

Shaktipith Maa Kamakhya Temple And Its History

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Abstract: The Kamakhya Temple also known as Kamrup Kamakhya Temple is a Hindu Temple dedicated to mother Mahamaya or Kamakhya and is considered to be one of the major Shakti shrines of India that lays the essence of Tantrism and Power worship within itself. The historical origin of the Kamakhya temple have shaped the socio political and cultural dimensions of the region in its own unique way and have always been looked upon by the civilizations as a source of power, a place of sacrifice and a epitome of worship and devotion. The origin of the temple dates back to the mythological ages when it is said that Sati the first wife of Lord Shiva upon self immolation was cut into 51 pieces and her sexual organ (yauni) fell on the Nilachal hills where later on the Kamakhya temple was built by Kaamdev with the help of Lord Bishwakarma and was named Anandakhya Temple. Later on King Narakasura the ruler of Pragjyotispur (present day Kamrup district) built the Kamakhya temple along with the rock stairs leading to the temple as the ruins of the one built by Kaamdev could no longer be traced in the hills. The Koch king Biswasingha rebuilt the temple with bricks and gold between 1515 to 1580 AD after the early ones built by Narakasur and Kaamdev were destroyed. This temple that was rebuilt was again destroyed by Kalapahar and then it was King Naranarayan (son of King Biswasingha) who rebuilt it once again and it is been standing ever since. The temple is a nucleus of power and strength that depicts the sacrifice, patience and destructive power a women a wife and a mother beholds and it have stood over time always draining the same amount of devotion and dedication from the believers.

I. INTRODUCTION

Kamakhya temple located on the southern bank of the Brahmaputra river above the Nilachal Hills in a historic shaktipith (source of power) temple whose origin and development right from the mythological ages till the rulers of pre-British era have shaped the religious and cultural dimension of the region as a whole. The history behind the origin of Kamakhya Temple is being reflected through the verbal tales, religious aural, folktales and various other oral traditions. A brief historical origin of the temple is found in Kalika Purana, Yogini Tantra, Shiva Purana, Brihadwadharma Purana and a few other literary works of that period.

II. BIRTH OF YONIPITH

A religious mythology has its saying that the female sexual organ (Yoni) of Goddess of Parvati fell on this hilltop that in turn gave birth to the religious site. This is the reason

why Kamakhya Temple is also known as Yonipith. Kalikapurana mentions it as-

Goddess Mahamaya, the most powerful God created Bramha, Vishnu and Maheshwara and gave them the responsibility of creating, maintaining and destroying the world respectively. The story goes that Lord Brmha and Vishnu fulfilled their responsibilities efficiently but Lord Shiva, being in a state of meditation was semi-conscious and hence could not give his full concentration to the atsk he was entitled to. As such Bramha and Vishnu came up with this idea that could awaken Lord Shiva from his deep meditation state. Brmha called on his son Dakshya and advised him to pray Goddess Mahamaya and please her and as a reward should ask her to re-incarnate herself as his own daughter. Subsequently Goddess Mahamaya took birth as Sati, daughter of King Dakshya and Queen Birini. Sati lateron pleased Shiva by worshipping him and inturn asked the Lord to be her husband. Thus Lord Shiva married Devi Sati even though there was a little resistance from her father as he always thought of Lord Shiva to be good for nothing and a homeless

addict. A few years later King Dakshya organized a big religious function (Yagya) and he invited all the Gods and Kings but not Lord Shiva. It is only when Sati came to know about it from the mouth of Narad Muni that she went to her husband Lord Shiva to ask for his permission so she could attend her father's Yagya.

The Puranas beautifully describes the whole picture and shows how when she did not get the permission from Lord Shiva to attend her father's Yagya that she transformed herself into the four armed Goddess Kali, the colossal of destruction and the epitome of anger and she chased after the fearful Lord Shiva and blocking his path in ten different directions each time appearing as one of the ten different avatars of Mahamaya known as Dasamhavidya- Kali, Tara, Jurshi, Bhubneshwari, Bairavi, Chinnamastha, Dhumawati, Bagala, Matangi and Kamala. Temples of the ten (Dasamhavidya) are present in the same hill near Kamakhya shrine.

'Lord Shiva divided the whole universe into ten parts and on each one recited one of the ten avatars of Dasamhavidya. It is believed that this ten avatars of Sati is the ultimate supreme peak of power and the epitome of unmatched knowledge. The power of the three namely of Lord Bramha, Vishnu and Maheshwar have actually combined in this ten divisions.

When Lord Shiva saw the transformation of Sati into Kali, he was forced to give way to her so that she could attend the religious ceremony of her father. But when king Dakshya saw his daughter he got furious and cursed her and even criticized her husband Lord Shiva. Not able to swallow the bad words against her husband she sacrificed her life by jumping into the Yagya fire.

The news of Sati's demise made Lord Shiva very furious. By transforming into Birbhadra he beheaded king Dakshya and destroyed the whole ceremony. It was only because of Queen Birina's pleading that made Shiva returned back her husband's head and brought back him to life. Lord Shiva full of grief carried the dead Sati on his shoulder and roamed the whole universe without having any purpose or destination. In order to bring back normalcy into the universe, Lord Vishnu with the help of his Spinning Wheel (sudarshan chakra) made fiftyone parts of her body. The places where the body parts of Sati fell were all were turned into holy, religious, places for worshipping her. Lord Shiva even promised that he would recite in each of these fifty one places along with his beloved wife in the form of the Shiva Lingam. It is believed that out of the fifty one body parts, one of it namely the female sexual organ fell above the Nilachal hill of Kamrup- the sexual organ of the ever powerful, of the Goddess of Power, Mahamaya, the place of her ultimate rest.

III. HISTORY BEHIND THE ORIGIN OF NILACHAL

It is believed that after the sexual organ of Sati fell on the mountains of Kamrup, it turned blue (nila). Hence the name Nilachal, meaning blue mountain. The hill could not bear the weight of the organ of Sati and was forced back deeper into the ground which was somehow prevented when Lord Bramha, Vishnu and Shiva incorporated themselves into the hill in order to share the weight among themselves.

"Satang Satang Yojonamang Tungamashidigarikrayam

Tadakrantang Mahakabya Sarbameba Hyadhugatam.

The hill above which the Bhubneswari temple is located is known as the Bramha Hill within the Nilachal Hill area. The hill above which the Mahamaya Temple is located is known as the Shiva Hill. To its west is the Vishnu Hill at an elevation of 850 feet above the sea level.

IV. HISTORY BEHIND THE ORIGIN OF THE WORD KAMRUP, AND BUILDING OF THE TEMPLE

The grief stricken Lord Shiva after losing Sati sat for meditation in the Ishan direction. The whole universe came to a standstill and all the Gods tried their best to break his meditation specially Kaamdev and Rati. This made Lord Shiva angry and he burnt Kaamdev into ashes with his third eye. Probably that is the reason why the place where he was burnt to ashes is known as Bhasmachal (Bhasma meaning Ashes and Achal meaning Hill) or Bhasmakut. and hence it is said that the ashes of Kaamdev recites within the sexual organ of Sati.

Later on when Shiva along with his newly married wife Devi Parvati (Daughter of Himalaya) went to Bhasmachal hill, Rati the wife of Kaamdev prayed and pleaded her so that Lord Shiva could bring back Kaamdev her husband back to life. Parvati was pleased of rati that she convinced Lord Shiva to give Kaamdev his life back. The joy and happiness that Paarvati felt when Lord Shiva did as per her wish was so immense that the name of the small hillock which was earlier known as the Bhasmachal came to be known as Umananda (Uma being the other name of Parvati and Ananda meaning Happiness) among the masses. Though Kaamdev got his life back he was no more that handsome which he earlier used to be. When he complained to Lord Shiva about it the Lord said- "Kaamdev! The sexual organ of Devi Sati is secretly lying in the hills of Nilacahal. Go there, establish a temple in the anem of mahamaya Kamakhya and start to publish and profess her name and significance among all people and only then will you get back the beauty you lost".

Kaamdev subsequently established the temple in the name of Mahamaya Kamakhya and professed her significance far and wide along with his wife Rati which in turn pleased Mahamaya and she returned Kaamdev his lost beauty and the country where Kaamdev got back his beauty came to be known as Kamrup (Kam being the prefix of Kaamdev and Rup meaning beauty).

V. HISTORY BEHIND THE CONSTRUCTION OF KAMAKHYA TEMPLE

There are many stories and many logics defining the process of construction of the Kamakhya temple. The joyous Kaamdev after getting back his beauty brought in Lord Bishwakarma (God of Construction) to build the Kamakhya temple. Along with Goddess Kamakhya one can also find Goddess Lakshmi and Goddess Saraswati in the eastern direction of the temples sanctum sanctorum. To the north of the Tambrakunda (Holy Pool) Lord Bishwakarma built a beautiful temple on whose walls were engraved sixty four Yoginis (female saints) and eighteen Lord Shiva statues.

Originally Kaamdev named this temple as 'Anandakhya Temple' and professed its significance in all three worlds of the universe, heaven hell and earth and hence it also came to be known as 'Manobhab Guha' (Manobhab being the other name of Kaamdev and Guha meaning Cave or abode). That early temple or cave is completely destroyed and its ruins and remains are buried somewhere deep in the heart of Nilachal hills.⁸

Later on the king of Pragjyotishpur (Present day Kamrup district of Assam), Narak built his capital and rebuilt the Mahamaya Kamakhya temple on the same site by roping in Lord Bishwakarma once again. The thirty sixth episode of Kalika Purana depicts the Narakasura phase as-

Rajaswalaya Gotraya Garve Birjyayam Patrinah
Jato Jatasthatubhurta Debaputrahapikhuhakhurah
Garvasanstang Mahavairang Gyata Brahmadaaya Surah
Mahaputra Durdharkhong Mahabal Parakramam.

It says that Mother Earth got pregnant by the bore avatar of Lord Vishnu and it was highly probable that the child born could be a demon possessing a lot of power as she got pregnant during her menstrual period, a very rare situation indeed. The fearful Gods conspired so that mother Earth could not give birth to her child. Out of immense pain she prayed to Lord Vishnu to save her from her sufferings and relive her of the pain and Vishnu in turn blessed her saying she can't give birth to her child until the mid of Treta Yug arrives when Lord Rama would kill Ravana, but assured her that till then she won't feel any pregnancy pain or discomfort.

Subsequently it was only during King Janaks reign that Mother Earth could give birth to a baby boy who was blessed by Lord Vishnu that- "At the age of sixteen would he become a King". The baby was found by the king enclosed and protected within a human skull and hence named by Gautam Rishi as Naraka (Meaning human). He gave the baby to Devi Sumati for child care.

On the other hand Mother Earth herself took a human avatar namely Katyani to care for her child. The child Naraka was slowly growing up to be a brave and strong boy which made king Janak nervous fearing the boy Narak would one day snatch away the kingdom from his own child. Mother Earth thus called for Lord Vishnu and when he arrived took both mother and her son Narak into the Ganges only to immerse in Pragjyotishpur. Kamrup at that period was recited upon by the Kirats and was ruled by King Ghatak. Narak defeated King Gahtak and took possession of both the kingdom and his precious white elephant for his personal means of communication. Vishnu explained clearly to his son Narak the situation prevailing in Pragjyotishpur. That he should never harm any saint, sadhu, Brahman and should always respect and pray Devi Kamakhya if he was to stay alive at all.

"Kamakhya Tangbina Putra Nanyadebang Jaishyakhi
Ituhanyatha Tang Biharan Gatapranu Bhabiswakhii
Tasmanarak Jatnane Samayang Pratipalaya"

Earlier Narak used to worship Devi Kamakhya but as Dwapar Yug arrived he made good friendship with King of Sonitpur Bana and under his influence king Narak quit worshipping the Goddess and engaged himself in heinous activities like harassing the Gods and saints as well as kidnapping and torturing any women he would lay his eyes

upon. Narak even prevented saint Basistha in visiting and worshipping Devi Kamakhya which forced the saint to curse the king out of anger. He said- "You will be killed by your own father who will take a human avatar to do so and until then Devi Mahamaya Kamakhya will stay dormant and only when you die, shall I offer my respect and prayers to her."

It is said that the disappearance of the Kamakhya temple made the whole Nilachal hill a barren land. On the other hand Narak and his heinous activities were creating a lot of chaos and discomfort throughout the universe. The Gods then requested Lord Vishnu to save them and on their request Lord Vishnu re incarnated himself in the form of Krishna and arrived in Pragjyotishpur. He then destroyed all the bad forces and later decapitated the torturous king Narak with his sudarshan chakra (flying rotational disk). After the death of Narak, Bhagadutta became the new ruler of Pragjyotishpur.

There a lot of stories and theories regarding the construction of the Kamakhya temple. Kalika Purana describes that the four paths namely Bagradwar, Hanumantadwar, Swargadwar, Singhadwar and the steps built out of rocks namely Satuspadwar were all built by king Narak. There is folktale among a section of the people that king Narak was so mesmerized by the beauty of Devi Kamakhya that he proposed her to marry him. Devi put a condition that only if he build the temple and the pathway to the hill top in one night, would she consider the proposal. King Narak was surprisingly about to complete the whole project but then just prior to dawn Devi Kamakhya took the form of a rooster and started crowing thereby reminding the king that the night was over and his work incomplete. He failed and could not marry the Devi. The king chased after the rooster and killed it and hence that place is named as Kookorakota Baat (Kookora meaning rooster, Kota meaning to cut and Baat meaning path). That work is considered to be the foundation of the temple. Just standing near the Nilachal hill is the Narakasura hill constantly reminding us his association with the Goddess. The temple of Devi Kamakhya have witnessed a lot of rise and fall within the Pragjyotishpur empire. Shankaracharya had visited the state in 9th century BC to profess and preach the philosophies of Vedanta. Such was the greatness of the Goddess that Koch king Biswasingha and prince Shivasingha were reunited with their lost armies after their battle with the Ahoms only when they offered their prayers at Devi Kamakhya temple. The king believed in the powers of the Goddess and as promised king Biswasingha rebuilt the temple with bricks and gold. As per Sarbananda Rajkumar, it was in between 1515 to 1580 AD that the Kamakhya temple was rebuilt by him after the early ones built by Narakasur and Kaamdev were destroyed.¹⁸ Biswasingha brought in Brahmins (priests) from Sualkuchi and gave them the responsibility of offering prayers and looking after the daily affairs of the temple. This temple that was rebuilt was again destroyed by Kalapahar and then it was King Naranarayan (son of King Biswasingha) who rebuilt it once again and it is been standing ever since. The influence of Koch dynasty on the Kamakhya temple ended when the king Naranarayan conspired with priest Kendukolai to secretly have a glimpse of the dance of the Goddess during the evening prayer time which angered the Goddess and she cursed the king never to return again to the temple else the Koch dynasty

would never have any more heir. This marked the beginning of the Ahom influence on the temple. Being adopted Hinduism the rulers of the Ahom dynasty namely Rudrasingha, Shivasingha, Rajeshwarsingha, Gaurinathsingha undertook various building projects within and near the temple.

VI. CONCLUSION

The architectural layout of Kamakhya temple is very mesmerizing and quite advanced even in to-days standards. Engraved upon the walls of the temple are various Gods and Goddesses that add the minuteness of detailing in the architectural design. The history behind the formation and construction is intriguing and interesting and the prevailing aural of the significance of the Goddess and her power add a sense of devotedness among the believers. At last we can say that the discussion that we undertook in this paper included the history of the Kamakhya temple, its birth, its construction, the prevailing folktales among the masses, and the Nilachal hills where the temple stands. There are many books articles etc on Kamakhya temple.

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