

## The Portrait of the Goddess in the *Kalika Purana*

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**Abstract:** The Kalika Purana is a Hindu religious text belongs to the genre Puranic literature. Written around the 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> century AD in Sanskrit the text celebrates the power of the divine feminine in her various manifestations centering round the goddess Kamakhya or Kalika. To this day it is used in the worship of the goddess and is greatly revered by her devotees. In the text the goddess is portrayed as the supreme deity who can manifest in various forms in accordance with the need of the time. Sometimes she is associated with the male gods as consort; at some other episodes she is independent and superior to male gods. This paper attempts to discuss the different forms of the goddess discernible in the Kalika Purana.

**Keywords:** Kalika, Kamakhya, Goddess, Saktism, Upa Purana

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Date of Submission: 05-09-2017

Date of acceptance: 18-10-2017

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### I. INTRODUCTION

The Puranas, a set of religious texts, do share certain characteristics which mark them as a distinct genre of literature in Hinduism. Though traditionally acclaimed as eighteen in number, the real number of texts having the suffix Purana are more than this. Considering eighteen Puranas as 'Great Purana' (though there are some discrepancy in lists), the other Puranas are given the title of 'Upa Purana'. Like the epics, the Puranas also belong to group of Smriti (derive from one body of oral tradition) and they claim a connection with the Vedas. However in many aspects the 'Puranic religion made a departure from the Vedic religion'. Unlike the Vedas, the Puranas are sectarian by nature. They tend to be dedicated to one god or another-usually Vishnu and Siva. This signifies the coming of new form of Hinduism, which is called 'Puranic Hinduism', because more than the Vedas and allied texts, the Puranas represent the essential structure of Hinduism as it is practiced today. It represents an evolutionary stage of the history of Hinduism because of its taking the focus of religious practice away from sacrificial ritual as well from exclusive Bhakti. [Chattopadhyaya: 2005].

The position of the female divinity in the Puranas also differs from their counterparts in the Vedic literature. It has been interpreted by some scholars that depending upon the particular material contexts, pre-eminence is given to either male or female deities. [Kosambi 1962.; Bhattacharya: 1999 ] Bhattacharyya narrates "The accumulation of wealth occurred in primitive societies in two ways: (i) by development of agriculture and (ii) by the domestication of animals. Where agriculture developed considerably without any intervening pastoral stage, mother right elements became the driving forces of society. Elsewhere the stage of highly developed agriculture was reached only after passing through a purely pastoral phase of long duration, as with the Rigvedic tribes of India,... we have the opposite result." The pastoral tribes require greater courage and an efficient leadership to protect their cattle which gave rise to patriarchal societies and therefore pastoral religion is generally identified with male divinity. This is why the Vedic goddesses (i.e. Usha, Aditi, Savitri, Sri) are given a secondary position in the texts. Ingalls [1984] states that "such goddesses...as we meet...are goddesses with a small 'g' rather than the singular embodiment that that we might write with a capital." Their position in the Puranas is quite different, where the goddesses -Sarasvati, Lakshmi and Parvati are portrayed as the spouses of the male gods-Brahma, Vishnu and Siva respectively. One notable exception is found in the Devi-Mahatmya section of the *Markandeya Purana*, one of the early Puranas and considered as Mahapurana, in which the ultimate reality is understood as female, as the Goddess. Following the footsteps of *Markandeya Purana* many Upa Puranas were written, in the subsequent period, which are overloaded with sectarian material relating to Saktism. As in these texts the goddess is portrayed as the primeval power (*adyasakti*), needed for creation of the universe and activate the male energy, these are given the titled as Sakta Upapurana. Regarding the Goddess tradition, Ludo Rocher [1986] has rightly opined "Sakti worship appears, though rather infrequently, in some of the Mahapuranas. It is far more prevalent in the Upapuranas. In some of them it is so prevalent that they have been labeled 'Sakta Upapuranas.'" The *Kalika Purana* is one among the Sakta Upapuranas. Written around the 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> century CE in Sanskrit, the text celebrates the power of the divine

feminine in her various manifestations centering round the goddess Kamakhya or Kalika. Among Saktas (worshippers of divine feminine in Hinduism) the *Kalika Purana* is one of the revered and famous scriptures. To this day it is used in the worship of the Goddess. Though starts with the salutation to Hari (Vishnu), the text shifts its centrality to the goddess as the fundamental form of the universe who can manifest in various forms in accordance of the need of the time. Sometimes she is in benign form providing wealth to her devotees, while in some other episodes she is in terrible form destroying the evil (demon). Thus the Goddess in the *Kalika Purana* is many-sided figure. She is called by more than fifty names or epithets, while many of these names are simply honorific (for example, Mahamaya, Maheswari, Jaganmayi). This article seeks to discuss the different forms of the goddess as portrayed in the text.

## II. RELATION OF THE GODDESS WITH VISHNU:

In the first episode of the *Kalika Purana* the Goddess is associated with Vishnu. The text starts with the salutation to Hari (Vishnu) and next to Hari salutation is given to the Goddess. Here she is called as Vishnumaya (Illusion of Vishnu) and is addressed as the protectress, dispeller of ignorance and bestower of salvation to her devotees.

Let that Maya protect you, she is Vishnumaya, because of her alluring charm of all the living beings who like the sun dispels the darkness of ignorance (*avidya*) from the mind of the ascetics, who is the cause of salvation and destroys the evil desire in the pure mind of the people. [1.2, KP]

In another episode the Goddess Prithvi is depicted in relation with Vishnu in his boar incarnation out of which Naraka, the early ruler of Kamarupa was born. Here Goddess Prithvi is motherly by nature and takes care of son Naraka after birth as a nurse in the form of Katyayani. Later on, as the story goes on, when Naraka becomes rude (*asura*) after tying up friendship with Bana the Goddess in her form of Kali or Kalika helps Hari in his fight against Naraka.

While fighting he observed tall Kalika by the side of Krishna similar to Kalika, with red face and red eyes, wearing sword and sakti and also Kamakhya, the protectress of the world, the enchantress. [40.102, KP]

Thus in the text the Goddess is portrayed as the consort of Vishnu, who can create illusion and enchanting needed for creation of universe and destruction of evil. In this way one facet of the Goddess is Vaisnavite. Of all the male deities Vishnu is the earliest with whom the Goddess is associated in the *Kalika Purana*

## III. RELATION OF THE GODDESS WITH SIVA:

Out of the male gods in the *Kalika Purana* Siva is the mostly associated god with the goddess. Throughout the text the Goddess is associated with Siva as his consort. Some names of the Goddess such as Rudrani, Samkari, Sivaduti are due to her association with Siva. The text relates the story of the birth and rebirth of the Goddess only to marry or enchant Siva for welfare of the world.

The Goddess says-

In every age of creation after dissolution of the world I, in the shape of woman, shall continue to follow Hara with great earnestness. [6.7, KP]

In the first episode of the text, the Goddess is born as Sati, the daughter of Daksa, to enchant Hara (Siva) as she only can do it. She is the power to create illusion (Maya) in the mind of the great ascetic. Thus the motive behind her birth as Sati is to become the spouse of Siva. But as the story goes on she leaves her life as Daksa does not invite Siva to the sacrifice that the former arranged. Afterwards Siva destroys the sacrifice and Sati's dismembered body parts gave rise to many *pithasthananas* (seat). The *Kalika Purana* enumerates the *pithasthanas* as seven: Devikuta (where pair of feet lie), Uddiyana (where pair of thigh lie), Kamagiri (where genital organ lies), on the ground of Kamagiri (where the navel lies), Jalandhara (where pair of breast lie) and the place beyond Kamarupa (where the head lies). In every *pitha* the goddess is known by different names and Siva lives with the goddess. Praising Kamarupa as the most sacred *pitha* where Hara with Parvati always resides.

Wherever the pair of feet and other parts of the dead body of sati had fallen, Mahadeva being attracted and out of deep attachment to her stayed himself, in all those places, assuming the shape of a linga.

[18.46, KP]

Thus Siva is associated with every *Shaktipithas*. Even in the present day Assam Siva in *linga* (phallus) form is worshipped along with the goddess in the *Saktipithas*.

In another episode, the Goddess is reborn as the daughter of Himalaya to be the spouse of Siva. Girija, Girinandini, Parvati, Kali, Gauri and Uma are her various names. She practices severe austerity to obtain Siva as her husband. Being possessed many qualities and following various methods of austerity in her deep attachment with Siva, she acquired half of Siva's body with his consent. Since then Siva had become Ardhanariswara (the lord who is half woman). Likewise half of the goddess's body became male and another half remains female. It

indicates that Goddess is not only the wife of Siva, but also his permanent associate in the form of Ardhanariswara.

In both of the above mentioned episodes contain stanzas relating to the Goddess's marriage with Siva. Chapter 48 of the text narrates one story of a couple –king Chandrasekhara and Taravati, who are depicted as no other than the human form of Siva and Parvati.

In later part of the *Kalika Purana* Vetala and Bhairava, the sons of Siva and Parvati, are moving towards Kamarupa and their parents (Siva and Parvati) are guiding them about the sacred sites of the land and the procedure of worshipping the deities here.

In this way throughout the text in many episodes the Goddess is associated with Siva as consort.

#### **IV. GODDESS AS MAHAMAYA - 'THE GREAT ILLUSION'**

In the text the illusive power of the goddess is praised. Here the supreme female divinity or the fundamental form of the goddess is addressed as Mahamaya (Great Illusion). It is the illusive power of the Goddess which enchants the male gods needed for creation of the universe. Thus the illusive power of the Goddess is celebrated without which the creation is not possible. The text begins with the salutation to the goddess, addressed as Vishnumaya (illusion of Vishnu).

In one scene the Goddess Vishnumaya is propitiated by the creator (Brahma), to fascinate Hara (alternatively Sambhu and Siva), as she is able to do alone, and to reborn as his consort without which the eternal creation does not arise. Thus she is depicted as the enchanting power needed for the creation of the universe. Here she is also the primordial form of the goddess who can also manifest in other forms (e.g. consort of Siva).

In the same episode she is addressed as Mahamaya or Yoganidra, through which the illusory power of the Goddess is focused.

She is so called, because she causes the creatures constantly subject to anger, temptation and attachment, and constantly turns them lustful thus makes them bewilderment with anxiety, in turn who makes them joyous and addicted to vices.

[6.64-65, KP]

Thus in the *Kalika Purana* the Goddess is celebrated as the great illusion for which the fundamental form of the Goddess is addressed as Maya or Mahamaya.

#### **V. GODDESS AS ONE SUPREME DIVINITY:**

The concept of one supreme divinity is present in Hinduism from the Vedic period onwards. In the Puranas the single divinity is called Brahman of which Brahma, Vishnu and Siva are three different forms. In some Puranas, sectarian by nature, any of the three deities are portrayed as the supreme that can manifest in various forms according to the need of time. Such as in Vaishnava Puranas Vishnu is the Supreme deity and can assume different incarnation to preserve the world and destroy evil. This notion of single divinity and manifestations are seen in the Sakta Upapuranas where the female divinity (*sakti*) is supreme and her various manifestations are celebrated. The *Kalika Purana*, being a Sakta Upapurana also contains the idea of female supreme divinity in many passages.

In one episode while persuading Siva for marrying; Brahma says him that like Brahma, Vishnu and Siva –three different manifestations of the single eternal truth, similarly the Goddess, addressed as Maya, is also manifested in different forms according to different nature of works. Thus she is addressed as Maya (illusion) in her supreme form in the text. The female supreme divinity is also represented with the manifestations like her male counterparts.

O Maheswara; though we are three, and are in three different forms, in reality we are one: do realize the eternal truth. Similarly Maya also is manifested in different forms according to different nature of work; thus she is known as Kamala, Saraswati, Savitri and Sandhya.

[9. 33.34, KP]

In another episode it is narrated that Mahamaya is the fundamental form. She is one and manifests in different forms in different occasions. Though she is known by different names according to her manifestations in different seats in reality she is the same. She is one and everywhere, the primordial cause of the universe and the embodiment of the world.

Mahamaya is the fundamental form...though she is known by different names according to her manifestations in different seats in reality she is the same.

[58.48-52, KP]

In a different episode, the Goddess is presented as superior to the Hindu trinity-Vishnu, Brahma and Siva. It narrates the story of confrontation between the Goddess and Vishnu, as the latter shows disrespect to her. Vishnu and Brahma are overpowered by the illusory power of goddess Kamakhya and after worshipping the Goddess, at the behest of Siva, they see the glory of Kamakhya. Thus the story shows the female divinity as superior to the male gods.

The gods became highly astonished, their sense turned numb, and they kept on praising again and again, the vagina of Kamakhya.

[72.85, KP]

Thus the goddess is portrayed as the Supreme Divinity, who can manifest in various forms in different seats bearing different names, in the *Kalika Purana*.

## VI. GODDESS OF VEGETATION AND FERTILITY:

In some passages of *Kalika Purana* the goddess is associated with vegetation and fertility of the soil. Bhattacharyya (1999) opines that all over the world, the earth spirit is generally regarded as female and presiding deities of agriculture are mainly goddess, because the idea of fertility and reproduction is connected with women. In fact, in every place, the Mother Goddess is mainly concerned with vegetation and fertility. The most ancient expression of this in the Hindu tradition is found in the *Rigveda* and its several hymns that praise the goddess Prithvi. This is more prominent in the goddess-focused Sakta Upapuranas like the *Kalika Purana*.

In one episode Goddess Prithvi appears in connection with the birth of Naraka. As the story narrates the menstruating goddess Prithvi is impregnated by Vishnu in his boar incarnation and consequently she gives birth to Naraka who became the king of Kamarupa. Here the mention of menstruation and pregnancy as well as delivery by Prithvi, who also incarnates as Katyayani, is significant. It can be site as an indicative of the vegetative power of the Goddess which is celebrated in the text.

Naraka was the son of God,...because he was born from the semen of Vishnu discharged into the womb of Prithvi at a time when she was impure on account of menstruation. [36.7, KP]

Paolo Eugenio Rosati (2017) relates the Ambuvachi Mela, when the Goddess's menstrual cycle is celebrated (every year in June-July), in the Kamakhya Temple to the above mentioned episode of the *Kalika Purana*, the earliest text devoted to the worship of Kamakhya. The identification of earth with woman implies that the functions of the earth and those of woman are alike. The same preconditions which fertilize woman are also thought to fertilize Mother Earth. For the same reason in the Sakta literature special importance is attached to the menstrual blood. However, there is no any mention of the Ambuvachi or celebration of the Goddess's menstruation is found in the text of *Kalika Purana*.

The colour red is frequently connected with the Mother Goddess. Red, representing the menstrual blood, is the symbol of fertility supposed to represent the earth or Mother Goddess [Bhattacharyya: 1999]. In the *Kalika Purana*, in the list of the offerings to the Goddess red cloth is praised as the best. Thus the Goddess as the symbol of vegetation and fertility is narrated in the text.

Red cloth and red silk are highly praised for offering to the great goddess. [69.7b, KP]

Moreover, the goddess's appellations in the text such as Dhara, Prithvi, Jagaddhatri, Jaganmayi, Vasundhara, Ksiti support the fact she is the Earth-goddess growing and nourishing the plants.

## VII. THE BLOODTHIRSTY GODDESS:

In the *Kalika Purana* the Goddess is portrayed as bloodthirsty goddess whom a devotee can propitiate by sacrificing human and animals. Blood sacrifice is called as the best of all the offerings to the goddess. Chapter 65 narrates an *adept should perform balidana which causes much delight to the goddess*. An adept should always satisfy Candika with *balidana*.

Chapter 67 of the text, called *Rudhiradhyaya* means blood chapter, is dedicated to the items and procedure of offering blood sacrifices to the goddess. The items include birds, reptiles, fish, animals, human and even one's own body. Here human sacrifice is considered as the greatest of all the sacrifices (*mahabali*). Through offering sacrifices a devotee can attain liberation and the kings can destroy his enemies. In *Rudhiradhyaya* the goddess is addressed by various names- Candika, Mundamala, Durga, Bhairavi and Kamakhya. Thus there are references in the text that the goddess can be pleased by offering blood sacrifices.

It is interesting to note that in India it is the Mother Goddess alone who needs blood sacrifices. Bhattacharyya opines [1999: p.66] of all the higher religions, it is only Saktism and its offshoots, which are developments of the primitive Mother Goddess cults that require sacrifices - human and animals. Gioia Lussana's [2015] study shows that fluid essence is one of the most archaic and universal features of the sacred closely related to Mother Earth, whose very nature is arid and dry because through her monthly menstruation she loses her generative power and so needs to regenerate it constantly by absorbing liquid. In the tribal societies of ancient India the absorption of fluids ensuring the perpetuation and regeneration of the vital principle is realized through a ritual offering of blood. Thus the *Kalika Purana* where the goddess is symbol fertility also narrates the goddess as bloodthirsty to whom offering of blood sacrifices to be made among which human sacrifice is the best.

## VIII. THE WAR GODDESS

In some episodes of the text the goddess is portrayed as war goddess who participates in the war to protect the world whenever it is oppressed by the demons and also confers victory and success on her worshippers in the battlefield. There are two different episodes where the goddess is portrayed as warrior. In the

former the goddess kills the demon Mahisha by assuming the form of Durga, Bhadrakali and Ugracanda [59. KP]. In the later episode the goddess in her terrible form of Ugratara and Ekajata kill the demons Sumbha and Nisumbha [61. KP]

Here the Goddess is depicted as a composite figure of religio-political power that the devotees, specially the kings, need to propitiate for victory against the enemies in war. Through offering sacrifice, a prince gets victory by conquering his enemies. [67.6, KP]

The *Kalika Purana* devotes a great deal of attention to the governing role of the king and to worldly politics. Many rituals are designed to ensure the prosperity of the kingdom and conquest of the enemies.

Thus the goddess is associated with war in the text.

### IX. KAMAKHYA- THE REGIONAL GODDESS OF KAMARUPA:

Goddess Kamakhya appears for the first time in the text while discussing the seven *Pithastanas* of the Goddess after the dismemberment of the Goddess's body by Vishnu, Brahma and Sanaiswara. Here the goddess is mentioned as form of the Goddess to be worshipped in Kamarupa or Kamagiri where the female reproductive organ of the Goddess lied [18.41-50; KP].

Again in the episode of Naraka the goddess is addressed as the presiding deity of Pragjyotisha, in the middle of Kamarupa. While establishing Naraka as the king of Kamarupa, Vishnu informs Naraka that the great goddess Yoganidra, having assumed the form of Kamakhya, always resides in this region. The *Kalika Purana* refers to Naraka as the king of the vast region up to the river Dikkaravasini recovered from the Kiratas, where the goddess, Kamakhya was the heroin.

Vishnu having plunged into Ganga within a moment arrived at pragjyotishpura situated in the midst of Kamarupa where Kamakhya is the presiding deity. [38.100;KP]

From the west of the seat of Lalitakanta upto the river Karatoya this is the region of Kamakhya. This is region where Naraka is the ruler. Therefore Vishnu instructs Naraka not to worship any other god or goddess except the great goddess Kamakhya, who is no other than Mahamaya herself.

O my son ; you shall not worship any other god or goddess except the great goddess Kamakhya, the mother of the world, who is none else than Mahamaya, Ambika. [38.149 KP]

Praising Kamarupa as the most sacred *pitha* where Hara and Parvati always reside and Hara is subordinate to her in the mountain called Nilacala.

In another episode Siva suggests Vetala and Bhairava that like Vishnu is superior to all gods, and Lakshmi excellent of all goddesses, the same way Mahamaya (in form of Kamakhya) in Kamarupa is recommended to be best of all. Kamarupa is praised as the most sacred land of the goddess.

The Goddess Kamakhya is rare everywhere, but in Kamarupa she is present in every household. [58.42 KP]

In this way Kamakhya is presented in the text as form of the Supreme Goddess to be worshipped in the region of Kamarupa. Thus she is the regional goddess of Kamarupa.

#### Companion goddesses:

In many episodes of the text it is mentioned that the goddess Kamakhya has her attendants. There is the mention of some goddesses which are to be worshipped along with the Great Goddess. The companions of the Goddess are divided into two categories: *yogini* and *nayika*. The worship of *yoginis* and *nayikas* are necessary for welfare and prosperity. [61.KP]

We find a description of the Yoginis in the *Kalika Purana*. Wherever the Goddess goes the Yoginis accompany her. Each Yogini is to be worshipped separately without which the worship of the Goddess will produce no fruit. Vidya Dehejia [1986] in her book on Yogini cult and temples opines that the portrayal of Yoginis as companions of the goddess in some religious texts belong to the phase during which the worship of the goddess, originally non-Brahmanical, had become so compelling that the orthodox Brahmanical tradition admitted the incorporating of the cult into its own system. It is comparable to the portrayal of the host of *ganas* as attendants of lord Siva in the literature. The *Kalika Purana* gives the names of Yoginis associated with various forms of the Goddess and enumerates them variously as eight, sixty four and millions. Goddess Durga has eight associates known as Saktis, called Ugracanda, Pracanda, Candogra, Candanayika, Canda, Candavati, Camunda and Candika. [] Likewise the Nayika is another group of female deities to be worshipped along with the goddess.

### X. CONCLUSION

From the above discussion it comes to light that the Goddess is portrayed in the text in various forms. At the tone of Puranic literature she is depicted as the spouse of the great Hindu triad- Brahma, Vishnu and Siva. Initially she is worshipped as spouse of Vishnu (Vishnumaya); later on more prominently as spouse of Siva in her various names- Sati, Parvati, Kali, Gauri, Kamakhya and so on. She is ambivalent by nature; in her benign

form she is the goddess of vegetation and fertility giving prosperity to the devotees while in terrible form she is bloodthirsty and war goddess destroying the evil. However, throughout the text she is the single divinity called Mahamaya in fundamental form and different goddesses are Her manifestations. She is superior to all male gods. She is accompanied by her associates –Yoginis and Nayikas.

The earliest text in Hinduism portraying the Goddess as the supreme divinity is found in the Devimahatmya section of the *Markandeya Purana*. David Kinsley [1978] suggests that different manifestations of the Goddess as mentioned in the text are the female version of Vishnu. There is the least doubt that the Goddess portrayed in the *Kalika Purana* has the close affinity with the Goddess in the *Devimahatmya* of the *Markandeya Purana*.

The female version of supreme divinity in the *Kalika Purana* can be understood as the result of cultural assimilation of the Aryan and non-Aryan. The text was composed in the early state of Kamarupa which conforms to major portion of the Brahmaputra valley. This region is the land of habitation for various non-Aryan tribes from a great antiquity. Even if we look at the modern day ritual practices of the north-eastern tribal population the prominence of mother goddess cult and blood sacrifices is noticeable. The primitive tribes were practitioner of agriculture and that is why they were the believer of fertility rites. As a symbol of fertility they worshipped the Earth Mother as female divinity. The Aryan-speaking people when came to the region got assimilated with non-Aryan tribal culture where the concept of Mother Goddess was predominant. The *Kalika Purana*, which was composed in early Kamarupa by the Sanskrit Aryans, was revelation of this acculturation process.

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IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS) is UGC approved Journal with Sl. No. 5070, Journal no. 49323.

Rashmi Rekha Bhuyan. "The Portrait of the Goddess in the Kalika Purana." IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS) , vol. 22, no. 10, 2017, pp. 78–83.