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The Antiquity Of The Festival “ĀMATI”

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Abstract

The Kamakhya temple is the most famous, revered temple in the world located in Guwahati, Assam on the Nilachal hill. The temple was built over a natural ‘Yoni’ Peeth made of stone. Therefore, it is believed that mother Goddess resides here. The mother concept also relates to the earth, and therefore, this ‘peeth’ is worshiped as a ‘Yoni’ of mother earth. As women have menstrual period, so, the mother Goddess or earth also has menstrual period annually. Though not month the period of menstruation of mother earth is observed as a festival known as ‘Amati’ or ‘Ambuchi’ has been being observed or since when the menstrual period of the mother earth has been noticed, - is a matter of research or study. Why is menstrual period of mother earth is considered to be important, is also a subject of research. here, we will discuss the antiquity of the concept of ‘Amati’ or ‘Ambuchi’ with reference to the mention ancient literature such as Rigveda, Brihat Samhita etc. At present, the aspects of nature conservation is also actually associated with Amati. 'Beti Bachao, Beti Badhao' - in this context Amati plays a vital role as well. All these aspects will be covered in this research paper.

Field study will be conducted while preparing this research paper. The help of various people from Kamakhya Dham will be taken in need and various books on Shaktipuja and Shakta Dharma will be used in need.

Key words : *Antiquity, Kamakhya, Amati, Ambubachi, Yoni Peeth.*

Introduction

Menstruation is a natural biological process that women undergo during a major period of their lives. In many a sense, menstruation due to its relationship with fertility and motherhood, is, therefore, closely associated with womanhood, and it indicates how women as individuals are different from men on many levels.

Menstruation has always played an important role in how various societies and cultures across the world have perceived women in society as a whole. Āmati is such a festival observed at Kamakhya Temple located at Guwahati, Assam. Amati festival is related to the menstruation of goddess Mother Earth that occurs annually in the month of June i.e. when the sun enters in the ADRA nakshatra astrologically. In this paper, let us discuss the antiquity of the Festival AMATI observed at Kamakhya, Assam.

Concept of Mother Earth

We all know that menstruation is a natural biological process that happens to a girl after attaining certain age that is usually known as “puberty”. The attaining of puberty simply means that the girl now becomes capable of being mother. In case of human being it quite natural all over the world. Contrary to menstruation, when a mother or girl get menopause, it means she has lost her capability to become a mother further. But the question is : the earth is not like human being and therefore no question arises of menstruation in case of the Earth, still people across different countries believe the earth as woman, why? The earliest written usage is in Mycenaean Greek: *Ma-ka* (transliterated as *ma-ga*), "Mother Gaia", written in Linear B syllabic script (13th or 12th century BC).

Greek myth

In Greek mythology, Persephone, daughter of Demeter (goddess of the harvest), was abducted by Hades (god of the dead), and taken to the underworld as his queen. Demeter was so distraught that no crops would grow and the "entire human race [would] have perished of cruel, biting hunger if Zeus had not been concerned" (Larousse 152). Demeter would take the place of her grandmother, Gaia, and her mother, Rhea, as goddess of the earth in a time when humans and gods thought the activities of the heavens more sacred than those of earth. (Leeming, *Creation Myths of the World: An Encyclopedia*)

Ancient Rome

Roman Epicurean poet Lucretius opens his didactic poem *De rerum natura* by addressing Venus as a veritable mother of nature. Lucretius uses Venus as "a personified symbol for the generative aspect of nature".

Basque mythology

Amalur (sometimes **Ama Lur** or **Ama Lurra**) was the goddess of the earth in the religion of the ancient Basque people.^[6] She was the mother of Ekhi, the sun, and Ilazki, the moon. Her name means "mother earth" or "mother land"; the 1968 Basque documentary *Ama lur* was a celebration of the Basque countryside.^[7]

In South-East Asia

In the Mainland Southeast Asian countries of Cambodia, Laos and Thailand, earth (terra firma) is personified as Phra Mae Thorani, but her role in Buddhist mythology differs considerably from that of Mother Nature. In the Malay Archipelago, that role is filled by Dewi Sri, *The Rice-mother in the East Indies*.

In India

“Great is our Mother Earth” (Rig veda 1.168.33) was the exclamation of the vedic poets. In Atharva Veda, with some developed ideas mother earth was mentioned (12.1.1-18). In Aiteriya Brahmana (8.5), the earth is addressed with Shri. In pauranic Literatures, the earth is regarded as Shakti.

From the above mentioned reference it can be easily surmised that the concept of other Mother Goddess or Earth is an ancient concept and the earth is always considered as female and it is world-wide since remote past.

If mother concept existed, the menstruation is natural biological concept, so the menstruation of Mother Earth will definitely come into existence. To understand the importance of menstruation since time immemorial, let us read the Metaformic Theory .

Metaformic Theory states that modern-day material culture is rooted in ancient menstruation rituals, called "metaforms". Metaforms are rituals, rites, myths, ideas, or stories created to contain emerging knowledge relating to menstruation. when Grahn outlined the Metaformic Theory in her book *Blood, Bread, and Roses: How Menstruation Created the World*. She continues to write and edit the online journal, *Metaformia: A*

Journal of Menstruation and Culture, which includes many other authors' works on Metaformic Theory and related menstrual topics. Metaformic Theory has been linked to the creation of a "post-queer" theory.

Menstruation far predates languages. Our lives as the earliest evolving humans centered around survival, reproduction and biological functions: birth, death, sex, hunting. These elements were central in shaping language, not the other way around. And that's where anthropologists do their research into menstrual taboo: at the intersections of evolution, behavior, and biology.

But while menstrual negative taboos are *nearly* universal, there are exceptions, and taboos themselves are variable. Certain societies operate with positive menstrual associations and euphemisms. Some modern-day hunter-gatherer societies, for example, hold an understanding of menstruation as being powerful, healing, protective and sacred. These groups are also more likely to have a degree of gender egalitarianism.

Therefore we can say that menstruation played an important role since time immemorial in shaping the culture. So, the time of considering the earth to be Mother may simultaneously prevail in the society with the menstruation occur or may be later development. But we may be sure that people since the remote past had the concept that the Mother Earth must have menstruation period. In vedic period, girls are allowed to marry at her choice after attaining puberty. It means that during vedic period it was clear that menstruation was the condition that indicated the capability of women to bear offspring.

So, from the above discussion, we are now clear that The Mother Earth concept is very old and menstruation predates languages. Therefore, the importance of menstruation period of Mother earth has to be searched.

The Nilachal Hill is located in Guwahati, Assam. The mighty river Brahmaputra flows nearby. The "Yoni Peeth" naturally formed is located on the middle hill of Nilachala. Naturally a water fountain is also at this Yoni Petha. Annually, in the month of June each year, Amati has been being observed at this Peetha believing that the water of the fountain becomes red like menstruation. As menstruation is the condition for a woman to be capable of giving birth to offspring, similarly menstruation of Mother Earth will help us to sustain the lives on the Earth.

Therefore we search, where we may have the mention of the menstruation of mother earth. For this, we have to interpret the Rik found in RIG VEDA. What 5.47.3 of Rigveda is:

उक्षा समुद्रो अरुषः सुपर्णः पूर्वस्य योनिं पितुरा विवेश । मध्ये दिवो निहितः पृश्निरश्मा वि चक्रमे रजसस्पात्यन्तौ ॥
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Ukṣā samudra aruṣaḥ suparṇaḥ pūvasya yonim pituḥ ā vivesā

Madhye divaḥ nihītaḥ pṛśniḥ, āsmā vi cakrame rajasāḥ pāti antau

(As per ṚGVEDA ŚMĪTĀ by H.H.Wilson and versya of Sayanacharya,)

Here, Multi-layer Annotation of the Ṛgveda

[Rigveda 5.47.3 English analysis of grammar] as per the Book "RIG VEDA" by H. H. Wilson | 1866 | 1,999,864 words | ISBN-10: 8171101380 | ISBN-13: 9788171101382

ukṣā < ukṣan

[noun], nominative, singular, masculine

"bull; ukṣan [word]."

samudro < samudraḥ < samudra

[noun], nominative, singular, masculine

“ocean; Samudra; sea; samudra [word]; four.”

aruṣaḥ < aruṣa

[noun], nominative, singular, masculine

“red; red.”

suparṇaḥ < suparṇa

[noun], nominative, singular, masculine

“Garuda; Suparṇa; bird of prey; Suparṇa; suparṇa; Suparṇa; eagle.”

pūrvasya < pūrva

[noun], genitive, singular, masculine

“aforesaid(a); antecedent; previous(a); first; eastern; former(a); pūrva [word]; age-old; anterior; bygone; fore(a); predictive; firstborn; easterly; instrumental.”

yonim < yoni

[noun], accusative, singular, feminine

“vagina; vulva; uterus; beginning; origin; reincarnation; birthplace; family; production; cause; race; grain; raw material; birth; kind; caste; kinship; bed.”

pitur < pituḥ < pitṛ

[noun], genitive, singular, masculine

“father; Pitṛ; ancestor; parent; paternal ancestor; pitṛ [word]; forefather.”

ā

[adverb]

“towards; ākāra; until; ā; since; according to; ā [suffix].”

viveśa < viś

[verb], singular, Perfect indicative

“enter; penetrate; settle; settle.”

madhye < madhya

[noun], locative, singular, neuter

“midst; center; cavity; inside; middle; center; waist; group; pulp; torso; time interval; area; series; madhya [word]; Madhya; noon; middle; middle age; span; belly.”

divo < divaḥ < div

[noun], genitive, singular, masculine

“sky; Svarga; day; div [word]; heaven and earth; day; dawn.”

nihitaḥ < nidhā < √dhā

[verb noun], nominative, singular

“put; fill into; stow; insert; ignite; insert; add; put on; establish; keep down.”

prśnir < prśniḥ < prśni

[noun], nominative, singular, masculine

“varicolored; dappled.”

aśmā < aśman

[noun], nominative, singular, masculine

“stone; aśmarī; rock; aśman [word]; adri; mineral; piṇḍatālaka; mountain.”

vi

[adverb]

“apart; away; away.”

cakrame < kram

[verb], singular, Perfect indicative

“kram; step; go; continue; proceed; traverse; heat.”

rajasas < rajasah < rajas

[noun], genitive, singular, neuter

“powder; menorrhea; dust; Rajas; atmosphere; rajas; pollen; passion; rajas [word]; sindūra; rust; tin; impurity; dark; sky.”

pāty < pāti < pā

[verb], singular, Present indicative

“protect; govern.”

antau < anta

[noun], accusative, dual, masculine

“end; last syllable; end; end; boundary; inside; border; death; anta [word]; edge; end; shore; limit; region; outskirt; destruction; boundary; limit; anta; termination; corner; conclusion; hem; end; ant; edge.”

Here we take the same meaning except one i.e. *suparṇah*. In Assamese dictionary “HEMKOS” by Hemchandra Barua, the meaning of *suparṇah* is “rays of the Sun”. Besides we take the synonymous meaning of other words given in the above chart to reinterpret the Rik, and we have the meaning of the above mentioned Rik as follows:

Washed by Laouhit and illuminated by the ray of the sun, the forefather inhabited around the Yoni in the east since then. In the midst of the rocky Yoni, the light (heavenly) was there. The cyclic menstruation of this Yoni prevent us from destruction.

ukṣā means wash or clean(Sanskrit- English dictionary by), *samudro aruṣa* means “red sea” or **Laouhit or Lohit sindhu**. In ancient stone inscriptions, or copper plate inscriptions, **Lohit Sindhu** is used in Assam. Here *prśni* means The earth.

Conclusion: From the meaning of the Rik (5.47.3) of the RIG VEDA, it is clear that the description of the Rik tallys with the Yoni peetha of Kamakhya on Nilachal Hill in Guwahati. The river Lohit, today popular as Brahmaputra flows by the Nilachala Hill. It means the river goes on washing the Nilachala Hill where the Yoni peetha is located. It is always shined by the Sun . The Yoni peeth is rocky and heaven or light is here. The heavenly power of Yoni still can be read in Mahasthangarh Brahmi Stone Inscription according to which Kamdeva got its form back after having the water of the Sati i.e. the Yoni peetha. The cyclic menstruation occurred annually popularly known as Amati is similar to that of the description found in the said Rik. Therefore, it can easily be surmised that the composer of the Rig Veda knew about the Kamakhya Yonipeeth located on Nilachal Hill and also knew about the annual menstruation that is well-known as Amati. Again, in Tantric practice the menstruation is considered to be sacred, and the Amati is also a festival of reverence. Therefore, the antiquity of Amati can be traced back long before the composition of the RIG VEDA.

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