

Myths that Spread to Defame Goddess Kali; Archaeological Analysis of Origins of Mother-goddesses and its Ancient Puja Rituals in Bengal

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Abstract: The adverse political remark against Goddess Kali that stormed controversy, was just because of lack of proper knowledge of politicians. Goddess Kali still holds a very important role in the lives of people living in eastern India. The history of Goddess Kali is very old and it has its evidence since the time of Harappan civilization. To know more about Goddess Kali we have to look the chronology of the evolution of the residents of eastern part of the country, earlier known as Greater Banga, from the pre-historic age we could easily observed how the Tantra and Sankhya philosophy introduced the religion in the daily life among the local inhabitants. It should be remembered here that this religion or the acceptance of religious belief in daily life was prevalent at that time. But such religious belief or custom was more prevalent in Harappan Civilization than before. It has been proved that the ancestors of Greater Banga were the Harappans and so it has already been established archaeologically that Goddess Kali is the transformation of the Nature-mother-deity once worshipped by the Harappan people. The idols/sculptures of mother-deities recovered from archaeological excavations are said to be transformed into the present idol of Maa Kali. Here we are discussing the theory of Kali on the basis of archaeological evidence and proper historical validity in this writing. Mother Kali is the protector of the people living in this region, a very ancient belief that continues till the date that the Bengali community, whose sizable presence is available in the Eastern part of the country, has been defined by the name of Goddess Kali.

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INTRODUCTION

Recently there was storm of controversy in the country over the obscene comment of a member of parliament of a political party from West Bengal about Goddess Kali, the popular deity of the Bengali race. Nowadays, for creating a pseudo political debate has become very common where purposeless and provocative comments are used deliberately.

The comment by that Member of Parliament created storm but rather going to that controversy, we could discuss the theory of Kali on the basis of archaeological evidences and proper historical validity in this context.

To understand this theory of Kali, we need to go back a little in ancient history. Mother Kali is the protector of the Bengali community, a very ancient belief that continues till the date. Bengali community is defined by her name. She is Bangamata Bangeswari, the reason why it can

be said “KalikaBangeshcha”. Again, in Kali Yuga, without Kali there is no way so she is Yugeswari. “Kalau Kali Kalau Kali Nanyadebo in Kalau Yuge”. She is very much relevant even in the Kali Yuga.

It is not true that there is no concept of a single God in Hinduism. For example, monotheism has been characteristic among the followers of Bhagavata since ancient times in India.

There is also clear evidence in history that the schools of Vishnu Bhagavata and Shiva Bhagavata later took their structure from the mother-Goddess worshipping Tantric civilization that prevailed from the Harappan period, that very philosophy of Bhagavati worshipping, the *Adi Sankhya* (classical *Sankhya*) philosophy and the source of creation of *Tantra*. Monotheism occupies a prominent place in the history of Hinduism.

Therefore, Goddess Kali is eternal one for the residents of Bengal (better said the greater Banga). So the Bengali race is mother worshipers, no matter how many different forms the people worship their universal mother, all mother forms merge into Kali, just as all colours merge into black.

THE ANCIENT HISTORY OF BENGAL

No doubt, the Ganges valley settlement was followed by the Harappan civilization, and several nature-mother Goddesses with vermilion marks on their heads were discovered from Nasir at Baluchistan. The Red and black combination (the nature-mother Goddesses) had religious significance as randomly worshipped by the inhabitants of that great civilization. Red symbolizes Usha, a mother-Goddess worshipped by Harappan residents (*Rigveda* mentions how Indra, an ancient warrior god in Aryan’s camp, assaulted Usha and that indicated how the aggressions by the patriarchal Vedic Brahmanical society gradually destroyed the old civilization of this land). But the legacy of the ancient old civilization has been silently carried forward in terms of customs and rituals.

Women in Bengal particularly and other parts in the country generally use vermilion on their foreheads. Many of us think it symbolizes the marriage-related issue. It must have some link with the old civilization. Even today we can find many persons (males) who worship mother Goddess like Kali, also use vermilion on their foreheads.

We should also know the chronology of the evolution of Bengali community people from the pre-historic age. There are several instances like the archaeological evidence from the mound of king Pandu located at Bardhaman district of Bengal. The excavation reveals the origin of the ancestors, the copper age civilization, or the much older civilization. It’s a fine example of the Chalcolithic culture of this land, they might have been proto-Australoids or Vedoids.

Rivers Ajay and its tributaries meeting the Bhagirathi were navigable at that time. The excavation at that site has proved evidence for the gradual growth of a Chalcolithic culture and its displacement by iron-using people.

It is learnt that some residents inside the geographical territory of the greater Banga, mostly indigenous primitive tribes still continuing the practice of worshipping some mother-goddesses after sketching their figures. Those figures were always unique and peculiar, some mother-goddesses appeared with wings in that sketches. What was the mystery behind such peculiar figures?”

Actually they worship those ancient mother-goddesses once who were worshipped by the people of this region. And they were termed as Gangaridi, the residents of the Gang basin of that era. Such sculptors/ broken idols were found in many places including at the mound of Pandu Raja, Tamralipti (modern Tamluk), Pundra (north Bengal) and many other important places including Chandraketugarh.

Chandraketugarh is another archaeological site beside the river Bidyadhari in the district of North 24 Parganas in Bengal. This Chandraketugarh was most probably the capital of powerful providence, Gangaridi¹.

EVOLUTION OF NATURE-MOTHER WORSHIP BY THE NATIVES OF BENGAL

The idols/sculptures of mother-deities recovered from Gangaridi civilization and from the mound of king Pandu during archaeological excavations are the seeds of later Tantraism. It's not very difficult to find an outline of the evolution of worshiping of Nature motherhood-divinity by the Bengali race. In a comparative discussion of that idols (recovered from archaeological excavations), one could easily observe the silent characteristics: -

Sovereignty of Prakiti (Nature) or Adimatrika. Masculinity lies at her feet or in her lap as a child. This hint is clear. The existence of a supreme father or a supreme God was not imagined along with the original mother of Bengalis, i.e. the Nature mother-deity. That here the silent passive man described as in Sankhya, is exclusively the refuge of the mother-Goddess. Second, the most important aspect of Pakshimatrika(a Goddess with bird's face). The idols of Pakshimatrika were found at different sites like at the mound of king Pandu, Chandraketugarh, Bangarh and many other places which were earlier inside the geographical territory of greater Banga. In this idol, the face of the Goddess is that of a bird and the body is that of a human. Elevated nipples are a sign of motherly love and open vagina symbolizes the eternal motherhood of reproduction of this world. What is surprising is that in many places in the Tantras and even in the Puranas, we can have a valid reference to this Pakshimatrika. In Puranain the reference of marriage of Harparvati, we can find the presence of Goddess Kalika among Shiva's bridegrooms. Here description is mentioned as "Balaka(a flight of geese) in the blue sky". Among the fifteen Nityashakti of Kali, we can find the name of Asthimalini Devi Balaka. In Tantra and Yoga Shastra, AjapaHansais considered in a ritual. Perhaps this idea is inspired from the imagination of Pakshirupini Devi. The name of Baglamukhi, one of the Dasmahavidya, probably has the memory of that bird mother. Even seen in an eighteenth-century image of Kali puja in Kolkata, on the left side of Kali there was the idols of Saptomatrika. And among them, an idol identified with having bird's face.

Mahadeva referred to as Kokamukhaswamy². In other words Devi Parvati was known as Kokamukhi(face of wolf). Perhaps the ancient mother-deity of Bengal used to have mentioned some special animals and birds. The early Bengalis imagined the form of anatomy in the shape of some special plants and animals. So their words have been mentioned repeatedly. Perhaps among all these animal-faced or bird-faced Goddesses, Pakshimatrika was the most worshipped.

MILESTONES OF RISING OF GODDESS KALI

Maa Kali has a long history of rise. In the Zhob valley belonging to the Harappan civilization (5000-4000 years ago from today), ancient evidences of the worship of mother-Goddess was found. Usha-Nisha (the mother-deities) is probably the prototype of today's Durga-Kali. Nisha or Kali is Mokshadayini (who manages salvation).

The Balochistan region was probably first settled by the Bratya Aryan (outer Aryans), the ancestors of Bengali community before migrating to eastern India. Archaeological evidences of conch and vermilion have been found there(conch factories of copper age have been found at various places. Conch beads were made. Besides, vermilion –encrusted mother-deities idols have been found in Nowsaro region)³.

4000 years ago from today, Pandu king's mound was an urban civilization of worshiping motherly-divinity, contemporaneous with the late Harappan civilization. Residents there used to worship Pakshimatrika. That's why the 'AitareyaAranyaka' called the non-Vedic culture holders of this civilization of Bangabaghad as Bayanshi (those who speak in birds' languages)⁴.

The form of Pakhimatrikathat was worshiped on the mound of king Pandu is still worshiped by Bengali community in a slightly evolved form.

This is the original form of Balaka (a flight of geese) of mother Kali. Bagala, one of the Dasmahavidhya derives from this Balaka. Apart from this, Balaka is one of the coats of mother Goddesses Kali (*Nitya*). Even during old time Balaka Matrika was worshiped along with Goddesses Kali in Kolkata. Poet Kalidas repeatedly refers to Kali as Balaka.

Some 2300 years ago, Balaka Matrika was strongly worshiped at Chandraketugarh, the epicenter of Gangaridi civilization. Although *Dassayudha* (it is termed so because if you minutely observed the sculpture which named as *Dassayudha*, you would find she used ten separate weapons as hairclips on her chignon)⁵ was the first in terms of popularity, Pakshimatrika was also popular. Although, that *Pakshimatrika* having a look of bird's nest remained with quite changes right from Pandu king's mound.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCES

These two terracotta seals of Harappa civilization and Gangal civilization of Chandraketugarh. The gap between the two is at least more than two thousand years. But there are shapes of sacrifice of goats in front of the mother deities. According to ancient plaque found in Harappan civilization, goats were sacrificed in front of a tree-dwelling mother-deity. *Saptamatrika* were present to accept the sacrifice.

Animal sacrifice plays a unique role in the school of Shakta followers among all the other followers of different school of religious practices. It is very truth that animal sacrifice may have a special role to boost up matriarchy that exists in Bengal even today while it has disappeared in the rest of the world. Scary traits emerge through the ritual of animal sacrifice. *Dharma, Kama, Artha* and *Moksha- Chaturvarga* is manifested through animal sacrifice.

But after the rise of patriarchy, the impersonal and unselfish role of the male is universally praised, with the father sacrificing his son to a supreme father in all the world's major religions/ practice of religious rituals where patriarchal has a strong influence.

But in India, in the Harappan civilization in the pre-historic period and in the historical period especially in the eastern part of India where the identity of Bengali race is defined as a main worshiper of motherhood--divinity, animal sacrifice is essential to please the mother-Goddesses usually. Animal sacrifice has been condemned by many from Gautam Buddha to Rabindranath Tagore but it is the cornerstone of Shaktism in the subcontinent, which cannot be stopped.

In an alternative (those who are unable to sacrifice animals) the ritual of sacrifice can be done with fruits etc, but the ritual of the sacrifice has to be done. Even today the *Sandhipuja* during Durgapuja is impossible without sacrifice.

If we look the ancient archaeological evidences, we can find Tantraism prevailed in the places of worshiping motherly-deities at the main centers of the Harappan civilization. Sacrifice of buffalo was very common to appease the deities. The worship of *Mahishamardini* (we also called as Durga who kills a demon along with a buffalo) was common in Harappan civilization⁶.

In Mahabharata, Arjun's *Durgastava* (*shlokas* to appease Durga) the deity is eulogized as 'Mahishshapriya', meaning the one who loves the bloods of the buffalo. Even today buffalo sacrifice is done to complete the rituals of Sandhi puja at some Durga Puja conducted by the Bengalis.

At the time in the Harappan civilization men wore conch rings regardless of women, today only women wear conch rings, but matrilineal vermilion is still worn by men and women. Although vermilion has taken on a special meaning for married women. Priests of this mother-deity worshiper used to wear conch shells on their heads.

Usha was worshiped in Harappan civilization⁷ and Sharadiya Bodhan (Durga puja in the month of September/October) was arranged to worship Usha⁸. Hence the subcontinent has an ancient tradition of Sharadiya Durga Puja and Mahishamedha (sacrifice of buffalos).

At the end of the Chalcolithic era, there was no longer such a great matrilineal race like the Bengalis. It is possible to prove that Bengalis' matriarchy has survived where the matriarchy of the rest of the world has perished. And that is largely because of maintaining the animal sacrifice in puja rituals, a symbolic violence through which the mother-deities worshippers surrender to matriarchy and destroy the enemies of matriarchy. In this vein buffalo sacrifice should be considered as an ancient experience of the love of the Bengali race to its mother deity and also for the protection of the community.

FLOW OF TIMES HAS CHANGED FORM OF ANCIENT MOTHER-DEITIES & PUJA RITUALS

Now if we observe history, we can find the mother of the Gangal civilization will disappear. They will never return to Banga's history in its previous form. They will return to Pala Yuga, but as warrior mothers. Padmalaya will return as Manasa and Pakshimatrika (bird mother Goddesses) will return as Chamunda. And the mother of the most divine is the mother who will come back as a DashaBhuja (Goddesses with ten arms).

We can easily observe how changes introduced in the traditional customary worshiping of mother-deities in the land of Bengal. During Shashanka's reign, perhaps a festival of Shiva and Nilavati's marriage took place across Gaur and Radha, from where the tradition of Bengali New Year may have originated. Before Shashanka, in the *Jainaga-yuga* (Jainag was before Shashanka) in the sixth century (or a little earlier) Iswarkrishna's *Sankhyakarika* was written. Where *AdiSankhya* is being erased, subverted, perverted and by cutting *Prakriti's* (Nature's) predominance, *Purusha* (the soul that with *Prakriti* constitutes the primary cause of phenomenal existence according to *Sankhya* philosophy) is being set up at the centre⁹. Then that *Purusha* would have to be separated from Nature. It is called classical *Sankhya*. The classical *Sankhya* came before Buddha, Buddhist (Theravada), Jainism etc. religions are not created, all these non-Vedic religions are prepared by borrowing the structure of *Sankhya*. But this patriarchal revision of *AdiSankhya* (which is called Classical *Sankhya*) gained tremendous force with the collapse of the castle of *Matrika* worship (worshipping mother deity) with the Ganga civilization ending. *PrakritiMatrika* (Nature-mother deity) does not concert because she is *Adya* (first, first power, first to inhabit or first to be at the beginning of the Universe, unparalleled) and *Nitya* (something that is eternal and lasts forever), she is the source of creation. The first concert will be *Purusha* but then separated *Uchitti / Apavarga / Moksha* etc. We are saying that no man can be next to *Adimata*. Regardless of men and women, everyone is a child of Nature. We think of her as a mother only for the benefit of meditation, the Nature is inexpressible. That is why the poet will write much later, Kali is not only a woman but sometimes a man.

Adi Sankhya is found in the *Charaka Samhita*, where it is understood that *Prakriti* is the cause of the Universe. It is doubtful how auspicious the event of linking *Prakriti Matrika* with Shiva in Shashanka era was for Banga, the land of worshipers of the mother deity. In the Gangala civilization, however, a full-grown but miniature man is seen in the lap of Nature, which is suggestive, so the placement of men may have been pre-Shashanka. But from the primal Mother, male, female, inanimate, conscious, or unconscious, the entire world originates so it was wrong to associate a man with her. The union of man and woman is undoubtedly the form of creation, it is a very beautiful event. But *Adimata* is literally the source of creation, in today's terms the state before the Big Bang. So, she has no male partner, she created the world from within herself.

“AdiSankhya or Adi Tantra does not have space for such patriarchal nuisances. But the Gangaridi civilization has fallen, but *Purusha Dev* Shiva is still only placed under the feet of the mother. We have to remember that there is no other deity in the ancient land of greater Banga except the mother-deity. Even Vishwakarma or such others are fine; their work is in a specific niche. But when a monolithic male deity like Allah, Ram, Shiva or Vishnu comes in, the danger to the roots of Banga was evident, and finally resultant the decline of the Gangaridi civilization leads to a major damage to Banga’s roots. Roots were threatened, and the Banga was rooted out with the decline of the Gangaridi civilization. To return to the roots of *Matrika* worship today’s the ancient lands are reminded of Chandraketurgh Gangal civilization. If the natives of this ancient land are conscious of their roots, it is possible to defeat the aggression of all external enemies, including cow belt, Islam, and various attackers. But even more deadly than these are the enemies of Bengal’s in house like the female politician who commented adversely on Goddesses Kali, whose irresponsible activities can harm Bengal a lot.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. as mentioned by the ancient Greek and Roman writers
2. in Vaigram copper plate inscription
3. report of the Joint German-Pakistani Archaeological Mission at Kalat
4. Atul Sur surmised that the worshiper of *Pakhimatrika* was so called
5. Sculptures of so called Dassayudha recovered during archaeological excavations at many places inside Bengal including Chandraketurgh
6. as said by AskoParpola & Shirin Ratnagar.
7. D D Kosambi
8. Dr Sukumar Sen
9. According to one researcher Narendranath Bhattacharya.