

## THE ŚAIVITE MOTHER-GODDESS: *Mytho-cultural Paradigms and Cultic Assimilations*

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### Abstract:

Multiple studies on issues related to cultural-complex and mytho-cultural discourses of Mother-goddess in India have been carried out, from Harappan Civilization to Hindu Śākta cults. However, the apparent linkage between the two paradigmatic stages remains a desideratum. Out of all sects in Hinduism, Śaivism offers a complex processual picture of the emergence of its chief deity's prime consort, which reflects itinerant transformations occurring in the socio-cultural milieu, and therefore narrates closely the ritual absorption and cultic assimilation of Mother-goddess figure in principal sectarian traditions. In this paper, an attempt has been made to contextually comprehend the transformation and subsuming of independent Goddess cults into Śaivite more of worship, and structural complications that arose thereby. The paper also focuses on Mother-rights in proto-historic period, highlights mythological roles and functions of Śaivite goddesses, and underlines the genesis of their gendered roles in mainstream Hinduism.

**Keywords:** Mother-goddess, Cultic assimilation, Mother-rights, Structural tensions, Gendered narratives, Śaivite goddesses, Pārvatī.

### I. INTRODUCTION- *Contexts, Processes and Goddesses*

The Śākta sect of Hinduism has been a witness to a varied, contended, and much interpreted discourse (Sircar 1948, 2), with its significance in the Indo-Āryan world of ritual and orthopraxy ranging from liminal to central (Kinsley 1988, 10). It has been the primary contention of many scholars, including Goyal (1984, 1986), Bhattacharya (1975) and Sircar (1974) that the worship and reverence to the Mother Goddess has enjoyed an unbroken, unseconded and continuous evidential existence on the Indian subcontinent, a feature postulated through ring (Yoni?) stones found in Dk-area of Harappā, and archaeological finds of terracotta or backed-mud built rude sculptural depictions of Mother Goddess inside Chalcolithic circular residences at Daimabad (Dhavalikar 2014) and Mitathal (Kumar 2022).

As Elgood (2000,45) precisely avers, the propitiation of a female deity, throughout the echelons of Indian History, can be verily located on a spectrum ranging from socio-ritual supremacy to suppressed patriarchal affixture. While in male-dominated, orthodox ritual-complexes, feminine deities were sidelined (Goyal 1986, 25), or were not given sufficient and integral focality in ritual chants and mythological narrations (Jamison & Brereton 2020, 80). It is further emphasized that the categorical positioning of some female deities, who acquired considerable ritual attention and royal piety in later eras were intricately enmeshed with certain politico-economic processes that emerged substantially only in Early Medieval Period, and thence their relative positional enhancement, spelled in terms of ritual-appeasement and ceremonial focus, appeared cross-wise in alternative sectarian motifs, a phenomenon that still leads to confabulation of views and collision of perspectives (Srinivasan 1997, 98).

In order to comprehend, with coherence and consistency, the internally contradictive and externally contrastive (Thapar 2000 [1984], 67) legendary-complex of a Vedic-Purāṇic deity in a Brāhmaṇical context, as reflected in and gleaned from multiple textual evidences (chiefly Vedic and the Śāstra), P.K. Agrawala (1967,

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42) proposed the *Sum of parts theory*, which specifically highlighted that the characteristics of deities, of which we get scattered glimpses across varying legends and stories, are the consequence of Vedic-cults absorbing innumerable local, regional or even Non-Āryan gods and goddesses, a process ostensibly attested to in annals of the Atharva-veda (Bryant 2002, 158), which caused significant transformations to occur in the nature and personality of the Gods, a process termed by Goyal as *flow of streams* (1984, 20). Thus, it becomes pertinent to inspect the ethnographical and socio-cultural context of ceremonies and rituals to truly comprehend the nature blessings of the Devi on that are infused within a particular sectarian tradition and ritual-cultural order.

## **METHODOLOGY:**

Some processual mechanisms also contributed in the carving out of a distinctive and distinguished ritual niche of the female deity-figure, which expanded the reach and effectivity of the deity's tale across many differing social-groups, and made Śāktism a major and mighty sect in the collectivist pantheon of Brāhmanic worship. As Shin (2010,95) highlights, the *Devī-māhātmyam*, a text astutely dated by Hazra (2025 [1940],108) around 6<sup>th</sup> Century CE, illustrates a bewildering yet benign model to inspect the transformation of local feminine deity-figures into another aspect of the Great Goddess: 1-] by highlighting the commonality of attributes in legends and narratives, 2-] using a male-god to combat, coalesce, woe or worst the deity, though as a part of the meta-narrative only, 3-] obscuring the regional-peculiarity of the transformed deity-figures, and 4-] increasingly assigning more attributes of the orthodox ritual-circle, and cross-fertilizing the traditions of the local Goddess with more cosmopolitan and complex philosophical attributes of mainstream Brāhmanic society. The connections of many regional goddesses with symbolic, theriomorphic and anthropomorphic narrative devices and mythological legends must be analyzed with the aforementioned processes definitely in perspective. In this paper, an attempt shall be made to trace this trajectory involving progression and transformation, the methodological steps for which are the following-

- 1- Firstly, we shall discuss the processual emergence of Mother-goddess and her prime manifestation, to provide a theoretical context to societal and cultural position of divine feminine cults in hoary antiquity.
- 2- Secondly, we will elaborate on the nature and structure of transformation of worship-modes and reverence-mores of Mother-goddess cults, running in parallel with societal patterns and transition of mode of economy to nomadic pastoralism.
- 3- Thirdly, after ascertaining position of Mother-goddess cults in India, we will proceed to highlight it's subsuming into Śaivite worldview. For this, contentions of commonality, which brought the mother-goddess close to Śaivite realm, have been commented upon.
- 4- Fourthly, the assimilation of initially independent Mother-goddess cults into Śaivite pantheon will be underlined through a re-examination of Mythological narratives and functions of Śaivite goddesses in the larger realm of Śiva. Two more Śaivite deities have been put to mytho-sociological examination, in order to glean and comprehend structural tensions that pervaded ritual-cultural milieu of the Śaivite World.

Lastly, to make the analysis full circle, a summative view of chief findings has been provisioned in the Conclusion. In the next section, we will briefly comment upon and examine the socio-historical and cultural trajectory of Mother-goddess in ancient India from an anthropological perspective, elucidate the associated changes that occurred in the nature of mother-rights, and prepare the stage for transformative context that facilitated her appropriation and assimilation in Śaivite worldview.

## II. THE MOTHER OF ALL: Worship & Metamorphosis

Although, no historical evidence, either textual or archaeological, discovered till now can be utilized to make pronouncements in regard to the absolutist ritual-political supremacy of any female deity-figure in any epoch, the differential assignment of attributes to station the stance and strive of the deity at a relatively higher platform of consideration necessarily demands a brief, albeit limited exposition to the formation of the concept of Mahā-Devī, the seeds of conception of which lie in Upaniṣadic period, which saw the gradual but marked absorption of many tribal/native folklore elements in Vedic corpus (Hasnain 2015, 43). Kinsley (1988, 197-198) demarcated two different, but not mutually exclusive processes of action: 1-] by positioning one of the female deity-figure at a level higher in relation to compatriot figures (which generally betrayed sectarian-ideology), and cross-linking their attributes and prowess, or 2-] by creating an Omnipotent and Universal female deity-figure, and contextually assigning her traits of almost all known goddesses. The ultimate product of these two mechanisms can either be a unified, harmonic depiction, or a horrendous and confounded deity-form.

As a distinctive conceptual formulation, the concept of Mother-Goddess finds its genesis in the evolutionarily linear framework of Johann Jakob Bachofen (1973 [1861],48), who emphasized that human society has progressed through four different stages of socio-religious evolution- 1-] Matriarchal (Mother-right predominant, matriarchal, matri-focal and matrilocal society), 2-] Patriarchal (Father-right predominant, patriarchal and patrilocal societal structure), 3-] Hetaerism (Father-right extensive, matriarchal complex assertive occasionally), and 4-] the present, undefined and uncertain stage. He tried to co-relate this with macro-scale societal configurations, by collating the gender-based societal evolutionary pattern generalized for the entire socio-cultural edifice, subsequently proposing many stages of cultural evolution<sup>3</sup>.

Bachofen inspired a long and illustrious academic genealogy, which included in its iteration the masterly works of Morgan (1868, 1871), Rev. E.O. James (1959) and Briffault (1927), the last of whom produced the magnum opus of the concerned inquisitive line, culminating in the publishing of *The Mothers*, which furthered the proposition that a matriarchal cultural sub-stratum still persists in cultural-constructs throughout the world, and best evidenced in agricultural, fertility, maternity, mortality, marriage and menstrual rites (Bhattacharya 1975,88). However, this cultural construction received a major blow from Westermarck (1891; *A History of Human Marriage*), B. Malinowski (1921, 1944: *Argonauts of Western Pacific*), who highlighted the functionality and potential-value of such structural arrangements, for which no definitively un-ambiguous evidence was ever adduced.

It was contended by Gimbutas (1974) that the prehistoric world, before the intrusion of Āryan Communities from the Pontic Steppes north of the Black Sea, was predominantly populated by feminine deities, chiefly the mother-Goddesses of antiquity, who were then supplanted sequentially by the violent introduction of male-dominated orthodox ritual-religious contexts, which suppressed and vanquished a community which was sedentary, peaceful, gender-egalitarian and goddess-worshipping. While the male-bias of nomadic pastoral communities is a known fact, its subvention of an altogether feminine-ritual based social-group is not warranted by archaeological studies (Bryant 2002, 67). Eisler (1987, 72 f.) carried the concept

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<sup>3</sup>**Hetaerism:** a wild nomadic 'tellurian' [=chthonic or earth-centered] phase, characterized as communistic (minimal personal property) and polyamorous (no well-defined dyadic pairings) whose dominant deity was believed to have been an earthy proto-Aphrodite, in whose birth laid the castration of dominant masculine deities (Bhattacharya 1975, 58). **Das Mutterrecht:** a matriarchal 'lunar' phase based on agriculture, characterised by the emergence of chthonic mystery cults and laws. Its dominant deity was an early Demeter, the goddess of grain, goodwill, prosperity and progeny, who enjoined a proximal relation with crops (especially corn), and whose cult-status had a cyclical, occasionally repetitive context to its practice by select social-groups. **The Dionysian:** a transitional phase when earlier traditions were masculinized as patriarchy began to emerge, and formulated numerous attempts, direct or indirect, to subvert, submit, subside, subdue, or circumscribe the ritual-status of matriarchal customs. Its dominant deity was the original Dionysos, the god of frolicity and juvenilia from the East. **The Apollonian:** the patriarchal 'solar' phase, in which all trace of the Matriarchal and Dionysian past was eradicated and modern civilization, with almost procedural and bureaucratic regularization and standardization of sex-selective roles and mores emerged. It was marked by the subservience of feminine deities, glorification of male divinities, and general evidential concern with martial thematics.

further, and tainted the Kurgan Hypothesis with fervent anti-matriarchal colour. However, studies in world history produced a version of history that stood in distinct contrast to that of Gimbutas (1974, 1991) for in absence of men during neighboring raids and in war-bands, village politics and economics chiefly remained under female supervision, which gave them sufficient managerial authority and autonomy (Galinaev 2001). Also, female empowerment in nomadic Mongol territories was both renowned and pronounced (Weatherford 2011, 125 ff.). Scythians, the Indo-European speaking war-bands from Pontic Steppes not infrequently buried their prominent female members in military attire, which succinctly corroborated the words of Herodotus about the existence of Amazonian groups among the barbarian Scythes (West 2002, 440). Rightly thus, it is a theoretical position now firmly disregarded by academia (Allen 2023, 256), which now attempts to locate community-interactions on the basis of a different, and more reasoned template.

Following the pastoral link, Bhattacharya (1974, 22-30) posits a structural framework to explicate the emergence of patriarchy in human cultures, stages thereof, and its dominance over prevalent matriarchal social setup: Initially, the small hunter-forager groups worship Natural forces due to the association of *Generative* (reproduction of new members of species) and *Formative* (rearing, grooming and growing-up the infant to a functional member of 'herd') prowess with the female members. This incipient ideological complex later on evolved into a systemic, structured and symptomatic practice of the semi-cult, evidenced by the finds of Venus figurines in strata related to Upper Paleolithic Period (36 kya-27 kya), especially in sites of Mucchtala Chintamani Gavai (Guntur, Andhra Pradesh), Reningunta (Telangana), Sarai Nagar Rai (Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh), Mirzapur (Uttar Pradesh), Nevasa (Pune, Maharashtra) etc. The shapely formulation of female genitive organs, plumpness of figure and heaviness of buttocks proceeds to somewhat inform us about the child-bearing capacity of female members of the highly mobile social-group (Bhattacharya 1964, 91), though exactitude still remains in absentia in such conjectural speculations (Hasnain 2015: 258).

The chthonic element of such prehistoric communities is attested worldwide by the application of red coloration to sacred objects, ritual potteries, and interestingly to deceased and buried members of the community. Bhattacharya (1974, 26) speculates that it probably signals the return of the son back to Earth, from where everyone has emerged, a belief still common in folklores, and Hasnain (2015, 38), while agreeing with Bhattacharya (1974, 36) in spirit, differs in letter, when he asserts that the possibility of ancestral worship must not be discounted, a position which also considers the presence of flowers atop the buried chamber in Shanider Cave of Western Iraq. However, the continuation of this practice at the non-ceramic, Neolithic level of Mehrgarh (c. 7000-5500 BCE), where red wash was applied even to the figurines colloquially labelled as Mother Goddess somewhat gives more weight to Bhattacharya's speculations.

Again, the earthly power and generative association of the female members was carried forth too in transformation of a Neolithic group into Chalcolithic one, as proved in the later ceramic levels (c. 5500-3500 BCE) of Mehrgarh. This was asserted to comply with the seasonal intensive Productivity required for surplus, or even sufficient yield at the end of agricultural harvest. Practices such as ritual juvenilia, ritual-intercourse, harvest festivals, were connected to link the social world in essence with the para-social world of Nature. However, such a linkage with antiquarian female-oriented rituals was only preserved without the intervention of pastoral stage in the socio-economic evolution of cultures. Where came the intervening pastoral, especially nomadic pastoral practices, there went away the predominance of Mother-right.

While the constitutive conditions of Mother-right are usually accounted by the presence of conditional variables such as geographical clustering, horticulture, capital insufficiency, extensive territorial holdings, etc., its abrupt diminishment in the onslaught of Pastoralism is heralded chiefly due to counteracting variables like high mobility, indirect reliance on hunting-supply, territorial conflicts, geo-political demarcation, expansion of cultivable fields, physical power-based dispute resolution, resource-acquisition, kinship boundaries, and exponential expansion of household services with the socio-economic progression of the entire community (Bhattacharya 1975, 20), which elevated the relative mythological position of divinities related to war, courage, hunt, virility etc., and relegated divinities related to fertility, fecundity, to the foreground of ritual-focus (Rosati 2017, 26). In terms of the binary socio-structural categories purported by Eisler (1987, 92), it can be averred that pastoralism gives existential fuel to *domination-model*, which, in place of hierarchies of *actualization*, produces hierarchies of *severance* and absence of resources, with allocation and distribution of opportunities, movement and resources, leading to genesis of incipient *Gendered-roles*.

Here, by gender-based roles, we refer not to situational roles in a community, but to those assigned through structural agency in a society, without volition or consent of those affected (Martin 2009, 44).

To serve as illustrative examples, Bhattacharya (1974, 25) highlights the contrastive cases of Harappan and Vedic Civilization. The prominent position of Mother Goddess at Harappan sites (with some controversy) is proved by the numerous terracotta votive figures of females carrying a (suckling) child in arms, with inflated artistic renditions of breasts and hips, with highly ornamented head-dress, or with subservient male accomplices (Possehl 2010). It is generally believed that the Neolithic socio-cultural Chalcolithic assemblage at Harappā and other IVC sites were successors to the preceding Neolithic phase, and were formed by the expansion of agricultural enterprise and technology, seen at sites like Kot-Diji, Amri-Nal and Sothi-Siswal. The archaeological evidence of an intervening pastoral stage lacks astute confirmation, partly due to the inherent nature of the socio-economic stage (high mobility, limited duration of stay, repetitive resource exploitation, minimal material assemblage), and also due to supplanting of agricultural edifice over possible remnants (Possehl 2010,56). On the contrary, the pastoral nature of Vedic Civilization is strongly proved by the voluminous and copious literary tradition. Bhattacharya (1974,38-65) emphasizes upon a range of glaring events, such as rape of Uṣas by Indra, breaking of Aditi's womb, and characteristic delegation of female deities to minimal reiteration in poetical invocations (Jamison2014,108). Amongst this divine group, the literal Earth Goddess, Pṛthvī emerges as an important deity, worshipped by Āryan nomads and priests, reaching the zenith of mythological significance in the eponymous hymn of Atharva-veda, in a period which saw the gradually increased adsorption, amalgamation and interaction of Āryan and non-Āryan social-groups (Chaudhary 1964, 40).

In archaeological evidence gathered over a century, the special ritual association of the Mother Goddess has been iterated with some objects of significance, ranging from Ring-stones, stone discs, ritual tanks, and most importantly, trees (Gupta 2002, 25). While their fertility function and support to life has been noted well enough in annals of Indian Art (Agarwala 1965, 35), their association with divinities remains of unsure antiquity. The common architectural motif of Śālabhanjikā in temples and Stupas for decoration symbolizes both Vedic deities and Yakṣas of local significance and purport. The numismatic depiction of tree in railing on punch-marked coins is of cultic consideration. Its associative linkage specifically with the Goddess may not be definitive, on accord of the symbolic connection of trees with other major Brāhmaṇic deity-figures (Gonda 1954, 20), but contextual, relational and associational factors relevant to the specific coinage issues may play out in certain directions.

### III. ŚĀKTA GODDESS IN A ŚĀIVITE WORLD: Narratives & Tensions

The Hindu tradition of religious belief is populated by numerous, rather innumerable deities and divinities, each serving a different mythological purpose in narration, and essential function in the lives of propitiators. Some require annual worship, while some definitively demand daily veneration for bestowing meritorious benedictions and benisons. It is a perplexing task for religious Historians and Scholars alike to classify or categorize Hindu deity-figures into groups of distinction and perfect potential of making distinguished considerations on their Evolution and role in the tenets of Hinduism. Yet, a tendency is oft observed, where some deities enjoy closer visualized and ritualized proximity with a commanding mythical figure, a Great God, generally considered in a Trinity- Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva, along with their feminine power, their generalized divine consorts- Sarasvatī, Lakṣmī and Pārvatī respectively. On their spherical accretions stand many other deity-figures, considered divine on their own wondrous exploits, but still experiencing differential connection to the Trinity members. For instance, in Purāṇic legends, Gaṇeśa is naturally closer to Pārvatī, and thence to Śiva, than to Viṣṇu, while Lakṣmī, though linked with seemingly every other God in Epic narratives, is close to the heart of Viṣṇu. This tendency is perfected in the conceptual construct of Sects, forming closed mythical-ecological niches, within which their stories, functions, endeavors are both shaped and formed. While these constructs essentially reflect the family affiliation as prevalent in Indian society (Kosambi 1943, 16), their very presence and purpose taint the Purāṇic legends with colors of socio-cultural contextuality, and impart them a narrative and action form quite distinct from other similar myths and ethos in other cultures (Goyal 1984, 78).

These sects, when perfectly aligned internally and differentiated externally, create differing Religious-systems within the broader outlines of Hinduism (Doniger 1988, 90). While Sectarian conflicts and discords have formed the order of the day in many epochs of Ancient Indian History, they were generally the exception, rather than the norm (Srivastava 2019, 13). The sectarian system, conversely, has also provided a socio-cultural apparatus within which deity-figures related and included in it have multifariously and multidimensionally evolved to become major figures of reverence in the Hindu tradition today. For benefit of Analysis, here we prefer calling these deities members of the [Sectarian] pantheon. To differentiate with alacrity, while members of a sect could experience both proximate and distant relation with the major figure, members of the pantheon appear as a harmonious, closely knit family. Their behaviors, tendencies, traits and characteristics are diligently maneuvered and strategically designed to act in perfect synchronicity and consonance.

With this in view, we may refer to a *Śaivite Pantheon* formed by Śiva, Pārvatī, Kārttikeya and Gaṇeśa, and a *Śaiva abode* where Nandī, the bull, Vāsuki, the Nāga, and the peacock, cock of Kārttikeya, joined ceremoniously by the mouse of Gaṇeśa. Furthermore, in the same manner, we can perfectly envisage a *Śaiva mytho-ecological niche* additionally populated by Gaṇas, Piśāchas, Ghosts and Pramathas, finally adjoined by Śaivite ascetics and followers, forming a *Śaivite ritual-system*, which with its characteristic ritual paraphernalia, ritual patronage, ritual custom and ritual conventions forms the *Śaivite Sect*, standing in contradistinction to Vaiṣṇava sect. The Śaivite sect, however, later grew with two parallel offshoots- the sects of Śakti and Gaṇeśa, which developed in a full-fledged form when entrance of Śākta worshippers, emergence of Tantra movements, rise of tribal polities and regionality criterion became defining forces in the Early Medieval Period of Indian History (Sircar 2004, 56). However, their growth and progression were not to the exclusion or detriment of Śiva, whose legends and promises only grew into a massive edifice of faith and belief with every turn of a new century. For now, it would be felicitous to come to the discussion of Mythological narratives of Mother-goddess in the Śaivite worldview.

## MYTHOLOGICAL NARRATIVES:

### SATĪ & PĀRVATĪ:

The two deity-forms closely connected with the legends and stories of Śiva are Satī and Pārvatī (Chakravarti, 1998), who wean away Śiva from his morose, mountainous, snowy and sylvan abode of Kailāsa, and bring his potency and prowess into the realm of domestic life and affairs. Even though Purāṇic accounts make the two severed on account of rebirth, even therein the two are considered as two forms of the one, singular Ādi-Śakti, the female principle, Nature incarnate, the other half of Śiva, the All-Mother (Kinsley 1988, 18).

While the Vedic-Saṃhitās remain silent over the characterization of Satī-Pārvatī, and it is only in the Purāṇas and Epics that we firstly find a comprehensive exposition to the relation<sup>7</sup> of Satī-Pārvatī with Śiva (Srivastava 1978, 66), which on first glimpse, appears to be a consequence of several co-joint factors, including Śiva's rise to religious-sectarian prominence, absorption of Śākta pīṭha tradition of local worship, and a meta-narrative to connect the two (Sircar 1948, 26). Furthermore, the character of the Goddess in Śaivite legends follows a common template, observed in adjoined sects as well: paradigmatic shifts to bring the sectarian Goddess worship in close proximity to Śaiva traditions, personification of Goddess as the associate-power helping Śiva (a slight demotion from her unparalleled supremacy in Sāṃkhya philosophy), transmutations of the Goddess as an ideal wife and mother, and by personifying her as the embodied grace of Śiva (Kinsley 1988, 57).

The mythology of Satī is firstly comprehensively stated in *Śiva Purāṇa* (2.24), which describes her asceticism and affection for Śiva, and the simultaneous nourishment of abominable hatred for Śiva by Dakṣa, father of Satī. While the causative initiation behind the unraveling storyline fluctuates between pre-meditated union of Śiva-Śakti to cunning, cosmic manipulation of Brahma, father of Dakṣa, who wants to see Śiva humiliated due to the latter's assault on former's splendor and swagger by cutting-off one of his head, when Brahma was lustfully chasing his own daughter (2.11.27). When Dakṣa performs a great sacrifice, he intentionally sends no invitation to Śiva, in order to invoke his anger. However, while Śiva remains calm and

unfazed, it causes immense pain to Satī, who attends the sacrifice, but on being disrespected, throws herself in the sacrificial pyre (2.29.30), an inauspicious act which impels Śiva to avenge the wrong, a feat accomplished with the decapitation of Dakṣa by Vīrabhadra, a fierce form of Rudra-Śiva (2.11.43). Immediately, the legend moves to describe the cosmic wandering of Śiva, dis-embodiment of Satī by Viṣṇu, and establishment of Śākta pīṭha, upon seeing which Śiva conjoins himself with the Yoni, a symbol of eternal unity.

The meaning of Satī's cycle is clear. Her primary mythological function is to bring Śiva in the world of Brāhmaṇas and Vedic rituals. It is commonly held by scholars that Śiva was a Non-Āryangod (Kinsley1988,62), and thence the distrust and disagreement between the two traditions. As Devdutt Pattanaik puts it-

*“Śiva stands against order, his best mates are the fright of the Brāhmaṇas, his residence is the cremation ground, the place where existence ends, he is chaos incarnate, disorder Overlord, and possesses the Skull as his chalice. His meditation produces potent semen, which he however stores inside himself, and channels it into cerebral valor by his tapas. He stands outside the pale of sacrifices, an event performed by Brahma to support and sustain life.... The clash between two differing views was not only imminent, but necessary to produce harmony.”* (2017, 28).

Thus, the endeavors of Satī brought Śiva into the domestic world, while the integration remained somewhat dismayed and incomplete. However, the ‘sacrifice’ of Satī brought Śiva outside the margin lands, but in direct confrontation with the established Brāhmaṇic order. This conflict has been characterized by Goyal (1986, 90) as struggle of the Margin-men, who “stayed at the margin of two world, but never completely belonged to any one specifically.... Their perspective stands in apparent contrast to the two, and remains a curious, and mostly volatile mixture of non-congruent ideologies and ways of living.” (ibid, 98-110). In a way, Satī served as a crucial bridging unit between Brāhmaṇic and Non-Āryan social-groups, and thus made Śiva a revered deity in the Vedic sacred-complex as well (Chakravarti1998, 62). It also, quite implicitly, reiterated an old legend of Earth-Mother and Sky-Father, since Śiva descends from above on the impermanent plane of existence, to propitiate the pīṭha, by whom Satī now pervades the entire Earth (Chakravarti1998, 58). It also signals that with Śiva in the Vedic divine pantheon, his potency would be used to achieve noble and orthodox ends in the Brāhmaṇic social-order (Kinsley 1988, 60).

The story of Śiva's induction into the orderly, Brāhmaṇic world was essentially brought full circle by the continuation of his mythic-social dalliance with Pārvatī, also called as *Giriputrī* (daughter of mountains), *Girīsājaputrī* (daughter of the King of mountains), *Girīsā* (mistress of mountains). Her character is in a greater synchrony with that of Śiva, since the Purāṇic accounts do not induce any melodramatic foreground leading to her affection for and affiliation with Śiva, which maybe a consequence of I]her positional stance on the periphery of Brāhmaṇa socio-cultural order, a feat not peculiar for populace residing in mountains, II] antiquarian connection of Śiva with mountains, especially Muñjavata in Atharva-veda, and Kailāsa in the Purāṇas, III] mountains being abundant in reclusive and hidden locations, the favorite feature of the abodes of Śiva, and IV] the very potent connection of Pārvatī with mountains, as proved by numerable annals of Mahābhāratam and Devī-māhātmyam.

While the Purāṇic legends emphatically connect the necessity of her marriage for obtaining the son of Śiva, capable of killing Tārakāsura (2.49.31), it later renders it necessary from the viewpoint of union of Śiva-Śakti as well (Kinsley1988, 72). It is to be noted that, Śiva only agrees to the marriage after testing the zenith of Pārvatī's asceticism, which exceeds even the sages (4.56.7), and later complies with desire of Pārvatī to woo her while adhering to traditional customs and conventions. She is often depicted as a complainant wife, disappointed on the absence of shelter, a hemp-smoking careless husband, but remains steadfast in her devotion and fealty to Śiva and the divine Śaiva family (Thompson & Spencer1923, 28).

The symbolic alliterations abound in the legends of Pārvatī continue the tale of mythical dalliance after the abrupt departure of Satī. It seeks to address the tension due to the polarity of asceticism and eroticism in Śiva's character, which often leads to constructive (but sometimes destructive) tension in the Cosmos. Her presence also controls the excessive sexual rigor of Śiva, the Paśupati, addressed symbolically in the legend of burning of Kāma (Kinsley 1988, 80). While Śiva is fire, Pārvatī is soothing calmness, when Śiva engages in the thunderous dance, Pārvatī prevents him from errantly destroying the Universe. Thence, the dis-balanced and excess aspects of Śiva's persona are regulated by the domesticity of Pārvatī, who links him to the

mundane mortal world. Pārvatī not only civilizes the heterodoxy present inherently in the mythological-complex of Śiva, but also binds and domesticates him to the domestic world. While Śiva is not concerned with progeny and lineage, Pārvatī comes from the reins of a realm where such concepts enjoy unambiguous importance, a fact which provides a mythic-base for Śiva's later associations with Kārttikeya and Gaṇeśa.

## MYTHOLOGICAL NARRATIVES:

### UMĀ & AMBIKĀ:

While Pārvatī is the most frequent consort of Śiva, the numismatic evidence strongly purports to position and place Umā in that capacity (Shrava1985, 42; Rosenfield 1967, 88). The occurrence of her name as OMMO on Kuṣāṇa gold coins points towards the popularity of her religious-status as the consort of Maheśvara, proven by her depiction as the deity-figure accompanying Śiva (OESHO) along with his characteristic bull.

The name of Umā lacks any clear etymological derivation (Kinsley 1988, 64), and has been explicated by scholars and classical authorities with their very own and distinctive methods. *Harivamśa*, the appendix of Mahābhārata, and a very late addition into the main corpus of the semi-historical text (Jaiswal1967, 34), explains that when Pārvatī decided to take to a harder and austere route to achieve union with Śiva, her mother cried in indignation, and exclaimed “*Oh No!*” (U Mā), and thence it became a term associated with the deity, a phenomenon repeated in *Kumārasambhavam* of Kālidāsa (fl. 4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> Century CE). S.K. Chatterjee (1931: 34ff.) purports that this name of the Goddess is clearly an import from Mediterranean region, where Earth Goddess is attributed the term Ma, Ma'at, Amma, or Ammā of Dravidian origin, a fact not completely impossible due to probable Prehistoric ethnic connections between Indian peninsula and population residing around Aegean and Black Seas (Basu Roy 2010, 268). The retention of such a term in North-west India, where certain languages/dialects such as the Brahui, spoken predominantly in Nuristan region, and having linguistic linkages with proto-Dravidian language family (Rivers1909, 458) is not utterly impossible, though difficult to verify with exactitude; the connection is somewhat strengthened by the occurrence of Sāho! For praise in the Uruzgan Inscription of Mihir-kula, the Alchon Hunnic Ruler of North-west Indian frontier region (c. 515-530 CE). Rahman (1965, 226-244) asserts that the term OMMO (trans: Umā) was possibly a Scythian adoption of Phrygian goddess Anahitā. Thence, the prevalence and usage of the term Umā for great Mother Goddess hardly remains peripheral to at least conjectural certitude. The multi-lingual complex of the Kuṣāṇas is well-known in historical annals (Jongeward2020, 66), and so is their willingness and ability to absorb numismatic renditions from different socio-cultural contexts residing within their Kingdom (Mann2012,49).

Kena Upaniṣad (X.28) marks the first prominent appearance of Umā in ritualistic annals of the Vedic World. Herein, she is not depicted as a wife of Śiva, while referred to as Haimavatī (daughter of the Himalayas/hailing from Himalayas), and intimately linked to Brahma-Vidyā. In the somewhat anachronistic text of *Śatarudrīya*, she is hailed as the wife of Rudra-Śiva, a feat soldered in Maitrāyaṇī Saṃhitā, the 10<sup>th</sup> canto of which forms the part of Vājasaneyīsaṃhitā (i.e. Later Vedic Period), where Śiva is propitiated as Giritra, and Umā-Pārvatī are equated into one entity- wife of Rudra-Śiva.

We are on a more certain, though elusive footing, in regard to the reconstruction of Ambikā from the voluminous literary data. It is commonly believed by scholars now that the Rigvedic reference to Ambikā is a later interpolation into the text (Jamison1999, 26), a feat verified by its positioning in the 10<sup>th</sup> Book (Witzel1986: 195). However, we here get a glimpse of a ferocious, furious and diabolical deity, who lusts for blood, demands battle, and accompanies Rudra on his destructive enterprises (Macdonell2015 [1897], 72). Unambiguously, we next witness her presence in the *Vājasaneyīsaṃhitā* (3.42), where she is described as the sister of Rudra, a narrative reiterated in *Taittreyaśaṃhitā* (5.56), but the appellation metamorphosis results in Ambikā being described as wife of Rudra-Śiva in *Taittreya-Āraṇyaka*, a phenomenon also observed in the affinal relation between Rāma and Sitā in Daśaratha Jātaka and Rāmāyaṇa (Jaiswal 1967, 67), with the belief of most scholars that the former is chronologically earlier (Singh2011, 252). In most historical anecdotes, the concept of sister-wife signaled either lineage-purity (Davids 1903, 102), or was an implicit attestation of sectarian-adjustments (Srivastava 2019, 65) taking place in the highly turbulent period between 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE- 1<sup>st</sup> century CE (Olivelle2006, 305). This shift in structural relations demands some further attention,

since it augers significantly a considerable influence on the analysis of some Indo-Greek coinage bearing deity-figure of our interest. Some tentative theories may be proposed here-

**Natural Development-** In the character of Ambikā, from its characteristic antiquity in Rigveda, we get a glimpse of furtherance of the behavioral-mythological traits of *Rodasī*, the female accomplice of Rudra and Marūtas (Macdonell 2015 [1897], 40). While her etymological derivation remains ambiguous at best, it would not be wide-off the mark to punctuate it in proximity of Rudra-Śiva, both etymologically and functionally (Jamison 2020, 108). The √rud root-verb of her name attests to her affinity with destructive functions, a behavioral trait also associated intimately with Mother-Goddess (Bhattacharya 1964,51-58/*supra.*), while association of epithets of Jagata-devī, Jagata-janani etc. with Ambikā in Maitrāyaṇī Saṃhitā (V.68.1) speaks of her natural development as a fierce but venerable accomplice of Rudra-Śiva.

**Convergent Evolution-** Chakravarti (1998,34) notes that with passage of time, Rudra-Śiva, along with Viṣṇu was elevated to sectarian supreme positions in the propitiation-pantheon of Later Vedic Period, a feat traceable through close examination of Saṃhitā and Śāstra literature of the epoch concerned, and which reaches its climax and zenith in the positioning of Rudra-Śiva as Mahādeva in Śvetāśvataropaniṣad (XII.29). The status-change of Ambikā occurred in the same period, which we may tentatively posit as a sort of convergent evolution, since the chief feminine accompaniment of Mahādeva and the supreme, sublime Śākta cosmic, all-pervading power had to be one and the same to establish literary coherence and ritual sanctimony.

**Surreptitious befall-** In her study of the relatively fluid and narratively differing positions of Bhadrā and Ekānamśā in Vaiṣṇavite legends and texts, Jaiswal (1967,80) claimed that her degradation from an equivalent companion of Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma to a feminine deity-figure of secondary significance in Pāñcarātra rites probably reflects the influence of patriarchal norms over matriarchal conventions. Or, as it happened in case of Sitā (Jaiswal1967, 223-224), it was the explicit superimposition of patriarchal norms over previously existent matriarchal concepts. Sitā was initially a form of the Earth-Goddess, often connected with Indra, who, being the God of Rain and Masculine prowess, was an amicable partner to increase the fecundity of the tilled landmass (Gonda 1954,38). While being an ideal heroic figure originally, Rāma gradually became deified, and was later connected to Viṣṇu (Pollock 2006,508-525). Gonda (1954, 40) purports that the antiquarian Rigvedic connection between Indra and Viṣṇu permitted the literary construction of this idealized, albeit somewhat strangely articulated poetical couple.

**Cult appropriation-** The anomalous propitiation of Ambikā in Śaivite-sects is also situationally attributed as a consequence of cult appropriation, as happened in Ancient Greece in context of the diametrically oppositional religious-cults of Zeus and Athena-Pallas (Srivastava 2019). Bhattacharya (1964,58) also supports this idea, as in his belief Śākta powers were associated with Vedic Male Gods to give them a vantage point of consideration, and Ambikā was felicitously thence comingled with Rudra-Śiva, a fact not completely negated due to the vague and mysterious presence of Rudra in Rigvedic verses. While being a sister during the period of early ritual contact, later socio-cultural exchange and interaction might had increased the proclivity of two different deity-figures to enter an intimate religious role of husband and wife.

Taittreya Āraṇyaka contains invaluable and numerous references regarding the affiliation of Ambikā with the emergent deity-figure of Durgā, who was herself undergoing rapid, radical transmutation to become a suitably adjusted Indo-Āryan goddess. It also refers to Rudra-Śiva as Umāpati, while equalizing Umā and Ambikā in the very next hymn. Thus, the occurrence of functions and actions of Durgā under the garb of Ambikā should not remain mysterious in anyway (Rahman1965,458).

#### IV. **CONCLUSION:***There and back again?*

Yokochi (2005, 19) typologically divided Goddess deity-figures in Hinduism into three broad categories- *Consort Goddess* (whose primary function is to support, sustain and strengthen her husband's feats, conforms to Śāstric norms), *Warrior Goddess* (provides strength and motivation to warriors, defies Śāstric injunctions), and *Supreme Goddess* (Supreme Power, sustains all existence, mundane and sacred,

subverts all conventions). Interestingly, the Śaivite Mother-goddess and her myriad manifestations fit into all moulds harmoniously, though their sojourn, from an all-potent independent cultic deity-form to a structural component of the ever-encompassing Śaivite world has been both tenacious and torting, from suggestive occurrences in prehistoric past<sup>4</sup>, which become definitive during Neolithic.

With the commencement of incipient agriculture in Neolithic Period, the cult of Mother-goddess received a newfound and zealous boost in popularity, on accord of the magical connection between women fertility and productivity of land. This cultural specificity is observed on many sites, including Çatalhöyük, Turkey (Chakraborty 1999, 56). Burials show a pronounced use of red-ochre, as if exhibiting return of the dead to Earth's womb (Bhattacharya 1974, 16). However, wherever agricultural transition was accompanied by the development or onset of pastoralism, the cult of Mother-goddess became subsumed into emergent patriarchal structures (Lerner 1986, 11), due to the renewed and sanguine competition for land, cattle, control and security of territory and populace. In India, numerous scholars co-relate this transitive phase with the advent of Aryans (Sharma 2005, 78), while some place the causative onus on eco-meteorological factors, which made struggle and scarcity of resources imminent (Bryant 2002, 98). It cannot be ignored altogether that the fusion of Indo-European beliefs created a rather unique and uncanny cultural-complex that had both pastoral patriarchy and earlier Mother-goddess worship in due proportions. But, if there ever was a conceptual edifice of Mother-rights in proto-historic India, this would have obviously and naturally reduced the scale of practice and scope of existence.

However, the subsuming of earlier cultural strata below did not completely vanquish ritual supremacy of Mother-goddess. Rather, it made it a sub-structural component of emergent sects, with that of Goddess connecting well with Śaivism, a natural development since Śaivite elements had previously been incorporating many non-Aryan traits (Sanderson 2001, 43). Within Śaivism, the Mother-goddess was readily transformed into a subservient consort, whose primary function solely became affixture of Śiva to both his worshippers and society, and normalize his ritually eccentric, wayward trends.

But, with the resurgence of reverence of Durgā, the suppressed cultic supremacy of Mother-goddess again experienced a return to form, with the establishment of Śākta sect, given conditional obeisance and patronage by aspiring monarchs with regional visions and tribal affiliations. Her gender-role too shifted, from being a novice consort to a seasoned warrior, and her worshippers too asked for blessings in martial, and not household or marital affairs. This was not to remain stable. The mid-phase of Early Medieval Period, during c. 9<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> Century CE saw a revolutionary rise of Śaivism, which even began to encapsulate Durgā, by explaining her mythological form as a deviant of Pārvatī<sup>5</sup> and Umā<sup>6</sup>. Her domestication process was initiated by making changes in her character (less belligerent, playful marital status), removal of certain epithets (especially those highlighting her unfavorable stance to marriage), iconographical innovation (addition of drapery, household items in added arms, ostentation), and occasions of worship (autumnal, harvest festivals).

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<sup>4</sup>It has been postulated by many scholars that in the Prehistoric world, many cults worshipping Mother-goddess or one of her right forms were existent throughout the world (Gimbutas 1974, 76), and especially in India (Pandey 2012, 99). This is clearly evident from the discovery of a quartz prism from Chandravati in Rajasthan which bears enigmatic and esoteric designs on its surface, often connected with Goddess worship (Sonawade 2023, 507). Another definitive evidence comes from Bagor-III, where a triangular stone atop a possibly man-made altar has been taken by its excavators as a representation of Mother-goddess, known to be worshipped in this form at neighboring sites (Sharma 1967, 51; Misra 2023, 78).

<sup>5</sup>Great goddess Śivā is of the three natures. Śivā became Satī and Śiva married her. At the sacrifice of her father, she cast off her body which she did not take again and went back to her own region. Śivā incarnated as Pārvatī at the request of the Devas. It was after performing a severe penance that she could attain Śiva again. Śivā came to be called by various names [such as Durgā,...] (Śivapurāṇa 2.1.16).

<sup>6</sup>Gods eulogized Umā with devotion: —“[...] O goddess Umā, mother of the universe, resident of Śivaloka, favorite of Śiva, O great goddess (i.e., Maheśvarī), O Durgā, we bow to you. With great devotion we bow to the illustrious Energy, the holy, the tranquil, the holy nourishment and the one with the forms of Mahat and the Avyakta”. (Śivapurāṇa 2.3.3).

Her absolute absorption within Sanskrit tradition left space for newer local Mother-Goddesses to occupy her position. As Sircar (2004, 52) further notes-

*It speaks of the crafty ingenuity of the local episcopacy that, by the simple device of eliminating the great Hindu triad from later Durgā -stelas, they ensured not only that the goddess's hegemonic symbols were removed, but also that leaving her alone with just her two sons would gradually lead to the replacement of her war-like prowess with expected maternal 'softness'.*

While these actions brought about a certain change in her mode of reverence and patronage patterns, it definitely did not alter the primary mythological lair of power and piety in which Durgā was conceived. Ritual enactment of her fight against Mahiṣāsura was given a philosophic touch, with the Supreme Goddess and her semi-bovine foe representing light and darkness within us respectively (Pattanaik 2000, 16), nor did it alter her sole supreme status in Śākta traditions, select Purāṇic discourses and especially in Tantra rituals (Urban 2009, 50). The Śaivite Mother-Goddess has many projections of gendered-roles, propositions of power and positions of differing significance in the Śaivite world, but the principal cosmic connection between her ritual-cultural personality and her ardent propitiators still retains its core, fundamental and intimate essence, from prehistoric past to the times present.

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