

When the Divine Mother performs Her yearly Menstruation.

The Ambubachi Mela

KINDLY NOTE:- This article is part of the article released by www.dipika.org.za called "Hinduism's views on Menstruation".

The famous Kamakhya Temple (below) is located in the Kamrup district of Assam (N-E region of India). The temple is dedicated to Kamakhya Devi (a form of Mother Durga who fulfills one's desires).



What attracts people to Kamakhya Devi is that this form of the Divine Mother menstruates. The significance of the temple is that it's one of the 51 Shakti Peethas (more on this below). The Kamakhya Temple is amongst one of the holiest Shakti shrines throughout India. This temple commemorates Mother Sati in her aspect of Kamakhya Devi. As per Vedic shastras, after the time of Her self-sacrifice, the genital organ (yoni) of Sati-Devi fell at this spot. Kamakhya Temple has a natural cave with a spring. In order to reach the temple, one has to take a flight of steps that goes down into a dark shrine. In the shrine, Kamakhya Devi, in the form of genital organ (yoni), presides as a big crevice in the bedrock. Devi is covered naturally by a rivulet of water gushing upward from an underground spring. The crevice is usually covered with sari, flowers and vermilion powder (Sindoor). Essentially, 'Kamakhya' Devi is the granter of desires. In Kalika Purana, Kamakhya Devi is referred as the goddess who fulfills all desires, the bride of Lord Shiva and the benefactor of salvation.

The Ambubachi Mela:- The Ambubachi Mela is the most important mela (festival) celebrated in the Kamakhya Temple in Guwahati, Assam. This yearly mela is celebrated during the monsoon season, around the middle of June, when the Brahmaputra River is in spate. It's the celebration of the yearly menstruation course of Devi Kamakhya. The festival known as Ambuvaci (Ameti), is unique with its own significance. For the duration of this fertility festival, Devi is said to undergo her

menstrual cycle period. At this point of time, the temple is closed for three days and before closing, white sheets are draped inside the temple. During these three days some restrictions are observed by the devotees like not cooking, not performing puja or reading holy books, no farming etc. This may sound rather contradicting but they practice this so that Devi can rest. After three days Devi Kamakhya is bathed and other rituals are performed to ensure that the devi retrieves her purity. When the temple is opened after three days, the sheets are found red in color. Then the doors of the temple are reopened and prasad is distributed. On the fourth day the devotees are allowed to enter the temple and worship Devi Kamakhya. On the fourth day, great festivity is observed. Devotees from far and near, come to visit this temple at this juncture of the festival. The red sheets are torn into pieces and distributed amongst the devotees. It's also believed that during the monsoon rains the creative and nurturing power of the 'menses' of Mother Earth becomes accessible to devotees at this site during the mela. The Maha-prasad is distributed in two forms – Angodak and Angabastra. Angodak literally means the fluid part of the body-water from the spring and Angabastra literally means the cloth covering the body - a piece of the cloth used to cover the stone (yoni) during the days of menstruation. There is no Deity of the presiding Goddess but she is worshiped in the form of a yoni-like stone instead over which a natural spring flows.



This mela is also known as Ameti or Tantric fertility festival since it's closely associated with the Tantric Shakti cult prevalent in eastern parts of India. Even some Tantric

Babas (ascetics) make their public appearances only during these four days. The rest of the year, they remain in seclusion. So every year between 22nd - 24th June Devi menstruates in Kamakhya Temple. But for arguments sake, what if hypothetically Devi menstruates once a month and what if one has to perform a puja for Mata like a Devi puja and havan? Does this mean Devi will not attend the puja because she is in her cycle period? Personally I find that rather unfortunate and nonsensical/primitive in mentality.

The Shakti Peethas

The Shakti Peethas (seat of Shakti) are places of worship consecrated to the goddess Shakti or Sati, the main deity of the Shakta sect. In the Srimad Bhagavatam (4th canto Chapters 2-7) mentions that Daksha performed a yagna with a desire to take revenge on Lord Shiva. Daksha invited all the Deities to this great Yajna (Havan) except Lord Shiva and Sati (Daksha's daughter). The fact that she was not invited did not deter Sati from attending her father's yagna. She expressed her desire to attend the yagna to Lord Shiva, who tried his best to dissuade her from attending. Lord Shiva eventually relented and Sati attended the yagna. Sati, being an uninvited guest, was not bestowed any respect at the yagna. Furthermore, Daksha insulted Lord Shiva. Sati was unable to bear her father's insults toward her dear husband, so she immolated herself. When Sati Devi immolated herself (picture below), Lord Shiva being the all-knowing immediately knew what had transpired and it enraged him to no end.



Being inconsolable, Lord Shiva created the great Virabhadra (by throwing on the ground just single strand of his hair) who then then went on a rampage and destroyed Daksha's yagna and also severed Daksha's head, which was later replaced with that of a male goat as Lord Shiva (being so merciful) restored him to life. Still immersed in grief, Lord Shiva picked up the remains of Sati's body, and performed the Tandava (the celestial dance of destruction), across all creation. The other Deities requested Lord Vishnu to intervene to stop the oncoming destructive dance. Lord Vishnu then used His Sudarshana Chakra (The All Auspicious and Powerful Disk), which cut Sati's corpse into 51 parts linking to the 51 alphabets in Sanskrit. The various parts of her body fell at several spots all through the Indian subcontinent and formed sites which are known as Shakti Peethas today. At all the Shakti Peethas, the Goddess Shakti is accompanied by her consort, Lord Bhairava (a manifestation of Lord Shiva). Some of the great religious texts like the Shiva Purana, the Devi Bhagavatam, the Kalika Purana and the Asta Shakti recognize four major Shakti Peethas (centers). The Body Part or "Ornament" refers to the body part or piece of jewelery that fell to earth, at the location on which the respective temple is built. There are 51 Shakti Peethas in total in and around Bharat Bhumi (India).

List of 4 Main Adi Shakti Pithas

Sr. No. Place Body Part or Ornament

1 Puri, Orissa (inside Jagannath Temple complex) Pada Bimala

2 Berhampur, Orissa Sthana (Breasts) Tara Tarini

3 Guwahati, Assam Yoni khanda Kamakshya

4 Kolkata, West Bengal (Kalighat Kali Temple)

Mukha khanda Dakshina Kalika

The yoni is the quintessence of femininity and is a yantra (view the picture below) for many Shakta-based Tantric societies in India. Represented as a downward pointing triangle, it stands for the sacred feminine womb, from which all life springs.



One worships the Goddess Kamakhya, who, in this form, illustrates her creative power. Devi is venerated as a life giver and Kamakhya temple happens to be one of the very few Hindu shrines where the Goddess is worshiped in Her reproductive aspect as the

source of all life on Earth. During Ambubachi, for three days, Mother Earth Herself menstruates, and all the temples in the region are closed to devotees. Inside the Kamakhya temple, Devi is bathed and then dressed daily. Devi is draped in a red silk cloth in consideration of Her menstrual flow and also is given Naivedhyam (fruits) and is offered worship. Families who reside near the temple also cover their own shrines and offer fruits and simple puja to Devi, preferring Devi to rest in this period. On the 4th day, the temple doors are opened and Devi's devotees wait to receive Her special darshan. Ardent devotees plead to receive a small piece of the “rakta (blood) vastra (cloth)”, the red silk “blood cloth” upon which Devi sits during Her menses. As a Tabeez/talisman/amulet, this piece of cloth is said to be very auspicious and powerfully beneficial if tied onto one's body, generally around the wrist or arm. The Sanskrit word of “Ambuvaachee” from the local Assamese word of “ambubachi or ambubasi” is derived, literally means “the issuing forth of water”, referring to the swelling of the Earth's waters from the onset of the monsoon (starting around June/July). Ambubachi is a time of tremendous power and celebration. Mother Earth (a.k.a Dharti/Varahi/Bhoomi) cannot be impure, as she is cleansing the Earth through the monsoons - thus this is the time of potency and reflection. How can she be “unclean” if she is purifying the entire Earth? It's a time to relinquish selfish desires and to focus completely on Devi and celebrate with joy all that She is, to celebrate the gifts that Mother Earth provides to nourish us viz. food, shelter, guidance, protection, etc. This is a time to offer Devi simple worship, serving Her selflessly, without asking for anything in return or for oneself. Recognizing one's own selfish nature without judgment is a powerful part of releasing the ego and striving towards full devotion and love for our awesome Mother.

How to celebrate Ambubachi in one's own home.

During Ambubachi, it's important to allow our dearest Mother to rest. Every day we are asking Ma for this and that, so for these few days we let our most awesome Ma rest rather than asking Her to help in our requests. It's a time we need to be selfless and serve Ma instead - without any expectation of any rewards. In the west this similar concept is celebrated as Mother's day in May every year, when we pamper our Mothers in the same way to acknowledge them for what they have done for us and how much we love them and appreciate them.

Every year Ambubachi Mela begins on the 22nd June and ends on the 25th June.

You may observe this important period the way that the families in Kamakhya does. On the first day take a piece of clean cloth (preferably red silk, but you can use what you have access to) and cover the altar/prayer place or the Murti. If you have a temple room in your home then close the door. You can also draw a curtain in front of the altar. This is to allow Devi privacy and rest during this time also to honor and respect Her. She is extremely powerful in this period as She is in the activity of purifying and regenerating the entire Earth, which is Her body itself, and it's best to allow Her a wide berth.

In the Tantric philosophy menstruation is not considered impure, nor can the Mother Herself ever be made impure. So Her worship continues, but no requests are to be made to Ma. Twice a day you may offer Naivedhyam (fruits or sweet rice), warm milk (with Gur/Jaggery/Sugar), and water. The items are to be placed on a tray and left in front of Devi for Devi to consume. After 10 minutes (you must wait for Devi to first finish eating her Naivedhyam), you may offer Devi (on a tray have 3 incense sticks which is in an incense holder, a small lamp which has a piece of camphor on it, and three flowers (red or yellow will be best but optional)). Now light the incense, and camphor while still leaving the items on the tray. With a bell in your left hand now ring the bell as you turn the tray around Devi 3, 5, 7 or 9 times in a clockwise direction. Afterwards, bow down to Ma and ask for nothing - instead giving thanks to Ma for allowing you to serve Her in this important time. When offering the food and aarti you may chant the following mantra dedicated to Ma Kamakhya.

Kaamaakhye varade devee neela-parvata vaasinee
tvam devee jagatam maataa yoni-mudre namo astu te

You may also wish to meditate silently on our most awesome Mother during these three days and focusing on your gratitude to Devi. You may also like to participate in activities that helps to heal Mother Earth like cleaning up your local area of dirt etc, or fertilize your garden. In the morning of the 4th day viz. 25th June, remove the cloth and open the door to the temple and then clean everything thoroughly. Replace all the clothes, etc, and dress your Deities with new clothes. Offer simple worship as given above but cook tasty, elaborate vegetarian foods for Devi like Pumpkin curry, Drumstick herbs (or any herbs), mixed veg curry, offer Devi her favorite fruits like Anar (Pomegranate), Coconut juice, etc. Offer with your full heart and on this day you may ask Devi for anything you desire, but beware of what you desire. When you ask with a pure heart and with the highest good in mind, this definitely pleases Devi. Devi will give us what we truly need and wants to fulfill our desires. Take the time during this period to purify your heart and recognize your imperfections and humble yourself at Her lotus feet. In this way you can observe Ambubachi and the most powerful time of the year of our most awesome divine Mother Earth in all Her many forms.

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Compiled for the upliftment of Sanatan Dharma
Narottam das & Arjun Nandlal
Email info@dipika.org.za