

Women Deities: The Mythological Icons in the Context of Indian Culture and Philosophical Texts

Deepashree Mondal*

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Abstract: *In India, the tradition of Goddess worship is being carried on since the pre-historic period. They are being worshipped since Vedic age to till date in India. Vedas, a large religious text originating in ancient time are not exempted from this tradition. On the other hand, Tantra takes a vital role in Indian Philosophical sphere at present time. Tantra still exists as a living cult. Its vivid world of the creative imagination draws on the fabulous wealth of Hindu myth and legend and weaves the spiritual elements together into a dense tissue of meaningful life. Vedas and Tantra both are contemporary but the Vedic literature is comparatively older. The trails of Tantra can be traced back to the time period that we call the times of R̥g-Veda. A few women deities are being worshipped in the text of Śāktopaniṣads (post-vedic minor Upaniṣads) which are associated with the Saubhāgya-kāṇḍa of Atharva-veda. These Goddesses are being worshipped in Tantra also. As for example, we can focus on Daśamahāvidyā, the ten forms of Goddesses. There are many tantric texts written in which they are being established as the supreme power of the universe. On the other hand, worshiping of Daśamahāvidyā is a popular as well as a living culture and spiritual phenomenon in many places of India till date. The present paper aims to throw a light on the forms of those deities who take vital part in Indian society and religious texts since Vedic age to till date.*

Keywords: Women Deities, 'Daśamahāvidyā', Minor Upaniṣads, 'Śāktopaniṣads', 'Tantra', 'Śākta-cult'.

* Assistant Professor, Dept. of Sanskrit, T. D. B. College, Raniganj.
e-mail: mondaldeepashree86@gmail.com

Introduction:

In India, the tradition of Goddess worship is being carried on since the pre-historic period. They are being worshipped since Vedic age to till date in India. Vedas, a large religious text originating in ancient time are not exempted from this tradition. On the other hand, Tantra takes a vital role in Indian Philosophical sphere at present time. Tantra still exists as a living cult. Its vivid world of the creative imagination draws on the fabulous wealth of Hindu myth and legend and weaves the spiritual elements together into a dense tissue of meaningful life. Vedas and Tantra both are contemporary but the Vedic literature is comparatively older. The trails of Tantra can be traced back to the time period that we call the times of *R̥g-Veda*. *Upaniṣads* are the entity of Indian philosophy and as well as Indian culture. *Upaniṣads* belong to four Vedic texts. Debates have remained from quite ancient times regarding the relationship between *Upaniṣads* or Vedic literature with the Tantra. A few women deities are being worshipped in the text of *Śāktopaniṣads* (post-vedic minor *Upaniṣads*) which are associated with the *Saubhāgya-kāṇḍa* of *Atharva-veda*. These Goddesses are being worshipped in Tantra also. As for example, we can focus on *Daśamahāvidyā*, the ten forms of Goddesses. There are many tantric texts written in which they are being established as the supreme power of the universe. On the other hand, worshiping of *Daśamahāvidyā* is a popular as well as a living culture and spiritual phenomenon in many places of India till date. The present paper aims to throw a light on the forms of those deities who take vital part in Indian society and religious texts since Vedic age to till date.

In tantra, worship of *Devī-śakti* is referred to as a *vidyā*. The *Daśamahāvidyā*, ten forms of Goddess possessing the supreme knowledge of Brahman are considered as Her important manifestations. These major forms of the *Daśamahāvidyā* are described in various tantric texts viz. *Toḍala-tantra*, *Cāmuṇḍā-tantra*¹ etc. The said ten forms are viz., i. Kālī, ii. Tārā, iii. Mahā-Tripurāsundarī (or *Ṣoḍaśī/ Lalitā*), iv. Bhuvaneśvarī, v. Chinnamastā, vi. Bhairavī, vii. Dhūmāvātī, viii. Bagalāmukhī, ix. Mātāṅgī and x. Kamalā. These ten aspects of *Śaktis* are the epitome of the entire creation. The successful *sādhana* of these *vidyās* gives several boons to the practitioner. The worship of these *vidyās* is also prescribed as an astrological remedy for the nine Planets and the *Lagnas*. The forms of *Daśamahāvidyā* have been mentioned in the *Śāktopaniṣads*. These forms are described here briefly.

Forms of *Daśamahāvidyā*:

The aforesaid ten forms of the Goddess are mentioned below respectively:

Kālī:

According to *Śākta* cult, Goddess Kālī is the primeval *mahāvidyā*. She is seated on a corpse, greatly terrifying, laughing loudly, with fearful fangs, four arms holding a cleaver, a skull and

giving *mudrās* bestowing boons and dispelling fear, wearing a garland of skulls, her tongue rolling widely, She is completely naked (*digambarā*), thus one should meditate on the Goddess Kālī, dwelling in the centre of the cremation ground. The *bija-mantra* of the Goddess is *Krīm*. In tantric texts, the various forms of Kālī have been noticed. According to *Toḍala-tantra*,² the eight forms of Kālī are observed, these are viz., i. Dakṣiṇākālīkā, ii. Siddhakālīkā, iii. Guhyakālīkā, iv. Śrīkālīkā, v. Bhadrakālī, vi. Cāmuṇḍākālī, vii. Śmaśānakālīkā and viii. Mahākālī. The *Kālī-mantra* is:

krīm krīm krīm hūm hūm hrīm hrīm dakṣiṇe kālīke krīm krīm krīm hūm hūm hrīm hrīm svāhā//.
The mentioned *mantra* is the best among many *mantras* of Dakṣiṇākālīkā.

Tārā:

The Goddess Kālī and Tārā are identical. It is said in *Śaktisaṅgama-tantra*³ that there is no difference among the Goddess Kālī, Tārā, Tripurasundarī and Chinnamastā. Variant types of meditation on the Goddess are mentioned in various *Tantras*. Goddess Tārā is seated in the *pratyaliḍha-āsana*, on the heart of a corpse, supreme, laughing horribly, holding cleaver, blue lotus, dagger and bowl, uttering the *mantrahūm*, colored blue, Her hair braided with serpents, the Ugratārā. She is bestowing all supernatural powers. She is of medium in size, but possesses a protruding belly. She has three forms viz., a. *Ekajaṭā*, b. *Ugratārā* and c. *Nīlasarasvatī*. The *mantra* of the Goddess is:

om hrīm strīm hūm phaṭ//

If *om* is removed it becomes the *Ekajaṭā-mantra* and if *om* and *phaṭ* both are removed it becomes *Nīlasarasvatī-mantra*.

Mahātripurasundarī (Ṣoḍaśī):

Mahātripurasundarī is also called Ṣoḍaśī. It has been said in *Kubjikā-tantra* that as the Goddess gives Śrī, i.e., wealth so this *vidyā* is called Śrīvidyā. Another name of Ṣoḍaśī or Śrīvidyā is Lalitā. A few *mantras* of Ṣoḍaśī-vidyā are found in which *Pañcadaśākṣarī-mantra* is most popular. This *mantra* is:

*kāma yoniḥ kamalā bajrapāṅirguhā hasā mātariśvābhramindraḥ/
punarguhā sakalā māyayā ca purucyeṣā viśvamātādividyā //*⁴

In *Yoginīhr̥daya-tantra*, the form of the Goddess on which meditation should be done by *sādhaka* has been found. She is red like red lead and China-rose, bright like rising Sun, adorned with crown which is made of precious gems. Her lips are red like coral. She is *kambugrīvā* (i.e., conch-necked) and holding lotus, five arrows and bow in Her hands. She is with four armed and three eyed Goddess. She is adorned with red clothes, holding *Pāśa* and *Aṅkuśa* (i.e., hook) also in Her hands. She is seated on the red lotus. The Goddess is *sarvaśaktimayī* and *maṅgalamayī*.

Bhuvaneśvarī:

The Goddess Bhuvaneśvarī is the queen of the universe. She is bringing up the whole world. She is the form of *māyā*, power of love. She is like the red rays of rising Sun, with the Moon as Her diadem; She is three eyed, with a smiling face, bestowing boons, holding a goad in Her hand, a noose and dispelling fears. On the right side of Bhuvaneśvarī who in the heavens, on earth, and in the under worlds is known as the *Ādyā*, worship *Tryambaka*. The *mantra* by which *sādhaka* should worship to the Goddess is: *aiṃhrīṃśrīṃ*. *Ekākṣara-mantra* of the Goddess is *hrīṃ*. Many other *mantras* are found except these in tantric texts.

Chinnamastā:

There are many tales found about the origin of the Goddess. The Goddess is called *Pracaṇḍacaṇḍikā*. The various forms of the Goddess to meditate on Her are mentioned by various texts. Her left foot forward in battle, She is holding Her head and a knife. She is naked. She drinks voluptuously the stream of blood nectar flowing from Her beheaded body. The jewel on Her forehead is tied with a serpent. She has three eyes. Her breasts are adorned with lotuses. Inclined towards lust, She sits erect above the God of love, who shows signs of lustfulness. She looks like the red china-rose. The *mantra* of the Goddess is: *śrīṃ klīṃ hrīṃ aiṃ vajravairocanīye hrīṃ hrīṃ phaṭ svāhā*. This *mantra* is called *Ṣoḍaśākṣarī-vidyā*. It yields all desired benefits quickly. If *om* adds with this *mantra*, is called *Saptaśaśākṣarī-vidyā*, which is the form of *bhukti-mukti-pradā*.

Bhairavī:

According to *Kubjikā-tantra*, the Goddess has the power to remove all miseries of mankind. As She is the wife of Kālabhairava, so She is called Bhairavī. She has many forms, these are: Tripurabhairavī, Caitanyabhairavī, Bhuvaneśvarī-bhairavī, Sampatpradābhairavī, Ṣaṭkūṭābhairavī, Rudrabhairavī, Annapūrṇābhairavī, etc. These different forms have been described in *tantra Śāstras*.

The Goddess is the form of supreme energy, speech, as *tapas*, as woman warrior. Her head is garlanded with flowers. She is resembling the red rays of thousand rising Sun, smeared with red, holding milk, book, dispelling fears and giving boons with Her four hands; She is three large eyed. She has beautiful face with a slow smile. The Goddess is wearing white gems.

Dhūmāvati:

In *Kubjikā-tantra*, it has been noticed that:

dhūmāvati mahāmāyā dhūmrāsuranisūdanī/ dhūmrarūpā mahādevī caturvargapradāyini//
The *mantra* of the Goddess, mentioned in *Mahārthavana-saṃhitā* is- *dhūṃ dhūṃ dhūmāvati svāhā*. The Goddess is wearing smoky clothes, holding a winnowing basket, dishevelled clothes,

deceitful, always trembling, with slant eyes, inspiring fear. She is terrifying.

Bagalā:

Bagalā is called *Stambhanī* according to *Merutantra*. She is identified with the second night of courage and is the power or *śakti* of cruelty. Bagalāmukhī means 'the crane-headed one'. This bird is thought of as the essence of deceit. She rules magic for the suppression of an enemy's gossip. According to *Toḍalatantra*, Her male consort is Mahārudra. The Goddess is three eyed, with four arms and seated on lotus. She is holding *Mudgara* and *Pāśa* in Her two right hands and the tongue of enemy and *Vajra* in left two. She has heavy breasts. She is golden colored, adorned with golden clothes, golden jewelleryes and garlands. The *mantra* of the Goddess is: *om hlīm bagalāmukhi sarvaduṣṭānām vācam mukham stambhaya jihvām kīlaya kīlaya buddhiṃ nāśaya hlīm om svāhā*. This *mantra* is *ṣaṭtriṃśadaḥṣari-vidyā*.

Mātaṅgī:

The Goddess Mātaṅgī is dusky and beautifully browed. Her three eyes are like lotuses; She is seated on jewelled lion throne, surrounded by Gods and others serving Her, holding in Her four lotus-like hands a noose and a sword, a shield and a goad. The six forms of the Goddess which have been seen in different *Śāstras*, are viz., i. Mātaṅginī, ii. Ucchiṣṭā-mātaṅgī, iii. Rājamātaṅgī, iv. Sumukhī-mātaṅgī, v. Vaśya-mātaṅgī and vi. Karṇa-mātaṅgī. The different *mantras* are found for Her said six forms.

Kamalā:

The Goddess Kamalā is with a smiling face, holding two lotuses in Her beautiful hands like white lily and showing the *mudrās* of giving and dispelling fear. She is bathed in nectar by four white elephants and stood upon a beautiful lotus. In *Svatantra-tantra*, the Goddess Kamalā is called Śrībhuvanā and Mahālakṣmī also. The *Kamalā-mantra*, mentioned in *Śāradātilaka* is: *om aiṃ hrīm śrīm h sauḥ jagat prasūtyai namaḥ*.

Forms of Daśamahāvidyā in the Śāktopaniṣads:

In several *Śāktopaniṣads*,⁵ the forms of *Daśamahāvidyās* are seen as well as tantric Texts. Those *Śāktopaniṣads* in which the different forms of the Goddess have been mentioned, are described below briefly. The forms of Goddess which are found in *Śāktopaniṣads* are given in a chart of the next page:

Sl. No.	<i>Śāktopaniṣads</i>	Forms of the Goddess
1	<i>Tripuropaniṣad, Tripuratāpinyupaniṣad, Devyupaniṣad</i>	Tripurāsundarī, Ṣoḍaśī
2	<i>Bhāvanopaniṣad</i>	Mahātripurasundarī
3	<i>Bahvr̥copaniṣad</i>	Ṣoḍaśī/ Mahātripurasundarī, Bagalā, Mātaṅgī, Bhuvaneśvarī and Dhūmāvati
4	<i>Saubhāgyalakṣmyupaniṣad</i>	Kamalā/ Mahālakṣmī
5	<i>Kālikopaniṣad</i>	Kālī and Her fifteen violent forms ⁶
6	<i>Guhyakālyupaniṣad</i>	Guhyakālī
7	<i>Kālīmedhādīkṣitopaniṣad</i>	Kālī
8	<i>Sumukhyupaniṣad</i>	Sumukhī/ Ṣoḍaśī
9	<i>Śrīvidyātārakopaniṣad</i>	Ṣoḍaśī
10	<i>Śyāmopaniṣad</i>	Dakṣiṇā-kālikā
11	<i>Vanadurgopaniṣad</i>	Mātaṅgī, Kālī, Bagalāmukhī, Annapūrṇeśvarī

From the viewpoint of above discussion, it can be said that there is a core relationship between Śāktopaniṣads and tantric texts in the focus of the ten vital forms of Goddess or *Daśamahāvidyās*. A few Goddesses of several tantras has been worshipped in the *Śāktopaniṣads* which signify the core connection between both. A brief description of those Goddesses, except the forms of *Daśamahāvidyās* is given below.

Kurukullā:

The Goddess Kurukullā is like Vārāhī, a *bali-devatā*, a receiver of offerings. She is one with the fifteen *Nitya* Goddess of the waxing moon. The Goddess Kurukullā has been revealed in Buddhist tantric *śāstras* as a Buddhist Goddess. She is with four arms, red-colored, dressed with red clothes, adorned with red crown, and seated on red lotus. According to Buddhist tantra, she is the Goddess of love and wealth. She resides in the beautiful cave on mountain. A few forms of standing and the form with the garland of human skill of Goddess have been found also. According to some scholar's opinion, Kurukullā is a local Goddess. The Goddess has three *mantras*, one of seven syllables, one of thirteen and one of twenty-five syllables, but Her daily worship should be performed with the *Tārā-mantra*, i.e., *oṃ tāre tuttāre ture svāhā*. Her seven syllabled *mantras* are- *oṃ kurukulle svāhā*; thirteen syllabled *mantras* are- *kurukullayāḥ oṃ kurukulle hrīḥ svāhā*, twenty-five syllabled *mantra* is- *kurukullayāḥ oṃ kurukulle hrīṃ mama*

sarvajanaṃ vaśamānaya hrīṃ svāhā. These three types of *mantras* are called as *Trikhaṇḍa*. In the *Śākta*-tantra, Her different forms have been seen. She is a naked Goddess (*digambarā*), with dishevelled hair, red and full of bliss. Her four hands bear arrow, bow, noose and quiver. Around Her is a multitude of *Śaktis* who look just like Her and have taken their first bath after menstruation, have flowering *yonis* and eyes intoxicated with desire.

Vārāhī:

Vārāhī is worshipped by all the three major schools of Hinduism, Śāktaism, Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism. She is usually worshipped at night, and according to secretive *Vāmamārga* tantric practices. The Buddhist Goddesses Vajravārāhī and Marici are believed to have their origins in the Hindu Goddess Vārāhī. Vārāhī is one of the seven *mātrkāś* in Hindu religion. With the head of a sow, Vārāhī is the *Śakti* of *varāha*, the boar *avatāra* of the God Viṣṇu. Her *mantra* is- *oṃ hrīṃ vārāhī hari oṃ*. Her weapon is trident and sword. She is mounted on buffalo, lion, tiger and horse. Vārāhī is *bali* (i.e., animal sacrifice)- *devatā*, one of the Goddess Lalitā's receivers of offerings. Her four alchemical elements (i.e., *dhātus*) are known as the four fires. The union of Vārāhī and Kurukullā is the complex figure in the centre of *Śrīcakra*. Vārāhī and Kurukullā both are connected with. According to *Tantrarāja-tantra*, Vārāhī is the father form and Kurukullā is the mother form of the God. But Vārāhī has been mentioned as one of the eight mothers (i.e., *aṣṭamātrkāś*) in several tantra *śāstras*.

Bheruṇḍā:

The form of the Goddess Bheruṇḍā has been found in fifteen *Nityā-vidyās*. She is the fourth *nitya*. The form of Her is naked. So, she is called naked moon Goddess. She has three eyes and eight arms; She is colored of molten gold, wearing beautiful ornaments on Her hands, feet, arms and around Her waist. She is with smiling face and holding noose, goad, shield, sword, mace, thunderbolt, bow and arrow on Her eight hands. According to *Tantrarāja-tantra*, Her *mantra* is- *aīṃ hrīṃ śrīṃ īṃ oṃ kroṃ bhroṃ krauṃ jhmrauṃ cchrauṃ jrauṃ svāhā īṃ bheruṇḍā nityā śrī pādukāṃ pūjayāmi tarpayāmi namaḥ||*.

Aṣṭamātrkāś (The eight Holy mothers):

The *aṣṭamātrkāś* are mentioned in the *Śāktopaniṣads* as well as several tantric texts. The eight forms of the mother Goddess are viz., Brāhmī, Nārāyaṇī, Māheśvarī, Cāmuṇḍā, Kaumārī, Aparājītā, Vārāhī, Nārasimhī. These forms have been mentioned in various tantras. The forms of *aṣṭamātrkāś* have been mentioned in *Agnipurāṇa* also.

Subhagā:

The form of Goddess Subhagā has been revealed in a few tantric texts. It has been seen in *Kālikāpurāṇa*, the Goddess Subhagā is the sliding of the Goddess Ugratārā. The offerings to worship Her are viz., strong liquor, sweetmeat, meat, coconut and sugarcane. The sacrifice of human body is one of the oblations of the Goddess.

Now a days the forms of said Goddesses are being worshipped in many places of India. There are many temples of different forms of the Goddess situated in Kasi or Varanasi. At Prayag the junction point of two rivers Ganga-Yamuna which is near to Allahabad, the Goddess Lalitā is being worshipped there. There are many famous temples located in different places of Uttar Pradesh (UP). As for instance, a temple of Śrīvidyā is located at the village Bangarmau under Unnao district of UP where the form of Daśamahāvidyā is worshipped till date. A temple of Mahātripurasundarī is situated in Tirwayar under Farrukhabad district of UP. Another temple is situated at the village Mahishi in Bhagalpur District under the state Bihar, which is known as Ugratārā-sthāna to local people. An ancient *pīṭha-sthāna* of the Goddess is situated at Udaypur in Tripura. The Goddess Tripureśvarī is the main deity here. The temple was built by the king Mahārāja Dharmamāṅkya in 1501. A temple of the Goddess Tripurasundarī is found in the city Ahamedabad in Gujrat, where a community called nagar-brahmin and their relatives take part actively in worshipping the Goddess. The worship of Daśamahāvidyā is seen in a few states, viz. Kashmir, Bihar, Assam, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh (MP), Delhi, West Bengal etc. The Śakti cult takes place in West Bengal immensely. A few places of Bengal viz. Tarapith, Kalighat, Nalahati etc. are being established as the spiritual and holistic zone.

Conclusion:

The Śakti cult has been developed since Vedic period in India. A few Goddesses of several tantras are found in different philosophical texts like *Śāktopaniṣads*. The aim of these various sects of Indian Philosophical texts is to realize the ultimate truth, Brahman. The praying number of Goddesses in the *Śāktopaniṣads* is the indication of the bond with tantric literature. The *Śāktopaniṣads* and tantras both imagine the worship to the variant forms of Goddesses as the way to uplift towards salvation. At the conclusion of this paper, it can be said that not only Indian philosophical literature, Indian society also is influenced by these mythological icons from Vedic era to till date, also a mass people are influenced by the spiritual thought regarding these mythological icons. It is excess to mention that a socio-economic sphere lies down behind the reverence of the mother Goddesses in Indian states. Hence, at the end, it can be said that as the worship of the Goddesses is a well-known custom of Indian Culture and Religion at present time also, thus not only Indian philosophical literature, Indian society also is influenced by these mythological icons from Vedic era to till date.

References:

1. kālītārā mahāvidyā ṣoḍaśī bhuvaneśvarī/ bhairavī chinnamastā ca vidyā dhūmāvati tathā// bagalā siddhavidyā ca mātaṅgī kamalātmikā/ etā daśamahāvidyā siddhavidyā prakīrtitāḥ// (Das, Upendra Kumar, (1391 BS). *Śāstramūlaka Bhāratīya Śaktisādhanā*, RMIC, pp. 459, 529).
2. Das, Upendra Kumar, *Ibid.*, p. 467.
3. Das, Upendra Kumar, *Ibid.*, p. 491.
4. Das, Upendra Kumar, *Ibid.*, p. 495.
5. There are eight texts of Śāktopaniṣads are found, viz. *Tripuropaniṣad*, *Tripuratāpinyupaniṣad*, *Devyupaniṣad*, *Bahvr̥copaniṣad*, *Bhāvanopaniṣad*, *Sarasvatīrahasyopaniṣad*, *Sītupaniṣad*, *Saubhāgyalakṣmyupaniṣad*. (Pansikar, Vasudev Laxman Shastri, (1917), (Ed.) *One hundred and eight Upanishads, with various readings*, Nirnaya Sagara Press. Except these texts of Śāktopaniṣads C. Kunhan Raja has given the texts of the eighteen other Śāktopaniṣads in his *Un-published Upanishads*. - Raja, C. Kunhan, (1933). *Unpublished Upanishad*. The Adyar Library (Theosophical Society).
6. The fifteen violent forms of Goddess Kālī, mentioned in *Kālikopaniṣad*, are viz., Kālī, Kapālīnī, Kullā, Kurukullā, Virodhinī, Vipracittā, Ugrā, Ugraprabhā, Dīptā, Nīlā, Ghanā, Balākā, Mudrā and Amitā.