

## GODDESS KAMAKSHI IN NORTH-EAST INDIA AND TAMIL NADU

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Kamakshi is described as one of the supreme form of Mother Goddess and is worshiped all over India. Her form is popularly connected with Kanchi. Though the term Kanchi may have many spiritual interpretations the one popular association is taking its literal sense – namely the navel belt and hence with the *odyana pita*. Amongst the four primordial sacred seats of the manifestation of the supreme (peetas), Odyana is considered to be the most important. Apart from the city of Kanchi *odyana* is also identified with the region North-west of Kashmir on the river bank of Swat and this is also referred to by the Tibetans as Orgyan. It is also identified by scholars like Haraprasad Shastri and Benoytosh Bhattacharya<sup>1</sup> with region in Assam or Bengal. Hence we find the worship of the Kamakshi prevalent in these regions.

Kamakshi's greatness is espoused in *Kālikula krama Sadbhava* (1.1) as *Srimat Purva dig bhage peetavaram mahat odayanabhidhanam tu siddha yogini sevitam*. Even the Kamakhya is considered to be the seat of Kamakshi. Hence she is the main deity of worship. Coming back to Southern India, Kamakshi presides over the Kamakoshta. All the temples of Kanchipura have their main gopuram or entrance facing the Kamakoshta. There is no separate sanctum of Devi in any Shiva temple in Kanchi. It is because of Manmatha who was made formless by Lord Shiva (*Thathasamaksamdahatamanobhavampinakinabhaganamanoratha sati*) in order to recover his lost form, invoked the Goddess Kamakshi in Kanchi. Pleased by his penance Devi gave him a new form by her gracious look.

### ***Hara netrāgnisandagdakāmasanjeevanauṣadhi (Lalitāsahasrnama 34)***

He then prayed that he should be empowered to conquer Shiva, granting his prayer, Kamakshi withdrew her Sānnidhya unto herself from all the Shiva temples including Kailasa and concentrated all of it in the space of small cave. The *Kanchi Mahatmya*<sup>2</sup> refers to the holy space (*bila*) beneath the sanctum sanctorum of Kamakshi as *Bilākāśa* as the spot wherein the deity is said to be undergoing penance *Tapastānambilamsuksmamparamvyoma tatsmrtam*.<sup>3</sup> Finding the temples bereft of the presence of Kamakshi, it appeared as if that it was the moment of Manmatha's triumph over Shiva. Upon the prayers of Brahma, Kamakshi's Sānnidhya in all the Shiva temples except in those Kāñci was restored and further said there is no need for separate sanctum for her in any temples at Kāñci because of her presence and also to serve as a reminder that Kāñci is the Shivajitkṣetra.

(*Shivajitkshetramityuktam idamkshetram vinabhuvi sarvalayesu saiveṣusannidhattāmsad āmbika*).

The association of Kanchi Kamakshi with penance is also found in a separate shrine dedicated exclusively to her in Mangadu<sup>4</sup> 60 kms away from Kanchipuram (**Plates 34.1-34.3**). Here the goddess is found in a form performing the *Pañchagni tapas*.



**Plate 34.1:** Kamakshi at Ekamra vrksa (Kanchi, India).

***Kumarasambhava* of Kalidasa- V. 20.**

*Ścaucaturṇāmhavirbhujāmsucismitāmadhyagatāsumadhyamā.*

*Vijityanetrapatighātinīmprabhāmananyadṛstih savitārāmaixat.*

A similar image is also found in inside the sanctum of Kamakoṣṭa resting one foot on the ground and holding her right hand near her chest. This form is known as *tapas Kamakshi*, to her left is seen the Goddess who is seated with bow of sugarcane in one hand, flower arrows in another, noose in the third and goad in the fourth.

*Dhanurbhāṅpāśamsṛṇimapidadhānākaratalaiḥ.*

*Purastādāstāmaḥpuramathiturāhopuruṣikā.* (Saundarya Lahari-7).

The *tapas Kamakshi* is also depicted as worshipping the Shivalinga. The identification of this form with *sthula* manifestation is based on Kundalini śakti surrounding the *svayambuva* Linga in the *Muladhara*.

There are similar depictions of sculptures in Pala as well as all over India. Where in Parvati is found worshipping the Shivalinga the legendary episode gives the reason behind such depiction

as her yearning to have a blissful union with Lord Shiva. Kalidasa beautifully portrays the sequence of these events in his *Kumarasambhava Mahakavya*.<sup>5</sup>

*Tāmvīkṣyavepatumatīsarasāṅgayaṣṭinixepanaaya admudrutamudvahantī.  
Mārgacalavyatikarākulitevasinduḥśailādhirājatanayānayaunatastau.*



**Plate 34.2:** Dhaka Museum (Kamakshi Tapas). **Plate 34.3:** Kamakshi holding Shivalinga, Khulna Museum.

In the yogic terms this represents the Kundalini's drive towards the Sahasrara.

The union comes about after along arduous process and the first moment of this union is marked with relief, stupor, bliss (Kumara sambhava Yayanatastau)

After the union the conjugal bliss this finds an apt representation in the Uma Lingana Murti sculpture where in Parvati is shown seated on the lap of Shiva.

Though the worship of Kamakshi is found all over India, the popularity in the North-east, especially in Bengal, Assam and also Tamil Nadu which has to be seen in contact between two regions in fields like philosophy, music and architecture which requires further study.

**Notes and References:**

1. *Sadhana Mala*, vol. 2, pp. 37-39, Tantric studies in Memory of Helene Brummer- French Institute Pondichery, 2007.
2. *Kanchi Mahatmyam*, chapter 31.70
3. *Kamakshivilasam*, 31-40vv.
4. In Inscription termed as Mangadunadu.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 85.

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