

²³³ Bolon Carol Radcliffe, *Forms of the Goddess Lajjā Gaurī in Indian Art*, p. 45

²³⁴ Khan M Nasim, 'Lajjā Gaurī Seals and Related Antiquities from Kashmir Smast, Gandhara', p. 86

This is a square seal. On the negative, a dancing figure is shown in the left upper corner with widely outstretched legs. To its right is a pūrṇa ghata with a rounded base. Further, to its right are a trident and the figure of Lajjā Gaurī. Here, her head is marked with a dot and the breasts with two more dots making a triangle. The female organ is shown through an upturned triangle with a dot. Wide spread legs are attached to it.

inscription suggest that Acimā is a divine figure, perhaps an ancient name for Lajjā Gaurī.²³⁵

Second, the bronze Lajjā Gaurī seal²³⁶ has word inscribed in Gupta Brāhmi. It can be read as Srī Śīmiya or Srī Śīmāya. It might suggest the name of the owner of the seal or the name of the divinity.²³⁷

Third, another bronze Lajjā Gaurī seal²³⁸ from Kashmir Smast too has word inscribed in Brāhmi. According to Khan, it can be read as 'Vibhideya' or 'Vibhidaya', a dative (or genitive) of Vibhidā. The etymology is not clear. Vibheda means 'breaking, asunder, splitting, piercing, etc.' He argues that since Lajjā Gaurī is called by different names, it is possible that Vibhidā might be one of her names. Another possibility is to consider Vibhidā as the owner of the seal.²³⁹

Fourth, the Lajjā Gaurī image from Nāgārjunakoṇḍa bears a one-line inscription engraved at its base. The inscription reads as follows. 'Success. (This image is) caused to be made by Mahadevi Khamduvula²⁴⁰ (who is) an a-vidhava (i.e., one

²³⁵ Khan M Nasim, 'Lajjā Gaurī Seals and Related Antiquities from Kashmir Smast, Gandhara', p.86

²³⁶ Khan M Nasim, 'Lajjā Gaurī Seals and Related Antiquities from Kashmir Smast, Gandhara', p.85
This is a rectangular seal. Across the top of the seal are four symbols. On the negative, in the top left corner is a pūrṇa ghata shown in a triangular form with a pointed base. To its right is a trident. Besides it is a crude figure of Lajjā Gaurī. The upper body is marked with two bold circles or points, placed horizontally and joined to the body by two lines. The dots and the lines might represent the torso with breasts. The legs and the lower body are represented with two curving lines going in opposite directions. Lajjā Gaurī is shown in a schematic form seated with splayed legs. The navel and the female organ are marked with small indistinct dots. Besides her, in the corner, is a dancing figure with raised arms holding an object over his head. Below these is the inscription.

²³⁷ Khan M Nasim, "Lajjā Gaurī Seals and Related Antiquities from Kashmir Smast, Gandhara", p.85

²³⁸ Khan M Nasim, "Lajjā Gaurī Seals and Related Antiquities from Kashmir Smast, Gandhara", p.87

This seal bears a seated Lajjā Gaurī figure in a well-developed figural style. Her head is marked with a rectangular block. In both her hands, she is holding two rectangular objects. In the left field, a trident is shown. Below the figure is the inscription.

²³⁹ Khan M Nasim, "Lajjā Gaurī Seals and Related Antiquities from Kashmir Smast, Gandhara", p.87

The implication of the seals found from Kashmir Smast has been pointed out in the section *Association, Assimilation, Distance, Negotiation with the Cult of Lajjā Gaurī*

²⁴⁰ Prākṛit and Sanskrit Epigraphs (257 B.C.- 320 A.D.) p426. Footnote 2- Neither the queen's metonymics is given nor is the name of her son given. Ehalala Chantamūla is known to have

with her husband alive) and (who is) a *jivaputa* (i.e. one who has her child or children alive (and who is) the wife of (?) of Maharaja Siri Ehavala Chamtamula.”²⁴¹

The noteworthy words of the inscription are *a-vidhava* and *jivaputra*. It shows that this goddess was seen as a bestower of martial happiness and fertility. Also, the fact that a woman patronized this goddess probably indicates that she was a women’s goddess. The latter is also seen from the presence of women devotees in multifigured plaques. ...

Narasimhaswami points out that the inscription indicates that the image was a cult image and that its sponsor was a follower of that cult.²⁴² For K.K.Shah, however, the whole text of this brief dedicatory record is devoted to establishing the identity of the Ikṣvāku queen figuring in it.²⁴³ Elucidating, he points out that the first to figure in the chronology of attributes is the official title of the queen which is not the same as her wifely status, because the latter is the last in the four attributes and expressed clearly by the technical term *patnī*, in relation to king Ehavala Cāmtamūla. In between, occur two attributes, conceived in accordance with the ideals prescribed by orthodox Brahmanism for women. The specific mention of *avidhavā* and *jīvasutā* statuses as constituents of the queen’s identity, according to Shah, reflects that she was fully indoctrinated into the ideology of orthodox Brahmanism or, perhaps, this is a case of social construction of identity from the pen of her scribe or teacher.²⁴⁴ Narasimhaswami, who edited the inscription, has cited several passages from the epic and classical literature in which the twin-attributes have figured

three queens. One is known only from the metronymic *Vāsishṭhīputra*. The other was *Kṛiṇaśrī*, a *Hāritī*. The third was *Varmabhaṭā* who belonged to the *Bṛihatphalāyana-gōtra* and is described as the mother (i.e., the step mother) of *Vāsishṭhīputra Rudrapurushadatta*. Queen *Khaṇḍuvulā* may be identified with the lady mentioned first.

²⁴¹ EI, Vol 29, no 18, pp. 137-139

²⁴² Ibid., p. 138

²⁴³ Shah K Kirit, *The Problem of Identity*, p. 81

²⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 81

indicating that the record represents transcription of ideals set forth in the Brahmanical normative literature.²⁴⁵

Another point indicated through this inscription is the presence of a woman donor. Here, the ability of the lady to donate an image by herself can perhaps be attributed to her association with the royalty. This may have provided her with resources to donate an image to a cult that ensured her wish fulfillment. At the same time, it can be seen as indicative of the power of the goddess translated to the woman as a donor.

It is noteworthy that women of the Ikṣvaku dynasty were patrons of Buddhism, and to a small extent even the Brahmanical religion. They donated resources to a large extent for the construction of Buddhist structures. For instance, the whole of the Mahācaitya complex at Nāgārjunakoṇḍa is attributed to the initiative, enthusiasm and munificence of women related to the Ikṣvaku royal family. This reinforces the argument made above regarding the ability of the women related to royalty to donate. Interestingly, while Ikṣvaku queens were strong supporters of Buddhism, kings figuring in their inscriptions are eulogized for patronizing Brahmanical sacrifices. Shah argues that if it can be interpreted in terms of state policy of supporting prominent religions on one hand, it can also be taken as a reflection of religious freedom enjoyed by the queens.²⁴⁶ He, also, points out to the fact that the Buddhist management never objected to accommodating eulogies in the Brahmanical frameworks shows that the doctrinal differences between the two systems did not affect their relations in public life.²⁴⁷ Last, through the high visibility of women in Nāgārjunakoṇḍa inscriptions, he points to the possibility of survival of matriarchal elements, co-existing with patriarchal ones in this society.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 81-82

²⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 84

²⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 84

²⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 85-86

Thus, this lone inscription throws up various possibilities and situations that could have been associated with Lajjā Gaurī.

Bolon gives evidence of the worship of the goddess under the Chalukyas through three inscriptions. According to her, they only hint at facts that survive in regard to the identity of this goddess or her name or function.²⁴⁹

First, this inscription refers to Vishnuvardhana worshipping “Nanda, the holy Gaurī, on the Chalukya Mountain”²⁵⁰. Vishnuvardhana was a prince born to the Chalukyan king Vijayaditya, who died in a battle, leaving behind his queen pregnant with this prince. After the prince was born, the queen instructed him and made him worship this goddess before going for a war. According to the inscription, “Vijayaditya by name, went to the region of the south from a desire for conquest, and having attacked Trilochana-Pallava, lost his life through the evil influence of fate. While he was in difficulties, his queen, who was pregnant, came with the family-priest and with a few of the women of her bed-chamber and with her chamberlains to the agrahāra (village) named Mudivēmu, and being cherished just like a daughter by Vishnubhatta-Somayaji who dwelt there, brought forth a son, Vishṇuwardhana.....And he being instructed in history by his mother, went forth, and having worshipped Nanda, the holy Gaurī, on the Chalukya mountain; and having appeased Kumara and Nārāyana and mothers of (mankind);.....he ruled over the region of south, lying between the Bridge and the river Narmada.”²⁵¹

With regard to this inscription, Bolon argues that although this inscription is a confusing compilation of facts and dates, this reference to a Gaurī, Nandā, a

²⁴⁹ Bolon Carol Radcliffe, *Forms of the Goddess Lajjā Gaurī in Indian Art*, p. 31

²⁵⁰ IA, Vol6 (1878), no XLVI, p. 245 The exact lines in the inscription are as follows. “And he being instructed in history by his mother, went forth, and having worshipped Nanda, the holy Gauri, on the Chalukya mountain; and having appeased Kumara and Narayana and mothers of (mankind);.....he ruled over the region of south, lying between the Bridge and the river Narmada.”

²⁵¹ IA, Vol6 (1878), no XLVI, p. 245

mother goddess otherwise worshipped in the form of Lajjā Gaurī (a Lajjā Gaurī figure from Rajasthan, identified as Nandā) is of interest.²⁵² She points out that the Chalukya Mountain near Aihole at Siddhanakolla preserves a seventh century image of Lajjā Gaurī carved of the living mountain rock. Other details referred to in the inscriptions seem datable to late seventh century, this is time of creation of Siddhanakolla image and most active worship of Lajjā Gaurī by the Chalukyas. She concludes that though the inscription is a mishmash reconstructed at a later date, its reference must have some grounding in fact, and the inscription may refer to Lajjā Gaurī.²⁵³

In the next inscription, on the basis of the lines, which describes the goddess Gaurī in comparison to a lotus, Bolon identifies this goddess as Lajjā Gaurī. She argues that the language is suggestive of artistic associations visualized in Lajjā Gaurī images, and during the Chalukyan period, the goddess was described as Gaurī.²⁵⁴ This is an eight century inscription of the Western Chalukya king Kirtivarman II. The following are the lines from the inscription from which Bolon infers refers to Lajjā Gaurī. “Om! Om! Reverence to Siva! Victorious, victorious, be that union of (the god) Hara and (the goddess) Gaurī, in which the face and the breast (of the goddess) are passionately kissed by the left arm (of the god); in which the fingers (of the god) separate themselves among the curled tresses (of the goddess) that imitate the quivering movements of a swarm of black bees; (and) which resembles in beauty a fully expanded white water-lily (i.e. the god), enhanced by the sweetness of a yellow water-lily (i.e. the goddess) brought to maturity by the rays of the sun!”²⁵⁵

My reading of the inscription, however, suggests that the identification has been forced. The inscription is referring to a different goddess, seemingly Pārvatī, and in no way alludes to Lajjā Gaurī.

²⁵² Bolon Carol Radcliffe, *Forms of the Goddess Lajjā Gaurī in Indian Art*, p. 31

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 31

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 32

²⁵⁵ *EI*, Vol 3, no 1, pp. 1-7.

The third inscription is from Belligame, where an eight-century Lajjā Gaurī image is still worshipped by the side of the Kedaresvara temple. Bolon points out that the inscription records that the Early Chalukya king Vinayaditya imposed a tax on sonless couple. The same inscription, also, mentions and that the king made land grants to temples. She speculates that Vinayaditya needed soldiers for his military campaign, and perhaps the images of Lajjā Gaurī were housed at special temples to serve recourse for sonless woman.²⁵⁶ Also, behind this argument is her assumption that worship of Lajjā Gaurī started largely under Vikramaditya and Vinayaditya. They were the first two Śaiva kings, who were ruling when the temples that were provided with images of Lajjā Gaurī and Saptamatrkas were built.

However, the reference mentioned by Bolon shows that inscription refers to the reign of Western Chalukya king Vinayaditya, and records the remission of certain fees and duties by an official Kandarba, at the time of his accession to office, and not the imposition of tax on sonless couple.²⁵⁷

An inscription of Brahmadeva, a feudatory prince of Prithvideva II of the Kalachuri dynasty of Ratanpur dated to 1163-64 CE records the religious and charitable works of Brahmadēva at several places. The inscription opens with a customary obeisance to Śiva, who is described with Pārvatī. S.P.Tiwari identifies Pārvatī mentioned in this inscription as Lajjā Gaurī. He makes this identification on the on the basis of a mythological story mentioned in the inscription that refers to the bent down head of Pārvatī. He identifies this as a reference to Lajjā Gaurī and her headless state. The reference from the inscription is as follows. "May that lover of Pārvatī remove your sin!- seeing in the nails of whose lotus-

²⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 32

²⁵⁷ IA, Vol19, no 187, p. 145 According to the inscription, "Kandarba, on becoming the officer in charge, remitted (the fees leviable at) the festivity of attaining puberty, and the alavana (rent), and (the duty leviable in the case of) a man dying without a son; (and thus) he conferred a favor, in the shape of a royal proclamation, upon two districts headed by the guild of Dasas of Valliggame, and the establishment of the temple of the people of Amali...."

like feet as in the surface of a mirror the reflection of the universe in the form of Brahman, Indra, Viṣṇu, the moon, the jewel of heaven (i.e. the sun), the principal mountains, the earth, the oceans and other things, the daughter of the lord of the mountains (Pārvatī), at the time of her marriage, was struck with wonder, her moon like face being bent in bashfulness!"²⁵⁸

It is difficult to accept this identification for two reasons. First, barring the Lajjā Gaurī plaque from Ellora no images or plaques of Lajjā Gaurī are known to have been made or worshipped during the Kalachuri era. Second, to forge identification only on the basis of headlessness is tenuous, because headlessness is not the only feature of Lajjā Gaurī. In fact, her defining feature is her *deviant* posture.

Last, Jamkhedkar brings to our notice an inscription, which according to him refers to Lajjā Gaurī. This copper plate inscription found at Mahurjhari was issued by Prthvisena II c460-475 CE. It is supposed to have been issued from the banks of a late Prthvisamudra. He points out that not only the lake, but the king himself is named after the goddess Lajjā Gaurī, who was none other than Mother Earth, who was worshipped at this place where a lake was dedicated to her.²⁵⁹

There are problems with this identification. One, the inscription referring to Prthvi, might simply be making a reference to an earth goddess, and not necessarily Lajjā Gaurī. Since, the goddess has not been described in the inscription, especially her unique features; it is difficult to accept this identification. The only part of the argument that can make us accept his identification is that it is found in Mahurjhari, where Lajjā Gaurī images have been found. Again, since the exact find spot of neither the images nor the inscription is given, this identification becomes tenuous.

²⁵⁸ EI, Vol 26, no 35, p. 264

²⁵⁹ Jamkhedkar A.P., 'Symbols, Images, Rituals of Mother in Vākatāka Period', p. 36

An examination of this limited inscriptional record raises the question as to why did this goddess not get inscribed in history? Did it have to do with her *deviant* image, particularly her posture? Or did it have to do with her lack of popularity with the royal class? Or was it because she was a goddess at the local level? Or is it simply because the records mentioning her have not survived?

Lajjā Gaurī in Literary and Oral Tradition

Like the inscriptional evidence, the evidence of Lajjā Gaurī in the literary and oral tradition is scarce. Sole **literary evidence** alluding to her has been found in the Matsya Purāṇa by J.N. Tiwari. He identified certain puns used for Pārvatī in Nārada's prophecy as referring to Lajjā Gaurī. He contends, in relation to this reference, that the nude squatting goddess and the rapprochement of her popular cult with Śaivism is the real basis of Nārada's prophecy. Looked in this light, Nārada's prophecy, according to Tiwari, reads like a beautiful iconographic description of our goddess. The goddess in this prophecy is characterized as *uttāna-hastā* because her two hands are always raised, and *vyabhicāribhih caraṇaih* because her feet are going astray, straying away from each other, going in opposite directions, falling apart. The expressions *lakṣaṇaiśca vivarjitā*, devoid of marks, seems to have been chosen to suggest the utter simplicity of the iconography of the goddess, who has no distinguishing marks, no attributes, save her peculiar form and posture. The use of the word *svacchāyayā* perhaps is, also, iconographically meaningful. The word *chāyā* not only conveys the sense of shadow, but also of light, effulgence. Its parallel meanings are reflection, likeness, manifested likeness or image. *Svacchāyayā* in Nārada's prophecy, therefore, may suggest that the goddess will be characterized by her own special form, her peculiar iconography.²⁶⁰

This lone reference, according to Tiwari, suggests the alien character of the goddess. The nature of the Purāṇic allusion to her and the labored puns also

²⁶⁰ Tiwari, *Goddess Cults in Ancient India*, p. 199

confirm it. Perhaps, he points out, a touch of irony and disapproval is implied in the expression *lakṣaṇaiśca vivarjitā*, and possibly the words *vyabhicāribhih caraṇaih and svacchāyayā* have been chosen to suggest the goddess' offensive posture. That the prophecy as a whole was also meant to be evil is evident from the fact that the parents are shocked to hear it. It is obvious; therefore, that the nude goddess to which the Matsya Purāṇa seems to allude was essentially a figure alien to the Brahmanical tradition. At the same time, she must have assumed an important popular cult of her own, whence attempts were made to absorb her in the Brahmanical Śaivite pantheon by regarding her as identical with Pārvatī and as consort of Śiva. This is also evident, according to him from the Vadgaon plaque and from Ellora plaque. He reinforces this argument by pointing out that it is often suspected that Matsya Purāṇa was composed in South. However, even by the time of Matsya Purāṇa this absorption was far from complete, especially when one considers that this is the only text which alludes to the goddess and that too in such an awkward manner.²⁶¹

Unquestionably, the reference is a significant one, but cannot be accepted without taking into account a few reservations. First, if one reads the entire narrative of the Taraka-vadha episode, in which this reference occurs, one gets the impression that the entire narrative is about Pārvatī, and does not allude to any other goddess. Second, the puns seem to be referring to Pārvatī, and seem to be picked according to the need of the narrative of the text. Third, if the authors of this text were attempting to incorporate Lajjā Gaurī within Śaivism through the figure of Pārvatī, why would they refer to Lajjā Gaurī in such a covert manner, where no one would easily be able to identify her? Last, a comparison of the narrative of this episode with the narrative in other texts, indicate that the reference is to Pārvatī. Thus, one perhaps needs to examine this reference more closely, as well as compare the puns used in this episode in the Matsya Purāṇa

²⁶¹ Ibid., p. 201

with the puns used in same episode in other texts, to consider this reference as a definite literary evidence for Lajjā Gaurī.

The **oral tradition** exists only for two places, namely Mahākūta and Ālampur, where Lajjā Gaurī images housed in shrines. The oral tradition at both these places attempts to explain the physical characteristics of Lajjā Gaurī, particularly her *deviant* posture, nakedness and headlessness. This attempt to explain her image, rather than her origin or function is perhaps indicative of the attempt of the local tradition to come to terms with the *deviant* sexuality of a divine figure.

The following legend from Mahākūta attempts to explain her *deviant* posture by explaining it in terms of her engaged in coitus with her husband, rather than in terms of the fertility function of the goddess. Thus, her *deviant* posture is justified in terms of legitimate (or illegitimate) sexual relation with her husband. It is also noteworthy here that, Lajjā Gaurī is identified with Pārvatī. This is perhaps indicative of the continuation of the tradition begun by the Chalukyas, whereby Lajjā Gaurī was assimilated within the Brahmanical tradition through Śaivism, or probably indicative of the process of whereby the local tradition was ready to accept a goddess with a *deviant* posture only as Pārvatī (who is considered as a respectable consort goddess), and not as the goddess in herself.

Pārvatī asked Śiva the meaning of the term 'adultery'. Śiva replied that he would shortly show her what it meant, and then, locking Pārvatī, richly appareled in a room, he went away. After a little while Pārvatī found all her clothes torn by mice, and was at a loss to know what to do. Just then a tailor appeared, and offered to mend them all on the condition that she should grant him whatever reward he might ask for, to which Pārvatī rashly assented. On finishing his task, he demanded to have intercourse with her. Pārvatī, however, knew that the tailor was really Śiva himself, and though with reluctance and fear, consented to what he asked and laid herself down in the proper posture for it. But Siva then assumed his own real form, and Pārvatī, overcome with terror and shame, and unable to hide her face, caused her head to sink down into the ground and so disappear.²⁶²

²⁶² IA, Vol 10, no XCIV, p. 103

This myth was locally known in Mahākūṭa, and was recorded by Fleet.

Similarly, the following legend from the Sthala Purāṇa of Ālampur attempts to explain the headlessness of the goddess through the Reṇukā beheading myth. The Reṇukā beheading myth has been used to explain the origin of many local goddesses. In this case, her beheading in the myth perhaps came handy to explain the origin and the headless state of Lajjā Gaurī. It is also noteworthy that here she is called Bhūdevī, which unlike the above oral tradition, perhaps indicates the fertility function of Lajjā Gaurī, for Bhūdevī means Earth Goddess, who is known for her blessing for fertility, whether in agricultural fields or for humans.

Reṇukā was the faithful and chaste wife of Jamadagni. She used to bring water from the river Tungabhadra every day for the pūjā of her husband in a pot that she used to make out of the clay of the river Tungabhadra. This power of molding clay and sand into a pot was acquired by her due to the great power of her Patibhakti. One day, while engaged in her daily work, she chanced to glance at a king and queen, who were bathing in the river. This caused a little amount of mental disturbance in Reṇukā, and this was enough to disturb her equanimity, and hence she was not able to make a pot out of the clay that day. She, therefore, came back empty-handed to the aśrama.

Jamadagni who was aware of the powers of his wife realized that his wife had deviated from her path, and therefore ordered his sons to kill her at once. All of them kept quiet, but Paraśurāma who alone was so dutiful to the commands of his father carried out the order of his father. Jamadagni was very pleased with Paraśurāma's filial affection, and asked him to select any boon. Paraśurāma immediately asked that his mother be brought back to life. Jamadagni told him that her head could not be attached to her body, as it fell on some impure place, and he gave her a boon that the head would be worshipped by all classes of people under the name Yeḷḷammā, and the body would also be equally renowned in the name of Bhūdevī. Thus, these two goddesses came to be situated at Alampur and these are not seen anywhere else except at Alampur.²⁶³

This myth occurs in different sources with minor changes in the narrative, though the larger structure remains the same. The following are the sources.

Bapat Jayant Bhalchandra, 'The Lajjāgaurī: mother, wife or yogini, p.85

Pattanaik Devdutt, 'The Goddess in India: The Five Faces of the Eternal Feminine', p. 5

²⁶³ Ramesan N, 'Temples and Legends of Andhra Pradesh', pp. 35-36

Thus, while the literary tradition maintain a silence on the goddess, the oral tradition wherever it exists, attempts to come to terms with the goddess' *deviant* image.

APPENDIX A

FIND SPOTS OF LAJJĀ GAURĪ IMAGES

Kashmir

- Kashmir Smast

Uttar Pradesh

- Bhita, Allahabad District
- Jhusi, Allahabad District
- Kausambi, Allahabad District
- Mathura, Mathura District

Bengal

- Chandraketuragh, South Bengal

Orissa

- Nuapada District

Rajasthan

- Bhinmal, Jalor District
- Arna, Jodhpur District

Gujarat

- Samalaji
- Pavi Jetpur village, Jabugam Taluk, Baroda district
- Kanad, Olpad Taluka, Surat District
- Kavi, Broach District
- Variavi, Surat District
- Amreli, Amreli District
- Bavaka, Panchmahal District
- Tarsang village, Panchmahal district
- Valabhpur, Bhavanagar district
- Munjeshwari Step Well, Dhank, Rajkot District
- Padri, Bhavnagar District

Madhya Pradesh

- Sanchi, Raisen District
- Bundelkhand, Rewa District
- Seoni District

Maharashtra

- Ter, Osmanabad District
- Bhokardan, Aurangabad District
- Hamlapuri, Ramtek Tahsil, Nagpur
- Pauni, Nagpur
- Ramtola, Bhandara District, Nagpur
- Mandhal, Nagpur
- Nevasa, Ahmadnagar District
- Vadgaon District, Satara
- Nanded, Nanded District
- Island of Gharapuri
- Ellora, Rameshwar Cave, Aurangabad District

Karnataka

- Aihole, Bijapur District
- Huchchimalli temple, Aihole
- Badami, Bagalkot District
- Kedareśvara Temple, Belligamve, Shimoga District
- Mahākuteśwar Temple, Mahākuta, Bijapur District
- Naganathakolla Temple, Naganathakolla, Bijapur District
- Lakulīśa Temple, Siddhankolla, Bijapur District
- Majati, Belgaum District

Andhra Pradesh

- Nagarjunakonda, Guntur District-
- Alampur, Kurnool District
- Panchaliṅga, Panchaliṅgेशvara Temple
- Kesaragutta, Hyderabad District
- Kunidene, Guntur District

Tamil Nadu

- Cakrāyi Temple, Darasuram, Tanjore District
- Kāmākshī temple, Kāñchipuram, Kanchipuram District

CHAPTER 4

GODDESS RENUKĀ: THE *DEVIANT* WIFE AND THE SATĪ

This chapter looks at the many representations of Reṇukā. Reṇukā first appeared as a mortal in the Mahābhārata, as the wife of Jamadagni and mother of Paraśurāma. This identity of Reṇukā continued in the later traditions, but the prominence given to it varied in every tradition. As a goddess in the Reṇukā Tīrtha (popularly known as Reṇukā Lake) in Sirmaur, Himachal Pradesh, her divinity was derived from this identity, however, in the Reṇukā Śakti Pītha in Mahur, Maharashtra, where she is a stand alone goddess, this identity is almost relegated, for she is the Goddess, the focus of the pilgrimage center. In association with the local stand alone goddesses, particularly in South India, it is in fact Jamadagni and Paraśurāma, who gain entry through Reṇukā. Thus, this chapter attempts to trace the changes and continuities that the figure underwent over a period of time, after first appearing in the Mahābhārata.

I

This section looks at the figure of Reṇukā in the Mahābhārata and the Purāṇas. It is divided into four sub-sections. The first three sub-sections look at the myths, where Reṇukā is the *deviant* wife, the devoted wife, and the satī respectively. The last one looks at a reference from the Skanda Purāṇa, where she is a deified figure.

A

The first textual reference to Reṇukā comes from the Āraṇyaparva in the Mahābhārata. This text was composed between the fourth century BCE and fourth century CE, and was situated in the northern region. Here, Reṇukā is born to King Prasenajit. She is married in the Bhṛgu family, to the sage Jamadagni. She

bears five sons to him, the most prominent one being Paraśurāma.²⁶⁴ She is mentioned in the following episode.

Jamadagni, a great ascetic went to King Prasenajit and wooed Reṇukā. The King gave Reṇukā to him. Thereafter, Jamadagni with his compliant wife performed great austerities in his hermitage. She gave birth to five boys. The last one was Paraśurāma, but he was actually the first of them all (in terms of ability).

Once when all her sons had gone out to gather fruit, Reṇukā who kept to her vows, went to bathe. As she was going, Reṇukā happened to see King Citraratha of Mṛttikāvati playing in the water with his wives. When she saw this, Reṇukā coveted (desired) him. From this bad thought she wetted herself mindlessly in the water and returned trembling to the hermitage. Her husband found her out and seeing that she had lapsed from constancy and had lost her brahmanic beauty, he vilified her. Thereafter, he asked his first four sons, who had just come in, to kill their mother, who being completely confounded and witless, gave no reply. In his fury, Jamadagni cursed them, and upon his curse they lost their minds and suddenly began to behave like animals and birds, or inanimate things.

After a while, Paraśurāma came in, and quickly acceded to his father's demand. He took his axe and cut off his mother's head. This subsided the fury of Jamadagni, who then asked Paraśurāma to choose as many boons as his heart felt like asking for. Paraśurāma chose that his mother would rise alive, that he forget the murder and be untouched by the crime, and that his brothers return to normality. His father granted him matchlessness in battle, longevity and all those things that his son wished for.²⁶⁵

The first major purāṇa to describe the above episode was the Bhāgavata Purāṇa. This is a Vaiṣṇavite Purāṇa. This text was composed in the former half of the sixth century CE²⁶⁶ in the Tamil region.²⁶⁷ However, the mention of the river Gaṅga in this episode indicates that perhaps either the myth was incorporated from this area or this part of the text was written in this region. The episode described in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa is as follows.

²⁶⁴ This familial identity of Reṇukā continues in the later traditions. Changes are introduced only in the name of her father, and her sons. But, her identity as the daughter of a kshatriya king, married to a Brahmin, and bearing five sons to him remains constant.

²⁶⁵ *Mahābhārata*, 3(33.c)116.1-25 (The Book of the Forest), pp. 445-446

²⁶⁶ Hazra R.C., *Studies in the Purāṇic Records on Hindu Rites and Customs*, p. 55

²⁶⁷ Nath Vijay, *Purāṇas and Acculturation*, p. 11

On one occasion, when Reṇukā went to the Gaṅgā for fetching water, she happened to see Citraratha, the king of Gandharvas, adorned with a wreath of lotuses, sporting with celestial nymphs (in the water). While gazing at the king, she conceived just a passing longing for Citraratha and forgot the time fixed for the *Homa* (sacrificial worship). She realized the delay, she had caused, and being afraid of the sage's (Jamadagni) curse, she hastened back, kept the pitcher of water before him, and remained standing with folded palms. Realizing his wife's faithlessness, Jamadagni got enraged and commanded his sons to kill the sinful woman. But, none obeyed. Only Paraśurāma, who was aware of his father's power through his spiritual meditation and penance, obeyed his father's orders, and dispatched (killed) his brothers and mother. Jamadagni pleased with his son asked him to seek a boon. Paraśurāma asked for the restoration of life of all those killed and that none should remember who slew them. His mother and brothers then got up hale and hearty as if from a sound sleep. Rāma killed his kin and kith, as he had known the spiritual power of his father.²⁶⁸

The next purāṇa which gives a detailed account of the beheading episode is the Vishnudharmottara Purāṇa. This is a Vaiṣṇavite upapurāṇa. The account from the Vishnudharmottara Purāṇa is as follows.

Reṇukā saw King Chitrangada sporting with his wife. Seeing this, Reṇukā had the desire for enjoyment and mentally went to that king, who was like cupid. At that very moment, she fell from the luster of the Brahmins. Seeing her luster less, Jamadagni asked his sons to kill their mother. Considering the honor of their mother, the sons refused to obey their father's order, thus were cursed by their father to become void of sensation. However, Paraśurāma agreed to his father's demand of killing his worthless mother. He immediately cut the head of his mother with a sharp axe. Jamadagni pleased with him, blessed him with a boon of invincibility in battle and then asked him to choose another boon. Paraśurāma asked for the revival of his mother and brother and that they should forget this incident. Thus, Reṇukā and her sons were revived.²⁶⁹

These abovementioned texts were composed in different time periods and regions. But, the characterization of Reṇukā is similar in all of them. To begin with, they first portray Reṇukā as working within the normative paradigm of a pativrata. The Mahābhārata calls her a compliant wife, who performs great austerities with her husband. She is said to have always kept to her vows. The

²⁶⁸ *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, IX.16.1-14, pp. 1209-1211

²⁶⁹ *Vishnudharmottara Purāṇa*, I.36.1-16, pp. 61-62

Bhāgavata Purāṇa depicts her as being part of the *Homa* with her husband. Most significantly, every text portrays her as having performed her duty towards her husband and his lineage by begetting sons. But eventually, she *deviates* from this normative paradigm by allowing an adulterous thought to pass her mind. It is to be noted that a pativrata has to be devoted and faithful to her husband, not only in speech, action and body, but also thought. Non-adherence to this norm is considered as a *deviation*, and therefore sinful.

This episode reflects the discomfort and anxiety of the male authors with any kind of *deviance* on the part of women. This is suggested from the immediate loss of luster that Reṇukā had accumulated as a result of being devoted and faithful to her husband. The Mahābharata describes her as wetting herself with the bad thought and losing her brahmanic beauty. The Vishnudharmottara Purāṇa, too, mentions her as falling from luster.²⁷⁰ More evidently, it is seen from the immediate execution order for Reṇukā, by her husband, without giving her a chance to expiate her sin. It is, also, reflected from the punishment and the reward accorded to the elder sons and Paraśurāma respectively.

The last point, also, reflects the discomfort of the authors with any kind of *deviance* in a patriarchal arrangement. The elder sons on disobeying the orders of Jamadagni, the male patriarch of the family are immediately punished like their mother. In the Mahābharata, they are cursed for losing their minds, upon which they begin acting like animals and birds. In the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, they are killed along with their mother. In the Vishnudharmottara Purāṇa, they are cursed to lose their sensation. On the other hand, Paraśurāma, who passively accepts his father's command, and kills his mother, is rewarded. In the Mahābharata and Vishnudharmottara Purāṇa, he is rewarded with longevity and matchlessness in battle. Apart from these rewards, Paraśurāma is granted boons by his father,

²⁷⁰ Luster in Indian mythology is very closely associated with purity and power. Men achieve it through the practice of asceticism and women by being chaste and devoted wives. Any kind of deviation leads to loss of this luster and power that accompanies it.

which he uses to revive his mother, to help his brothers return to normalcy and ensure that her mother and brothers forget their murder at the hands of Paraśurāma. Thus, he is able to get rid of both the guilt and crime of matricide. The authors of these texts give him a chance to expiate his sin, a chance that Reṇukā never gets.

Now, I note how various other Purāṇas, which have accounts of Jamadagni and Paraśurāma, treat Reṇukā's *deviance*.

The Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa came into existence between 325-400 CE.²⁷¹ It is believed to have been composed in the northern extremity of the Sahya Mountains.²⁷² It is a Vaiṣṇavite text. It has a large section on the myths of the Bṛḥgu lineage, and Paraśurāma specifically. It gives Reṇukā's reaction to her husband's death in detail, but does not tell us about her *deviance*. It simply mentions this episode, and provides a criticism of the act of beheading of his mother by Paraśurāma, through the mouthpiece of Śiva, when he comes to test Paraśurāma's penance. It is noteworthy that after criticizing him for murdering his mother, Śiva rewards Paraśurāma with the deadly weapon, the axe, to kill the asuras. The episode is as follows. Testing Paraśurāma, Śiva said,

"By killing your own mother, you have been repudiated and expelled by almost all the people of the world. Under the pretext of performing a penance, you confine your activities to the dense forest devoid of people. It is for dispelling the sin arising from Brahmin slaughter, the murder of an elderly lady (your mother) that you are performing a penance but it won't be destroyed on account of this penance. There are means of expiation and atonement for other types of sins. But understand that there is no expiation (from sin) to those who injure and hurt their mothers. If, O Rāma, the main characteristic feature of virtue is considered to be non-violence by you, why did you cut off the head of your mother with your own hand? After committing the terrible murder of your own mother, (a sin) despised by all the worlds, you profess to be a righteous man and you censure others as you please. Without knowing one's own positive (irremediable) fault (sin)

²⁷¹ Hazra R.C., *Studies in the Purāṇic Records on Hindu Rites and Customs*, p. 18

²⁷² Nath Vijay, *Purāṇas and Acculturation*, p. 10

and by seeing and laughing (on your part), I regard it incompetent for you to criticize the fault of others.”²⁷³

Yet, Śiva forgives him, and later gives him the deadly weapon, his axe, to fight against the Asuras.

The Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa, a Vaiṣṇavite text, first composed most probably in the eighth century CE, has many chapters devoted to Paraśurāma. Out of these, two chapters show Reṇukā’s reaction to her husband’s death. But, it does not even mention her *deviance*.

The Padma Purāṇa was composed between seventh and fifteenth century CE. It has come down to us in two major recensions, one from Bengal and other from South India.²⁷⁴ It is a Vaiṣṇavite text. First, this text mentions the killing of Reṇukā by her son followed by the below mentioned lines. Lakṣmaṇa says these lines, after being asked by Rāma to leave Sitā in the forest.

“Jamadagni’s son (Paraśurāma) killed even his mother by the order of his father. The *order of an elderly person, whether it is proper or improper, is not at all to be disobeyed*. Therefore, with a desire to do what is dear to Rāma, I shall leave her (Sitā) (in the forest).”²⁷⁵

Thus, it uses the example of Paraśurāma to establish the norm of complying with the command of an elderly person by a younger one in a patriarchal arrangement.

Next, the Padma Purāṇa, in the first chapter of the Uttarakhaṇḍa, which summarizes the content of the khaṇḍa, promises to tell us about Reṇukā’s murder. According to the text,

“(The Uttarakhaṇḍa contains) the account of Paraśurāma; so also (of) the murder of Reṇukā; so also (of) the gift of land made to brāhmaṇas and whatever Rāma did.”²⁷⁶

²⁷³ *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, 2.3.23.65-70, p. 602

²⁷⁴ Nath Vijay, *Purāṇas and Acculturation*, p. 12

²⁷⁵ *Padma Purāṇa*, V.58.42-44, p. 1886

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, VI.1.59b-64, p. 2317-2318

However, in the account of Paraśurāma, the episode of Reṇukā's beheading is absent. Rather, she is mentioned simply as the wife of the great sage Jamadagni, and mother of Paraśurāma. According to the text,

“Jamadagni, of great penance (to his credit), married in the proper manner, Reṇukā, Reṇuka daughter. The pious-minded one for many years enjoyed her as Indra with Paulomī, his auspicious queen. Then the very pious one, with a desire for having a son, performed a sacrifice. With (that) sacrifice he pleased god Indra. (Indra) Śacī's husband, being pleased, (promised) him a very strong, powerful son, mighty-armed son, tormentor of all enemies. Then in course of time, the best brāhmaṇa generated a very strong and powerful son with a part of a portion of Viṣṇu and having all (good) marks, on Reṇukā.”²⁷⁷

The Agni Purāṇa was compiled during the ninth century.²⁷⁸ It is a Vaiṣṇavite text and considers Paraśurāma as an incarnation of Viṣṇu. This text, while summarizing Paraśurāma's acts does not mention the episode of Reṇukā's *deviance*.

The Skanda Purāṇa was composed after eight century CE²⁷⁹ in the Gujarat region.²⁸⁰ It is a Śaivite Purāṇa. The chapter on the Rāmeśvara liṅga, where Paraśurāma expiates his sins, mentions Paraśurāma killing his mother, but does not state the cause. According to the text,

“He (Paraśurāma) was a great devotee of his father. He was born of the womb of Reṇukā. He was Viṣṇu himself incarnated as Rāma due to the irrevocable curse of Bhṛṅgu.

Once he was directed by Sage Jamadagni: ‘O my son, cut off this big head of your mother.’ On hearing the words of his father, Rāma cut off the heads of brothers and his mother. Jamadagni granted him a boon: ‘You will become invincible to all the rulers of the earth. Ere long, O Bhārgava, there shall be a holocaust. Take this axe, dear son. It is strong. It has come out of flames of fire. Hence you will become famous on account of this sharp weapon.’”²⁸¹

²⁷⁷ Ibid., VI.241.5-17a, p. 3216

²⁷⁸ Hazra R.C., *Studies in the Purāṇic Records on Hindu Rites and Customs*, p. 138

²⁷⁹ Ibid, p. 165

²⁸⁰ Nath Vijay, *Purāṇas and Acculturation*, p. 12

²⁸¹ *Skanda Purāṇa*, V.ii.29.1-7, p. 97

Paraśurāma said, “The sin of Brāhmaṇa slaughter perishes through a horse-sacrifice or if the sinner sits in the same posture or in the same seat continuously for twelve years. But many living beings were ruthlessly killed by me again and again- persons having full trust in me, erring ones and those killed in the wombs. Women, old men and boys were repeatedly killed by me. Even my own mother was killed by me.’ Saying so Rāma, the miserable, felt utmost grief.”²⁸²

The Śiva Purāṇa, a Śaivite text criticizes Paraśurāma’s act of killing his mother. This happens in an episode where Tāraka is counting the mistakes of the god Viṣṇu. While mocking Viṣṇu, Tāraka said,

“In his his sixth incarnation (as Paraśurāma), he cut off the head of his own mother”.²⁸³

Thus, one notes a complete silence on Reṇukā’s *deviance* in both the Śaivite and Vaiṣṇavite Purāṇas. But, Paraśurāma’s act of killing his mother evokes different responses. The Vaiṣṇavite texts sometimes criticize the act, at times dismiss it in a line, or choose not to mention the killing. If it criticizes the act, the criticism does not have severe consequences for the murder is awarded immediately after the criticism (as in the Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa), or the text argues for the necessity of such an action (as in the Padma Purāṇa). This can perhaps be attributed to the fact that most of these texts were Vaiṣṇavite texts, and began to consider Paraśurāma as an incarnation of Viṣṇu. The act of killing his own mother would have affected his status. It is, also, possible that the association of a *deviant* mother with an incarnation of Viṣṇu would have affected his popularity, and therefore the episode was treated in these ways. The Vaiṣṇavite Purāṇas, preferred to portray Paraśurāma as one who was ready to kill the kshatriyas twenty-one times because his mother beat her chest twenty-one times, after seeing her husband murdered at the hands of a kshatriya.

The two Śaivite purāṇas criticize the killing of his mother by Paraśurāma. The Skanda Purāṇa mentions the killing, but without stating the cause, and significantly, criticizes it through the mouthpiece of Paraśurāma. The Śiva

²⁸² Ibid., V.ii.29.17-28, p. 98

²⁸³ Śiva Purāṇa, IV.9.23, p. 751

Purāṇa, too, criticizes the act, but significantly through the mouthpiece of Taraka, an evil character of the text. The criticism by the Śaivite purāṇas can be attributed to it being the texts of the rival sect.

Choudhary, in his work on Paraśurāma, points out that the myth related to the killing of his mother Reṇukā by Paraśurāma has been one of the most prominent aspects of his personality in popular perception. Surprisingly, very few Puranic texts and versions of his myth deal with this aspect of his legend. In fact, there are indications that a conscious effort was made in the Purāṇas to suppress the myth of the killing of Reṇukā by Paraśurāma. It became a popular theme only in the late Sthalapurāṇas of south India and there it played a crucial role in the penetration of the Paraśurāma cult in marginal communities. Thus, it helped the transformation of the Paraśurāma myth into a popular cult. But as far as ancient and early medieval texts are concerned, very few provide enough details about it.²⁸⁴

Thus, these Purāṇas give different responses to the same episode, which can be attributed to their sectarian nature.

B

The second episode, in which Reṇukā's presence is seen, comes from the Anuśāsana Parva of the Mahābhārata. Even though the reason behind crafting this episode was to establish the custom of giving umbrellas and shoes at religious rituals, the characterization of Reṇukā is noteworthy. The episode is as follows.

On being asked by Yudhishtira, on how and by whom the custom of giving away umbrellas and shoes at religious rites started, Bhishma recounts the following episode.

²⁸⁴ Choudhary, *Rāma with an Axe*, p. 103

Jamadagni was engaged in practicing with his bow. Taking his aim, he shot arrow after arrow. His wife, Reṇukā used to pick up the shot arrows, and repeatedly bring them back to him. One day, at noontide, having shot all his arrows, Jamadagni asked Reṇukā to fetch those arrows. Reṇukā went to do the task, but was compelled to sit under the shade of a tree, on account of her head and feet being scorched by the heat of the sun. Having rested for a moment only, fearing the curse of her husband, she began collecting the arrows. Taking them back, Reṇukā distressed in mind, with her feet smarting with pain, and fearful of her husband, she approached him. Jamadagni filled with anger asked his wife the cause of her delay. She informed him that sun's heat had scorched her head and feet, and thus forced her to take shelter under a tree. Hearing this, he decided to destroy the sun, for he had afflicted his wife. The sun in the form of a brahmana appeased him and asked for his protection. Jamadagni gave it to him, but asked him to give the people something that would relieve them of the sun's heat rays. The Sun immediately gave him an umbrella and a pair of sandals and pointed out that from that day, the gift of these articles shall be established as a custom.²⁸⁵

This episode is recounted in the Vishnudharmottara-Purāṇa. It is as follows.

Jamadagni accepted Reṇukā, King Prasenjit's daughter, as his wife. Reṇukā served her husband with devotion, when he went to the forest. Once during summer, when the sun was in the middle of the sky, Jamadagni was throwing arrows as a sport. Reṇukā, who knew religion and acted according to the words of the husband, for a long time brought the arrows thrown by him again and again. Tortured by him, with feet burning, she went under the shade of a tree. Having rested for a moment, she brought back the best arrows for her husband. When she arrived, Jamadagni got angry and asked her as to why she had put hindrance, while he was sporting with the arrows. Was she not afraid of him? Did she not regard him? Reṇukā retorted and said that it was only for a moment, tormented by the sun, that she took rest. Thus, he should pardon her. On hearing the words of Reṇukā, Jamadagni got angry at the sun and became ready to throw arrows at it. But, that very moment, the sun came in the form of a Brahmin and told Jamadagni that it was his nature that caused burning, and he acted according to his nature. So, I should not get angry. He further said that he would be borne by his wife and shall do the work of the gods and good for the people. He gave his wife an umbrella and shoes, and said that the donation of umbrella and shoes will be the best donation in the world, and whoever will do it, will go to heaven. Thereafter, the Sun god went away and the former chaste woman goddess, mother of Sun god, Reṇukā gave birth to three sons followed by Paraśurāma, who was an incarnation of Viṣṇu.

²⁸⁵ *Mahābhārata*, Anuśāsana Parva Ch XCV-XVCI, pp. 209-211

In these episodes, we see Reṇukā as the devoted wife. Both the texts show her as constantly serving her husband. She obediently fetches the arrows that her husband keeps throwing. Even when tired, and tortured by the act, she rests only for a moment, again ready to be at his service, for she feared her husband, and also knew her duty was towards him. The Vishnudharmottara-Purāṇa explicitly mentions her as serving her husband with devotion. But, like the previous instance, she again lapses from her duty, for a moment. This angers Jamadagni, who questions her on disregarding him. In the Vishnudharmottara-Purāṇa, he asks her “Was she not afraid of him? Did she not regard him?” This time, however, Reṇukā replied and pointed out that the cause of her *deviation* was the sun, whom Jamadagni then decided to punish.

It is significant that in order to establish the custom of giving sandals and umbrellas, the Mahābhārata portrayed her as the devoted, compliant, *non-deviant* wife of Jamadagni.

C

The third episode which features Reṇukā shows her reaction and action on the death of Jamadagni. The first textual reference for it comes from the Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa. This text came into existence between 325-400 CE, after being separated from the Vāyu Purāṇa.²⁸⁶ It is believed to have been composed in the northern extremity of the Sahya Mountains.²⁸⁷ It is a Vaiṣṇavite text. The episode is as follows.²⁸⁸

It so happened one day that King Kārttavīrya came to the hermitage of Jamadagni, situated on the banks of Narmadā. The sage offered him hospitality through his cow Kāmadhenu. However, greed took over the king and he decided to take away the sage’s cow. The sage refused to give his cow and a quarrel broke over it. The sage was badly hit during this quarrel and fell on the

²⁸⁶ Hazra R.C., *Studies in the Purāṇic Records on Hindu Rites and Customs*, p. 18

²⁸⁷ Nath Vijay, *Purāṇas and Acculturation*, p. 10

²⁸⁸ This text does not discuss the beheading episode. Rather, just before this episode, there is a mention of Paraśurāma killing his mother. Śiva who has come to test Paraśurāma penance, tells him that there is no expiation from sins for those who injure and hurt their mothers.

ground unconscious. Even then, the king was unable to procure the cow. So he returned to his city. In the meantime Reṇukā came out of the hermitage, and saw her husband lying motionless on the ground in a pool of blood, with all his limbs wounded. She thought that her husband had died and thereupon she too fell down on the ground and fainted. After a long time, she got up and lamented. She said, *“O highly fortunate Lord! My heart is not torn asunder immediately after seeing you in such a plight as this. Indeed women are hard-hearted.”*²⁸⁹ She cried for Paraśurāma, who returned to the hermitage. Overwhelmed by sorrow, she beat her belly (?)²⁹⁰ twenty-one times with her hands. Seeing this, Paraśurāma declared that since his mother had beaten her chest twenty-one times, he will exterminate the entire kṣatriya caste as many time, wherever they may be on this earth.

Reṇukā was consoled with this declaration and agreed to her son’s oath. Thereafter, Paraśurāma with his brothers made preparations for their father’s cremation. Reṇukā, in the meantime, decided to follow her husband to Heaven by entering his funeral pyre. She told her children about her decision and asked them not to oppose her. She said, *“O my sons, I wish to follow your father who has gone to Heaven and who was by nature meritorious. It behoves you all to allow me to do so. The misery of widowhood is unbearable. How can I endure it? I will be hated as I am bereft of my husband. How can I carry on my activities, thus? Hence, I shall follow my beloved husband so that I shall proceed along with him without interruption forever in the other world. By entering this burning pyre, I will be slighted after a long time, the dear guest of my husband in the world of the Pitṛs. If you wish to do what is pleasing to me, dear sons, nothing else should be expressed by you by taking a united stand against me, except your concurrence and support in this act of my self-immolation to fire.”*²⁹¹ After saying these words with firm decision, Reṇukā decided to follow her husband by entering the fire.

At that very moment, an incorporeal speech asked Reṇukā not to die and maintain fortitude, for her husband would regain consciousness. Also, she was told that all that had happened was due to an inevitable cause. Thereafter, Bhṛgu got Jamadagni back to life.

But, later, King Kārttavīrya’s son killed Jamadagni and took away his head (in revenge for Paraśurāma killing their father). On seeing her husband dead, Reṇukā too instantaneously died of grief.²⁹²

²⁸⁹ *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, 2.3.30.13, p. 644

²⁹⁰ The translator was not sure about the exact word. Therefore, uses the question mark.

²⁹¹ *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, 2.3.30.36-41, p. 646

²⁹² *Ibid.*, 2.3.30.5-67, pp. 643, 649, *Ibid.*, 2.3.45.1-13, pp. 724-725

Another purāṇa which has this episode is the Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa. It was first composed most probably in the eighth century CE. From about the 10th century it began to be changed in the interfering hands of the Bengal authors who recast it to its present form and content in the sixteenth century.²⁹³ It is a Vaiṣṇavite text. The account is as follows.

After her husband's death, Reṇukā lamented and summoned her son. She warned him against going to the battle-field to fight the kshatriyas, after performing the last rites of his parents, since the result of the fight would be unpleasant. She rather asked him to stay in his abode comfortably and perform tapas. However, Paraśurāma refused to obey his mother and vowed to rid the earth of the kshatriyas twenty-one times.²⁹⁴

Reṇukā then decided to follow her dead husband, and asked Bhṛgu whether she could do so, since then she was in the fourth day of her menses. Bhṛgu pointed out that on the fourth day of the period, a woman got purified in all respects and could perform all the deeds for her husband. But, the woman gets purified on the fourth day for the husband and not for performing divine actions. Thus, she could not perform the task that day. It was on the fifth day that a woman got purified for performing the tasks of the gods and the manes. He, also, added that only that woman was virtuous, who followed the footsteps of the husband. Then Reṇukā asked Bhṛgu to tell her about women who were competent to follow the footsteps of their husbands and those who were not. To this, Bhṛgu gave a list of women who were incompetent, one of whom were those averse to serving their husbands.²⁹⁵ Further, he said that if a woman carried her husband to the funeral pyre and followed him, she was sure to reach heaven with her husband and get him as his husband again and again.

Following this tradition and again warning her son again, the chaste Reṇukā entered the funeral pyre of her husband and was reduced to ashes. And thus, both Jamadagni and Reṇukā reached heaven.

²⁹³ Hazra R.C., *Studies in the Purāṇic Records on Hindu Rites and Customs*, p. 166

²⁹⁴ Interestingly, this part is followed by statements which point out acts which are sinful. Significantly, killing of brother and father are considered as sinful, but that of mother is not mentioned, perhaps indicating that it is not.

²⁹⁵ *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa*, Ch28.11-13 In response to Reṇukā's question, Bhṛgu said, "The ladies having small children, those who are pregnant, the lady who has not started the menses, the lady in period, degraded woman, woman suffering from leprosy, the women who are averse to serving the husbands, undevoted women, and the women with foul tongue are not considered to be unsuitable for following the footsteps of their husband."

Unlike the first episode, where Reṇukā was the *deviant* wife, here she is a Satī. She is the ideal devoted widow, who readily and willingly follows her husband on his funeral pyre.

It appears that perhaps the male authors of these texts were using the figure of Reṇukā to establish the norm of self-immolation of widows on their husband's funeral pyre, by glorifying it as a virtuous act. For in the Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa, the composers of the text make her say that women are hard-hearted if they too do not die on seeing their husbands' dead. They establish that the misery of being a widow is unbearable for she will be hated for being a widow. Further, she will not be able to carry out any of her activities. This argument can, also, be ascertained from the way the narrative unfolds in the Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa. The first time Reṇukā sees her dead husband (here he has simply fainted); she decides to follow him by entering his funeral pyre and tells the audience the reason for such an act. But, the moment she is about to do so, she learns that her husband is not dead and would be soon revived. However, in the next scene, when he actually dies, she too simply dies a passive and quiet death due to the grief of widowhood. Thus, compared to earlier declaration of self-immolation and its virtues with the passive death later, it seems that the earlier act of Reṇukā was primarily written to establish the norm of self-immolation of the widow. In the Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa, Bhṛgu is seen as glorifying the act of Satī. He is made to say that it is only the virtuous women, and not others who can follow their husband's footsteps.²⁹⁶

D

All the above references view Reṇukā as a mortal figure, whether she appears as the *deviant* wife, a pativrata or a Satī. However, the later Purāṇas also begin to view her as a deified figure. One such evidence comes from the Skanda Purāṇa.

²⁹⁶ The conversation between Reṇukā and Bhṛgu is, also, noteworthy for the association it brings about between menstruating women and impurity.

The chapter, The Greatness of Jāmadagnya Tīrtha, from the Skanda Purāṇa, refers to Reṇukā as a Goddess. The reference is as follows.

“There (Jamadagni tīrtha) the Lord (Śiva) was installed by Rāma, the son of Jamadagni. There the Devas, Gandharvas, sages, Siddhas and Cāraṇas perform the Upāsanā of the Three-eyed Lord and the excellent sage Jamadagni. Men, who also see Goddess Reṇukā here, remain in the pleasing Śivaloka for as much time as they desire.”²⁹⁷

This reference shows that like Paraśurāma and Jamadagni, Reṇukā too perhaps began to be worshipped.

The questions, however, arises- Why did Reṇukā began to be worshipped? Which myth was used to bring about her deification? Was it the myth, where she figures as the *deviant* wife; or where she is the devoted wife/widow ready to follow her husband on his funeral pyre; or where she beats her chest twenty-one times and becomes the cause of extermination of cruel kshatriyas twenty-one times; or was it her association with the famous sage Jamadagni; or was it her being the mother of Paraśurāma, the incarnation of Viṣṇu?

If Reṇukā’s deification happened within the paradigm of her being a devoted wife-widow-mother, then it is perhaps easy to answer the question. Devoted wife- widow-mother(s) have generally been considered powerful within themselves. A devoted wife is considered to have the same power as a man who accumulates it through asceticism. A mother, too, has always been considered powerful due to her ability to procreate. Therefore, it is easy to justify and translate the powers of devoted wife-widow-mother into that of a goddess. However, if Reṇukā’s deification happened using the beheading myth, it is difficult to answer why would a *deviant* figure be deified.

To conclude, in this section we see Reṇukā figuring in the sources as both the *deviant* wife and ideal widow. However, it is significant that no one source mentions both the characteristics. They portray her in either of the two ways.

²⁹⁷ Skanda Purāṇa, V.iii.218.49-57, p. 610

Yet, both the episodes are indicative of the male authors' anxiety about women's sexuality and the need to control it, for in the first episode, the *deviance* is quickly checked and punished with death, and in the third episode, that widow is glorified who follows her dead husband on his funeral pyre.

In the end, we also see her emerging as a deified figure, for she is referred to as a Goddess, who perhaps had begun to be worshipped like her husband and son. The next sections will show that not only tīrthas came to be named after her, but were also centered on her.

II

This section looks at Reṇukā in her pilgrimage centers. It is divided into three sub-sections. The first one looks at the references to the Reṇukā Tīrthas in the Mahābhārata. The next two sub-sections look at Reṇukā Tīrtha in Sirmaur, Himachal Pradesh, and the Reṇukā Śakti Pītha in Mahur, Maharashtra respectively. These subsections are based on the sources and information collected from the pilgrimage centres.

A

The first reference to a Reṇukā Tīrtha comes from the Mahābhārata. There are two evidences of the Reṇukātīrtha in it. They come in the section on the tīrthas in the Āraṇyaparva. Exactly similar references come from the Padma Purāṇa,²⁹⁸ indicating that the references in the latter were borrowed from the former.

The evidences are as follows. When Yudhiṣṭhira asked Nārada to describe the rewards of pilgrimage for a man who cannot afford to do the Vedic sacrifices,

²⁹⁸ The first reference is as follows.

Padma Purāṇa, III.24.32-33, p. 1424. "There only is the holy place of (i.e. sacred to) Reṇukā. A brāhmaṇa having bathed there would be pure like the moon.

The second reference is as follows.

Padma Purāṇa, III.27.50-52a, p. 1437. "From there, O lord of kings, he should go to the excellent (place called) Reṇukātīrtha. Engaged in worshipping manes and deities he should bathe there. with his soul freed from all sins, he would obtain the fruits of Agniṣṭoma sacrifice.

Nārada pointed to a list of pilgrimages, and the rewards derived by visiting them.

In this list, there were two references to the Reṇukātīrthas.

“In the same area (as Ford-of-the-Daughter-of-Indra), is the ford of Reṇukā, which is frequented by Gods; bathing there a Brahmin becomes pure like the moon.”²⁹⁹

This ford was located on the way, that was north of the Narmadā, dotted by holy water places, the last one being Pañcada (Punjab).³⁰⁰

Then one should proceed to the great Reṇukā ford, do one’s ablutions, and worships ancestors and Gods: one’s soul will be cleansed of all evil and one will attain the fruit of a Laud-of-the Fire.³⁰¹

This ford is at some distance from Kurukṣetra, and very near to Pṛthūdaka.³⁰²

Though the Mahābhārata does not point out that the Reṇukā of the Reṇukātīrthas is the same figure as we have been discussing above, I argue that the Reṇukā of the Reṇukātīrthas is the same figure. I argue this on the following basis. First, the first reference to the Reṇukātīrthas comes from the Mahābhārata, the same source which gives the first textual evidence of this figure. Second, the reference to Reṇukātīrthas, in both the Mahābhārata and Padma Purāṇa, comes from the section discussing the tour of tīrthas all over the country. Within it are, also, references to tīrthas of Jamadagni³⁰³ and Paraśurāma³⁰⁴. Therefore, it is possible that the Reṇukātīrthas, too, refer to

²⁹⁹ *Mahābhārata*, 3(33)80.95-100, p. 376

³⁰⁰ Dange Sadashiv, *Towards Understanding Hindu Myths*, p. 389

³⁰¹ *Mahābhārata*, 3(33)81.135-140, p. 384

³⁰² Dange Sadashiv, *Towards Understanding Hindu Myths*, p. 389

³⁰³ *Mahābhārata*, 3(33)81.20-25. “This is known as the Gate of Kurukṣetra, O bull of the Bharatas; after doing the circumambulation and bathing at that place that equals the Puṣkaras and worshipping ancestors and Gods, at this place that was set up by the great-spirited Jāmadagnya; the diligent pilgrim becomes acquitted of his tasks, O king, and finds the reward of a Horse Sacrifice.”

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 3(33)81.20-35. “From there the pilgrim should proceed to the lakes of Rāma, where Rāma of blazing splendor, after his eradication of the baronage, energetically and powerfully created five lakes, filling them, so we have heard, with blood. Thus satiated his fathers and grandfathers; whereupon those pleased ascetics said to Rāma, “Rāma, lordly Rāma, we are pleased, Bhārgava, with this your devotion to your ancestors and with your bravery, O lord. Be blessed, choose a boon! What do you wish, magnificent man?”

Reṇukā. Third, the first reference shows that the tīrtha was perhaps located in the area around Punjab and Himachal Pradesh. The latter state has many regions which are Jamadagni, Paraśurāma and Reṇukā religious centers. Thus, it is possible that the tīrtha refers to Reṇukā. Also, this area lies in the peripheral zone of the northern belt. Thus, during the process of assimilation and negotiation with these zones, the figure of Reṇukā could have been used as a means of assimilation. The second reference shows that tīrtha was perhaps located in the area around Kurukṣetra, a religious place centered primarily on Paraśurāma. Also, both Jamadagni and Reṇukā are worshipped here. Thus, it is possible that the second tīrtha, too, refer to Reṇukā.

The question now arises- Why was Reṇukā chosen as a figure to name a tīrtha? She is only a mortal in the Mahābhārata, and that too a *deviant* wife. Can the reason be attributed to her association with the Bhṛgu lineage; her being wife of Jamadagni, a powerful sage; or her being mother of Paraśurāma, who began to be considered an incarnation of Viṣṇu? Or can it be ascribed to the lone reference in the Mahābhārata, where she is the devoted wife of Jamadagni. While, it is easy to justify the naming of a tīrtha after a woman associated with a popular Brahmin lineage, a devoted wife of a popular sage, or the mother of a valorous son, who was an incarnation of Viṣṇu, but difficult to ascertain the reason for having a sacred place centered on a *deviant* wife.

At these words of his ancestors, great king, Rāma, greatest of fighters, spoke with folded hands this word to his ancestors who were standing in the sky: "If you are pleased with me and if I am to be favored, then by my ancestors' grace I wish for satiety in self-mortification. And may I, by grace of your splendor, be rid of the evil I incurred by eradicating the baronage in my fury. And may my lakes become sacred places, renowned on earth." When they heard Rāma's auspicious words, the fathers were pleased and rejoiced greatly; and they said to Rāma, "Because of your superior devotion to your forbears, your austerities shall grow ever greater. You are free of any evil on account of your furious eradication of the baronage: they were brought down by their own acts. Your lakes will beyond doubt become places of sanctity. If one bathes in these lakes and offers to his ancestors, his pleased fathers will give him his heart's desire, however hard to attain on earth, and the everlasting world of heaven." After having thus given boons to Rāma, O king, his pleased ancestors bade the Bhārgava farewell and vanished on the spot. So did the lakes of great-spirited Rāma Bhārgava come to be. By bathing chastely in Rāma's lakes and worshipping Rāma, a man of good vows will obtain much gold."

B

The Reṅukā Tīrtha in Sirmaur, Himachal Pradesh is centered on the Reṅukā Lake and the Paraśurāma Temple. The Sthala Purāṇa is called the *Śri Paraśurāma Charitāmṛta* with the sub-title *Bhārgava Purāṇa*.³⁰⁵ As the name suggests, the Sthala Purāṇa is based on Paraśurāma. Reṅukā occupies a small part in it. In this section, I concentrate on this text, and draw from other Chap books wherever required.³⁰⁶

The *Śri Paraśurāma Charitāmṛta* introduces Reṅukā as the ideal Brahmanical woman working within the patriarchal norms. It elucidates this with various examples. She is shown to be devoted to her husband. She is shown as nurturing and bringing up her children very well. She feeds them with milk on time, ensures that her small children do not enter either the place where the *yagya* was being held, to prevent them from getting burned, or in the cow shed to prevent them from getting hurt by the cows. The exemplary household of Jamadagni, where not only his family, but other sages, their wives and students live happily, is attributed to Reṅukā. She is, also, shown as involved in discussion on issues such as Creation, Preservation and Destruction of the Universe,

³⁰⁵ This text is written in Hindi. But, the Hindi text is interspersed with Sanskrit ślokas, which are generally picked from the Major and Minor Purāṇas. The style of writing seems to have been borrowed from the Major and Minor Purāṇas. Similar is the case with some of the concepts such as Kalpa, Avatār, and so forth, and the story of Reṅukā. The last, however, has been changed and interpreted by the author differently.

The narrative is a mixture of various stories put together from different stories. Therefore, the narrative events are not always very neatly connected to each other. They are intertwined by the author's own views on them.

³⁰⁶ The other Chap books collected are called *Śri Reṅukā jī ke Pavitra tīrtha kā Sanksipta Itihās* and *Śri Reṅukā Chālisā*. Both these texts, including the Sthala Purāṇa are written by Paramahansa Swami Dayananda Bharti. There is no other known version written or oral available regarding the Tīrtha or Reṅukā, other than those available in these.

Paramahansa Swami Dayananda Bharti is considered as the religious and spiritual leader of the place. All the mathas in the Reṅukā Tīrtha are under him. The introduction of the Sthala Purāṇa gives an indication of his connection with the government.

The author derives the legitimacy to write this text by claiming that the Goddess Reṅukā herself asked him to write this text (Sthala Purāṇa) about her son and herself, and it was with their blessings that he could manage to complete this difficult task.

Manavantarās of the Avatār, and Dharma in every Yuga with her husband and sons.

The first episode in the Śrī Paraśurāma Charitāmṛta, where Reṇukā features prominently is the Beheading Episode. The episode, from the text, is as follows.

After taking a bath in the river, Reṇukā was coming back to the hermitage, chanting the name of Tulsā Mahārānī and Harī kī Patarānī, when her gaze got fixed on the other side of the river. There, she saw Gandharva Yārtikrāvata's king Chitraratha, dressed in divine objects and flowers, which emitted a beautiful smell. He was sexually involved with his wife. The young couple was happily engaged in their activities without being concerned about the social norms of sexual conduct. After looking at the couple, Reṇukā thought of sexual enjoyment. She immediately sat down in the water. After the thought of sexual enjoyment passed away, she left for the hermitage. She reached the hermitage late. This made Jamadagni angry and he questioned her on the reason for her late. Reṇukā kept quiet. Using his powers, Jamadagni found out the cause of her delay. Therefore, he decided to punish his wife. In the meantime, his sons returned from the woods, Jamadagni decided to take advantage of the situation, and test his sons for *pitrabhakti*. He asked his sons to kill the sinful woman, for she had committed a mental sin. The sons had learnt the custom of worshipping the mother first, and then the father. So they could not follow their father's orders, for killing their mother would have been a great sin. Further, they realized that they could not disobey their father's order too. Therefore, they decided to stay mute, and not kill their mother. This made Jamadagni very angry and he cursed them to become dumb and mute. Paraśurāma, however, decided to follow his father's order. He beheaded his mother. This relieved Jamadagni of his anger, and he realized that his son was no ordinary a boy. Pleased with his son, he asked him for any boon. Paraśurāma asked for the revival of his mother, Reṇukā forgetting her death at the hands of her son, she getting redeemed of her sin, and finally the revival of his brothers as healthy human beings. Jamadagni agreed to them. In addition, for following his father's orders without any doubt, and without thinking about the consequences, he blessed him with the following boons: winning all wars that he would fight, fame that would spread all over the world, he would be a role model for people in Kaliyuga, and those who would follow him in Kaliyuga would be without any stain, he would win all wars, and be known Yuga after Yuga.³⁰⁷

³⁰⁷ Paramahansa Swami Dayananda Bharti, Śrī Paraśurāma Charitāmṛta, pp. 59-62

This account is interspersed with the author's own views on this episode. It indicates an ambivalent attitude towards Reṇukā's *deviance*. First, unlike the Purāṇas, which refer to Reṇukā's act of gazing, and its consequent sexual thinking as sinful, the author justifies Reṇukā act by referring to it as a natural reaction on viewing an amorous couple. Again, unlike the Purāṇas, he criticizes Jamadagni's anger, though not for his unjust treatment to his wife, but for behaving unlike a sage. He, then, justifies the beheading as part of Jamadagni's plan to test his sons for pitrbhakti. He appreciates the elder sons' refusal to kill their mother on the account that they followed the norm they were taught, that is, to worship one's mother, even before the father. Later, he justifies Paraśurāma's act of execution for it was believed that only an extra-ordinary (divine) boy could perform such an act, and yet be free from the crime and its guilt.³⁰⁸

Reṇukā again appears in the narrative, when she is painstakingly described as a Ādarśa Grihaṇī (Model Housewife) at length, with a number of examples. The author describes how she left the comfort of the palace to live with her husband, in his hermitage. Further, not only did she live there, but also engaged herself in her husband's service; and organized and ensured the smooth functioning of every aspect of his hermitage. The following conversation from the Śrī Paraśurāma Charitāmṛta is an interesting example to elucidate the point.

One day, an old lady living in the hermitage asked Reṇukā how she had managed to enchant her husband. Reṇukā replied that she hadn't used any magical means to enchant her husband, for such means destroy the entire family. Rather, she controls her feelings, and serves her husband with all good feelings. She finishes his work, the moment he signals. She eats food after him. She takes care of his food, prayers, serves guests, and maintains the cleanliness of the hermitage's surroundings. She doesn't keep running to the door. She stores quantities of food in a secretive

³⁰⁸ During my interview with the Head Priest and the Sevak of the Paraśurāma Temple, two sages living in the mathas of the Reṇukā Lake, it was noticed that there was a sense of discomfort, while narrating this incident. The interviewees would sometimes not mention this episode in their narrative, quickly gloss over it or tried to justify it.

Śrī Reṇukā jī ke Pavitra tīrtha kā Sanksipta Itihās chooses to not mention this episode at all.

manner. She follows the dharma taught by her mother-in-law. She considers her great husband as her god. She does not go anywhere without him. She does not talk to evil women. She never argues with her husband or any of the hermitage's residents. She considers her husband's body as her shelter, and works according to him. She never thinks differently from him. Therefore, he is always favorable to her. Other than this, she does not know anything or do anything.³⁰⁹

The author intersperses such a description of Reṇukā's with his own views on women in contemporary times. He compares their behavior with that of Reṇukā. He condemns contemporary women's actions that are done under the pretext of women's independence and empowerment, and propagates Reṇukā's pativrata acts. For the author, this is the source of happiness and salvation for all women.

Such a portrayal of Reṇukā interspersed with the authors' attitude towards the women in contemporary times highlight the author's anxiety regarding women, especially those who do not adhere to the normative gender roles, and their sexuality. Therefore, perhaps he painstakingly highlights Reṇukā as a pativrata, for the women readers and listeners of the text to emulate.

In the end, Reṇukā figures as witnessing the murder of her husband at the hands of sons of Sahasrārjuna. She is shown pleading with them to save her husband. But, they kill her husband, and take away his head. The text now refers to Reṇukā as the great Satī mother, even though unlike the Purāṇas, she is not shown as committing Satī.³¹⁰

Rather in an earlier episode, she was shown as taking samādhi in Rāma Sarovar in Sindhuvana, after her son killed Sahasrārjuna,.

It is significant to note that **Reṇukā's divinity** is not inter-woven in the narrative. But, the text contains a chapter which talks about Reṇukā as the Goddess. In it,

³⁰⁹ Paramahansa Swami Dayananda Bharti, *Śri Paraśurāma Charitāmṛta*, p. 90

³¹⁰ According to the *Śri Reṇukā jī ke Pavitra tīrtha kā Sanksipta Itihās*, after seeing her husband dead, Reṇukā takes samādhi in water. But, after Paraśurāma revives his father, Reṇukā too emerges out of the water.

Paramahansa Swami Dayananda Bharti, *Śri Reṇukā jī ke Pavitra tīrtha kā Sanksipta Itihās*, p. 27

the author draws on various sources, interprets them, and devises evidence to tell us about Reṇukā deified status. Its description, along with some from other Chap books, has been discussed below.

The Śrī Paraśurāma Charitāmṛta describes Reṇukā as having both the puruṣa and prakṛiti in her. She is the creator of the universe, the mother of the universe. She becomes male and female to give wealth to the world. She steadies the consciousness, and by doing so draws the ethical and social conduct to rule the world. She is the root prakṛiti and the ultimate Śakti. The Śrī Reṇukā Chālīsā, which consists of prayers dedicated to Reṇukā and Paraśurāma, describes Reṇukā as the controller of everyone's destiny; protector of their body and mind; bestower of virtue and good; and problem solver. In the world filled with evil, she is the only one who sustains and does all the work for her devotees. Nothing can exist without her. She is the first Śakti who defeated Brahmā and Viśṇu, and created Brahmā, Viśṇu, and Śiva.

The Śrī Paraśurāma Charitāmṛta and Śrī Reṇukā Chālīsā, describe her as taking the form of various Goddesses. She is Umā-Satī-Pārvatī, Lakṣmī-Sīta, Durgā, Mahiśāsura-Mardinī, Chaṇḍī, Kālī, Ambikā, Jagadamde, Kālīka, Vāṇī, Śārdā, Mātangī, Dhumāvātī.

The Śrī Paraśurāma Charitāmṛta end by referring to her as the ideal woman, full of good qualities, creative śakti, oppressor of evil like Mahādurgā Kālī. She upholds and propagates the ideal woman dharma. The Śrī Reṇukā Chālīsā interestingly refers to her as a chaste and virtuous woman, a Yoginī, and a Mahāmāyā.

This Goddess is said to have taken the form of Reṇukā, when Prasenjit through his strong tapas, and devotion made the Goddess happy, who then decided to take birth as his daughters. She took birth in three forms- Ambā, Ambikā, and

Ambalikā, who were the forms of Mahākālī, Mahālakshmi, and Mahāsaraswatī. They were, also, called Reṇukā, Veṇukā, and Kaushikī.³¹¹

Thus, the Śrī Paraśurāma Charitāmṛta stresses on Reṇukā as the quintessential wife, mother and homemaker, and as the Goddess. And as noted earlier, it portrays Reṇukā as part of Paraśurāma's mythology. The tīrtha structure, the main temple, Reṇukā's iconography in it, the everyday rituals and the main festival, too, highlight these points. In fact, these aspects highlight the former point more than the latter. It, also, raises the question, whether unlike the Śrī Paraśurāma Charitāmṛta, which considered Reṇukā as the ultimate Goddess, Reṇukā's divinity in the Reṇukā Tīrtha can be attributed to her being the quintessential wife, mother and homemaker? The above mentioned aspects are discussed below.

Sirmaur is dotted with temples and images of Jamadagni, Reṇukā and Paraśurāma. Every place is associated with this family of the Bhṛgu lineage. In it, the **Reṇukā Tīrtha** consists of the Reṇukā Lake and the Paraśurāma Temple, and therefore one can infer that it is centered on Reṇukā and Paraśurāma.

It is believed that the Reṇukā Lake was originally a well. When Reṇukā took samādhi in it, it changed into a lake, with the shape of a woman (which is believed to be of Reṇukā.) Since then, the lake is called as the Reṇukā Lake, and became an object of veneration. Every pilgrim who comes to Reṇukā Tīrtha takes a bath in it, for it is believed that the pure water of the Lake cleans the sins of the devotees and purifies them. One part of the Lake is marked by an idol, which portrays a mother breast-feeding her child with milk. This spot is known as Sahasradhārā. It is believed that after Reṇukā took samādhi in the water, Paraśurāma prayed to Reṇukā to meet him. So, she came out to meet her son. Out of a mother's affection, she began lactating with milk sahasradhārā. Then, she gave her son knowledge, and promised to meet him every year on

³¹¹ Paramahansa Swami Dayananda Bharti, *Śrī Paraśurāma Charitāmṛta*, p. 92

Devodhanī Ekādaśī. Thereafter, she submerged into the same sahasradhārā. Today, the devotees drink water from this sahasradhārā. They believe that it still as tastes like milk.³¹² Thus, this tīrtha centered on the Reṇukā Lake venerates Reṇukā as the mother of Paraśurāma, who took samādhi in water.

The second important feature of the tīrtha is the **Paraśurāma Temple**. This temple has been completely renovated, and nothing of the old structure remains. The present structure consists of the temple complex, which in turn consists of the main Paraśurāma Temple and various sub-shrines namely Reṇukā Temple, Śiva and Pārvatī Temple, Reṇukā Daśavatār Temple, Durgā Temple, Saraswatī Temple. According to the temple priest, the Paraśurāma Temple is the oldest, the rest are later additions.³¹³ Clearly, the name and chronology of the temple complex suggest that the temple is centered on Paraśurāma, and not on Reṇukā.

Like the temple structure, the images too have been replaced. But, the old discarded images have still been kept at a corner of the temple complex. In them, **Reṇukā's image** carved in stone is noteworthy. She is portrayed as a lady wearing a saree holding a rosary in one hand, and a kalaśa in the other. This image is similar to the one currently kept in the Reṇukā temple of the complex though with a few minor changes. Here, Reṇukā is portrayed in a standing pose with one hand in the abhaya pose, and the other left free. She is covered in a red saree with all the adornments of a married woman such as vermillion, red bindi, red bangles, and ornaments. It is noteworthy that neither of the images have attributes such as sword, mace, bows and arrows, discus, which are generally seen in the hands of the Goddesses. Rather, what the image carries is a rosary. Thus, even as a Goddess, the image tends to highlight her pativrata, maternal character, and perhaps her sagely attributes.

³¹² Ibid., p. 212

³¹³ According to the temple priest, the Reṇukā Daśavatār Temple, Durgā Temple, Saraswatī Temple has been added in the last ten years.

The **everyday rituals of the temple complex** are centered on Paraśurāma and his temple. The rituals consist of the ārtī performed by the head priest, along with the beating of the drums by the sevak. The morning ārtī begins in the Paraśurāma's temple in the temple complex. After the ārtī, the jyot burnt during the ārtī is taken to the sub-shrines and small prayers are offered in each. Then again, the ārtī is performed at another Paraśurāma temple on a hillock near the temple complex. The order is reversed for the evening ārtī.

The **main festival** of the Tīrtha is centered on the meeting of the mother with her son. It is believed that once Reṇukā was feeling sad, and remembering Paraśurāma a lot. Immediately, Paraśurāma appeared and took blessings of his mother. He told his mother that he could not be with her all the time, because he had to perform tapas. But, on every ekādaśī, he would come to meet her, and stay with her for the next five days. The meeting of the mother and son takes the form of the main festival of the Tīrtha.³¹⁴

The festival begins nine days after Dīpāvalī on daśmī, and continues till pūrnimā (full moon day). On daśmī, Paraśurāma comes to meet his mother Reṇukā.³¹⁵ The festival starts with Paraśurāma palanquin (pālakī) beginning its journey from Jammū Kotī village, coming to Dadahu, where it meets the palanquins of other gods from different parts of Himachal, till it reaches the main Paraśurāma temple in Reṇukā Tīrtha.³¹⁶ This Paraśurāma remains in the Paraśurāma temple for three days, i.e., from the sudi daśmī to dwadaśī.³¹⁷ The festival now involves the

³¹⁴ Paramahansa Swami Dayananda Bharti, *Śri Reṇukā jī ke Pavitra tīrtha kā Sanksipta Itihās*, p. 30

³¹⁵ Ibid., p. 30

According to the mythology, once Reṇukā was remembering Paraśurāma a lot, and was feeling sad. Immediately, Paraśurāma appeared before her and took the blessings of his mother. He told his mother that since he cannot be with her all the time, since he has to perform tapas, so, on every ekādaśī he would come to meet her, and stay with her for the next five days. The meeting of the mother and son takes the form of the fair, which is held after Dīvalī.

³¹⁶ Ibid., p. 11

³¹⁷ Neg, *Himachal Pradesh District Gazetteer, Sirmur District*, p. 365

During this time, the hill people pry the pujaṛī with questions during the night, when he goes into a trance, and turns an oracle. These answers foretell things, and quite often, enjoin upon the questioner some offering or sacrifice to the deity, or some other act as a condition precedent to

presence of the government officials, including the Chief Minister, who performs the *pujā* (worship) of the palanquins, and gives a speech. Thereafter, various cultural programmes are held. Devotees come from all over India, especially the whole of Himachal Pradesh. Religious festivals are held all throughout the day, and night. On *Ekādaśī*, the devotees take a dip in the holy water of the lake, and perform worship of the deities in the *Paraśurāma* temple.³¹⁸

The official **priest** of the temple belongs to the Brahmin caste. The **sevak**, who plays the drum when the *ārtī* takes place, cleans the temple every day, and maintains the temple, belongs to the lower caste. His last three generations had served the temple like him.³¹⁹ It was difficult to determine the caste of the **devotees** who would largely visit the temple.³²⁰ According to the priest, one and all were allowed to visit the temple.

A comparison between the mythology of *Reṇukā* in the *Śri Paraśurāma Charitāmṛta*, and the *Tīrtha* Structure, the temple complex, iconography, everyday rituals and main festival allows us to draw the following conclusions. First, the mythology draws on every aspect of *Reṇukā*'s mythology and characteristic even though with varying attitudes towards them. It describes her *deviance* in an ambivalent manner, but it glorifies her as a *pativrata* and mother. Further, it doesn't forget to highlight her divine aspect. The other aspects of the *Tīrtha*, however, tend to draw attention to her ideal wife and maternal character almost relegating her existence as the Goddess. Second, in both the literary tradition and the aspects of the *Tīrtha*, she is part of the *Paraśurāma* mythology and tradition. In the former, she is a subsidiary, though important part of the

the fulfillment of the prophecy such as deliverance from some misery or recovery from disease, and so on.

³¹⁸ Paramahansa Swami Dayananda Bharti, *Śri Reṇukā jī ke Pavitra tīrtha kā Sanksipta Itihās*, p. 11

³¹⁹ His exact caste could not be determined for he didn't want to mention it. Also, during the personal communication with him, one realized that he was operating with a strong sense of caste consciousness.

³²⁰ It was difficult to determine the caste of the devotees because there were not many people who visited the temple. The devotees who visited the temple were the ones who lived nearby.

mythology. In the latter, even though she is an important part of the Tirtha, the temple complex and the festival, but the prime most position is that of Paraśurāma. Third, both the traditions tend to highlight and glorify Reṇukā as a pativrata and the Mother of Paraśurāma.

C

The second pilgrimage centre that I look at is the Reṇukā Śakti Pītha situated in Māhūr, Maharashtra. Unlike the Reṇukā Tīrtha in Himachal Pradesh, this pilgrimage place is centered on Reṇukā. As the name suggests, Goddess Reṇukā is the focal point of this pilgrimage centre.

To look at her mythology known in this region, I concentrate on the *Reṇukā Mahātmaya*, which is written by Rājakumār Ambādāsa Bhopī (Pātīl) the head priest of the Reṇukā Temple and is considered as the official version of Reṇukā's mythology. Other chap books too give a similar story, but with few differences, which have been pointed out wherever they are noteworthy.

Unlike the Śrī Paraśurāma Charitāmṛta, the Reṇukā Mahātmaya is centered on Reṇukā, and not on Paraśurāma. She is the agent driving the events of the story. Again, unlike the Śrī Paraśurāma Charitāmṛta, her divinity is woven in her mythology right from the beginning. Thus, the text opens with Viṣṇu promising to descend on earth to help the Devas against the Rāksasas. However, he could take birth only through Aditi's womb. Aditi agrees and takes the form of Pārvatī, so that Śiva can take the form of Jamadagni. Thus, they descend on earth as Reṇukā and Jamadagni respectively to give birth to Viṣṇu, who would take the form of Paraśurāma. According to the text-

After the Devas lost the battle against the Rakśasas, they went to Viṣṇu for help. Viṣṇu agreed to help them. He told them that he would take birth on earth from Aditi's womb (who is also known as Ekavīrā), and kill the kśtriyas twenty-one times. Further, he added that Aditi would also have to descend on the earth as Reṇukā. Therefore, the Devas should go and worship Aditi or Ekavīrā.

So, the Devas went to Aditi, praised her, and asked her to allow Viṣṇu to take birth from her womb.³²¹ Aditi agreed in order to remove the obstacles faced by her devotees.

Thereafter, she performed rigorous penance and got the tejas of Devas, Gandharva, Kinnar, Sidha, Vidhyādhara Sarpa, Rudra, and Rishīs. So, she also got the name of Ekavīrā. Then, she went to the Kailāsha Mountains, and prayed to Lord Śiva. Śiva, on being happy with Aditi, asked her the need to come to him for a favor, when people go to her and ask for her blessings and favors. Aditi asked him to give her the blessings to have a Ayonī birth (the state of not being born from a womb) on earth. She also asked him to be born on earth as her husband, and give birth to Viṣṇu, who would kill the Rakṣasas twenty-one times. Śiva agreed.

Then, Aditi prayed to Pārvatī, who blessed her, and told her that she would take the form of Pārvatī³²² to take birth on earth. She, also, said since she is full of good qualities, has the ability to make wishes come true, she would also bestow salvation, and prosperity on all people who take her darśan.³²³

Before being born on earth, Ādiśaktī Reṇukā took an auspicious form, with absolute sacred luster. She became full of divine qualities. This form of Reṇukā was unique and unparalleled. Further, by doing tapas, she got both motherhood and femininity imbibed in her.³²⁴

Next, keeping in congruence with her divinity, the narrative portrays her birth as supernatural. According to the text-

King Reṇu and his wife did tapas to Śiva and Pārvatī for a daughter. Śiva and Pārvatī became happy with their devotion gave them their blessings for a daughter. Thereafter, the king organized a Yagya. From it emerged Aditi full of luster. Her beauty was lustrous like that of Gangā- Pārvatī, she had beautiful features, her eyes were beautiful like that of Lakṣmī; she wore

³²¹ Bhopī, *Śrī Reṇukā Mahātmya*, p. 1

³²² It is noteworthy that here Aditi takes the form of Pārvatī, the wife of Śiva. Whereas above, she is referred to as Ekavīrā, which is an epithet meaning daughter of Śiva. To the people visiting Reṇukā's temple, Ekavīrā was the sister of Reṇukā. In fact, there is a separate temple of Ekavīrā in the Māhur region.

Williams Monier, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*

³²³ Bhopī, *Śrī Reṇukā Mahātmya*, p. 2

³²⁴ Ibid., p. 3

Another chap book called *Śrī Reṇukā Devī: Mahātmya and Kavacha* by H.B.P Santkavī Dāsaphule Mahārāja begin by asserting that the root cause of the universe is a Śakti and it is formless. This formless Goddess takes birth as Reṇukā for the destruction of the asuras, protection of dharma, and welfare of the people.

Dāsaphule, *Śrī Reṇukā Devī: Mahātmya and Kavacha*, pp. 2-5

divine clothes, ornaments and sandalwood; she had a halo around her; she spoke about the welfare of others; and gave greater happiness than being in heaven.

After she emerged, the place was filled with divine music. Immediately then, a voice came from heaven. It asserted that this Devī was Ekavīrā, Aditi, Gangāgaurī, and Lajjāgaurī.³²⁵

King Reṇu named her Reṇukā after him. She was full of virtues, and anything was possible for her. It was difficult to describe the Goddess. Even Brahmā and Śiva were unable to describe her. But, whosoever saw her became free from all sins.³²⁶

After she grows up, she chooses to marry Jamadagni in a svayamvar ceremony. After her marriage, she begins to live in her husband's hermitage, and engages herself in her husband's service. She keeps everyone happy with her services to them. Here, the author points out that it was also her role as a daughter and wife that guided her devotees. It is significant that here, too, Reṇukā's role as the ideal daughter and pativrata is emphasized by the author, but unlike the Śrī Paraśurāma Charitāmṛta the emphasis is less on the ascribed gender role, and more on her divinity.³²⁷

The next significant episode where Reṇukā features is the Beheading episode. It is noteworthy that unlike the Mahābhārata, the Purāṇas, and Śrī Paraśurāma Charitāmṛta, this episode is given considerable weightage in the narrative. The episode is described as follows.

³²⁵ It is significant that Reṇukā is referred to as Lajjā Gaurī, for the name Lajjā Gaurī referring to the fertility cult discussed above largely from Maharashtra. Even though the two are completely different goddesses, yet this inter-change of name from the Maharashtra area is significant. This could indicate a few things. First, that like Lajjā Gaurī, Reṇukā too would have been only a fertility cult earlier, who eventually over the course of time acquired more functions. Second, this reference of Lajjā Gaurī coming from this small śakti pītha, perhaps indicates reminiscence of this goddess in this area, since most images are coming from Maharashtra.

³²⁶ Bhopī, *Śrī Reṇukā Mahātmya*, p. 3-6

³²⁷ The *Śrī Reṇukā Devī: Mahātmya and Kavacha* similarly points out that Reṇukā was an ideal wife. She left the palace to live with a sage in his hermitage. She left her costly garments, and instead began adorning herself with flowers. She is the model of an ideal sacrificing wife for the young women. One must learn the lesson of sacrifice from the *Reṇukā Mahātmya*. Dāsaphule, *Śrī Reṇukā Devī: Mahātmya and Kavacha*, p. 6

Once, on the fourth day of her menstruation, Reṇukā went to take a bath in the Gangā.³²⁸ There, she saw Gandharva Chitraratha indulged in watersports with his women. Reṇukā got attracted to him for a second. But, immediately the next moment, she thought about her husband.

In the meantime, Jamadagni got to know everything. The moment Reṇukā reached the aśram, Jamadagni filled with rage called her a Vyābhichāriṇī.³²⁹ He said that while being his wife, she had indulged in unchaste activity. For a person who upholds dharma, like him, it would be inappropriate to have a wife like her. He said that he would not pollute his hand by forcefully hitting an evil woman like her.

Reṇukā tried to pacify him. She pleaded with him. She asked him not to have any doubt about her vows to her husband (about her being a Pativrātā) She said that she was without any stain. But, to appease his anger, she asked him to take any action he felt would be in accordance with dharma. Jamadagni replied that she was his wife according to dharma, but because of her indiscretion, her death was appropriate.

Jamadagni called his first son, Vasu, and ordered him to kill his mother. On his refusal to perform the act, Jamadagni cursed him, and brought him to the ground. Then, Jamadagni ordered Viśvāvasu to kill his mother. He said that his mother was his sreshtha (first/superior) Guru, she was more sreshtha than his father, because his father had himself taken birth from her womb. Therefore, he would not kill her. He, too, was cursed and brought down, like his elder brother. Jamadagni, then, asked his third son, Brihatkaṇva, to kill his mother. Brihatkaṇva, said that she whose feet are like lotus, great mother that she is, Brihatkaṇva could not kill her. So, he too followed the fate of his elder brothers. Thereafter, he asked his fourth son, Brihadabhān to do the same. He told his father that his words were said in anger, and asked him not to speak that way. She was the mother of the entire world, how could he kill her. He too followed his brothers.³³⁰

Then, Jamadagni, called Paraśurāma. Very affectionately, with folded arms, he requested his father to give order, which he promised to fulfill immediately. Such behavior delighted Jamadagni. He told Paraśurāma his mother's act and ordered him to kill her. So, Paraśurāma immediately killed his mother.

³²⁸ It is noteworthy that the author makes Reṇukā's *deviance* happen on the day of her menstruation, which is considered to be polluting days for women.

³²⁹ William Monier, *Sanskrit English Dictionary*

This term means going astray, deviating, unchaste (wife), faithless towards, transgressing.

³³⁰ It is noteworthy that neither the Mahābhārata and the Purāṇas, nor the *Śrī Paraśurāma Charitāmṛta* give a detailed version of the elder sons' denial to kill their mother, and establish her superiority over their father.

Jamadagni became very happy, and asked Paraśurāma to seek any boon from him. Paraśurāma asked for the revival of his mother and brothers. He, also, requested his father to make sure that his mother forgets how she was murdered, so that he can get rid of the sin of matricide. Jamadagni did so.

After all the events, Jamadagni regretted the course of events. He realized that any action done with anger is bound to be wrong. Therefore, he gave up anger.³³¹

It is noteworthy that the author does not stop at simply telling us the story of Reṇukā's *deviance*, but continues, to justify her *deviance*. He states that through her *līlā*, Reṇukā is able to free sinners from sin. She also freed her husband of his anger. In order to make her husband get rid of his anger completely, Reṇukā made the abovementioned events occur. In this way, Lajjā Gaurī- Reṇukā sent a message to humankind.³³² Further, he portrays Reṇukā as the quintessential Lajjā, that is, one who is full of shame and modesty. He points out that Reṇukā understands the importance of Lajjā. Therefore, she has divine powers, courage, beauty, tejas, and self-control. The lust she felt on seeing the man was an obstacle to Lajjā. So, the consequence of shameless sinful act was realized by her. She accepted her husband's death punishment without resistance, but only from the son, who too had the tejas. It is from this that she obtains the form of Lajjā Gaurī. Reṇukā is Lajjā Gaurī. Her greatness lies in setting an example for male-female interaction.³³³ Thus, like the Śrī Paraśurāma Charitāmṛta, this account too points towards the male author's anxiety regarding Reṇukā's *deviance* in particular and women's *deviance* in general.

Reṇukā is last seen in the Reṇukā Mahātmaya as attempting to save her husband's life from Sahasrārjuna. When she fails to do so, she follows him on his funeral pyre. This incident introduces Dattātreya, who is an important local deity, and gets associated with Reṇukā through her mythology. The following is the account from the Reṇukā Mahātmaya.

³³¹ Bhopī, *Śrī Reṇukā Mahātmaya*, pp. 18-19

³³² *Ibid.*, p. 18

³³³ *Ibid.*, p. 18

When Jamadagni and Reṇukā refused to give Kāmadhenū to Sahasrārjuna, Sahasrārjuna attacked Jamadagni. On seeing her husband being attacked, Reṇukā was filled with wrath. She laid down on him, in order to save him. But, Sahasrārjuna also attacked Reṇukā twenty-one times, and then killed Jamadagni. Reṇukā called out for Paraśurāma. When Paraśurāma saw his dead father, he was filled with grief. He decided to kill Sahasrārjuna, and free the earth from the kshtriyas twenty-one times.³³⁴

Reṇukā asked her son to take his father's body and her to a place where they would hear the voice of a Satī. There, he would also meet guru Dattātreyā. It was on that spot that Paraśurāma should perform the last rites of his parents. Paraśurāma went to various tīrthas, mountains, rivers, forests, and finally reached Amalkī Village, which is known as Mātāpūr, or Māhūr today, near the Sahayādri Mountains. In this village, he heard the voice of a Satī. Reṇukā told Paraśurāma to perform the last rites of his father there.

Then, with Dattātreyā's permission, he used his divine arrow to bring all tīrthas at that one place. The parents were made to take a bath in the tīrthas. After this, Dattātreyā lit Kravyāda named agnī, in which Jamadagni was cremated, and Reṇukā entered the same fire with her husband. With the touch of Satī, that place became sacred, and came to be known as Mūladarī.³³⁵

Last, unlike the Śrī Paraśurāma Charitāmṛta, the divinity of Reṇukā is in-built in the narrative of the Reṇukā Mahātmaya. It is also noteworthy that the narrative highlights Reṇukā as the ultimate Mother Goddess, for she is Aditi. The text describes Viṣṇu as taking avatārs by being born from her womb only.³³⁶ The text also gives an example where a king named Triśankū performed the Putreṣṭhī yagya, for a son, in Māhur, and with Reṇukā's blessings, he got a son.³³⁷ The other chap books from Māhūr, however, see her as the ultimate Godhead (Goddesshead), higher than Brahma and Viṣṇu, who manifests herself in many forms, similar to the one ascribed in the Śrī Paraśurāma Charitāmṛta. The functions attributed to her in these events are not only of cosmic dimensions of creation, preservation, destruction, but also include saving her devotees from all sorts of troubles, and blessing them with good thinking power, prosperity, and

³³⁴ Ibid., p. 24

³³⁵ Ibid., pp. 25-26

³³⁶ Ibid., pp. 13-14

³³⁷ Ibid., p. 28

happiness. Eventually with her blessings, one can also achieve the final emancipation, salvation.

Thus, the Reṇukā Mahātmaya portrays Reṇukā as the Goddess, the ultimate Śakti. It, also, sees her as the pativrata, the great Satī, and the mother of Paraśurāma, the avatār of Viśṇu. In comparison to the Śrī Paraśurāma Charitāmṛta, the Reṇukā Mahātmaya focuses more on Reṇukā's divinity and her becoming a Satī. Again, this is reflected in the Śakti Pītha structure, the importance of Reṇukā's temple in it, her iconography in her temple, rituals and festivals. These aspects are discussed below. The Reṇukā Śakti Pītha is one of the four Śakti Pītha of Maharashtra.

The hill on which the entire Śakti Pītha is situated includes not only the Reṇukā temple and places related to her, but is also dotted with temples of other equally significant deities. The two other popular temples are of Anāsuya and Dattātreya. Other temples include those of Jamadagni (known as Jamadagni Kuṇḍa), Gaṇeśa Temple, and temples of various local gods and goddesses. But, it is the Reṇukā temple, which is most significant and popular of all. Reṇukā as the ultimate Śakti is the focal of Māhūr.

The **Reṇukā temple** was constructed during the reign of Raja Ram Chandra Yadav of Devagiri, in his thirteenth year. In the door towards the north of the temple, there is an inscription dated 1624 (according to the ruler's calendar as 1546). It has also been referred on the periphery of the temple that it was made by a devotee named Govind. On the basis of this evidence and comparison between the stone material and style of the interior of the temple with the temples of the surrounding areas, the temple has been dated to the Yadav Era. Also, an inscription in the Mahadev temple at Unkeshwar, in Kinwat district, thirty-four kilometers from Māhūr, states that Raja Ram Chandra Yadav of Devagiri initiated the construction of the Reṇukā Devī temple at Māhūr. After the Yadav Era, Māhūr went under the Nizam. Then, it went under the King of

Gond tribals of Chandrapore. Since then, the number of tribal devotees of Māhūr has increased. The Gond kings of Chandrapore twice conquered the Reṇukā Devī temple preventing it from falling into the hands of Muslims, and since then it has remained in the custody of the Gonds.³³⁸

The Reṇukā temple is part of a big temple complex. The center and focus of the complex is the Reṇukā temple. There are sub-shrines of Jamadagni in the form of a Śiva liṅga, and Tulja Devī. Idols of various local goddesses have been put around the temple complex. The Paraśurāma temple, within the complex, is small and situated down hill on the temple complex. Unlike the Paraśurāma temple of the Reṇukā Tīrtha, this is not the focus of the complex.

The other significant part of the Śakti Pītha based on Reṇukā is the **Mātrikunda**. This is a big lake. It is considered to be the place, where Jamadagni was cremated and Reṇukā became a Satī. Devotees come here to take a bath after performing the piṇḍadāna. The water of the Mātrikunda is considered to purify people from all their sins.

The **iconography** of Reṇukā in her temple is unusual. It consists of a big face, with the body represented through a saree. She is shown seated on a lion, which is her vāhana. It seems that a large stone was painted orange, and facial features were marked on it to give it the look of a face. Since there was no place for the body, the saree was used to give the appearance of a figure, which was then made to sit on her vāhana.

It is noteworthy that similar to Reṇukā's iconography in Reṇukā Tīrtha, this figure too does not have any attributes of a Goddess such as sword, mace, bows and arrows, discus and so on. The only feature that gives her the appearance of a Goddess is her vāhana, which is also the vehicle of Durgā.

³³⁸ ASI Document taken from the site museum in Mahur.

This unusual iconography of the Goddess is explained in the popular texts in the following manner. It is believed that after cremating his mother, Paraśurāma was once sitting next to the Mātrīr̥tha and remembering his mother with a heavy heart. So, Reṇukā emerged from the earth. Since, she had not emerged fully; she told her son that in a month, she would emerge fully. So, in the meantime, he should not remember her. But, Paraśurāma in his grief, remembered his mother on the thirteenth day. Till then, Reṇukā's body had emerged only till her neck. Therefore, her idol in the temple is only till her neck.³³⁹

It is noteworthy that her maternal character is used to explain her unusual iconography.

The **everyday ritual** of the Reṇukā Temple consists of changing the attire and ornaments of Reṇukā, performing the ārti and offering the bhoga to her.³⁴⁰ The rituals, unlike the Paraśurāma temple of Reṇukā Tīrtha, are centered on the Goddess. They are performed both in the morning and evening first before the Goddess. Then, a small prayer and bhoga is offered to Paraśurāma in his temple followed by other deities in the temple complex.

Various festivals are celebrated in the Reṇukā Temple, and are centered on the Goddess, but the **main festival** of the Goddess is Navarātra. The Navarātra is symbolic of the Goddess' and her nine forms' valor and victory against the demons. The nine day festival begins on the Aśvin Śudhda with the installation of the pot.³⁴¹ A jyota is lit, which burns continuously for all nine days. For the first four days, all the rites and rituals take place according to the prescribed ways. The Goddess is offered Pūranapolī and Dahībhāt for the next four days.

³³⁹ Jahagirdara, *Māhūragada Darāśana*, pp. 6-7

³⁴⁰ The bhoga consists of offering her purana polī and betel nut.

³⁴¹ The installation of the pot takes place in the following way. A pond, which has a stone lining, is filled with mātrika. Then, five kinds of grains are put in it. It is covered with a pot, which is further covered with a coconut. The entire thing is decorated with five sugarcanes, which are put around it.

On the fifth day, known as Lalita Panchamī, Reṇukā is made to wear all her ornaments, all of which are worshipped. At the end of the day, all her ornaments are removed and a Mahārti and Mahābhoga follow. On the seventh day, the Goddess is made to wear the Mahāvastra (Grand Attire).

On the eighth day, the Goddess' worship includes the performance of a yagya, and reading of the Saptaśatī.³⁴² After the worship, a goat is sacrificed secretly. The ninth day celebration is similar to the one on the eighth day.

On the tenth day, the Goddess' sign is taken off from the pole. Then, the worship of the pole with Panchāmrita, Sindūr, and other things takes place. Thereafter, the sign is covered with fifty-one meters of cloth, and is put it back on the pole, the Mahāprasāda and Mahārti follows.

After this, Paraśurāma is worshipped. He is made to sit in a palanquin, and taken to the Varadāyī Mountains. After performing the worship in the mountains, the palanquin is brought back to Māhūr. A goat is again sacrificed in front of the Reṇukā Temple. The leaves from the Āptā tree are taken off. They are considered to symbol of gold, and are put on the Goddess. This brings an end to the festival.³⁴³

The head **priest** named Rājakumāra Ambādāsa Bhopī belongs to the Maratha caste. He deliberates on all the prayers and festivals. I was told that only the Gosāsivs or the Mahāpuruṣa could perform the Goddess' puḷā. The priest who performs the sacrifice during the navarātra festival, also, belongs to the Maratha caste. The temple is, however, kept close during the sacrifice, and the Goddess

³⁴² The worship takes place in the following manner.

First, a Navagraha pūḷā takes place. Then in the Homakuṇḍa, five types of grains, wood from five trees, curd-rice, and ghī are added. Thereafter, the sixty-four Yoginīs are worshipped, followed by the Mātrikās, the guardians, and all the gods and goddesses. After this, a Yagya starts, which goes on for four-five hours. During the eighth chapter of the Saptaśatī, the Yagya is stopped; Reṇukā is worshipped, is made to wear new clothes, and offered Pūranapolī. A Mahārti follows, after which the Yagya is resumed. With the end of the reading of the Saptaśatī, the Yagya is stopped.

³⁴³ Bhopī, *Śrī Reṇukā Mahātmya*, pp. 36-39

REṆUKĀ OF THE REṆUKĀ TĪRTHA



RENUKĀ OF THE RENUKĀ ŚAKTI PĪṬHA



can see the sacrifice only through a window. But, the head of the sacrificed animal is offered to the Goddess, and the body is distributed amongst the performers and others in the temple.³⁴⁴ The bards or the people who sing and perform at the temple belonged to the Gondhalīs caste. The devotees, I was informed, came from all castes. Those who would regularly visit the temple were those whose kuladevī was Reṇukā. Also, a large number of tribals especially from the nearby areas would regularly visit the temple. Further, I was informed that the devotees consisted more of women, since the godhead was a Goddess, the adīśakti. Men would generally worship Dattātreya.

A comparison between the literary sources and the other aspects discussed above show that the former portrays all aspects of Reṇukā's characteristics given in her mythology- her *deviance*, which is justified, her being a pativrata, and the Satī, her maternal character, with her divinity as the running thread across the narrative. The Śakti Pīṭha, as the name suggests, highlights her divine status, she is the Mother of the Universe. The perception of her as the pativrata of Jamadagni, his Satī, mother of Paraśurāma, the avatār of Viṣṇu here seems to add to her divine status.

To conclude, a comparison between the literary sources of the two pilgrimage centers shows that both narratives describe all aspects of Reṇukā mythology and characteristics, though with varying emphasis. Also, what is common to them is their discomfort and anxiety regarding Reṇukā's *deviance*. Perhaps, it would have been difficult for the author and the people to accept a goddess, who is *deviant*. Therefore, they leave no effort to either justify or cover up the *deviance* and concentrate on presenting her within the Brahmanical paradigm of an ideal woman, the pativrata and a mother, statuses which in themselves are considered to be divine. Second, this anxiety is not just limited to Reṇukā's *deviance*, but there seems to be an anxiety about women's sexuality at large, for

³⁴⁴ In personal communication with the head priest, I was told he did not eat non-veg, or the sacrificed animal of the navarātra. However, the other priests of his family ate both.

the authors sermon on how the pativratā dharma is the primary dharma for women, and how women need to follow the pativratā dharma that Reṇukā's has set before them as an example. Further, the fact that these texts are easily available, at a very nominal price, are easy to read, and are meant for daily recitation suggests that these texts were perhaps, also, aiming to set gender norms, where the Goddess in her 'non-deviant' was to serve as a model. Moreover, the fact that the other aspects of the pilgrimage centers, too, tend to portray Reṇukā as a pativrata, a satī, and a mother, apart from showing her deified status, reinforces the above argument.

III

This section looks at Reṇukā's association with the local goddesses. It is divided into two sub-sections. The first sub-section looks at the references in the Purāṇas. The second one looks the process of association with local goddesses from South India through the District Gazetteers.

A

The process of associating local goddesses with Reṇukā began with the Purāṇas. Local goddesses from two late Purāṇas, namely the Skanda Purāṇa and Garuda Purāṇa, are perhaps named after Reṇukā. The reference from Skanda Purāṇa is as follows.

"King Toṇdamān saw goddess Reṇukā who was stationed in the form of an anthill. She is the bestower of desired things on favorite devotees. She stayed in a divine garden always accompanied by her attendants. She is adored by even by Devas. Toṇdamān bowed to her and then went to the west."³⁴⁵

"Again King Toṇdamān went to the forest of Devī and got down from his horse. He worshipped Reṇukā on the ninth day in the bright half of the month of Caitra. He worshipped offered ghee and best cooked rice along with many condiments and articles for seasoning food. Sacrificial offerings of animals were also made to the accompaniment of incense and lights. A hundred pots

³⁴⁵ *Skanda Purāṇ*, II.i.9.59-62, p. 54

of liquor flavored with jasmine and saffron were also offered. The Goddess who was worshipped thus became pleased and granted boons to the king.”³⁴⁶

The goddess in the above reference was a local goddess can be seen from the fact that she was worshipped in the form of an anthill and not a permanent idol; her place of worship was a garden/forest and not a permanent structure like a temple; she was worshipped with apart from other things mentioned, with animals and pots of liquor, a form of worship that is generally not seen with Brahmanical goddess. While it is difficult to associate the Goddess Reṇukā mentioned in this reference to the one being discussed in this chapter, but it is possible that this local goddess worshipped in the form of an anthill was given the name and identity of Reṇukā.

The extant Garuda Purāṇa probably compiled between second half of the ninth century and eleventh century CE³⁴⁷ mentions a Goddess Reṇukā. The reference occurs in a chapter glorifying the worship of Viṣṇu, as against other gods both Brahmanical and local. The reference is as follows.

Lord Kṛṣṇa said, “Those who do not worship the idol of Viṣṇu but worship the idols of inferior gods or goddesses- Reṇukā, etc, of the form of Daityas, purposeless is their worship of Viṣṇu as well as of the manes. This is true, very true, I say. If all what I have said is proved to be false and untrue, then the lord of serpents sting me mortally.”³⁴⁸

“The younger one (younger wife) encourages the soul (her husband) to indulge in activities for the fulfillment of worldly desires. She disregards the sanctity of the Brāhmaṇas, of lord Viṣṇu, and his narratives, of sacrifices, cows, the holy fig tree, of bath and purity. She misdirects to worship their stupid husbands and goddess Reṇukā and waive lights to Māyādevī.”³⁴⁹

“O my Lord, do not propitiate any god or goddess except lord Viṣṇu. Let not that (deceitful) Reṇukā attend on you. If lord Hari, of unmanifest form is unable to protect you who else can do the same. If you propitiate her who is deceitful and an a-vedic deity, always inimical to you

³⁴⁶ Ibid., II.i.9.87-89, p. 56

³⁴⁷ Hazra R.C., *Studies in the Purāṇic Records on Hindu Rites and Customs*, p. 144

³⁴⁸ *Garuda Purāṇa*, III.28.64-65, pp. 1117-1118

³⁴⁹ Ibid., III.28.87, p. 1120

(though outwardly pleasing), you will by that very act contract diseases such as leprosy, fistula, etc, and you will go to hell. This, your bad wife, will not help you at all. Hence, O lord, do not follow upon bad advice of that wretched lady.”³⁵⁰

Like the above example, it is difficult to associate the Goddess Reṇukā of this evidence to the Reṇukā discussed in this chapter. The fact that the above goddess was local deity can be seen from the fact that amongst the various gods and goddesses described in this chapter and compared to Viṣṇu, many are local gods and goddesses. Also, like other local deities mentioned in this chapter, this goddess too has been considered inferior and condemned. The Board of Scholars translating this text mentions in the footnote, that the Goddess Reṇukā of this text is a goddess of low status, and cannot be identified with Jamadagni or Paraśurāma. However, they do not give a reason for their argument. Thus, it is possible that a local goddess was given the name of Reṇukā for the mythology does not know any other figure named Reṇukā.

Thus, in both the examples it is possible that the local goddesses were given the name of Reṇukā. Otherwise, however, they continued to maintain their identity in terms of their iconography, place of worship, method of worship and their devotees’ social identity. This indicates a process of negotiation rather than simply assimilation of a local goddess by a Brahmanical goddess.

B

The process of associating Reṇukā with various local goddesses continued in later traditions, and occurred to a large extent in South India. The District Gazetteers give evidence of various local goddesses such as Māriammā, Kolāhalammā, Ellammā, Yellammā and Mātaṅgī being associated with Reṇukā. The associations with the local goddesses are described below.

³⁵⁰ Ibid., III.28.107-108, p. 1122

The Goddess **Yellammā** of the Yellammā temple on the Yellammā hill in Belgaum, Karnataka, is identified with Reṇukā. This temple is held in great veneration throughout Bombay and Karnataka. Though locally known to be about 2000 years old, in its present form the temple, appears to have been built within the 17th or 18th century, and its predecessors does not appear to be older than the 13th century.³⁵¹

The legend known in this part of Karnataka is as follows. It, however, does not give an explanation on how or why is Yellammā identified with Reṇukā.

Reṇukā's sudden love for a heavenly minstrel led to her husband ordering their son, Paraśurāma, the execution of his mother. Paraśurāma killed her, and asked for a boon from his father in reward for his obedience to him. He requested his father to restore Reṇukā back to life. After she was restored to life, her husband's curse still smote her with leprosy. So, she devoted herself to two seers. After long devotion to them, she was cured. In honor of her cure, she built this temple on this hill because it was her original abode from which she used to go and bring water from the Malprabha River.³⁵²

Fairs are held, in honor of the goddess, on the full moon of Chaitra or April-May, and on the full moon of Mārgshirsh or November-December. The Chaitra fair is small, but on the Mārgshirsh fair people assemble in large numbers.

Prior to 1885, during the Chaitra or April-May festival, men and women would come stark naked to this temple usually under a vow for children, for cure of skin diseases, or to offer prayers. They would have applied only sandal wood or neem branches. People, who would not go naked before the goddess, would appear before the goddess in a robe or waistcloth after walking several times round the temple clad in neem leaves.³⁵³ Barren women offer lamp stands, silver candles,

³⁵¹ *Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency Volume 21: Belgaum*, p. 612

³⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 613

³⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 613

with golden figures of children to the goddess. They, also, burn camphor on the temple spire, or light a thousand lamps round the temple.³⁵⁴

The priests who officiate at the temple and stay on the hill are the Lingayats of forty families divided into eight divisions.³⁵⁵

The devotees who visit the temple are largely from the vaiśya and śūdra caste. Specifically, they are Nārvekars, officially put under the category of traders. They claim a vaiśya status. Hanbars, Kulmarus, Kunbis, and Lonaris, are officially put under the category of husbandmen. Badgis, Kumbhars, Lohars, Otaris, Patvegars and Uppars are officially put under the category of craftsmen. Parits are officially put under the category of personal servants. They are washer men. Kolis are fishermen. Biadrus or Berads, Gollas or Gopalas, Kaikadis, Korvis, Vadars, are officially put under the category of laborers. Killiketars are officially put under the category of beggars. Bhangis or Halalkhors, Chalvadi, Holiās or Mhars, Mangs or Madigas are officially put under the category of Depressed Classes.³⁵⁶

Second, the Rāmeśvar temple in Chikanayakahalli, Tumkur District, Mysore houses the village goddess known as **Hirimavarda Yellammā**. She is identified with Reṇukā, and so is also known as Reṇukādevī. Her image is a wooden one with a stone head set up in front. To her right is a seated stone figure, about one

³⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 613

³⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 612

³⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 105,107-109, 133, 141-143, 145, 148, 152, 157, 164, 167-168, 172, 177, 185-186, 190, 192-195.

Hanbars are husbandmen and day laborers; Kulmarus were iron workers, but now work as husbandmen and field laborers; Lonaris are salt workers, cement makers, and sellers of charcoal, firewood, and laborers. Yellammā is their household deity. Badgis are carpenters; Kumbhars are potters; Lohars are blacksmiths; Otaris are smelters; Patvegars are makers of silk patas or bands; Uppars are salt makers, stone cutters, and women work in fields. Biadrus or Berads are guardians of public property such as village watchmen, husbandmen, hunters, laborers; Gollas or Gopalas prepare medicines from metals and forest plants, weave mats; Korvis are day laborers, hunters; Vadars are diggers, stone-cutters. Killiketars are cattle keepers and picture showmen. The women of this caste make tattoos. Bhangis or Halalkhors are sweepers or removers of night soil; Chalvadi live by begging; Holiās or Mhars are village servants, watchmen, boundary markers, escorts, removers of dead animals, drummers; Mangs or Madigas are leather workers, shoemakers, musicians, husbandmen and laborers. The Holiās or Mhars and Mangs or Madigas occupy the lowest position amongst the Hindus, and considered to be untouchables.

foot high, of Jamadagni. His right hand is in the abhaya pose, and the left placed on the thigh. The processional image is a wooden figure of Paraśurāma. Outside the temple are two small shrines containing round stones to represent Mātangī and her son Patappa.³⁵⁷

Next, the Mādiga Asadis chief goddess is **Ellammā**. She, too, is identified with Reṇukā. The description of Ellammā is as follows.

Ellammā was the daughter of Gīrīrāja Muni and Jānakīdevī, and wife of Jamadagni. Her son was Paraśurāma. It was believed that she lived in a town, which had three names- Jambupurī, Isampurī, Vijayanagara. It had eighty-seven gates and was fortified by seven walls. She had all kinds of snakes for her dress. Several groves of margosa trees were said to flourish in her vicinity. She was worshipped under many names, and had become Lakśmī, Gaurammā, and Saraswatī in Brahman houses; Akkumari in Vakkaliya houses; Gatabhaghya Lakśmī in Īdigas houses; Ganga Māri in Kuruba houses. She was believed to be the goddess of all, and the cause of the universe.³⁵⁸

Fourth, the legend behind the emergence of the Kolar district, Mysore involves the goddess **Kolāhalammā**, who is again considered to be a form of Reṇukā.

It was believed that a herdsman named Kola discovered a hidden treasure. When the king Uttama Chola heard of it, he asked him to come to Kanchi, the capital of the king. The king was warned about it in a vision by Reṇukā, in the form of Kolāhalammā. The king erected a temple in the honor of Kolāhalammā. He, then, founded the city of Kolāhala, and invested Kola with the government.³⁵⁹

Last, the origin of the Goddess **Mātangī** has been explained with Reṇukā's beheading myth.

The Reṇukā and Jamadagni temple, Suvabeswara, Kurnool District, Andhra Pradesh houses the idols of Jamadagni, Reṇukā and Surabhi. Near it are two more shrines. One houses the Saptamāthas (Seven Mothers). The second shrine

³⁵⁷ *Mysore State Gazetteer: Tumkur District*, p. 574

³⁵⁸ Thurston Edagr, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India, Volume 4*, p. 305

³⁵⁹ Rice, *Mysore: A Gazetteer compiled for the Government Vo2*, p. 106

is a curious one, not bigger than a railway pointman's box, dedicated to Mātaṅgi. In this shrine, are found five idols arranged in the following manner: a three-headed snake; another three-headed snake; female body with palms joined reverentially in the worshipping posture in front with lower half of the body being that of a snake, and with a canopy of snaky hoods above; Mātaṅgi proper a female figure of about 15 inches, made of stone- wearing a garland round the neck, but no upper garment, a short skirt, below which the feet are visible. Her right hand holds a snake headed stick, while the left has an aduka, a kind of sieve. In the end, another similar figure is put, but without the skirt.³⁶⁰

The local version explaining the existence of the temple of Mātaṅgi, and its association with Reṅukā is given below.

One day Reṅukā Devī went, very early in the morning, to the river Gundlacama to bathe, and fetch water for her husband's sacrificial rites. She was accompanied by a female slave of the Mādiga caste. While she was bathing, the great warrior Kartavīrya, happened to fly across the sky, and Reṅūka saw his form reflected in the water. She was pleased with it in her mind. It must be remembered that she never used to take any vessel to fetch water, for her chastity was such that she had the power to roll water into a pot-like shape, as if it were wax, and thus bring it home. On this day, however, she failed to effect this, and returned home empty-handed. Jamadagni through his wisdom sight found out what had happened, and ordered his son Paraśurāma to slay his sinful mother. Paraśurāma went towards the river, and seeing his mother returning, aimed an arrow at her, which severed her head from her body, and also similarly severed, with its unspent force, the head of the attendant, who was coming immediately behind his mother. Paraśurāma returned to his father without even noticing this accident, and his father, pleased with this prompt obedience, offered him any boon. Paraśurāma prayed for the re-animation of his mother. Jamadagni then gave him some holy water out of his vessel, and told him to put together the dismembered parts and sprinkle some water over them. Paraśurāma went in great delight and haste, and as it was still dark, and early in the morning, he wrongly put his mother's head on the attendant's trunk, and sprinkled water on them. Then, seeing another head and body lying close by, he thought that they belonged to the female slave whom he has unwittingly killed, and he put them together, and re-animated them. He was extremely vexed, when he found the mistake he committed. But, as there was no rectifying them without another

³⁶⁰ Thurston Edagr, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India, Volume 4*, p. 300

double murder, he produced the two women before his father, and begged to be forgiven. The sage finally accepted the lady with his consort's head as his wife, and granted to the other, the status of an inferior deity, in response to her prayers, and owing to her having his wife's body. This was the origin of Mātaṅgi.³⁶¹

The priestess of this temple is Māthangī. She is chosen from the Mādiga caste in the following manner. All the Mādiga caste girls of the village between the age eight to ten, who have not attained puberty, are assembled before the shrine. Hymns are chanted amidst the playing of trumpets, drums and other instruments. The girl who becomes possessed, that is, on whom the goddess descends is chosen as Māthangī. She is invested with the insignia of her office, namely a round sieve, a bunch of margosa leaves, a snake-headed bamboo stick, a piece of cotton thread rope with some cowrie strung on it, and a small vessel of kumkuma. A vow of lifelong celibacy is also administered to her.³⁶²

This shrine is venerated by all castes, from the Brahmana downwards. At the time of worship, the Māthangī dances about in wild frenzy. She is given toddy to drink, which she infrequently spits on her devotees including the Brahmanas, who regard this as auspicious and not in the least polluting.³⁶³

The chief goddess of the Mādigas, in the Telgu country, is Mātaṅgi. The stories about her origin are shrouded in various legends. One of them associates her with Reṇukā. According to it, Reṇukā, the wife of Bhṛgu, was beheaded at the order of her husband. Her head fell in a Mādiga house, and it grew into a Mādiga woman, and she later became Mātaṅgi.³⁶⁴

The Mādiga woman, who claims to have been possessed with Mātaṅgi is worshipped not just by the Mādigas, but also by the high caste including the Brahmins. She presides at all the purificatory ceremonies that precede all

³⁶¹ Ibid., pp. 301-303

³⁶² Ibid., pp. 303-304

³⁶³ Ibid., pp. 304-305

³⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 297

ceremonies. Her touch and saliva (when she spits on the people) are believed to purge all uncleanness of body and soul. But, ordinarily, that is beyond these ceremonies, the high caste people scorn to approach her. Also, only few Brahmin families have kept up with the homage to Mātangi.³⁶⁵

To conclude, this section shows how various local goddesses either began to be identified with Reṇukā, or began using her myth to justify their origin. Yellammā the fertility goddess, the goddess who cures skins disease, and a village goddess began to be identified as Reṇukā. However, it is significant that even though Yellammā was identified with Reṇukā, her own identity is not taken over by Reṇukā. She continues to be identified as a Goddess in her own right. Similarly, Ellammā and Kolāhalammā exist as independent Goddesses, with only the name of Reṇukā given to them. Mātangi, on the other hand, uses the myth of Reṇukā to explain her origin, even while maintaining her own self in it. Thus, what one encounters is a process of negotiation rather than assimilation taking place between a Sanskritic figure and local goddesses.

Also, noteworthy is the huge range of caste associations with this one figure, when she gets associated with other local goddesses. As Yellammā, she is worshipped by the vaiśyas and śudras. As Ellammā, she is worshipped across classes. As Kolāhalammā she becomes the principal deity of a king. And as Mātangi, she is worshipped not just by the Mādiga, but also by people from the Brahmin caste.

³⁶⁵ Ibid., pp. 296-297

APPENDIX A

Worship Centres of Goddess Renukā in India

Reṇukā Ksetra in Uttar Pradesh- It is located on the road between Mathura and Agra. Jamadagni's ashram and temple is located on a hillock. The temple has Jamadagni and Reṇukā's idols. Below it a Paraśurāma's temple is located.³⁶⁶

Reṇukā temple in Runkata, Tahsil Kiraoli, Agra, Uttar Pradesh- The Reṇukā temple is situated in a village originally known as 'Rund Kata' or slaughter torso. The legend floated in the region considers this village as the birthplace of Paraśurāma, who at the behest of his father put his mother and brothers to death setting an example of filial obedience.³⁶⁷ The name of the village perhaps is derived from the slaughtered torso of Reṇukā.

Reṇukā temple in Uttarakāśī- There is a Jamadagni and Reṇukā temple in Uttarakāśī. Ten kilometers below it is the Kārtavīrya fort. There is also a Paraśurāma temple nearby, which claims to have has his farasā.

Reṇukā temple in Nasik, Maharashtra- Near the Trayambakeśvara Jyotirlinga, there is a Reṇukā temple. A fair is held here during the navarathras, called the Reṇukā fair.³⁶⁸

Reṇukā temple in Saundanti, Karnataka- The temple of Reṇukā is located on the mountain top. Nearby is the Jamadagnieshvar Śīva temple, and the Paraśurāma temple.³⁶⁹

³⁶⁶ Paramahansa Swami Dayananda Bharti, *Śri Paraśurāma Charitāmṛta*, p. 208

But, according to the author of the text, the actual Reṇukā Kshetra is located in Sirmaur, Himachal Pradesh, where it is known as Reṇukā tīrtha.

³⁶⁷ *Uttar Pradesh District Gazetteer: Agra*, p. 397

³⁶⁸ Paramahansa Swami Dayananda Bharti, *Śri Paraśurāma Charitāmṛta*, p. 211

A similar reference is found in the *Imperial Gazetteer of India, Volume 10*, p. 167. It, also, adds the name of the town, which is referred to as Chāndor Town (Chāndvad).

³⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 211

Reṇukā temple in Chandragutti, Karnataka—The Reṇukā temple at Chandragutti is said to mark the spot where she burnt herself on the funeral pyre of her husband, and became a Satī, after Kartavīrya’s sons had killed Jamadagni,³⁷⁰ Every year, on Chaitra, a Reṇukāmma rathōtsava is held here for eight days.³⁷¹

Reṇukā cave temple in Chandragutti, Karnataka- In a large natural cave is a small liṅga, now covered with a metal face. Below it is a rock shaped like two colossal hips of a woman. They are identified as those of Reṇukā, who is said to have hidden there, when Paraśurāma pursued her. The outer part of the cave serves as a large sukhānsi. There is, also, a navaraṅga that can be dated to the Vijayanagara or Palegar times. In the navaraṅga, a figure called Saraswatī with a severed stone head on each side, a Ganeśa, a Nāga stone, and a liṅga, are kept. There, also, lies a damaged wooden image of Kolhapuradamma. On the pavement are the names and figures of numerous votaries including some children.

Near the temple is a cave shrine which contains has a Mātangi, a ‘sidi’, some ‘Nāga’, Masti’ stones and an image of Paraśurāma.

Animal sacrifice takes place here during the car festival, at the foot of the hill, which has the cave temple.³⁷²

Reṇukāmbal Temple, Padaividu, North Arcot district, Tamil Nadu- This temple contains the figure of Reṇukā, Jamadagni and Paraśurāma in the niches. There are also a few bronze images of Paraśurāma in the temple, which show him holding the bow and arrow. In another niche of the temple, the figure of Reṇukā and Paraśurāma is represented, which depicts Reṇukā putting tilak on the forehead of Paraśurāma. Paraśurāma is seen standing with folded hands with a

³⁷⁰ Rice, *Mysore: A Gazetteer compiled for the Government Vol1*, p. 275

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 275

³⁷² *Annual Report of the Mysore Archaeological Department 1931*, p. 53

bow on his right shoulder. This panel cannot be dated before the fifteenth century.³⁷³

Rām Rāi or Rām Hrid, in Jind District, Haryana- This place is connected with the Paraśurāma legend. It is believed that Paraśurāma killed the kshatriyas here. A Paraśurāma temple marks the place. The idols of Paraśurāma and his parents are found in this temple. After taking a bath in the Sanet Tīrtha, the holy tank, people worship in this temple.³⁷⁴ This is the only place in North India, where all the three figures are worshipped as gods.³⁷⁵ This reference is also found in the Mahābhārata. Near it is another tīrtha called Sannahita in Jinda. In the months of Vaiśākha and Kārttika, pilgrims take a bath here, and perform the worship of Paraśurāma and his parents Jamadagni and Reṇukā.³⁷⁶

Rāmtīrtha, Pṛthūdaka (Pehova) Haryana- It is believed that this is the place where Paraśurāma performed his sacrifice. At this spot, people worship Paraśurāma, and his parents Jamadagni and Reṇukā.³⁷⁷

³⁷³ Choudhary, *Rāma with an Axe*, pp. 213-214

³⁷⁴ Ranga, *Haryana District Gazetteer, Jind District*, p. 37

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 42

³⁷⁶ Choudhary, *Rāma with an Axe*, p. 197

³⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 197

APPENDIX B

Festivals centered on Renukā in Renukā Śakti Pīṭha

Gudhi Pādvā is celebrated on the New Year. On this day, a long bamboo is stuck into the ground. Its top is covered with pot put upside down. It is decorated with a new cloth, mango leaves, sugar garland, and fresh paddy. This is called the gudhi. It is symbolic of all the joyful moments that would come in the New Year.

In the Reṇukā Temple, the gudhi is put at the main entrance. Reṇukā's idol is made to take a bath with Panchāmrita, and then adorned with Mahāvastra (Grand Attire). A special offering called Panara made of Chanādāla, Guda, Neem leaves, Hinga, Onions is offered to the Goddess, apart from Pūranapolī and betel nut. Then, a Mahārti takes place. Once dusk sets in, the pot and the new clothing is taken down. The bamboo is left as it is for the next twelve days.³⁷⁸

Nāgapanchamī is celebrated on the Srāvana Śudha Panchamī. The Goddess is worshipped with all rituals. Then, worship is held at the Nāga Temple, near the Paraśurāma Temple. Nāgadevatās are made with mud. They are bathed with Panchāmrita. Pūranapolī is offered to them. The festival ends with a Mahārti.³⁷⁹

Srāvana Śudha Tryodaśī or the Reṇukā Alankāra Pujā- On this day, Reṇukā is made to take a bath with Panchāmrita. She is worshipped with proper rites and rituals. She is adorned with all her ornaments. Pūranapolī and betel nut are offered to her. The devotees benefit from the Mahāprasāda that takes place. The Saptaśatī is read everyday all throughout this month.³⁸⁰

Polā of Māhūr is well-known. After the proper worship of the Goddess, her living symbol the bull Jākamātī is brought to the sacred temple. Then, the head priest comes with the Goddess' sign, riding on a horse. The bull and the horse go around the town in a procession. They return to Reṇukā's temple and enter the

³⁷⁸ Bhopī, *Śrī Reṇukā Mahātmya*, pp. 33-34

³⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 34

³⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 34

people's hall of the temple. Pūranapolī is presented offered to the Goddess, after which the Ārti takes place. Thereafter, the devotees take the Mahāprasāda.

Kojāgīrī Paurṇimā is celebrated during the Aśvin Śuklapakṣa. The Goddess is worshipped according to all rites and rituals. The congregation sings the prayers of the Goddess all throughout the night. After seeing the full moon, an offering of milk and five eatables is offered to the goddess, after which the Mahārti takes place, and the offering is distributed amongst the devotees.³⁸¹

Dipāvalī- On this day, the entire Reṇukā temple is decorated with lamps. After worshipping Reṇukā, Lakṣmī puṇā takes place in the assembly hall of the temple.³⁸²

Holī- After adorning the Goddess with new clothes, and ornaments, and making the offerings, Holī is played. All the Banjaras from the nearby area come during this festival.

³⁸¹ Ibid., p. 39

³⁸² Ibid., p. 39

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Thus, this work dealt with the *deviant* image of goddesses. In other words, stand alone figures of goddesses, goddesses outside the purview of male dominance, who were also *deviant* in terms of their iconographic representation, as well as in their mythology. Kālī and Mārīammā represented *deviance* within the goddess tradition. They are fierce independent goddesses representing unleashed female power and sexuality with ambivalent functions; they are also, for their multitude devotees, the Mothers. Lajjā Gaurī, too, a stand alone figure represents a *deviant* iconographic representation of a goddess within the goddess tradition. Lajjā Gaurī's posture, for many, denotes unleashed sexuality. However, when understood in terms of her symbology and worshippers' perception, she is the fertility goddess, who blesses her devotees, especially women, with fertility boons. Reṇukā, as a goddess, again is an independent figure, who in the mythology is well known for her *deviance*. She is seen as the *deviant* wife, thereby representative of unleashed sexuality, but for her worshippers, she is not only the sati of Jamadagni, the mother of Paraśurāma, but also their Mother, who blesses them with benevolent blessings. Goddesses associated with Reṇukā, too, are stand alone goddess, *deviant* in various ways, yet seen as Mothers, blessing their devotees. Thus, despite their *deviance* Lajjā Gaurī and Reṇukā, are Mothers for their worshippers, who bless them with fertility boons and benevolent blessings respectively.

These two *deviant* images of goddesses, who emerged at the local level as a goddess, got assimilated in the Brahmanical tradition through the figure of Pārvatī. They are seen as the 'fallen' form of Pārvatī. However, despite being associated with this consort goddess, they maintained their identity, characteristics, functions, iconographic representation, and mythology, thus indicating negotiation, rather than simply assimilation between the traditions. At

the same time, a study of the worship centers and their worshippers show that for their devotees, they are Lajjā Gaurī and Reṇukā, and not Pārvatī.

Specifically, Lajjā Gaurī originated at a local level as an aniconic image. But, with her growing popularity amongst the people, her association with the royal class through patronage to her cult, and her assimilation and negotiation with the Brahmanical tradition, she acquired an anthropomorphic form. However, it is noteworthy, that every region charted its own course of acceptance, development, and distance from her cult. Broadly, while there were some rulers and dynasties that accepted her such as the Ikṣvāku queen and the Chalukyas, though hesitatingly; yet others such as the Vakatakas ignored her. The Brahmanical tradition, too, displayed a mixed reaction. For in places such as Kunidene, Darsi and Uppalapadu in Andhra Pradesh, she is represented as an equal to the male Brahmanical gods, but in others such as the Chalukya Śaiva temples, she is housed in subshrines, and not the main sanctum. Various other traditions, too, accepted her whether it was the tantric tradition, or various other ritualistic traditions in different regions. Thus, there were varying levels of acceptance and distance from Lajjā Gaurī's cult. At the same time, it must be noted, that the interaction of this cult with the royal class and the Brahmanical tradition, was never unidirectional, for there was not just assimilation of the former, by the latter, but interactions and negotiations at various levels.

Reṇukā, a mortal figure, in the Brahmanical-Sanskritic tradition of the Mahābhārata and the Purāṇas, was either the *deviant* wife or the *satī*. A goddess at the local level, she was both the *deviant* wife and the *satī*, apart from being the mother of Paraśurāma. However, each local tradition treated her divinity and her characteristics differently. While the Reṇukā Tīrtha, highlights and glorifies her as a *pativrata* and the mother of Paraśurāma, the Reṇukā Śakti Pītha is centered on the goddess Reṇukā. Her characteristics such as the *pativrata* of Jamadagni, his *Satī*, mother of Paraśurāma, the *avatār* of Viṣṇu only add to her

divine status. But, what is common to both these traditions is their discomfort and anxiety regarding her *deviance*, much like the Brahmanical-Sanskritic tradition. While in the latter, her *deviance* was immediately checked with beheading, in the local traditions, there is an attempt to either justify or cover up the *deviance* and concentrate on presenting her within the Brahmanical paradigm of an ideal woman, the *pativratā* and a mother, statuses which in themselves are considered to be divine. This perhaps has to do with the anxiety about women's sexuality, and the need to control it. In the Reṇukā Śakti Pīṭha, she is also considered to be the form of Pārvatī, though the latter's identity never takes over Reṇukā. Reṇukā is perceived by her devotees as their Reṇukā Mātā. In South India, interestingly, Reṇukā is in turn a figure whose name, identity and mythology are used by various local goddesses. However, despite their association, they too stand as independent cults.

Thus, this work shows how the emergence and development of each cult is distinctive, for each one charts its own path in every region and tradition. They are all placed at different levels on the continuum marked by the Brahmanical and local, and keep moving on that continuum. Their interaction with the Brahmanical tradition is marked not just by assimilation, but rather negotiation with it. In fact, most cults are almost independent of the Brahmanical tradition, and thereby need to be studied in themselves in order to understand and theorize their tradition.

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