
ICONOGRAPHY OF MAHIṢĀSURAMARDINI :A STUDY

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Abstract

Iconography is a medium which tells as the truth of religious dogmas with meaningful existence. On the other way iconography acts as 'vidya' of principles and the significance of contemporary of the people in an apparent from there are many branches of study in which the icon such as the 'asanas', 'mudras', 'bhanigimas', varnas etc-delineate some special features of it . The genre of the term we can see the greek word 'eikon' means a figure representing a deity. With the above meaning this word has a close parallel in indian tems as 'arca', 'bera', 'vigraha' connected with 'tanu or rupa'. This branch can attach itself with the human beliefs,religious and psychological emotion of common life as reflected in indian context .

Keywords:

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1. Introduction

Indian iconography has chiefly been catalogued by historians. It has not been extensively subjected to the analytical scrutiny that is essential to its use as a source of knowledge about our historical past. The present dissertation is therefore a study of the images of Mahiṣāsūramardini's as an index of socio religious change at the micro and macro levels. As per the traditional beliefs there are four goals of life on earth and each human being should aspire to achieve that¹. Everyone should aim for Dharma or righteous living; Artha or wealth acquired through the pursuit of a profession; Kama or human love; and finally Moksha or spiritual salvation. The holistic view is reflected as well as in the artistic production of India. Although a Hindu temple is dedicated to the glory of deity and is aimed at helping the devote towards Moksha, its wall might justifiable context. That we may best understand the many sensuous and apparently secular themes that decorate the walls of Indian temples and sculptural content.

Śakti, the cradle of the phenomenal existence of beings, plays a vital role not only in India but also in the whole world. She is the source of cosmic evolution and the controller of all forces and potentialities of nature. She is the immediate cause of the perceptible world and all the beings are in her domain. As such, to know her in the entirety is to know her reality. To add more, Śaktism is the worship of Śakti or the female principle, the primary factor in the creation, sustenance and dissolution of the universe². The term Śakti represents divinity in general and stands for the energizing power of some divinity in particular. Being feminine in gender she has long been associated with the various male deities as their energy but in Śaktism the energy of each God becomes personified as his consort, and thus, if a god is separated from his consort or Śakti, it is powerless and inert.

2. Research Method

In the general features of the iconography of the goddess, it has been told that many people worship her in various forms. “when she is worshipped as an year old baby, she is known by the name of sandhya, if she is conceived to be two years old she is called sarasvati; if of seven years age sambhami, if of nine years age, Durga or Bala; of ten years of age Gauri, of thirteen, Mahalaksmi; and of sixteen, Lalita. Sometimes she is named in recognition to one or other of her heroic achievements; for instance, she is called Mahisasuramardini in consequence of her having destroyed the demon Mahisasura” Thus, she becomes the beholder of many names after getting a massive success of a particular age or after accomplishment of a particular deed. The goddess in various forums is responsible for slaughtering of many demons who were the cause of the sordidness and steamingness for other Gods. Thus, this heroic deeds help her to differ herself with various attributes, postures and chariots while battling with the ‘asuras’. According to puranic accounts the goddess Mahiṣāsūramardini emerged out of the combined energies of Brahma, Visnu, Siva and other gods for the sake of saving the gods from the wrath of Mahisasura in many critical situations she is described as adi Sakti or para-Sakti, yet she takes various forms. This lead to various iconographical features to this goddess. The first sculpture of *Mahiṣāsūramardini* to be unearthed was from Bhita and it belonged to Gupta period (ASIA 1911-12: 86). The other hands are broken. With the front left hand the goddess holds the right hind leg of the animal and pins down the head of the buffalo with her right leg.³

The *Mahiṣāsūramardini* figures during historical period are depicted variously- ranging from two to thirty- two arms. The two, four and six handed specimens are wide- spread and continue till recent times. Between 11th and 13th centuries most diverse types of *Mahiṣāsūramardini* compositions were carved. One may notice some kind of development in the compositions of early- medieval times, which are featured in terms of different counts of hands, anthropomorphic form to the buffalo demon and addition of the lion as mount of the goddess. In the light of this brief historical account the select goddess of Dulmi would be discussed⁴.

Iconography of Mahisasur mardini as Delineated in various Texts:-

The puranas, Agamas and also the other texts described the iconographic features of the goddess Mahisasurmardini as recorded below with varied references.

Puranas

Only purana can take as lock to the age of ancient times apart from the ‘vedas’ The purana is also a part of Indian literature. That is why in many of the works of the vedic literature, the puranas is even called as the fifth veda. Moreover, the puranas are possessing force of literature, for this reason only there are many stories which grown up with various genres, imaginal, religious stories created different persons of various tastes in a broader sense. It is no less to say that puranas keep pace with the socio-religious beliefs of people- According to very old definition contained in the famous lexicon Amarakasa, a purana is comprised of five characteristics such as sarga (creation), pratisarga (re-creation), vamisa (genealogy), mamvantana (cosmic cycles) and vamisanucari (accounts of royal dynasties). Amongst the five characteristics of puranas, the first three deal with the early religion and mythology and the other two with the traditional history⁵. So while reading the five characteristics of purana or more precisely the study of purana can help as to know the history of the development of rites and customs with a very enriched material along with the in a broader sense and accounts of the royal dynasties during the centuries.

Agni purana

Agni purana described Durga Mahisasurmardini as the name of Candika who has been depicted as bearing twenty arms. The right arms are carried with a heavenly trident, a sword, a spear, a cakra, an arrow, a noose, a club, ayudha, abhaya, damru (drum) and spike and on the main left hand she holds a naga pasa (snake-nose), a khetaka, an axe, a mouse, a bow, a ball, a banner, a gada (mace), a mirror and a mudgara. The Agni purana represent the buffalo with its truncated head and the blood coated ‘asira’ with his bloody eyes is emerging out from this head with wrath and anger, bragging the sword in the air and vomiting blood which dripping down around his breast like gartand. The goddess, with standing position, having been resting her right foot on the lion and left on the shoulder of twisted neck demon whose arm has been pounced upon by her divine lion biting him Candika has been presented with three eyes, fully armed and squeezing the enemy of god. The

process of her worship is a kind of mystic digram .she has been devoted with navapadma i.e. the vimade of nine lotus flowers at the beginning, center, the eastern and other of the same forms of the representation of the goddess, with nine 'talvas' in turn⁶.

The eighteen armed goddess having a trident, cakra, sword, conch, arrow, open, vajra, mace and a dart in her right hand and the left hand is decorated with tarjane -mudra, mirror, bonnet, club, noose, bow, human-head and a shield. The ten armed goddess could be a sword, a trident, a cakra, an arrow and a spear in her right hand and in her left hand a shield, a bow, a snake noose, a good and an axe. This purana also depicts that the goddess, driving her chariot lion, holds the trident grimly into the chest of the buffalo demon.

Bhabisyia purana

We can find eighteen and sixteen armed goddess Mahisasurmardini in Bhavisiya purana. The portrayal of the eighteen armed goddess sixth jullay grown bosom, studded with all ornaments and nourished with blessings. she has a skull, ashield, a bell, tarjani -mudra, a bow, a flag, a damru, a noose, and mirror in her left hand and a sakti, a club, a trident, a vajra, a conch, an ankusa, a cakra, a salaka and a mace in the right hand the victory mongers and the Dager become her devotee. The absence of the salaka and arrow have been found when she is presented with sixteen hands and in this form she looks terrible sometimes appears with a fair and yellow like complexion and often as syama she stands on the buffalo and is furnished with weapons to attack the demon⁷.

Devi Bhagavata purana

In this purana as we see the beautiful appearance of the goddess having eighteen arms and is ornamented with all kind of jewels .she holds different types of weapons and a lion as her chariot. A the appearance of fourteen armed goddess would be decorated with a trident, cakra, conch, arrow, spear, vajra, staff and a patra, axe, bell, pot, bow, rosary and a shield in the left hands.

Kalika purana

Kalika purana describes Mahisasur madini with a head dress of matted hair and a crescent on the top eulogied her decoration. Three beautiful eyes, full moon like face, shining gold complexion make her juvenile appearance well built she is bedecked with all ornaments .she has grown up with perfect womanly features .standing in tribhanga posture the goddess, Mahisasurmardini has ten arms, bearing the sign of lotus stems .A sword, a cakra, sharp arrows, a sakti and a trident were positioned in her right hands and a bell, an ox, a khetkaka, a bow and a noose were in her left hands she was at a time with severed head Mahisasur mardini in a buffalo form Mahisasur or Asura, with a sword in his hand has been discovered himself as a human form from the severed necked buffalo .The trident of the goddess should be stuck on the chest of the Mahisasura who may be bound with naga pasa with blood coating body .The goddess hold the blood soaked Asura with her left hand along with her lion chariot⁸ .The goddess reposed her right foot over the back of the lion while her toe of the left foot passed over Mahisasura upraisingly.

Markandeya purana

The goddess here having eighteen arms with the weapons like mace, gada, arrow, vajra, totus, bow, kundika, danda, sakti, sword, shield, conch, bell, vase or honey, pasa and carra . The totus plays the role of altar on which the goddess seats with smiling face, as Mahalakami the killer of Mahisasura.

Matsya purana

The image of kalyani goddess should be portrayed as having ten arms holding the same weapons as it could be seen in the hemd of Brahma, Visnu and siva .she has been depicted as matted hair on her head and crescent she has three eyes and her face recognizes that of the moon with its radiance like the atasi flower and mesmerizing eyes and a lofty ornamental presence with five teeth and grown up breast ; standing with her body bowed in three dimensions. The goddess's both hands are armed with the same elements as described by the previous puranas and the deadly bloody image of Mahisasura I also akin with the other purana and this particular purana also has the same resemblance of the lion chariot below the goddess's foot .Even the position of the foot and toe of the goddesses on the back of the lion and the other on the body of Mahisasura is very close to other depiction .This feature of the goddess surrounded by other praying ' devas' is welcomed for all kind of depiction of the goddess.

Vamana purana

The interpretation of Devi -Mahatmya of the Markandeya purana is deeply found in vaman purana. This purana describes Mahisasur mardini as kalyani because her creative prowess was held in the kalyani as hram. This goddess is the beholder of eighteen arms and three eyes. Her body has the radiance of thousands of suns. She is armed with the weapons like trident, disc, conch, dart, iron rod, bow, quiver, arrow, thunder-bolt, mace, raurya, water pot, sword, shield, battle-axe and other attributes.

Varaha purana

The trio-force vision of Vishnu, Shiva and Brahma is the source of the production of the goddess as clear in Varaha Purana. Unlike the Purana here the description of the goddess is dark in complexion like blue lotus and has black curly hair. She got a beautiful nose with a party force and a charming face. This kind of bodily decorums where all might with equal proportions in her as the definition of the fusing of fire was giving by Tvasta. Most of all the goddess in her eight hands carries somka, cakra, gada, padma, khadga, ghanta, dhanu and bana.

Visnudharmottara purana

Here in Vishnudharmottara Purana Candika is mentioned as Mahishasuramardini. The appearance of goddess has been painted in a very beautiful way, having gold complexion and a body of verdant youth and charming with fierce too attitude. She has been seated on the back of a lion with twenty hands in each night hands there was the sula, uadga, sankha, cakra, bana, sakti, vajra, abhaya, damru, ankusa, dhanus, and in the left hand we can notice the nagapasa, ketaka, parasu, ankusa, dhamru, ghanta, dhruva, gada, a mirror and a mudgara, in the case of asura, the real Asura is cut from the buffalo headed Asura and the real Asura emerged oil from this decapitated part. At this condition there roared around his hair, brows and he also vomits blood. He was attacked by the lion, the chariot of the goddess and the goddess struck her trisula into his neck. The asura carries as sword and a shield but the goddess bounds down his with the haka pasa.

Agamas

Agamas is the verbal account which is spoken by Lord Shiva and for this reason this account is called the sacred texts. The ten glorious the dignity of Agamastra while Lord Shiva gained the realization of Parvati and a divine support from Vasudeva (Agatain bhavauktrebyah getam cha Girja srutau).

Anisumadbhedagama

The portrayed the goddess Durga in Anisumadhedagama with having four arms, three eyes and dark complexion. She wears pitambara (yellow) suited to her potent features and also adorned with all ornaments and worshipped with a karanda-mukuta. Abhaya Mudra and cakra one the manifestation of her right hands and a conch and kalaka mudra for the left hands.

Purvakaranagama

We find the goddess wearing a karanda -mukuta, having two arms, two eyes and a smiling face is Purvakaranagama. Here the goddess is ornamented with all jewelries and she has two garments to put on with perfectly shaped womanly features in syama complexion. This description of the goddess we can see some differences i.e., the goddess are hold on ankusa and the left hands holding nothing and freely brush aside. Often she holds a lotus flowers with her right hands and the left hands are in the same posture the description don't stop here it goes on to many other descriptions like the goddess used to mark her forehead with tila come her eyes are a rite and many decorating her hair kiritamukta with a help. Shaped moon is worn by the goddess and others wears adorned with jewels. She could have eight four arms having a still a khadga, an arrow, and a cakra and on the other's hands a pasha, a kethaka and a conch. The posture of the left hand of the goddess is raised in varadamudra. The portrait of four armed goddess should must hold a trident sword, slide and a noise. Owing such beautiful appearance she stands over the head of Mahisa.

Sprabhedagama

The sprabhedagama helps the artist to draw a picture of the goddess by giving options of four and eight arms at the artist took four armed to goddess to create his out then artist must put sankha, a cakra, ca dharmels, a khadga, besides a stila and a pasa on the hands of the goddess here we can find black complexion durga with charming face and the lion as her chariot. She seats on it in padmasoma. She has been decorated with all ornaments and also at she rests her feet on the head of Mahisa. Other texts. The Puranas and Agamastras maybe the the eminent texts which bears the

testimony of the iconographic features of the goddess, but the silpas as astra and others literary texts which are referred below are leave imprint for describing the features of the goddess respectively.

Mayadipika

The goddess here represented as katayayani who is adored by three 'deuas' her features as described by the text are of having ten arms, she wears jata mukuta which is the symbol of crescent moon in her head and she has three eyes the representation of the goddess as katayayani should have a beautiful face which remind the full moon with the atasi flowered complexion. She has been portrayed beautifully with peerless beauty and stainless youthful body with shining eye, and bright lips. That is left rumored to increase the charm of the goddess in tribhaniga posture when the demon Mahisasura is being killed by the goddess. But the similarity with other texts can be noticed in the fact of use of hands with weapons. Here also the image shows that the goddess should have a trisula, a khadga, acaurabana and sakti in left hands and in the right hands there should have khatka, full vessel a pasa and an ankush the bell or with variation a parasu and a camara. Mahisa is tied with naga pasha which separated his body with his head and blood is drifting out of his head. The effing of Mahisa should be done like that of his emerging out from the body of buffalo with slide and sword in his hand with an enraged mood. The goddess bores her trident on the body of the asura by holding his hair.

Pratima Vijnana

The ten armed goddess katayayani rules the universe as shows in this account. Both in her right and left arms she carries a sula, a sword, a vajra, a cakra and arrow a bow, a khetana, a pasa, a bell and an ankush. Even both are busy with taking position once or the right on the body of Mahisasura and the other rests over the invisible lota she holds tightly the hair of the severed head Mahisasura and blood streaming out of this decapitated part. Mahisasura is also attached by the lion the chariot of the Goddess.

3. Results and Analysis

We can find the similar iconic features of the goddess Mahisasurmardini as prescribed by puranas and other texts. Only the description of the arms and poses varies differently the most accepted number of her arms is eight and ten. We can also find the goddess with four or six arms even with twelve or more arms. The number of the arms differs unequally. Even the last edited depiction of the goddess is with four arms⁹. This depends verily on the iconography from Mahisasura rather than on the numbers of arms. 1st mode, Mahisasura deals with a hybrid form that is to say half part of his body is human and head represents that of a buffalo 2nd mode Mahisasura emitted himself from a severed head buffalo and 3rd mode the demon with completely animal form or theriomorphic form.

4. Conclusion

The early evidences of Mahiṣāsūramardini offer the divinity with two, four, or six arms exclusively, killing the demon, at some point drawn by its zoomorphic type, ardhaniṣkranta type or complete anthropomorphic type, by thrusting a trident or lance into its body, squeezing its head with and lifting its rear half by getting its tail¹⁰. The development of the iconographic portrayal of Mahiṣāsūramardini in association of Mahisasura and the lion greatly enriched the sculptural tradition of Bengal.

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