

**A Philosophical Exploration of the Goddess as Role Model for Women with  
Special Reference to The Great Goddess and Her Various Representations  
in the Text and Some of its Contexts**

**A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the  
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**Submitted by**

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*This is Dedicated to....*

*Maa & deuta,*

*And My guide Archana Barua Maam*



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## Declaration

I do hereby declare that the thesis entitled “**A Philosophical Exploration of the Goddess as Role Model for Women with Special Reference to The Great Goddess and Her Various Representations in the Text and Some of its Contexts**”, is a research work carried out by me in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati, under the supervision of Prof. Archana Barua, for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

No part of thesis has been submitted to any University or Research Institute for the award of any degree or diploma.

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## Certificate

This is to certify that Sunu Kalita has prepared the thesis entitled “**A Philosophical Exploration of the Goddess as Role Model for Women with Special Reference to The Great Goddess and Her Various Representations in the Text and Some of its Contexts**”, under my supervision for the award of the degree of Doctor of philosophy. The thesis is the result of her own investigations during the period she worked here as a Research Scholar in strict conformity with the rules laid down for the purpose.

The present thesis or any part thereof has not been submitted to any other University or Research Institute for award of any degree or diploma.

All assistance received by the researcher has been duly acknowledged.

*Archana Barua*

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Sunu Kalita

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## Table of Contents

<b>Contents</b>	<b>Page No.</b>
Dedication	I
Declaration	II
Certificate	III
Acknowledgement (i)	IV-V
Acknowledgement (ii)	VI
Table of Contents	VII-IX
Abstract	X-XI
<b>Chapter 1: General Introduction: Goddesses as role models</b>	
1.1. Introduction	1-2
1.2. We need some myths to live by?	2-3
1.3. A Possible Virtue Ethical framework	3-5
1.4. Life is as a cluster of Virtues and Vices: An Ethical way to choose one Role model	5-6
1.5. Goddesses as a role model in contemporary phase	6-9
1.6. Literature Review	9-17
1.7. Literature Gap and need for readdressing	17
1.8. Statement of problem	17-19
1.9. Research questions and Research Objectives	19-20
1.10. Research Methodology	20
1.11. Layout of the Chapters	20-23
<b>Chapter 2: Introducing goddesses as role models: A selective examination of some Sahadharmini ideals in goddesses</b>	
2.1. Introduction	24-25

<b>Contents</b>	<b>Page No.</b>
2.2. Woman in Vedic religion	25-30
2.3. Sahadharmini emphasised the complementary nature of man and women	30-33
2.4. Woman as Pativrata in consequent times though not as a dominant ideology in the Vedas	34-35
2.5. Complementary to one another as Ardhanaareeshwara	35-38
2.6. Goddess complementary to God	38-46
2.7. Contemporary notions have changed the concept of Sahadharmini	46-49
2.8. A brief outline of the chapter	49
 <b>Chapter 3: Women as Lakshmi and Sita: the most popular and perfect Sahadharmini role model for Hindu woman in particular</b>	
3.1. Introduction	50-51
3.2. Origin of Lakshmi the Goddess	51-52
3.3. Women uphold cultural practices as the symbol of Lakshmi	52-55
3.4. Significance of Lakshmi goddess related to the woman in modern time	55-56
3.5. Lakshmi as independent goddess Maha Lakshmi	56-59
3.6. Sita: As the most popular and perfect Sahadharmini	59-62
3.7. Sita's paradoxical portrayal as a woman	62
3.7.1. Scope for Revisiting the Text in Nuanced ways: Bhakti over Shakti	63-73
3.8. Chapter Summery	73-74
 <b>Chapter 4: Woman as Kali and Durga: Some dark and powerful Goddesses as a role models for women</b>	
4.1. Introduction	75-76
4.2. Kali expressed as a strong role model for feminists both east and west	76-78

<b>Contents</b>	<b>Page No.</b>
4.3. Paradoxical repossession of the Goddess Kali	78-79
4.4. Passage of Kali to Bhadra Kali	79-82
4.5. Kali as Kala or time	83
4.6. Influence of Kali as a role model for both folk and city cum urbanised life of Woman	84-87
4.7. Kali's appearance in rejuvenation	88-91
4.8. Kali as a role model to heal divisions in women's lives	91-94
4.9. A brief outline of the chapter	94
<b>Chapter 5: Can a marginal Goddess of desire remain a role model for aspiring women in our time? Kamakhya, The folk goddess of desire at Shaktipitha Kamakhya as a Role Model</b>	
5.1. Introduction	95-97
5.2. Kamakhya as folk, the regional and local identity with the woman	97-99
5.3. Re-christening Her as Great Goddess	100-103
5.4. Kamakhya as a tribal girl to Yoni Goddess as Shakti	104-107
5.5. The power of menstruation interconnected to Kamakhya	107-113
5.6. Some observations and some basic findings: Kamakhya as a synthesis of Aryan and non Aryan belief systems	113-118
<b>Chapter 6: Conclusion</b>	119-127
<b>Bibliography</b>	128-142

## Abstract

The present research work examines some of the various representations of women seen through the lenses of Vedic literature, mythology and even contemporary writings in the significant research area. This background literature has helped immensely to reflect the current scenario and the changing status of woman in the present period that covers up the modern sphere and the roles women have to play as per requirements and adoptability possibility. It attempts to make a systematic study of different role models that women are expected to play within social setups in Indian Hindu society. It addresses some such matters faced by different women who keep looking for role players in these chronological phases till some modern social up-gradation can be made harmoniously blending the tradition with modernity as well. Generally, Hindu scriptures and mythology are full of Gods and Goddesses who are believed to be in high esteem to be suitable for some desired Role Models. Such divine Role models usually refer to mythological figures from which source others can who acquire divine virtues, and imbibing some such virtues in them, an ordinary individual in life can be socially accepted also as Goddess-like. One thus tries to establish a connection between the Divine and the human in a very natural way. Thus, it is expected that every one of us can transform our lifestyle. These possible role variations need to be awakened so that our inner qualities will be brought into action by adopting the attributes of the role models.

When a traditional Goddess is sought to be looked at as role models, modern girls face various challenges. Within this changing nature of society which is the age of globalisation and technolisation, when a human being is valued more as a resource than as sacred, a woman's motherhood, instead of being her glory and pride, may make her permanently dependent on others, economically, politically, socially, and culturally. Similar positions are also seen with revered Goddesses as well. She is adored for her motherly role, no doubt, but the Mother Goddess herself underwent various transformational phases till she re-claimed her lost power as the Great Goddess with more focus on her warrior traits and *shakti* and her heroism. The Goddess now turns darker, independent and exhibits much that have a strong resemblance with strong feminist traits in some manner. While Goddess as a woman still provided the impetus for many to be reconnected with one's forgotten root and one's source, the womb, in that with larger prakriti, nature, life and all others in an intimate manner of participation, but with time

the goddess remained more a strong ferocious source of strength that is frequently needed in time of war and crisis and no wonder that such image of the Goddess came to be adaptable to a larger masculinity oriented mind-set than the feminine, nurturing and caring ones.

The broad objective of the thesis is to throw the focus more on if one's possible role models even though the source remains traditionally worshipped Goddesses also seen as Mother Goddess, interestingly, certain other marginal goddesses remained desirable in various ways not only as ideal mothers but also as eroticised yoni or a menstruating goddess who bleeds. Will some such images affect modern-day feminist-minded strong personalities who remain critical of traditional role models and who want to glorify that which society often puts in a stigma as impure menstruating goddess cum woman who will not be otherwise ideal role models for many others. This Thesis seeks to read out various modalities that these goddess images may keep for various kinds of devotees and for various actual girls and woman in our time who may look for an alternate role model for them in difficult times.

Accordingly, the Thesis keeps room for various role models, from a feminist menstruating goddess or a darker warrior one such as Durga and Kali; a chaste wife models such as Sita or Lakshmi who remained submissive to their male counterparts; the means of emancipation the bleeding and the desiring goddess Kamakhya, for example, can really bestow on her weaker and vulnerable women who look forward to the independent and strong goddess as their role models.

# Chapter 1

## General Introduction: Goddesses as role models

### 1.1. Introduction

As Role Models, the Hindu religious and mythological characters are endowed with life enhancing virtues. Admiring these virtues in everyday life, people get inspired and even try to involve there as a vital attribute that can be imbibed in them. There are significant influences of these intrinsic values as there are regarded as worthy of emulation and fit to imbibed as be in them as role models. Generally, Hindu scriptures and mythology are ample of Gods and Goddesses, who are believed to be honoured as epitomes of virtues. Hindu mythology and religious scriptures reveal religious figures appearance as in human forms and provided examples of ideal human behaviour, which leads the way to identify themselves with those tamed characters easily. Thus the Divine becomes a living presence in the Hindus lives and then evolves a strategy for an ordinary individual who tries to establish a connection between the Divine and oneself. It is expected that every one of us can transform our lifestyle following possible role variations. Adopting the role models attributes will help one awakening the inner qualities and can be transformed into action. Herein unlike in a world where 'God is dead', gods still remain a living force to guide one's ways. In a tradition where culture is usually intermixed with religion, dominating religious tradition often provides a platform for silent dialogue in any crisis circumstances between oneself and some other superior or better personalities, be it human or divine. That is how goddesses as role models may provide moral or spiritual support to carry on life despite its difficulties.

Goddesses as role models draw inspirations from Hinduism as a religion, a culture that has tremendous influence in shaping Hindu women's mind-set at large; it depends on which particular role model is suitable or desirable as per contextual variation of a specific class, caste section of the people. The society also offers the potential for a more powerful and liberating set of role models for contemporary women, suitable the temperament either a submissive or a traditional one as a role model, or a different that, in an attempt at exploring how Hindu Goddesses and mythological characters have influenced ordinary life and continued serving as epic role models in matters of authority and power, the work begins with the submission that in our society, usually women in upper-caste mostly, have long been compared to goddesses.

It is justified that when one becomes vulnerable, then can take solace or support in an enormous persona, taking strong goddesses such as Durga, Kali as role models situation wise or Sita, Lakshmi in other circumstances depending on one's life situations. Having goddesses as role models will inspire life with some hopes or ideals disputes at times.

The thesis explores the formation of some strong, powerful goddess images as Kali, Shakti, Durga that glorifies more the masculine image of women and the goddesses like Sita, Lakshmi which celebrates femininity and household image of women. An analysis of the socio-cultural factors has contributed to the goddesses images in different ways. All these observations will keep room for fluctuating from the masculine model to the feminine role model, according to which the goddesses are portrayed in the modern period. The goddess image plays a role for modern women when they try to recreate them with the time, so in this background, it will be entirely to see if there is any difference between the goddesses images formed at some folk level, particularly the folk goddess of North East India Kamakhya Goddess, is interesting as She keeps room for exploring, the story of Her origin and development. That way, to explore and analyse philosophical dimensions of some of the mythical and religious views of ours centred on the question: 'Can the Hindu Goddess be a role model for a woman?'

## **1.2. We need some myths to live by?**

Some philosophical clarification is needed as the question remains, do we need some myths to live by? Or can we just live in and perform entirely in a secular way without any myths? Can we remain entirely myth free? If not, we may want to see in what sense life will be better or worse if one lives with some role models to look forward to? Now, if the question comes, what is the harm if a woman wants to live life the way she prefers to, without bringing to her life any possible role model connection, that too of a possible goddess role model connection?

In this context, what is more relevant is Jean-Paul Sartre's ethical guideline with his distinction between two kinds of existence. One that is qualitatively inferior 'Dehumanized' that is 'thing-like'(*en-sui*). And the other which superior, 'Human-like' because it is free and future-oriented (*pour-soi*). Citing an example from the restaurant waiter Charlee, who is professional in a restaurant, where Sartre regularly visits as an exceptional philosopher in

search of his own space and authenticity, not away from the crowd but in the crowd. So he selected a very crowded place like a restaurant, sitting in a corner as an anonymous and unknown someone when he watches others and also ponders upon his own more profound philosophical questions (who I am). And he found that man is by birth free and though the situation makes him a slave of circumstances. To remain human is to keep exploring possible ideal role models with which one can identify. So that one can overcome the meaningless phase of robotic existence. Sartre was pained to see that many of us have lost the power to see different from what they are now in this context and thereby completely identified them with the present predicament. Charlee, the waiter, remains a waiter, so long he is duty-bound to serve others as a waiter. But he can play many other roles besides this provided he remains a dream, but Charlee lost his imagination to dream and so is reduced completely to a thing like en-soi position.

That way, the thesis eludes complete identification of a goddess position for women. There will be a gap between the goddess who is always perfect and the ordinary woman who is never perfect. An ordinary and average girl born in a Hindu family remains a struggling human in life. She needs some power and strength to move ahead on her way to become goddess-like to some extent, but not wholly the never suffering and all-powerful Goddess as such. So here we can cite lines from Rabindra Nath Tagore's poem from his play Chringada- "I am Chitra. No goddess, to be worshipped, nor yet the object of common pity to be brushed aside like a moth with indifference. If you deign to keep me by your side in the path of danger and daring, if you allow me to share the great duties of your life, then you will know my true self" (Rabindra Nath Tagore, 1926, pp 66).

### **1.3. A Possible Virtue Ethical framework**

This now leads to a moral dilemma as to which particular role model be the chosen one if one has to. Now, if we bring the Aristotelian concept of Virtue Ethics, as to what can be a possible moral guideline for action to be right or virtuous, Aristotle shows us the middle path between two extremes. One can be an ethical person by being a virtuous person and by selecting options that will be humanly possible for his or her. According to Aristotle people will identify themselves with different role models as per one's taste, temperament and capability. As We all are socio dutiful clusters of virtues or vices of one kind of the other, we need to choose role

model who can match with our temperament and our life objective. There is a cluster of virtues in store, the way we may have a right virtue model for a good wife, also womanly virtues for intellectual learners and others etc. Hinduism is referred to as a way of life so often because it is an eternal way of life, which mostly consists of duty concepts. Duty means Dharma, which leads to the teachings of Hinduism basically. In this context, the women who seek ethical guideline is a Hindu woman of modern time, who is by being a part of a Hindu cultural tradition and is already surrounded by a religious world view. That makes her depend on choosing a future that will be socially, culturally and religiously a balanced one. This means, as Aristotle says, she can choose a middle path between two extremes, but she must choose some role models. On the one extreme, one can be a goddess-like completely, which she cannot become with her human limitations. She cannot be a goddess-like perfect as in real life; she will be subordinate to so many external conditions. On the other, the other extreme is to completely lead a life that does not keep any role model before it, either goddess centric or anything else. Because to live such a life will be like a robotic, de-humanized life that does not have any definite role model with which to identify oneself.

This further clarifies the Thesis position that an ordinary and an average girl may not be actually benefitted in life if the Great Goddess as Shakti infinity and as a source of all power remains her inspiration in life, more than that, she will look forward to a Goddess who is forgiving and compassionate, who is a mother like and at times friend like but with whom she can open for dialogue as she herself remains vulnerable in life that needs affection and forgiveness more than anything else. This shows that when in the Text the Goddess is shown as the one great goddess, often identified with Power or Shakti, the actively engaged interaction continues between average woman and their countless familiar numbers of gods and goddesses, may it be regional, village goddess or a folk one.

However, while philosophical language uses the language of prayer and worship, then only a personal contact is made between the two, the Divine as the role model and the profane sharing an intimate bond in worship in intimate. It keeps focusing on the development of the concepts that keep room for providing highly philosophical and abstract conceptions on the one hand and deeply personal and religious attachment with this role model on the other hand. This is well illustrated, and the life of the great Advaita philosophers Sankaracharya, who developed the highest concept of Nirguna Brahmana, also composed very personally

devotional, hymns to the goddesses. And this work leads to contribute the general knowledge and understanding of Hindu religious practices and forms of worship.

#### **1.4. Life is as a cluster of Virtues and Vices: An Ethical way to choose ones Role model**

We ourselves are a cluster of virtues and vices, which are our aptitudes, interests and others. Accordingly, we may be nurtured in a tradition that has specific guidelines for being a good wife, and so on, being a good warrior or others. We need to choose virtues that are required according to what we look forward to in life. A woman, when she plays many dutiful roles as social person, certain family centric values remains deciding factors in choosing a particular role model and in these roles she is never singular, rather, always in some relation. Let us begin with the supposition that she will always in some relation. Generally, our activities have reference to gods and goddesses, as a learner one has the art of handwork with and so we have dedication goddesses Saraswati for example.

Having given these options of various goddesses kinds as her possible role models, it is found that there is some distinct nature of some such role models. If we find goddesses like Saraswati, who is single and she is a goddess of learning and knowledge unlike goddess Saraswati, Lakshmi will always be accompanied by Narayana as she representing prosperity, wealth and material bliss. Similarly, women as fertile and productive are also with Lakshmi and images like the Ganga, where especially in The Mahabharata become associated with free women and not to be controlled by husbands or society. When unwanted children were returned to mother Ganga's womb which the Mahabharata shows and accordingly modern women will find various role models to particularly follow. Again there will be darker and stronger role models as Kali, Durga, Parvati as per the situations demands. This kind of role model may inspire some modern women who often engaged in philosophical feminist debates or issues such as women right to abortion, rejection of marriage as an institution, mother the sole authority in decision making of her biological child etc. So is different virtue for different goddesses. However, along with changes in time and the socio-cultural conditions the original meaning of certain terms such as Sahadharmini idea that provides sanctity to institutions like family and marriage keep room for further flexibility in widening its scope and meaning as per situation. Although along with changes in time and the socio-cultural conditions the original

meaning of certain terms such as Sahadharmini idea that provides sanctity to institutions like family and marriage will change at a later time, sometimes certain virtues may have greater roles to perform in a particular context that a flexible and symbolic interpretation of certain terms may be possible. For example, one possible goal for any Indian women and also for Hindu women is to follow the Hindu way of life and for daughters and son marriage at appropriate age is one such responsibility. So, we may say that goddess role model will be like looking for an epitome of virtue that one seeks to imbibe in life. Can goddess provide some possible role models for choosing patterns of virtues as desirable or not? In other words, to choose a particular role model it will be like identify among the cluster of virtues which one is suitable with the goddess as Lakshmi or Sita, who particularly represents comes wifely or motherly virtues and Sahadharmini role models.

### **1.5. Goddesses as a role model in contemporary phase**

Here the goddess role model comes because being born in Hindu religious society any modern woman cannot completely dissociate herself from what is given to her as her heredity or her cultural background with which she is surrounded mostly. If we even then ask the question, why goddesses as role models? Then the only possible response will be that because as a part of our tradition a girl born in a Hindu family usually inherits certain samskaaras from her tradition as she is already reminded by others or told by others that no matter what she becomes, she should also be Durga like, Lakshmi like, Sita like or Draupadi likes. So for her probably she has to identify which role model will be more suitable for her, and as per as per Aristotelian Virtue ethics norms, that will be suitable to her temperament, sensibility, and capability. That is how one of the prime objectives of the thesis is can goddess be possible role models for modern women and in what sense?

At our modern and postmodern scenario when there is legal provision for safeguarding girls and women's right to the extent that sex change, single mother identity etc. are now legally approved. In such a time, suppose the actual girl in a situation still want to follow a goddess who remained Sahadharmini or a goddess who remained independent male like courageous and heroic., she may wonder why goddess and which goddess should be her role model. Within this changing nature of patriarchy, her motherhood, instead of being her glory and pride, made her permanently dependent on others economically, politically, socially, and culturally. Rather, her sole identity now would depend on her functional part, her ability to reproduce a male child.

She is adored for her motherly role, no doubt, but the Mother Goddess herself transformed various phases till she re-claimed her lost power as the Great Goddess with more focus on her warrior traits and shakti and her heroism. Here it is seen as the scope for goddesses even to change their nature and roles if the situation demands and looking for a goddess role model and an actual woman may feel empowered to take a bold decision in her life that is to marry and respect the institution such as family in a traditional sense or remain a single mother if she still wants to be a mother but not tied to any authority or control of any male member in her life. As Modern women's problems and experiences in life may be different and more challenging, according to the situations, the role models will turn different. So we cannot take only one model; thus, we have to re-define that.

To conclude, Chitrangada is a true symbol of modern woman, wearing male's attire, horse riding and hunting, ruling powerfully, proposing to her hero and not getting upset even though rejected her proposal, being stubborn on her demand (for Arjuna), romanticism and desiring for working with man are the real qualities of modern woman. She seems to have defied all the traditional roles assigned to her by the orthodox society. Tagore has deliberately depicted such a character of Chitra so as to uphold values of women's liberty and man woman equality. His attempt is just to indicate that the women in the Vedic India were quite free...!". (Vijay P. Shirsath, 2019)

In the present-day context, the most significant question remains regarding the paradox in Indian Hindu women-those people of Devi worshippers worship their women or are it just religious imagery that often rejects the real picture. Still admiring its earlier liberal position scholars are not tired of recording the fact that cite ancient Indian tradition as a reason to discriminate against women. For, the incontrovertible truth is that Hinduism must be one of the very few religions in the world that both in philosophy and mythology accord a status of absolute equality to women and philosophy, the highly evolved Shakta tradition equates Shiva with Parvati, in her form as Shakti.

In India, where spirituality is a major part of many people's lives, women are using their religion as a guide for empowerment. In the religious history of India, where religion and culture have been inseparable, the cult of *Shakti* had been at the forefront of mother worship. Before Puranic Brahmanism reached eastern India, it was already under the pervasive influence

of Tantra, where goddesses occupied the most important role. The historical circumstances and values in India have added distinctive Indian way of addressing women's issues in a manner that might differ from the feminist rhetoric. Among the academic circles, under influence of feminist and gender studies, there is a tendency to misrepresentation of genders, with the male often reduced to the oppressive heinous patriarch and the female reduced to being the oppressed victim of patriarchy. Any alternate lens is struck down as being in denial of, or an apology for, patriarchy. Indeed, all traditional discourse is being seen as a vast conspiracy theory (hermeneutics of suspicion) designed to establish patriarchy and keep women in their place. Reading mythology with this lens may have its use, but it strips culture of all meaning other than gender oppression and that is difficult. One of the prime objectives of this research is to bring out

Ancient Indian literature exhibits a uniform spirit of reverence for womanhood and Vedic religion doesn't deny any right to women, not in the least the religious. True that there have been ups and down in the position of Hindu women, but they have never been shorn of their inherent goodness and greatness on account of oppression or excessive depression. With the changes of time and period the position and possessions of women appears to vary, so to analyse that we must have a thorough grasp of the position of women in ancient and modern India. In the Indian Hindu context, the idea of women as 'powerful' is accommodated into patriarchal culture through religion. Not only that religion provided scope for glorifying and celebrating the image of a powerful mother goddess, but also patriarchy is seen as one of the hierarchies within which woman is valued in terms of the relations and basically in terms of man although it is not ruled out that an alternate arrangement could be made in a different situation.

Goddesses are specific and some of them made women strong. The view that women can be goddess-like if she takes care of the household in a good way and she can become like a goddess incarnation. Women feel that the goddesses give them strength. Some women see goddesses as a role model but the main question whether to improve women's situation, Hindu goddesses can be of real help or not? And the answer is both yes or no. Women are known as a mother but many goddesses represent as a symbol who can destroy as well as creates and also takes as well as gives life. Goddesses play a significant role model, and in ordinary languages, Devi is worshipped in the east and west. This can be defined as the ultimate source of

motivational power for the women power. It is referred that some goddesses mistress of the universe as not all equated with other goddesses. Goddesses embody the quality of the different stages in a woman's life such as related to purity, maternity and wisdom. Sometimes goddesses have been imaged as religious figures who preside over love and war, or who are paradoxical, or who have dangerous character. They are also worshipped as holy-mother and also been depicted as slaying demons in the battlefield. These different depictions confirm goddesses as the union of various concepts. Thus, goddesses resemble power, freedom, and equality for many women society.

### **1.6. Literature Review**

Remarking on the position of women in Vedic age, D.N. Mitter (1931) writes, "Women held an honoured position in the Vedic age and were quite competent to take part in every aspect of the social, intellectual and spiritual life of the race".

Although the term "feminism" is a Western import, the concept of "debate" on women is an old one and has its origin rooted in the soil of Asia. "Women enjoyed far greater freedom in the Vedic period than in later India. She had more to say in the choice of her mate than the forms of marriage might suggest. She appeared freely at feasts and dances, and joined with men in religious sacrifice. She could study, and like Gargi engage in philosophical disputation. If she was left a widow, there was no restrictions upon her remarriage." (Will Durrant, 1935).

According to Altekar (1938, p. 1), "one of the best ways to understand the spirit of a civilization and to appreciate its excellences and realise its limitations is to study the history of the position and status of women in it." In his book "The position of women in Hindu civilization" During Vedic period, she was mostly engaged in military or semi -military activities for the security to the country. As a result, their dependence on women folk increased for the latter took on active and equal part in the agricultural activities and manufacture of war material like bows and arrows. Vedic literature refers to female workers who specialized in dying, embroidery and basket making etc. They not only faced the onslaught of invading army but served as efficient bodyguards to the sovereigns of renowned dynasties".

According to Prof. Jasbir Jain, the most important theme before Indian feminist theorists is “culture” which is crucial to the understanding as well as realization of feminist principles in the Indian context. So our basic question is: “what do ‘feminist paradigms’ mean in India?” (Archana Barua, 2012).

In the Vedic period, women were placed on a high pedestal. Manu, who set the code of conduct for Indian society, said, “*Yatranāryastupūjyante, ramatetatradevatā,*” meaning where woman is worshipped, there resides god. Divine souls take birth in such houses, where the women are respected. Where they are not respected, all works become useless there” (Manusmriti, 3/56).

In early Vedic family affairs, women who enjoyed both their autonomy and their role as wives were considered to be *ardhangini* (better half) and *sahadharmini* (equal partner). Marriage was never forcibly imposed on women in Rig Vedic society. The R̥g-Vedā-Samhitā has often referred to spinsters as “*Amajuh*, one who grows old in (one’s parents’) house” (Altekar 1938, p. 38). Whereas the religious life (*dharma*) of a man was usually described in terms of his class (*varṇa*; i.e., according to his membership of the priestly, ruling, mercantile, or servant class) and stage in life (*āśrama*; i.e., according to whether he was a religious student, a married householder, a hermit, or a renunciate), that of a woman focused solely on the cultural expectations of the good wife (*strīdharma*). Thus the narrative and prescriptive literature is full of glorifications of the ideal wife often startlingly juxtaposed with dire pronouncements regarding the inherently wicked nature of women (*strīsvabhāva*). In the *Rāmāyaṇa*, for example, male figures include Rāma (exemplar of the ruling class) and Hanumān (exemplar of the devoted servant). Conversely, for women, Sītā represents the perfect wife, and Kaikeyī stands for the inherent wickedness of women. Although many goddesses are depicted as consorts rather than as independent deities, there is the widespread notion that divine power is feminine (*śakti*, meaning “power,” is a feminine noun). According to this view, without *śakti*, the gods are powerless, and the ultimate power of the universe is that of Devī, the Great Goddess.

The Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South Asia (1991), Edited by Paula Richman, gathers analyses with new angles and focal points and considers the textual paradigm of fluid adaptability. Richman wisely utilizes Ramanujan's probing view of the Ramayana as a richly dynamic multivoiced entity to orchestrate this exercise in relativity and to sort out how various

telling and interpretations arise and function. Even for those who despise it, the Ramayana is a second language; it is a communication resource to affirm, deny, or re-shape existing order.

A woman remains to be seen in new ways and as capable of playing alternate role models as the situation demands. Accordingly, we find shifts are made in patriarchy or within matriarchy looking for suitable role models for woman that remains an act of rediscovering a suitable Goddess as the ideal for the actual woman whose changing roles need to be re focused accordingly in the post-colonial context of Independent India, its burgeoning middle class and its increasingly cosmopolitan urban centres, faced the challenges of proceeding to an ambivalent younger audience that the gender models of epic lore are still relevance to the modern world (Dhand, 2008).

Kathleen Erndl in 'Is sakti empowering for Women?' Looks at some ways in which sakti has been empowering for Hindu women and has been consciously embraced in contemporary Indian women's movements. "Western feminist looks for "a new means of empowerment and feminine role models that break the mould" (Erndl,2000). Rajalaxmi Sundararajan wonders if such a pious aspiration does really happen that actual socio-cultural-biological along with transcendental dimensions of one's being in the worlds can all be taken care of as soon as to some alternate possible bonding between humanity and divinity can be looked forward to?

William L. Smith's scholarly article, "The Wrath of Sita: Sankaradeva's Uttarakanda" (2004), interprets how from the perspective of the Bhakti tradition a much more woman oriented and gender sensitive portrayal of Sita could be projected even within the Sant tradion as in Sankaradeva's Eka Sarna Naam Dharma perspective. Sankaradeva takes liberty to portray a strong and angry Sita who is not so silent as in Valmiki's. She utters these words: "In my mind Rama seems like the god of death. Had I known that he was so heartless, I certainly would have ended my life in Lanka." Her response leaves Hanuman and His companions speechless. They make no further attempts to persuade her; instead Hanuman goes to Valmiki and tells him that Sita will not listen to them. Valmiki in his turn asks Sita to forgive all Rama's earlier offense (purbba yata dosa), and Sita merely weeps in response.

The book Hindu Goddesses Beliefs and Practices (2009) by Lynn Foulston and Stuart Abbott give in-depth explanations of the three main elements associated with the Devi: Shakti,

Maya, and prakrti. Shakti is defined as, "power, ability, and strength". Tantrics regarded women as Shakti. Man uses Shakti and he became too the owner of Shakti. In Tantric school the whole way of interpreting women will change as seen as power centre may be spiritual or intellectual. Later we will find this power will be a more specialized sense, some parts will be more power centres than others. The focus on the divine creative feminine force is important as it is known by Hindus as Shakti. We have to believe this knowledge is important because it demonstrates how women can maintain positions of power without upsetting an established patriarchal tradition. Understanding power structures and roles that people play within their society is central to a holistic understanding of a society and its culture. Here is to trace the history of the concepts and to see the patterns of the changes incorporated in this. In Vedic religion, women were seeming to glorify the status of goddesses as power centres from whom even man emerged stronger and derived strength. In actual society, women were regarded as dutiful wife where Hindu women's position and role in society has been topic to frequent change.

Nina Paley created the unapologetically quirky, irreverent, and unconventionally animated film *Sita Sings the Blues* (2008). After her own divorce from her husband, She saw in the tale of Ramayana, which the film juxtaposes with the story of Nina's own divorce, "*the greatest break-up story ever told.*" The film tells the tragic story of Sita, who was first kidnapped by Ravana and then cast away (twice) by her husband Rama on suspicions of infidelity. Sita's story is peppered with the wildly anachronistic jazz songs of 1920s singer Annette Hanshaw. An impossibly curvy Sita thus sings of her woes to the upbeat tempo of Hanshaw's numbers, like when she sultrily croons "*My Man Don't Love Me No More*" when Rama abandons her. Paley's Sita reacts to her tragedy with trills instead of tears, abandoning a woe-is-me approach in favour of waist-shaking foot-tapping jazz numbers, which are, let's face it, way more fun.

In the Indian context, men often took the initiative to address women's questions in a more sympathetic manner, which provided much impetus to subsequent feminist movements. Feminist issues were also included in the national agenda some of which are sought to be politically and constitutionally resolved at a later time. In India, feminism and nationalism were closely interlinked. To quote Partha Chatterjee: "Pre-colonial social structures and women's role in them reveal that feminism was theorized differently in India than in the West.

Colonialization of “Indian culture” and reconstruction of Indian womanhood as the epitome of that culture through social reform movements resulted in political theorization in the form of nationalism rather than as feminism alone” (Shakuntala Rao,1999).

To speak of the goddess is misleading as the Hindu pantheons include several female deities who are continuously divided into two main categories, which benign goddesses and fierce goddesses respectively, which are characterized by a set of features such as their character, appearances, mobility, kinship, residence, worshipper, priest, etc. (Stephanie Lama, 2001). This also justifies why work incorporates images of strong and powerful Goddesses such as Kali not only among upper caste and well of Hindu society but the changing scenario that leads to a tribal, a regional and a local cultural folk girl and a folk goddess can attain so much freedom and independence that she remains Kali like but in her regional way. The goddess Kamakhya is depicted that way that there is no suggestion in this of her subordination whatever way as she rose above all such man imposed limitations.

Generally fierce Hindu goddesses such as Kali, Durga have not been considered as suitable role models for women. As some unjustly treated and righteously angry women drew strength from this purity gained victory over male intimidation and violence and thus brought healing to their communities. Moreover, many mythical tales record how normal women were transformed into goddesses and this transformation and demonstrating the ultimate victory of women’s strength like Draupadi and Sita (Allyen,2002, pp 8).

Goddesses myth recount how women suffer ill-treatment by men were then elevated to divine status and could be regarded as role models for their contemporary sisters. The texts can enable women to identify with the women protagonist and thus be freed to tell their stories to be assured that they are not alone and silence disempowered. For women to share their stories structural violence of male or any social dominant with the tradition to mythology to suggest that Draupadi, Durga, Kali, and other strong autonomous goddesses should consciously be appropriated as role models by women as such independent, self-assertive women have been regarded as threatening and potentially dangerous to the order of society. These goddesses offer an image of womanhood freed from the demands and constraints of wife and mother, thus allowing women to explore roles not defined and controlled by men (ibid, pp 9-15).

Goddesses' religion of Hindu society offers the potential for a more powerful and liberating set of role models for contemporary women. Androcentric thinking has also

perpetuated the fear of undertrained, untamed female sexuality. It has promoted ambivalent attitudes towards women as well as desiring women and their powerful Shakti. Ideally in a patriarchal society, women should be married and under the control of their husbands, so that what is perceived as their powerful and potentially dangerous sexuality can be expressed in safely controlled ways. In Hinduism courting or channelizing sexual energy constitutes the kind of austerity that generates great spiritual heart, power which can be used positively or negatively. To allow women as autonomous beings to express their sexuality as they choose, to explore and discover the fullness of their female nature, truly unleashes the potential of women's Shakti, their physical and spiritual powers. The tales of human women who were defined, these becoming goddesses, represent the personified wrath of all women of all cultures. They illustrate the potency of women's power which can be tapped into by all women who wish to triumph over the circumstances of their lives. And those images could be powerful inspirational and healing changing women to take courage from the example of the female divinities and defined women and to regard themselves as survivors rather than victims of the sexism and violence of male-dominated religion and culture (ibid, pp16-17). Rajalakshmi further questions the paradigm shift from man-god to woman as goddess and a powerful goddess as Kali or Durga whether this kind of shift will empower a real woman in actual society.

Regarding dominance, sometimes male seems more dominant, sometimes the female and sometimes genuine mutuality is portrayed. Hindu goddesses do not bear out many stereotypes about goddesses. They are never portrayed as child bearer, nor are they merely wives or adjuncts of the male deities, though sometimes they primarily bear that identity. The fact that Hindu goddesses don't bear out these stereotypes is more easily demonstrated using this dyadic model than using 'Vishnu, Shiva, Devi's model. Though Lakshmi is Vishnu's wife and is often portrayed as a submissive deity in her own right, and some are often portrayed without her consort. Sita is almost the paragon of The Total Woman who lives through her husband. But Kali dances upon Shiva's prone body to his delight in iconography though not always in texts. And Durga and Saraswati function almost independently of males (ibid, 326). The power of the role models as goddesses in changing beliefs, behaviour, and outcome for women in the present day.

Although Hinduism offers the greatest living resource for the veneration of the Goddess, there is an obvious discrepancy between the respect paid to these divine images and

the daily realities of the lives of Hindu women. The powerful female figures, especially Draupadi, Mother Goddess and patron of fire walking, offer women empowering role models encouraging them to challenge patriarchal structures and injustice perpetrated against women. Recovering knowledge of some of the mythical characters and goddesses could provide women and the possibility to bring about social transformation (Allyn, Disel, 2002). The practices of using goddesses as role models hold a central place in Hinduism where the divide between Divine and human has always been very thin so that deities frequently become incarnated as humans and exceptional humans are elevated to divine status (ibid, pp8).

One common observation is made that women's situation depending on class and situation most common one was that it looks different depending on class or depending on if a woman lives in a city or the countryside. Susan S. Wadley asserts that in the Hindu tradition 'The female is first of all Shakti, the emerging principle of the universe. The female is also Prakriti, the undifferentiated Matter of the universe. Wadley touches upon the link between Shakti or Prakriti and female gender in mythic-religious and philosophical contexts, but her main concern is how the association of these principles with femaleness is reflected on the social level in the expectation established for the behaviour of women' (Tracy, Pitchman, 1994, pp 4). It would be fruitful to turn from textual analysis to cultural analysis and to explore some of the possible implications of the theology of the goddess and based on this can lead the status of women in the modern situation.

Goddesses with conflicting attributes have been especially fascinating to females in modern society as a new means of empowerment and feminine role models that may break the traditional mould. Infact Hindu goddesses in the west are seen as "symbols of and models for women's empowerment" (McDermott,283). The repressed characteristics of dark and strong goddesses that can be liberating for women. These alternate models may seem to provide normal women with an outlet for the release of anger and the entire principle brings healing in a male-dominated world. Moreover, women in the west have made use of those kinds of strong imagery goddesses of Hinduism to liberate them from patriarchy. In this regard, some such Feminist issues in the western context mean somewhat different application when seen in the typical caste deciding Hindu society. Here more than man-woman rivalry or dominion-suppression, the issue of caste and feudal hierarchy plays a distinctive role as unlike in patriarchal societies elsewhere, Indian man often showed sympathy and voiced for woman empowerment. Many social reformers for woman in India are man and from Ram mohan

banning Sati to Sister Nivedita and before that Bhakta reformer like Tukaeram, Phule, and even Sankardeva in Assam all sought to address suppressed woman's questions to keep the better position for them. Caste remains decisive in many such areas here than other matters. The following observation is also relevant here when the Indian political theorist and Ambedkarite activist, Kancha Illaiah argues for more democratic and secular feminism that appeals to women from non-dominant castes as well. In his critique of Hindu Philosophy, he makes some very interesting observations about how goddess-inspired feminism grew among the upper-caste women in Indian society as a response to the Mandal reforms in the 1990s. Glorifying her victory against *asuras* many have immortalised warrior and dark goddesses like Durga, Kali and others as the divine manifestation of *Stri-Shakti*. In the article, '*Is the Hindu Goddess a feminist?*' Rajeshwari Sundar Rajan argues that comparing women with goddesses is problematic on many accounts. The first of which is the notion of a singular goddess entity, a universal term that seems to encompass a certain brand of femininity and 'goodness' over the pantheon of goddesses in Hindu mythology that hold very diverse connotations for different groups of people.

In this background, we find that The Goddess tradition is no exception as 'Hindu Goddess worship is a highly developed complex of myth, ritual, and theology with many regional variants (Stephen, G. Lewis, 2016, pp 2). The goddess tradition of India is recognized as the only place where worships of the feminine Divine exist in many diverse ways (Harvey and Baring 1996, pp 150). The relationship between the gods and goddesses reflects women's social role (Preton, 1985, pp 13).

The images goddesses generally represent Hindu family values, especially those encouraging self-control and self-restraint of women. In Hindu mythology, there are both gods and goddesses. Worshipping goddesses is a source of power and inspiration for both man and women. Often the Divine is drawn as half man and half women, Siva and Parvati. But in reality in Indian Hindu society it is not reflected (Hanna Hedman, 2007, pp 2). The purpose of worshipping goddesses has been transformed now as a source of power instead of devotion.

Eva Hellman in her book about 'Hindu goddesses and women' argue that there seems to be an unspoken idea that worshipping goddesses is a source of power and inspiration for women. According R. Roy, Indian women, either a victim or a heroine, witch or goddess,

housewife or prime minister-these are the dual image that persists in our minds about Indian women. So here the aim is to study what role in Hindu goddesses play for Hindu women.

In this background Vasudha Maranyanan submits that "There are many areas in the Hindu traditions to which women can look for encouragement and hope. One of the factors is the philosophical sphere in which soul is considered not to have any gender (pp 6). Goddess has two basic qualities as Shakti and Prakrti. These qualities are understood as good if they are controlled by a force that is identified as masculine (pp 7). The qualities of goddesses possess can be compared to good qualities when the goddess is maintaining the cosmic order, the way actual women should also maintain the social order. Hellman finds that, there is a gender constitution here because the female side is shown as ambivalent while the male side is unified. On the other hand, Women and goddesses are also shown of a certain nature that does not change even if society does change.

### **1.7. Literature Gap and need for readdressing**

In the literature review that is made in related areas, it is found that though literature is available in each one of the sections, not much is seen on the Hindu socio- religious dimension of Indian philosophy. This justify why this rather ambitious work of a text and contextual interpretation of Hindu cultural dimension needs to be explored. As method of hermeneutic, this interpretation of Texts and contexts keep room for paradigm shift from traditional status of women to a contemporary one, under the shade of goddesses images. Accordingly, the literature gap keeps room for further exploration of the possibility of hermeneutic method regarding the text and context as method to explore goddesses image to choose as role model in Indian Hindu tradition.

### **1.8. Statement of problem**

The challenge is to understand that whether we can take the image of goddess as representation of the role model of ordinary woman. While Goddess such as Kali, Durga, Chamundi etc.may be seen as representations of more strong feminist images of liberated and fearlessly independent woman as per modern definitions of what role a feminist model should play that projects a positive image of woman as powerful, while images of Lakshmi, Sita etc.

may be seen as compromising role models for woman that is sought to be retold by Feminist writes in them re-telling of such stories using Feminist terminologies. That way we find attempts being made again using Goddess metaphor for re-interpreting traditional and stereotyped roles from a feminist perspective such as Sita Sings the Blue. It may also be seen as deconstructing a dominant paradigm by projections of multiple voices within a composite culture as we find different portrayals of Sita as role models are there in vernacular traditions and translations of the Text. This shows that Goddesses as role models still remain the ideal though which role is suitable to the changing time and situation may vary as per requirements of the reader and the author of these texts when any interpreter recreates the story and this remains an author in his or her own terms. This reminds us that a particular Goddess image remains suitable at a particular era and a particular socio cultural situation and this meaning is never fixed or final.

We can find that from the last centuries there has risen gender basis studies in the research field and that is mostly related to bodily discrimination between male and female. And it leads to a way that the study is not possible without religion; as religion is part and parcel of every society and social norms. Goddesses are representation of women images throughout the very long history. Many works have been denoting draw attention to similar themes that topics relating to the female body share with goddess spirituality. And we believe that women have a central role in building an institution of culture that is, institution of togetherness, re-generation and replenishment. It is necessary that a woman comes to realise the dignity of living gracefully as a person and that she too has the freedom to make meaningful choices in the current era, to live and share her inner experiences with others. Without such a process, one would feel suffocated and set in motion forces of destruction within the self. Sharing experiences which include past actions and choice is a necessary part of the struggle for those individuals who want to try and transcend old roles and crystallise their identities according to new definitions, roles and lift space. It would also make it possible for them to join in the process of creating a new philosophy adding new elements to the social tradition. It is only by realising this truth that the women could recognise that no action, choice or experience is powerful enough to be held in shame as guilt or denunciation within the self. Most women realised that in order to discover new horizons of 'becoming' and new unfolding of 'being' one has to pass over several thresholds and negotiate many crossroads. The women in various phases of her life as Daughter, Wife and Mother not only protects and invigorates the man to the best of her power

but safeguard is interests even at her own cost. The journey from goddess to woman, in here can it possible to take that image still as role model? Which is still not clearly explored in this manner specially related to Hindu goddess.

### **1.9. Research questions and Research Objectives**

Accordingly, the literature gaps and the statement of the problem keep room for raising a few research questions that are now sought to be incorporated in the present work

- What do we mean by Goddess as role model and why?
- What are the recent challenges to take goddess as role model for women in the present period?
- The main objective is to clarify what we mean by goddesses as role models and for whom these goddesses are models and who decides which model is to be preferred and why?
- And finally, what will be the position of the Goddess as imagined in a tribal, regional, folk and a local context in particular? And why one needs such role models, of at all?
- This also leads to further clarification of the point that as the term Goddess here is not meant in a generic sense as homogeneous in all cases, there will be scope for reinterpreting the meaning of the term goddess in a multifaceted way as per different socio-cultural contexts in society that look for some such goddess as role models. This justifies exploring goddess role models in terms of Text and its Contexts.
- One basic objective is to explore if Goddesses as role models do have real influence in shaping the mind-set of Hindu women at large, is there any specific and also ethical-philosophical guideline to explore which particular role model is suitable or desirable.
- To find, about that there is possibility of examining some goddesses concepts within a duty bound social setup that sought to do justice to both male and female counter parts to both god and goddess. Certain family oriented goddess as Lakshmi, Sita more as 'Sahadharmini', What difference it will bring when goddesses were portrayed as Sahadharmini image.

- To find, what are the changes that lead to the strong association of sacrificial blood with goddess more with wrathful goddesses and what socio political changes were associated with such some changes.
- Since when goddesses as well as women are glorified more on their functional efficacy part these any other matter, also glorified as ‘Garbha’(womb) as bearer of male child for glorifying and continuing the husband family line or as ‘Yoni’ similar? Related, to analyse the particular folk goddess of North East India Kamakhya associated with different socio cultural political changes in her transition from a goddess of a tribe to shakti the eternal powerful goddesses as the ultimate role model.

### **1.10. Research Methodology**

The proposed work is about socio cultural study of some distinctive Hindu ways of addressing goddesses as role model that could also keep room for a creative dialogue between cultural-religious role models on the one hand and on the other some concerns that address the actual woman in the society. The research is based on an adequate literature review and primary and secondary sources thoroughly discussed. As there is not much scope for applying quantitative method for the present study, so the method partly applies the hermeneutical method of various interpretations along with research articles, documentaries etc. No data collection and questionnaires comes within the scope of the study.

### **1.11. Layout of the Chapters**

#### **Chapter- 1: introduction**

The first chapter begins with a general discussion of the concept of role model as hindu goddesses images and a methodology for understanding why do we need to live with myth. It discussed how the goddesses image is important and also applicable in the present day context. There are various representations of goddesses images as like wife, daughter, independent goddesses, dark and motherly one. It varies with the time and situations so it leads to a moral dilemma as to which particular role model be the chosen one if one has to. It discusses the literature and the research questions and objectives for the further chapters.

## **Chapter- 2: Introducing goddesses as role models: A selective examination of some Sahadharmini ideals in goddesses**

After the general introduction and literature review made in the first chapter, in the second chapter, we are attempting to understand, goddesses as role models draw inspirations from Hinduism as a religion and also as a culture that has tremendous influence in shaping mind set of Hindu women at large, it depends which particular role model is suitable or desirable to a particular class, caste or section of the people. As per literature reviews guidelines this chapter tries to explore the possibility of one specific kind of role model that we may name as a complementary model, where both the male and the female counterparts, both the gods and the goddesses remain complementary to one another. This model is usually described as the Sahadharmini model for the Goddess. While examining a possible role model in a goddess that an ordinary family bound girl looks forward to imitating in her life also. She may look forward to this kind of Sahadharmini model. Male and female goddesses are counterparts to each other which will portray human life also illustrated in how husband and wife are the ideal counterparts to each other in real life.

## **Chapter- 3: Women as Lakshmi and Sita: the most popular and perfect Sahadharmini role model for Hindu woman in particular**

In continuation with the earlier chapter here is a selection of two particular *sahadhrmini* role models that are Lakshmi and Sita, this chapter will try to explore the role models provided by goddesses Lakshmi and Sita. Goddess Lakshmi means more than a yearning for wealth and prosperity. She embodies a goal, an aspiration to be like her, fiercely independent even in the role of a wife, mother, being an embodiment of femininity. Another Lakshmi like *sahadharmini* image is reflected in the image of Sita. In the evolution of the position and roles of Indian womanhood, the phase to which Sita belongs spells the status of women in the domestic sphere of activity. Sita is considered to be the incarnation of Sri or Lakshmi, the consort of Vishnu, who comes to the transitory plane of existence in order to endure an arduous life that illustrates to humanity the finest of virtues—virtues that need to be inculcated and put into practice A gradual shift toward a singularity and a strong darker image independent of her eternal consort Vishnu is seen in the later turn to Mahalaxmi image than that of Laxmi-Vishnu. And trace the interpretations that the way which would be relevant to see the currency of Sita in today's world. To get an accurate and balanced perspective, the first step is to go

beyond the rigid lines of either putting her on a pedestal as the ideal woman for all times and climes or denigrating her as a mere patriarchal tool for ensuring submissiveness in women.

#### **Chapter- 4: Woman as Kali and Durga: Some dark and powerful Goddesses as a role models for women**

This chapter begin with Kali and Durga as a possible role model, they represent apparently a counter-image to the typical usual role models for women, especially with the Hindu Society context. But she is both a wife, a mother and at the same time an immodest aggressive terrifying and a violent image for all possible aspiring women who may like to like Kali in challenging tamed and domestic role model for women. She is extreme in both cases, in death, destruction and is radically rebellious positions always. She has four arms showing aspects both creation and destruction with blood sword in one hand she defects the enemies and carries the head of a demon on the other hand. She holds the bowl on the third hand where the blood of the enemy is collected, and last is held out in blessing. Kali is associated with blood, death and destruction, she is also seen as a mother figure and often referred to as Maa Kali meaning mother Kali. Kali is the dramatic expression of a fierce Mother's anger and the feminine power that awakens to attack those who threaten her children. In the first face we can see that two basic versions of Kali in popular Indian religion. Often see as goddess of margins, scary, half demonic deity. Basically They are invoked for protection and magical purposes by mostly uneducated tribal people, often in night-time rituals and seasonal dances in which goddess-possessed worshippers enact the myths with lots of shouting and roaring, fuelled by home-distilled local liquor. Black magicians worship this same aspect of Kali with mantras, for the sake of acquiring magical powers and killing enemies. Kali is the force many young women call on in those moments when they courageously face and move beyond their own trauma, or when they want to break through sexual shyness, politesse, insecurity, and discomfort. Kali's image offers an entrance into a wild audacity that has historically been denied both to the divine feminine and to individual women.

#### **Chapter- 5: Can a marginal Goddess of desire remain a role model for aspiring women in our time? Kamakhya, The folk goddess of desire at Shaktipitha Kamakhya as a Role Model**

This chapter makes an attempt at analysing the particular folk goddess of North East India. Mother Goddess Kamakhya is associated with different socio cultural political changes

in her transition from a goddess of a tribe to Shakti, to the the the eternal powerful goddesses as the ultimate role model. Kamakhya consists of images as we find of women and the feminine via story. Especially focusing on the attitudes toward females, in this case, goddesses, reveals much of interest regarding male responses to the feminine and women. One primary approach that engagement for this chapter is especially to the areas where some medieval texts contest received portraits of women's identities, in the process negotiating new ways for us as scholars in the twenty-first century to be open to the diversity of women's images. With this, we see how the voices and representations of women in some texts with their own approaches to revising women's identities.

### **Chapter- 6: Conclusion**

This chapter mainly takes into account the summary of the research objectives of the all chapters and along with the important finding of the thesis that can be related to contemporary problems. This in turn keeps inspiring actual women in their own struggles in life to explore one such suitable role model to bestow strength and power upon them and to continue their own journey in a committed and an inspired way and along with this ended up by assigned some future possibilities.

## Chapter 2

### Introducing goddesses as role models: A selective examination of some *Sahadharmini* ideals in goddesses

#### 2.1 Introduction

All the ways through the ages, Mythological and religious characters have enriched Indian and also Hindu religious philosophy utilising prolife generosity, that is also found in ideal role models laid down for a layperson. This impersonation of goddesses attributes as role models by an ordinary individual tries to establish a connection between the Divine and the human. In an attempt at investigating and exploring how Hindu Goddesses and mythological characters have influenced ordinary life and continued serving as epic role models in matters of authority and power. Here I begin with this submission that usually women in upper-caste Hindu society primarily have long been compared to goddesses in our society that at times may get wider and many faceted identity including Bharat Maa to woman as Devi and her various transformations. Although Goddesses as role models draw inspirations from Hinduism as a religion and a culture that has tremendous influence in shaping Hindu woman's mind-set at large, it depends on which particular role model is suitable or desirable to a specific class, caste or section of the people. In this case, society also offers the potential for a more powerful and liberating set of role models for contemporary women, or a submissive and a traditional one as a role model. And it leads to further clarification of the point that the term Goddess here is not meant in a generic sense as homogeneous in all cases.

In the Indian psyche, the paternal problem or feminism explores how we make Goddess the normal exception to the regular. Does it affect the actual situation of ordinary women? While studying Hindu mythology, it has been found that it is one of the few mythologies where male and female forms are given equal importance; that is how we find that gods cannot exist without goddesses and vice versa. From a Samkhya principle of Purusa and Prakriti, the male in Hindu mythology typically embodies the mind, and the female represents matter. So nature is feminine, and Goddess embodies nature and the mind, or the consciousness that responds to

nature is embodied through male deities. What we commonly find that woman plays many dutiful roles as daughter, social person, wife, mother etc. and in these roles, she is never projected as singular. Let us begin with the supposition that she is always in some relation. Beginning, with ethics succeeding part focuses on some such role models beginning with woman and goddesses as *Shadharmi*. There is scope of the Thesis for reinterpreting the meaning of the term *Sahadharmi* in a multifaceted way as per different socio-cultural contexts in society that look for some such goddess –role models. It is illuminating to show that male and female goddesses are counterparts to each other which will portray human life as a harmony also illustrated in how husband and wife are the ideal counterparts to each other in real life.

## **2.2 Woman in Vedic religion**

There is a possibility of one specific kind of role model that we may name as a complementary model, where both the male and the female counterparts, both the gods and the goddesses, remain complementary to one another. This model is usually described as the *Sahadharmi* model for woman. While examining a possible role model in a goddess that an ordinary family bound girl looks forward to imitating in her life also, she may look forward to this kind of *Sahadharmi* model. Male and female goddesses are counterparts to each other which will portray human life also illustrated in how husband and wife are the ideal counterparts to each other in real life. Along with the time, the Ideal gets diluted when the friendship and creative dialogue between the two counterparts, the God and the Goddess, the husband and the wife, become diluted when the one counterpart emerges dominating over the other. Normatively, there is respect in India for women and their role in society, as described in ancient Hindu scriptures. An interesting feature is that in ancient India, early Vedic period women could have multiple husbands, widows could remarry, and divorce was permitted where there was incompatibility or estrangement. To instil high ideals in humankind, Indian ancestors created an accumulation of goddesses who enjoyed equal status with their husbands.

The idea of equality was most effectively expressed in Vedas and which states that the wife and husband both regarded as being the one and the same halves of one common element. They are equal in every respect; therefore, both should join and take equal parts in all work, religious and secular. Even there is some injunction from the Vedas that no married man shall

perform any religious rite, ceremony, or sacrifice without being united in by his wife. The wife is considered a partner in the spiritual state, so she was viewed as the life of her husband, and she is called, in Sanskrit, *Sahadharmini* or spiritual helpmate. Perhaps, no other scripture in the world has ever given the woman such equality with the man as the Vedas. The Hindu women of ancient times enjoyed equal rights and privileges with men, so women had an equal share and equal power with them in secular matters. And they have had the same right to possess property same as men. Even they could go to the courts of justice, plead their own cases, and ask for the protection of the law.

In brief, the prescriptions were that women must be honoured and adorned by their fathers, brothers and husbands if they desired good. Womanhood and Spirituality are fortunes to perceive. Where women are honoured, the gods rejoice; however, when they are not observed, then all sacred rites prove fruitless. Where the female counterpart in grief, that family soon perishes wholly as a family always prospers when women are honoured.

The first literary tradition in the Indian subcontinent (and the oldest in the world) is that of the Vedic corpus. From the four Samhitas to the Upanishads, we find many interesting references to women in various roles. Some of these women have left their mark on the cultural heritage to this day and are remembered in various ritual and social contexts. Their names, stories, some highly revered hymns, and other interesting facts are mentioned in the Vedic corpus. Women referred to not only in the context of social roles but also as originators of many important hymns. Not only feminine and masculine but also various neuter characters and categories can be identified in the Vedic corpus. The Vedic literature has been classified as Early Vedic and Later Vedic. The Rig Vedic society and polity seems to be celebrating with life, and the agro-pastoral economy was enmeshed in close kinship ties. Women, as well as men, participated in society, economy and polity. Various natural phenomena are depicted as Goddesses, and they are offered prayers. While quantitative analysis highlights the predominance of Indra, Agni, Varuna and other male gods, the power and stature of the goddesses are equally well established. Not only in the context of the Divine but also in the descriptions of the temporal world, we have women making their own life choices and participating in the decision-making bodies. Women participated in all three Vedic socio-political assemblies like Sabha, Samiti and Vidhata. They had access to education and were even engaged in knowledge creation. They could choose to be brahmavadinis with or without

matrimony. Hence, there is no reason to believe that they were only confined to home and hearth.

Gradually, the status changed away the Brahminical period that focused regarding caste, Varna etc. Uma Chakravarti has largely contributed about the women in ancient Hinduism and in this arena through re-interpreting the existing sources from radical perspectives on women. Literary texts which were not focused in the conventional histories have investigated the history of early India for signs of forms of patriarchy in the Indian past by bringing caste into her account of patriarchy in ancient India. The term she uses is “Brahmanical patriarchy”. Looking at ancient texts such as the Dharmasastras and including the Manusmriti, as well as subsequent Buddhist sources, Chakravarti reconstructs early Indian society from approximately 1000 B.C. onwards. Social organisation is reconstructed through these texts to show how control over women by men was mediated through the creation of caste and class hierarchies and differences. Women were subordinated to men. Their behaviour, reproduction and sexuality were controlled and guarded by men. Additionally, women were seen as a private property of men, not having any existence of their own. There was a desire for sons, and the birth of a son was celebrated. The Brahmanical texts depict that women had no access to economic resources. A woman was valued for her role in reproduction alone. From the above passage, it is clear that texts like Manusmriti portray a picture of women who enjoyed no rights and were subordinate. T. S. Rukmani, however, attempts to understand if women had agency in early India. Her work has highlighted many interesting details. The author acknowledges the fact that though the patriarchal set up put women at a loss, there were instances where women found space to exercise their agency. She points out that though the texts like the Kalpasutras (Srautasutras, Dharmasutras and Grhasutras) revolved around the ideology of Dharma and there was not much space to express alternative ideas, still these works also find some scope to express ideas reflecting changed conditions. For example, there is a statement in the Apastamba Dharmasutra that one should follow what women say in the funeral samskaras. Stephanie Jamison believes that in hospitality and exchange relations, women played an important role. She says that the approval of the wife was important in the successful completion of the soma sacrifice. In a different review, it has been shown that women enjoyed agency in deciding what was given in a sacrifice, bhiksha, to a brahmacarin or to a sanyasin. The men had no authority in telling her what to do in these circumstances. Vedic society was the one that valued marriage

immensely. In such contexts, Gender Perspectives if a woman chose not to marry, then it would point to her exercising choice in her decision to go against the grain and remain unmarried.

Gargi was a composer of hymns and has been called a brahmavadini (Rukmani, 2009). This term applies to a woman who was a composer of hymns and chose to remain unmarried, devoting herself to the pursuit of learning. Similarly, in the case of Maitreyi, she consciously opts to be educated in the Upanishadic lore, and Yajnavalkya does not dissuade her from exercising her choice. The statement in the Rigveda III, 55.16 that learned daughters should marry learned bridegrooms indicates that women had a say in marriage. Though male offspring is desired, there is a mantra in the Rigveda, recitation of which ensures the birth of a learned daughter.

Altekar refers to the yajnas like seethayagna, rudrayajna etc., that were to be performed exclusively by women. Some of the women were known for their exceptional calibre; for example, from the Rigveda Samhita, we find mention of women like Apala, Ghosha, Lopamudra, Gargi, Maitreyi, Shachi, Vishwavara Atri, Sulabha and others. Women have not only been praised as independent individuals but also with reference to their contributions towards their natal or marital families. The Later Vedic literature shows the progression towards a State society with a change in the organisation of the society and polity. The chief comes to be referred to as Bhupathi instead of gopati. However, within the twelve important positions (ratnis) mentioned, the chief queen retains a special position under the title mahisi. The importance of the chief queen continued as gleaned from several references to them in the Epics, Arthashastra and even in coins and epigraphs from early historical times. The other Samhitas also refer to women sages such as Rishikas.

The wife is referred to as *Sahadharmini*. Brahmanas, of the texts dealing with the performance of the yajna (Vedic ritual), requires a man to be accompanied by his wife to be able to carry out rituals. For example, Aitareya Brahmana looks upon the wife as essential to the spiritual wholesomeness of the husband. However, there is a mention of some problematic institutions as well. Uma Chakravarti has pointed towards the condition of Vedic Dasis (female servant/slave), who is referred to in numerous instances. They were the objects of dana (donation/gift) and dakshina (fee). It is generally believed that from the post-Vedic period, the condition of the women steadily deteriorated. However, Panini's Ashtadhyayi and subsequent grammatical literature speak highly of women acharyas and Upadhyayas. Thus, the memory

and practice of a brahmavadini continued even after the Vedic period. The Ramayana, Mahabharata and even the Puranas keep the memory of brhamavadini alive. Mention may be made of Anasuya, Kunti, Damyanti, Draupadi, Gandhari, Rukmini, who continued to fire the imagination of the poets. Since a woman taking sanyasa was an act of transgression, one can explore women's agency through such instances. In the Ramayana, Sabari, who was the disciple of Sage Matanga, and whose hermitage was on the banks of river Pampa was one such sanyasin. Such women find mention in Smriti literature and Arthashashtra. Kautilya's prohibition against initiating women into Sanyasa can make sense only if women were being initiated into sanyasa. He advises the king to employ female parivrajakas as spies. Megasthenes mentions women who accompanied their husbands to the forest, probably referring to the Vanaprastha stage. Another category of literature called Shastras that comprises of sutras (aphorisms) and the smriti texts ('that which is remembered') becomes important in the post-Vedic period.

The textual traditions cover many subjects relating to the four kinds of pursuits of life referred to as purusharthas (namely dharma, karma, kama and moksha). In all these texts, we find very liberal values and freedom for both women and men. The setting up of a household is seen as an ideal for men as well as women (though asceticism for learning is equally praised for both). For example, Apastambha Sutra opines that rituals carried out by an unmarried man do not please the devatas (divinities).

Similarly, Manusmriti provides that for three years shall a girl wait after the onset of her puberty; after that time, she may find for herself a husband of equal status. If a woman who has not been given in marriage finds a husband on her own, she does not incur any sin, and neither does the man she finds (MS IX.90-91). Thus, we see that women enjoyed choice in matters of matrimony. It is interesting to note that unmarried daughters were to be provided for by the father. In fact, the daughter is stated to be the object of utmost affection (MS IV.185). Should a girl lose her parents, her economic interests were well looked after. It was provided that from their shares, 'the brothers shall give individually to the unmarried girls, one-quarter from the share of each. Those unwilling to give will become outcastes' (MS IX.118). With regards to defining contemporary attitude towards women, Apastambha Sutra prescribed that one need to make way for a woman when she is treading a pathway. Later Dharmashastra also makes similar statements. Yagnavalkya smriti mentions that 'women are the embodiment of all divine

virtues on earth.’ However, there are several provisions that look problematic. On the one hand, we have reverence assigned to the feminine (divine and worldly) and important roles being played by them; on the other hand, we have questionable provisions and descriptions like the right to chastise them through beating or discarding.

Gender perspectives gives us information on women who were engaged in economic activities of various kinds. They formed a part of both the skilled and the unskilled workforce. They were into professional as well as non-professional employment. Some of their vocations were related to their gender, while the others were not. There were female state employees as well as independent working women. Similarly, some of them were engaged in activities which, though not dependent on their biological constitution, are nonetheless categorised as women’s domain, e.g. domestic services etc. Some of them were actual state employees, while some others were in contractual relations with the State. For example, we have female bodyguards and spies in State employment.

Jaiswal suggests that these women perhaps came from Bhila or Kirata tribe. Female spies were not only to gather information and relay it to the proper source but also to carry out assassinations. However, a closer look at some Hindu religious text shows that there were different classes of female spies engaged for different purposes. Amongst others, ‘women skilled in arts were to be employed as spies living inside their houses’ (KA I.12.21). Others were required to work as assassins (KA V.1.19, XII.5.48). Some were to play the roles of young and beautiful widows to tempt the lust of greedy enemy (KA XIII.2.42). Female slaves formed an important part of the workforce both in the royal establishment and in the common households. In the royal establishment, ‘female slaves of proven integrity’ were to do the work of bath attendants, shampooers, bed-preparers, laundresses and garland-makers; otherwise, they were required to supervise the artists doing these jobs (KA I.21.13). Further, they were to offer garments, flowers and other cosmetics after first putting them on their own eyes, bosoms and arms (KA XXI.14-15). Thus, they were functioning not only as personal attendants but also as security checkers.

### **2.3 *Sahadharmini* emphasised the complementary nature of man and women**

In Vedic religion, women seemed to glorify goddesses status as power centres from whom even man emerged stronger and derived strength. In actual society, women were regarded as

dutiful wife where Hindu women's position and role in society has been a topic of frequent change. In Vedic religion, which is often considered as the basis of present Hindu dharma, women were given the status of Goddess, and infact from their power emerged the male strength. Women regarded as dutiful wives and benevolent mothers, but also we can find various occurrences where women promoted and took steps for themselves against discriminatory law and customs of the society and also, on certain levels, seem to have gained equality with men. But in the present-day context, the most significant question lingers regarding the paradox in Indian Hindu women- that people of Devi worshippers worship their women or are it just religious imagery that often rejects the real picture. What is women's true space in Hindu society by taking into account Hindu goddesses, social customs and present-day conducts of the society?

It is manifest that male and female images were formed by the patriarchal, hierarchical Hindu Society. We have been subscribing to this myth and exploring its possible variants, and, in doing so, that have been keeping the myth alive. The woman is the mother who takes care of her children, patient, self-sacrificing, abundant in her gifts like the mother earth, she is Grihalaksmi, symbolising the prosperity of home and family, she is *Sahadharmini* identifying herself with the dharma of her husband, she is Sakti, the primal source of energy. But the moment the woman is seen to lead her own life, to act in conformity with her own nature and not according to the specifications of the role assigned to her, she loses favour with us, and she is damned. This situation thus leads to associate power also with womanhood to suitable in different times and gradually she changes as a Shakti, Male shaktis, the Great Goddess.

An early pre-vedic agricultural economy subjugated by the female. If we noticed that the Khasis of Assam their economy remains almost wholly agriculture-based and still retain the matriarchal pattern, the woman enjoys social supremacy. Agriculture, since it was the discovery of the female, created conditions for the economic and, therefore, social supremacy of the female in its early stages. The later agricultural economy developed and passed into the hands of the male, but some of the cultural features of its early stages remained attached to it. The Indian masses, the controls of the soil, by and large, have stuck to the idea of the mother goddess.

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regarded as dutiful wife where Hindu women's position and role in society has been a topic of frequent change. David Kinsley comments: "It must require a phenomenal level of illiteracy and prejudice to cite ancient Indian tradition as a reason to discriminate against women" (Kinsley,1986). For, the indisputable truth is that Hinduism must be one of the very few religions in the world that both in philosophy and mythology accord status of absolute equality to women and philosophy, the highly evolved Shakta tradition equates Shiva with Parvati, in her form as Shakti. This is more in line with the polytheistic Hindu pantheon's role models that provide revered images of women as unique and yet complementary to those of male deities. More cementing and integrating concepts like *Sahadharmini* emphasised the complementary nature of man and women. Indian tradition has always valued the spirit of cooperation and toleration at all levels, including the domestic domain. One ideal role model is that of the *Sahadharmini* model.

The Hindu woman as life partner has a fourfold character: she is ardhangini, one half of her husband. And symbolically speaking, *Sahadharmini*, an associate in the fulfilment of human and divine goals; saharmini, a part of all her husband's action and sahayogini, an absolute co-operator in all his endeavours. Husband and wife together are called dampati, joint owners of the household, sharing work in terms of their biological, psychological and individual dharma. The former provides the seed (bija) and the latter the field (ksetra) for its fructification so that humans could be continued in the cosmic process of evolution. Both have the joint responsibility of helping their children grow in all respects, but the contribution of the wife is always immense.

Although that was a late position, initially, this model provided scope for harmonious relations between the two. Will Durrant has mentioned and lets us know, "Women enjoyed far greater freedom in the Vedic period than in later India. She had more to say in the choice of her mate than the forms of marriage might suggest. She appeared freely at feasts and dances and joined with men in religious sacrifice. She could study, and like Gargi, engage in philosophical disputation. If she was left a widow, there were no restrictions upon her remarriage." (Durrant, 1935, pp 401). So we can find equality between girl and boy during the religious period. This proved that Gargi was a dialectician and philosopher of a high order.

Whereas the religious life (*dharma*) of a man was usually described in terms of his class (*varṇa*; i.e., according to his membership of the priestly, ruling, mercantile, or servant class)

and stage in life (*āśrama*; i.e., according to whether he was a religious student, a married householder, a hermit, or a renunciate), of a woman-focused solely on the cultural expectations of the good wife (*strīdharmā*). Shalini Shah, in her article 'On gender wives and Pativratas' the words refer to essay it was suggestive of the view that R.C. Majumdar, in his essay 'Ideal and position of Indian Women in domestic life (1953) as follows that during the marriage rituals in Rig Veda and in the fully developed form in the Grhyasutras, do not enjoy the obedience upon the wife. However, this division was based on karma and dharma when a man was associated more with the public domain and female than mostly with nurturing and culturing; accordingly, roles were divided between husband and the wife, that did not keep room for a dominated dominating relationship that Hegel characterised as master-slave inequality. Although at a later phase, the *Sahadharmini* Ideal appeared more a contract than a dialogue.

Unlike the pseudo-Vedic attempt of a few scholars in mediaeval India, which prove that Daughter is an unwelcome member of the family, early Vedic literature draws a very positive image of daughters and women. Women's position gradually deteriorated as the Vedic ideals of unity and equality began to vanish off as time passes by. During Smrities, women were bracketed with the Shudras. Achla Sharma, in her article Status of women: A social-historical analysis in different ages of Indian society, quoted that, according to Baudhayana, "A father who did not give his daughter in marriage before her first menstruation incurred the guilt of one procuring abortion (a grave sin, worse than many kinds of murders) for every menstrual period in which she remained unmarried". However, there are some references in smriti like in Manusmriti that women should everywhere be worshipped as Goddess. He also takes the opposite position that women should be in control by her father, husband and son. According to Manusmriti, "Bride was one third the age of the groom; thus a male of twenty-four should marry a girl of eight years, i.e. Nagnika" (Sharma,2014).

On the contrary, some literature was totally against of early marriage of a girl child, as example. Sati system was prevalent in this period. This might be the main reason that women often immolated themselves on the husband's funeral pyres. Widow had suffered a lot; she was an ascetic, sleeping on the ground and eating once a day simple meal, wearing no ornaments or coloured garments. The widow had to maintain this austere regimen to the end of her days in the hope of being remarried to her former husband in her consequent births.

## **2.4 Woman as Pativrata not as dominant ideology consequent times though not as a dominant ideology in the Vedas**

Generally, the word Pativrata is acquainted from Vedic scriptures, which defined as an adjective representing a woman wholly faithful to her husband. If we continue with the Vedic period, it has found that Pativrata was not the Vedic tradition's dominant ideology. In its early phases, Vedic literature was more resilient with determining the uniformity of husband and wife. They were equally and unified while doing the tasks like safeguarding the home and the act of ritual as has been copiously mentioned in the texts. In Vedic literature, the primary notion of woman is *Sahadharmini*, rather than Pativrata. Hence a woman was understood as the necessary and obligatory ritual partner of her husband. The husband was as imperfect without her as she without him. But the recent scholars of Hindu literature and tradition take it as a point to be debated, though literature is remarkably known for this unifications for generations.

Ancient Indian literature exhibits a uniform spirit of reverence for womanhood, and Vedic religion does not deny any right to women, not in the least the religious (Chaudhuri, 1956; pp1). A woman had a clearly defined ritual role in the Vedic sacrifice, and her participation in the ritual was an essential requirement. In this way, she was associated with ensuring the solemnity and success of the sacrifice as the man. Apart from Vedic paradigms, the process of change is evident everywhere. The evolution in the theoretical place of womanhood mirrors these broader intellectual and social existences. Women thus go from being the partners and supporters of their husbands in religious life, which indeed in the Vedic world is all of life, to being their uncritical servants and devotees. Pativrata Dharma is thus an embryonic ideology that becomes grafted over the older paradigm of the *Sahadharmini* woman and exercises a powerful ideological appeal. It is seen rapidly emerging as the dominant ethic, considering prior ethics into its own title. While more ancient practices continue to be recorded in the text, the increasing supremacy of the Pativrata dogma is evident in the moral aims of the text. The depreciation of women's roles in the conjugal relationship coincides with the attenuation of women's roles in the ritual orb. Whereas in Vedic times, women were indispensable participants in the sacrifice, even if in passive rather than active modes increasingly. Where women clearly did perform various rites, these reflect the evolving mood that women's religious lives should be located around their husbands. In classical Hinduism, it became

common to refer to marriage as the upanayana for girls and think of the husband as the guru. These formulations reflect the ethos of the pativrata creed that husbands possess both intellectual and religious priority over their wives. In living in humble service of their husbands, women hope not only to propitiate them as they would a deity but also to learn from them, be intellectually formed by them. This is a very different ethic from that of sahadharma, where husband and wife are conceived as complementary partners with different roles, together responsible for maintaining order in the universe through their ritual activities. A host of congruent cultural practices achieves the purposes of Pativrata dharma from every angle of society- public, media, ritual, social convention, even law; she is beamed images of Pativrata woman. She is that gigantic model of virtuous womanhood in whose image she must shape herself. Even in this age of urbanisation, globalisation, and increasing sexual equivalence in the public globe, all promise change. The Pativrata woman is a profoundly internalised peaceful identity for Hindu women, armoured through the current boulevards of the present era. Though hidden in the western group, the Pativrata woman reign as the reserved ornamentation of this genre of presenters, readers, writers and through her enticing fashion sense, she magnifies and bolsters the Pativrata ideals for new generations.

## **2.5 Complementary to one another as Ardhanaareeshwara**

Advocates of the Hindu religion believe their Gods to possess both male and female elements that are integral to their origin. God is shown as 'ardhanarishvara' or 'God who is a half-woman. Interestingly there are subtle conceptual differences and sophistication when terms as gods and goddesses are used in the Hindu pantheon. It sometimes overcomes the usual male-female dichotomy where God is shown as 'ardhanarishvara'. The mother is considered a thousand times more venerable than the father. There was no restriction in the ancient Hindu society that sons must always be named after their father. Numerous heroes of Hindu tradition are frequently addressed as sons of their mothers. Generally speaking, mothers had a free hand in administering home and family affairs. Some women from the high class were not only highly educated but took an active part in intellectual discourses (Singh, 2009, pp 85).

Another reason for connecting dharmic role models for the prophet character of modern society is that there was scope for interpreting Dharma in a positive sense, and very often, it helped to provide better scope for women's emancipation and empowerment. A careful inspection of Hindu religious texts, social customs and laws make it abundantly clear that our

Dharma grants a very high status to women. She and her male partner form a pair together, or rather, the husband and wife form one whole. It is a convention rather than religion that has halted Hindu women's growth on many accounts. Though it cannot be denied that over the centuries, many vices have crept into the Hindu society, which has negatively impacted women's condition, these can only be altered through internal reforms. Evil customs such as dowry, female infanticide /sex-selective abortions, child marriage etc., are not only regressive but also criticise the Hindu religion and culture. It becomes the duty of the Hindu husband to treat his better half on equal footing. Indian women also desire little respect and just treatment at the hands of the society that they are very much a part of it (ibid, pp 90).

Ardhanaareeshwara, is the union of Shiva and Shakti in one body. And the form denotes, male and female principles work together as equal partners in the universe. In the Hindu pantheon of gods and goddesses, every God has a goddess. Other instances reiterate that already has mentioned the status of woman as *Sahadharmini* in ancient India; women occupied a vital position. The concept of Ardhanaareeshwara, where God is depicted as half-man and half-woman, is a concrete example to support the view that how men and woman are complementary to one another this argument. And, one can find a comparable Goddess for each God. In many philosophical versions, God is referred to as Tat, meaning 'It', which means that God is beyond gender.

The notion of Prakriti and Purusha is one of the most significant aspects of Hindu philosophy. This has been a matter of dialogue from time ancient, what with different schools of philosophical thought, understanding it in different ways if we analyse the concept on this Prakriti and Purusha phenomenon, and defining its origins and reality right from Indian mythology to how it is still very much valid in the present-day world.

Indian mythology is probably the most all-encompassing in the world. The reason being, several beliefs of Hindu philosophy are explained by means of modest, interesting and educative mythical stories. These stories sometimes even explain high philosophical and ethical principles by the approach of representation. However, a mythological story may sound modest at first glimpse, but a deeper level of those analyses reveals the true wealth of philosophical content it has to offer by those. Corresponding to everything else, Indian mythology explains this very perplexing concept of Prakriti and Purusha. And makes us understand in the humblest way, and along with that contributions are there also by way of

tales and stories of yore. We now examine one of the most oft-repeated stories of Lord Ardhanarishvara and find out how this complicated Prakriti-Purusha concept is explained by way of mythology. The Ardhanarishvara, which signifies that Prakriti and Purusha in complete harmony. The conception of Ardhanarishvara pre-eminently illuminates the aspects of Prakriti and Purusha and male-female as complementary to one another. Ardhanarishvara, the Neutral One, is an aspect of Lord Shiva, whose representation is half man and half woman. The image embodies a transgender entity. It portrays how the female principle of Goddess Shakti is inseparable from the male principle of Lord Shiva. The Shaktas (devotees of Shakti Goddess) and the Shaivas (devotees of Shiva) of the Tantra school of thought both believes in the Divine Union of Shakti with Shiva as the Ultimate Reality. The neutral form of the Ardhanarishvara represents this concept of Oneness or wholeness. It is that which goes far beyond all perceptions of duality and from whose womb all existence began. The Ardha-Nari, which literally means 'half woman, is considered in Indian mythology to be the Soul of the World. All the creation starts from Him, life is created from Him, and death is considered as a reoccurrence back to His Kingdom, only to appear yet again arrayed in another entity.

Hence, there is no perishing of any being; it is all only a part of a much larger procedure of the cycle of life itself. The Shaktas consider the Shakti (Goddess) as the main source of all creation. So they contemplate Goddess Ardhanarishvari to be the Supreme Creator, who divided Her own body into half man and half woman. The Ultimate One should be female, as it is the female species that gives birth to all being. They also believe that this Supreme Goddess is at the centre of all creative processes in this world. The Shaktas depicts the Goddess producing Shiva from Her own form, thereby balancing her own feminine qualities with masculine ones. Philosophers agree that it is not much significance debating if God is masculine or feminine and meet up to the common point that the inner meaning of the form of the Ardhanarishvara. God is essentially energy that activates all being, and all else associated with that icon are mere symbolism and nothing more. In an article written by Saipriya Viswanathan (2008), Ardhanarishvara - the Dual Nature of the Cosmos, that it is to be understood here that the concept of Ardhanarishvara is not merely a combination of the male and female genders. Infact it, in reality, exists in order to educate the Sadhak about nonduality between male and female. And moreover teaches to break free from the malicious cycles of base human emotions, biases and other common idiocies and eccentricities.

The Rig Veda put forward a beautiful explanation for this concept of Ardhanarishvara. It says that in Aadikaala, that is during the very beginning, there was only One and Unique non-manifest supremacy. This power existed without breath, without emotion and without thought, and there was nothing beyond the One. Without its proper knowledge, there only darkness and inconscience ruled. Then the Universal Supremacy created its own energy, and it leads to rise to the Supreme One, who then gave rise to the whole with a mere thought by springing from its Mind. And this One Being felt the desire to grow numerous. This is where the phrase 'Ekoham Bahusyami', comes to be. This means, 'That which I only am, shall manifest as many'. This was the desire of the Power to emanate forth in the form of Shakti, creating a multitude, and also to emanate as Shiva, to witness that multitude in action.

Male and female are the two completely opposite, yet complementary, forces of Shakti and Shiva as Prakriti and Purusha, respectively. Here, Shiva is the Transcendent One, the Sat-chit-ananda, who merely observes and is unmoved by events occurring in creation. Shakti, on the other hand, does not depend on him to perform her functions, but she needs his power to sustain and maintain her creation. So though Shakti is not co-existent with the Purusha, that is, Shiva, she requires his presence to keep the cosmos functioning smoothly. Shiva, though he wields unlimited power, cannot create the universe without the Eternal Life Force of Shakti to back him. Therefore, the concept of Ardhanarishvara clearly conveys the fact that Prakriti (Shakti) and Purusha (Shiva) are nought without each other, and one cannot exist and function in the absence of the other. It also shows that the male is as much female as the female is male. This means that masculinity and femininity are merely attributes working to create the entire bigger picture of the world.

## **2.6 Goddess complementary to God**

A woman in the role of wife subjugates a position of primacy in ancient Hindu tradition. Some illustrations from Hindu mythology provide insights into the transcendent journey that they made during their lifetime and how they are being perceived in contemporary India. India, a land of vast spiritual, social and cultural diversity, has shown the power of women in an infinite way. The infinite potential of women shakti has been seen in Sita, Draupadi, Durga, Kali, Saraswati, Lakshmi, Kamakhya goddess and several other Goddesses. Goddess has expressed the deep and boundless potential of the human personality. When women have identified with these mythological characters, they have examined, understood and deepened

their own concerns, values and identities. In the senses of women, Goddess Sita is a capable, independent woman who met every challenge with strong, feminine grace and archetypal audacity. Goddess Durga is referred to as all-powerful and Kali as the destroyer of evil. Lakshmi symbolises wealth and is highly revered by both men and women. The consorts of the three gods of the Hindu trinity Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva - Saraswati, Lakshmi and Parvati, respectively, were their men's strengths. They were complementary to their male counterparts.

Women occupied a very important position in ancient India. It is a philosophy whose only words for strength and power are feminine, that is Shakti. All male power comes from the feminine. Knowledge, intelligence, rhythm and coordination are all essential requirements for any creative activity. These aspects are personified womanhood and religiousness. Saraswati, the Goddess of knowledge, learning, music and fine arts and without the grace of Saraswati, Brahma cannot do the creation and would not be regarded as the Creator of the universe. Any preservation movement needs plenty of resources, mainly fiscal resources and here Lakshmi, the Goddess of Wealth. She is an essential companion to Vishnu. Shiva, as Destroyer, requires abundant power and energy. This is what Parvati, or Durga or Shakti as she is called, provides. It is only the Hindu tradition that delivers, even at the theoretical level, this picture of the male and female principles working together as equal partners in the universe. This togetherness or complementary concept is carried further to its logical climax in the form of Ardhanaareeshwara, formed by the fusion of Shiva and Shakti in one body. And each occupying one half of the body, denoting that one is incomplete without the other.

Shakti is female; in Hinduism, it generally symbolises all power. So, the female signifies the entirety of the power, and the male is imaged as the mediator of the female. Shiva, this great power, is the moon god. Parvati, his consort, is the sun power. And although the worship in the masculine-oriented action systems in India is directly to Shiva, it is the Goddess Kali, who is finally worshipped. In Hinduism, Kali is the great divinity. The Hindu goddess Kali is shown standing on the prostrate form of Shiva, her spouse. She waves the sword of death, that is, divine discipline. In this background, the thesis keeps its focus on the development of the concepts that keep room for providing highly philosophical and abstract conceptions on the one hand and deeply personal and religious attachment with this role model on the other hand.

This is well illustrated, and the life of the great Advaita philosophers Sankaracharya, who developed the highest concept of Nirguna Brahman, also composed very personally

devotional hymns to the goddesses. The focus on the divine creative feminine force is important as it is known by Hindus as Shakti. We have to believe this knowledge is important because it demonstrates how women can maintain positions of power without distressing an established patriarchal tradition of society.

The book *Hindu Goddesses Beliefs and Practices* (2009) by Lynn Foulston and Stuart Abbott acts as a general primer on the subject. Foulston and Abbott give in-depth explanations of the three main elements associated with the Devi: Shakti, Maya, and prakrti. Shakti is defined as "power, ability, and strength". Tantric regarded women as Shakti. Man uses Shakti, and he became too the owner of Shakti. In Tantric school, the whole way of interpreting women will change as seen as power centre may be spiritual or intellectual. Later we will find this power will be a more specialised sense, some parts will be more power centres than others. Accordingly, the representation of women's body parts in yantras, chakras, and others will try to capture their particular body parts as power centres more vividly. For example, a Sadhaka may be required to focus his whole attention or concentration on a particular Yantra or diagram like the Yoni, the grave or even some other parts of the body as fluids, menstruation blood, etc., which may be required for some kind of extreme Tantric Sadhana.

Even later on, the corpse of the dead body can also be seen as a power centre that may lead to meditation on the corpse (shav Sadhana). The point is women here, especially a bleeding woman, fertile women will be seen especially powerful Shaktis in comparison to men. And here, the thesis will also focus on the development of such concepts, particularly when a folk goddess Ka-Mei-Kha will emerge as a powerful centre of Tantric sadhana either as a yoni goddess or as a menstruating goddess.

Women are also seen as powerful not only for her womanly attributes but also for her men like abilities to fight with men and to aggressively kill the demon-like any other men will do in war heroically. Sita, who appears in the epic Ramayana, the Goddess that is most often put forth as exemplifying an ideal Hindu wife Sita is loyal to her husband Rama, even to the point of death. Another submissive goddess is Durga's tamed avatar, Parvati. Like Sita, Parvati also exemplifies the ideal Hindu wife through her mythology. To obtain the love of her consort Shiva, who is a devoted ascetic, Parvati leaves her lavish lifestyle to meditate for decades alone. Her commitment to her meditation finally forces Shiva to acknowledge Parvati's utter devotion to him. David Kinsley notes that "goddess mythology to a great extent is probably a means by

which the Hindu tradition has thought about sexual roles and sexual identity"(Kinsley,1986). Here we see actuality termed role preferred in a patriarchal role as ideal. Thus these are obedient and ideal.

Power bears on chastity as equal with the power of tapas as also there is the power of Truth (satya) and others, chastity too came to be regained as to be a virtue, for a general philosophical understanding if we compare it as one of the virtue ethical terms in the context of Aristotelian virtue ethics, this remains a gradually acquired virtue in a particular context only not in general, also understandable from an Aristotelian virtue ethical perspective. Virtue should not be something that is in extremes, that it ultimately leads to disintegration and disharmony, then stability and pro-life eudemonia rather transforming by extreme positions what is life to death like situation, a euthanasia. Thus any virtue of being good must take a middle path in between destruction and extreme obsession for both sides. That way, chastity understood as pativrata as a virtue sought to serve its purpose that is seen in the sanctity of marriage as an institution attached in Vedic and also post vedic society that was hoped to safeguard stability of such institutions counting on loyalty and mutual trust as one of the main capitals. The concern remains despite some flexibility in understanding towards the true meaning of some such terms used context wise even within the so-called patriarchal family structure. That Rama, the ideal god-man in the Epic, himself remains concerned about Sita's chastity despite she being forcefully kidnapped by Ravana and making her a captive. That way, we can see these accidental disturbances in Rama-Sita's life could not lead to disintegrations of the sanctity of the institution of marriage. Because even after Vanavasa and of all trails they remain Sahadharmi(nis) to one another, dutiful parents to their children, the ideal daughter in law in Dasaratha's family, so that even in the coronation and in Yajgya that Rama had to perform his Shadharmi Sita's presence was mandatory. Even in case of her physical absence for some reason, a replica of Sita was made to sit by Rama's side.

This shows that sometimes certain virtues may have greater roles to perform in a particular context that a flexible and symbolic interpretation of certain terms may be possible. In the case of Sita's exile, we have seen that for Rama, Sita remains chaste, as a role model, Ram thus remains remain an ideal sahadharmi even though he put her in trials but more as a prajaranjaka ideal role model for kings for his subjects that took upper hand over his personal relations time and again. Within this role model king in a democratic setup, where people

decide what kind of husband role he should play to his wife, it was a picture of a fully committed ideal king dedicated to the will of his people who in turn will follow his works and deeds as ideals to be followed for them too. Rama had to unwillingly succumb to the pressure still waiting that the section of the people of Ayodhya, who remained still insensitive not very educated or with refined taste and sensitivity and not very refined in their public treatment of their better-halves, will one day appreciate and realise that a woman, Sita, can remain chaste and retained her *Sahadharmini* virtues by keeping loyal to her better half till her death, that her own position cannot be denied by any external force no matter how powerful that force came to her. That her own self-willed suicidal possibility remained a threat that she used against Ravana's power was clearly reciprocated by her otherwise always a loving and caring counterpart Rama. However public mind being mostly less reflecting and less sensitive differed in their interpretation and this is how at times individual's own sense of right and wrong become hijacked by strong mob power or majoritarianism. But Rama still remaining an ideal husband as *sahadharmini* even in Hindu mindset, patiently walked and hoped for a change in the outlook of may not refer common page. This justifies how Rama is adored both as ideal king and representative of his people and also an ideal husband that for him he remained loyal to Sita only all in his life and in death also as per Hindu marriage vows.

Here chastity could be taken to mean that when one of the counterparts particularly the wife never violates the vow of ideal *Sahadharmini* herself, she ideally remains true to her husband through thick and thin. Even in her difficult time, it was Rama only who is in spirit was always with her, not the person Ravana who tried to take her away from Rama. As per Rama's understanding, Sita remains chaste and *Sahadharmini*, and with his sole focus, she will overcome any physical trial or ordeal right from imprisonment to *agnipariksha*. However, Rama's symbolic interpretations of chastity differed from their very literal and rigid interpretation of the term (e.g. news of rape victim accepted by husband). Related to this, we may also refer to some newer interpretation of conjugal partnership in a modern setup. That will also lead to concepts like living together as partners without taking the vows of marriage etc. that are on the one hand threats to the stability of the institute and sanctity of marriage, family etc. but also a modern way of experimenting with some such terms as understood by the new generations in difficult times and so on. Here, of course, there is no question of safeguarding the sanctity of marriage as an institution because marriage is seen here as a temporary contract, so long both the partners remain agreeable to one another in temperament,

taste and others. Thereby the question of chastity is no virtue in this context. However, it is better if one remains committed so long as the relationship continues. But in the case of marriage, especially a Hindu marriage. The religions and the sanctioning social part remain so great that breaking loyalty means becoming unchaste in this regard that appears almost an impossibility, a vice-like as it will also lead to seriously touch upon religious, social and other expectations and objectives what so ever.

Hinduism regards man and woman as the two halves of the eternal Being. Both are constituting a vibrant, existential part, quite imperfect and imperfect and incomplete in itself. Usha Kapoor (2005), in her article, mentions the Vedic woman status, that in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, Prajapati, the primordial God, divides himself into two-man and woman, the symbols of cosmic polarity deriving sustenance from the same source. In the cosmic scheme, man represents Purusha (the Person, Spirit) and woman Prakriti (Nature, Primal Matter), both of whom unite to keep the world going. So goes the Vedic verse: 'I am He, you are she; I am song, you are verse; I am heaven, you are earth. We two shall here together dwell becoming parents of children.

Women traditional period of Hinduism was quite learned in the Vedic lore. Draupadi and Tara were the famous brahmavadini and also skilled at narrating spiritual syllables. Moreover, additional women sages were there like Oghavati, Arundhati, and Sulabha possessed a thorough knowledge of the Vedas and imparted religious knowledge even to rishis. The spiritual attainments of Savitri and Anusuya have become legendary. In the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, one meets women of wisdom such as Maitreyi and Gargi. There has been a famous conversation between king Janaka and the sage Yajnavalkya that about the formerly abandoned wealth for wisdom. And the latter entered into a debate with sage Yajnavalkya at the court of King Janaka. Much later, Bharati, the wife of Mandana Misra, carried forward the tradition by acting as a critic in the ethical and philosophical discussion between her husband and Shankaracharya. When she found her husband losing the discussion, she insistently told Shankaracharya that his conquest would be complete only if he could defeat her since she constituted her husband's better half.

Manusmriti regards women as a precious unit of the family and society. But refutes them complete freedom due to their physical vulnerability. He, however, differentiates between the noble and virtuous and the degenerate women, and like other smrti karas, criticises those who

are dishonest, indecisive, sensuous, immodest, quarrelsome and loose. There has mentioned that day and night women must be kept in dependence upon males, and if they attached themselves to sensual enjoyments, they must be kept underneath one's regulator. Manusmriti suggests capital punishment for killers of women, exempts pregnant and older women from paying fines and suggests that as a matter of courtesy, they should be given precedence when crossing the road.

We have seen from above examples that the adherence of the pativrata dharma by women is not comparable to master-servant relation and subordination. Conjugal dependability is significantly valued in the Hindu custom, and it leads to family harmony and bestows occult influences. A woman who comprehends the Lord in her husband and makes him her very life. And cannot depart from the pathway of virtue, and virtue is supremacy itself. There are many illustrations of Hindu women who, as life companions, made abundant sacrifices, experienced trials and misfortunes, and sometimes showed their thaumaturgy powers born of chastity.

Hindu women as life partner by Dr Usha Kapoor (2005), where she tried to focus on the notion that Hinduism concerns man and woman as the two halves of the eternal Being and each constituting a vibrant, existential part but quite incomplete in itself without the other halves. She has put down that partner in Faith is the Meaning of *Sahadharmini*, and tried to jot its strong base by mentioning the Vivekananda's quote as the sage (woman) placed her hand on the head of Sita and said: 'It is a great blessing to possess a beautiful body; you have that. It is a greater blessing to have a noble husband; you have that. It is the greatest blessing to be perfectly obedient to such a husband; you are that. You must be happy.' Sita replied, 'Mother, I am glad that God has given me a beautiful body and that I have devoted a husband. But as to the third blessing, I do not know whether I obey him or he obeys me. One thing alone I remember, that when he took me by the hand before the sacrificial fire-whether, it was a reflection of the fire or whether God himself made it appear to Me-I found that I was his and he was mine. And since then, I have found that I am the complement of his life, and he of mine.'-*Swami Vivekananda, 'The Women of India'*.

But regarding the meaning of the word *Sahadharmini* may be literal and symbolical. People are often confused with the term are misunderstood. If we go with the literal meaning, then it will lead to our understanding limited. When we go for the literal sense, then the touched

and untouched concept has come up. So certain times, it can be taken as symbolically like in Sita Rama, *Sahadharmini* redefined Chastity but not literally as explained here.

In Hinduism, there is clear expectations towards the performance of a woman in society exist that the role of a wife in marriage is not only socially but also religiously defined. In Hinduism, role models are given, Rama's wife Sita and Krishna's mistress Radha, as Narayand's wife Lakshmi, As Siva's wife Parvati, as Kali, as Durga. An explanation has to be made by having a closer look at the relationships between the mythological couples. Those relationships strongly emphasise the commitment and pledge of a woman to a man. In the Ramayana, Sita is defined as constantly concerned with her husband's wellbeing, reputation, and will. To please him, she acts generously and sometimes even shows an incapability to operate since Rama didn't confirm her deeds. Thus, these benign goddesses have been represented as the 'ideal' Hindu wives and daughters, faithful and obedient. At the same time, women must surrender to their husbands, fathers, and other males in positions of power. But here it is in some of the case of their children that mothers may express masculine traits such as aggression and dominance. For instance, aggression may be expressed by a woman seeking to protect her children. Aggression and dominance may also be conveyed by a woman when she must discipline her children, especially her daughters. Discipline is one means by which a mother indoctrinates the Hindu patriarchal ideology in her daughter.

An article, The role model wives in Hinduism, by Kati Neubauer (2008), tries to explore the nature of Sita as *Sahadharmini*. Only one time Sita makes a decision herself and puts the norms of society above the word of her husband, she immediately gets in trouble. By stepping outside the area restricted by her husband to give food to a hermit, she gets captured by Ravana and causes trouble for her husband and even might disgrace him (Pattanaik 90, 1, e.g. Ramayana). But in her devotion to her husband, she refuses to be rescued by Rama's ally, Hanuman, because, on the one hand, she would have to touch another man and by that disgrace Rama and on the other hand, she would take Rama's chance away to free her to protect his dignity. Also, she claims she could defend herself by burning Ravana with the fire of her chastity but refuses since Rama disapproved of this option (Kinsley, 1997, pp 73). In Ramayana, Sita is always thinking about their mate first and are almost unable to take action without seeing the will of their partners. A *Sahadharmini*, or complementary is the principle in a male-female

association, is the selfless love of a woman towards a man, displayed in Sita's obsessive concerns about Rama regardless of his action towards her.

*Sahadharmini* is the division of labour. It's like the present-day social status demand for women. This kind of division of labour was according to aptitude and capacity. The wife took part in household activities, and husbands used to go to work. Here the concept of equality does not come as inequality as household activities are also important to run a family. *Sahadharmini* is the co-partner of Dharma. Dharma stands for duty, not the Kama.

## **2.7 Contemporary notions have changed the concept of *Sahadharmini***

When Hindu society started dominated by Brahmanical concepts, then the concept of *Sahadharmini* has changed. According to lifestyle and needs, the idea also varies as we know. When Priests came into the scenario, the 'purity of women' specifically for the upper caste Brahmins is to maintain the 'purity of caste'. Women's general subordination was essential in this stage because it was only then that the mechanism of control upon women's sexuality could be effective. In the case of Hindu culture, the design of the patriarchal caste-class structure was mapped out by the Brahmins, 'pativrata' and *Sahadharmini*, and the specific dharma of Hindu wife then became the beliefs by which women accepted and even aspired to chastity and wifely fidelity as the highest expression of their selfhood. Thus the 'Stridharma' or 'Pativrata dharma' has taken as a theoretical device to take control over women's sexuality through the institutions like purdah, arranged marriage, pre-puberty marriage, widowhood which are 'naturalised' in Indian caste structured society. Acceptance of these norms given by priests' class, reflected how they had victimised women in a structured society, which give them an explicit reward of caste and class.

The firm belief of the day was that only a male heir could save his parents from the cycle of rebirth. Since a daughter left her parental home after marriage, it was the son who was left with the responsibility of caring for parents in their old age. This added further value to the sons. A woman's place was the home, and her primary responsibility was to bear sons and ensures the continuity of the family lineage. A husband's rights over his wife were total, and he had the freedom to go for another marriage if his wife failed to beget sons. A woman was kept constantly under male control and lost her right to seek knowledge. Over some time, marriageable age was also lowered. Though there within this changed nature of patriarchy, her

motherhood, instead of being her glory and pride, made her permanently dependent on others, economically, politically, socially, and culturally. Instead, her sole identity now would depend on her functional part, her ability to reproduce a male child. She is adored for her motherly role, no doubt, but the Mother Goddess herself underwent various transformational phases till she re-claimed her lost power as the Great Goddess with more focus on her warrior traits and shakti and her heroism.

As her womb, instead of being glorified for her femininity and creativity, remains to be magically controlled aiming at more productivity, particularly of more male members into her dynasty, and thus disrobes her of all joy of motherhood, this kind of post-Vedic phase of patriarchy created problem for a woman against which specific feminist paradigm shift was looked for in a feminine way. But the later trend of masculinising Shakti, irrespective of the power centre, is the Male or the Female deity, as it is the power of Shakti that energizes all, sacred as well as secular, the gap widened between the powerless mortals and the supra-powerful Divine, who is now elevated to a level of 'beyond male-female' symbolically but more in line with focusing entirely on the masculinist traits at the cost of transcending the feminine ones. Unlike her previous recognitions of glory in motherhood or her feminine characteristics, although it remained a complimentary with no feminine ones as well, the ideas that nurtured such values were '*sahadharmini*', the ideals that encouraged such traits were femininity even in male gods and masculinity even in female gods, but both in a balanced and dialogue. Now under changed patriarchy of priest Vedic Brahmanical era, gradually everything, including the womb, fertility, blood of any kind, all attained power centric magical centrality only.

Thus we have seen that the changes in time to concepts like *Sahadharmini*, *Pativarata*, etc., have also come to be emancipated in many different ways, which sometimes lead to male domination or domination of the powerful one instead of giving equal roles to both the relational terms. In place of liberal kind of patriarchy that we have seen where man praised women for their motherly and wifely roles. But also treated her equally as his friend, companion and at times philosopher and guide at a different moment of life as he is to her. Later, the wife, instead of *Sahadharmini* came to be seen as a man as woman is essence of man and then men end in survive a prophet and the husband as the master, the one who owns his wife, the way he owns his house and properties. We can also refer to a certain new way of looking at the relationship with changed terminology closure to the legal concept of property

ownership or master-slave domain etc. Here we may refer to changing patterns of addressing husband even in the Bengali language when he will be addressed more as 'Karta-babu'(my master lord). Than classical term 'swami' or 'pati' etc. The present work seeks focus The Goddess as role models. And Here more than Sita, Lakshmi, she will be dependent on her master and the person who owns her. Therefore, her in modern times Lakshmi is more seen and prayed as *dhana Lakshmi* only, the 'dowery' she will carry with her will add value in her although earlier time her presence itself was celebrated into the household as the presence of Lakshmi herself. Even if she is Sita or Lakshmi in this changed perspective, she is praised for more material benefits that will bring with her, and so instead of this one should follow that in marriage institution both can contribute to their better material comfort and future as per demand of the time but that does not mean that an unproductive wife remains valueless in comparison to a working wife in modern society.

It seems only natural that the modern Indian woman should rediscover the Goddesses of her culture as a means of empowering herself. These images belong to her as part of her cultural heritage. The modern woman has to use the Goddesses as tools of an all-powerful, all-enduring feminine energy. Religion is an exploratory path in the journey of self-exploration. It is a process of looking inwards and establishing a deep level of honesty with the self. The sexual core of an individual is the seat of great power and energy, and the spiritual path is to unleash this power to transcend into higher realms of supreme bliss. It may be stated that the term '*Sahadharmini*' may convey a variety of meanings to women in its cultural and historical contexts. These may range from possession, asceticism, obligation, compassion, and transcendence. The examination of the term *Sahadharmini* in work is undertaken within the context of traditional texts and its various contexts. However, it is clear that gender differentiates the paths, expressions and attributions to woman, both at the individual and at the societal levels.

However, there is one common point in Indian texts and contexts, quite irrespective of language and region. This one characteristic that is noticeable both by men and by women is the archetypal mother figure. Not the terrible mother, but the shakti giving, sustenance giving, stable figure of security representing Indian womanhood in person. The eternal mother is a familiar figure appearing in both the world of female writers as well as male writers. This archetypal mother is a reality in the Indian social scene. She holds the world together, supplies

moral courage to the men, just as she once supplied milk to her children for basic sustenance. This is the one point where writers all over India agree, across time and region, sex and language; this makes the duality even more apparent.

## **2.8. A brief outline of the chapter**

Although along with changes in time and the socio-cultural conditions, the original meaning of specific terms such as *Sahadharmini*, pativrata idea that provides sanctity to institutions like family and marriage keep room for further flexibility in widening its scope and significance as per the situation, within the changing scenario, the whole question is do we need a goddess as role models appear meaningless, a redundant question that has lost its value in the current period. The exploration will choose role models with changing time, our sight of understanding of marriage, partnership, and any other relation more as a fashion. Still looking for some different kind of stability over and above the material foundation of such relations, do we need to be sole partners in marriage, then do we need Goddess as a role model for women and complementary gods for men, or do some concepts such as soul partners appear to be metaphysical only? Is there any scope for re-interpretation of our life partners and relationships in terms of friendship and companionship as Aristotle once laid down as ideals for role models to imbibe in them, the profound virtue ethics looked for as the ideal relationship over and above one being a citizen of a state that safeguards the right of any partnership legally and constitutionally only. The further chapter seeks to explore that with reference to two goddesses natures, Lakshmi and Sita, as ideal illustrations of *sahadharmini* models in our mindset.

## Chapter 3

### Women as Lakshmi and Sita:

#### the most popular and perfect Sahadharmini role model for Hindu woman in particular

##### 3.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, we have seen that Sahadharmini image is the prospect of one specific kind of role model that we may name as a complementary model, where both the male and the female counterparts are involved. The chapter will introduce the concept of Goddess Lakshmi and related concepts like Sita that keep inspiring for long in the Indian tradition to achieve a Sahadharmini idea in their real life. The history and development of Lakshmi and Sita concepts and their origin and significance in a more agricultural society and a lifestyle other than an urban one, descriptively will convey the view that here woman are more related to agriculture and accordingly they carry different degrees of individuality. But the different role models as Sahadharmini is not only submissive one. If we see Lakshmi Goddess, then Kali, fierce Goddess, can also be interlinked to one another. That way, even Lakshmi may be developed to strong Maha- Lakshmi that will be darker than usual Lakshmi, rather there Kali like, can the dark goddess who even then keep room for a Lakshmi like nature in heart. This leads to this understanding that two role models, though differing in degree, do not differ in kind.

We can take the image of the goddess Lakshmi as a representation of the role model of an ordinary average woman. While Goddess such as Kali, Durga, Chamundi etc. may be seen as representations of more strong feminist images of liberated and fearlessly independent woman as per modern definitions of what role a feminist model should play, that projects a positive image of woman as powerful, while images of Lakshmi, Sita etc. may be seen as compromising role models for a woman that is sought to be retold by Feminist writers in them re-telling same such stories using Feminist terminologies. It may also be seen as deconstructing

a dominant paradigm by projections of multiple voices within a composite culture as we find different portrayals of Sita as role models are there in vernacular traditions and in various translations of the Text. This shows that Goddesses as role models still remain the ideal though which role is suitable to the changing time and situation may vary as per requirements of the reader and the author of these texts when any interpreter recreates the old story in a new way, and this remains an author in his or her own terms. This reminds us that a particular Goddess image remains suitable at a particular era and a particular socio-cultural situation, and this meaning is never fixed or final. This chapter will also refer to some nuance ways of projecting goddesses as woman's role model as depicted not only in the main narratives but who is Sita; therefore, and in vernacular translation of a text. This is why the chapter will also revisit Sita as Sahadharmini role model not only in Valmiki's Ramayana but also in the translations and other commentaries of Valmiki's Ramayana by the Bhakti saint Mahapurusha Sankardeva.

### **3.2. Origin of Lakshmi the Goddess**

Lakshmi is, in general, the most widespread and the most extensively worshipped goddess all over the Hindu social system. The Hindu Goddess of prosperity first expresses herself in this world in the form of a lotus. Rhodes mentioned that in particular, early worshippers recognized that earthly form of the goddess Lakshmi is rather very much of the natural realm and yet not quite of this world, a mixed vision of an ecstatically beautiful woman embodied in all living, but most especially in the sacred lotus. Infact many images depict the primordial lotus, beneficent deity of life-force, fertility and glorious abundance, the earliest form of the Indian mother goddess. The lotus comes to be recognized in the interior, subtle body of the human being and infact itself as a reflection of the divine consciousness of the goddess. The word Lakshmi is a derivation from the Sanskrit Lakshmi (Denotative of feminine gender), whose etymological meaning is one who looks upon the prosperity of mankind and helps for the aims and objects of all the Creatures in the Universe (Constantina Rhodes,2010).

She looked upon the productiveness of every person and believed it to be the primary reality upon which all rests. She encompasses all creation with energy, will and consciousness. Underlining the role of Lakshmi as the Mother Goddess, Lakshmi has created and embodied the entire Universe, both seen and unseen, out of a mere one-billionth fraction of Herself. According to mythological details, Lakshmi is very commonly known as Shri. As the wife of

Lord Vishnu, the preserver appears in various names in the innumerable form taken by the great Lord himself. She is often shown held on a lotus, as She was born from an ocean of milk standing on a lotus flower. She is the goddess of good fortune, prosperity, wealth, and beauty. She is representing all that is feminine, while Her consort Vishnu represents all that is masculine. Infected Lakshmi is also worshipped as Sita, the reincarnation of the perfect wife to Rama in the Indian epic, the Ramayana. (Naresh Rout, 2016).

David Kinsley (1997) perceives that Sri, as she is widely addressed as Sri Lakshmi, is used in the Vedic hymns and suggests beauty, luster, glory and high rank. Sri also refers to riches, prosperity, and abundance in universal. It is an acquired status and puts the goddess on a high pedestal. She is related to fertility, an abundance of harvest; as a result, women in villages relate to her and worship her widely.

### **3.3. Women uphold cultural practices as the symbol of Lakshmi**

Women generally uphold cultural practices in society as a symbol of Lakshmi. So as we know well that rice culture is no exception in India, and moreover, of all the food grains, rice conceivably has a unique place in determining the means of the people who be subject to depend upon it for their food and livelihood. Basically, rice is associated with the Lakshmi goddess, the rice-cultivating section. As even along with Lakshmi Goddess, each stage of rice production is done on an auspicious day, and some rituals are being performed. Being a predominantly rice-producing country, and followed in different ritual related to rice farming design, like sloughing, relocation, reaping and storing the rice. The harvesting of rice is marked by ritual expressing gratitude to the Goddess Lakshmi, and the sowing season is perceived as the fertility ritual. Rice and Lakshmi are interchangeable concepts in the local imagination. Hence if we see that Lakshmi is connected to rice as is elaborated, then her worship goes too long antiquity, which represents Mother Earth. Lakshmi is known as the most reasonable goddess, being kind to women who face basic disparity in the family, caste and class. These marginalized and oppressed women are Lakshmi's subjects and have gained her attention, as depicted in Lakshmi Puran.

The goddess Lakshmi embodies not just wealth and prosperity but also women's agency beyond their roles as wives and mothers. Many women see the goddess Lakshmi as an ideal, recognize and honour the feminist powers of the goddess. Relatively, women become

accustomed to the new culture and adopting the strength and supremacy of the goddess who serves as a role model in the Hindu patriarchal system. And Lakshmi goddess represents an objective as a desire to be resembling like her, who is viciously independent even in the role of a wife, mother, being an epitome of femininity.

In an article, *Women and Religion in the Indian Diaspora* (2017), there Annapurna Devi Pandey had elaborated that how Goddess Lakshmi has proved her independence in the role of a wife and when she was chastised by her husband for her independence and autonomy, instead of walking out of marriage, she taught her husband, Jagannath, how to do everything right in his role as a husband, the lord of the family and society.

Lakshmi is also acknowledged as the foundation of eternal knowledge and ultimate truth amongst Hindu women across India. She is the eternal energy without whom her spouse Vishnu would not move as the matter remains inactive without energy, known as the Sakti. In her spousal role, she is independent-minded and bestows any blessing to her devotee, regardless of class, status, creed and gender. In Lakshmi-tantra, it has elaborated that not Vishnu, who is defined as the object of devotion, the one who grants all requirements and whose distinctive mantra embodies power, it is Lakshmi. And whose form is described in aspect and presented as the supreme object of meditation.

In the present scenario, women have taken a prominent part in the development of the way to keep themselves intact and also giving a new purpose and meaning to their own lives. And goddess as a role model compromises them a new forming to redefine themselves as women of their choice. Choosing Goddess as a role model and that too feminine, and sahadharmini will bring a new way, gives them a sense of concealment. So that they can reform and rebuild their new identity by redefining the gender roles previously dictated by their Hindu tradition from the Vedic period. For example, Annapurna Devi Pandey (2017) has mentioned in her article that women coming from over-protective families in Odisha have adapted to a new land and constantly reinvented themselves to fit into the shifting environment. They have opened up a new space for women to redefine their gender roles in the sphere of religion as well. And then give emphasis to that some women have transformed their traditional domestic religious roles to public life and find new meaning in their roles as religious specialists. Rather than being a hindrance to their modern lifestyle, their orientation in Lakshmi Vrata supports

their position in their own community and acts as an inspiration for their leadership in their socio-economic and political setting.

There is reason which may defend that Lakshmi can be taken as a role model at the modern time also. As the goddesses confer power, but it doesn't accompany the darker or the revolting side only. Goddesses mean the word Shakti, after all, is power. Lakshmi represents the skills of success, worldly and divine. She also carries the inner qualities that make life lovely with a combination of love, harmony, kindness. When we have Lakshmi, the old mythic texts tell us we have everything, inner and outer, for a beautiful life. What would be there without her? Well, without her, we're impoverished, both inwardly and outwardly. Without her, the world is a desert. Lakshmi's Shakti is life-supporting both in the physical and refined realms. Lakshmi is an ancient Hindu goddess, and the Vedic singers praised her under her most ancient name, Shri, and sang the "Hymn to Shri" to bring forth whatever is glorious and beautiful in the natural world. Besides being a name of Lakshmi, it shrines an abstract noun that signifies all the qualities associated with auspiciousness: good fortune, lovingkindness, material prosperity, physical health, beauty, purity of motive, well-being, authority, energy, vitality, and every kind of radiance.

Lakshmi, for instance, the consort of Vishnu, is the embodiment of female virtue; she is the model wife, the bringer of prosperity, the embodiment of compassion. Parvati, the consort of Shiva, is, likewise, the model wife and devotee; she is also often depicted as the model mother. She holds the promise of material accomplishment and contentment, which can be related to the woman as the sahadharmini model. She is described as restless, whimsical yet maternal, with her arms raised to bless and to grant. The practise of personifying the beauty and bounty of earth as a goddess was prevalent in all ancient cultures, and Shri-Lakshmi is the Hindu form of the timeless mother-goddess who nurtures and nourishes all life, which symbolizes the woman's nature in general.

Lakshmi goddess is not only conveying the model as a suppressive and feminine one. We have found that in Lakshmi Tantra, She herself powerfully proclaims, "Inherent in the Principle of Existence, whether manifested or manifested, I am at all times the inciter, the potential in all things. I manifest Myself as the Creation, I occupy myself with activity when Creation begins functioning, and I ultimately dissolve Myself at the time of destruction. I alone send the Creation forth and again destroy it. I absolve the sins of the good. As Mother Earth to all beings,

I pardon them all their sins. I am the Giver of Everything. I am the thinking process itself, and I am contained in Everything." (Lakshmi Tantra, 50.65.67). By such assertions in the Lakshmi Tantra, Vishnu is pushed second place. Here it is Lakshmi, and not Vishnu, who is Creator, Preserver and Destroyer, and She is the sole object of devotion and meditation, who is the dispenser of grace and the bestower of liberation.

### **3.4. Significance of Lakshmi goddess related to the woman in modern time**

Many researchers have made on woman scenario and come up with an overall common picture that not only in India Hindu society but there is a worldwide concern at the falling ratio of girls amongst youth populations in developing countries. And which are in the forefront otherwise making news as rising economies. Some survey has come up with the result that these countries contemporary a still increasing gender gap and thus a worrying trend toward an increasing female deficit over the years. A deeper enquiry of this phenomenon specifies that it is related small measure to the non-recognition of the economic value of women's involvement in production procedures and household work. And as measure along with changing of the mindset of people, we can give a glance into traditions of economy and culture. It can provide evidence to solving this problem. The historical experiences of Indian, and especially filled with rice-growing areas, show that even in a prevailing patriarchal milieu. And recognition of women's participation in the agricultural process and household controlling has added to improving the status of women. By the study of social reform, the initiative has illustrated that in India, which shaped popular consciousness in the sixteenth century through a literary formation deep-rooted in the myth of goddess.

Basically, Lakshmi, who represents to perform from the rural economy and the household, helped convey a socially transformative communication whose ritual observation endures on a mass measure until today. And Lakshmi the basis for a comparatively more democratic and gender-just society. The Lakshmi Purana imitates this tendency. We have already found that how the mythological genre is prevalent in Indian scripture, particularly in the tradition of Hinduism. Usually portrays the story of a goddess or god and sometimes communicates a radical message to the masses of common people. Provided a social and philosophical direction to the movement and confronted the existing patriarchal and caste

hierarchy and the inferior role of women by engaging members from all castes and supporting that the status of any specific is based on work rather than birth.

Lakshmi is also known widely as Annapurna, a provider of the bounty of rice, which can be related to Mother earth and woman. Examining the way Lakshmi is conceptualized reveals her links to the cultural practices of rice cultivation, as we have already mentioned. Women generally uphold cultural practices, and rice culture is no exception. The unique place of this grain in shaping the lifestyle of the people whose sustenance and livelihood depend on it is seen in the fact that only rice is associated with the goddess Lakshmi. It shows how woman and agriculture are related. Apart from the relation with agriculture, it also depicts that woman can be independent by taking Lakshmi as a role model if the society not only devotes the Lakshmi for her blessing for wealth as like the same girls are giving importance for the dowry that will be brought by her.

Upholding the Lakshmi image as a role can bring the projection that woman and girl child are not the depictions of burden and suppressive form. Though from the Vedic texts, we have found that woman and girl are equally given importance in every field, basically in religion. But later, with the development of the Brahminical state, woman was treated as in the same status as Sudras. Moreover, a girl child was accepted as they will bring a plentiful dowry during the marriage. They were seen as more like Lakshmi image with lots of jewellery and ornaments. But if we follow up the social-cultural contribution of a woman towards society, she is more equal to a man. There were divisions of duty, but the amount of labour they provided were the same as men. By doing household tasks, they contributed to the *sahadharmini* model, where a man used to work outside and women in the households. It shows the division of labour according to physical need and convenience. Woman and girl are Lakshmi but not to bring money and wealth but also equally contribute to the development of the family as well as the society as a whole.

### **3.5. Lakshmi as independent goddess Maha Lakshmi**

By the late Vedic period, when the scintillating and auspicious qualities known as Sri come to be recognised as manifesting in a particular form, they are also called Lakshmi, literally an imprint, a sign, a display, an embodied expression, that is, a specifically recognizable manifestation of Sri. No longer only an abstract quality, this divine force now

takes form as a deity and, in particular, as a goddess, a personification of the abundance, prosperity, splendour and beauty that have long been recognised as desirable qualities in life. In all of her attributes of abundance and splendour, it is not surprising that the goddess of prosperity comes to be known by an abundant array of names, all of which lend further dimensions to the human perception of her identity. But the splendour and well-being are not without a dark side. (Rhodes Constanti, 2010, pp 19)

Lakshmi Goddess referred to anything that was auspicious or brought good luck or bestowed riches and power. The connotation with many gods has led to Lakshmi's existence viewed as fickle, restless and independent. Many researchers view the mythology of Lakshmi's fickleness as indicative of her cult's confrontation to being embraced with conventional Hinduism. Even today also there is many contradicted discussions between the mythology of Lakshmi as an independent goddess and her mythology as Vishnu's consort. In some of the texts and commentaries, it reflects that She is Prakriti, the perfect formation: self-sustaining, self-sufficient Nature. And She is Maya, the charming delusion, the dream-like expression of divinity that makes life coherent and worth existing. She is Shakti with liveliness, unlimited and generous. To realise her is to celebrate the phenomena of life. Philosophers indicate to view the inconsistency and independence of Lakshmi as a symbol for the restlessness of prosperity. More often than not, there are no rational descriptions for fortune and misfortune. Her image is also not stable as one and solid. She is mostly depicted as a wife, a feminine, motherly goddess with her counterpart Vishnu. But there is also another image of her that interprets the Maha Lakshmi image, that is independent without her counterpart Vishnu.

In Tantrik texts, Lakshmi acquired supreme importance. She was Maha-Lakshmi, the supreme goddess. Lakshmi is often distinguished from Maha-Lakshmi. While the previous is the consort of Vishnu and the goddess of wealth, Maha-Lakshmi is viewed as an independent entity. Even as the supreme incarnation of the mother-goddess. When adored as Maha-Lakshmi, She is not visualised as a beautiful goddess seated on a lotus, pot in hand. But like a virginal warrior goddess riding a lion, much like Kali and Durga. Ancient Pancharatra texts that adore Maha-Lakshmi contemplate her to be the root of all creation. In the beginning, they say, the cosmic soul, the unfathomable unmanifest Narayana desired to produce the cosmos. But he did not have the means to do so. And so he pondered over this problem, his dormant energy, his shakti, burst forth in a blinding light, manifesting as Maha-Lakshmi. Maha-

Lakshmi to be found the seed of celestial desire in the palm of her hand and released the dynamic forces of creation until the three worlds took shape and all forms of life came forth.

All women are the embodiment of Lakshmi; whether exhibiting steadfastness or restlessness, nurturing, independence, or any other embodiment or mode of expression, Lakshmi always retains her core essence as the divine feminine. Every one of her forms is especially female. Infact she incarnates as other goddesses- as Radha, Rukmini and Sita, who are consorts of various forms of Vishnu. She is the divine feminine embodied as Mother Earth. In the earthly realm, Lakshmi expresses herself as every girl and women. Infact the identities of the goddess and of human women merge as women step into specific roles that give form to their goddess-essence. But situation wise it varies with the adoption of role model. Even Lakshmi carries two strongly opposite images. By virtue of her being female, a woman is said to be a form of the goddess and thus an extension and repository of the goddess's power as goddess Lakshmi has her primary identification as an independent force and entity as Maha Lakshmi later. Women as the embodiment of her energy, and all females are recognised as forms of the goddess, regardless of age, station, or marital status.

As expressive of nature, two general meanings seem deceptive. We noted earlier that Male could not rule without the authority that is bestowed by Goddesses. The association of Lakshmi with Vishnu, the supreme divine king, as her husband is therefore fitting. She follows him when he becomes part of his human agents, the righteous kings, and she bestows on these kings her royal power, prosperity, and fertility. In effect, Vishnu designates his human agents, and Sri then empowers them, enabling them to be effective maintainers of Vishnu's cosmic scheme. Her role as a model wife typifies her more subdued nature. She is occupied in this role with household order. In her role as an ideal wife, she exemplifies the orderliness of human society and human relations. Iconographic representations in association with Vishnu, Lakshmi provides a picture of marital contentment, domestic order, and satisfying cooperation and beneficial interdependence between male and female. Most iconographic representations picture the pair as a smiling, happy couple. The intimacy of the two, indeed, their underlying unity, is dramatically shown in images in which they are merged into one bisexual figure, moreover like Ardhaneweswera.

A gradual shift toward a singularity and a strong darker image independent of her eternal consort Vishnu is seen in the later turn to Maha lakshmi image than that of Lakshmi- Vishnu.

In the Lakshmi Tantra, the goddess says: “I am inherent in existence. I am the inciter, the potential that takes shape. I manifest myself. I occupy myself with activity and finally dissolve myself. I pervade all creations with vitality, will and consciousness. Like ghee that keeps a lamp burning, I lubricate the senses of living beings with the sap of my consciousness.” A twenty-first century Lakshmi is someone who is majorly autonomous and likes to take difficulties into her hands and make her own life selections like Maha Lakshmi role model. She is no complainer and believes in functioning rigid for all she wants. Societies tend to associate Lakshmi with only granting wealth. But in reality, at the present time, she grants abundance of which includes good health, prosperity, success, and wisdom, apart from wealth. But also take stand as more like Kali, the extended part of Maha Lakshmi; most of her character traits would point to someone who fights for her rights, has confidence in herself. She doesn't shy away from facing the circumstances and takes the decision for herself by ownself. Even angry and dreadful and at the same time is considered as a strong maternal figure and a source of motherly love and affection.

### **3. 6. Sita: As the most popular and perfect Sahadharmini**

Another Lakshmi like sahadharmini image is reflected in the image of Sita. In the progression of the position and roles of Indian womanhood, the segment to which Sita belongs influences the status of women in the domestic sphere of activity. She is reflected to be the incarnation of Sri or Lakshmi, the consort of Vishnu. She comes to the brief plane of being in order to endure a difficult life that illustrates to humanity the finest of virtues. That virtue needs to be taught and put into practice in everyday life by all people, even in the present day. The reflection of her way is the best that precept. Although Sita may often be seen as the most obvious example, among all the Hindu goddess figures, of wifely submission demanded by the Laws of Manu with regard to Hindu marriage and gender relations, a certain element of ambiguity can be detected. Sita may well consider herself to be secondary to Rama's importance as husband and king, but she is not always silent or entirely submissive. Ultimately, she chooses spiritual liberation above continuing her earthly relationship with her husband. Her love and loyalty to Rama, against all odds, can further be construed as a metaphor for divine love and surrender, as an example to devotees and spiritual seekers. Indeed, her close link with

nature does confirm her divinity, and, in the end, she attains liberation in reunion with the goddess of the earth.

That Rama, the ideal god-man in the Epic, himself remains strongly convinced about Sita's chastity and purity due to her strength of will power and loyal love to Rama, her beloved husband, despite being forcefully kidnapped by Ravana and making her captive. That way, we can see these accidental disturbances in Rama-Sita's life could not lead to disintegrations of the sanctity of the institution of marriage. Because even after the period of Vanavasa and of all trials they remain Sahadharmini(nis) to one another, dutiful parents to their children, the ideal daughter in law in Dasaratha's family, so that even in the coronation and in Yajgya that Rama had to perform his Shadharmini Sita's presence was mandatory. Even in case of her physical absence for some reason, a replica of Sita was made to sit by Rama's side. Thus any virtue of being good must take a middle path in between destruction and extreme obsession for both sides. That way, chastity as virtue sought to serve its purpose that seen sanctity of marriage as an institution that remains despite some flexibility in understanding towards even within the so-called patriarchal family structure. That way, we find attempts being made again using Goddess metaphor for re-interpreting traditional and stereotyped roles from a feminist perspective, such as depicted in Nina Palay's 'Sita Sings the Blue' (2008). Interestingly enough, even from a non Feminist folk Bhakti platform, some alternate and freer role models for women may be designed. It may also be seen as deconstructing a dominant paradigm by projections of multiple voices within a composite culture as we find different portrayals of Sita as role models are there in vernacular traditions and translations of the Text. This shows that Goddesses as role models still remain the ideal though which role is suitable to the changing time and situation may vary as per requirements of the reader and the author of these texts when any interpreter recreates the story, and this remains an author in his or her own terms. This reminds us that a particular Goddess image remains suitable at a particular era and a particular socio-cultural situation, and this meaning is never fixed or final.

Moreover, it has been argued that Sita represents an embodiment of shakti, "the energy that inspires the hero Rama to action", and of the fertility of the earth and natural world (Dimmit 1986). For instance, when Sita is absent from the kingdom, animals, plants, and trees seem to lament and wither; and on her return, "Fruitless trees became fruitful; trees without flowers abounded blossoms; those that were withered sprouted leaves, and the foliage dripped honey" (Valmiki's Ramayana 6.12; cited in Dimmit 1986). Nonetheless, Sita's identity as a loyal and

faithful wife to Rama remains the symbolic representation most commonly upheld as a model for young Hindu women entering a marriage. In this popular role, Sita stands in stark contrast to the independent and powerful "dark" goddess.

But what about the real Sita in her real life? A perfect model of self-surrender for the spiritual devotee, does she remain the self-sacrificing pativrata, to be mimicked by all Hindu women? Madhu Kishwar's (2000) field survey across class, religion and gender s of the popular perception of Sita and her hold over imagination leads her to conclude that Indian women were not endorsing female slavery when they mentioned Sita as their Ideal. Sita, for them, is not a mindless creature who meekly suffers maltreatment; instead, she is perceived as a being whose sense of dharma is greater to and more awe-inspiring than that of Rama. In other words, many people perceive Sita's steadfastness as a sign of emotional strength and not slavery. To get a precise and composed outlook, we have to go beyond the rigid lines of placing her on a pedestal as the perfect role model for a woman of all times and condescending her as a mere patriarchal tool for ensuring submissiveness in women.

On the one hand, we find an emotional approval of Sita's status as follows the emotional response evoked by the character of Sita also determines many perceptions. Swami Vivekananda places her at unassailable heights of glory: 'Sita, purer than purity itself, all patience, and all suffering. She who suffered ... without a murmur, she the ever-chaste and ever-pure wife, she the ideal of the people, the ideal of the gods Sita has gone into the very veins of our race. She is there in the blood of every Indian man and woman; we are all the children of Sita. The women of India must grow and develop in the footprints of Sita, and that is the only way.' And on the other hand, one may now find attempts to review the version from Sita's point of view, like *Sitayana: Sita Sings the Blues*. This is a new twist to the Ramayana from Sita's perspective, by Nina Paley. Or, for instance, there is Madhu Kishwar's article 'Yes to Sita, No to Ram! The Continuing Popularity of Sita in India', which clinches the point of subversion by saying: 'Ram's rejection of Sita is almost universally condemned while her rejection of him is held up as an example of supreme dignity.'

Many related sub-versions are to be found while analyzing the popular response to Sita's experiences. They mainly determine whether she is seen as a negative or a laudatory model. Sita's character thus repeats the reverence rendered to women in Indian culture as well as their important contribution in all dialogues of life, public and private, along with men. The

effacement which women chose to adopt on many occasions was often by a free exercise of volition and not compulsion or coercion. All these aspects make the understanding of Sita's multifaceted character very complex. But Paley's critique of the Ramayana goes beyond simply championing Sita's story over Rama's. In the gentle, irreverent, humorous way she tells this story, she's also criticizing the monolithic, heavy-handed and hegemonic version of the Ramayana with an alternate position from a modern-day sahadharmini looking for an ideal match in her counterparts to treat her as an equal counterpart in their conjugal dialogue.

The Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South Asia (1991), Edited by Paula Richman, gathers analyses with new angles and focal points and considers the textual paradigm of fluid adaptability. Richman wisely utilizes Ramanujan's probing view of the Ramayana as a richly dynamic multi-voiced entity to orchestrate this exercise in relativity and to sort out how various telling and interpretations arise and function. Even for those who despise it, the Ramayana is a second language; it is a communication resource to affirm, deny, or re-shape existing order.

### **3.7. Sita's paradoxical portrayal as a woman**

The role models provided by the polytheistic Hindu pantheon provides revered images of women as unique and yet complementary to those of male deities. The goddess that is most frequently put forth as representing an ideal sahadharmini role in the Hindu pantheon is Lakshmi and later Sita, who appears in the epic Ramayana. Sita is faithful to her husband Rama, even to the point of demise. The focus on the divine creative feminine force is important as it is known by Hindus as Shakti. We have to believe this knowledge is important because it demonstrates how women can maintain positions of power without distressing an established patriarchal ritual. Considering power structures and roles that people play within their society is central to a holistic understanding of a society and its culture. It would be applicable to see without endeavouring this kind of unequal equality; it can be said that Sita in no way seems inferior to any other personality in the epic. She has the obligatory self-confidence to live a life of dignity in the most trying of situations. Her self-confidence is not manifest through any form of belligerence, and instead her restraint and stillness are clearer signs of her faith in herself than what was possible through any fierce overt display of hostility.

### 3.7.1 Scope for Revisiting the Text in Nuanced ways: Bhakti over Shakti

William L. Smith's scholarly article, "The Wrath of Sita: Sankaradeva's Uttarakanda" (2004), interprets how from the perspective of the Bhakti tradition, a much more woman-oriented and gender-sensitive portrayal of Sita could be projected even within the Bhakti tradition as in Sankaradeva's Eka Sarna Naam Dharma perspective. Sankaradeva takes the liberty to portray a strong and angry Sita who is not so silent as in Valmiki's. She utters these words: "In my mind, Rama seems like the god of death. Had I known that he was so heartless, I certainly would have ended my life in Lanka." Her response leaves Hanuman and His companions speechless. They make no further attempts to persuade her; instead, Hanuman goes to Valmiki and tells him that Sita will not listen to them. Valmiki, in his turn, asks Sita to forgive all Rama's earlier offence (purbba yata dosa), and Sita merely weeps in response.

Traditionally people have a very negative idea about women's position in a patriarchal society considering the distinctive meaning of Indian patriarchy. We may say the term patriarchy has different shades and colours as per the phases of its development from an earlier and a liberal one of its kind that was substituted later with a rigid one during the time of caste oriented Smarta phase handled by priest-king alliance at the instrumentality of the Karmakaandi Brahmins. Even then, even despite all its ups and downs, we cannot overall generalise the term patriarchy as it is also seen in the context of the Indian scenario, as it is not exactly what patriarchy means in the west that remains the target of the Feminist critics across culture. What we can say in the beginning is that we find that similar to other patriarchal setups, in India too, gradually a rigid kind of patriarchy emerged out of its base in a comparatively liberal one as in a comparative study we find that that gradually women's position deteriorated unlike in the earlier phase which we used to see in early Vedic period as well. At post-Vedic and a Smarta period, the position deteriorated, which was sought to be corrected and reformed by many, including a large section of the Bhakta Saints with their creative expressions in Bhakti literature as thus trying to re-discover those lost liberal ethics of the idea. Taking that as the true liberal spirit of this vast country of many cultures and many races living in harmonious pluralistic platform despite differences.

This is the context that makes sense why in Bhakta, saints like Mahapurush Srimanta Sankaradeva, in particular, could accommodate some liberal ethos even within a so-called patriarchal family set up. Sankaradeva and the other Bhakata saints and reformers of Assam,

as in mainly in Medieval India, did not interpret husband-wife relation in terms of Hegelian and Sartrean master-slave exploitative relation that enables the master, usually, the husband, if he remains the authority and the more powerful one, to be the total controller that the wife is to be completely controlled by the male counterpart, the husband, who is thus projected more as a boss and a master than an equal and complementary partner to his female counterpart. The initial liberal position of husband and wife as *sahadharmi (ni)* was also the true meaning of the word *sahadharmini* when more than being a partner in a dominating relation, husband and wife portrayed a complimentary status. That way, both husband and wife remain *Sahadharmi* (also as *sahadharmini*) as co-traveller in life and in *dharma*, through thick and thin. Accordingly, there remained more scope for liberal interpretations of men women relationship that also safeguarded women's secured position in society. The present study is a short exploration of the status of Indian women within a comparatively liberal and reformist kind of patriarchal society is based on literature review and research of particular scriptures with its most traditional sources based on Vedic texts as analysed by innumerable researchers and scholars in various ways. In order to determine whether Hindu women really enjoyed some kind of freedom and independence in the early phase of the Vedic Period, even though that period regarded as patriarchal, we have surveyed some scholarly literature in this regard. Based on some of our study we may summarise the following here. Women were found enjoying their rights to develop their potentiality in various fields, ranging from housekeeping, cooking, being a good host to being a good daughter-wife etc. Also to learn music, other womanly skills from stitching, needlework to weaving and knitting, from decorating to artistic aspects in them as well. Thus their presence was essential in all the streams of life even though overall household centered around a father figure or a male authority who also remained the prime food provider for the family, also the one who goes out to the agriculture field when there was a need for ploughing etc. Those way families had paternal authority as a father, the husband and in that case, a wife is seen and treated as a *sahadharmi(ni)*. Along with that, we find that a section of really studious and talented women excelled as scholars and poets, philosophers etc., during the early Vedic period. On the other hand, some also showed courage and independence as warriors too. Especially in the context of Sankaradeva influenced Vaishnavite society only we found the first Assamese woman poet Aai Padmapriya, the learned and *bhakti* daughter of Sankaradeva's disciple Gopal Ata, the founder head of the Kaala Sanghati sub-sect of Neo Vaishnive Order founded by Sankaradeva. We also hear about the valour of Mula Gabharu

during the Ahom period as of Radha and Rukmini and others during Moamoria vidroh from the Maran community in Assam.

We also have Sati Radhika as an epitome of ideal housewife balancing her wifely duties as per moral and social norms and also as the first woman work team leader who contributed their manual labour in the construction of Tembuani stream (small river) bāndh (dam) that Sankaradeva sought to save the locality and its people from flood and erosion. That needed contributions from both male and female members, and here came Radhika Sati representing an otherwise lower caste of Kaivarta community whom Sankaradeva particularly identified and glorified as the role model of virtues personified in her and an ideal of all other women also in so-called higher castes to follow her. Sankaradeva also disapproved of caste hierarchy and discrimination that Brahmins and priests, and kings sought to impose and monitor. Here she stands as the role model, a perfect epitome of both feminine and wifely virtues imbibed in her that so long she remains dharma bound to her husband, she values loyalty to her wife as she expects similar loyalty from her sahadharmini counterpart, her husband. So she remained chaste, so she said to the Bhakta saint what remains her virtue and strength that will enable her to pass the trial of the beginning the whole process by one virtuous woman when she claimed herself to be eligible to do so, to join hand in this dharmic act of helping people out of crisis situation besides performing all her expected wifely and womanly duties in a balanced way. No doubt the land was full of some such sahadharmini is when we find the story of Sati Jaimoti, who made herself a crusader to the dictatorial and rigid Ahom monarchy of her time so that her husband can be saved to restore liberal values in the land later. The fascinating point to note here is that no one forced them to act in this manner, nor any male member forcing them to do so though it was a patriarchal society, rather the males, her husband Gadapani when he heard the news of Jaimoti tortured by the king, came in disguise to persuade her to withdraw that he himself will be imprisoned if the king wants that, but Jaimoti strongly refused as her dharma was to keep the rightful and liberal heir to the throne alive so that the people will be liberated from tyranny. This was the kind of sahadharmani ideal that Sankaradeva too glorified in his literature. Women were treated equivalent to men and had the freedom to develop, which encouraged them to explore their identity as per their choice. Various customs and traditions were absorbed by the Hindu society gave full and active participation to its women. During this liberal phase of Vedic patriarchy, we find women as Atri, Maitreyi, Lopamudra, and many others who were also greatly honoured in society but who excelled in merit and intellect along

with their male counterparts. But gradually, with the passage of time, this high and equal status that women enjoyed once began to decline, more so when as we move from the early Vedic to later Vedic Period and it touched its base during the Smriti period when women were deprived and divested of their due status, respect and opportunities. In the northeastern part of society also, including Assam, it has been found that the impact of patriarchal pressure on women tightened suddenly, and it turned out to be negative and a controlling kind of authority that also lost its original complementary kind of relations that characterised sahadharmini ideal. Still, later, women were not to be treated as equally as there came social barrier of various kinds which sought to discriminate between men and women. As long as the problems of women were identified as peripheral and a woman's personal problem, and not as social problems, the attempts at the solution of these problems lost the importance. We see that this kind of attitude even worked at the otherwise progressive kind of Marxist movements that paid little attention to woman's domestic labour issues in their overall labour related negotiations when the problems are seen as a major issue for the whole society than only these may set importance.

In Assam during the time of Mahapurusa Srimanta Sankardeva, 1400 A.D, there were social structures and old social norms in Assam that suddenly deteriorated demolished the veil of preserving modesty and sanctity. And Sankardeva was one who tried to liberalise women even though he himself was a product of a patriarchal social system led by the definite setup where man still possesses the central authority in every matter. The patriarchal system prevailed during Srimanta Sankardeva's time when the Bhakta Saint was born in 1449 A.D. The place he was born at Borduwa in the Nagaon district of Brahmaputra Valley of Assam. He was a great social reformer, progressive thinker. Along with that, he was a writer, actor, dancer, and he formed some religious drama. Srimanta Sankardeva was not only a religious preacher but also wide-ranging literature as well as a social reformer. Srimanta Sankardeva tried to reclaim and recover woman from that degraded state and regarded them to equal status with man, basically with equality in all spheres, including dharma.

Feminism has mostly challenged the idea that women could be projected as an ideal wife or daughter that she can find fulfilment of her life as wives and mothers. In every way, the concept of feminism has applied in the political, social, religious arena by raising the issue of women's rights. But many people do not know that Srimanta Sankardeva had already introduced the concept of feminism in the true and in its Indian sense of the term when despite caste, family restrictions and other constraints, some reformers, mostly male, addressed

woman's issues in a very liberal and sensitive way back in the fifteenth century itself, before the beginning of all the proponent of feminism in the West. Though generally, people get bewildered, and they conclude that Srimanta Sankaradeva's idea as Sahadhrmini is not a liberal kind of approach if judged from a typical feminist perspective also because people generally equate feminism with woman's right issues than anything with duty aspect of any relationship. Feminists also primarily focus on issues more related to sexual liberation etc., that cannot appreciate how come some woman-friendly liberal ideas could be fostered from a so-called patriarchal set up that also glorifies the duty aspect of a woman and of man.

In this background, this part of the chapter explores some issues that are related to woman welfare irrespective of whether we use the term feminist or not, to understand what actually this Bhakta Saint of Assam sought to address on woman welfare or whether this was there in some manner in his writings or not. Sankaradeva (traditional date 1449-1568) was a near contemporary of Vallabhacarya and Caitanya and founded the Eka-Sarana dharma sect, which has dominated Vaisnavism in Assam ever since his day. A skilled and prolific poet, he produced works in Maithili kind of Brajabuli as well as in Sanskrit and Assamese.

We may try to understand Sankaradeva's liberal approach to the woman and her position in society whether any woman too can be seen as a person in her own right who has feelings of her own, whether she can demand her right in a legitimate way despite being otherwise a duty-bound daughter, wife, daughter in law and all others. This will also picturize the alternative image of the strength or weakness of Sahadharmini role model for woman. We will try to see here a so-called typical Feminist kind woman, and particularly Sita oriented woman-friendly position of Mahapurush Sankaradeva in his creative translation of a part of Ramayana in Assamese. Here we follow a mostly very scholarly approach to Sankaradeva's Uttarakanda by W.L. Smith particularly. The greater part of Sankaradeva's production was in the latter of these languages and consisted of Assamese renderings of portions of the Bhagavata Purana, the Hariscandra-upakhyana, the Rukmini-harana-kavya and various other Sanskrit works" (W.L. Smith, 2004). Sankaradeva's translation Uttarakanda Ramayana is not an independent book. As mentioned above, when Adikanda and Uttarakanda could not be found in Madhava Kandali's Ramayana, Sankardev took the responsibility of translating Uttarakanda from the original Valmiki Ramayana and added it to Kandali's Ramayana. While translating from the Sanskrit original, the saint excluded several stories and emphasized mainly those portions that rotated around Rama and Sita (Biswadip Gogoi). Now while coming to see Sankaradeva acting

also as a saviour of a woman against injustice made to her in his writings, we have to understand the post-Vedic deteriorating situation that Assamese society in Sankaradeva's time was going through in some part, though not in all others. The time of Srimanta Sankaradeva's advent was a horrible time. As scholars point out: "Women had no honour in those days a woman could be taken by the Bhogi (a man selected for sacrifice before the deity) at any time. That situation arose from the Tantriks. Making woman the object of enjoyment in the name of the Sahajiya path of the Tantric cult gave rise to adultery among some people. Srimanta Sankaradeva redeemed woman from that degraded state and elevated her to equal status with man in the performance of the religion of devotion" (Sanjib Kumar Borkakoti, 2008). Srimanta Sankaradeva tried to give these subdued women some taste of their lost dignity being recovered to them by enabling them to be free while taking leadership in Naam-kirttan, also some of them emerging as well versed in sastras who could recite kirtanas in performance of regular Naam-kirttan etc. Some also emerged as Guru to be able to initiate disciples as we see later in Harideva's daughter and also Sankaradeva's daughter-in-law Aai Kanaklata playing an active role in rediscovering Guru's dharma and the ancestral place at Bardowa. Sankaradeva himself took the steps so that women can enjoy the right to organize offerings in the Kirtan-ghar and also perform Nama-kirtana by themselves. The Eka-Sarana-Nama-Dharma preached by him attracted many women devotees into the fold of Eka-Sarana-Nama-Dharma, and women played a crucial role in the spread of the Dharma. Along with that Sankaradeva advised the married couples to offer Bhakti to God together and by this man and women sharing equal status.

There are many other instances that show that Srimanta Sankaradeva bestowed honour to women, and His project was progressive in his thought. "A revolt against the traditionalists was brewing in his maiden book 'Harish Chandra Upakhyaana' itself. The people who torture women are strongly condemned here" (S.K. Borkakoti, 2008). Here is his writing Srimanta Sankaradeva recognized the strength of woman by comparing her with a burning fire in various verses, and also even more important than that is narration by Sankaradeva in his plays the act of seeking of apology by men from women in his writings.

In Valmiki's version of the final scene, Sita does not speak a word to Rama. She swears her innocence, calling upon Madhavi, her mother, the Earth goddess, to open a fissure in the ground and admit her as she has never had thoughts of a man other than Rama, and so it happens Sita disappears triumphantly into the depths of the earth. In Sankaradeva's rendering, Sita has far much more to say through her silence, through her defying and protesting acts and through

her acts of crucifixion far more than words can convey. She is so much humiliated and enraged at the necessity of having to undergo a second public test of her chastity, and her temper is obvious to the crowd which has come to witness the sight. Thinking of all she had suffered, “Though Sita does protest her devotion to Rama’s feet in conventional terms, this is drowned out in a long (longer, in fact, than the story of her exile) and very unconventional harangue in which she vents her bitterness. Sita then swears the same oath as in Valmiki; the earth heeds it and splits open and accept her. She is gone, and Rama is crushed with grief. The point Sankaradeva is trying to make is one of compassion, compassion for Rama’s dilemma, of course, but much more for Sita sufferings. Sankaradeva’s sympathies are with her” (W.L. Smith, 2004). The Ramayana story belongs to everyone, and Sita belongs to every woman. Assamese version of the Ramayana morally supports suffering woman to protest against injustice as Sita here questions Rama’s decision to ask for her fire trial a second time. Sita has accused Rama that he failed to protect her even in the minimum way and that as a wife, she has a right to ask him this minimum protection of her life, safety and security. In that period, even Sankardeva carefully creates a scene in which Sita negotiates the questions of freedom, dignity etc., with Rama, her husband also meant to others who are the audience here. In the contemporary feminist way, then it is coming from a duty-bound *sahadharmini* the feminist questions of rights of woman as wife and as daughters as well, that could be contextualized in the contemporary context as well. Sankaradeva touches upon the human rights aspect of Sita’s destiny, seeing her as a dignified human being in her own right who deserves fair treatment, more so, as a deserving wife asking for her right from a husband.

One of the things in India and Hinduism is that it’s a male-dominated society and religion, and it is a religion that has attributed the words for the strength and power to feminine. “Shakti” means “power” and “strength”, and all-male power comes from the feminine. But Sankardeva given a new image while to mostly Sita protests against Rama. Still, she remains or likes to remain dutiful as *parivrata* herself to her Rama like husband as his true *sahadharmini*, and we find that Sankardeva remains very sympathetic for Sita’s ordeal and trials (*agnipariksās*). And taking his liberty as a *Bhakta* saint, in his creative interpretation of the *Uttarakanda* Ramayana, Sankaradeva puts strong words in Sita’s mouth before which Rama, the God incarnate, appears to remain speechless. Despite his strong sympathy for Rama’s own tragic predicament that he too is a victim of tragic circumstances in life, Sankaradeva is not happy at repeated ordeals that Sita herself has to undergo despite Rama remaining very sure of

her virtue. This makes the saint present Sita's case kindly, and gesture on Sankardeva's part tells a lot about men's sympathetic understanding of women's conditions through patriarchal social system prevailed. Sankardeva showed that despite playing role models as an ideal wife, Sita is also an individual, a suffering human being who is to be sympathetically understood by her husband, who is not supposed to act as her master and boss but a friend, philosopher and guide. Sankardeva's portrayal of Sita in the context of Assamese society and in North-East at large remains significant and meaningful at Sankardeva's hand.

Another sahadharmini Lakshmi image is reflected in the image of sita. In the evolution of the position and roles of Indian womanhood, the phase to which Sita belongs spells the status of women in the domestic sphere of activity. Sita is considered to be the incarnation of Sri or Lakshmi, the consort of Vishnu, who comes to the transitory plane of existence in order to endure an arduous life that illustrates to humanity the finest of virtues—virtues that need to be inculcated and put into practice. Since the best method of instruction is not by word but by precept, she could do no better than undergo all the travails possible in order to show that the path to perfection is not through avoidance of suffering but in suffering willingly and subverting the ensuing pain with the right mental attitude. By choosing to suffer but not be weighed down by pain and anguish, the evil which engenders suffering is nullified—this is more purifying and elevating than any ordeal of fire.

Although Sita may often be seen as the most obvious example, among all the Hindu goddess figures, of wifely submission demanded by the Laws of Manu with regard to Hindu marriage and gender relations, a certain element of ambiguity can be detected. Sita may well consider herself to be secondary to Rama's importance as husband and king, but she is not always silent or entirely submissive. Ultimately, she chooses spiritual liberation above continuing her earthly relationship with her husband. Her love and loyalty to Rama, against all odds, can further be construed as a metaphor for divine love and surrender, as an example to devotees and spiritual seekers.

Thus any virtue of being good must take a middle path in between destruction and extreme obsession for both sides. That way, chastity as virtue sought to serve its purpose that seen sanctity of marriage as an institution that remains despite some flexibility in understanding towards even within the so-called patriarchal family structure. That Rama, the ideal god-man in the epic, himself remains concerned about Sita's chastity despite being forcefully kidnapped

by Ravana and making her captive. That way, we can see these accidental disturbances in Rama-Sita's life could not lead to disintegrations of the sanctity of the institution of marriage. Because even after Vanavasa and of all trials they remain Sahadharmi(nis) to one another, dutiful parents to their children, the ideal daughter in law in Dasaratha's family, so that even in the coronation and in Yajgya that Rama had to perform his Shadharmini Sita's presence was mandatory. Even in case of her physical absence for some reason, a replica of Sita was made to sit by Rama's side.

That gendering does influence Hindu ideas of gender roles, with the man being perceived as more inclined to spiritual knowledge and the women as more inclined to earthly action. The great goddess has philosophical roots in the mainstream as well for Samkhya. After all, They recognise the categories of purusa and prakrti. The latter that actuates the inert Purusa is primary so far as world process is concerned. This idea is developed and elaborated in tantra. The classical mainstream text of Devimahatmaya, which sees the ultimate reality as feminine and is based on this germinal concept from Samkhya. Thus we find that the Great Goddess as Shakti is often interpreted in a too impersonal and abstract way, taking it as a philosophical requirement. Moreover, it has been argued that Sita represents an embodiment of shakti, "the energy that inspires the hero Rama to action", and of the fertility of the earth and natural world (Dimmit 1986). For instance, when Sita is absent from the kingdom, animals, plants, and trees seem to lament and wither; and on her return, "Fruitless trees became fruitful; trees without flowers abounded blossoms; those that were withered sprouted leaves, and the foliage dripped honey" (Valmiki's Ramayana 6.12 Swami Vivekananda; cited in Dimmit 1986). Nonetheless, Sita's identity as a loyal and faithful wife to Rama remains the symbolic representation most commonly upheld as a model for young Hindu women entering a marriage. In this popular role, Sita stands in stark contrast to the independent and powerful "dark" goddess.

Many sub-versions are to be found while analysing the popular response to Sita's experiences—they largely determine whether she is seen as a negative or a laudatory model. Sita's character thus reiterates the veneration accorded to women in Indian culture as well as their significant participation in all discourses of life, public and private, along with men. The effacement which women chose to adopt on many occasions was often by a free exercise of volition and not compulsion or coercion. All these aspects make the interpretation of Sita's multifaceted character very complex. But Paley's critique of the Ramayana goes beyond simply championing Sita's story over Rama's. In the gentle, irreverent, humorous way she tells this

story, she's also criticizing the monolithic, heavy-handed and hegemonic version of the Ramayana with an alternate position from a modern-day *sahadharmini* looking for an ideal match in her counterparts to treat her as an equal counterpart in their conjugal dialogue.

The Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South Asia (1991), Edited by Paula Richman, gathers analyses with new angles and focal points and considers the textual paradigm of fluid adaptability. Richman wisely utilizes Ramanujan's probing view of the Ramayana as a richly dynamic multi-voiced entity to orchestrate this exercise in relativity and to sort out how various telling and interpretations arise and function. Even for those who despise it, the Ramayana is a second language; it is a communication resource to affirm, deny, or re-shape existing order.

However, in a situation where God is not yet dead, though hidden or half-veiled, for a Hindu girl Goddess is not a philosopher's god as an abstract idea but a living, loving guiding friend, philosopher and guide in one's life which can be worshipped, can be looked forward to in difficult times, can be angry with when still frustrated m, but always sharing a lived and a personal relationship. In the article 'Queering women and Hinduism: Disembedding, the material script from women and earth' (2011) by Maheshvari Naidu has mentioned that Hinduism is a religion with a professed popular face featuring as many female goddesses as male gods and with the popular perception of a matriarchal bent of spirituality bent manifest in the rich veins of mythological narratives and rituals performance. Hinduism is very much mother centred and matriarchal religion that emphasises the feminine within the doctrinal Streams of Shaktism.

Mother Goddess does co-relate with high secular status for women in India. In fact, it is possible to argue for an inverse relationship. Campbell provocatively suggested that mother-goddess worship is prominent in cultures that polarise male and female roles that it has an inverse relation to the secular status. She suggested that the mother goddess may be compassionate for the subordinate status of women (Campbell, 1983).

This is more in line with the role models provided by the polytheistic Hindu pantheon that provides revered images of women as unique and yet complementary to those of male deities. The goddess that is most often put forth as exemplifying an ideal *sahadharmini* role in the Hindu pantheon is Lakshmi and later Sita, who appears in the epic Ramayana. Sita is loyal to her husband Rama, even to the point of death. Another submissive goddess is Durga's tamed avatar, Parvati. Like Sita, Parvati also exemplifies the ideal Hindu wife through her mythology.

To obtain the love of her consort Shiva, who is a devoted ascetic, Parvati leaves her lavish lifestyle to meditate for decades alone. Her commitment to her meditation finally forces Shiva to acknowledge Parvati's utter devotion to him. On the one hand, bare impersonal Shakti remains exclusively and one-sidedly power centre while its Bhakti centric complementary roles humanise the loving bond shared between the two in a harmonious pattern. However, while philosophical language uses the language of prayer and worship, then only a personal contact is made between the two, the divine as the role model and the profane sharing an intimate bond in worship in intimate. In this background, the thesis keeps its focus on the development of the concepts that keep room for providing highly philosophical and abstract conceptions on the one hand and deeply personal and religious attachment with this role model on the other hand. This is well illustrated, and the life of the great Advaita philosophers Sankaracharya, who developed the highest concept of Nirguna Brahmana, also composed very personally devotional hymns to the goddesses.

### **3.8. Chapter Summery**

Women's role models in Hinduism are differed as depending upon many numbers factors like region, caste, occupation, and education, most importantly, social system. It is practically unfeasible to present an illustration that is consistent and self-contained. And therefore, when we want to talk about women's role model, then it includes the question of women in Hinduism, and moreover, we cannot escape from the Goddess as a role model. Thus while talking about that in a pluralistic fashion as recognizing that there are numbers of clusters and concerns that are relevant to the following chapter seeks to address a select number of this concern, but it is by no means extensive. It has some limitations, and basically, here the chapter has tried to explore the Lakshmi and Sita's origin along with different interpretations regarding the characters along with the time and social systems. And tried to find out if we take them as role models, then will it lead us to the solution for women related issues in modern times or not. The first part of the chapter will discuss the Lakshmi goddess's origins and philosophical interpretation of her. Her origination will lead us to know how do women can relate to the earth, but the dark side cannot be demolishing from her. Just like that, normal women carry both soft and fiercely attributes. This chapter made a philosophical and textual interpretations of Sahadharmini role model ideals for woman will set to Lakshmi or Sita in particular. Later

part of the chapter also discussed regional, folk portrays of the Text Ramayana that is how with the Bhakti tradition of Sankardeva as a mere symbolises as constructive role model as Sahadharmini was portrayed in his vernacular translation of the Utrakanda Ramayana. This also justifies from traditional till modern time also portrays Sahadharmini as role model for woman.



## Chapter 4

### Woman as Kali and Durga: Some dark and powerful Goddesses as a role models for women

#### 4.1 Introduction

Kali and Durga are the most renowned and significantly powerful Goddesses of Indian Hindu society. In the previous chapter, we have seen how feminine role models of a goddess like Lakshmi, Sita have played a role in a deciding possible role model for women. Further, it will now lead to explore how some goddesses as darker and untamed, apparently suitable for acting as negative role models, also remain decisive for aspiring women at times. Kali and Durga are the warrior goddesses and mostly followed by a desolate group of worshippers. They remain associated with blood, sacrifices, war, sex, tantra, magical efficacy and mainly as a source of power. But do they represent only a fierce image? A woman can take them as role models despite their dominating images. Lakshmi, Sita are feminine goddesses, but we have seen another side of their images. That is the dark one. In the same manner here, the exploration is that the representation of Kali like goddesses as role models for a woman in society give some hint about some positive traits in them despite their dark image otherwise.

Kali is famously known as the ultimate creator, preserver, and destroyer, the original form of all things and eternity, change, time, destruction, and death. The essence of the chapter is that we are looking in many ways, mostly the opposite of what we think of in relation to the woman or Goddess with various representations of possible role models. Kali is the primal wilderness and turmoil as per the story of the birth or origin of Kali popularly known through the story of her fight in the Markandeya Purana. In Hindu mythology, Raktabej was a demon or asura, to whom had been given a boon by Lord Brahma that every time a drop of his blood falls on the ground, a new version of his own would be created. Having received this boon, he made the life of people and gods miserable. More so, with this power to produce more Raktabej, he sheds a drop of his blood almost everywhere. Hence the gods reached out to the goddess Durga or Shakti for help. Prepared with all the weapons, the Goddess charged at the demon. But as she wounded him with her sword and his blood fell on earth more like him appear. Angry by this, the Devi took the fierce and furious form of Kali. She went on to abolish the

demon with the sword in her hand, slay each demon and, collected his blood in her bowl and drank it immediately. Soon she finished the whole army of Raktabej, and the only real Raktabej was left. Then she killed him down and drinking all his blood until he fell lifeless. Not realising that the real Raktabej was dead, the Goddess continued her destruction and drinking the blood of the innocent others also. She continued to kill anybody that appeared in her way. Seeing this, the gods became extremely worried and approached Lord Shiva for help. Lord Shiva went and laid down amongst the corpses where the Goddess was madly dancing for blood. Accidentally Kali stepped on Shiva, and soon she realised her mistake. It was then she stuck out her tongue out of embarrassment and calmed down. She was ashamed that her blood lust had prevented her from recognising her husband. Soon came back to her original form and stopped the destruction. Shiva lying at the feet of Kali symbolises the supremacy of Nature over man. It clearly shows that without Kali or Shakti, even a powerful force like Lord Shiva is inert. Kali may be associated with many different forms and stories, like Mahakali, Daskkali etc. The image of Kali has travelled from east to west and made a home in the eyes of many. But in reality, Kali does not exist in front of us; she lives in space behind our eyes, in our minds and minds, and has many shapes, forms, and meanings.

#### **4.2. Kali expressed as a strong role model for feminists both east and west**

No character in the history of all religion is as fierce as the Hindu goddess Kali. In Indian, Kali is known as the dark Goddess. In the 20th century, with the rise of women rights, feminist came into view of Kali as the embodiment of feminine power. The image of Kali that exists in the west is somewhat different from the way most Indian see her and found her liberating. All the cultures along with texts remain intermixed, and by the time the common traditional interpretations changes with the cross regions across the globe, Kali as a symbol embodiment of rebellion against injustice, is mostly followed in modern times. While defining woman as Kali the intention is to bring about the state of liberation in her thought and to take stand against all discrimination. At the age the issues which are demanding are caste system, gender, economic inequality etc. and this radical goddess is an ideal to face and demolish these kind of constrains. Kali, the name which literally means time in Sanskrit, is an intense fighter and the most powerful manifestation of Shakti. There are many depictions of the different forms of Kali. The most common form often shows Kali as black, naked with angry red sunken eyes,

wearing skulls around her neck as jewellery and limbs around her waist. Her blackness represents that she is 'nirguna', meaning beyond all qualities of nature. She has four arms showing aspects of both creation and destruction with a bloody sword in one hand; she defeats the enemies and carries the head of a demon on the other hand. She holds the bowl on the third hand where the enemy's blood is collected, and last is held out in blessing. She has an open mouth with blood drooping down her tongue while she stands on the body of her husband, Lord Shiva. Although Kali is associated with blood, death and destruction, she is also seen as a mother figure and often referred to as Maa Kali meaning mother Kali. Kali is the dramatic expression of a fierce Mother's anger and the feminine power that awakens to attack those who threaten her children.

In Hinduism, traditionally, Kali as Chamunda in particular was regarded as the consumer of blood and sacrifices basically in tribal culture and the tongue as a consumer of demons. And this is still followed by most in the eastern culture. In the contemporary period, Kali represents an emblem of awkwardness or shame in modern-day India. These representations are fundamental hermeneutical devices designed to place the discussion in broad and various historical texts and contexts. Here the exploration is not some sort of historical accuracy, which we find in a large number of interpretations from ancient till modern time. But for the importance of ancient development and change in analyzing the complexity and internal conflict inherent in images and representations of Kali in many religions along with practical situation according to her various forms.

Moreover, these phases of Her should not be understood as mutually exclusive of one another. Like most spiritual forms of Her built up over time according to the related circumstances. It seems preserved in myth, ritual, iconography, and these different encrusted representations are always prospective actualities for those capable of understanding Her wilderness accompanied by mother like nature. In the Tantras and mostly in earlier works of literature, Kali is a Great Goddess in her own right, same as the way the radical feminist interpreters want woman to be her like, Who is not simply an emotional appendage of Durga and Lakshmi, but also from the philosophical tradition of Samkhya she is engaged to interpret the union of the Goddess and the god. And the Goddess as Primordial Nature that is prakrti unites with the Eternal Spirit that is purusa to create. By the time of the Tantras, those philosophical versions have entered deeply into Kali's nature and considered that She is the creator and the destroyer. "Her white teeth are indicative of the white self-manifesting quality

of Purity biting the red lolling tongue, which indicates the quality of Passion, thus suppressing both Passion and Darkness by Purity " (Jeffrey J. Kripal, 1994). That means She played the role of fierce and femininity too. Here in search for alternative constructions of femininity and motherhood along with modern woman issue that covered by feminist mostly will be the primary objective.

### **4.3. Paradoxical repossession of the Goddess Kali**

Beginning with Kali as a possible role model we find that she represents apparently a counter-image to the typical usual role models for women, especially with the Hindu Society context. But she is both a wife, a mother, and at the same time an immodest aggressive terrifying and violent image for all possible aspiring women who may like to like Kali in challenging tamed and domestic role model images for women. She is extreme in both cases, in death, destruction and radically rebellious positions always, also projected as a mother and also a wife. However, not a typical tamed wife that way comes across in another motherly role model of goddesses but carries an image of femininity and selfhood. The most visible images of Kali, what in a broader sense we can see, is that one of her hand is raised with the gestures, fear not, an abhaya- mudra and another point downward, bestowing boons by releasing and liberating. The fierce aspect of the feminine, which is Kali is not a goddess to take lightly as She became the power of yogic –strength that will eat up desires and thoughts so that the shine of our essential awareness and selfhood can reveal itself.

The feminine image that represents Kali here is powerfully terrifying, naked and intoxicated dark female bloodstained, and dancing on the prostrate body of her spouse, Shiva. With her tongue lolling out, wearing not anything except a wreath of human heads around her neck, a garland of severed human hands around her waist, and infant corpses as earrings. Subsequently, oddly abundant, the believer sees an impossible beauty of a woman and a mother in this frightening picture. But Kali does not establish a direct re-characterization of the concepts of wife and mother. There is the shift from Kali as fierce to Kali as a mother, and it will become clear as we go along. And to get the answer to whether the miserably oppressive patriarchal institutions of the home cultures of the Indian social system, does the Kali image convey any effectiveness as instruments of the liberation for women? Since Kali co-exists quite well with patriarchal structures and along with the partial oppression of women in India in

some pockets, there be no real radical solution in her symbolism, or worship, related to women at the present social system. These apprehensions are significant, but the drawbacks of trying to derive a politics from the realm of spirituality are far more significant if we concentrate simply on the Kali model. It will become the end of the chapter how rearranging to Kali as an indigenous worshipful love for mother alleviates objections. The spiritual formations that co-exist with traditional patriarchal developments can be linked to the liberatory position of woman.

Kali in India is a feminist principle, which is followed by the West most. As is well acknowledged, it has frequently been argued that the making of female divinity is a disposition to keep absolute power away from real women in the real world. But the terrifying image of Kali is a creation of the platform of female sexuality gone wild. Through representing how Goddesses have been otherwise appropriated, such as tamed feminine model Lakshmi might also explain the hesitation that many Indian feminist's impressions about suggesting the practice of Goddess symbols as role models. Now it is indubitable that the mere presence of spiritual phenomena like Mother Goddesses do not represents themselves but ensure a society. An image has been manipulated to serve the ends of patriarchy does not infer that it has no constructive worth or that it cannot be more manipulated to attend other ends. It is the prospect of such an alternative goddess of a spiritual phenomenon that is being suggested here. The Indian context is not the ideal platform for manipulating Goddess symbols for political purposes only. Its spiritual agenda too remains prominent.

#### **4.4. Passage of Kali to Bhadra Kali**

Here an attempt is that the derivation of an alternative role model of woman for self-construction and for self-other relationship from an analysis of a particular category of two contradictory addressed to Kali. According to Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, the "recuperation of the/a Hindu goddess as feminist is problematic at the present historical juncture both for its assumption of an undifferentiated 'woman- power' as well as for its promotion of a certain radicalized Hinduism" (Sunder Rajan,1998). The spiritual idea here is suggestive of ontological transformations without which even very self-consciously adopted socio-political agendas for change might not be effective. As the symbol of femininity, Kali may be read in two ways, as serving patriarchal purposes and emerging from male fear of female sexuality; or as genuine

feminine self-assertion and power, a mother who is not terrified of stepping out of the conventions of motherhood to express herself, her rage and her needs. But the point to be emphasized is that Kali always signifies more than the feminine.

This feminine aspect of reality is identified with knowledge and wisdom. The Mahāvidyas include Kālī, Tārā, Tripura-sundarī, Bhuvaneśvarī, Chinnamastā, Bhairavī, Dhūmāvati, Bagalā mukhī, Mātāṅgī, and Kamalā. Their predominant characteristics are linked to death imagery, signs of decay, skulls, blood, cremation grounds, sex, wildness, outskirts, and outsiderhood. They also embody the frightening and the forbidden, as well as magical powers. They are fierce, independent, and dominant. In fact, they substantiate death, violence, pollution, and marginality, representing the opposite of what is accepted by conventional society. The association with death, destruction and graveyard, and also known as Smashan Kali and otherwise unwelcome and inauspicious goddess who is not included in the list of gram devi (village-goddess), when she seen as 'smashan-kali' and also so kept at a distance from the village also as a marginal similar to forest goddesses. Here we may also recall the image of Bandurga (forest Durga), which will not be allowed as a welcome goddess into the Hindu Brahmanical household, although more in demand with warriors, wanderers, homeless wonderers (tantricsidhhas), Kapalikas. The Aghori (Sanskrit aghora) panthis, who will be worshipping very dark and powerful Goddess as 'smashan-Kali', or at times 'Bana-Durga'. Here Kali represents death and destruction. Therefore, polluted and to be pacified with a magical and tantric antidote to keep her at a distance then welcoming her to villages and household, as we find in a transformed concept, a tamed Kali as Bhadra Kali or 'a tamed non-warrior Durga', who is worshipped and welcomed to the Hindu household as a daughter is welcomed for her annual visits to her maternal and paternal household with her kids Kartik and Ganesh during Durga puja annually. Here among the metropolitan, urban societies also there is need to annually appease the dark Goddess Kali and Durga with blood offering because the dark is found of red colour, here this ritual is also symbolically transformed into a domestic goddess adoration of her wifely role in the ritual that the Bengali women perform in 'Sindur-Khela', exchange of sindur to the value of married women with blessings from the Goddess that interestingly glorifies the role of women as a mother and an ideal wife. Sindur Khela (Bengali: সিঁদুর খেলা), literally meaning 'vermillion game', is a Bengali Hindu tradition where women smear each other with sindur on Vijayadashami, the last day of the Durga Puja.

So here we have seen although the ferocious and dark side of Kali is associated at a distance from the village, not as a 'gram- Devi', as 'samshan-kali', the same kali needs to be transformed to her motherly role while entering the household with Bhakti at heart and prayer to the Goddess. This differs from mantra-tantra used to pacify dark Kali when she remains inauspicious. In that case, she represents unwanted dark aspects of life, death, disease, as our current pandemic situation, which no one will welcome with prayer to grace their household, but will take recourse to the vaccine, medical recourses as needed when we remain victims looking for way out of the darkness, so here is a mantra r a tantra to drive away the dark forces, from attacking us and disturbing the life balance. These two sides her familiar image of dark goddesses as in Kali and Durga.

And later in Goddess Kali is portrayed as Uma, wife of Shiva as also synonymous with Durga and at a time we find more in the literature called 'Smanasangit' and 'Umasangit' or 'agomoni and bijoya' songs during Durga puja. This devotional Sakta poetry begins the process of 'sweetening the Goddess from a frightening figure to a much acceptable motherly or wifely role. This was a gradual change. Interestingly, sometimes there is a variation of the goddess role in the 'devimahattya' from the local, regional variation of the Goddess. In Bengal itself, there are some regions where 'Mahisa-mardini' Durga puja in autumn comes in a clash with some local, regional goddesses. Sometimes village goddesses represent Durga and Kali, but sometimes they differ entirely. And also, when folk goddesses remain less associated with kings and politics with their more focus on household and family values.

In addition, most of the Mahāvidyās may be considered antimodels of female behaviour, often being tempestuous, enraged, domineering, and wild. In fact, according to Kinsley, their meaning has to do with undermining and mocking social norms in order to reveal the fundamental truth of the cosmos that encompasses creation, destruction, as well as constant transformation. Therefore, in order to provoke shock and awakening, their forms may be depicted in disturbing, ambiguous, contradictory, and paradoxical ways (Frawley, pp60). Kālī has traditionally been worshipped by low-caste people and criminals in uncivilized and unfrequented places. She was a patron deity of the infamous Thugs and was believed to grant them magical powers. Nevertheless, since Kālī embodies liberation and empowerment and, similar to her predecessor Kottavai, was worshipped. by a vast population in South Asia, it is not surprising that she came under the control of the Brahmanized elites and the British colonial rule. The Goddess was "reconfigured as a danger, chaos, and pollution"; was appropriated,

tamed, domesticated, and sweetened; and her maternal aspects were emphasized. In addition, female shamans and oracles were converted into male religious specialists dressed in goddess attire (Caldwell, “Margins” 254–62). This process led to the transformation of Kālī in Bengal “from a wild, ferocious deity of death to a benign youthful mother.” In spite of the attempts to tame her, Kālī’s ferocious and independent aspects still persist, even when she is reconfigured as a mother. Like other powerful deities discussed in this book, Kālī is portrayed as independent and childless in the literal sense, but simultaneously she is the great “Mother of the Universe”: ‘O Mother, thou gives birth to and protects the world, and at the time of dissolution dost withdraw to Thyself the earth and all things; therefore, Thou art Brahmā, and the Lord of the three worlds, the Spouse of Śri, and Mahe śa, and all other beings and things. Ah-Me! How, then, shall I praise Thy greatness?’ (Karpūrādi-stotra 12: 78)” (Heather Ash Amara, 2014).

Iconographic representations of Kali and Siva nearly always show Kali as dominant. She is standing or dancing on Siva's body, and even in some writings mentioned, when the two are depicted in sexual intercourse, she is shown above him. Although Siva is said to have tamed Kali in the myth of the dance contest, it seems clear that she was never finally subdued by him and is most popularly represented as a being who is uncontrollable and more apt to provoke Siva to dangerous activity than to be controlled by him. In common, then, we may say that Kali is a goddess who threatens stability and order. Although she may be said to serve the order in her role as the killer of demons, more often than not, she becomes so furious on the battleground, usually becoming drunk on the blood of her preys, that she herself begins to destroy the world that she is thought to defend. Thus even in the service of the gods, she is eventually dangerous and be likely to become out of control. In relationship with other goddesses, she seems to symbolize their embodied wrath and fury, a frightening, dangerous aspect of the divine feminine that is unconfined when these goddesses become furious or are summoned to take part in warfare and killing. In relation to Siva, she seems to play a contradictory role from that of Parvati. Parvati calms Siva, counterbalancing his antisocial or vicious tendencies. It is she who brings Siva within the sphere of domesticity and who, with her soft glances, urges him to moderate the aspects of his tandava. She is at home outside the ethical-moral order and appears to be unrestrained by that order.

#### 4.5. Kali as Kala or time

Kali perhaps forces well observation by empowering one to see the wide-ranging picture. She allows one to see behind the kindness of the other goddesses who appear in benign forms. Kali reveals the insatiable hunger that logically must lie behind their amazing fecundity and liberality. Similarly, Kali permits a woman to see their overall roles in the cosmic drama. She offers a wider, more mature, more realistic reflection on wherever one has come from and where one is going. She allows the individual to see herself as merely one being in an endless series of variations rising from the ever-recurring series of life and death that constitute the internal measures of the divine mother.

As cycling and recycled energy, as both the creation and the food of the Goddess, the individual is permitted to glimpse social roles and identities in perspective, to see them as often confining and as obscuring a clear perception of how things really are and who he or she really is. Kali reveals that ultimately all creatures are her children and also her food and that no social role or identity can remove the individual from this sacrificial give and take. While this truth may appear grim, its realization may be just what is needed to push one over the threshold into the liberating quest for release from bondage to samsara. (David R. Kinsley, 1958).

Kali, the final creator, preserver, and destroyer, is the essence of the types of goddesses we are looking at in the thesis, in many ways the contradictory of what we think of in connection with the word woman or Goddess. She is the primal wilderness and chaos, the original form of all things and eternity, but also change time, death and destruction.

O you who, in the form of minutes, moments and other divisions of time, bring about change in things, and have (thus) the power to destroy the universe. . . . .  
. . . . . Salutation be to you, O Narayani, you who have the power of creation, sustentation and destruction and are eternal. (Devī - mähātmyam Ch. 11: 9, 11). She is without beginning or end, Whose Body is imagined to be blue of colour, because like the blue sky She pervades the world . . . is imagined to be black Because She is c colourless . . . as the Virat, the Witness of the world past, present and future She sees everything. (Karpūrādi-stotra, "Prayer" 44).

#### **4.6. Influence of Kali as a role model for both folk and city cum urbanised woman**

The women's revolution is an evolution from being other-self focused to inner self-motivated. While our consideration is trapped by fearful should, what we should do, and what we should not, we disseminate our vitality and struggle with significant anything which is authentic for a woman. When we convey our attention back to realizing who we are on the inside, not who we desire we were or who we ponder we should be, we begin a path of transformation toward our innate, authentic, embodied power related to Goddess.

In the modern story of the dark, warrior Goddess, are independent, sole woman endeavours out to find herself, battle fear and doubt, reclaim her power and vibrancy, and validate her strength of concern and fierce love. Most Goddess traditions from around the world do not exclude the masculine but see the divine principle as the Mother who unconditionally loves all her children, male and female. Goddess energy is our inspired course of unconditional love, pleasure, passion, and wisdom. When we claim goddess energy, we live in joyful self-acceptance and self-respect, and we listen to our sacred inner voice. As twenty-first century's woman, we have an abundance of difficulties to overcome. And lots of fears to exterminate on our passage to release our true identity. We are at the stage of modernity where stress, self-loathing, self-abuse, and addiction are normal. And sexual, emotional, and physical abuse are all too predominant. But while we are blessed that our ancient texts and mythologies laid a path for women's liberation and individual freedom in the outside world, even in the present time, by rebellious effects like the right to vote, equal management at the workstation, and so on, many of us are still trying to live up to standards, beliefs, and ideals that are not our own.

All around the world, women are stepping forward to invite back their authentic, creative, wonderfully unique selves. We are shedding the old, faded clothes of war, domination, competition, jealousy, and repression. We are rising like the sun, shining big and bright as the full moon. We are saying yes to the power of fierce love, compassion, constant authenticity, and vulnerability. These are the attributes of our warrior focus and our goddess joy (Palgrave Macmillan,2015).

In the first face, we can see that two basic versions of Kali in popular Indian religion. She is often seen as Goddess of margins, a scary, half demonic deity. Basically, they are invoked for protection and magical purposes by mostly uneducated tribal people, often in night-time

rituals and seasonal dances in which goddess-possessed worshippers enact the myths with lots of shouting and roaring, fuelled by home-distilled local liquor. Black magicians worship this same aspect of Kali with mantras for the sake of acquiring magical powers and killing enemies. The Mother symbolises the earth and fertility: the fertility of nature, animals and humans; and particularly all types of creativity in women. This shakti (female energy) is the creative principle of all life. This Mother is also the ambivalent mother: she births and nurtures, she gives from her ever-fertile womb; and she also takes away, bearing all back into the dark tomb of the earth. However, rather than being totally negative and terrifying role of the goddess that, she is usually viewed as representing the other side of life, that alternative, dark part of the cycle essential for its continuance (A, Disel, 2004).

In more modern, urban Hindu religious practice, Kali is Kali Ma, Mother Kali a benign and loving source of every kind of boon and blessing. At this level, her wildness is interpreted symbolically. The skulls around her neck are not dead victims but the letters of the Sanskrit alphabet, through which she manifests both liberating mantras and deluding ideas. (it reminds us the Goddess's dual nature as both the force that binds us and the force that sets us free.) The hands-on apron represents the karmic tendencies she removes from her devotees, as well as her own manifold capabilities. The skull in her hands, which her sword has just lopped off, is the ego that separates us from her. Kali's nakedness shows that woman should cast away illusion; in her that she is oppressed, then it will lead to the way to reveal the entire truth about life and to inspire others to be Kali like.

Her colour is esoteric; Kali's dark colours stand for the ultimate void state, where all differences dissolve into the absolute beyond all form. Her sword is the force that slices through misapprehension, ignorance, false hope, and falsehoods. Her locus on top of Shiva reveals that she is the dynamic force in the universe, the power that mixes the stillness of the void so that worlds can be created inside that transcendent nothingness. In fact, Kali holds both these energies, the spiritually liberating and the fearsome, which is why she always remains wildly, dynamically paradoxical. She is multi-faceted and multi-layered, both as an inner force, a spiritual and psychological power and as a force in the universe.

An article "Loving Paradoxes: A Feminist Reclamation of the Goddess Kali" by Vrinda Dalmiya (2018), has analysed the feminist meaning of the Goddess Kali that lies in a native worshipful attitude of Kali-bhakti as a mother rather than in the mere image of the Goddess.

Like all great devotee of Kali, who were able to hold her light and dark sides together, she too finds within her a path that transcends duality. She invites us to do the same, which may be why Kali so fascinates modern practitioners. Kali challenges us by daring us to look her in the face and find her hidden love behind the pain of life. The way we see Kali at any given moment has everything to do with where we are in our own journey. Whether Kali seems frightening, fascinating, or loving depends on our state of realization and our level of both emotional and mystical development. But she always offers us a radical form of ego-transcendence. So this paradox was well reflected in Rama- Prasad, the Bhakta poet. She is also reminded of her radical roles, and her loving healing side in her. Rama- Prasad remains sarcastic;

Kali, why are you naked again?

Have not you any shame?

Mother, don't you have clothes?

Where is the pride of the king's daughter?

And Mother, isn't there some family duty?

This standing on the chest of your man. (Vrinda Dalmiya,2000)

This paradox between a terrifying face that remains hard that is stone-like and a mother who is kind and motherly, is reflected;

“if you want to be like your father stone,

Don't call yourself the mother.” (ibid)

On the whole, here, the effort at taming Kali continues Mahasweta Devi, in her Bengali short story ‘Mother of dusk and dawn (1993)’, tells the story of a destined young widow who pretends to be the Goddess and acts rudely, appearing violent; actually, her intention is to collect the offerings that people give her praying and prostrating at her feet as goddess Kali, she then used the money to provide food for her children, and she remains the real mother. In this line, we can also find some goddess images as ‘lajja Gauri’ Goddess, who is ashamed of her unfeminine, unmotherly, radical Kali image or Durga image.

There are different interpretations of Kali's image when she opens her tongue, stands on the corpses that happen to be her husband, Shiva. It is said as is also reflected in the image of Lajja Gauri or Lajja Devi, that when she realises that it was Shiva on whose corpse she was

standing out of anger, and Shiva not controlling her but allowing her to release her anger even while standing on his body. Suddenly the realisation dawns, the Goddess, ashamed of her uncontrollable anger, she opens her tongue, which was fond of tasting blood, now is controlled and in shame. And she utters a word 'oh! It is you; this shows that as per the interpretation that Kali becomes ashamed of her radical role and regains her wifely image to Shiva, and she becomes Sati. But this interpretation differs among the Tantric and radical practitioners, who glorify Kali's anger and non-motherly role as central. That way, Kali remains a rebel woman, always in protest a strong feminist deconstructing images of conventional social norms and attacking these values. This role ever attracts postmodern, modern generation and feminist critiques.

Swami Vivekananda, one of the most important Hindu teachers to come to the West in the early twentieth century, deeply understood this truth. In one of his songs, he says:

“I am not one of those . . . Who put the garland of skulls around thy neck,  
And then look back in terror And call Thee “The Merciful.”

The heart must become a burial ground.

Pride, selfishness, and desire all broken into dust,

Then and then alone will the Mother dance there!” (Swami Vivekananda, 3.256)

The idea that divine grace can take the form of fierce, destructive blood lust, of wild freedom, of bared teeth and naked breasts seemed both deeply exciting and deeply mysterious. The woman could find herself identifying with Kali's strength and wildness, invoking her with poems comparing her to the volcano and the hurricane, feeling oneself expanding in a kind of participation mystique, as one considers the ways in which Kali manifests in nature and in human life. She is a massive love force that is exactly death to the ego. When she erupts in one's life, Kali will cut away whatever is superfluous, whatever is permissive. She is especially hard on self-importance, including the arrogance that makes us believe pre-maturely that radical feminist is outside the rules before our earned wisdom has legitimately given them the right to set away rules in the service of higher ideals. Though Kali embodies transformative anger, she also, paradoxically, destroys anger, especially the anger that comes from disillusioned egoic desires.

#### **4.7. Kali's appearance in rejuvenation**

When world-transforming energy gets moderated through an individual's unconscious, it becomes a personal epitome. For many contemporary Western women, Kali represents not the inhuman power in nature or culture but the possibility of a bold fierceness that has historically been denied both to the divine feminine and to individual women. Almost always, when a woman says, "One need to find my Kali side," or "One need some Kali energy," here she's looking for a way to stand up for herself, to discover her inner fierceness, or to express the outrageous side of her sexuality. Despite her problematic aspects, or perhaps because of them, Kali fascinates contemporary women. As feminist oriented social system, goddess centred spirituality, and rebellious thought have spread through the Western world, the image of Kali has surfaced in Western culture more visibly than any other Indian goddess. As a modern goddess, Kali exposes popular culture as the incarnation of the fiercely outspoken side of feminine power. Kali is the force many young women call on in those moments when they courageously face and move beyond their own trauma or when they want to break through their struggle with sexual shyness, politesse, insecurity, and discomfort. Kali's image offers an entrance into a wild audacity that has historically been denied both to the divine feminine and to individual women. If Kali symbolizes feminine audacity and youthful intensity, she also symbolizes more shadowy and problematic forms of power, especially the angry and aggressive energies that are hard for many women to own and for men to handle.

Even in East basically Indian society, to call a woman as a regular Kali, is not a compliment. Instead, it is a kind of tag or title for foul tempered or rageful. Kali, like all divine forces, is much bigger than our human ego. So when she shows up in the feminine psyche, it can feel as if we have been obsessed, literally taken over by something that has nothing to do with our normal, everyday personality. Kali's power, suppressed, will often turn in on us, fester in the form of rage, attack our mind in the form of dominant toward the situation. Which will lead into external behaviour in ways that can destroy our love and the love others have for us. It was not until the situation that conveying woman in general realized that many women suffering from misery and existential crisis had been the victims of rape or sexual abuse of different kinds. Their rage and pain had been stuffed inside and needed to be expressed as well as cleared in order for the women's bodies and psyches to heal. Women, as we know, have

repressed their power for thousands of years, becoming masters of passive aggression and remote offstage influence. So the procedure of discovery and binding that energy in ourselves is oppressed with errors. We do not always recognize how to separate the transformative resentment; that can stand against injustice. And from the rage of the wounded feminine, which all of us, whether we know it or not, can solve the current gender issues. And that way is to learn the root that the boldness and audacity that is as much a part of the divine feminine as her softness can be channelled into powerful and effective protest. Divine feminine anger can also erupt in ways that destroy the structures of our lives but also can form a social system that will be helpful for all.

For many women, specifically third-wave feminists in their twenties and thirties, owning their Kali side is a symbol for learning to love their own wrath and sexuality. Kali storms through us as the suppressed power that women hide as they try to live up to the image of the loving, nurturing feminine model that every society idealizes. It is no wonder that Kali and Kaliesque are more often than not used as rebellious terms for feminine rage. On the other hand, some women use the Kali image to justify shadow behaviours like unrestrained surges and acts of revengeful anger against members of the society and even family, who have abused or betrayed them. The following version of the Kali myth carries the scent of this uncontrollable quality as it appears in the personal psyche. A demon has appeared who can only be killed by a woman. So, at Shiva's request, Parvati enters his body and transforms herself by drinking the poison that Shiva holds in his throat. In this way, she takes in all the negativity of the collective consciousness, which she turns into wrath. She emerges as the naked, bloodthirsty Kali with matted hair and a blazing, red third eye in the middle of her forehead. Kali quickly dispatches the demon, but afterwards, she is so intoxicated by battle lust that she refuses to return to her beautiful form as a devoted wife. Instead, she wanders into the forest, where she dances so wildly and with such force that she threatens to bring down the worlds. The local sages petition Shiva for help, but even he is unable to get Kali's attention. Finally, he challenges her to a dance contest. He begins his own dance, which is so intense that it creates craters in the earth and shakes the planets from their orbits, causing so much destruction that it arouses Kali's compunction, and she comes to her senses and returns to her normal form. This story comes from the Shiva Purana, a text in which Shiva is the dominant partner and the Goddess merely a consort. From one point of view, it expresses both the male terror of the uncontrollable side of feminine power and the masculine instinct to show his strength in order to control the

feminine. In this instance, Shiva tames Kali by acting so wild that she has to calm down in order to soothe him. (In another version of the story, Shiva transforms himself into a baby, which arouses Kali's mother instinct.) From a neuropsychological point of view, we could look at Kali in this story as emotion and Shiva as reason, Kali as the amygdala and Shiva as the neocortex, Kali as a passion, while Shiva is insight. From the point of view of conventional society or of modernist rationalism, the Kali appearing in the personal psyche carries the blood scent of chaos—the all-bets-are-off chaos that arises when the abused and betrayed feminine rises up in vengeance or simply with a cry of "Enough." When women are seized by the rage of shadow Kali, it can wreak massive personal destruction.

Like all shadow behaviours, the expressions of negative Kali energy are distortions of the positive qualities of Kali Shakti. They twist and mask a quality that is essential and sublimely transpersonal: the force of liberation through a radical change. Kali can manifest sublimely through the intense activism of the women who fight to expose human sexual trafficking, factory farming, and the exploitation of workers in electronics factories. Any more than understanding what Kali is about will necessarily make your experience of a life upheaval more comfortable. But if you pay attention, Kali can teach you how to channel power so that you recognize, integrate, and deeply honour the forces of change, including the change that comes about through your encounter with the dark energies of the world. Kali offers us the freedom that lies beyond death. You can enter her freedom through many doorways looking into her force in nature, examining the hidden forces behind your shadow rage, or invoking her fire to help you dissolve emotional patterns and negative tendencies. Ultimately—and this is the secret that Kali reveals only to those who seek it Kali's essence is the vast, empty, ultimately fertile void itself. Kali's blackness is the darkness of the ultimate mystery, the transcendent womb of black light out of which reality is always arising and into which it constantly subsides (Sally Kempton, 2013).

Kali's power and existence are uncontaminated in nature, which is unconcerned to human observation. Any purpose and emotion we may venture on her are mere versions like She occurs as strong and liberated from any of culture's restrictions belong to our social system. She signifies nature at its rawest and most wild and the culmination of all that is power. Kali's femininity is not performative if we take her as a role model. As She is loving without being devoted, but the woman is always accompanied by many relations like wife, daughter, mother and so on. The woman should take the nature of Her existence to solve and adjust to the social

norms. However, She is the ultimate mother, the mother of all power, without being concentrated on the role of a mother. Kali's femininity is not performative in practical life. She is not, like more adaptable avatars of the female divinity such as Durga or Parvati, relaxing, reasonable, submissive, or modest. But she does not even have the traits that feminists old and new have seen and loved in her. She is not angry, although she is like wrath because nature knows no fury. She is not even harsh, though her presence rejects the limitations of ethos. She is, simply, wilderness itself. Thus choosing Kali as a role model is not reclaiming the right to be aggressive, feral, ugly, or merciless. It is embracing that the ultimate goal for which women continue to be at war is, simply, to be. Like Kali, whatever the human gaze may choose to see in it.

#### **4.8. Kali as a role model to heal divisions in women's lives**

Kali, we have noted a representation of the other extreme of masculinist perspectives of femininity, a vision of the potential danger to society if female sexuality is not channelled into the safe confines of marriage and male control. But, as explained earlier, this is far from the whole story, as Kali's nature is complex and ambiguous in its symbolic significance, especially in the sphere of spirituality. Of interest here, in contrast to feminist revisions of Sita within Hindu tradition in India, is the inclusion of Kali in the exponential growth of feminist and "New Age" literature on goddess spirituality in the West since the 1980s, and even in new forms of goddess rituals developing in the practice of women's spirituality (McDermott 1996). Although most of this type of literature and practice revives and reinterprets goddess figures from ancient European and Near Eastern cultures, it was the innovative work of a feminist scholar of religion, Rita Gross, who especially brought the attention of western women to the goddesses of the living Asian religious tradition, Hinduism, calling women of different cultures to share insights and theoretical resources to inspire and empower each other (Gross 1989). For Gross, feminist scholarship in religion needs to forge ahead with the cross-cultural study, not forgetting that sensitivity and care are required to deal with the dangers of crossing the cultural distance between western and eastern forms of religion. But she nevertheless claims that "if approached critically and carefully, and if intelligent selection and borrowing is utilised, the Hindu goddesses can be the greatest stimulant to our imagination and to our speculation about the meaning the goddess" (ibid: 218). A criticism that can be launched against some goddess

literature that appropriates symbols from distant cultures is that careful and sensitive treatment of the original home of a particular goddess is often blatantly lacking. In looking at the particular growth of popularity of Kali in this very context, McDermott points out the pitfalls involved in the process of "cross-cultural borrowing". Misrepresentations of Kali in western feminist literature mostly derive from lack of study and knowledge of Indian history, language and texts that form the basis of Hindu tradition within its own culture; and misinterpretation of recent archaeological evidence. Keeping in mind constraints of space, just one of McDermott's many examples is instructive here: Claims that Kali was a historical figure in a gynocentric, goddess-oriented world during an ancient Neolithic period are "simply not true" since she is first mentioned in Hindu scripture only in 500BCE and then, even more to the point, "it is not until the sixth century Devi Mahatmya that she rises to prominence and is equated with other goddesses" (McDermott 1996: 297). What is at the crux of the matter here, I feel, is a feminist reconstruction of myth and its meaning in the wider context of religious life that involves ongoing negotiation of meaning and power through media such as myth, symbol and ritual. The meanings and uses of a goddess figure such as Kali will change according to the dynamic process of history and cross-cultural encounter which is undeniably a reality of today's globalised world, a reality replicated in the microcosmic form in South Africa - and this, surely, is what religious myth is all about. Women in many cultures of the world are creating new myths, new rituals, and new symbolic meanings in their striving for psychological and spiritual wholeness and for ways of living unencumbered by the constraints of patriarchal religious doctrine. Claims to historical fact and textual accuracy, however, are problematic, and it is here that care - and honesty - on the part of the interpreters is vital. Are such claims even necessary in the imaginative and visionary process of re-creating myth and negotiating new meanings? As McDermott concludes: "Symbols have their own lives. So do goddesses. One should not expect Kali in the West necessarily to look like Kali in the East" (1996: 305). In South Africa, the issue is as complex as it is fascinating - imagine who Kali might be, for example, for a South African-born and raised, western-educated, young feminist Hindu woman searching for symbols to empower her in a male-dominated society and to enrich her spiritual life in a male-dominated religion? Most important, then, can Kali be a "genuine goddess of transformation" for women (McDermott 1996: 305) whatever their social, cultural or religious context? Recalling Gupta's article, "Kali the Savior", which is indeed based on study and sound knowledge of Hindu Tantric texts, she asks: "How can contemporary women identify

themselves with a mythical character? I think there is an interaction between a contemporary woman's psyche and the mythic behaviour patterns that inform and are played out in a woman's life" (Gupta 1991: 36). The ambivalence of Kali's nature and the paradox embedded in her symbolism - as a fierce warrior and protective mother, as creator and destroyer, as the Goddess of life and death, as social deviant and spiritual guide - can be an empowering model for women, facilitating the integration of what might be regarded as the 'shadow' in any individual woman's psyche. Kali provides a channel for expressing long-repressed anger that has, in the past, been deemed 'unfeminine'. Gupta describes her as "the personified wrath of all women in all cultures" and the expression of "a deep, long-buried emotion" that, in the myths, is always an appropriate response to situations Kali finds herself in. In other words, Kali's anger is not arbitrary or random, "She is not simply malevolent" (ibid: 31). Only because the power and wrath of the warrior are conventionally understood as a male function is Kali often "described as a masculinized female or as out of control and destructive as if strength and valour are constructive character traits only as long as they are part of a male deity" (ibid: 32). Kali's independence and active sexuality, too, can help redress androcentric denigration of the body and repression of female sexuality. As Gross puts it, Hindu images of the goddesses in general, and of Kali in particular, point to the reintroduction of sexuality as a significant religious metaphor helping us to move beyond the lingering body-spirit dichotomy and consequent hatred of the body. Kali's power and sexuality offer women a multi-faceted, transformative metaphor and tool for regaining wholeness, physically, psychologically and spiritually. This Goddess can indeed be a goddess of transformation and wholeness in helping "to heal divisions in women's lives" (McDermott 1996: 305). Finally, if nothing else, Kali is not silent, in spite of her significance for transcendence and spiritual liberation. She counters Lacan's image of transcendent "woman", confined to the silent, pre-symbolic Imaginary, and comes much closer to Irigaray's desire to construct an autonomous female discursive register that would give voice to women's agency and subjectivity. Moreover, Kali's image as mother-goddess shines new light on old patriarchal notions of motherhood - still deeply ingrained in the psyche of many women - that would go a long way towards resolving the ambivalence about maternity identified in Freudian and Lacanian theories. Gross expresses this best by pointing out that although we need to revalorise mothering and nurturing through a notion of 'God as mother', we should not glorify motherhood as divine at the cost of reinforcing the masculinist belief that "human motherhood itself is a sufficient role for women" (Gross, 1989: 224-25). Hindu

goddesses, she reminds us, are mostly worshipped as 'mother' and "references to the life-giving creative motherhood of God are omnipresent", but they are, nonetheless, rarely depicted as mothers of biological children. This certainly applies to Kali, and even Sita - one of the few goddesses who is the mother of children - is attributed with far greater divine powers of creativity and control of the earth's fertility.

#### **4.9. A brief outline of the chapter**

In our social system, what we summarise in a broader sense that as a girl, she is auspicious and blesses all by her presence like a goddess, but she must have a sense of disgrace about her very existence. She is easy to get to the form of the Goddess, yet she is also a contradiction, accessible but momentary, permanent but certainly wounded. She is the ideal of the household she enters after marriage, but passive to all, and her turn always comes last. So as a woman, her world must be made available to her through symbol is meant to be understood as represents like Goddess. So situation wise a woman has to learn her role by conveying her way through contradictory restriction. It has been seen as an encouraging side that about of India, where the goddess tradition has live roots. Even within an overall climate of extreme commodification of the female image, and even in the most intense form of sketch, goddess iconography has resisted being objectified and completely recast in terms of the male gaze. It is part of the world of meaning for many. It is a potential source of empowerment. The challenge is how to creatively link it with the lives of ordinary women without getting identified with sectarian and divisive interest. But it is the bitter truth that our veneration of the powerful Goddess does not eliminate our hypocrisy. While on the one hand, women continue to take huge strides in government, education and private sectors, such as banking and communication, the country still suffers from high rates of female infanticide dowry and the inescapable hold of patriarchy in every aspect of life. So, through mythology intertwined in complex ways by various texts and contexts, which are being followed by innumerable commentaries; but the core idea remains unchanged. The portrayal of Kali's image or presentation has defined in opposite orders that from a dark, wild, fierce one towards a loving mother. Thus we cannot define that by choosing Kali or other warrior goddess as role model for woman do not mean to have only one direction to follow up. It will always carry the changeable nature with the need of accurate state of affairs and phase.

## Chapter 5

### Can a marginal goddess of desire remain a role model for aspiring women in our time? Kamakhya, The folk goddess of desire at Shaktipitha

#### Kamakhya as a Role Model

##### 5.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, we have followed a strong and a ferocious dark Kali, who is also a manifestation of the all-encompassing Mother Goddess as per some particular religious and cultural narratives. In this chapter the light similar exploration will be made about the marginal Goddess Kamakhya who could be identified with the Great Goddess Kali at a later phase. Kamakhya, the Goddess of desire, is both associated with Shakti in Hindu religion and Tantric power cult as eroticized Yoni or bleeding goddess as Shakti. With her humble origin in folk tradition among tribes of North East India Kamakhya, a tribal goddess and an ordinary average woman, is the goal of feminist spirituality. A folk deity, worshipped her with in open landscapes and with agricultural rites, she could be seen more as an Erotic Goddess, personification of Kāma, (desire) related with Yoni-cult and its magico-religious fertility rites has added this folk dimension in the great Goddess herself. As Rachel McDermott has shown, the goddess Kali underwent a significant process of sweetening and softening during the colonial period as Kamakhya. Kamakhya has gradually evolved from a center of extreme, transgressive, and esoteric practice to a publicly accepted mainstream of religious life in modern Assam. Many other examples from northeast India can be perceived as per the pattern of the exoticization and institutionalization of after mysterious Tantric conducts, finally culminating in Devi or Shakti, the Mahadevi, the Power inherent in all.

Kamakhya begins as a normal tribal girl elevated to a goddess by her tribe, the Khasis or the Garos and also other North eastern tribes, who named her Kamai, Ka-mei-kha, or Kama, the feminine folk goddess through mythological texts and some of its contexts. A transition is made when in Puranic literature Kamakhya is depicted as the spouse of the great Hindu triad- Brahma, Vishnu and Siva. Initially she is worshipped as spouse of Vishnu (Vishnu Maya); later on more prominently as spouse of Siva in her various names- Sati, Parvati, Kali, Gauri,

Kamakhya. “This will pave way for transitions in her forms from a folk goddess to the Tantric goddess of desire. <sup>12</sup> She will now be seeming more as Kama, desire personified, who reminds one of Rati, wife of Kamdev, who was once burnt to ashes in Hindu mythology along with her eternal lover husband. Various stories will continue and an enquiry of stories, especially focusing on the attitudes toward woman related to various familiar goddesses will make the unfamiliar tribal goddess a familiar one, more as Rati or later as Kali for example. Also related is much of concern on the topic of male responses to the feminine, particularly a tribal and a folk goddess transformed from a humble tribal woman now equated even with the Great Goddess.

One major approach that engagement for this chapter is especially to the areas where Kamakhya is treated as a tribal goddess, which may differ from received portraits of women's identities depicted in non-tribal National or larger images of majority accepted Goddess images. this will introduce the course of negotiating new ways with the folk goddess and we will find her various names and roles as Yoni Goddess to Shakti with related contextual variations that justify her similarities and at times differences from the main line strong Goddesses familiar in the Hindu pantheon. This will further prepare one for the twenty-first century new reception to the Goddess along with diversity of women's images revising women's identities questions also matched with goddesses.

In a broader sense, depiction of women's bodies also plays a part in the representations of Tantric rites. A well founded linkage between a rejection of austerity and adoption of Tantric glorification of body and bodily enjoyment is a common Practice in Tantrism. an alternative attitude toward women can be seen including a dialogue enjoining respect for ordinary women and recognition of women's bodies as vehicle for moksha reduce prejudice on body rituals and body becomes sanctified. “Just as the Goddess Kamakhya, the Renowned Goddess of Desire, shows her subjectivity and mastery over her own body, leads to the conception which

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

recommends a discourse offering respect toward women and their bodies (Loriliai Biernacki, 2007).

In the tribal society the cult of Goddess Kamakhya helps one to understand the vast and complicated structure of the society and the role the female principle plays in feminizing an ordinary woman also making her extraordinary as a goddess. Portrayals of goddesses have been changing according to the changing demand of the society. It will be significant to observe how throughout the ages and despite changes and challenges Kamakhya stood as a marginal goddess sometime symbolized as a sufferer, an object of discrimination despite being a goddess because of objectifying male gaze in a hierarchy of power centric dominating social set up that becomes more rigid and transparent in a more sophisticated caste Hindu society than a caste liberal oral and a folk tradition where the goddess originally belongs to.

Many myths and legends associated with the Kamakhya temple have increased the importance of the region for pilgrims and tourists but the original shrine is a peetha than a temple that is almost marginalized now. The Kamakhya Temple also symbolizes the “fusion of faith and practices” of Aryan and Non-Aryan practices in Assam. The tantric cult of Kamakhya is thoroughly related with definite rituals that are done at the temple. The main forms of offerings are flowers, incense and sweets and animal sacrifice is also carried out on some times. Mass animal sacrifices are also carried out at some times of the years. A very special kind of *sindoor*, made from the local rock, is existing here. This is reflected to be a blessing from the Goddess. Kamakhya, a lately emerged custom as associated with the Hindu deities Shiva and Sati when the Assamese religion and customs were suitably blended with Brahmanic tradition, dominated by Pan-Indian gods and texts in Sanskrit. But submerged in the Nilachal hill and its close vicinity have many other stories to offer, all connected with local history, going back to mythical times and to its oral folk traditions.

## **5.2. Kamakhya as folk, the regional and local identity with the woman**

The name Kamakhya is derived from a tribal Mother Goddess. In this context, Dr. Banikantaa Kakati remarked, "This mother cult of Kamakhya must have belonged to certain matriarchal tribes like the Khasis and the Garos" (Kakati,1989). And further, he mentioned that the area of the Kamakhya temple was an inhabitant of two aboriginal matriarchal tribes like the Khasis and the Garos. In addition, "As the innumerable names of Goddess are mostly names

of local Goddesses both Aryan and non-Aryan, it may be suspected that the formation Kama in Kamakhya is of extra-Aryan origin" (ibid). Further, they stated that "Yoni-Goddess sprang up amongst peoples with leaning towards ancestor worship and believing in the protective powers of an Ancestral Mother and that she migrated into Assam with the migrations of the Austric peoples" (ibid). It was thought that the mythical emperor, Naraka, was responsible for the foundation of the Devi worship in the Kamakhya temple (Choudhury, 1987).

The recurring mention of Kamakhya in Assam as a well-known site for worship and pilgrimage suggests a north-eastern Indian location of the Goddess as a regional deity primarily. This mention of Kamakhya (or alternatively Kamarupa) is often not in combination with the famous list of four holy goddess sites, Oddiyana, Jalandhara, Purpagiri, and Kamarupa, which is characteristic of early Tantras. While this is not definite evidence, it is possible that Kamakhya could be revered from afar. Nevertheless, it more likely indicates this region than elsewhere. During this period, other smaller kingdoms existed, such as the Koch kingdom in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in western part of Assam. That included the district of Kamarupa, where Kamakhya was situated, and westward into Bengal. And also find additional smaller kingdoms, such as that of the Jayantias, the Kacharis, and Bhuyan landlords, concurrently with the Ahoms, who offered some form of acknowledgement to the Ahoms. A transitory exception to Ahom rule occurred under the Hinduized Koch king Naranarayan, who managed to subjugate the Ahoms for a short historical during the sixteenth century which we can see while exploring about the goddess Kamakhaya. This shows how intimately this regional Goddess is associated with the region, its history, socio political and cultural life of the people also with kings and their kingdoms. Finally, she remained patron goddess of Kamarupa and its ruling dynasty beginning with Vaishnava king Naraka who has connection with Janka Vishnu Krishna connection serving as custodian of the Goddess as mother earth.

As Kamakhya, the sacred complex evolved over a quite long period of time, it has been named differently in the past. There is extensive evidence to justify how Assam continues to be a shelter and a home to a crowd of ethnic communities. Among many local communities, there are several examples to illustrate women-domination, matriarchy, and supremacy of women, which provide explanations with the existence of Kamakhya's cult. It is also a common belief that women of this province acquire the knowledge of black magic and witchcraft as the

Goddess shrine are to be associated with agriculture related fertility rites and magic, later added a different colour by its Tantric association.

There are many tribal communities, who represent Kamakhya in various ways and convey literal meaning with Her name.

a) Khasis- According to widespread Khasi faith, the Kamakhya shrine was originated by the Khasis in the ancient past when the area was under their control. In their mythical interpretations, it is stated that the Sanskrit name Kamakhya is a corruption of the Khasi word Ka-mei-kha, which means the paternal grandmother. Ka-Mei-kha, who is the mythical grandmother from the paternal side, is accorded an important position in the bone burial ceremonies of the Khasis.

b) Garos-According to the Garo tradition, the word Kamakhya has been derived from the Garo word Ka-Ma-Kha, which means 'victory to my mother.' The Garo tradition states that the Kamakhya temple was built by a Garo architect in honour of the mother-goddess.

c) Bodos-Kamakhya was identified by the Bodos with their chief Goddess, Kharia Brui. The prominence of female deities in no way corresponded to the actual position of women. They worship goddess Kharia Buri or Ai Kamakhya along with Lord Bathow for all-around development. Khanya-Bimakha, which is another name of the Goddess Kharai Buri.

d) Rabhas-They worships different forms of Mother Goddess like Khokci, Rantak, Kaca – Khaiti and Manasa. As Khocki or Baikho, the Goddess is the deity of agriculture and harvest. Rantak is the deity of every household and worship her in the form of two earthen vessels full of rice and put her in one corner of their kitchen along with their traditional weapons. Kaca-Khaiti, as the dispeller of evil spirits and during her puja, which was held near a river, is the absence of animal sacrifice.

This folk regional demission of the Goddess also adds an autonomous identity of her own that can well be understood if we also place her character in the context of the northern and tribal rootedness of her character. Usually, north-east society is a mixed one, and originally Kamakhya reflects a folk goddess from a particular tribe, Khasis or Bodos. This also illuminates why usual women-centric discriminations associated with other patriarchal Hindu societies are not strongly visible among Assamese social values. It remained unheard of the vices of Sati, dowry death, girl child discrimination till recent times. Scholars find that the overall mosaic of an Assamese society is a mixture of tribal non-tribal values to a great extent

that late marriage time for women, allowing women to have free choice for their partner are also there. along with traditional kinds of arranged marriages, marriage by choice of one's own or eloping with the partners of her choice was accommodated on later as one kind of marriage. During the *Bihu* festival, some such incidents keep happening and such marriages of choice by elopement came to be sanctified and accepted later. This keeps room for portraying Kamakhya as a folk goddess and a goddess with her own mind, with some autonomy with the adjectives such as a goddess who menstruates, a goddess who is desire (kama) personified, a goddess who decides whom to forgive and whom to punish and so on. When in other societies marginal, subaltern tribal and other women voices are not seen as free and autonomous agents; that the Feminist writings keep highlighting, usually lament that such women have lost their voices and remain passive as in the philosophy of Samkhya also we have seen Prakriti dances to attract the Purusa only. And here Kamakhya dances for her own pleasure, to please herself, a dance not meant for others, not even for kings who wanted to have a backdoor entry to it, when she became Hinduised with the story of Shaktipitha.

The related story of Kamakhya dancing for her own self, can also be addressed reflecting a feminist concern on the aberrant of the male gaze, which will not be dealt with in this study, only secondarily. That is, we just touch upon this issue only insofar as the idea of the gaze, especially the male gaze, related with the notion of subjectivity as to who may have the authority to be the 'seer' and who to be 'seen'. In Samkhya it is Purusha the seer and Prakriti the 'seen'. This Kamakhya related story tells that when The priest Kendukalai gains her favour because of his great devotion toward her and is allowed to watch the Goddess Kamakhya's nightly dance in nude, he, unfortunately, tells the king, Naranarayan, about her dancing position at night, that in turn adds to the king's desire to be the 'seer' that will turn the Goddess to be "seen". Further down, with pressure from the king, and to gain his favour, Kendukalai organizes to have the king viewing the goddess dance through a crack in the wall. The Goddess, of course, comprehends what is going on and kills the unfaithful priest, while the king and all his descendants are cursed to not ever be able to have the ability to see (*darsana*) the Goddess at Kamakhya. To this day, the story goes, when the king's descendants come near the temple, they must carefully keep a distance and hold an umbrella as a screen between themselves and the temple. The Goddess thus dances out of her joy and in dancing, spin an enchanting web of motion for those who watch, but with the sole authority of the Goddess at the center than kings and others. This definitely adds uniqueness to the regional, local folk identity of the Goddess.

Repeatedly woman in Hindu culture is represented or imagined as an object of male desire and male property mostly we also find in the histories of Western cultures. As with prakrti, in Samkhya philosophy, her existence is meant to enrich and assist the interests of the other half of the species Purusa. And while a number of scholars have proposed that locating a sense of female rights, empowerment and feminism in Hinduism depends upon forming women's agency. And generally typical view of a woman presents her as the second sex, dependent upon male supremacy. It may not be required to repeat here the often quoted verse from Manu, that stipulates that a woman never be permissible freedom, but instead that her father should govern her in youth, her husband in the prime of life, and her son in old age. But to the contrary when the Goddess at Kamakhya dances, however, she dances for herself, for her own delight.

### **5.3. Re-christening Her as Great Goddess**

The Kalika Purana and Yogini Tantra record the ritualistic details, which also made ways to re-christening Her as the Great Goddess. The Kalika Purana, Written around the 10th-11th century CE in Sanskrit, the text revels the power of the divine feminine in her various appearances centring around the Goddess Kamakhya or Kalika. Among Saktas (worshippers of the divine feminine in Hinduism), the Kalika Purana is one of the revered and famous scriptures. Sometimes she is in the gentle form providing prosperity to her devotees, while in some other episodes, she is in terrible form abolishing the evil (demon). Therefore, the Goddess in the Kalika Purana is a many-sided character. She is called by more than fifty names or epithets, while many of these names are simply honorific (for example, Mahamaya, Maheswari, Jaganmayi). In the first part of the Kalika Purana, the Goddess is associated with Vishnu. The Goddess Prithvi is depicted in relation to 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 a friendship with Bana the Goddess in her form of Kali or Kalika helps Hari in his fight against Naraka. While fighting, he observed a tall Kalika by the side of Krishna, similar to Kalika, with a red face and red eyes, wearing a sword and Sakti and also Kamakhya, the protectors of the world, the enchantress. Thus the Goddess is portrayed as the consort of Vishnu, who can create illusion and enchanting

needed for the creation of the 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. Out of the male gods in the Kalika, Purana Siva is the most associated god with the Goddess.

Throughout the texts, the Goddess is also associated with Siva as her 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 the welfare of the world. In the first part 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 the 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 pithasthanas (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. She was praising Kamarupa as the most sacred pitha where Hara with Parvati always resides.

In different parts, the Goddess is presented as superior to the Hindu Trinity-Vishnu, Brahma and Siva. It narrates the story of the 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. 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 said as indicative of the vegetative power of the Goddess, which is celebrated in the Shakta 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. Relates with the Ambuvachi Mela, when the Goddess's

menstrual cycle is celebrated (every year in June-July), in the Kamakhya Temple in shows in Kalika Purana, the earliest text devoted to the worship of Kamakhya. The identification of earth with a woman implies that the functions of the earth and those of earth are alike. The same preconditions which fertilize woman are also thought to fertilize Mother Earth. This aspect makes the Goddess more a vegetative and an earth Goddess more Vaishnavite than Shakta that will be seen later in her Tantric variations.

More than seeing the goddess as a subject in her own the power hierarchy relation in Tantra will glorify her body parts as centers of Tantric power. For the same reason, in the Sakta literature, special importance is attached to the menstrual blood. However, there is no 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. In the Kalika Purana, in the list of the offerings to the Goddess, a red cloth is praised as the best. Thus the Goddess as the symbol of vegetation and fertility is narrated in the text.

Yogini Tantra is a major Tantric text which widely believed to be written in the 16<sup>th</sup> century AD. Which mainly deals with different esoteric practices and supremacy of the Sakti and focuses on different sacred places of Kamrupa along with the socio-cultural life of this period. 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 a major portion of the Brahmaputra valley. This region is the land of habitation for various non-Aryan tribes from great antiquity. Even if we look at the modern-day ritual practices of the north-eastern tribal population, the prominence of the mother goddess cult and blood sacrifices is noticeable. The primitive tribes were a 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 it came to the region, got assimilated with the 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 the revelation of this acculturation process.

#### **5.4. Kamakhya as a tribal girl to Yoni Goddess as Shakti**

Amongst all Shakti pithas in India, Kamakhya is the most admired. The Mother Goddess Kamakhya temple is located in the locality of Guwahati, on a hill called Nilachal, the regional capital of Assam – the foremost north-eastern state of India. Kamakhya's mythological context underlines its respectable place in the religious and cultural history of the North East of India. It can be said that any kind of geographical, political, social, religious, anthropological, landscaping and philosophical or culture-centric description of the North-Eastern part of India cannot be completed without the reference being made to the magical beauty of Mother Goddess Kamakhya. Some evidence from the iconographic representation, the yoni pithas of Mother Goddess, constitute a significant part of findings and scriptures also testify to that Kamakhya of Kamrupa is a residing place of the Goddess, along with that the evident form of the Goddess contains several symbolic meanings which assert her creative image from the local and tribal people from ancient time. The holy shrine of Kamakhya is widely known as the centre of mystical land to get magical powers and the land of thrilling and witchcraft. But along ongoing thinking and time, which has slowly changed the image of Kamakhya in accordance with the changing demand. This leads a number of visitors and researchers from all around the world and pilgrims that carry the growth of the global sacred shrine and other believing structures in the temple much complex.

Kamakhya is not only had spiritual significance alone. It has socio-cultural functions and festivities, rituals, celebrations. It is accepted by people as the core of culture. Some are performed on special festival days like Durga Puja, Pohan Bia, Durgadeul, Vasanti Puja, Madandeul, and Ambuvaci, in a calendar year in the Kamakhya temple. Festivals and celebrations are inseparable from the socio-cultural life of all ethnic communities around the place. On the occasion of autumnal worship of the Goddess Durga, a four-day festival takes place in Kamakhya. Pilgrims from different parts of India visit the temple. Apart from the usual sacrifices offered to the Goddess, goats and buffalos are also sacrificed on occasion. The unique festival for which Kamakhya is known is Ambubasi mela, which is held in the second week of the solar month of Asadha (second half of June), usually from 6th to 10th. Asadha is regarded as the menstruation period of the Goddess, and the temple remains closed for the pilgrims during this period. At the end of the period, the door of the temple is opened to the pilgrims. This is regarded as the most auspicious moment to pay obeisance to the Goddess. Thousands

of pilgrims from all over India visit the temple and wait impatiently for the auspicious moment and gate crash for the darshana of the Goddess.

The power of the Goddess, in short, suffuses the macrocosm, the sociocosm, and the microcosm alike, at once the geographic landscape of the *Shakta pithas*, the social landscape of South Asian religious life and physical landscape of the individual body. In fact, powerful mother goddesses were worshipped by many northeast tribal communities, such as the Bodos, Chutiyas, Jaintias, Khasis, Lalungs, and Rabhas. Thus the Khasis honoured Ka blei Synshar, "Goddess of the World," while the Jaintias worshipped a powerful form of Durga with blood (and at one-time human) sacrifice at her temple in Nartiang, Meghalaya. The Chutiya kings, who ruled eastern Assam from the thirteenth to the sixteenth centuries, were known for their worship of the terrible Goddess Kecai Khati, or "She who eats raw flesh," and her temple near Sadiya was infamous for the regular offering of human sacrifice. Many historians have suggested that Kamakhy herself may have originally been a tribal mother goddess and that Nilacala hill may have been a sacrificial site for nearby peoples such as the Khasis and Garos. Some trace the name itself to the Khasi goddess Ka Meikha, or "old cousin mother." To this day, in fact, many Khasi and Garo folk stories claim that Kamakhya was initially a site of their own deities. Thus, one narrative describes Kamakhya hill as "the place at which the Khasis halted during their journey from . . . the Himalayas to their present home," and the hill is still referred to as Ulum Ka Meikha by many Khasis. The Garos tell a similar tale about Kamakhya hill as the place they stopped on their journey through the region and installed the fertility goddess Phojou. To this day, contemporary authorities at the temple, such as the president of the Kamakhya Temple Trust Board, asserting that "all tribal peoples had been worshippers of Kamakhya" and that her current worship is simply the continuation of this ancient tradition. It is worth noting that the Khasis, Garos, Jaintias, and several other tribes of southern Assam and Meghalaya are matrilineal, with descent traced through the mother and property inherited by the youngest daughter. Various authors have speculated that this may have provided a fertile ground for the worship of the mother goddess as divine feminine power.

Gradually, She came to be seen as The Great Shakti herself, Mahamaya, Kali, Durga and above all, the impersonal aspect of power centre as Shakti personified, 'The Great Goddess'. Even then, her specific folk, regional identity added a difference to the Mahamaya, she is also Yoni and Menstruating goddess, carrying with her the rebellious nature, counter position to the meta-narrative of Shakti that she comes from a culture where one's menstruation or

menstruating women remain respectful, not impure as she then reflects in her the fertility and the creativity of Yoni goddess as a mother who gives birth. She does come from an agricultural community like Sita, but unlike Sita, she is more autonomous and at times mystical and dark with primitive magic, but basically, Yoni remained a status for her controlling of her body more than the motherhood association of her Yoni part she came to see as the power centre for tantra, yantra. When each of her body parts remained a power source, not holistically but separately and partwise as blood, Yoni, garbh.

Thus, we find the original owner of her own body by herself of Kamakhya, the Goddess who desires will now be controlled by others to enhance their power. A menstruating goddess then will be seen as impure as in tantra; the power gained through harassing the impure, the dark, and the forbidden adds strength to gain Siddhi for Tantrikan and kings in return. Still, Kamakhya remains a somewhat odd combination as a goddess who celebrates her menstruation in ambubachi, although ironically, later menstruated women will not be allowed to enter during the celebration. Yet, she though achieves to maintain her independence. She incorporates elements of the "fierce" goddesses, such as the getting of blood sacrifice, and, at the same time, she does not get carried away on a violent rampage, as Kali often does in stories when she kills in battle, but then cannot stop her anger.

Her autonomy was almost invisible as she looked more like Kali, Durga than Kamakhya. That is how Kamakhya remains Kameswari Kamakhya, the two aspects of her that cannot be compromised at any cost. The female who is the Lord but also the one as any other women with feminine virtues can desire her object of love, and more importantly, one who menstruates despite being a Great Goddess Kali or Shakti who is completely above any such biological and woman body-related limitations. Finally, the question comes how to harmonise the two aspects in the Goddess- *Krishnakanta Bhattacharya*-The traditional main priest of Kamakhya explained it does when she will be the desiring goddess, she will wear a red or blue robe and with a flower; and when she will be a killer, she will be with a sword. Because of her erotic nature, she resides in the Blue hill where her partner Siva also turns blue, and when she remains dead, the victim of death, Shiva also turns dark as Bhairava and dances tandav. In Nilachala, Siva is both the blue eroticised Siva and the Bhairava, the dark one.

As Gavin Flood points out, Tantra attempts to use desire to go beyond desire, to alchemically transform kama from a source of bondage into a means of liberation: "kama is

not an end in itself, but a means to an end; desire is used to transcend itself as a thorn can be removed by a thorn” (Hugh B. Urban,2009). Not primarily a means to pleasure alone, and kama is rather a means to awaken and channel the tremendous energy that lies within the body and the cosmos. As a living, embodied, and historical tradition, Hindu Tantra spread throughout South Asia in a network of holy sites or epicentres of divine feminine energy known as the Shakta pithas or seats of power. Extending from Kamakhya in the northeast to Purnagiri in the south and Uddiyana in the northwest, the sakta pithas embody a complex, capillary network or matrix of power, comprising many veins and nodes that reflect the vast, flowing system of energy that is the Goddess as Sakti, embodied and embedded in the physical world. This matrix of 'power is from its origin born from bloodshed and sacrifice the death and dismemberment of the Goddess Sati, whose various body parts make up the sakta pithas. But it is also intimately tied to the creative power of sexual union the union of Siva and 'Sakti who lie joined in ', the power of Tantra secret love plays on Kamakhya hill, giving life and vitality to the entire universe.

### **5.5. The power of menstruation interconnected to Kamakhya**

As implicit earlier, the taboos regarding menstruation approved are not only present in the society because women are taken to be pollutants or impure during menstruation. But because women are considered by Assamese society to be physically weak during menses, and thus the following of taboos allows her ample rest of the body. The sensitive parts of a woman's body, like the uterus, clitoris and vagina, are expected to be weak and soft during this time, and immense heavy work in any form may cause harm to them. However, whether menstruation is looked at more as pollution or a condition requiring rest is debatable. To keep oneself clean is another reason given for the need for menstrual taboos. Not touching things helps the menstruating woman to stay away from germs that she might let into her menses. The religious factor, as mentioned earlier, is the strongest reason for the maintenance of taboos. The kitchen is considered to be Goddess Lakshmi's abode (the Goddess of wealth) along with other Gods and Goddesses. And since a woman is polluted, she is best kept away from these places, which embody purity and holiness. The rules and restrictions of the menstruating women become even stricter during a religious period called Ambubasi or Xaat. It is during this period that, as myths would go, Mother Kamakhya menstruates (there is a temple too by the same name,

which is much adhered to by the locals). The seclusion is like the first menstrual separation ritual. They are to remain on their beds for three days and eat only fruits. Boiled food without oil is served in the evening. Elderly women, especially widows who are staunch believers of menstrual taboos, do not cook anything for those four days and survive on fruits and milk. They believe that they should not use firewood for making food as wood is part of nature and nothing from nature should be disarranged for the whole earth, i.e. Mother is menstruating. All over Assam, women who menstruate during this time must observe restrictions like not cooking, not performing puja (prayers) or reading holy books etc.

When the temple is re-opened, prasad (sacred handouts to temple goers), as part of the food offered to the Goddess, is distributed in two forms. Angadhak - the fluid part of the body - water from the spring, and angabostra - the cloth is covering the body- a piece of the red cloth used to cover the stone yoni during the days of menstruation. During Ambubasi mela, the rituals enacted fuse two natural phenomena that are perceived as distinctly different. The seasonal cycle of monsoon rains merges with the female physiology - the women's monthly menstrual flow. Both the earth's body and the female body processes can be deemed as profoundly sacred. Women have much faith in the religious activities that occur in Kamakhya during the monsoon. Mothers mostly hope to acquire the angabostro, if not done so already, as it is said to have the capacity of curing women affected with disorders related to menstruation or also make one's reproductive life successful. It is amazing to see in a paradoxical manner, how on the one hand, the same menstrual cloth and fluid are distributed as prasad, and on the other, women with menstruation are a threat to sacredness. The only soothing effect in this dampening situation is that perhaps the Ambubasi mela provides a sacred space for empowering images of the female body a space where the maternal and erotic aspects of women's lives are encoded and celebrated as divine. This description above, which talks about a vital process. Assamese society delivers in its structure, has socio-cultural meaning and adds to the communal running of the society. Hence through Assamese society used to celebrate the menstruation period of goddess Kamakhya as she is kind of an ordinary girl and as an average normal girl having her periods, the Goddess shares this trait with others showing the folk, regional and tribal cultural identity in her way still keeps room for celebration a period which is otherwise an impure phase as per caste Hindus pure impure norms. And it brings forth an Assamese way of life, which not only depicts women's position in it but the picture seen here

is that menstruation is not impurity and on the other hand it can be seen as impurity and source of power in tantrism which was mostly dominated by king and elite class.

It is found that Ambubachi has also been rediscovered and celebrated by many contemporary feminists, both Western and Indian. According to Janet Chawla, writing for Women's Feature Services, Ambubachi represents a rare but empowering image of women's creative abilities, one that is much needed in a world still dominated by negative representations of the female body. The Ambubachi worship of the simultaneous phenomena of monsoon rain and menstrual bleeding may reveal an important contribution to the global cultural representation of the female body. Kamakhya seems to question both the dominant religious legacies of the pollution inherent in female bodily processes. Kamakhya provides a sacred space for empowering images of the female body a space where the maternal and erotic aspects of women's lives are encoded and celebrated as divine. And we might wonder how "empowering" it actually is for women to celebrate their identity with the sexual organ, menstrual blood, reproduction, and the earth. But nonetheless, this is clear evidence of the fact that the power of the Goddess has persisted into the twenty-first century and taken on ever-new meanings in a postcolonial and now transnational context.

As the Goddess of desire (kama), Kamakhya herself is believed to menstruate once a year, the occasion of her most important festival, which is said to give life to the earth and power to her devotees. Kamakhya can be called the "matrix of power," as the generative mother or womb (Sanskrit matr, etymologically related to Latin mater and matrix) that gives birth to the universe and the divine energy that flows through all its elements (matras). Kamakhya temple has for centuries been infamous as a centre of Tantric practice in its most extreme forms, including both the regular offering of animal (and, allegedly, human) sacrifice and esoteric sexual rites. As we will see in the case of Tantra, the concept of power is very clearly "gendered." On the one hand, as the divine feminine energy that generates the universe, Sakti is essentially a female power, engendering both life and death in its temporal unfolding. Yet, on the other hand, this is also a power that can be harnessed and channelled for the "masculine" ends of priesthood, kingship, and war. The tantric ritual involves a complex alchemy of gender and power, which transforms the female energy of the Goddess into the masculine energy of the king and priest; but it also opens the possibility for women to assume new kinds of authority, to take power in a more active way as gurus and embodiments of Sakti in their own right. As the seat of the goddess' yoni or sexual organ, Kamakhya is widely regarded as the

most powerful of the *pithas* and, indeed, literally the "mother of all places of power." According to the *Kalika Purana*, it is here that the Goddess dwells in the form of a reddish stone, the physical embodiment of her yoni, which grants all desires; and it is here on the blue mountain (Nilacala or Nilakuta) that the Goddess and Lord Siva' lie in a secret union in lovers' play beneath the mask of stone. Together, the pithas comprise a vast, interconnected, sacred landscape suffused with the goddess' vital energy. As Sarah Caldwell observes in her study of Sakta Tantra in South India, "Throughout India, the earth is regarded as a sacred, living entity having a female nature. From the temple of Bharat Mata in Banaras to Kamarupa in Assam, the land of India is infused with Sakti, female creative power." (Caldwell,2001)

Within the temple itself, Kamakhya is represented not by any human image but by a she is represented in iconic form, Kamakhya appears as an extremely ambivalent goddess, who has two very different sides a santa or peaceful state and an ugra or terrifying state. The two faces of the Tantric Goddess, a loving mother, terrifying destroyer in sum. The Goddess Kamakhy is an extremely eclectic figure who assimilated a variety of older goddesses, both Hindu and indigenous, into her complex form. As we see in popular representations of the Goddess today, she is a complex synthesis of a number of mainstream Hindu goddesses, incorporating the iconography of Durga, Lakshmi, Kali, and others into her multi-armed, many-headed form. Yet, she also incorporates more wild and bloody elements drawn from the indigenous traditions of the northeast. As Kakati (1948) observes, "All independent deities began to be identified with her as her manifestations. The notion of the Mother Goddess assumed a cosmic perspective and all unconnected local numina were affiliated to her." As we will see it seems likely that this assimilation of many local goddesses into one "Great Mother" was also part of the tempt by Assam's kings to assimilate a variety of local communities into a larger political formation under a single ruling power: "The cult of Kamakhy a belonged to matriarchal tribes like the Khasis and Garos. To win their allegiance . . . royal patronage was extended to the local cult of Kamakhya." Conversely, non-Hindu groups like the Ahoms also gradually assimilated their own deities with mainstream Hindu gods and goddesses. Thus the Ahom goddess Lankuri became equated with the supreme Sakti or Durga; the god Burha Deota became Sivaksim Tyao became Visnu; and so on. Within the temple itself, Kamakhya is represented not by any human image, but by a sheet of stone that slopes downwards from both sides, meeting in a yoni-like depression. When she is represented in iconic form, Kamakhy an appears as an extremely ambivalent goddess, who has two very different sides a santa or

peaceful state and an ugra or terrifying state. In the words of Krsnarama Nyayavagisa, the well-known Sakta theologian and preceptor of the Ahom king Siva Singha, the Goddess has a twofold nature, at once loving and horrifying, creative and destructive: "She will put on red clothes and red and yellow flower garlands and bestow sexual pleasure to her devotee. During war and danger, she will throw away her clothes and flowers, will take sword in hand to protect her devotees and take revenge." In her santa state, she is the beautiful Lady of All Desires, Sarva-Kamesvari, "seated on a red lotus in the red-lotus posture, with a fresh and youthful body, her hair untied, wearing a fine necklace, seated on the chest of a corpse, her breasts swelled and high, beautiful, with clothes like the rising sun". As the Kamakhya Tantra describes her, she is the very essence of kama as eros embodied, surrounded by yoginis and Kinnara women (a hill tribe of the Himalayas) chanting erotic words. Again, we might note here the association of the Goddess with tribal groups and the tribal groups in turn associated with eroticism: the power of tantra Wearing red garments, offering boons, adorned with a vermillion mark on her forehead, immaculate, the abode of nectar, radiant with a rosy face, adorned with gold, jewels, rubies and other ornaments, supreme, seated on a lion throne made of gold and jewels, etc. . . . Beautiful in her entire body, always surrounded by the Vidya (goddesses), adorned by dakinis and yoginis, accompanied by loving women and fragrant with various perfumes . . . Three-eyed, infatuating, holding a bow made of flowers, she is praised by the Kinnara women by the chanting of "bhaga-linga" (vagina and penis). In her terrible ugra form, however, the Goddess appears in her most frightening and destructive aspects. Here she is identified with Kali, the dark Goddess of time and death, "taking up a sword and standing on a naked white corpse, with eyes rolling and hair disheveled," or the emaciated terrifying Chamunda, who smiles ghoulishly as she sits upon a human corpse and drinks blood from a skull-bowl. As the Kalika Purana describes her. When it is the time for love, she abandons her sword and adorns herself with a garland. When she is no longer in a loving mood, she holds a sword. When it is time for love, she is seated on a red lotus placed on the body of Siva. But when she is no longer in a loving mood, she is 'seated on a white corpse. These two sides of Kamakhya as lovingly sensual and violently destructive recur throughout the mythology and ritual of the goddess, who is worshipped with both sensual rites and sacrifice as the two primary forms through which blood, desire, and power flow to and from the yoni pitha.

How can these two opposite aspects of the Devi Kamakhya be combined in a harmonious manner? Krshnaram Nyayabagish, the preceptor of the Ahom king Siva Simha is better known in the history of Assam as the *Parbatiya Gosain*, was a well-known Shakta theologian of his time. A native of Nadia, Bengal, he was the last philosopher of eminence to offer an explanation on the "composite character" of the Goddess *Kāmākhya-Kāmeswari*. "She will put on red clothes and red and yellow flower garlands and bestow sexual pleasure to her devotees. During the war and danger, she will throw away her clothes and flowers and will take *khadga* (sword) in her hands to protect her devotees and will take revenge. [i] " According to Krishnaram Nyayabagish, the Goddess has two forms, the sexy one when she seats on the red lotus (*sodasi*) and the destroyer cum preserver when she stands on the lion. (*Durga Kātyayani*) or seats on the dead body (*Candi Cāmunda*)".

Wearing red garments, offering boons, adorned with a vermillion mark on her forehead, immaculate, the abode of nectar, radiant with a rosy face, adorned with gold, jewels, rubies and other ornaments, supreme, seated on a lion throne made of gold and jewels, etc. . . . Beautiful in her entire body, always surrounded by the Vidya (goddesses), adorned by dakinis and yoginis, accompanied by loving women and fragrant with various perfumes . . . Three-eyed, infatuating, holding a bow made of flowers, she is praised by the Kinnara women by the chanting of "bhaga-linga".

Thus we find the pure guidelines gradually differ although earlier some freedom was allowed for the kiratas and the tribes for continuing with their, somehow culturally different kind of rituals, food habit and freedom and autonomy for girls etc. when Shiva and Parvati named the land as 'The land of the Kiratas' where the Dharma is ' *Kairataja Matat*' . . . , later we find in her complete identification with Shakti.

*Yasmin pithe ya ācārah sa acāro vidhi smrtāh/*

*Sarvesu yoginipithe dharmam Kirātaja matm. (Y.T. 2.9.13).*

The Goddess Kamakhya is rare everywhere, but in Kamarupa, she is present in every household. In this way, Kamakhya is presented in the form of the Supreme Goddess to be worshipped in the region of Kamarupa. Thus she is the regional Goddess of Kamarupa. The icon of Goddess Kamakhya is a case in point, as, through her, one can touch the extension and expansion of the tribal "Mother-Goddess" cult into a mainstream Hindu icon. The worship of mother goddesses evolved from the custom of nature worship, which was prevalent in pre-

Aryanised Assam. With gradual Hinduisation, the cult of the mother goddess got embraced in the Shakta tradition, and so an attempt has been made to trace the original worshippers of this Goddess and the development of the icon from a tribal deity to one of the most revered Shakta goddesses. There is no icon of the Goddess, and it is unique in its own standing. Modern scholars are of the opinion that “the formation of the Kama in Kamakhya is of extra Aryan origin” and hold that the Goddess Kamakhya originally was a deity worshipped by the matriarchal tribes and later on identified with the Goddess Shakti.

### **5.6. Some observations and some basic findings: Kamakhya as a synthesis of Aryan and non Aryan belief systems**

Hindu tradition considers women as the vessels of Sakti and the identification of women with Sakti leads to the concept of women as the source of both creative and destructive power. Some scholars criticize this identification because they believe it has led society to states women either saints or sinner and leads for a little room in between, and maintain that women, like benevolent goddesses, are predictable to exhibit forgiveness, compassion, and tolerance of others wrongdoings. If they follow to this role, patriarchal society accepts them; if they do not and try to exhibit independence and assertiveness, they are considered destructive, disrupting community and family social organizations. On the other hand, some also contend that the idea of Sakti can be used to empower Indian women to resist patriarchy. Thus is up to the woman, whom they take or mixed with both identities. This shows how an ordinary girl become an image of a power centric society. Choosing a dark strong goddess as a role model one may want to imbibe I her the power that will make her a subject than a victim object for others. However, the irony is that even in societies with Goddess worshippers actual condition of women remain pathetic as on others. On one side woman are treated as goddesses and on the other hand they are exploited in the name the social norms.

This chapter highlights some such related issues while understanding a folk and a marginal goddess as Kamakhya emerging as a role model, as equal to none other than a string Goddess Kali, Durga and others. This also remains a mismatch between the two as Kamkhya fails to be complete Kali like as she has to make continuous dialogue with her folk part that also makes her a yoni goddess, a desiring goddess and a bleeding goddess which Kali is not.

YoginiTantra states that the religion of Yogini Pitha (Kamakhya) is of Kirata origin and that this sacred place being closer to Devi's heart, here she makes her permanent abode on the abode of the 'blue hill' and so does her better half-Mahadeva, as such every woman here being an image of the Devi, this sacred place, so it says, is ever holy by the eternal presence of the Goddess, that no one is impure or imperfect here. *Kairataja Dharma* ' , *dharma of the Kiratas* , as practiced in and around Shakti Pitha Kamakhya and of some tribes and communities generally applying the term Kiratas are thus exempted from undue restrictions as per orthodox censoring on some of its ' *svabha-dharma* ' kind practices as per different kinds of nature, temperament or capabilities, such as ' *ritudharma* ' may be the natural dharma for woman while non-vegetarian food habits also may be the traditional practice of some such tribes and interesting part is that in this Tantra ( Yogini Tantra) utmost relaxation is shown in its Left Handed Tantra practice that justifies exemptions to the norm saying that since the place is very dear to Shiva-Parvati's heart, nothing is impure here by dint of their very presence.

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.<sup>3</sup>

The larger background of which provided a platform for accommodating of the Kāmākhyā cult in Assam introduced for the first time by Naraka, the son of Mother Earth whose mythical presence was felt near him in the guise of his foster mother Kātyāyani. It was the association of earth-tiller, Balarama and later Vishnu as Varaha who remained protector of the earth goddess Bhumi ,made the myth acceptable to some tribes and communities who had deities such as ancestors, of graveyard protector, agricultural rites and rituals related with earth mother that could accommodate myths associated with Naraka –Vishnu –Bhumi .From her humble beginning as a folk-deity Kamakhya soon came within Brahmanical pantheon till

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<sup>3</sup> 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.

she was identified with the Great goddess, Shakti and Devi. Shakti connotes the role and power of the Goddess as the source of all cosmic energy.

Hindu Deities as Feminist Role Models invoke and praise both gods and goddesses. *Ushas* ("Goddess of Dawns") is praised in twenty Hymns of Chapters VI.64, VI.65, VII.78 and X.172, with Hymn VI.64.5 declaring goddess Ushas as the one who must be worshipped first.<sup>4</sup> <sup>5</sup>Max Muller states that, while there are difference in frequency of mentions, gods and goddesses in Rig veda are "neither superior nor inferior; almost everyone is represented as supreme and absolute".<sup>6</sup> Kamakhya Devi is famous as the bleeding Goddess. The mythical womb and vagina of Shakti are supposedly installed in the 'Garvagriha' or sanctum of the temple. In the month of Ashaad (June), the Goddess bleeds or menstruates. At this time, the Brahmaputra river near Kamakhya turns red. The temple then remains closed for 3 days, and holy water is distributed among the devotees of Kamakhya Devi.

There is no scientific proof that the blood turns the river red. Some people say that the priests pour vermilion into the waters. However, symbolically, menstruation is the symbol of a woman's creativity and power to give birth. So, the deity and temple of Kamakhya celebrate this 'shakti' or power within every woman. It is believed that when the body of Sati was pierced into pieces by the 'Sudarshan Chakra' of Lord Bishnu, parts of the body fell into different places each creating a 'Shakti Peeth' which are thought to be very sacred. Similarly, the vagina of Sati fell in Pragjyotishpur or Assam, giving rise to the Kamakhya Temple.

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<sup>4</sup> The shining tints of the Dawn have spread like the waves of the waters,  
Beautifying the world, she renders all good roads easy to traverse,  
She who is replete with delight, excellence and health,  
Divine Ushas, though art seen auspicious, thou shinest afar,  
thy bright rays spread over the sky, lovely and radiant with great splendour;  
Do thou Ushas bring me opulence, daughter of heaven;  
thou who art divine, who art lovely, who art to be worshipped at the first daily rite;  
At thy dawning, divine Ushas, birds fly from their resting places, men arise to work;  
Thou, divine Ushas, bring ample wealth to the mortal, the offerer of these prayers.

— *Rigveda*, VI.64

<sup>5</sup> [Vaishnavi Pallapothu](https://medium.com/the-red-elephant-foundation/hindu-deities-as-feminist-role-models-) <https://medium.com/the-red-elephant-foundation/hindu-deities-as-feminist-role-models->

<sup>6</sup> [William Joseph Wilkins](#), *Hindu Mythology: Vedic and Purānic*, p. 8, at [Google Books](#), London Missionary Society, Calcutta

The Yogini Tantra now follows the story and rehandles the myth of the origin of the Mother Goddess Kāmākhya, who is now to be seen more as the most powerful Great Goddess of Shakti-Tantra salutations to whom is made as follows:

Ya Devi Sarva Bhuteshu Shakti Rupena Samsthita

Namastasyai Namastasyai Namastasyai Namaha!

“We bow to the divine goddess in all existence who resides in the form of energy. We bow to her, we bow to her, we continually bow to her”!<sup>7</sup>

In the new Hinduized form, this local goddess Kāmākhya, who had her base in folk tradition, is now shown as indistinguishable from the Great Goddess of the Shakti Tantra who is superior to Brahma the creator and Vishnu the preserver and all others. In the course of a conversation, Parvati (Sati reborn as the daughter of the Himalaya Mountains). Sati asks her spouse Shiva, “Who is Kāmākhya?” and Shiva replies that Kāmākhya is the same as Kāli, the eternal in the form of Brahmā who fulfils all desires. Shiva then narrates the origin of Kāmākhya. He then continues with the story introducing the Great Goddess Kāmākhya and identifying her with Uma, Parvati and other versions of Shakti along with her associates who reside in the shrine all together. Yogini Tantra thus re-handles the myth, further making it more a Shakti-shrine (*pitha*) than a Yoni shrine. In the new Hinduized form, this local goddess Kāmākhya, who had her base in folk tradition, is now shown as indistinguishable from the Great Goddess of the Shakti Tantra who is superior to Brahma the creator and Vishnu the preserver and all others.

In the *Yogini Tantra* now we find a different version of the origin of the Yoni-Goddess of Nilāchal, stressing creative energy. In the new Hinduized form, this local goddess Kāmākhya, who had her base in folk tradition, is now shown as indistinguishable from the Great Goddess of the Shakti Tantra who is superior to Brahma the creator and Vishnu the preserver and all others. In the course of a conversation, Parvati (Sati reborn as the daughter of the Himalaya Mountains) asks her spouse Shiva, “Who is Kāmākhya?” and Shiva replies that Kāmākhya is the same as Kāli, the eternal in the form of Brahmā who fulfils all desires. Shiva

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<sup>7</sup> *Yogini Tantra*, quoted in Archana Barua, “Elements of Magic, Esotericism, and Religion in Shaktism and Tantrism in Light of the Shakti Pitha Kāmākhya”, *The Pomegranate* 17.1-2 (2015) 51-70)

then narrates the origin of Kāmākhya. He then continues with the story introducing the Great Goddess Kāmākhya and identifying her with Uma, Parvati and other versions of Shakti along with her associates who reside in the shrine altogether. Yogini Tantra thus re-handles the myth, further making it more a Shakti-shrine (pitha) than a Yoni shrine.<sup>8</sup> This accommodates other minor goddesses within the Kāmākhya cult. Other non-Hindu and local deities could also be accommodated as per various forms and manifestations of the Dark and powerful Goddess Kāmākhya who is none other than Kālī, Tāra and Shakti.<sup>9</sup>

Although Shaktism started giving women her due regards as the embodiment of the Goddess and encouraged casteless solidarity among devotees from all ranks and castes. Almost all small or big landlords and kings were Goddess worshippers including Sankaradeva's ancestors Chandibar who was given the honorary title Devidas by the King Durlabhnarayana for his utmost devotion and service to the Goddess. Gradually the Shakti aspect in the Great Goddess overpowers her original folk image when she remained more a mother Goddess than a center of power. In her final stage she was more a dark Goddess Kali like who is to be appeased with sacrifices and also blood. That way she emerges Power goddess in Tantricism and serves as pay to Goddess or kings more with Shakti than with bhakti.

Yogini Tantra thus re-handles the myth, further making it more a Shakti-shrine (pitha) than a Yoni shrine. Sponsored by the three ruling dynasties, the Mlechhas, the Palas and Koches, goddess is portrayed as war goddess who participates in the war to protect the world. 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. 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. 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.

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<sup>8</sup> *Yogini Tantra*, quoted in Archana Barua, "Elements of Magic, Esotericism, and Religion in Shaktism and Tantrism in Light of the Shakti Pitha Kāmākhya", *The Pomegranate* 17.1-2 (2015) 51-70

<sup>9</sup> *Yogini Tantra*, quoted in Archana Barua, "Elements of Magic, Esotericism, and Religion in Shaktism and Tantrism in Light of the Shakti Pitha Kāmākhya", *The Pomegranate* 17.1-2 (2015) 51-70

She remains an odd combination of both masculine and feminine traits in her, its terrifying and eroticized *Kaama*, both in one, in a Brahmanisation phase she finally appears as equal in status with the great Goddesses of the Hindu pantheon, such as Kali, Durga and Mahamaya. Among the holiest of these became the seat of her *yoni*, which fell in Assam, and it is here that Shiva and Sati eternally reside in secret union. As Lord Shiva declares in one 11th century text from Assam, “in this most sacred pitha...the goddess is secretly joined with Me. Sati’s sexual organ, which was severed and fell there, became a stone; and there Kamakhya is present” (Hugh B. Urban, 2015, pp26-48). The goddess who resides in Nilachala is called Kamakhya because she came here secretly to satisfy her *Kāma* (amour) with Siva. Identifying Kamakhya herself with Sati and Devi who now is a resurrected form of Sati in order to fulfil her love desires with her husband Shiva.

Since early mediaeval times therefore, Hinduism has emerged as a blend of traditions. It stratified old Vedic theology with marginal and, even, tribal beliefs, often creating newer regional theologies based on canonical Sanskrit scriptures. On the one hand, these newer scriptures traced their roots back to Vedic sacredness while, on the other, they showed great skill in blending ancient myths, rituals and symbols with uses and customs of marginal, and often oral, traditions. Hinduism has been extremely versatile in accepting, modifying and adapting what Brahmanism perceived as alien, influencing the further development of Hindu-Tantra. As there is need for new ways of looking at the old, myths multiply and explanations differ but yet fact remains that a meaningful dialogue could take place between the two way marginal and national and at times even beyond that.

## Chapter 6

### Conclusion

The overall ideas of the Thesis are to analyse and explore the various goddess images and their relevance to the modern context of woman. In the last many years, the Hindu goddess has been the object of much interest in various circles, both India and West, and in a new age, spirituality has invoked her as a source of inspiration. The present analysis helps in that direction of exploring the possible link between the ideal and the actual. Multiple Goddess images have prevented potential role conflict for women; they can walk in the street; meet with strangers, even with men who are not family members, without losing their responsibility, following the various role models whom society have accepted as ideal even otherwise dark, aggressive or at times with counter ideal family woman as in radical goddess images as well. They can also engage in a traditionally masculine activity without a threat to their femininity along with playing usual tamer domestic roles otherwise.

On the whole, if the question can still be asked why goddesses are taken as role models by some, it can be shown that philosophically speaking, the most fundamental question that still haunts one always still remains unanswered, that is, "to know thyself". To throw light on what kind of life one needs to lead is dependent on the question of what kind of person he or she would like to be. If the Goddess as such is still one of 'my-kind ', one who is not very distant from what or how I see myself as a human being, as a person and also as a woman of a particular culture and religion which conditions my self-quest, then goddesses can remain role models as is made explicit in the following observation inspired especially by the tradition's acknowledgement and approval of the special link between the Goddess and women, as portrayed here. Besides, in whatever role, the greatest aspiration that a woman will look for a safe and secure position where there is love and also respect for her position in whatever way she is placed or will be placed in. Goddesses and the divine should be such that inspires the mortals here, and the divine will be extremely happy where women are respected.

Indian Hindu society is nowadays described as a society with many possibilities and positions to woman. Suppose we start from mythology, where we can find that there are both gods and goddesses where The divine *Ardhanarishvara* represented composite half man and

half woman position. It reflects that the divinity consists of both male and female, and the two are equally important to an extent that both are seen as one unified whole, one incomplete without the other. And this can be taken as the basic structure of the social system that represents man and woman also as intimate companions all throughout their life through thick and thin. But we can see that this happy scenario is not much reflected in actual situations when the divine sahadharmini image remains ideal even for man most of the time, but not to imitate that life pattern in their real life when the ideal goddess liker woman is to be treated with equal dignity and loving respect in their personal life too. Hindu woman and goddesses seem to be understood as goddesses who are a source of power even for man and mostly inspiration for both man and woman. But in the broader picture, a woman is left unsupported separating her goddess ideal from her actual image. The following capture from the National Daily is one such various common readings in the current situation that reflects this mismatch aptly:

“Abused Goddesses campaign against domestic violence has gone viral. But goddesses do not get slapped, belted, punched and kicked around into subservience and 'domestication'. Women do.”<sup>10</sup> The sad realization continues: “*India is a country where we worship women as goddesses and yet burn them for dowry and kill girls in the womb.* How many times have you heard such an observation? In my experience, almost as many times as that other hackneyed statement: *India is the land of Kama Sutra and yet we are so repressed and prudish when it comes to sex.* Neither of these oft-quoted insights has helped change anything.”<sup>11</sup> This leads to a position that more than deriving strength from her real life God like hero an woman has to derive her own strength from the same divine source whom she addresses as her Mother who alone can remain her companion and strength when human ones fail .

More than religious motive, goddesses are worshipped to gain power that too by man. And in the practical situation, a woman doesn't get the status that should be given to them. So, research is mostly on the goddess image can take a role model for a woman to the present-day context is usually a dark, strong power source image that more than a feminine and wifely

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<sup>10</sup> Praneta Jha, New Delhi,” Abused or not, women are not goddesses”, Hindustan Times News

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EPaper(<http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:4n96wF2eb9wJ:https://www.hindustantimes.com/art-and-culture/abused-or-not-women-are-not-goddesses/story-> )

<sup>11</sup> ibid

image can fight back with equal strength when she remains abused in this power game. That leads often to take a Shakti image of the goddess than a bhakti centric one. Here the study doesn't include the part like gender issues, feminism etc., but only a discrimination issue that may affect anyone of the counterparts, both can remain victors or victims alternatively, unlike in solely feminist way it does not identify only the female the victim here. It is mainly about Hindu Goddesses for Hindu woman at large to the present time. If we follow the mythology and take that Goddess and woman share some common nature, the work is to find the common necessary qualities shared by both humans and the divine, males are not exempted from the larger domain that makes one human here.

Shakti and Prakriti are the two basic virtues of Goddesses we can find from the traditional texts and commentaries. And these are also found as nature in an ordinary woman. Goddesses maintain the cosmic order as Shakti and Prakriti, and ordinary woman maintains the social order. A woman has the power like Shakti when she needs to protect herself from the negative situation, protects her children and so on. At that time, she has to be like Skahti as Kali, Durga, who is most dangerous and independent and not controlled by anyone. And sometimes she has to be like Prakriti, goddesses Lakshmi, Sita, who are always accompanied by their consorts for the creation. Just like Purusha need Prakrit for the evolution. Not suppressive one but co-partner to each other to achieve the goal and to maintain the social order. A woman has both the qualities of a warrior and sahadhrmini. Women and goddesses are of the same nature, and it always remains the same under different social structures. But we have found that Goddess as a single being can be all independent, sahadharmini, creative force, fierce, motherly too. So a woman should also take it as a role model, not a particular but a combination of them according to the present situation. It cannot be generalised about the particular Goddess as a role model for a woman as a whole. Because situation wise, the problems are different and mostly depend on where she belongs to, city or countryside, privileged or deprived. Goddesses are role model and ideal for all woman. A woman almost becomes like a goddess when she takes care of her household responsibilities and being a mother and a wife just the way the Goddess seems to be like Durga. Woman feel strength, power, and motivation when they feel they replica as goddess quality.

The civilisation of a country is best understood by a thorough study of the position of its women. The women in various phases of her life as Daughter, Wife and Mother not only protects and invigorates the man to the best of her power but safeguard his interests even at her

own cost. Ancient Indian literature exhibits a uniform spirit of reverence for womanhood, and Vedic religion doesn't deny any right to women, not in the least the religious. True, there have been ups and downs in the position of Hindu women, but they have never been shorn of their inherent goodness and greatness on account of oppression or excessive depression. With the changes of time and period, the position and possessions of women appear to vary, so to analyse that, we must have a thorough grasp of the position of women in ancient and modern India (Chaudhuri,2012). With the changing of time, the position of women has changed, but women developed an inner strength to come forward to make choices in life and influence the direction of social changes. In the West, feminism and religious conviction are often perceived as being at odds. Still, in India, where spirituality is a major part of many people's lives, women use their religion as a guide for empowerment. In India's religious history, where religion and culture have been inseparable, the cult of Shakti had been at the forefront of mother worship. Before Puranic Brahmanism reached eastern India, it was already under the pervasive influence of Tantra, where goddesses occupied the most important role. The historical circumstances and values in India have added a distinctive Indian way of addressing women's issues in a means that might differ from the Western feminist rhetoric.

Though we are at the peak of modernisation but still the gender concepts of the various traditional epic have a great impact on present-day gendering issues. The study of sexual ideology in The Mahabharata theorised the logic of sex and gender in the text, identifying the linkage drawn between one's biological sex and one's social location. It will examine the mythic frames and cosmological narratives that support the gendering sexes and will study the values with which each gender is inscribed (Dhand,2008).

The woman's position at the time of the post Vedic period and also the later stage changed gradually. We find that the strong belief of the day was that only a male heir could save his parents from the cycle of rebirth. Since a daughter left her parental home after marriage, the son was left with the responsibility of caring for parents in their old age. This added further value to the sons. A woman's place was the home, and her primary responsibility was to bear sons and ensures the continuity of the family lineage. A husband's rights over his wife were total, and he had the freedom to go for another marriage if his wife failed to beget sons. A woman was kept constantly under male control and lost her right to seek knowledge. Over a period of time, the marriageable age was also lowered. Though there within this changed nature of patriarchy, her motherhood, instead of being her glory and pride, made her permanently

dependent on others, economically, politically, socially, and culturally. Rather, her sole identity now would depend on her functional part, her ability to reproduce a male child. In the society at present, a woman is adored for her motherly role, no doubt, and to overcome those negative stereotypes, we have to take Goddess as a role model. But the Mother Goddess herself underwent various transformational phases until she reclaimed her lost power as the Great Goddess, focusing on her warrior traits and shakti and her heroism instead of feminine one. Unlike her earlier recognitions of glory in motherhood or in her feminine traits, although it remained complementary with non-feminine ones as well, the ideas that nurtured such values were 'sahadharmini', the ideals that nurtured such traits were femininity even in male gods and masculinity even in female gods, but both in a balanced and in dialogue. She always carries dual images in accordance with the needed situation. Though in modern time, we are highly able to know and learn and even practically follow up some laws regarding equality of woman with a man. Shadharmini role could be taken as a positive point, as it does not mean to become subordinate to her husband. It is more like a counterpart to each other and not like a master slave.

In the advancement of the position and status of Indian womanhood, the period to which Sita belongs influences the status of women in the domestic sphere of activity. Sita is considered to be the incarnation of Sri or Lakshmi, the consort of Vishnu, who comes to the transitory plane of existence in order to endure an arduous life that illustrates to humanity the finest of virtues. Virtues that need to be instructed and put into practice. Since the best method of lessons is not by word but by precept, she could do no better than experience all the struggles possible in order to show that the path to rightness is not through avoidance of suffering but in suffering freely and undermining the succeeding pain with the right mental outlook. By taking to suffer but not be weighed down by pain and anguish, the evil which produces misery is nullified. This is more purifying and elevating than any ordeal of fire. Without endeavouring this kind of unequal equality, it can be said that Sita in no way appears inferior to any other personality in the epic. She has the indispensable confidence to live a life of dignity in the most trying of situations. Her confidence is not marked through any form of fierceness. In fact, her strength of mind and silence are vibrant signs of her confidence in herself than what was likely through any fierce overt demonstration of aggression. It would be appropriate to see the currency of Sita in today's world. Sita of contemporary time may be a role model for women of the modern-day era and can be proved as radical instead of rebellious. The present

technological era has changed perceptions of woman empowerment and ideology on honoured womanhood. Role model as Sita seems foot stepping with modern time and understands the need for time to meet the challenges of life and tackling the women related issues in such kind of society. It is also the fact that Sita's character shows that human sorrow is inevitable and affects all, whatever may be one's temperament, scholarship, lineage, etc. It is also amazing to see how in modern times the goddess as role model can be viewed differently in and through different mediums, the ancient Sanskrit sources, the medieval vernacular retellings, and the contemporary TV versions as well. By analyzing several popular recent and classical hit movies that use Sita and Radha tropes, Heidi R.M. Pauwels shows in her book *The Goddess as Role Model* how these moral messages have developed and how they spill into the domain of popular culture for commercial consumption.<sup>12</sup>

Finally, as a concluding part, the Thesis that ends with a positive note that Goddesses can still be role models for a woman at the present day, but from the literature reviews and remarks along with the observation that has made through the study, it may be qualified with the statement that Modern women's problem is different more complicated and challenging and according to the situations the role model or models remain different. So we cannot take only one model. Thus we have to redefine that. Through this, we can improve the deteriorating situation that women face in today's society and how to look for their wellbeing and empowerment. Here, the newness or the contribution of my work is to provide the possible bridge the gap between women's perspective of mythological characters as goddesses and now the modern challenging secular period, where can there be at best technical and technological online solution of the previously faced actual physical problems that need more a team effort with help from many others also to empower woman with technological skill so that she can approach even cyborg goddesses like images if not offline available to meet her in person What is intended here is more than waiting for the Goddess like image to intervene in real crisis a goddess like woman can empower her and learn to be goddess like in her own persona with more technical skill and education in her that she herself can collect emergency help numbers, e mail addresses, twitter-faebook uses in a woman friendly way that her victim like position can be taken care of in a proper way and her voice be allowed to be heard . This will keep room

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<sup>12</sup> Heidi R.M. Pauwels, *The Goddess as Role Model : Sita and Radha in Scripture and on Screen*, OUP, 2008

for also she herself playing a goddess like role model of many others of her kind who will then know where and how best to look for the goddesses too. Such issues can be addressed by remodelling the women in the image of Goddess. There is the possibility to take Goddess as a role model and solve the various issues which make women's position increasingly vulnerable subjecting her to exploitation even in modern up-gradation of her image otherwise.

Even a Sahadharmini model Lakshmi and Sita, is never open for only one kind of feminist interpretations here that focus is more on independence and strength of the goddesses Rather than being tied with male gods and counterparts. We find the transition of Lakshmi into Maha-Lakshmi. Similarly, there are various possibilities of re-interpreting the Sahadhrmini role model of Sita in a more contemporary and at times feminist way of glorifying Sita as The Goddess herself, independent, strong and at times rebel. We have already seen there is various way like feminist way, dark way etc. that even a feminine and mother goddess was seen as dark Goddess. Similarly, the dark Goddess Kali will also be transformed as a loving Goddess as in Rama Krishna and others. Therefore, while choosing a role model, an actual woman may select a dark goddess Kali or a loving goddess as Lakshmi or Sita. But ultimately, various options are there for making and remaking the available goddess images as per one's temperament, choice and familiarity. Whether they want to be married and Motherly in their real life, or they want to defy traditional marriage norms without compromising their independence. Accordingly, one may opt for a suitable Goddess model to carry on. However, the interesting point to note here and that also comprises one of the major Thesis findings is that more than an available Goddess model deciding the way, it is we who re-create our goddesses to suit our ideal image. That way, even beginning with a dark goddess as Kali and Chamunda, we may transform her into Bhadrakaali than Smashan Kali or an otherwise loving domestic sahadharmini goddess as Lakshmi or Sita can be later remodelled to a darker image and more Kali and Durga like as in *Adbhut Ramayana* and in Feminist portrayals of Sita.

The Thesis concludes that even if Goddesses remain our role models, even Goddesses will have to change to be our 'favoured role models' more than we being transformed in their way, although at times a drastic change in both ways remains another viable option. They may accept a transformed version of Lakshmi as Maha Lakshmi and Sita more as feminist Sita. And if not, they will recreate Goddess as per their ideal role model. This depends upon they want to

see themselves in life more as mother, wife or single women; accordingly, goddesses will change.

And we have also seen that Kamakhya, as folk and regional Goddess, there is an attempt at retaining the sole agency over her own body and her own decision making position. In her complete identification with the great Goddess, either Kali or Shakti, She may finally be disrobed of her personality and will remain a pale copy of the great Goddess being completely Kali, or Shakti like. But in certain matters, She wants to continue the great Goddess-like image in creative dialogue. Otherwise, the priest in Tantra will ignore her personality as an embodied, desiring, menstruating Goddess with different food habits and with freedom in '*karataja way*' will be transformed otherwise completely to just our centre as in terms of magical efficacy of Yoni, menstruating blood, power of the body as its parts or as whole as yantra, Tantra only. She wants to remain as an independent, autonomous goddess, although she must like the great Goddess but not allowing others to decide what to do with her body parts unless she gives permission for it. This is another important finding of the Thesis that can be related to contemporary problems of using the body as a subject or an object for making purpose.

The following long quotation will help summarizing the Thesis position how the single woman as goddess like can retain various aspects of her persona in a harmonious way instead of imitating just one strong image exclusively that take away her either creative variations as insignificant and unworthy. The Thesis looks for a harmonious blending of various parts so that a goddess like woman can remain empowered actualizing all her suppressed and hidden potentialities in a creative way.

*Devdutt Pattanaik submits:*

“They say that Shiva never spoke a single word until Shakti came into his life as Parvati. She became not only his wife, but also his student, asking questions, discussing and deliberating with him, till he revealed to the world the mysteries of life. So one day, she asked him, “What is love?” All he did then was look at her and smile. “Tell me, please, what is love?” she asked, turning away to hide her blush. This is what he said. “When you come to me as Annapoorna, the goddess of food, and feed me and ask for nothing in return, I feel love. For you have taken care of my hunger unconditionally. When you come to me as Kamakhya, the goddess of pleasure, and hold me intimately as no one does do, I feel love. For you have made me the object of your desire. This is bhog. This is one kind of love. But there is another kind of love.

“When you come to me as Gauri, demure and delicate, and allow me to dominate you, demand things of you, take you for granted, knowing fully well that you cannot be dominated by anyone, I feel love. You made me play dice, laugh at the simple pleasure of games. You made me make you dolls and enjoy entertaining you. When you come to me as Durga, bearing weapons in your hand, and protect me, I feel secure and safe, and cared for, I also feel love. This is shakti. This is power. By granting me power over you, by defending me, protecting me, empowering me, you make me feel loved. This is the second kind of love. But there is yet another kind of love. “When you dance atop me as Kali, naked with hair unbound, unafraid to be yourself, unafraid to be powerful and vulnerable and unafraid of being judged and mocked, I feel love. You make me open my eyes. I realize that Lalita, the beautiful one, is also Bhairavi, the fearsome one. I realize Mangala, the auspicious one, is also Chandika, the violent one. I see you totally, without judgment, and I realize I am capable of seeing the truth. That you allow me to see you fully, without judgment, tells me that I have become trustworthy. Thus you become the mirror, the Parvati darpan, that reflects who I am. You help me discover myself. You become my Saraswati. You reveal the true meaning of ‘darshan’. In joy, I dance. I become Nataraj. “Thus there are three kinds of love: love for the body that grants satisfaction, love for the heart that grants security and love for the head that grants wisdom. Animals can give the first and the second, only humans can give the third because they have the third eye hidden inside the head. The first two loves spring from Kama, god of desire, and they sustain life on earth. But the third kind of love springs from Kamantaka, from the destruction of desire, unmotivated by fear of death.”<sup>13</sup>

This, in turn, keeps inspiring actual women in their own struggles in life to explore one such suitable role model to bestow strength and power upon them and to continue their own journey in a committed and inspired way. Future areas of study relevant to the present work like 'Representation of goddess' -relevant to the social caste system, 'Is the Hindu Goddess a role model?'-Challenges at the Technological spheres from a philosophical perspective.' Beyond gender dichotomy: Alternative role models for women in Cyber Feminism either as a Goddess or A Cyborg'.

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<sup>13</sup> From Kali to Krishna : A love song

Indian Mythology by Devdutt Pattanaik, [https://devdutt.com/articles/from-kali-to-krishna-a-love-song/\(08-Jul-2012\)](https://devdutt.com/articles/from-kali-to-krishna-a-love-song/(08-Jul-2012))

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