

VENERATION OF ŚĀKTĪSM IN THE TEMPLES OF KOLAR

Kolar – a quintessential galore of glorious temples in Karnataka is definitely a delight to one and all, given ode to its diverse landscape of architectures, unique significances of the deities worshipped and sublime artistic elements. Kolar houses a number of famous temples with distinctive styles of architectures belonging to *Vijayanagara*, *Cola*, *Hoysala* and *Ganga* dynasties. India, which is traditionally known to be patriarchal has a substantial spread of temples dedicated to female goddesses, out of which, temples on various forms *Śakti* (ultimate cosmic power and dynamic energy) are predominant. Special locales dedicated to goddesses can also be witnessed in many male deity-based temples. The eminence of *Śakti* is obvious even in the temples of Kolar. *Śaktism* is a denomination of Hinduism that worships *Śakti* as the absolute manifestation of divinity and marks a deep reverence to female principle. *Śāktāgama* preaches that the worship of *Śakti* is the way to attain *mōkṣa*. The texts of *Śāktāgamas* are called *tantras* and *Pratiṣṭhālakṣaṇasamuccaya* of *Vairocana* divides the *Śāktatantras* in to four parts: *Gāruḍa*, *Vāma*, *Dakṣiṇa* and *Bhūta*.

The *Gaṅga-Cola-Vijayanagara* styles of architecture can be witnessed in the thousand-year-old *Kolārammā* temple. In this L – shaped temple which has two sanctums and a common *Mukhamantapa*, the eight-armed *Mahiṣāsūramardhini* who is the fearsome manifestation of *Śakti* and is named as *Kolārammā* by the natives, is the presiding deity and is installed at the south of the northern *garbhagrha*. The deities offer prayers to her looking through the mirror which is placed in the *mukhamantapa* opposite to the idol. There are a number of reasons attached to the placement of mirrors at the vicinity of the deities, some say it is significant for the people to notice the hair of the idol, others opine it is to give a divine aura by illuminating the lights from the lamps as the *garbhagrha* is usually dark, whereas the best interpretation according to me is that the imagery of one seeing the god and himself/herself together instigates a feeling of oneness with the god based on the *Upaniṣad* statement - '*tat tvam asi*'. Apart from these, the main reason behind viewing the deity only through the mirror according to the priest of the temple is because the form of *Mahiṣāsūramardhini* is highly fearsome to look at directly. A large gold-plated image of the scorpion goddess called *Celamma*, adorned with replicas of scorpions is on the wall next to the idol. People believe that worshipping this goddess will protect them from scorpion bites.



Fig 1 & 2: View of the *Kolārammā* temple that exalts *Śaktism*

Yet another lionized aspect that exalts *Śaktism* in the *Kolārammā* temple is that of the *Saptamātrikas* – the seven divine mothers-goddesses each of whom is the *Śakti* of a god, they are: *Brahmaṇī* who emerged from *Brahma*, *Vaiṣṇavī* from *Viṣṇu*, *Maheśvarī* from *Śiva*, *Kaumārī* from *Kumāra*, *Indrāṇī* from *Indra*, *Varāhī* from *Varāha* and *Cāmunḍī* from *Devī*. In *Śaktism* they are referring to as the ones assisting *Śakti* in fighting demons and are associated with conception, birth, diseases and protection of children. Huge idols of *Saptamātrikas* and the *utsavamūrti* of *Kolārammā* can be seen in the southern shrine.

It is believed that *Cāmunḍī Devī* began her fight with the demon *Mahiṣāsura* at the place where the temple is located and then chased him up the *Cāmunḍī* hill in Mysore which is why Mahārājas of Mysore frequently visited this temple to seek the blessings of *Kolārammā*.

Some carvings of the fierce goddess: one depicting eight handed *Mahiṣāsūramardhinī* slaying *Mahiṣāsura* in his bull form (Fig 3) and another depicting a form of four-handed *Śakti* adorned with weapons (Fig 4) can be seen in temple premise. The carvings related to a battle scene (Fig 5) which is said to be of Rajendra Cola I, could also be suggestive of the manifestation of *Śakti* to destroy demonic forces and restore balance.



Fig 3



Fig 4



Fig 5

Another significant temple of Kolar is the **Someśvara temple** built by *Coḷas* and expanded by the *Vijayanagara* empire is a fine example of magnificent *Vijayanagara* architecture. Though Śiva who is worshipped as *Someśvara* is the main deity here, there is a discrete **sub-temple/shrine for Goddess Pārvatī** in the north-west corner of the temple.



Fig 6



Fig 7

A panel consisting of five carvings of *Durgā* with her *vāhana* – lion, is seen on the *gopura* of *Someśvara* temple. Out of these, the striking middle carving is that of four-handed *Durgā* with *śankha-cakra* in her rear hands and *triśula* in her forehands slaying the bull form of *Mahiṣāsura* (Fig 6). Another similar carving of *Durgā* but with six-hands has been carved in the premise of the temple. The middle right hand can be seen holding the mouth of the beast whereas a sword is being held on the left, the right leg is placed on the body of the beast (Fig 7).



Fig 8

Another interesting carving of *Durgā* can be found in **Kurudumale Someśvara** temple. The four-handed goddess can be seen standing on the back of *Mahiṣāsura* who is downtrodden and in his complete human form (Fig 8). *Durgā*'s clear victory over the demon can be seen here.

Another carving that is almost similar to the above one can be spotted in **Kuruḍumale Gaṇapati** temple. Here, *Durgā* is seen standing on the stomach of the demon who is laying on his back on the floor with the left in *āyata* and the right leg slightly lifted, the hands of the demon is suggestive of him accepting defeat.



Fig 9



Fig 10

A carving of *Durgā* with her *Vāhana* in a standing pose with her rear hands holding *śankha-cakra*, fore right hand in *abhaya hasta* and the left placed on her *kati* is seen in the same temple.

The depiction of yet another form of *śaktī* who is *Aññapūrnā* can be seen in the *Kuruḍumale Gañapati* temple. This carving illustrates the story of Śiva's *Bhikṣātanamūrti* where he takes the form of a beggar to test the righteousness of his wife. *Aññapūrnā* proves her sanctimonious nature by exceeding in his test irrespective of her garment falling off her body while giving alms to the beggar.



Fig 11

They say that a truly balanced person is the one who has learned to manifest and embrace the best of both masculine and feminine qualities. Feminine traits such as empathy, forgiveness and perceptive communication skills makes people convivial. Temples do not only mirror the socio-cultural notions of its period, but also embody an essence of communion with divinity in the people which can be one of the reasons behind the solace felt by numerous people in conceding in goddesses. The position and reverence given to goddesses in Hindu culture is unparalleled, among which *Śaktism* has its own niche and spiritual adherents. Not just the acclaimed *śakti pīṭhas*, but there are a multitude of temples that sanctify the glory of *śakti* as the supreme energy behind the happenings of the world. The temples of Kolar also exalt the eminence of *Śaktism*.



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