

Sacred Geography of the Goddesses in Kashi, India

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Abstract

Omnipresence and omniscience of the goddess are attested by the variety of goddess-images in the sacredscape of Kashi (Varanasi). The veneration of the goddesses initiated the process of establishment of shrines and temples. Processes of getting in close contact with the divine spirit, spatial manifestations, acceptance and recognition of Folk tradition by the Great tradition, and symbolic expression of identity, respectability of the feminine divine, etc. have shaped the human quest to establish goddess-images in various forms and at different places. Local mythologies are superimposed to justify the historicity and religious merit, and after passage of time it finally became part of the contemporary tradition. The spatial pattern of goddesses in Kashi is an outcome of representation of manifestive realities, acculturation process and maintenance and continuity of the tradition. The paper deals with the cultural, symbolic and spatial affinity of goddesses in Kashi; their number reaches 324 in the Puranas. The physical complexity of location converges into an order of patterning, which easily fits into the symbolic description in the mythology. This complexity can be explained in the context of fractal, and self-organised system in which the complexity of disequilibrium itself forms an order and finally results to equilibrium. This system is always re-created and rejuvenated by the ritual processes and the sacred performances. The paper deals with the cultural, symbolic, mythical and spatial affinity of goddesses in Kashi; their number reaches 324 in the *Puranas*.

1. Introduction

The Vedic mythological story of Divodas in course of time was modified in the *puranic* literature to fit into the local traditions and the rulers (cf. Kkh,43). When Shiva left Kashi, king Divodas made the city capital of his kingdom. Of course, a king named Divodas is mentioned in association with Indra's destruction of a hundred cities (cf. RgV, 4.30.20) but it is difficult to accept the same figure as king of Kashi/Varanasi (Eck, 1982: 387). In the *Mahabharata* (MhB,12.31.26-28) Divodas is described who had fortified the city of Varanasi and also taken away the sacrificial fire of his enemies. This act resulted in conflict with Shiva who wished to dwell there (MbH,12.97.20; see Shulman,1980: 77).

Shiva and his wife Parvati did not like to live longer away from their homely abode, Kashi. Shiva thought that any fault or disturbance in the divine order would create a crisis, which will result into making the city disordered. And, this way when king Divodas will fall, his power will also fall. Only then Shiva and other gods will get resort in the ordered and holy city of Kashi. First of all Shiva sent sixty-four **Yoginis** ("assisting goddesses") who entered the city and being thrilled by the cosmic order and sacred power of the city, they settled down there. Similarly, other gods, planetary divinities, goddesses, demi-gods, assisting divine beings, and divine vehicle-animals in their different forms, all went there and settled down.

When a cycle of time was completed, on Vishnu's appeal Shiva and Parvati returned home and re-settled down. At one stage, Divodas himself worshipped Shiva by installing a linga, which was later on known after him as Divodasheshvara. After passage of time, the varieties and different groups of goddesses and gods came to support Shiva and to enjoy the sacred power of the city. This myth clearly indicates the historical growth of goddesses and their multiplicity together with their male partners. That is how with the supreme integration of *prakriti* (feminine power of nature) and *purusha* (masculine power of nature) an equilibrium is maintained. Further, this myth also narrates the processes and stages of non-equilibrium and equilibrium and their final merger in resulting to converge into an order.

Metaphorically speaking, by the intense power of deeper consciousness (*iccha-shakti*) of the 'cosmic man', *purusha*, generated the energy of creation ('*prakriti*') denoting the feminine power. The

prakriti get settled down at different places possessing the strong energy—*sthana-shakti*. The inherent power possessed at these places are awakened by the power of words and sounds, *vak-shakti*, and by the power of rituals, *kriya-shakti*. The above powers (*shaktis*) of consciousness, sound, and actions together took a form at the powerful places; thus a place converges into a more powerful sacred place, i.e. **sacredscape**. After passage of time the varieties, distinctions and uniqueness of these sacredscapes are mythologised and glorifying literature is developed. Consequently developed a series of hierophany in different groups. All such groups independently make their own system of articulation which in other context to be referred as state on non-equilibrium, while with respect to interdependency altogether making a complex system responsible for making a state of equilibrium. This way the opposite poles converge into an ordering mode of complex web of networking system, which is in itself a mosaic of several independent but mutually cohesive sub-systems. This is reflected into the varieties and groupings of goddesses in Kashi/Varanasi.

In the Rajghat excavations, some remains of goddess worship are found, like ring stones, the circular discs which seem to have been associated with goddesses since the Indus Valley civilisation (Banerjee, 1974: 168-173, 489). On one of such rings tones from the Mauryan period in the 4th or 3rd century BCE, there are relief carvings of full-hipped *devis* (female divinities) with honey-suckle between them (Eck, 1982 : 75). In Kashi, one finds varieties of the goddesses, existing from the very early (4th-3rd century BCE) non-Aryan feminine divinities, e.g. *yakshis* that are closely associated with fecundity, especially the ever-renewing cycle of vegetative life and growth. Also, there exists the Mahavidyas of the late 13th century CE and Santoshimata of the 20th century.

Kashi / Varanasi, the abode of Shiva, possesses the different forms of the goddess orienting towards complexity, variety, cosmogony and the sacred manifestations. These can be interpreted in the context of multiplicity of layers, ordering, locations, hierophany, manifestations, and so on. The fourth canto of the *Skanda Purana*, called *Kashi Khanda*, Kkh (most of its parts dated to the ca 14th century CE), is the main source of the mythologies related to the goddesses in Kashi. The list and categories are prepared on the basis of the Kkh, and are further compared with the field study. According to the Kkh there were 324 forms (identified by names) of the goddesses in Kashi. They are categorised into several groups, like 96 Shaktis, 8 Kshetra-rakshikas, 64 Yoginis, 9 Durgas, 12 Gauris, 12 Matrikas, 9 Candis, 41 Kshetra Devis, 12 Devis on the Pancakroshi route, 12 Independent Devis, and 42 Loka (folk) Devis. Of course, out of the 324, only 144 are presently existing in Kashi and of which 36 are repeated in two or more groups. As a result at present only 96 are enumerated. Most of them are prescribed to be worshipped independently, and also sacred times and ordering are fixed for pilgrimage. All the goddesses are associated with their male partner, always some form of Shiva, of course sometimes not mentioned. There also described 324 main forms of Shiva, who together with 324 forms of the goddesses, by integrating the power of male and female, runs and regulates the rhythm of cosmic cycle in the universe. By this integrity the territoriality of the cosmic equilibrium is maintained. The paper narrates the spatiality, cosmic geometry and related myths and metaphors; and finally projects the idea of self-organised system to explain the complexity of the distribution of goddesses-shrines.

2. The Cosmic Circuit and Protecting Goddesses

There are five main sacred territories, marked by the respective travel routes, symbolise the ecological cosmology and wholeness. These routes also symbolise the five *koshas* (“sheaths”) and are analogous to the five gross elements of organism according to the Hindu mythology. The outer sacred circuit is identical to a circle whose centre lies at Madhyameshvara and the radial point at Dehli Vinayaka, covering a distance of 5 *kroshta*, i.e. 11 miles/17.6km. The circuit is also described as an aura of cosmic light that illumines the world. It is an example of archetypal nature of spatial transposition, called as *hierophany* by Eliade (1959: 12).

The outer circuit, known as Chaurashikroshi Yatra route is divided into eight directions (*astha-dik*), and protected by the directional deities. Each of these directions is regulated and controlled by goddesses of the cycle of time (i.e. 12 zodiacs/12 months), called as Shaktis (“power goddesses”), thus their number reaches to 96 (i.e. 8 X 12). The myth refers that the 96 Shaktis had helped the goddess Durga in killing the demon’s army. At the end of the war the Durga had cited their names (Kkh, 72. 3-13). The act of these *Shaktis* in each direction is supervised by the *Kshetra Devi* (“territorial goddess”), a form of the Great Goddess *Durga*, and further assisted by a form of *Bhairava* (“male partner”), a directional deity (*dikpala*) and three *Vetalas* (“demi-divinity assistant”). This way the sacrality of time (twelve months) and temporality of space (eight directions) finally merge at a cosmic

state controlled and maintained by *Shaktis*. At the centre exists Saubhagya Gauri who supervises the articulation and ordering (Kkh, 72.91).

In cosmogonic frame the numerical symbolism related to the number of divinities on this route can also be interpreted. There are 96 *Shaktis* (i.e. 8 directions X 12 months), 8 Kshetra Devis, 8 Bhairavas, 8 Dikpalas and 24 Vetalas; thus the total number reaches to 144. The number 144 (12 X 12) refers to cosmogony where macrocosmos (12 zodiacs) leads to the microcosmos (12 months), thus from earthly journey one can experience the cosmological occurrence. The multiplicity of number 144 is interpreted as multiplying product of 9 Hindu planets (*macrocosmos*), 8 directions (*mesocosmos*) and 2 parts of day (day and night, *microcosmos*). According to Kkh (72.101-102) the 96 *Shaktis* protect the territory and help the devotees to get relief from any sort of difficulty. It is difficult to infer that their worship had been a part of tradition. In contemporary time, there is no trace of their independent worship. Among the 96 the twelve are spatially manifested at different places in the main city, mostly as auxiliary deities in the main temples. And, some of them received the power of great goddesses by taking the benefit of identical names and capturing the similar glories from the *puranic* mythologies, e.g. Trailokya-Sundari, Tripura-Bhairavi, and Kamaksha. The rest have lost their identity in the city area; of course many of them are existent in the form of ruins, or folk goddesses along the Chaurashikroshi route.

3. Kshetra (Rakshikas) Devis

The Kkh (72.88) describes the Nine Durgas as protecting deities of the outer territory of Kashi. Durga had also created subordinate power representing herself who protects the inner area of the cosmic territory (*Kshetra Rakshikas Devis*); they are eight, each one in one direction and an additive at the centre named Saubhagya Gauri (Kkh, 72.90-91). Their spatial arrangement is comparable to a cone in which the base is an octagonal wheel showing the eight directions, and the apex is the controlling centre.

The Kshetra Devis are prescribed to worship together with Durgas. By this process one gets protection from the sides, the outer border and the inner space. This hierophanic symbol of spatial manifestation representing 96 forms of goddesses (*Shaktis*) is an example of exteriorisation of space, an example of expansion (*vistara*). At the other end, the manifestation of 9 Kshetra Devis shows interiorisation of space, an example of shrinking (*sankoca*). In independent condition, both the situations show a state of non-equilibrium, which results into further retreat, that is, why together they finally converge into a state of equilibrium. This is close to the perspective of *Tantra* (“to weave”) which metaphorically explains the creation by the interaction of two opposite forces. This metaphor can easily be explained in the above context of arranging territorial goddesses who protect the nature’s realm of the space-time and human realm of deeper consciousness. In other way the integration of the two sub-states, mentioned above, represents the meeting of transcendent to immanent where one understands the reality.

4. The Sixty-Four Yoginis

The story of Divodas and supremacy of Shiva mentioning the 64 Yoginis sent at first to disturb the cosmic order and to overrule the city. This story suggests that Yoginis are “surely among India’s oldest deities, and they have always been linked to place—to some particular hill or grove, some particular village or cross-road, to some particular river or cave. These goddesses unquestionably occupied their “benches” (*pithas*) in the Forest of Bliss long before that mythical time when Shiva chose the city to be his home” (Eck, 1982: 157-158). During the 10th-11th centuries, the worship of Yoginis was very popular in the religious arena. It is possible that some portions of the Kkh might be composed in the late 11th century. Out of 64 Yoginis’ shrines 60 are assumed to be in the Rana Mahal at Chausatthi Ghat (cf. Kkh, 45.34-41; also see Dehejia, 186: 215-216). Presently only 13 Yogini images exist and are mostly attached to other temples.

The symbol of number 64 is a product of 8 directions and replication of each one in the *astha- mandala / asthaka-cakra* (eight points on the cosmic circuit). This theoretic or esoteric interpretation is explained in the *Agni Purana*, AgP (52; 146) that prescribes that one goddess must preside over each group of the 8 goddesses. The primordial number of eight *matrikas* (mother goddesses) symbolises the condensation (*sankoca*) of the cosmic rhythm, and the number 64, resulting to the emergence of the *matricakra* or *matrimandala* represent its expansion (*purna vikas*). This pattern is clear by the geometrical arrangement of the 64 Yoginis. Thus, the number eight and sixty-four are the two sides of the *reality* referring to the two phases of creation. Following the framework of the AgP,

the placement of 64 Yoginis would be arranged into an Eight-petal (*lotus*) *Yantra* where each petal places eight forms of Yogini. Each of the petals is ascribed to a specific direction; and each direction is under the control of one of the eight forms of *Matrikas* : Brahmi (east), Maheshvari (southeast), Kaumari (south), Vaishnavi (southwest), Varahi (west), Aindri (northwest), Camunda (north), and Narasimhi (northeast). Although at one time there might have been Yogini temples, at present altogether worshipped in the single temple, Chausatthi Devi, close to the same named Ghat. The identities of Yoginis and their characteristics are not very clear, however most of them are place-specific, or task-specific. Many of these *Yoginis* (“sorceress”) are allied to *Yakshis* (“tree-spirits”), *matrikas* (“mothers”), *vetalis* (“vampires”), *shaktis* (“power goddesses”), or Gauris (“White goddesses”). Place association of these goddesses and archetypal connotations that all of goddesses are formed of the Great Goddess; make the mythology a sacred geography.

The Yogini Yatra, pilgrimage, at Chausatthi Ghat is performed on the dark-half 1st of Chaitra (March-April), and for all the Yoginis pilgrimage is performed on the dark-half 14 of Ashvina (September-October). Many pilgrims follow the traditional time of journey, i.e. dark-half 12th of Chaitra, and majority of them pays visit only to the Chausatthi Devi in Rana Mahal. On the light-half fortnight 11th of Phalgun (February-March) a type of initiating carnival and festival is celebrated with wet colour and colour powders in the temple of Chausatthi Devi.

5. Nine Durgas

Though there are many versions of Durga’s origin myth, She is commonly accepted as a most powerful warrior goddess who appeared on earth under many names for the destruction of demons. She obtained the name Durga because She slew a demon named Durga (cf. Kkh, 71; 72.81). According to the DM (11.38-51; 12.32) Durga is narrated as cosmic force incarnate in many forms to kill the demons and maintain the cosmic order. Her origin in the backdrop of cosmic crisis highlights her as cosmic mother who intervenes on behalf of her devotees. By contextual inference Durga means ‘who destroys misfortune’; this supreme power is the spirit of the trinity of forces of creation, preservation, and destruction. Durga is described in nine forms, parallel to the eight directions and the centre as She protects the cosmic territory (cf. **Fig. 1**). The number 9 may also be compared with the number of planets in Hindu mythology, which directly influence the earthly happenings and human realm. The spatio-geometrical arrangement of the 9 Durgas is like the three layers of spire crossing at the cardinal points, each of which is taken care of by one of the forms of Durgas.

Pilgrims and devotees especially visit these nine forms of Durga during the nine nights (*navaratri*) of spring and autumn, sequentially one of the Durgas on each of the nine days. Each form is described in short.

5.1. **Shailaputri.** As the name identifies she is the daughter of the Himalaya Mountain. In her earlier incarnations she was the wife of Shiva who committed suicide in repentance to negligence of her husband. She rides a bull.

5.2. **Brahmcharini.** This form reflects her great devotion to *tapas* which is reflected as aura around her. Having rosary in one hand and sacred water pot in the other she symbolises the nature of meditative power and supreme bliss. This form is associated with the myth of Parvati, Shiva’s wife, who as virgin girl performed a great strenuous *tapas* to have Shiva as her husband. She is also known as Uma.

5.3. **Chandraghanta.** Having crescent shaped moon on the forehead her face radiates like gold. She has three eyes and ten hands. She shows the gesture of being ready for war. She wears bell-necklace whose sound creates fear among demons and sinners.

5.4. **Kushmanda.** Her name refers to ‘pumpkin’ that symbolises the cosmic egg in the cosmos and ten rays from her body radiate the world. She has eight hands and rides a lion. She is popularly perceived as the protector of the holy territory on the south as one of the fierce goddess guardians (Eck, 1982:165). The Durga at Durgakund is known as Kushmanda. This Durga is “particularly pleased with sacrificial offerings (*bali*), which, though not stated explicitly, are most likely construed as blood sacrifices (*mahabali*)” (Rodrigues, 1993:190). The term *bali* is used almost synonymously with blood sacrifice in the later puranas (cf. Kooij, 1972: 21,52-54). Still today during autumn festival of nine nights, on the early morning of eighth day a few cases of goat sacrifices are obvious. The sacrificial altar possesses the signs of goat sacrifice.

5.5. **Skandamata.** Being the mother of Skanda, the first son of Shiva, she is known as Skandamata. She represents the flame in the pyre having Skanda in her lap. She has three eyes and four hands, and also known as Bagishvari. Her face “consists of a compound of eight kinds of metal,

which is of a pale hue, and highly burnished. She wears on her head a large crown, surmounted with balls, like the coronets of the nobility” (Sherring, 1868: 90).

5.6. **Katyayini.** Pleased by the great *tapas* of sage Katyayana, who completed the final version of Panini’s book of grammar “*Asthadhyayi*”, the goddess was born as his daughter. That is how the name is Katyayini. In the Braj Mandala She is the patron deity whose stories are described in the mythologies of the region. She is portrayed as three eyed and eight armed.

5.7. **Kalaratri.** Having dark complexion, disheveled hairs and electric-like shining rosary, she rides a donkey. From her three eyes electric currents flow and by nasal breath come out flames of fire. She provides fearlessness to devotees and grants boon of ‘auspiciousness’ (*shubha*), that is how she is also known as “*Shubhankari*”. She is one of Durga’s energy manifestations (*shakti*) who served as messenger to tell the demon Durgama to desist, and finally she burned the demon’s attendants with her breath and finally prepared Durga for war (Rodrigues, 1993:191).

5.8. **Mahagauri.** She is described as an innocent girl of eight years and her garments, ornaments and complexion—all are white. She rides a bull and appears very quiet. When Gauri was in deep *tapas* her body got covered with dust and mud, later on cleaned by Shiva using holy water of the Ganga river. Afterward she became more fair and beautiful—Mahagauri. Mahagauri is recognised as the **Annapurna**; and She is Kashi’s queen, reigning alongside the king, Vishveshvara Shiva. She is also eulogised as Bhavani, the feminine energy of Lord Shiva (see Kkh, 61.123-38). The myth says that “ For happiness, there is no home like Kashi; there is no father like Vishveshvara; there is no mother like Bhavani, destroyer of rebirth; and there is no household like the people of Kashi, who are Vishnu’s incarnate!” (Eck, 1982: 160-161).

5.9. **Siddhidatri.** As giver (*datri*) of eight-fold mystical powers (*siddhi*) she is considered as the supreme. At one stage even Lord Shiva worshipped her and she granted him all the mystical powers. That is how half of Shiva’s body became female (androgynous), called *Ardhanarishvara*. Sages, gods, and noble souls always surround her—all worshipping her to get her kind blessing.

5.10. Durga Puja in Varanasi

During the period of *Ashvina Navaratri* (light-half 1-9), i.e. 28 September -- 6 October 2000, interviews of 250 pilgrims and devotees were conducted at Asi Ghat, Dashashvamedha Ghat and near to the Durga temple, Durgakund with a view to understanding their background and various characteristics. Out of 250 persons there were 162 males and 88 females. Among the castes Brahmins recorded 43%, followed by Kayastha (13%) and Rajput (10%); this trend clearly indicates dominance of higher castes. With respect to age, the group of 20-30 years recorded 47%, and 30-40 years 27% of respondents. It is notable that the autumn season is famous for many celebrations, especially installation of the Durga images and related festivities, therefore many young people from the nearby areas came to take part in the festival and also side-by-side recreation and entertainment. Around 54% of the respondents belonged to the countryside of the Varanasi district, and the rest came from the bordering district of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar (less than 100 km). For moving from one place to another in the city area, more than half of the people used bicycle *ricksaw*. A little over sixty per cent of devotees was schoolteacher, and fifteen per cent were engaged in their own small business. Almost all the devotees took holy dip in the Ganga River, and half of them recorded their earlier frequency of bath here around ten times; this clearly indicates the importance of the Ganga River. Eighty percent of people paid visit to and performed rituals at three goddess temples, viz. Durga, Annapurna and Kamaksha Devi. Concerning the merit received about sixty percent explain that it is a religious act one has to perform as rite of passage being a Hindu, and fifteen percent had explain their motive to purify themselves together with having blessings of the mother goddess.

About ten per cent respondents (mostly young) accepted that they came for recreation and entertainment and at secondary level they also took part in religious activities. The active participation of youngsters in Durga festival shows the tendency of using this festival as mark of identity. Many of the low caste people have also formed their committees and installed the Durga images (made of clay) as part of the celebration. This is a sign of using the traditions and symbols of higher castes as a means for upward mobility. With increasing impact of this tendency, now the people of higher castes and rich class are improving and making more decoration of their Durga-pavilions and also making the celebration more grand and bigger at the scale of show, money involved, decorations, stage performance, distribution of *prasada* (offered-food items to divinities).

6. Gauris (“White Goddess”)

One of the forms of the Great Goddess is Gauri, primarily the nine as also in Varanasi (Kkh, 100.68-72). After passage of the time seven other, viz. Vishvabhujā, Shantikari (LP in KKT, 45; Kkh, 67.17), Ambika (Kkh, 67.19-20), Parvati (Kkh, 33.128), Virupakshi (Kkh, 70.36), Vijaibhairavi and Trilokasundari (TS: 221, 225) Gauris and their shrines are added in the list reaching to sixteen (**Fig. 2**).

One of them, namely Vijayabhairavi, does not exist at present. Except the Shantikari, the rest of the Gauris exist within the Avimukta Kshetra. Like Matrikas and Durgas, primarily the number of Gauris too was eight, and later on an integrating power point is added, thus totalling to nine and represented as square. At two successive stages a triangle with three images and finally a covering circle with four images were superimposed. The three basic geometric designs in the arrangement of the Gauris may be interpreted as the three parts of the *cosmogram*. The basement of *square* (symbol of “water”) that denominates 9 points (planets); the covering *circle* (“light”) marking 4 points of cardinality; and the *triangle* (“wind”) symbolizing the 3 mythic realms. The total number reaches to 16. And, their integration (9 X 4 X 3) comes to 108 -- in itself a numerical cosmogram; this is comparable to the integrity of macrocosmos (9 planets), mesocosmos (4 directions), and microcosmos (3 qualities of human consciousness), (cf. Singh, 1994a: 189-190).

It is notable that these Gauris do not have any direct interrelationship among themselves except for being the forms of the Great Goddess. Mythology refers that Gauris possess mystic power to grant boon and bliss, especially for fulfilment of all kinds of wish and glorious life (Kkh, 100.72-73). Her pilgrimage is performed during the nine-day period of light-half (waxing, 1-9) of Chaitra (March-April). The initiation rite starts by installation of Gauris’ images made of clay and cow dung in the house at a very sacred place, and from the next day which marks the first day of the Hindus’ lunar calendar the worship and pilgrimage starts. By glancing every day at one of the forms in a sequence the worship is completed on the ninth day but the concluding ritual is performed on the tenth day marked by immersing all the ritual items, including the sacred pots, water, flower, incense, etc in the Ganga river. This day a great festival of Ramanaumi (“the 9th of Rama”) the birthday of Lord Rama is celebrated at pan-India level. Among the nine-day period, the eighth marks the zenith when Annapurna is worshipped; formerly this day was known for the worship of Bhavani.

Two of these Gauris, i.e. Bhavani and Vishalakshi are historically very popular. By the inference of mythology it is believed that as late as CE 1585, Bhavani was the prominent goddess of Varanasi, and in course of time her glory was captured by Annapurna (KR, 20.102), and in this process Bhavani emerged into Annapurna. *Annapurna* (“She of Plenteous Food”) is completely gracious and luminous goddess, the “Mother of the Three Worlds”. Today, she is revered as the cosmic mother in Kashi. She is also perceived as the basic spirit among all the forms of Durga (Kkh, 61.30); in the list of nine Durgas she represents Mahagauri. Being the consort of Vishvanatha, the patron deity of Kashi, she is the city’s governing goddess (Eck, 1982: 160-161). The great festivals associated with the goddess relate her with production of cereal grains (*anna*). Annakuta (the “Food Mountain”) festival falls on the first day of the waxing fortnight of autumn month of Karttika (October-November). During the second festival, celebrated in Margashirsha (November-December), Annapurna is decorated with green sprouts of paddy and the same is given as blessed-food (Eck, 1982: 163-164).

Vishalakshi (the “wide eyed” goddess), though counted among the Gauris in Varanasi, is the only goddess in the city being referred and thereafter counted in the list of 51 and 108 *Shakti Pithas* (“sacred spots of Goddess”). It is said that Sati’s eyes/ear ring had fallen here (Sircar, 1973: 27 and 36). Her mention in the Kkh at several places (Kkh, 70.13-14, 79.77, 100.70) is a clear indication of her significance.

7. Matrikas

The reference of Matrikas (“Mothers”) goes as early to the *Mahabharata* (13.215.16, 18), however the best known mythological account is found in the third episode of the DM (8.12-21) which refers to the story of killing the demon brothers Shumbha and Nishumbha. The DM refers only the Seven Matrikas. Along with Kali (also known as Chandika), Shivaduti (another form) and the Great Devi herself, the Matrikas killed the demons (Kinsley, 1986: 156). At the end demons’ spirit came to Kashi and worshipped Shiva while installing the *lingas*, later known by their names as Sumbheshvara and Nishumbhushvara. The malevolent nature of the Matrikas seems clear in several myths, and they

are perceived as a dangerous group of goddess (Kinsley, 1986: 159). They are always related to male deity of Hindu pantheon, and took form to serve as role supportive in maintaining the cosmic equilibrium and order. The *Varaha Purana*, VrP (17.33-37) relates the Matrikas to the symbol of human emotions: Brahmi is the symbol of pride, Maheshvari/Mahendri of anger, Kaumari of attachment, Vaishnavi of greed, Varahi of envy, Aindri of jealousy, Chamunda of depravity, and Yogishvari/Narasimhi of lust (cf. Bhattacharyya, 1974: 102). These Matrikas are also described as the feminine deities together with their male partners controlling the eight directions, sequentially from right to left, i.e. from the east to north. In the Yogini Yantra, they are represented as the controller of the eight directions (cf. AgP, 146).

The earlier number seven of Matrikas was a symbol of seven naked eyes seen planets. This number in course of time reached to nine, also denoting the common cosmo-vision of eight directions of the cosmic circumference and additionally the centre; this is also comparable to the nine planets in Hindu mythology. After passage of time the number nine reached to twelve, making parallel to 12 zodiacs, or months as in case of Varanasi. In the later case some of the important goddesses of other group are given the status of Matrikas. Among the twelve, Raudri is disappeared. The rest are worshipped in association with other pilgrimages and groups.

The Matrikas are said to protect their devotees against all difficulties and fulfil their wishes with motherly affection (cf. Kkh, 97. 45-46). The Kkh (83.33) eulogises their glories. Some of the Matrikas, e.g. Narasimhi is described separately (Kkh, 70.31). Vikata is also identified as Katyayini, Pancamudra (Kkh, 83.37-38; 97. 40-41), and Sankatha Devi (cf. Sukul, 1977:96-97). Sankatha (the “Goddess of Dangers”) vanquishes dangers for her devotees. She is worshipped on Fridays (Eck, 1982:168-170). Worship of Sankatha is very popular among women devotees. She is said to fulfil all wishes of the devotees and provides security in the difficult moments in life.

8. Ten Chandis

The “fierce, passionate” derivative of the Great Goddess Durga is called Chandi. She is eulogised in three ways: (a) as the daughter of Himalaya, (b) as the wife of Shiva, and (c) horrific form of Durga (Coburn, 1988: 96). Of course, Chandi is called as *Chandika* in the group of Matrikas, She is also mentioned as an independent goddess who like others took ten forms to control the eight directions and also the upward and the downward. That is how she is described in ten forms.

In the *Linga Purana* the ten Chandis are mentioned, while in other texts there appear some variation of names and their association with place and direction (cf. Sukul, 1977:84-85). Among the ten, Uttareshvari and Adhahkeshi are now disappeared. Moreover, one of them has got her name changed like Shikhichandi is known as Shikhikanthih. This Yatra is to be performed in the same period of time like the Durgas.

9. Kshetra Devis Yatra

The Kkh (70.10-97) describes the list of Kshetra Devis that includes all Durgas, Gauris (of course, sometimes-variant names), and many other goddesses of Kashi in addition to Chandis who in different contexts and from different directions and different places protect the territory of Kashi. Kshetra Devis, in fact, represent the combination of all the goddesses, thus the total number reached to 41 (Table 1; **Fig. 3**). By this combination the numerical symbolism of the inner portion of Sri Yantra is represented; of course the total number of triangles in the inner part of Sri Yantra comes to 45, based on the crossing and super- imposition of nine triangles. Their pilgrimage is prescribed to be performed on each of the ninth or eighth day of waxing or waning of the lunar month. However this pilgrimage is not undertaken these days, and most of the goddesses of this group are worshipped together with other goddesses.

Table 1. **Varanasi : The Kshetra Devis**

No.	Name	Meaning	Location in Varanasi
1	Vishalakshi	Wide-eyed G.	Mir Ghat, near Dharmakup, D 3 / 85
2	Lalita Gauri	The Amorous G.	Lalita Ghat, in Madhi, D 1 / 67
3	Vishvabhuj	World's covering hands	Vishvabahuka, Dharmakup, D 2 / 15
4	Varahi	Boar-Form Vishnu's Power	Man Mandira, Tripurabhairavi, D 16/ 84
5	Shivaduti	Shiva's messenger	Panchagni Akhada, Prahlad Gt, A 11/ 30

6	Aindri	Indra's Power G.	(attached to Svarlineshvara temple) Near Manikarnika Ghat, c. CK 9 / 2
7	Kaumari	Skanda's Power	Kashmirimal, Kalashkup, CK 7 / 102
8	Maheshvari	Shiva's power	In the court of Vishvanatha, CK 35 / 19
9	Vrisayanavati	Amorous Desire G.	# Lost
10	Narasimhi	Man-lion Vishnu's G.	Manikarnika Gali, Sureka BI, CK 33 / 43
11	Brahmi	Brahma's Power	Brahmeshvara, Khalispura, D 33 / 66
12	Narayani	Vishnu's Power	Gauri Shankar T., Lal Ghat, K 4 / 24
13	Virupakshi	Virupaksha's G.	Vishvanatha T. compound, CK 35 / 19
14	Shaileshvari	Mountain's Daughter	Madhia Ghat at Varana's bank, A 40/ 11
15	Chitraghanta	Wonderfull bells	Lakhi Chabutara, CK 23 / 34
16	Chitragriva	Wonderfull neck	Near Kshemeshvara Ghat, B 14 / 118
17	Bhadrakali	Noble Black G.	# Lost (Madhyameshvara: K53/63)
18	Harasiddhi	Shiva's Power	Back of Siddhi V, Manikarnika, CK 9 / 9
19	Vidhidevi	Law Maintainer	Vindhyavasini c. Sankatha T., CK 2 / 33
20	Nigadabhanji	Remover of iron-chain	Dashashvamedha, D 17 / 100 (Bandi Devi)
21	Ghantankara	bell-sound maker	Shulatankeshvara, D 17 / 111
22	Amriteshvari	Nector giver G.	Amriteshvara, Nilakantha, CK 33 / 28
23	Siddhalakshmi	Perfected G.of wealth	Jagadhatri, E of Siddha Vin., CK 8 / 1
24	Kubja	Hump-backed G.	Prapitamaheshvara, CK 7 / 92
25	Trilokyasundari	Most Beautiful G.	Pitamaheshvara, Sitala, CK 60 / 92
26	Dipta/Diptashakya	Radiant One	Near Sambaditya, Suraj Kund, D 51 / 90
27	Mahalakshmi	The Great G.of wealth	Lakshmikund Temple, D 52 / 40
28	Hayakanthi	Horse-headed G.	Kalimath, Lakshmi Kunda, backside
29	Kaurmishakti	Tortoise-Form Vishnu's Power	Bhishmacandi, Pashpani-II, Sadarbazar
30	Shikhicandi	Tall-hair G.	Mahalakshmi T. , backside, D 52 / 40
31	Bhimacandi	The Strongest Candi	On Panchakroshi route, Bhimacandi
32	Chhagavakreshvari	She-goat face G.	S wall of Vrishabhadraja, Kapildhara
33	Talajangheshvari	Full-buttocks G.	# Lost
34	Vikatanana	Toughest One	Scindhia Gt, Atmaviresvara, CK 7 / 158
35	Yamadranstra	Destroyer of Yama's curse	# Lost
36	Shuskodari	Dry-belly G.	Vridhikal, Daranagar, K 46 / 23
37	Charmamunda	Leather-headed G.	Lolarka Kund, Munnar PandaH, B 2 / 62
38	Maharunda	Multilated G.	Lolarka Kund, Munnar PandaH, B 2 / 62
39	Chamunda	Killer of Canda & Munda	Near Lolarka Kund
40	Svapaneshvari	G. of Good Dreams	Hanuman Temple, Shivala, B 3 / 150
41	Durga	Inaccessible One	Durga Kund, B 27 / 1

(Source : Kkh, 70.10-97. G, Goddess. Out of 41, four are lost : No. 9, 17, 33, and 35; see Fig. 3)

The Kkh (70) describes the spatial and divine characteristics of the Kshetra Devis. Vishalakshi is described adjacent to Vishala Kund ('water pool') which was once connected to the Ganga River. However, at present this water pool does not exist. This sacred place is eulogised as *Mahapitha* ("the great seat") which possesses the strong power to liberate the soul from transmigration (Kkh, 70.16). The myth that her worship help to get conception, attracts a large mass of newly married ladies (Kkh, 70.15). The other prominent Kshetra Devi has been Maha Lakshmi, located in the neighbourhood named after her, i.e. Lakshmi Kund. In the month of Ashvina (September-October), light fortnight is especially prescribed auspicious for goddess worship.

10. Dasha Mahavidyas

The Mahavidyas (the goddesses of "Great Knowledge") are rather late addition to the list of goddesses, around the turn of 14th century C.E. They are accepted as "all one", and "every one of them is strongly associated with Durga in her role as demon slayer" (Kinsley, 1997: 5). According to the

VmP (30.3-9) the Great Goddess produced goddesses from different parts of her body. Says the DM (11.38-50) that She “often announces to her petitioners that she assumes different forms at different times in order to maintain cosmic stability” (Kinsley, 1986: 161). Yet the general people as a group least know them. And, some of them, like Kali, Tara and Kamala are well recognised, probably due to their unique appearance and independently glorified mythologies. Kali and Tara are also counted as prominent divinities in the list of Yoginis. They are very closely associated with Shiva according to their origin myths. Therefore, it is no wonder to find shrines of all of them, except Matangi in the city of Shiva, Kashi. However, there is little textual reference to a few of them, and most of them are worshipped locally and there is no reference to an organised and patterned pilgrimage to Dasha Mahavidyas. In span of time three other goddesses are re-counted under the Mahavidyas, viz. Rajarajeshvari, Lalita and Jvalamukhi, thus the total number reached to thirteen. Many of them are described in the list of Kshetra Devis (cf. Kkh, 70) and the Maha Shaktis (cf. Kkh, 72). According to the environmental conditions and the basic qualities the festive days and worship time to the Mahavidyas are prescribed. The annual dates are particularly used for celebrations and special decorations (*shringara*) and musical performances.

10.1. **Kali.** Among the Mahavidyas, Kali’s position is prominent. Usually she is considered as the first in most of the lists. The complexion of Kali is black. She stands on (a) corpse. Her appearance is frightening and she is depicted as laughing. She has four arms. She holds a cleaver in one hand, a severed head in another, making the sing of *abhaya* (‘fearlessness’) by another, and the fourth one is in the gesture of granting boon(s). She is naked except the girdle of severed hands. The cremation ground or the battlefield is her abode. Her hair is disheveled. In her appearance as standing on the corpse, in the Tantric version the corpse is identified as Shiva who in deep trance had stopped the rhythm of the body looking like a dead. There are two such images of Kali, known as ‘Shava-Shiva Kali’; the image in Devanathpura shows a corpse on the platform of five heads on which Shiva laid down and Kali is sitting on his body. There are images of jackal and lion on either side of the platform. Another Shava-Shiva Kali image is close to the Prahalad Ghat, where Kali is in standing pose. Similar image is also observed in the Manikarnika lane, close to the cremation ghat.

10.2. **Tara.** Generally Tara is depicted similar in appearance to Kali. Her complexion is black, she is pot-bellied, wears tiger skin, and has four arms. She holds a chopper, a severed head, a scissors, and makes the sing of granting boon(s) with the fourth. Her left foot is on a corpse (sometimes on Shiva). She is often depicted standing amidst cremation fire. There are four images of Tara in Varanasi city, viz. (i) Bengali Tola, built by Rani Bhavani in ca. 1776, (ii) close to stairways to Lalita Ghat, in the turret (*marhi*),; (iii) close to the gate of Kalika, in Kalika Gali,; and (iv) Brahmanal, built by queen Padmavati in 1855.

10.3. **Shodashi.** Also known as Tripurasundari, she is a sixteen years old young and beautiful girl. Her appearance is like youthful sun. She has three eyes and four arms. She holds a noose, goad, bow, and arrows.

10.4. **Bhuvaneshvari.** She said to be worshipped by the whole world, is bright complexioned. She wears moon as crown. Her breasts are large. She smiles pleasantly and has three eyes. She is four armed and holds a goad, noose, by the third one grants wish(es), and makes the sign of assurance by the fourth.

10.5. **Chinnamasta.** She is shown standing in aggressive posture with one leg put forward. She holds cleaver in one hand and her own severed head in the other. She is naked and drinks the blood gushing (through the middle stream) from her headless body. She is standing (or sitting) on copulating pair of Rati (‘goddess of sexual desire’) and Kama (‘god of sexual desire’). To her right is Varnini, possessed by the quality of *rajasa* (passion), who holds a sword and a skull-cup. She happily drinks blood gushing from the Devi’s severed neck. Dakini, who is on the left side, also drinks blood of the Devi’s headless body. Possesses by the quality of *tamas* (ignorance), she enjoys dissolution of the world.

10.6. **Bhairavi.** Her complexion is like the glow of thousands of rising suns. She wears a garland of skulls and covers her body with skin of demons she has killed. Her feet and breasts are blood smeared. She is four armed and holds a rosary, a book, makes the sign of fearlessness, and granting boon(s). She is three-eyed and sits on a lotus. The crown, she wears, is gem studded and beautified by crescent shape moon. Her smile is pleasant and superb.

10.7. **Dhumavati.** She is tall with stern and unsmiling face. Her complexion is pale and hairs dishevelled. She wears dirty clothes. She is the unique widow. Her carrier is a chariot with an emblematic crow printed flag attached to that. She has long pendulous breasts, a few tooth, and lifeless

eyes. She holds a winnowing basket in one hand and makes the sign of fearlessness, by the other. Her nose is large and crooked.

10.8. **Valga / Bagalamukhi.** She is sitting on a jewel studded golden throne in the ocean of nectar. Her complexion is bright golden and she wears yellow clothes. She holds a club in right hand with which she is about to beat an enemy. She is pulling tongue of him with left hand.

10.9. **Matangi.** She is dark complexioned and has three lotus like eyes. The moon adorns her forehead. She is seated on a jewelled throne. She is clothed in beautiful garments and a garland of flowers is around her neck. She holds a sword, goad, noose and club in her four hands.

10.10. **Kamala.** Her complexion is golden. She is sitting on a lotus in an area surrounded by snow-clad mountains. She is flanked by elephants, usually either two or four, who pour water on her. She is four armed and holds a lotus and a disc in two hands, makes sign of boon granting, and by the fourth hand assures fearlessness.

11. Independent Goddesses

There are many images and shrines of the goddesses, which are not grouped under a particular form, however many of them are already given seat or traditionally accepted as part of the different pilgrimages and their routes. The Cosmic territory, and the holy city, both are perceived as goddesses. The images are quite similar to each other, like other secondary goddesses, however at the neighbourhood level special celebrations are held every year. **Kashi** and **Varanasi** Devis are eulogised in the Kkh (97.8-9). According to Sukul (1977: 98) ‘perhaps these images are of the same deity installed at three locations, due to some threat perception’, or to reflect their local area as unique and representative of the whole territory. This process of manifestation has been very common in the medieval period.

Shitala is known as who wields influence over fever diseases, both causing and curing them, especially smallpox. She is considered as terrible, however gracious and popularly called *Mata* (“Mother”). She is considered to be the representative of the village tradition of goddess, who after passage of time accepted in the written tradition. Shitala is the standard name for the smallpox goddess worshipped throughout India under variety of names, e.g. Mahamai and Mata in north India, and Mariyamman and Amma in south India (Bakker, 1983: 12). Her shrines are often located at crossroads, present or former cremation grounds, or beside a *nima* (margosa, *Azadirachta indica A.Juss*) tree. Her vehicle is donkey. The most prominent Shitala temple is at the Dashashvamedha Ghat, after whom a portion of the Ghat is called as Shitala Ghat. There is also another shrine of Shitala near the Gaia Ghat, down stream; here too the nearby ghat is called Shitala Ghat. In fact, originally this was the shrine of the “Snake Goddess”, Nageshvari Devi, who in passage of time named Shitala (see Eck, 1982: 231). The 9th day of the waning fortnight (dark-half) is the popular day for her worship, of course people visit her on daily together with other deities.

Sankatha Devi, means “Goddess of dangers”, is perceived by the city dwellers and devotees as the one who vanquishes dangers for her devotees. In the *puranic* stories (e.g. Kkh, 83.33) she is described as one of the Matrikas who, together with nine heavenly mother-goddesses, is said to have been the foster mother of a young prince of Kashi; she was born under an unlucky star and left to their care (cf. Kkh, 10.100-101; 83.26). It is believed that this goddess has no husband. Friday is the most commonly accepted day for her worship (cf. Eck, 1982: 169-170). The shrine of Sankatha Devi lies in the compound of temple of Siddheshvari, to which is attached an ancient well known as Chandra Kupa (‘well of the moon’). On the day of full moon in Chaitra (March-April), a large mass of devout Hindus pays visit to this shrine.

According to the *puranic* story that after killing the demon the Great Goddess took rest and settled on the hill of the Vindhya, that is how the name she was given of **Vindhyavasini** (“Dweller of the Vindhya Mountains”). Her original shrine is at the right bank of the Ganga river in the adjacent district of Mirzapur, about 83 km southeast of Varanasi. In the process of spatial manifestation her image has been installed at six places in Varanasi. Some scholars may prefer to call her a regional goddess (cf. Kinsley, 1987:99). However, she is already included in the *puranic* list of 108 main goddesses and the whole territory of Vindhyachal together with two other forms of goddesses, viz. Kali and Astabhujā is an example of a complex network of landscape cosmogram (cf. Singh, 1997). The earlier form of goddess, named Kalaratri who had killed the demon Durg and got entitled as “Durga”, after killing demon’s army visited Vindhyavasini and informed her about the misdeeds and sins committed by the demon (Kkh, 71.61). This myth refers that Vindhyavasini was one of the elder forms of the Goddess. The 3rd day of the waning fortnight (dark-half) of Bhadrpada (August-

September) is assumed to be the birthday of her, therefore on those day special annual celebrations and musical performances take place at the shrine.

12. Spatiality, Complexity and Self-Organised System

The spatial patterning of goddess shrines follows a system of complexity converging into a geometrical order of self-organised structure, known as *fractal* (see Bak, 1996: 19). This is an example of the endless inclusion of patterns within patterns, replete with self-similar structures. No matter how much its tiniest element is magnified it still contains the essence of the entire universe. The mythologies support this characteristic by glorifying each form of goddess as specific, general and finally universal, an archetype. The psycho-spiritual design, cosmogram, of each group of the goddesses have the dual characteristics of distinctiveness and analogous.

By plotting all the 96 goddess-sites on a map (**Fig. 4**), the idea of opposite poles and corresponding opposite forces becomes obvious. The spot near Annapurna Devi is the epicentre of spirituo-magnetic force from where the power get diffused towards outside. This is an interplay between the *exteriorisation* (diffusion), and *interiorisation* (contraction), by which the system of self-similarity and scale invariance is maintained. With respect to four sacred territories (*kshetras*), the distribution of 96 goddess-sites (cf. Table 2) shows a tendency of decline from the inner to outer, while in terms of mean radius of circuit the distances increase. The frequency of shrines by the grouping of distances in descending order shows a unique tendency, which on double logarithmic graph shows a straight line.

This type of distribution tendency is called “*power law*”, since this shows that some quantity, or number of objects or events (N) can be expressed with respect to proportion to size, or some power of another quantity (s) raised to a negative power (α), $N = s^{-\alpha}$ (see Bak, 1996 : 27). In such situation, like in fractals, there are many more structures than large ones. The diffusion ratio decreases from inner to outer and its reciprocity shows correspondingly the increase of distortion (see Table 2). Taking diffusion ratio as representative of intensity of power, one can easily predict that from core to periphery the power decreases, and on the other side the total power emerges into the nucleus.

Table 2. Kashi / Varanasi: Nature of distribution of Goddess shrines

<i>Sacred Territory, Kshetra (inner to outer)</i>	<i>Mean radius of circuit from centre, km *</i>	<i>No. of Goddess shrines</i>	<i>Diffusion ratio: from in to out (2/ 44 base)</i>	<i>Reciprocity of power diffusion</i>	<i>Power ratio of radius (1/ 1.27 base)</i>	<i>Inter-circuit Power ratio increase, times</i>
	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Antargriha	1.27	44	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
2. Avimukta	1.97	28	0.64	1.56	1.55	1.55
3. Nagara Pradakshina	3.95	17	0.38	2.63	3.11	2.00
4. Pancakroshi	14.08	7	0.16	6.25	11.07	3.56
5. Chaurashikroshi	17.60	96	2.18	0.46	13.85	1.25

(Source : the distributional maps; * refers to Route length/ 2π . See Fig. 3)

These patterning are in close correspondence with the self-organising system. A change in scale does not change the significance of efficacy of the movement of pilgrims. Each route and each of the routes is valuable and meaningful for the pilgrim, each providing different benefit, of course also having some generality. The shrines are neither regularly spaces, nor randomly scattered, but their sequential placement may obey a fundamental organisation that is deep, hidden, and yet natural. These sacred places “reveal themselves”, and because of special features within a complex of landscape, tradition and belief, a site may become an “inexhaustible source of power and sacredness” any may operate according to “laws of its own dialectic” (cf. Malville and Singh, 1997 : 18). Eliade (1958 : 369) suggests that if the choice of sacred places were left entirely to intentional human design there could be no explanation for their permanence and continuity.

13. Epilogue

Goddess is accepted as omnipresent and omniscient in the sacredscape of Varanasi. The city-dwellers believe that “without the power and energy of Shakti, Shiva, is a *shava*, a corpse. It is She who embodies the vibrancy of both life and death” (Eck, 1982: 174). Shiva and Shakti, both are represented independently into 324 forms (i.e. = 108 X 3) whose integration maintains the rhythm of cosmic cycle in the universe. Processes of getting in close contact with the divine spirit, spatial manifestations, acceptance and recognition of folk tradition by the Great tradition, and symbolic expression of identity, respectability of the feminine divine, etc. have shaped the human quest to establish goddess-images in various forms and at different places. Local mythologies (*sthalapuranas*) are superimposed to justify the historicity and religious merit, and after passage of time it finally became part of the contemporary tradition. Further, in the chain of ‘existence-maintenance-continuity’ the goddess-worship is flourishing.

The spatial patterning of goddess shrines can be explained in the context of fractal, and self-organised system in which the complexity of disequilibrium itself forms an order and finally results to equilibrium. This system is always re-created and rejuvenated by the ritual processes and the sacred performances by the devotees, of course the earlier system always exists and serves as base and pre-condition. The remark by Cambel (1993: 4) that “ Complex systems are dynamic and not in equilibrium; they are like a journey, not a destination, and they may pursue a moving target” closely fits to this complex system of the goddesses in Varanasi.

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Figures/ Maps:

1. Varanasi : The Durgas
2. Varanasi : The Gauris
3. Varanasi : The Kshetra Devis
4. Varanasi : The Goddess shrines and temples.