



Sakti Shrines and Kapalika Practices in Orissa

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Saktism, the worship of Sakti or the female principle, which is the primordial factor in the creation of the Universe, occupies a unique position in the religious system of India, originated directly from the primitive Mother Goddess the Sakti Cult gradually crept into the mainstream of Indian religions and the indigenous folk-tribal faiths incorporating local godlings of aniconic and iconic forms, heterogenous elements, customs, rites, beliefs, worship patterns, interesting myths and legends etc. No other religion can claim to have continuous and colourful history right from the Indus Valley civilization with richest source of mythology, *tantras* and numerous manifestations as Saktism. From the Vedic period onwards Sakti represents different phenomena which are manifested in emancipations, each signifying particular aspects of nature.

The cult and the secret practices and philosophies were systematised by the sage Matsyendranath in his *Kaulajnananirnaya*. The parents were disgusted with their peculiar son, deformed and having bad habits. He was thrown into the sea, where a fish swallowed the boy. While in the belly of the fish he could listen to *Dhyanyoga* and *Jyanayoga* from Siva and Gauri. When Siva came to know of the fact he called him *Vipra* and named him as Matsyendranath. Having been blessed by Siva

and Gauri, Matsyendranath practised *yogini kaula* in the company of women. He expounded his *Mahat Kaula* in Kamarupa, where every woman was a *yogini* in the company of whom he discovered his new cult. Sakti is *Kula* and Siva is *Akula*, union of the two is *Kaula* and the process of establishing the relationship is *Kaula Marga*. This philosophy is reflected in the *yogini* temple. Siva in *yoga* pose is encircled by 64 *yoginis*. The images echo the reconciliation of the impassiveness of *yoga* with the lyricism of sex. Matsyendranath prescribes the evoking of the power of *Sakti* to attain *Pasostambhah*, *Nigrahanugraha*, *Yoginimelana*, *Marana*, *Vasikarana* etc. He applies eight *vidyas* to propitiate *yoginis*.

In order to practise such a hideous cult a Saivite sect known as Kapalika Sect acquired the occult knowledge. As regards the Kapalikas and their association with Yoginis and Chamunda we have some literary and archaeological evidence. *Lalitavistara*, a Buddhist text of early Christian era, describes *Kapalikas* besmearing their bodies with ashes, wearing red garments and carrying a triple staff (*tridanda*), a pot, a Skull, a *Khatvanga*. By the 6th/7th century A.D. the Kapalika Sect became prominent. Hieun-Tsang speaks of the *Kapaladharinis* in the following words, "the dress and ornaments worn by non-



believers are varied and mixed. Some wear peacock's feathers; some wear as ornaments, necklace made of skull bones have no clothing but go naked some wear leaf or dark garments, some pull out their hair and cut off their moustache; other have bushy whiskers and their hair braided on the top of their heads. The custom is not uniform, and the colour, whether red or white, not constant."

Harsacharita and *Kadambari* of Banabhatta mentions about the association of Savara tribe's magic and tantra which were amalgamated with the secret practices of the *Kapalikas*. The *Malatimadhava druma* of Bhababhuti describes that the pilgrimage site of Kurnool district of

Andhra Pradesh was the home of the *Kapalikas* and *Kalamukhas*. *Kapalikas* play two villain roles of the *Kapalikas* and their secret vows. *Brahmanda Purana*, *Vayu Purana* and *Matsya Puranas* narrate stories of *Kapalikas*.

The name of *Kapalikas* find mention with different sects on the two famous inscriptions of Sravanabelgola in Karnataka. Two inscriptions of the Chalukya King Nagavardhan (7th century A.D.) record the donation to the Kapaleswari temple and the *Kapalikas*. The copper plate grant of Tilakwarda near Baroda (1147 A.D.) refers to *Kapalikas*. The Vaital temple of Bhubaneswar (8th century A.D.) is a shrine of Kapali (eight

armed Chamunda). Remnant of a stone *Yupa* in front of the Vaital temple, the terrific tantric images alongwith Chamunda and the intensely dark cellar suggest the practice of animal and human sacrifice. The *Kapalikas* being the extreme cult must have been associated with the *Yogini* shrines. The penance of the *Kapalikas* is known as

Mahavrata, which prescribes the killing of a *Brahmana* as a part of Mahavrata for removal of sin. The *Matsya Purana* describes lucidly about the practice of *Mahavrata* through stories.

The doctrine of the *Kapalikas* is known as *Somasiddhanta*. Terrific Bhairava is their personal god. The basic principle of the *Kapalikas* is *Bhakti*

or imitatively aiming at the communion of the worshipper with the god. Through this process they attain superhuman magical powers. The *Kapalikas* are specialists in human sacrifice. The custom of human sacrifice was prevalent in ancient India, particularly associated with the tantric shrines, where the *Kapalikas* attained *siddhi* through occult practices of human sacrifice and *Panchamakara*.



Mahisamardini Durga, Parasuramesvara Temple, Bhubaneswar, circa 7th Century A.D.,

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