

KAMAKHYA: THE CRADLE OF TANTRA IN NORTHEAST INDIA

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Abstract

Kamakhya Devi temple (located on the top of Nilachal hills, Guwahati, Assam), happens to be one of the most respected and revered “Shakti Peethas” in India and is supposed to be the embodiment of fertility and feminine power. Known for its tantric practices, it draws an enormous number of devotees from all over the country. Its significance lies not only in being a great place of worship but also in the spiritual, cultural and mystical value. Visitors come to experience the divine energy of this place. “Ambubachi Mela”, which happens to be an annual Hindu festival symbolising goddess Kamakhya undergoing menstrual cycle, is considered the greatest “tantric fertility festival” as it symbolises the fertility of the earth.

Keywords: *Kamakhya, Yogini tantra, Shaktipeeth, Ambubachi Mela, Sadhak.*

INTRODUCTION

The Kamakhya temple is not just a “shaktipeeth” but also the most important centre and focal point of cryptic yoginis (64 manifestations of Shakti) and tantric powers.

The “chausath yogini” temple, which happens to be a part of the Kamakhya temple complex, symbolises the womb of Shakti. The two worlds-“material” and “astral”- are supposed to be separated by a realm and dimension that is guarded by these “yoginis”. There have been multiple testimonies of tantric sadhakas who have asserted that the “yoginis” provide mantras of a secret nature and various tantras to those who are sincere in their endeavours.

The tantric legacy of the Kamakhya temple is being guarded by these yoginis who remain potent, vital and enigmatic forces in this regard. “Ambubachi” mela is celebrated annually to symbolise goddess Kamakhya’s menstrual cycle and celebrate creation and fertility.

Kamakhya temple is a key centre of Hindu Tantra. Ambubachi mela is organised in the summer month of Asadh (June-July). This time coincides with the advent of monsoon and

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cooling rains, thereby after the scorching heat of the summers (a symbol and reflection of the goddess's blessings to her devotees and grace to the earth).

During the period of menses, for three days, a white piece of cloth is placed inside the temple, and the temple doors are closed, and during these three days, not even a single pilgrim is allowed inside the temple. On the fourth day, when the doors of the temple are opened, red pieces of cloth, which represent the fertility and vitality of goddess Kamakhya, are distributed to the pilgrims, representing the "nirmalya" of the goddess's flow, i.e. offering's sacred remains.

Another noteworthy thing worth mentioning is the system of "sacrifice", which can be seen as the ritualistic counterpart of the "Ambubachi" celebration. As per the "Kalika Purana", sacrifice constitutes an important aspect of goddess worship. Just as the power of vitality and fertility flows from the goddess to earth via her menstruation, in the same manner, the power flows back to her via the sacrifices made by the devotees.

One of the most important and noteworthy things to be taken into consideration is that the sacrifices made here are quite different from the rituals and sacrifices as prescribed in the "Vedas" and "Brahmanas" and these reflect the local tribal ritualistic components and elements of the North Eastern region as there are many offerings made here which are non-vedic in nature and many of them are expressly rejected by the Brahmanas on account of being impure and dangerous.

There is a special section in society and intellectuals that oppose the practice of sacrifice vehemently, and this still remains the most important and deepest fault-line in efforts to convert and transform the whole celebration into a global tourist attraction.

CONCLUSION

As a religious institution, Kamakhya has always been a prominent place in the narrative history of not only Assam but the whole of North-East and the Indian subcontinent since the ancient period.

The vitality of Kamakhya and its tantric system/cult can hardly be ignored by anyone who has any sort of taste in the given subject.

Kamakhya temple and “Ambubachi mela” both are representatives of the cultural heritage, and proper care should be taken so that by merging into the tourism sector and experience industry elements and specific aspects of religion might not become just figments of tantalising and alluring stuff fit for consumeristic purposes only. Care needs to be taken that the essence of this great cultural heritage remains intact and no dilution takes place in its originality.

Kamakhya represents not only the spiritual journey of the devotees but also the deep-rooted mystical world of tantra. It's a symbol of the divine feminine. Its sacredness, rich mythology and peaceful surroundings make it easier for the devotees to connect with the divine power of Shakti and leave all with a deep sense of serenity and peace.

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