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The Samaya Mata (A Tutelary Deity) Temple in Kapilvastu and Adjoining Areas of Siddharthnagar Uttar Pradesh

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Kapilvastu was located between the Nepalese foothills, in the present day Siddharthnagar. Kapilvastu is said to have been destroyed by king Vidudabha, son of Prasenjit who was king of Kosala. Vidudabha ruthlessly massacred Śākyas as a revenge and destroyed them in Buddha's lifetime. However, it seems that the Sakyas had never been extinct from the land because they have received share of body relics of Buddha, it is also attested from Fa- Hien's description who found during his visit in 4th century A.D. Fa hien mentioned it like a desert with neither King nor people except for a congregation of priests and about ten families of lay people. In 7th century A.D Huien Tsang, the Chinese traveller also mentioned it in his travelling accounts.

Buddhaghosa has preserved for us an old tradition that the Buddha had eighty thousand families of relatives on the father's side and the same on the mother's side.¹ Allowing six or seven to a family, including the dependents, this would make a total of about a million persons in the Śākya territory.² Rhys Davids further says that "It was no doubt in this plain, stretching about fifty miles from east to west, and thirty or forty miles to the south ward from the foot of the Himalayan Hills, that the majority of the clan were resident."³ The clan subsisted on the produce of their rice fields and their cattle.

About the religion of the Buddhist period Rhy Davids describes- "The gods more usually found in older systems- The dread Mother Earth, the dryads and the dragons, the dog star, even the moon and the sun- have been cast into the shade of new ideas (the new Gods) of the fire, the exciting drink, and the thunderstorm. And the charm of the mystery and magic of the ritual of the sacrifice had to contend, so far as laity were concerned, with the distaste induced by its complications and its expense."⁴

Rhys Davids further mention that there were many other beliefs, commonly held among the Aryans in India, but not represented in the Veda.⁵ The first of these three lines is the history of Atharvaveda. This invaluable old collection of Charms to be used in sorcery had been actually put together long before Buddhism arose. The second is the general view of religious beliefs, held by the people, given to us by the Epics. The third line is based on the references to the religious beliefs, not of the Buddhists themselves, but of the people, recorded in the Buddhist canon. Davids also remarks- “ The standard passages on this question are three, the one in prose, the other two in verse, and all found in our oldest documents. The first is in the Silas, and begin thus-“ where as some recluses and Brahmins, while living on the food provided by the faithful, are tricksters, droners out of holy words for pay, diviners, exorcists, ever hungering to add gain, Gotama the recluse holds aloof from such deception and patter.”

There then follows a long enumeration, evidently forming part of the beliefs of the people in the valley of the Ganges in the sixth century B.C. Among all sort of religious beliefs such as palmistry, divination of all sorts, auguries drawn from the celestial phenomenon, prognostications by interpretation of dreams, the power of prophecy, incantations, oracles consulting Gods through a girl possessed or by means of mirror, worshipping the great one, invoking siri(the goddess of Luck). It may be noticed in passing that we have representations, of a very early date, of this siri, the goddess of luck, of plenty of success, who is not mentioned in the Veda. Of these is marked in plain letters Sirima Devata. The other shows the goddess seated, with two elephants pouring water over her. It is the oldest instance of the Lakshmi Goddess.

The Siri was already a popular deity in the Buddha’s time explains the fact that the priest had been compelled to acknowledge her and to invent a special legend to excuse their doing so⁶; and they incidentally mention her once again, in mystic conjunction with the dread deities of the Moon, and the Sun, and Mother Earth.⁷

The Samaya Mata temples are dedicated to goddess Durga in this area. Every village has a temple dedicated to Samaya mata. It must be the tutelary deity of the ancient period which is still worshipped wide and large in the area of Siddharthnagar and its surroundings. But in these temples I found Pindis made of mud or cement on a high platform, sometimes three or single. People used to place elephant statues near the platform or on and above the platform. These elephants are in many numbers. The oral tradition says that Samaya mata is the goddess who protects from misfortune and gives blessings for good agriculture. It means that the Goddess is worshipped in the form of fertility Goddess. People pray for their agriculture and good fortune and when the wishes are fulfilled they donated a sculpture of elephant to the goddess.

As the name Samaya has been give to these temples, I discovered the meaning of the word Samaya in different contexts as follows-

Samaya is a Sanskrit technical term denoting a “residenc”in general, according to the list of Synonyms given in Mansara XIX 108-12.⁸

The Epics represent Samaya as

- a. An agreement, of Sagara with conquered chiefs, broken by Devas.
- b. A son of 'Kriya'.
- c. A Deva

In Natyashastra of Bharatmuni, Samaya refers to deliverance from all misery or misfortune. Samaya represents one of the fourteen nirvahanasandhis,⁹ This element is also known as Sama. Nirvahanasandhis refers to the segments(sandhi)of the concluding parts (Nirvahana) and represent the five segment of the plot.(itivrtta or Vastu) of a dramatic composition.

Arthashastra of kautilya explains Samaya as Guild. An inscription from Malteweda dated 1228 AD and an undated record fro Bezaweda warns the members of the Samaya that if anyone who violates the Samaydharma will be excommunicated from the guild or Samaya.

Sanskrit Grammar –Vyakarana mention Samaya- the omission of words which have already occurred before in the recital of the pada and other pathas or recitals, with a view to avoiding unnecessary repetition.

In Shakta Philosophy, (a) Samaya refers to rules/PLEDGES (to be observed after one has received initiation), according to Manthanbhairavatantra, a vast sprawling work that belongs to a corpus of Tantric texts concerned with the worship of Goddess Kubjika- rules(ie, Samaya) must be rigorously observed for their own sake or simply as act of obedience or self control

(b) In Shakta Philosophy Samaya refers to one of the eight Kaula consorts (duti –astaka)associated with Candrapitha (or Chandrpeethpura), according to Mahabhairavatantra. The Eight Kaula consorts are- Ananga, Anangaduti, Vidyaduti, Nadaduti, Niracara, Malini, Samaya, Saktiduti.

(c) Jayaratha quotes the Devipanchasataka (verse 3.15cd-17ab) as an example of a Kalikarma Tantra in which they are mentioned. They are (eg Sivananda and Samaya).¹⁰

In Shaiva Philosophy Samaya refers to “(the observance of) rules of action”²⁰

In Buddhism (Vajrayana or Tantrik Budhism) Samaya is 'Convention' refers to one of the five kulas (families) according to Guhyasamaya. The families owe allegiance to their progenitors who are known as Kulesha or Lord of families.

Samaya or Samayakarotaka refers to the 'Vow Skull Bowl'(filled with raja- blood) and represent one of the four Karota or Karotaka of the Samvarmandala of Abhayakaragupta's Nispannayogavali p 45 and n 145.¹² The chakrasamvara mandala has a total of 62 deities. The four skull cups in the cardinal directions, north east, north west, south west, south east. Together with Cakrasamvara, Vajravaraahi and the essence of Yoginis they make up the jñanachakra. “ the knowledge of Wheel” The four Skull Bowl (Karotaka) are (eg Samaya-karotaka skull bowls).

The Mahayana Buddhism mention Samaya as age (period), according to the ganaganjaparipraccha, the eight chapter of mahasamnipata .

Every Samaya mata temple in the region has something similar to each other, the Pindis of Shakti and Elephants being donated by the people. Wherever there is a place for Goddess Elephants are also to be found. This is symbolical representation of the dream of Maya. In Lalitvistara, “ Maya Devi , sleeping peacefully on an excellent bed, dreamt a dream- A white elephant, white as silver or snow, having six tusks, well proportionate trunk and feet, blood red veins, adamantine firmness of joints, and easy pace , has entered my belly. Such a delightful form I had never before seen, nor heard, nor conceived; it produced in me the same corporeal and mental feeling of Joy which one enjoys on being immersed in meditation”¹³

Thus these Samaya mata temples are dedicated to other goddesses as lok dharinis. The main sanctum of all the temples also carry a primary stepping stone adharshila which represents the goddess Prithvi variously called. The Pindis are the representation of adharshakti . This is again the vedic tradition where Dharini is mentioned as the bearer of all existence. Definitely Maya devi was treated as a goddess by the locals. In Budhacharita Canto I she has been described as-

“There was a king of unconquerable Sakyas” Suddodhana” by name, of the race of Ikshavaku and the peer of Ikshavaku in might. Pure was his conduct and beloved of his people as the moon in autumn. That counterpart of Indra had a queen, a very saci, whose splendor corresponded to his might. In beauty like Padma, in steadfastness like earth, she was called Mahamaya from her resemblance to the incomparable Maya.¹⁴

Thus as per the references the Samaya mata mandir which is found as a tutelary deity temples are associated to both Hindu and Buddhist belief. They worship her as a goddess of fertility. They pray for their happiness and fulfillment of desires. After getting the desired they contribute an image of elephant to the goddess. The elephant which is an auspicious symbol since the days of Buddha’s birth,

References-

1. See Dialogue of the Buddha,i.147,note
2. T.W.Rhys Davids- Ancient Buddhism p 18
3. Ibid, p 18
4. Rhys Davids- p 212
5. The religious ideas are incidentally referred to in the Vedas, and not admitted into it as a part of the priestly system of belief, see Kriste in the Vienna oriental Journal 1902,pp63, Rhys Davids ,p 213
6. Satapatha Brahmana,xi,4,3
7. Taittiriya Upanishad I,4
8. Mansara- A popular treatise of Vastu Shastra Literature.
9. Natyashastra Chapter 12
10. Preamble to Tantralok verse 29.43-46ab
11. Malinivijayottartantra Chapter 18(appropriate conduct of the accomplished Yogi) verse 18.74-81(as quoted in Tantralok verse 4.213-221ab)

12. Cf. Chakrasamvara tantra, Gray, David B. 2007
13. The lalit Vistar- English translation by R.L.Mitra, 1998, p 88-89
14. Asvaghosa’s Buddhacharita or Acts of the Buddha- E.H.Jonathan p 1-2

