

# Shakti Worship, Shaktipithas and Seats of Solanki Period in Gujarat

Dr. Vanrajsinh Chavada  
(M.A , Ph.D.)

## 1. Introduction

When archaeological material was available only to a small extent, the early scholars in Gujarat tried to trace antiquity of the prevalence of Shakti-worship in Gujarat mainly based on the traditional accounts. Many of them were given in the purans or puran-khandas of late origin, while some others were transmitted orally through generations.

The prevalence of shakti-worship in Gujarat probably received an impetus from Devi-mahatmya given in Markandeya Puran. The origin of the worship of the Goddess in Gujarat can be traced to the primitive tribe of the Bhils and that it received further impetus through the Nagars and Jadeja Rajputs. However, he could not trace any evidence for its prevalence in Gujarat before 1000 A.D.

Some scholar suggests that Shakti-worship can be traced even earlier in the prevalence of the folk dance garabo and the folk-drama Bhavai, which were originally associated with the worship of shakti and the celebration of the festival of Kali's victory over Shumbha. However, the bhavai seems to have come into vogue in the 14<sup>th</sup> cent, and on evidence has come forth to trace the prevalence of the Garabo prior to 6<sup>th</sup> cent.A.D.

Thus, the puranic and local traditions tempt us to trace the antiquity of Shakti-worship in Gujarat to the proto-historic times of Shri Krishna, but the earliest puranic references to it do not go beyond 6<sup>th</sup> cent.A.D.

## 2. Archaeological Evidence

We should better reply on archaeological evidence. The prevalence of Shakti-worship can be traced back at early as proto-historic times in the Indus valley, but no evidence has been available for tracing its antiquity in Gujarat so early, though more than 75 Harappan sites including Lothal, Rangpur, Desalpur and Dholavira have come to light in Gujarat. The same is the case with Rajasthan, where no traces of Shakti-worship have come forth at Harappan sites like Kalinbangan.

In Gujarat Ambaji, Bahucharaji and Kalika temple in North Gujarat represent popular Shakti pithas since long, but their antiquity cannot be traced prior to the beginning of the second millennium.A.D.

Among ancient temples the Gayatri temple (7<sup>th</sup> cent.) at Pasanavada, the Chamunda temple at Kinderkheda, the old temple at Chhaya, the old temple at Balej, the Brahmani temple at Kamali, the Vindhyavasini temple at Shrinagar, and the Shakti temple at Vadnagar to the Maitaka Period (407-788 A.D.).

The copperplate inscriptions of the Maitraka period contain references to several temples of Goddesses such as Pandura and Kottammahika at Trisangamaka, the earliest references belonging to the reign of King Dronsinh (circa 500 to 520 A.D.).

Thus, epigraphic references allude to the prevalence, of goddess-temples in Gujarat since 6<sup>th</sup> cent.A.D.

The evidence of sculptural remains in the form of goddesses leads us to trace the antiquity of Shakti worship in Gujarat still earlier. Excavations at Amerli have yielded two icons of goddesses. The earlier one dated to 2<sup>nd</sup> cent.A.D., is a fragmentary stone-bust of a goddess holding a spear in her upper right hand. The other icon is carved on a terracotta plaque. It represents a four-armed form of the goddess holding a vajra in her upper right hand and a sword in her upper left hand. At Amreli are also discovered an icon of Shashthidevi (3<sup>rd</sup> cent.) and icons of Mahishasuramardini and Ankadhatri Mother Goddess (4<sup>th</sup> cent.) . Sculpture of Parvati in the guise of a bhil woman Maheahvari, Chamunda.Etc. at Shamalaji and the icon of a matrika at Vadnagar are datable to the 4<sup>th</sup> cent.A.D. thus the sculptural evidence attests the prevalence of Shakti-worship in Gujarat since 2<sup>nd</sup> cent.A.D. It also indicates its wide prevalence in Saurashtra and North Gujarat until 4<sup>th</sup> cent.A.D.during the Kshtrap period. The images of the Goddess seen to have carved in the form of folk-art as well as the ritual form to be installed for worship in temples since the Maitraka Period (470-788 A.D.) In the beginning, the worship of Shakti developed distinctly from the impact of the Shakta sect. In course of time, the Shakta sect also prevailed as attested by the Tantric images of Navanidhi Lakshmi.

However, it is quite probable that Shakti-worship originated in Gujarat among the Non-Aryan aborigines by the beginning of the Christian era and the Aryans gradually adopted it from them through their cultural contact with them. In Gujarat Shakti temples seats during Solanki period together with Shiva worship, Shakti-worship was also present. The kukkut banner that Bahucharaji, were female goddess of the Solankis, Siddharaj to get a son, propitiated (worship) Mahalaxmi and the Mahalaxmi temple at Patan is the proof of it. Several form of Shakti worship quite popular. It is human from literary and is archaeological proofs that Lake Sahastraling was surrounded by human and eight temples of goddesses and had a temple of Vindhyavasini in its very center. The Saptmatrika temple-Patan, Shaktipith at Bahucharaji and Ambaji, temple of Kalikamata at Dabhoi, Hinglaj (Sarvamangala) temple at Khandosan, Shitlamata temple at Piludra, Parva-parvati and Nimjamata temple at Delmal, Khandeshvarimata temple at Matkasangadh of Sabarkantha. Bahusmarna Devi temple at Kanoda, Khamlai or Vagheshvari temple at Dhinoj, Ambamata temple at Kherva,

Brahmanimata temple at Siddhapur, Kankeshvarimata temple at Valam, etc., are among their Shakti temples.

## References

1. Agrawala, V.S. 'Ancient Indian Folk Cult', Varanasi, 1970
2. Apte, Vaman Shivram 'The Practical Sanskrit-English Dictionary', Varanasi, 1963
3. Banerjee J. N. 'Development of Hindu Iconography', Calcutta, 1941
4. Bhattacharya, B.C. 'Indian Images', Part I, Calcutta and Simal : 1921
5. Bhattacharaya, N. N. 'The Indian Mother goddess', New Delhi, 1977
6. Burgess J. & Cousens, H. 'The Archetectural Antiquities of Northern Gujarat', Varanasi, 1975.