

ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF DURGA CULT IN SRI SIVALOGANATHA TEMPLE AT GRAMAM - A STUDY

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Abstract

Bhakti also resulted in greater royal patronage. This patronage took the form of extensive gifts of land and gold to temples. The temples grew in size and so did their management too each generation added to the growth in wealth of the temple which in turn resulted in more business relations with the neighbourhood. The temple administration was too cumbersome for the village. The royal donation included granting of villages or lands for the benefit of the temple or making over to the temple of taxes due to the state, or remitting taxes on the lands gifted away to the temple.

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INTRODUCTION

The origin of the goddess Durga is shrouded in a cloak of mystery even though her various epithets and episodes are alluded to in some of the early Sanskrit literature of our land. The early vedic literature does not carry any reference to Durga. The Rig veda which extolls goddesses like Aditi and Usas does not speak of Durga. It is only the later vedic literature which makes a few references to Durga, but, one finds over whelming array of references in the epic and puranic sources. A study of these literary pieces reveals the clear ascendancy of the Durga cult from the later vedic to the epic and puranic periods.

Later Vedic Literature

The earliest mention of Durga appears in the Taittiriya Aranyaka. In this work, the epithets of Durga such as Katyayani, Kali, Bhadrakali, Varada, Kanyakumari, Sarvavatna and Vedamata are shared also by Ambika, the consort of Rudra¹. The same work also associates her with Agni². In one of the verses, she is described as being the rupa of Agni. She is also called as Vairochani, the destroyer of wild beasts and thieves³. Besides in the Durga Gayatri portion of the Aranyaka, she is called the wife of Katyayana, meditated upon as Kanyakumari and Durga. One again, there is a mention of the epithets of Durga in the Mundakaupanisad. Kali and Karali, the names of the goddess, are mentioned in this work as the two of the seven flames of Agni.

Through such references are found in the Taittiriya Aranyaka and Mundakaupanisad, there is no mention of her attributes or any of her valorous deeds associated with her in the later literary works. Based on the references to the epithets of Durga in the Aranyaka and the

upanisad, an origin earlier to these works, may be supposed for the cult of Durga. The cult seems to have taken some shape in the later vedic period, possibly after her identification with Ambika. There are some scholars who feel that the genesis of the goddess can be found in the vedic pantheon itself. P.K.Sharma is of the opinion that Durga with her various manifestations, developed from Usas who is described in the Rig veda as residing in the hills and also coming from the uplands.⁴

Muir, referring to the verse connecting Durga with Agni in the Taittiriya Aranyaka, says that Durga originated from Nirriti, the goddess of evil. Durga is thus adored as if the worshipper turned to the protection of this deity, who now seems to have become a benevolent deity as she is the protecting fortress (Durga) against 'durga' (difficulty) and 'durita' (troubles).³ Oppert opines that the worship of this deity is wholly the contribution of the non-aryan inhabitants of the land whom he calls Gauda Dravidians and that this worship of mother goddess was always popular in the South. He also believes that the epithets of the Dravidian word 'Amma'.⁵

Pre Vedic

Marshall connects the nude female figurines found in the Indus Valley sites with those found in Baluchistan and West Asia and says that they represent the worship of mother-goddess and that in India, they were worshipped by the pre aryan tribes who really never came into contact with Hinduism. Marshall considers them to be the proto type of Durga. Thus, there is no unanimity among scholars as to the origin of the Durga cult in the pre-vedic, vedic and the later vedic periods. At this juncture, it may be said that though there is no reference to Durga in the Rig veda, she was associated with vedic deities like Rudra and Agni in the later vedic period. Whether she was local tribal deity absorbed into the vedic pantheon and then associated with Rudra and Agni or whether her origin was from the early vedic goddesses themselves, cannot be said with certainty. Thus, her origin is still very obscure though the development of her cult may be traceable more or less clearly.

Epic Literature

The cult of Durga is very prominent in the epic period. She occupies a very exhausted position in the Mahabharata. There are two stories dedicated to this deity in this work which provide ample information about her. One of the stories appears in the Bishmaparva and is addressed by Arjuna to the goddess and the other is addressed by Yudhishthira in the Virataparvan.

Principal Deities

In the Mahabharata the Durga cult undergoes considerable changes. She is now very closely associated with Siva and Krishna. She is called as the sister of Hari, born of Nanda Gopa and Yasoda eldest born in the family of cowherds and kokhamukha. Her association with Siva is seen in her epithets Mahadevi and Skanda-mata (mother of skanda). That she is called as Jatavedasi reveals her connection with Agni who is already known as Jatavedasa in the later vedic texts. Her earlier epithets like Kali, Karali, Kapali are also attributed to her in the epic. Her association with Siva (Rudra) and Agni is a continuation of the trend seen in the later vedic texts. The cult centring around Siva got elaborated in the epic period and thereby Durga is affiliated with him and skanda is conspicuously seen in the Mahabharata. Some of the

attributes such as Sula, Kapal, third eye of Siva are also endowed to Durga. Besides, for the first time she is considered as the sister of Krishna, a new concept in the epic not noticeable in the later vedic texts. Obviously Durga's identification with Ambika and her association with principal deities such as Siva and Vishnu (Krishna) led to the further development in her cult culminating in the puranic period⁶.

We notice in the Mahabharata the attribution of several heuristic exploits to this goddess. She is called the destroyer of Kaithab and as Mahaisasuranasini. That she was the goddess of victory is known by the epithets Jaya and Vijaya and it may be gleaned from the verse addressed by Arjuna who seeks her favour to be victorious in battles. That she was slowly becoming powerful can easily be seen from above description. Her association with the principal deities of that period and the attribution of heroic episodes to her seems to have influenced this transformation.

Some of the verses in the Mahabharata give an idea of the iconographic features of this deity. She is said to have possessed 4 arms and 4 faces. She holds a bow, discus and noose. In another form, she holds a banner of peacock feathers and is armed with spear, sword and shield. She is also described as the goddess of the Vindhya and is said to delight in spirituous liquor, flesh and sacrificial victims. This association of the goddess with the Vindhya is noteworthy because it seems to have been the home of the tribes like the Sabaras and Pulindas and also because this throws some light on the new element of worship introduced in the Mahabharata. Her abode in the hills is further ratified by a reference to her in the hills is further ratified by a reference to her in the Bishmaparva as Mandarvasini. This is further elucidated in the Arya stave of the Harivamsa wherein she is referred to as residing in the mountains, rivers, groves and forests. The goddess is said to be worshipped by the tribes like the Pulindas, Savaras and the Barbaras. She is described as being adorned with peacock feathers (Mayurapicchadhavajini)⁷. Whether these facts point to a tribal origin of this deity before she became a Vedic goddess and later a powerful epic goddess due to her association with Rudra and Agni and still later with Siva and Krishna, cannot be precisely ascertained, but that she was worshipped by the tribes and that the tribal elements could have influenced by the later Vedic deity in the epic period cannot be ruled out. Perhaps there would have been several religious, tribal and Brahmanical, in the final make up and the crystallization of the Durga cult which could have taken place by about the epic period, but this again cannot be definitely proved.

Puranic Literature

In the puranic literature there are various accounts about the origin of Durga. The Chandi part of the Markandeya Purana gives one such version. Accordingly Mahisa, the king of the asuras, at one time terrorized the gods in war. The gods appealed to Brahma who sent them to Vishnu. Vishnu seeing their aggrieved state caused streams of power (glory) to issue from his face, whence came a female figure, Mahamaya. Similar streams of power issued forth from the faces of the assembled gods, which entered into the body of Mahamaya and as a consequence she became very powerful like a mountain and as a consequence she became very powerful like a mountain of fire. All of them gave their weapons to her, who, they slew the demon and redressed the gods.⁸

Agni Purana Bagavatha Purana

In the Devi Mahatmyam portion of the Markandeya purana the exploits of the goddess is dealt with in detail. Her conflicts with Madhu and Kaithabha, Mahisasura, Ganda and Munda, Raktabija and Sumbha and Nisumbha are portrayed very elaborately. The Agni Purana mentions the names of the goddess like Arya, Durga, Ambika, Bhadrakali, etc.⁹

Vamana Purana

The Vamana Purana narrates the story of the origin of Durga with a slight variation from that of the Markandeya Purana. According to the purana when the gods approached Vishnu, he commanded the other gods who emitted flames from their eyes and countenance and as a result, a mountain of effluence was formed and Katyayani with 3 eyes, black hair and 18 arms became manifest. Her weapons were contributed by each of the gods. Thus armed she fought with Mahisa on the vindhya and killed him.¹⁰

Bagavatha Purana

The Bagavatha Purana contains the address of Lord Krishna to Yogamaya. He is said to have told her that people would worship her, recognize her as the controller of men and bestower of boons, build temples for her and call her with appellations like Durga, Maya, Vijaya etc. It also goes on to narrate that, on the day before Krishna's marriage, a great procession of Ambika started in which, the bride went to the temple of goddess Durga and worshipped her. The inhabitants of Dwaraka along with Devaki, Vasudeva, Rukmini worshipped Durga for the safe return of Krishna.¹¹

Mahabagavatha Purana

The Mahabagavatha¹² purana is an interesting upapurana where in Durga is said to have destroyed Daksha's sacrifice. Her various epithets like Sati, Girija, etc... are mentioned. She is also called the Brahman as she controls the world during the Pralaya, Prakriti during creation and as an independent goddess she is Durga and when she kills the demons Munda, Sumbha, Nisumbha etc. she is called Katyayani and Ambika.

Matsya Purana

In the account of Siva's marriage with Parvati in the Matsya Purana,¹³ a distinction is made between Parvati and Durga.

Varaha Purana

The Varaha Purana mentions Durga as a possessor of 8 or 20 arms equipped with various weapons, having a lion as her mount and also having killed the asura Mahisa.¹⁴

Vayau Purana

The Vayau Purana refers to more than fifty names of the goddesses. The most important names of devi mentioned here are Bhadra, Kalaratri, Mahamaya etc. Mention is made of the Nava Durgas also.¹⁵

The Puranas thus, give an exhaustive account of the exploits of the goddess. Her epithets and attributes multiply and she seems to have become a powerful goddess. She is given the status of a powerful and an independent goddess. This is a definite pointer to the fact that the goddess had a well-established following during that period, which had grown from the time of the epic period.¹⁶

Saktam

The word Sakti of the feminine gender in Sanskrit. She is considered as the source of energy.¹⁷ A religious sect worshipping her as the supreme deity is called Saktam.¹⁸ Sakti is worshipped in many forms. They are depicted as Siva in three aspects the calm, the terrible, and the ugly.¹⁹

Kinds of Durga

Durga, a giver of victory, is the independent manifestation of Parvati.²⁰ She is one of the most impressive and formidable goddesses of the Hindu pantheon.²¹ Suprabhedagama mentions her as the clearly loved sister of Visnu.²² In Markandeya purana, it is stated that the goddess killed the buffalo-demon (Mahishasura), the symbol of the lowest human passions by the fierce radiance of Siva, Visnu, and Brahma. All the other gods contributed their powers for this purpose.²³ Her vehicle is the lion. Agama describes Navadurgas. They are Nilakandi, Shemangari, Arasiddhi, Orudirasusadugai, Vanadurgai, Agnidurgai, Suyadurgai, Vindiyavasadurgai and Iribumari Durgai.²⁴

Sangam Age

From the Sangam age, Durga has been a popular deity in Tamilnadu. During the Sangam period, Durga was known by the name Korravai²⁵ the presiding deity of the sandy desert land (palai), one of the five natural regions of ancient Tamilagam.²⁶

She has been mentioned in the Sangam literature. Tholkappiyam the earliest extant Tamil grammar, refers to the sacrifice pulled to Karawal nilai. The Sangam works like Thirumurukarrupadai, Siruppanatrupadai, Nedunalvada, and Kurunthogai give vivid references to the goddess Durga. Silappadikaram²⁷ belonging to the post Sangam age has also portrayed her.

The images of Durga are found in both Siva and Visnu temples. Pallava sculptors engraved Durga in various forms which show the mythology relating to the manifestation of Durga. A number of her forms are seen in the Kailasanatha temple at Kanchipuram. It is artistically presented in the Chola temples also.²⁸

Sivaloganatha Temple Durga

The earliest Durga as Mahisasuramantini (the slayer of the buffalo demon) image is seen in Singavaram cave temple which belongs to Mahendravarman – I. This beautiful Tribhanga Durga laid the foundation for further development in the succeeding images of the late Pallavas and the Cholas of Thanjavur. When compared with the Pallava period, Durga images are four armed in Samabhanga pose. The Chola images have eight arms and in Tribhanga pose.

In the northern devakostha on the northern wall of the ardhamanda in Sri Sivakozhunthu Iswarar temple there found an image of Durga. This image shows certain interesting development. This Durga penal was rare four armed standing pose. Her physiognomy is tall and slender. The lower pair of arms is in abhaya and is touching the thigh. The others hold canch, discuss, sword etc. the right arms from top bottom possess the chakra, the sword and the rest in Varadha are touching the thigh, she wears Karan Damakuda, Makarakundala Channaviram and other usual ornaments. The antariya found over her body is only upto the mid thigh. However, the tassels of the dress are hanging upto the ankles. The carving depicts the event of he suppression of the demon Mahisa by the goddess. Though this a form represents a fierce aspect the Goddess is not devoid of charm and beauty. She is one of the finest extant Chola images of Durga with aesthetic qualities.

CONCLUSION

This temple Durga is rare forms this penal is young virgin with four hands. The Goddess Durga is a destructive aspect of Sakti. It has been under great veneration since the age of 9th century C.E. The worship of Durga in the name of Vishnu Durgai temple of Sri Sivaloganatha temple at Gramam.

End Notes

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