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**CULTURE AND ORIGIN OF THE KAMAKHYA TEMPLE IN INDRA
GOSWAMI'S THE MAN FROM CHINNAMASTA : AN ANALYTICAL
STUDY**

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Abstract:

Many nations and traditions have discovered that the most ancient concept of Shakti evolved from the basic concept of Mother Prakriti. As a result, according to the belief system, she is the one who bestows life on us and also the one with whom we reunite after death. In Assam Kamrup, one such form of Mother Goddess is prayed and preached. The purpose of this study is to significantly interact with the notion of Shakti. The narrative also follows Chinnamasta Jatadhari, a hermit who leads the campaign to reform the harsh rite of animal sacrifice, as well as those around him, including Ratnadhar, a responsive teenager who falls to the floor and tears as he sees a buffalo being brought for slaughter in Indira Goswami's The Man from Chinnamasta.

Indira Goswami is one of the Assamese literature's most gifted authors. She has been praised for expressing real human ideals. Though she is no longer with us, she has left her mark by courageously questioning the threadbare norms of Indian Hindu society. She has utilised a straightforward storytelling approach with minimal embellishment. Her Assamese books have been serialized in the past. Her books aren't only reminiscences of the past. They reflect her hopes and desires to bring about a positive change in society.

In and around the fifth century CE, a latest and updated Hindu custom of religion, meditation, and ceremonial practices developed in India. Tantra, also known as Tantrism, was the name given to it. The origins of this idea are debatable. Tantra is typically translated as "Treatise" or "Exposition". The verbal root of "tan" – "to stretch, expand or extend", and the suffix "tra" – "instrument" it literally means "loom, warp, weave", and therefore "principle, system, doctrine, theory." Two major energy poles may be found in Tantra or Tantrism. The first is "Shiva," while the second is "Shakti". Pure awareness is personified as Shiva, a male god, while the objective side is the ingenious influence, which is embodied as Shakti, a feminine goddess. The Tantric word for the Great Goddess is "Shakti" (Devi). Shakti is a Sanskrit term that comes from the verb root "Shak," which meaning "to be able to do," "to do," and "to act." The most popular interpretation of Shakti is that she is the personification of pure feminine creative force. She is also called as "The Great Divine Mother or Prakriti," which means "nature."

The most ancient concept of Shakti is frequently seen to emerge from the fundamental concept of Nature or Mother Prakriti in every culture and tradition. She is the one who gives us life, and she is also the one with whom we reunite after death. In Assam and Kamrup, one such version of Mother Goddess is prayed and preached. The Goddess Kamakhya temple is located on the Nilachal hills overlooking the Brahmaputra River, about five kilometers from Guwahati. The Kamakhya temple, also recognized as the Temple of the Menstruating Goddess, is dedicated to the worship of the Yoni symbol. Yoni, which means "vaginal" or "womb", is the Hindu Divine Mother Goddess Shakti's emblem. The Yoni is also said to be an abstract depiction of Shakti, the ingenious power that pervades the universe. The Yoni is the wellspring of wisdom and ideals, as well as the beginning of existence. Many people think Kamakhya, also known as "Kameikha" by Khasi tribes, is the Goddess of the Crematorium, a site that signifies the end of one life and the beginning of another. In several ancient Indian texts, the present-day state of Assam is referred to as Kamrup. Due to astrological or "Jyotish Sashtra" traditions prevalent in this region of the nation at the time, it was also known as Pragjyotishpur. However, throughout the later portion of history, the name "Kamrup" became more popular. The origins of the name "Kamrup" and the founding of Shaktipeeth are linked.

The tale of the development and genesis of this peeth - Kamakhya – is recounted in the Kalikapurana (a shastra from the 10th century AD). It was the beginning of creation, or "Shristi", according to the Kalika Purana. Except for Shiva, Brahma and Vishnu were all involved in it, which rendered the entire creation process imperfect and hence impractical. Finally, in a hopeless situation, Brahma approached Raja Daksh and requested that he should perform a Puja to please Jagatmatri Mahamaya so that she would give birth to his daughter and subsequently marry Shiva. Mother Nature, or "Jagatmata", was satisfied after years of severe meditation or "tapashya" of Dakshya, and she stated, "As you have requested, I will take birth in the shape of your daughter and subsequently marry Shiva, but the time I am insulted, I will sacrifice that corporeal form."

As a result, Dakshya Raja's wife Birina became pregnant with Devi Aadya Shakti Mahamaya, who was later named Sati. Sati appeased Mahadev Shiva with her sincere "Archana" and adoration, and they subsequently wedded. Lord Shiva married Parvati, the daughter of a great ruler of the period named Dakshya. The monarch, on the other hand, disliked his son-in-law for some reason and did not invite him to the Yagna (Great Sacrifice) ritual that the King had meticulously planned. It was a calculated attempt to humiliate Shiva on his side. Naarad informed Sati of the situation. She requested Shiva's permission to join the Yagna despite the fact that she was not invited. Shiva turned down the offer and refused to let her go. Sati gazed at Shiva with

her “Krodhadipta Nayan”, her eyes brightening with rage, and her third eye opened up blazing fire, as well as taking the appearance of Shyama, Shakti's four-armed avatar. Shiva then said, “Taang Dhabomanang girisang Dristur adakhyayani sati Ma bhoimabhoiritigira ma Polayotyewasana Tathapyenang polayantang Hrinibratang bilukoho Dosomutridhobou devidosodikh yusibekhyita” (Kalikapurana).

O Supreme Sati! Your splendid form scares me, my heart cries as devastation follows now. And I will run to save myself from “Mrityu” or death (Kalikapurana).

According to the story, Shiva eventually made room for Sati. Daksha treated Sati and Shiva with contempt and humiliated them for showing up unannounced. She couldn't stand her father's disrespect for Shiva, so she went into the sacred fire of Yagna and gave her life. Shiva undertook a harsh penance and went across the globe carrying Sati's dead body on his head to cope with his grief over her loss. All the Gods were concerned by Shiva's “Dance of Death and penance,” which threatened to destroy the universe. To put an end to Shiva's terrifying wanderings, Vishnu, the greatest God, chopped Sati's dead corpse into 51 pieces with his “Sudarshan Chakra.” The pieces landed in 51 various locations throughout the globe, and the ground was considered holy wherever they landed. One of Sati's major organs fell on Guwahati's Nilachal Hill, which was declared sacred, and it is claimed that the renowned Kamakhya temple was formed from Sati's organ alone. This legend provided the inspiration for the hillock's name. When the cut portion of Sati's body dropped on it, it turned blue, and the word “Nila”, which means “blue”, was added to the term “Aanchal”, which means “parbat” or hill. The Kalika Purana mentions Kamakhya as the most significant Goddess of tantric devotion, referring to her as Mahamaya - “the great Goddess of Illusion”, who takes on many shapes depending on her mood. Kalika Purana, Yoginitantra, and Kamakhya Tantra all associate her with Kali. Dasa Mahavidyas is her affiliation. Kamakhya is shown as a strong goddess who is almighty, omniscient, and omnipresent, with 12 limbs and 6 heads of various colour. She wields a lotus, a trident, a sword, a bell, a discus, a bow, arrows, a club, a goat, and a shield in each of her 10 hands. Her remaining two hands are holding a gold or silver dish. She is seated on a lotus that emanates from Lord Shiva's navel, which is perched on a lion.

Exploring the narrative history and origins of the Shakti-peeth of Kamakhya in North-East India helps us discover the origins of the state's current name, Assam, which was previously known as Kamrup. A reading of the Kamakhya Peeth and its ceremonial activities will similarly assist us in reading through Kamrupia, now Axomiya Shakti-Culture. To do so, I've taken Indra Goswami's *The Man from Chinnamasta*, which is one of many gems in her oeuvre that pricks at our social conscience. Her visit with the Goddess Kamakhya temple inspired her to write the novel *The Man from Chinnamasta*. The rituals of worshipping the mother goddess thrived with followers thronging the spot from all over India, from ancient fertility cults through tantric worship in the middle Ages, to Ambubachi and other rites being practiced today. Her work is about animal sacrifice, which has been practiced since prehistoric times. She has been appalled by the terrible practice at the Kamakhya temple on Nilachal hill, Guwahati, where she grew up, since she was a youngster. She quickly discovered that regular sacrifices were performed at a number of other temples in her hometown. She strongly opposed animal sacrifice practises at Kamakhya in her novel, particularly the two-thousand-year-old buffalo sacrifice. *The Man from Chinnamasta* has a Kamakhya Temple. “The temple doors were shut. The Mother Goddess was menstruating. Her loins were covered with a red cloth. Every year, on the seventh day of the month of Ashaad, the temple closed for three days. It reopened on the fourth day” (Goswami 79).

The time of Ambubachi begins in the month of Ashara (Sanskrit: Ashadha, Hindi: Ashadh), when the Sun is in the house of MithunaRasi and enters into the first prada of constellation Adra, following Mrigasari, and lasts until the fourth day. Mother Earth is thought to be starting her menstrual cycle at this time. It's worth noting that the Sun's arrival into the first Prada of the Adra constellation always occurs on the 6th and 7th days of Ashara in the Indian calendar. It usually begins on the seventh day of Ashara. Our holy Mother Earth, according to ancient belief, is also like a fertile woman. The Earth cultivates, germinates, and produces seeds and crops, becoming pregnant as if by design. This is why the womb of a woman is referred to the "Kshetra" for "Krishi" (cultivation land). Ambubachi is a Japanese word that refers to an old agricultural idea. We are the children of Mother Earth, according to legend. As a result, the concept of Ambubachi contains agricultural, social, and religious elements that led to the phenomenon's birth. As the title implies, *The Man from Chinnamasta* examines circumstances of local knowledge in the context of modern reality, with Ambubachi serving as one of the sites for investigation and critique. "Tomorrow, the doors would be thrown open...the rush of pilgrims was indescribable [...] some had painted their bodies with ash [...] Ma...Ma" (Goswami 84-85).

The portrayal of competing cultural identities creates an intriguing backdrop for the novel's story, which includes Ambubachi. This aids Goswami in arranging the tale inside a cultural matrix of her choosing. The disparity in views, attitudes, and viewpoints becomes apparent, which aids in determining the relationship between the characters while also making it difficult for readers to evaluate and comprehend. The syndrome frequently extends beyond the personal to represent the concerns that people have about their place in society.

The Ambubachi was over. Devotees were streaming back to their homes. Those who stayed [...] A Couple of British Officers who had turned up for shooting practice happened to see the tantriks' booping heads. They thought they would have fun. They fired into the air to scare them out of their trance. But the tantriks did not budge. So deeply were they meditating that it seemed as though even a bullet through the heart could not disturb them (Goswami 116).

What distinguishes Kamakhya Devi – the Menstruating Goddess – from the numerous other pilgrimage sites in India is that it lacks adoration in the shape of a sculpture to adore. Only Kamakhya's Yoni, or vagina, is present. Ambubachi is the temple's yearly fertility fair, during which the Goddess is supposed to be going through her monthly menstrual cycle, which is a biological alteration in the uterus and ovaries that allows for pregnancy. Every "creation" or "Shristi," as we all know is fueled by Shakti. As a result, she resembles Nature, or "Vasundhara." As a result, just like any other female creature, she must go through this cycle in order to become pregnant with new life or to create. The temple's most hilarious feature is that bleeding women are not permitted to enter when they are menstruation. It's also strange that people go to the temple, and some even believe it's the most auspicious location in the country, yet when we talk about menstruation, the talks become murmurs. According to Shakta religion, a girl's three days of impurity begin when she menstruates. Menstruation is frequently used interchangeably with the word (in)auspicious.

Another significant Tantric practice that was explored and stressed virtually all over the story was "Animal sacrifice", which was discussed and highlighted in a comprehensive and intricate manner. This guy from Chinnamasta was utilized as a fun way to re-read the stereotyped Hindu traditional belief. In the novel, Goswami clearly utilized Jatadhaari to examine the logic of ritualized spirituality. Chinnamasta Jatadhaari was a hermit who led the battle against the barbaric practice of animal sacrifice. "Jatadhaari raised his hands, Ma...Ma...Ma! Cast off your blood stained robes" (Goswami 53). Animal sacrifice is an important part of showing devotion to

the Goddess at the Kamakhya temple, and includes the slaughter of buffaloes, goats, and birds such as hens, ducks, and pigeons. The priests bless the animal and proclaim it a sacrifice to the Goddess when the worshippers bring it to them. The animal's meat is given to the devotees as prasad, or blessing, and it is prepared and eaten. The Ambubachi Mela, a Tantric fertility festival, is also held at the Kamakhya temple during the month of June, which corresponds to the monsoon season. The temple is closed for three days when the Kamakhya Devi is said to be going through her yearly menstrual cycle, and when it reopens on the fourth day, pilgrims are given a prasad of water and a piece of red fabric symbolizing the meridians. In the novel 'The Man from Chinnamasta,' the animal sacrifice and the Ambubachi Mela are significant occurrences. In the novel, the tantrik says, "Deliverance comes only when sacrifice is offered. Sacrifice alone will lead you to heaven. A buffalo's blood quenches the goddess's thirst for one hundred years. And when a follower offers the blood of his own body she is satisfied for one thousand years" (Goswami3). Devotees come to the temple to make sacrifices and atone for their sins, or to seek blessings on the occasions of marriages, births, and auspicious events, and those who wish to show off their affluence sacrifice more than one bull!

The sacrificial ceremony at the Kamakhya is a highly violent scene, as writer Indira Goswami puts it. The story starts with visions of the enormous Brahmaputra River, with its machete-shaped expanse and blood-red waters reeking of slaughtered flesh. The anguish and suffering of the animals is strongly described in several instances. "The animal tried to break free as it was being hauled away to the slaughterhouse. It wanted to escape the death that came in the form of pilgrims. But the harbingers of doom kept tugging at it. Shoveling. Yelling. Prodding" (Goswami3). The Deodhani or Deodha Nach, a shamanistic dance, is another heartbreaking celebration described in the text. The deodhas, also known as shamans, are persons who have been possessed by a god and who speak in the deity's voice. The Goddesses Manasa and Kali's deodhas are the most powerful and ferocious. Every year, from the 17th to the 19th of August, this dance tradition is held for three days, with preparations beginning in June. While the audience gathers to adore them, present garlands, and wash their feet, the deodhas clad in crimson robes with their bodies smeared in vermilion and blood of the sacrifice animal's dance intoxicated to the rhythm of numerous drums. This is the festival where the deodhas are in communion with their deities and have supernatural powers to cure all ailments and problems of their devotees and to please them the devotees offer goats, hens and pigeons Goswami writes. "Kali's deodha flicked his long tongue, red with the blood from the sacrifices of last night. Goswami writes. "Kali's deodha flicked his long tongue, red with the blood from the sacrifices of last night. Raising his arms, head bowed, he began to dance. Now and again he cast an eye on the assembled devotees. His glance filled their hearts with terror" (Goswami3). As described in the literature, the deodhas frequently carry goats on their shoulders and long machetes with which they sacrifice the animals, and they also use their teeth to slaughter the animals and suck their blood, "A devotee dragged a black goat up to the altar. Face down before the deodha, he dedicated the goat, pleading for release from some terminal illness..... Then, without warning, the deodha sank his teeth into the goat's neck. As the goat bleated, struggling to free itself, drops of blood fell on the ground" (Goswami3).

Dorothy Brown, a character in the story, asks "What sort of worship is this? What sort of deliverance is this?" (Goswami3). Her heart rushes in time with the click of the buffalo's hooves dragging over the stone road; a route as harsh and frigid as the guys dragging it. The animal's sorrowful eyes shine brightly in the darkness, and she can see them. She is in a state of mental

anguish. ChinnamastaJatadhari, an ascetic, agrees. "We hold our souls together with the skins of sacrificed animals. No peace of mind" (Goswami3).

The Kamakhya temple's ceremonial animal sacrifice is part of the nitya puja, or daily devotion, in which one animal is slaughtered to the goddess each day before the temple doors open. Approximately 20 buffaloes, 3000 goats, and uncountable birds are sacrificed on a single day at the Durga puja in the month of October each year, as well as during the Deodhani festival in the month of August each year! The temple priests argue that goddess worship is linked to animal sacrifice, and that because this is a Vedic Hindu rite, it cannot be abolished. He goes on to say that it is entirely voluntary, and that no one has the authority to prohibit worshippers from offering sacrifices to Maa! The freedom to follow one's religious beliefs is a constitutional right that is not covered by the Animal Cruelty Prevention Act of 1960. The Animals and Birds Sacrifice Prohibition Act has been enacted by the state governments of Karnataka, Kerala, Gujarat, Tripura, Orissa, Himachal Pradesh, Telangana, Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan, Pondicherry, and Andhra Pradesh, although animal sacrifice continues in other states. As a result, the ritual is a tangle of religion, history, culture, discourse, and power, as well as tangible realities, such as the genuine loss of life and the very real flesh and blood that stains Kamakhya's foundations and the lives of her followers. Despite several demonstrations in India and throughout the world against ritualistic animal sacrifice, the killing in Kamakhya continues unabated. There are numerous reasons for its continued existence, including the large market for buying and selling live animals and their hides, the significant revenue generated by devotees and tourists, and, last but not least, the unshakeable religious belief of devotees that the ritual is a part of the Vedic texts and thus provides a moral excuse to its practitioners! The priests' approval of the ritual and their interpretation of the Vedic texts make the sacrifice moral, but it also removes us from the sacrificial animal's actual agony and suffering. It makes us numb to it! It is this distancing which makes the devotee walk with folded palms, lips uttering prayers, eyes unseeing the guillotine of the sacrificial altar and ears not registering the terrified cries of the animals.

A recent news article forbids ritual slaughter in the open on Kolkata's Kali ghat because the sight of flesh and blood, as well as the stench of raw flesh and offal, offends people's sensibilities and pollutes the river! As a result, the government has designated places away from the public view where the rite can be performed. The animal is reduced to its flesh and blood, as well as its smelly and polluting offal, in this situation. The problem is that the same animal serves as a link between the Goddess and the sacrificer, healing and protecting the sacrificer from danger. Instead of discussing how to treat animals, Cora Diamond believes that we should focus on understanding and acknowledging the difficulty in our relationship with them. She instructs us to "imagine the bodily life of others" and have a "deeper understanding of the kind of animal we are and indeed the moral life of this kind of animal" (Diamond2). When Goswami recounts the discussion between the ascetic ChinnamastaJatadhari and a devotee at Kamakhya, she uses the same ethos. He is attempting to persuade the devotee not to sacrifice the goats by saying, "These are pure, beautiful, innocent lives. Put your ear to their breasts and you will hear the footsteps of Ma Kamakhya. Listen for yourselves. Listen to the Mother's footsteps. The same rhythm the same rhythm that beats in your own breasts" (Goswami3).

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