Chapter 5

The Assimilation of Mahiṣāsuramardinī to Vindhyavāsinī and the Rise of ‘the Warrior Goddess’

5.1 Vindhyavāsinī’s Slaying of the Demon Mahiṣa in the Skandapurāṇa

The study of the Vindhyavāsinī myth in the Kauśikī cycle of the Skandapurāṇa in comparison with that in the Harivaṃśa, in the previous chapter, suggested that Vindhyavāsinī was in the middle of her evolution into a supra-regional warrior goddess around the time of the composition of the Skandapurāṇa. In order to clarify the process of this evolution further, the role of another demon-slaying goddess in the process, namely Mahiṣāsuramardinī, ‘the goddess who slays the buffalo demon’, must also be discussed. Mahiṣāsuramardinī was probably the most popular demon-slaying goddess in the period dealt with in the present study. Her popularity since the Kuśāṇa period, at least in North India, is well attested by a number of images that represent a goddess killing a buffalo. On the other hand, textual sources for this myth are not known before the sixth century. Of the four earliest such documents ascribed to between the sixth to the middle of the eighth centuries, it is only in the Skandapurāṇa that this myth is narrated in a coherent sequence.\(^1\) This chapter will first study this episode.

\(^1\) The other three are an introductory verse of benediction in an inscription of Anantavarman of the Maukharis, engraved in a cave in the Nāgārjuni Hill in Bihar and ascribed to the sixth century; Bānabhaṭṭa’s Caṇḍiṣatka composed in the first half of the seventh century; Vākapatirāja’s Gaṇḍavahio composed in the second quarter of the eighth century. All of them will be discussed later in this chapter. In the Mahābhārata, there are two eulogies dedicated to Durgā that are often counted among the early references to the
in the Kauśīkī cycle of the Skandapurāṇa, and then examine the archaeological evidence of Mahiśāsurasūrya images related to the iconographical description in the episode in detail. Lastly, after studying the other three textual sources, how and when the two demon-slaying goddesses, Vindhya-vāsini and Mahiśāsurasūrya, were assimilated and created ‘the Warrior Goddess’ will be investigated, drawing the textual sources and archaeological evidence together.

Kauśīkī-Vindhyāvāsini’s slaying of the demon Mahiśa is related briefly in SP 68.10–23 at the end of Layer B, after the entire cycle of her slaying of the demon brothers Sumbha and Nisumbha and her ensuing consecration. This supplementary location of the episode, as well as its brevity, indicates that the slaying of Mahiśa was not an original constituent of the Vindhya-vāsini myth, but incorporated into it from a different source. The story runs as follows:

Some time later, the sage Saradvat Gautama invited Devī (i.e. Kauśīkī) to his sacrifice at Svarṇākṣa. She set out to attend the sacrifice. On her way [back], the demon Mahiśa, the son of Sumbha, awaited her, seeking revenge. Aware of him, Vindhya-vāsini also hastened to the place where he awaited her. When the demon saw her, he attacked her fiercely, flinging himself upon her and striking her bosom with his hard horn. After withstanding his blow, she seized his horn with her hand, whirled him aloft and hurled him down onto the earth. Lifting up his tail and putting her foot on his head, she pierced his back with a trident and robbed him of his life. Then, Kauśīkī went back to her mountain abode (i.e. Mt. Vindhyā).

In this episode, Kauśīkī fought a duel with Mahiśa, resorting to her physical strength. This is partly due to the fact that the demon Mahiśa
is depicted as theriomorphic throughout the story, which is evident from his appearance described in SP 68.12: ‘he was thickset and had a broad breast, a stout neck, a fine tail, curved horns, and broad hoofs, his head being large and erect’. It is also said in 68.18ab, when he attacked Kauśikī, that ‘his tail was erect, his horns were sharply pointed, his breast swelled, and his ears were stiff and pointed’. Kauśikī is described as wrestling with this theriomorphic demon Mahiṣa, ‘the Buffalo’, until the last lethal blow. Then, she thrust a trident (trīśūla) into him for the first time, which caused Mahiṣa’s death. This manner of her fight with Mahiṣa is in stark contrast to her chariot fight with Sumbha and Nisumbha, which also indicates an independent origin of this episode from the Vindhyavāsini myth proper. It is true that there is an attempt to connect this episode with the Vindhyavāsini myth by describing Mahiṣa as Sumbha’s son (68.12b), but this statement sounds very abrupt since there is no allusion in the Vindhyavāsini myth proper foreshadowing it. To sum up, in the Kauśikī cycle, although Mahiṣa-suramardini is assimilated to Kauśikī-Vindhyavāsini in that the slaying of the demon Mahiṣa is attributed to her, these two goddesses have not entirely been integrated into one and the same goddess.

Concerning the site where the battle between Kauśikī and Mahiṣa is supposed to have been fought in this episode, it is not explicitly stated in the text whether Mahiṣa awaited her on her way to or from Svarṇākṣa. However, based on the statement in 68.23d that she went back to ‘the mountain (i.e. Vindhya mountain), her own abode’ after killing Mahiṣa, it would be appropriate to suppose that she fought the duel with Mahiṣa on her way back from Svarṇākṣa to the Vindhya mountains. Svarṇākṣa is said in SP 68.10c–f to be the place ‘where Viṣṇu, after propitiating the god Śaṅkara, had obtained various boons, [such as] the discus named Sudarṣana, which was like the god of death to [his] enemies’. This verse is very similar to MBh 3.82.16cd–17ab, which mentions the place ‘where in former times Viṣṇu worshipped Rudra in order to gain [his] grace and obtained a large number of boons difficult to obtain even among the deities’. The place is said to be Suvarṇākṣa in MBh 3.82.16a, an orthographical variant of Svarṇākṣa.3 The passage in the Mahābhārata is found in the section dealing with pilgrimages to various sacred places and Suvarṇākṣa is mentioned in the following sequence on its route: Sarasvatī, Śākambhari, Suvarṇākṣa, Dhumavati, Dharā, Gaṅgādvāra, Kanakhala. Among the places Gaṅgādvāra is identified with is present day Hardwar and, concerning Śākambhari, Dey says that ‘the celebrated temple of Śākambhari is situated in Kumaun on the road from

---

3MBh 3.82.16–17ab:

\begin{align*}
& \text{tato gacchet suvarṇākṣam trīṣu lokesu viśrutam |} \\
& \text{yatra viṣṇuh prasādārtham rudram ārādhayat purī \parallel 16 \parallel} \\
& \text{varūṃś ca subahāṃl lehe daivateśu sudurlabhām.} \\
\end{align*}

Suvarṇākṣa as an orthographical variant of Svarṇākṣa is also used in the SP 167.180a (SP Bh 167.195a) in the list of Śiva’s sacred places.
Hardwar to Kedārnāth' (1927, s.v. Śākambhārī). Therefore, it is possible to locate Suvarṇākṣa or Svarṇākṣa in the region around Hardwar. Other passages in the Skanda-purāṇa also support this location. In SP 9.23–29, which relates the origin of Svarṇākṣa as a sacred place of Śiva in the Maināka mountains, the place is also called Svarṇaśrīṅga (9.23b). This place is located in SP Bh 32.27 in the vicinity of Gaṅgādvāra under the name Suvarṇaśrīṅga, an orthographical variant of Svarṇaśrīṅga. Therefore, the battlefield in SP 68.10–23 may be considered to have been somewhere between this Svarṇākṣa near Hardwar and the Vindhya mountain range.

As mentioned earlier, Mahiša is also referred to as Sumbha’s son (SP 68.12b) in this episode. In the Kauśikī cycle, the demon brothers Sumbha and Nisumbha are said to have been born in the Vindhya mountains as sons of Sunda and Nisunda (SP 62.50–52) and nurtured by Mt. Vindhyā and his wife (SP 62.53). After conquering the gods, they returned to the Vindhya mountains, settled there, and had a battle with and were killed by Kauśikī-Vindhyavāsini there. This suggests that Mahiša, Sumbha’s son, was also considered to live in the Vindhya mountains in the Kauśikī cycle. Therefore, it is likely that the battle between Kauśikī and Mahiša was implicitly located somewhere in the Vindhya mountains, where both antagonists were considered to live. Kauśikī’s visit to Svarṇākṣa may have been a narrative means of realizing their single combat outside Kauśikī’s abode without describing a lengthy battle scene between Mahiša and Kauśikī’s retainers.

Let us now examine the relationship between the iconographical information contained in the episode and archaeological evidence of the Mahiśā-suramardini images. The images that appear in North and Central India since the Kuśāna period can be roughly categorized into three types: the Kuśāna type, the Gupta type, and the Mediaeval type, according to the period in which each of them emerged. Preceding types were not completely

---

\[4^{\text{SP Bh}} 32.27-28ab: \]
\[
\text{vrksah kanakhalayatra gaṅgādvārasamāpagaḥ |}
\text{suvarṇaśrīṅga'ca girir merapavatasaṁbhah ||}
\text{tasmin pradesye daksasya yajño 'yam abhava tadā].}
\]

The reading "khalā yatra" for Bhaṭṭarāi’s "khale yās tu (the reading of the Nepalese MSS) in 27a is conjectured by Bisschop and the present author, based on the same phrase in SP Bh 74.2c, in which S1 and S2 read "khalā yatra". In 28b, Bhaṭṭarāi’s 'sāv derived from A is corrected to 'yam, following S2 and S3. For the location of Svarṇaśrīṅga in 9.23b, see also n. 50 of Synopsis, SP I, for the location of Gaṅgādvāra and Kanakhalā, see Bisschop 2004b, 178–180.

\[5^{\text{Von Stietencron’s paper (1983) is valuable in offering us a clear idea of historical developments. The most exhaustive contribution is Seshadri’s (1963), including many photos. For studies dealing with the historical developments in the Kuśāna and the early Gupta images, see von Mitterwallner 1976; HärTEL 1992; Srinivasan 1997, 282–304 (Chapter Twenty). The iconic types of the images which are scattered from the Deccan to South India (see Kalidos 1989 and Tartakov & Dehejia 1984–85) are not considered in the following discussion because the Skanda-purāṇa was almost certainly composed in North India (see 1.3).}}\]

replaced by succeeding ones, but continued to be produced alongside them; nevertheless, the popularity of each type shifted from an older one to a newer one when a new type emerged, though there are regional differences depending on the manner of dissemination of new types. The characteristics of each type are summarized as follows:

1. Kusāṇa type: the goddess lifts the buffalo up with one of her left hands, either headlocking him or pulling out his tongue. One of her right hands presses his back. She holds several weapons in some of her other hands, but in many images of the Kusāṇa period she does not use any of them on the buffalo. She sometimes holds a wreath above her head with a pair of her hands and/or the sun and the moon with another pair. The number of her arms varies from four to six to eight. The appearance of a lion or lions is rare in the Kusāṇa period, but becomes more frequent from the late Kusāṇa onwards. Production of images of this type was centred on Mathurā.

A group of images that may be regarded as a hybrid type of the Kusāṇa and the following Gupta types began to be produced in the sixth century. Early images ascribed to the sixth to the seventh centuries are found in Ellora, Elephanta, Aihole and Alampur. In these images, the goddess grasps the buffalo’s snout with one of her hands, plants her foot or knee on his body and thrusts the trident into it. Later examples that may be classified into this type are scattered in Rajasthan, Chamba, and Afghanistan.

2. Gupta type: the goddess lifts up either the buffalo’s hind leg or his tail with her front left hand and has her right foot on his head. Generally, the trident wielded by her front right hand pierces either his back or his neck/head. She is usually four-armed, but the two-armed type is also found in some regions. A lion is absent except for some specimens later than the eighth century. One of the earliest specimens is the

---

6Von Stietencron 1983, 128–130 (Type 1), Abb.1–4; Seshadri 1963, Type 1 a, pls. 2, 3, 8; von Mitterwallner 1976, figs.1–5, 9; Srinivasan 1997, 287–290 (Type 2), Pl. 20.2–6, 9, 11–20; Viennot 1956; Agrawala 1958; Härtle 1973, 11, 14, Figs. 12, 15; 1992; 1993, 122f, 131–134, 245, 250; Harle 1970; 1971–72. Of these Srinivasan’s study is the latest and most comprehensive. See also p. 115 in 4.3.2.


8Diserens seems to propose a distinct group for the images of this type (1986, 465, n.18 for references). Von Stietencron, on the other hand, includes this group in his Type 1 (1983, 128f, Abb.5–6). Seshadri 1963, Type 1 d & e, pls.10A, 11B, 12; von Mitterwallner 1976, figs. 11–14 (examples from Goa); Diserens 1986, Plate 1 (Chamba). It is uncertain whether the Mahiṣaśuramardini fragment from Afghanistan, called ‘Scorretti Marble’ (Schlumberger 1955, Plate 1), belongs to this group or represents a variant of the Kusāṇa type.

9Von Stietencron 1983, 130f (Type 2), Abb.8–13; von Mitterwallner 1976, figs.6–8; Seshadri 1963, Type 1 b & c, plates 4–7A, 9, 10B, 11A; Viennot 1971–72; Barrett 1975; Yokochi 1999b; forthec.
relief on the facade of Cave 6 at Udayagiri, dated to c. AD 400, and another is a fragmentary statue found in Nagardhan, ascribed to the first half of the fifth century. This type was popular during the fifth to the eighth centuries and spread in North India, the Deccan, Orissa, Gujarat, and the western coast.

3. Mediaeval type:10 the buffalo’s head is cut off and the anthropomorphic demon emerges from the headless trunk. The goddess thrusts a weapon, usually a sword or trident, into either the anthropomorphic demon or the buffalo’s body. A lion often joins the battle, attacking the buffalo. The number of the goddess’s arms is generally more than eight. The earliest specimens are a small relief of Cave 15 at Ellora, ascribed to the first half of the eighth century,11 and a fine sculpture in the State Museum, Bhopal, from Ávará, Mandasaur District, MP, ascribed to the eighth century.12 Fragments of a big statue of this type, assigned to the eighth century by Taddei, have been found in Vihāra 23 of a Buddhist sanctuary in Tapa Sardar, Afghanistan.13 After the eighth century, this type became the most popular all over India down to the present day, and there is therefore much variety within it. Unlike the earlier two types, this type found its way in the iconographical prescriptions in the Puranic literature, of which the earliest is probably MtP 260.55cd–66ab.

In order to compare the iconographical information in the episode to these iconic types, the climactic scene of Mahiṣa’s death is the most crucial because it is that scene that these iconic types represent in distinct ways. In this episode the scene is described in 68.22, which says ‘Lifting up the tail (vāladhi) of the enemy of Indra (i.e. Mahiṣa) and setting foot on his head forcefully, she pierced him through the back (prṣṭha) with a trident (trisūla) and immediately deprived the demon of his life’. This description evidently conforms to the Gupta type. The theriomorphic figure of the demon Mahiṣa and the absence of a lion throughout the episode are also in accordance with

---

11 Von Mitterwallner 1976, 208. On the west side of the mandapa of the cave is a long, but much damaged inscription. It lists the kings of the Rāṣṭrakūṭas down to Dantidurga (c. 725–755), and seemingly refers to his visit to Ellora. See Burgess 1883, 87–89. About the dating of the cave and the inscription, Burgess says that ‘the inscription may be taken as proving that it was finished, or at least in an advanced condition, when Dantidurga visited Ėḷḷora in the middle of the eighth century; and it is not improbable that he had constructed it’ (ibid., 25f). An example of the same iconic type is also seen in a niche of the Kailāsa Temple, Ellora, the construction of which commenced in the reign of Dantidurga (ibid., 26, 29; Tartakov & Dehejia 1984–85, 320, Fig. 36).
13 Taddei 1973; 1978, 54–57, Figs. 12, 47–56, 81–93. Although the image is severely damaged, the photos and descriptions in Taddei’s paper clearly show that the image represented this iconic type.
this iconic type. Furthermore, the period during which the Skandapurāṇa is supposed to have been composed, the sixth to the seventh centuries, fits into the period in which the Gupta type was the most popular. Therefore, it can be maintained that in all probability the episode of Kauśikī’s slaying of the buffalo demon in the Kauśikī cycle of the Skandapurāṇa was closely related to the Gupta iconic type of Mahiśāsura-mardini.

5.2 The Gupta Iconic Type of Mahiśāsura-mardini

Let us now survey this type of Mahiśāsura-mardini iconography in more detail. The present author has collected about fifty specimens of the Gupta type, mostly ascribed to the fifth to the eighth centuries. Based on these specimens, general features of the images of the Gupta type will be pointed out before embarking on the further classification. The most noteworthy is that the iconic features of this type are fairly uniform. The standard iconography of this type was described in the list in the previous section. Most of the specimens ascribed to the fifth to the seventh centuries bear this standard iconography; deviations from the standard, with a few exceptions, are found only in the images that were produced either later than the eighth century or in peripheral regions such as Orissa and the west coast. Within the standard iconography, a small, but interesting variation is found in the Deccan, that is, the usage of the inverted trident instead of the ordinary trident. This regional feature seems to have been popular in the Deccan and, possibly, Gujarat. The attribute in the goddess’s rear right hand is also considerably uniform: it is generally a sword, if preserved, except for a discus in the images found in Badami and Alampur. On the other hand, the attribute in her rear left hand varies according to the region and period. To the north of the Narmadā river, this attribute was a shield at first and, slightly later, was often replaced by a bell. A bell also appears in the images of Subtype A2 found around Goa. To the south of the Narmada, on the other hand, it seems to be probable that it was generally a conch. The absence of a lion found uniformly in all the specimens before the seventh century is also remarkable, taking into account that the appearance of a lion became gradually more frequent in the Kuśāṇa-type images from the late Kuśāṇa period and was standard in the images of the Mediaeval type.

---

14These specimens are studied in more detail in Yokochi 1999b and some of them are in Yokochi forthcoming. Barrett’s paper (1975) was the first one to catalogue specimens of this iconic type with annotations, though he did not attempt any further classification. Viennot (1971–72) also deals with several images of this type.

15For the features of deviations, see Yokochi 1999b, 71; forthcoming. Some of the images that deviate from the standard at one point or another are included in the following list of three main subtypes.

16Yokochi 1999b, 71; forthcoming.

17Yokochi forthcoming.
Because of this prevalence of the standard iconography, further subdivision of the Gupta type should be based on it, and thus the following two criteria for subdivision can be derived: first, whether the goddess holds the buffalo’s hind leg or his tail; and second, whether the goddess thrusts a trident into the buffalo’s neck/head or his back. According to these two criteria, the standard iconography can be classified into the following four subtypes:

- **Subtype A1**: The goddess holds the buffalo’s hind leg and thrusts a trident into his back.
- **Subtype A2**: The goddess holds the buffalo’s hind leg and thrusts a trident into his neck/head.
- **Subtype B1**: The goddess holds the buffalo’s tail and thrusts a trident into his neck/head.
- **Subtype B2**: The goddess holds the buffalo’s tail and thrusts a trident into his back.

Application of the two criteria to the actual specimens of the Gupta type, which was first undertaken in my 1999b paper, proved the validity of the criteria because the images classified under each subtype showed a particular distribution pattern. Of the four subtypes, Subtype A2 can be considered a regional variant because the specimens of this subtype have been found within a confined region around Goa.\(^{18}\) The other three, A1, B1 and B2, are the main subtypes and have been named the Northern, the Deccan and the Vindhya subtypes, respectively, by the present author according to the region in which early specimens of each subtype were produced. The following is a list of the specimens of the three main subtypes mostly ascribed to the fifth to the eighth centuries.\(^{19}\)

- **Northern subtype**: The goddess holds the buffalo’s hind leg with her front left hand and thrusts a trident into his back with her front right hand, planting her right foot on his head. About nine specimens belong to this subtype.

The earliest specimen is the famous relief on the facade of Cave 6 at Udayagiri dedicated by a Maharāja of the Sanakānikas, a feudatory

\(^{18}\)Von Mitterwallner 1976, 201, figs. 7 & 8; Yokochi 1999b, 79.

\(^{19}\)For more detailed information on the images, see Yokochi 1999b, Appendix A (a catalogue of the images of the Gupta type) and the postscript including three additional images. The variants of these three subtypes are found under Subtypes A3, B3 and C in the 1999b catalogue, although calling them subtypes is not appropriate. In my forthcoming paper (b), these are grouped under the subdivisions ‘Variants of Subtype A’ and ‘Variants of Subtype B’.
king of Candragupta II, in AD 401/402. This relief is unique in its depiction of the goddess as twelve-armed. Two specimens that come from Bhumara, a circular panel on a candrusāla from the Śiva temple on the outskirts of the village of Bhumara and a stone statue found in the village of Bhumara, are both ascribed to the early sixth century. An image on a small seal from Rājghāṭ at Banaras, which is stylistically comparable to the panel from Bhumara, may be ascribed to the same century. The specimens that possibly date from the seventh to the eighth centuries include two images from Vidiśa District, one from Gyaraspur and the other from the Ramgarh hill near Pathari; another from Bharatpur, Rajasthan; one from Kanauj; and one or two from Haryana.

- **DECCAN SUBTYPE**: The goddess holds the buffalo’s tail with her front left hand and thrusts a trident into his neck/head with her front right hand, planting her right foot on his head. About sixteen specimens belong to this subtype.

A fine image, though its upper half is lost, from Nagardhan in Nagpur District, Maharashtra, ascribed to the first half of the fifth century, may be the earliest example of this subtype. Three small pieces that resemble each other, two from the territory of the Eastern Vākāṭaka

---

20 Yokochi 1999b, A1 No. 1 in Catalogue. The votive inscription (CII 3, No. 3, Plate IIB (No7, Plate VII in Rev.Ed.)) is on the wall just above this Mahiṣāsurasamardini and the next relief. In the Allahabad stone pillar inscription (CII 3, No. 1, Plate I), the Sanakāṇikas are referred to as one of the tribes who came to pay tribute to the Guptas as a result of Samudragupta’s campaign. This relief is reproduced in many articles and monographs. Special studies appear in von Mitterwallner 1976; Harle 1970; 1971–72.

21 This exceptional feature can be explained as the result of influence from the other Mahiṣāsurasamardini relief on the north wall of the same courtyard of Cave 6, which represents a variation of the Kuśāna type with the twelve-armed goddess (von Mitterwallner 1976, 199–202, 206f, Fig. 4).

22 This Śiva Temple is dated to about AD 520–530 by Williams (1982, 117–122). The former panel is now preserved in the Allahabad Museum (No. 152). See Banerji 1924, 13, Pl.XIVb; Iyer 1969, fig. 1; Barret 1975, No. (j); Yokochi 1999b, A1 No. 2 in Catalogue. For the latter image, see Yokochi 1999b, No. 2 in Postscript, Fig. 10. It seems likely that this image was somehow related to the same temple.

23 Iyer 1969, fig. 2; Yokochi 1999b, A1 No. 3 in Catalogue.

24 Viennot 1971–72, 70, 74f, fig. 6; Barret 1975, No. (f); Yokochi 1999b, A1 No. 4 in Catalogue.

25 Berkson, 1978, figs. 2, 12, 12a; Yokochi 1999b, A1 No. 5 in Catalogue.

26 No. OS 64 in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford. Harle & Topsfield 1987, 23f (No. 31); Barret 1975, No. (d); Yokochi 1999b, A1 No. 6 in Catalogue.

27 Viennot 1971–72, 71, 75, fig. 7; Barret 1975, No. (l); Yokochi 1999b, A1 No. 8 in Catalogue. The presence of a lion on the image indicates a later date. Viennot ascribes the image to the late eighth or the early ninth century.


29 Bakker 1993, pl. 20.1; 1997, 84f, 130–133, pl. XXIXa; Yokochi 1999b, B1 No. 2 in Catalogue; forthc. The image is housed in the Nagpur Central Museum.
The Assimilation of Mahiśāsūramardini

(Nagardhan and Mandhal) and one from Ajanta, also belong to the Vākāṭaka period, probably the fifth century.\(^{30}\) A small plaque similar to these three, excavated at Bhīṭā, may belong to the same period.\(^{31}\) Another similar specimen, though this is larger in size, was found near the Holalamma temple at Devihiar, Dharwad District, Karnataka, which may also be ascribed to the same period.\(^{32}\) The famous, beautiful relief at Badami Cave 1 in Karnataka belongs to this subtype and can be dated to the second half of the sixth century.\(^{33}\) To the southeast, two small plaques in limestone were excavated at Peddavegi, Eluru Taluk, West Godavari District, AP.\(^{34}\) Both of them may be ascribed to the late fifth to the sixth centuries.\(^{35}\) To the north of the Narmadā river are found some images ascribed to the seventh to the eighth centuries, one from Himgrājaḍh, Mandasaur District,

---

\(^{30}\)The piece from Nagardhan is now preserved in the Nagpur Central Museum and that from Mandhal in the Department of Ancient Indian History, Culture and Archaeology, the University of Nagpur. See Bakker 1997, 80–83, 132, n. 106; Yokochi 1999b, B1 Nos. 1 & 3 in Catalogue, Fig. 8. The specimen from Ajanta was recently excavated. It was kindly brought to my attention by Dr Walter Spink. The image is discussed in comparison with those from Nagardhan and Mandhal in Yokochi *forthc.*.

\(^{31}\) Marshall 1911–12, 86, pl. XXXI fig. 14; Barrett 1975, No. (k); Yokochi 1999b, B1 No. 6 in Catalogue. The image is now preserved in the Indian Museum, Calcutta. See also Yokochi *forthc.* for a comparison with the three small pieces from the Vākāṭaka realm.

\(^{32}\) Sundara 1990, pl. XXVa; Yokochi 1999b, B1 No. 4 in Catalogue; *forthc.*

\(^{33}\) Yokochi 1999b, B1 No. 5 in Catalogue. The dating of the image is related to the inscription of Cave 3 bearing the date of AD 578 (Harle 1994, 127; Tartakov & Dehejia 1984–85, 318f). The image is reproduced in many articles and monographs.

\(^{34}\) Sarma 1986–87, 19, Pl. 6a; 2002, 74f, Fig. 10 nos. 1 & 10, Pl. 22 nos. 31 & 32. Two similar plaques were found from Kondrapadu, Nandigama Taluk, Krishna District, AP (Sarma 1994, 92, fig. 118). Under B3 No. 3 in the Catalogue in my 1999b paper, I regarded these plaques as representing a hybrid icon of the Gupta and Kuśāna types, on the grounds that the goddess holds a short-handled trident upwards instead of the usual long-handled one piercing the buffalo. However, the considerable resemblance between these plaques and those from Peddavegi suggests that the short-handled trident may have been due to a misunderstanding of the inverted trident, which is depicted in the plaques from Peddavegi, by local artisans. The plaques from Kondrapadu show other iconic peculiarities: the sword wielded by the goddess’s rear right hand is pointing downwards and, in one of the plaques, her rear left hand holds a shield, which is unusual among the specimens of the Gupta type in the Deccan. Sarma refers to a similar plaque of limestone found at Virapuram, Kurnool District, AP (Sarma 2002, 74).

\(^{35}\) Sarma attributes one of them (Pl. 22 no. 31; Fig. 10 no. 1) to Phase-IA corresponding to the Śālankāyaṇa period (c. 4th to 5th century AD) (Sarma 2002, 15). However, this dating is not well attested since he states elsewhere that the plaque was picked up from the surface of disturbed pits (ibid., 74f). The other plaque (Pl. 22 no. 32; Fig. 10 no. 10) is attributed to Phase-IB corresponding to the Viṣṇukūṇḍin period (mid 5th to the end of 6th century AD) (ibid., 16, 75). It seems to be more probable that both of them were produced in the Viṣṇukūṇḍin period under some influence from Vākāṭaka art because of their iconographical similarity with each other and with the small pieces made in the Vākāṭaka realm (see Yokochi *forthc.*).
MP\textsuperscript{36} and two fragments.\textsuperscript{37} A grey gneiss plaque from Central India, preserved in the Indische Kunstabteilung, Berlin, may also have come from somewhere to the north of the Narmadā river.\textsuperscript{38} To the west, two fine images, one from Karvan, Gujarat, and the other from Valabhi, Saurashtra, may be datable to the sixth to seventh centuries.\textsuperscript{39} Further north, in Chamba, King Meruvvarman dedicated an image of this subtype under the name of Lakṣāṇā Devī as the main idol of the namesake temple at Brahmor in the early eighth century.\textsuperscript{40}

- **Vindhya Subtype**: The goddess holds the buffalo’s tail with her front left hand and thrusts a trident into his back with her front right hand, planting her right foot on his head. About seven specimens belong to this subtype.

The earliest specimen, though only the lower part remains, comes from Nachna on the Vindhya plateau, now preserved in the Rāmvan Museum. This statue may be datable to around AD 500.\textsuperscript{41} One more image, possibly ascribed to the late sixth century, is found on the

\textsuperscript{36}Garga 1980, 24, pl.13; Yokochi 1999b, B1 No. 7 in Catalogue. The image is housed in the Central Museum, Indore.

\textsuperscript{37}One comes from Jagat near Udaipur (Barrett 1975, No. (c); Seshadri 1963, 11, pl.7A; Yokochi 1999b, B1 No. 13 in Catalogue), and the other from Jhusi near Allahabad (Yokochi 1999b, B1 No. 12 in Catalogue).

\textsuperscript{38}The Indische Kunstabteilung, Berlin, IC 34797. Härtel 1960, 78f, Tafel 47; Viennot 1971–72, 70f; Yokochi 1999b, B1 No. 10 in Catalogue. The shield in the goddess’s rear left hand and the ordinary trident the goddess thrusts into the buffalo indicate its origin to be north of the Narmadā river.

\textsuperscript{39}Shah 1960, 25f, 118f, fig.13; Seshadri 1963, figs.6A & 9A; Barrett 1975, Nos. (a) & (b); Yokochi 1999b, B1 Nos.8 & 9 in Catalogue. The fine stone statue from Valabhi was discovered together with a Kṛṣṇa image and five Jaina bronzes bearing traces of inscriptions, one of which may give a date between AD 538 and 548 (Shah 1960, 25). The Karvan image, now preserved in the Department of Archaeology, M. S. University of Baroda, is unfortunately very fragmentary, but the elegant style of the original statue is discernable.

\textsuperscript{40}An inscription engraved on the pedestal of the image records the dedication by Meruvvarman, and it is assigned to the beginning of the eighth century on palaeographical grounds (Vogel 1911, 141f, pl.X). For the image, see Vogel 1911, 138, pl.VII(b); Goetz 1955, 78–80, pl.VI; Barrett 1975, No. (m); Yokochi 1999b, B1 No.14 in Catalogue; for recent research on the temple, see Pieruccini 1997. The image is often ascribed to a later date on stylistic grounds and suspected to be a recast of the original (Diserens 1986, 463f). Even if that were the case, there is little doubt that the original represented this subtype, as does the extant image. Diserens cites two stone slabs of this subtype from the Upper Kulu Valley, ascribed to the ninth century (ibid., 465, Plates III and IV).

\textsuperscript{41}Rāmvan Museum, No.83. Yokochi 1999b, No.1 in Postscript, Fig.9. According to Dr H.S. Caturvedi, Director of the Rāmvan Museum, this image was found in the vicinity of the Śiva temple known as Pārvatī Temple at Nachna. Pārvatī Temple is assigned to AD 480–500 by Williams, and other monuments and miscellaneous sculptures scattered about it show the continuation of the activity of temple construction at Nachna during the early sixth century (Williams 1982, 105–114). The style of the image, including the voluminous and relatively realistic representation of the buffalo, also points to an early date. Furthermore, the image somewhat resembles the big image from Nagardhan.
Vindhyā plateau, which is engraved on the hillside at Sindūrsī near Bahuriband, Jabalpur District, MP. To the north of the Vindhyā mountain range, the relief in a niche on a cliff going down to the Betwa river, called Siddhi-ki-gūpha, at Deogarh is another early example of this subtype and may be ascribed to the second half of the sixth century. To the south, a fine, lively, sandstone image, datable to the seventh century, is preserved in the Alampur Museum. In Orissa, many images representing this subtype were produced from the seventh century. In most of them the goddess is depicted as two-armed, but the standard four-armed goddess iconography is also found in a few early specimens. A fragmentary, apparently old, statue of a four-armed goddess from the breasts up found within the temple compound at the Virājā temple at Jajpur may also be an early example of the Gupta-type Mahiśāsuramārdini image.

According to Brighenti’s description, the image of the goddess Virājā at the Virājā temple, Jajpur, represents this subtype with the goddess having two arms. It

---

42 Yokochi 1999b, No. 3 in Postscript. The image is at the west end among four images carved on the hillside facing north. The others are, from east to west, a two-armed Narasimha sitting in a similar pose to the Narasimha images on Rāmagiri (Bakker 1997, 140–142, Pl. XXXIII) except for the absence of the discus, Anantaśāyi-Viśṇu, and a four-armed standing Viśṇu with two āyādha-puruṣas (club and discus). All four images are published with photos by Trivedi (1976).

43 Viennot 1971–72, figs. 4 & 5; Barrett 1975, No. (g); Yokochi 1999b, 72–75, 85, B2 No. 1 in Catalogue, Fig. 1. Viennot examines the style of the image in detail and assigns it to the seventh century. In my opinion, however, as argued in the 1999b paper, the image is stylistically comparable to the Saptamātrikā panel at Nahargāthī at the same site, ascribed to the sixth century (Paničar 1997, 88, 93, figs 46, 47; Yokochi 1999b, Figs. 4, 5), and the elaborate hairstyle of the goddess on the image is very similar to, though less refined than, the female figurines on the base of the doorway jambs of the Daśavatāra temple at the same site, dated around AD 500 (Williams 1982, 133–135, pls. 203, 204). A stone statue from Lakhamandar, Almora, ascribed to the ninth century, is another example of this subtype in North India (Nagar 1988, 216, Pl. 20). The statue appears to have been modelled on the relief at Siddhi-ki-gūpha because it resembles that relief in almost all details, including the goddess’s hairstyle and ornaments, sculpted in a less skillful manner.


45 The images bearing a four-armed goddess include one in one of the niches of the Pārasūrāmesvar temple (c. 650) and another in one of caitya medallions of the Mārkaṇḍeśvar temple (c. 750), both at Bhuwaneshwar. See Donaldson 1985, 59, 86, 1067, figs. 117, 3227; 2002, 233f; Panigrahi 1961, 134; Brighenti 2001, 220f; Yokochi 1999b, B2 No. 3 & No. 4 in Catalogue. As regards the Gupta-type images in Orissa, Donaldson says that ‘as a group the four-armed images in Orissa appear to be earlier’ than the two-armed images (2002, 233). His chart no. 13 (ibid., 234) lists the specimens of the two and four-armed images with approximate datings.

46 Donaldson 1985, 187, 486, fig. 428; Yokochi 1999b, B3 No. 5 in Catalogue. The image is placed together with a lower-half fragment of a Mahiśāsuramārdini image of the Medieval type, and Donaldson ascribed the two as fragments of a single image to the late eighth or early ninth century.

47 The image of Virājā represents a two-armed goddess holding a spear which pierces
may have been the model for two-armed Mahiṣāsura-mardini images of this subtype in Orissa, which are, according to Donaldson, ascribed to the period after the tenth century.  

Of the three, the Northern and the Deccan subtypes sharply contrast with each other from the viewpoint of the two criteria mentioned above. Concerning the distribution also, the images of these two subtypes were produced in different areas, although the distribution ranges partly came to overlap with each other later. Examples of the Northern subtype began to be produced around AD 400, as the relief at Udayagiri indicates, and were scattered to the north of the Vindhyas and on the Vindhyas plateau. To the south of the Narmada river, on the other hand, the Deccan subtype appeared contemporaneously or slightly later in Vidarbha and diffuses to the south as far as the Kṛṣṇa and the Tuṅgabhadrā rivers, to the north to the Gaṅgā river, to the west in Gujarāt and Saurashtra, and to the northwest into Chamba, or, if its variants are included, to Kashmir and possibly Afghanistan.

The question now arises which of the Northern and Deccan subtypes was the archetype of the Gupta type, because it is very unlikely that the two subtypes emerged independently in different places, one in the eastern Malwa and the other in the eastern Vidarbha. The relief on the facade of Udayagiri Cave 6, the earliest specimen of the Northern subtype, may have been the model for the fine and large image from Nagardhan because, if the latter formed a set with the Viṣṇu and Ganeśa images from the same site, it is possible that this set was planned under the influence of an iconographical programme for Udayagiri Cave 6. However, this relief at Udayagiri Cave 6 cannot be the only model for the Nagardhan one because, whereas it shows an exceptional iconography in that the goddess is twelve-armed, the Nagardhan image, although its upper part is now broken off, is very likely to have the body of the buffalo with her right hand while she is lifting his hind part by holding his tail with her left. She tramples on the buffalo’s neck with her right foot (Brighenti 2001, 219). In my 1999b paper, this image was classified into Subtype B3 (No. 5) according to Chanda’s description of the image, which is based on the dhyāna recited by the priests at the temple (Chanda 1930, 4).

Donaldson 2002, 234f. According to him, most Orissan scholars date the Virajā image to the Gupta period on the basis of the popular, though incompatible with the evidence, idea that the two-armed icon of Mahiṣāsura-mardini is older than the four-armed (ibid., 235; e.g. Panigrahi 1981, 331). Brighenti also follows this idea and dates the image to the Gupta period (2001, 72, 219). However, it seems more likely that the image should be ascribed to the mediaeval period, as are the other two-armed Mahiṣāsura-mardini images of the Gupta type in Orissa. For the two-armed images, see also Donaldson 1985, 1067, figs. 3228–3230; Brighenti 2001, 220f.

A small image from Kashmir, ascribed to the seventh century by Pal, represents a variant of the Deccan subtype, in which the buffalo faces not right but left (Pal 1986, 229f, S. 105; Yokochi 1999b, B3 No. 6 in Catalogue). Pal also states that several pieces similar to this image were discovered in Afghanistan.

Bakker 1997, 84f, 128–133.
originally had the standardized four-armed goddess as seen in the smaller image from the same site.\textsuperscript{51} Attention should now be directed to the political situation between the Gupta and the Eastern Vākāṭaka in the period. Near the end of the fourth century, the two dynasties had entered into a matrimonial alliance as a result of Rudrasena II’s marriage with Candragupta II’s daughter, Prabhāvatī Guptā, which must have enhanced the cultural interchange between the Gupta and the Eastern Vākāṭaka. Furthermore, in the early fifth century, Prabhāvatī’s daughter, possibly called Atibhāvatī, was married to her brother, Ghaṭotkaca, a viceroy of the eastern Malwa.\textsuperscript{52} This event points to a strong tie between the eastern Malwa and the eastern Vidarbha in the period. The aforementioned images of Viṣṇu, Ganeśa and Mahiśāsuramardinī found in Nagardhān, whether they were directly modelled upon the iconographical programme of the Udayagiri Cave 6 or not, must have ensued from this relation between the two regions. Therefore, it is sufficient to say for the time being that the contemporaneous emergence of the two earliest subtypes of the Gupta-type Mahiśāsuramardinī iconography in Udayagiri and Nagardhān can be attributed to the cultural interchange between the two regions around AD 400.

The earliest specimen of the third, Vindhya subtype, the image from Nachna on the Vindhya plateau, appears around AD 500, later than those of the other two subtypes. The Vindhya plateau is an area where the range of distribution of the two other subtypes overlaps. Furthermore, the iconography of the Vindhya subtype shows a mixture of those of the Northern and the Deccan subtypes: the goddess lifts up the buffalo’s tail in line with the Deccan subtype and thrusts a trident into his back in line with the Northern subtype. Therefore, it may be thought that the two earlier subtypes, the Northern and Deccan, were syncretized into the Vindhya subtype by the turn of the fifth century. If that were the case, Nachna may have been the place in which this blending happened. Nachna was probably the centre of the territory of the Uccakalpa king Vyāghradeva in the last quarter of the fifth century, who acknowledged the suzerainty of the Eastern Vākāṭaka.\textsuperscript{53} So there may have been some cultural influence from the Eastern Vākāṭaka, in which the Deccan subtypes were popular, upon Nachna. That the Nachna Mahiśāsuramardini image is stylistically similar to the big Nagardhān image,\textsuperscript{54} though iconographically different, underscores the point. At the same time, in Bhumara, which is situated about 22 km east of Nachna, are found two Mahiśāsuramardini images of the Northern subtype ascribed to the early sixth century, as mentioned earlier in the list. Bhumara was in that period either within the territory of the Parivṛājakas, who acknowledged Gupta

\textsuperscript{51} Bakker 1997, 132.
\textsuperscript{52} Bakker 1997, 17, Appendix I (Kevala Narasimha Temple Inscription). For the political situation of the eastern Malwa in the Gupta period, see Bakker forthec. b.
\textsuperscript{53} Bakker 1997, 47–49.
\textsuperscript{54} Yokochi forthec..
What did the Gupta Iconic Type Signify?

As described earlier in this chapter, the Gupta type is the second earliest type of Mahiṣaśurasuramardini iconography in North and Central India, and its iconic features differ distinctly from those of the preceding Kuśāṇa type. Furthermore, while the production of the Kuśāṇa type was centred on Mathurā, the Gupta type was probably the result of the cultural contact between Malwa under the Gupta and Vidarbha under the Eastern Vākāṭaka. Therefore, it may be assumed that the Gupta type signified something different from what was signified by the Kuśāṇa type. In order to consider what the Gupta type may have signified, early textual sources related to this iconic type will be examined in this section. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, there are four early textual sources of the myth of a goddess’s slaying the buffalo demon ascribed to the period from the sixth to the middle of the eighth century. The descriptions of the myth in all four documents are related to the Gupta iconic type. One of them is the episode of Kauśikī-Vindhyāvasini’s slaying of the demon Mahiṣa related in the Kauśikī cycle of the Skandaṇpurāṇa, which has already been studied in the first section of this chapter. In what follows, the other three sources, Anantavarman’s inscription in a cave of Nagārjuni Hill, Bāna’s Caṇḍīśataka, and Vākpatirāja’s Gaṇḍavahavan, will be studied in chronological order.\

Three inscriptions of Anantavarman, a chieftain of the Maukhari, have been found so far in the Barābar hilly area. All three are undated, but ascribed to the first half of the sixth century on the basis of palaeographical comparison with the other inscriptions of the Maukhari kings and Harṣa-\vardhana.\

One is engraved in a cave called Lomaśa Rṣi Cave on the
Barābar Hill, which records that Anantavarman of the Maukhāris caused to be made an image of Kṛṣṇa and placed it in that cave of Pravaragiri, probably an old name of the Barābar Hill. ⁵⁹ Another, found in a cave called Vadathī Cave on the Nāgārjuni Hill adjacent to the Barābar Hill, records that the same Anantavarman caused to be made an image of Bhūtapatī (i.e. Śiva) and one of Devī (i.e. Pārvatī) and placed them in that cave. ⁶⁰ The last one, which is relevant for the present study, is engraved in a cave called Gopī Cave on the Nāgārjuni Hill. ⁶¹

This inscription records that Anantavarman installed an image of Kāṭyāyanī in that cave in the Vindhya mountains and dedicated a village to Bhavānī (i.e. Pārvatī), who must be identical to Kāṭyāyanī here. This image of Kāṭyāyanī in the cave was probably a Mahiṣāsurasamudrī image of the Gupta iconic type because Devī’s foot placed on the head of Mahiṣasura is praised in the first stanza, ⁶² which calls to mind verses of the Caṇḍīśataka discussed later. Furthermore, Cunningham reports that numerous rude figures have been sculpted on the rocks of the northern face of the Kauwa-Dol Hill, which is situated to the southwest of the Barābar and Nāgārjuni Hills in the same hilly area. According to his report, the most common of these sculptures is the Mahiṣāsurasamudrī image, and the goddess is depicted as four-armed, holding a sword and trident in her two right hands and a shield in her upper left hand, and grasping the buffalo’s tail in her lower left hand. ⁶³ From his description, it is evident that these sculptures of Mahiṣāsurasamudrī represent the Gupta iconic type, probably either the Deccan or Vindhya subtype. These rude Mahiṣāsurasamudrīs on the hillside are very likely to have been modelled on an authoritative image available in the vicinity, which must have been the image dedicated by Anantavarman. For these two reasons, it is highly probable that Kāṭyāyanī’s image installed by Anantavarman in the Gopī Cave on the Nāgārjuni Hill was a Mahiṣāsurasamudrī of the Gupta iconic type.

In this inscription, attention should now be drawn to the statement that ‘[an image of] Kāṭyāyanī was installed in [this] wonderful cave of the Vindhya mountain’ (vinyastādbhutavindhyaḥbhūdaraguhā́śrītya kāṭyāyanī). The allusion to the Vindhya mountain here can be taken as a mere statement of the actual location of the cave, which means that this hilly area was a part of the Vindhyā mountain range in the contemporary geographical view. However, the other two inscriptions of Anantavarman do not refer to

---

⁵⁹ CII 3, no. 48, Plate XXXB; Thapal 1985, 133f, Plate I.
⁶⁰ CII 3, no. 49, Plate XXXIA; Thapal 1985, 135f, Plate II.
⁶¹ CII 3, no. 50, Plate XXXIB; Thapal 1985, 137f, Plate III.
⁶² The first stanza runs as follows (CII 3, 227):

\[
\text{unnidrasya sarorhaskya sakalāṃ uṣṭipya sobhāṃ rucā} \\
\text{sāvajñam mahiṣasurasya śirāśi nyasāḥ kvaṇanāpūraḥ} \\
\text{devyāḥ vaḥ sthirahaktiśvaṣaḥyām yujjan phalenaṭhīlam} \\
\text{dvāyād achchanakhaṅkājanajatalāḥ pādāḥ padaṃ sanspadāṁ.}
\]

⁶³ Cunningham 1971, 41. Buchanan also refers to these carvings (1925, 12).
the Vindhya mountain, in spite of the fact that they record the installation of images in the caves at the same site. Therefore, it may be not unreasonable to assume that the allusion to the cave of the Vindhya mountain as the place where the image of Kātyāyana was installed implied that Kātyāyana was regarded as not only Mahiṣāsuramardini but also Vindhyavāsini.

The next textual source is Bāna’s Caṇḍīśatāka. Bāna(-bhatṭa) was a court poet of King Harsavardhana, who reigned from AD 606 to 647. One of his works, Caṇḍīśatāka, is a collection of a hundred and one or two stanzas of benediction dedicated to the goddess Caṇḍī under various epithets. Each stanza is structurally independent but thematically associated with each other. This theme, with the exception of three verses (25, 45, and 54), is the myth of the goddess slaying the demon Mahiṣa. Because of the style, the myth is not narrated in sequence, but the features of the myth in this work can be inferred from the elements that will be collected in what follows below.

The most outstanding element is the goddess’s foot that is either treading or kicking Mahiṣa, especially on his head. Her foot, or sometimes the toenails, is a special subject of praise in fifty-seven verses and, in nine of these, the foot is specified as the left one. A trident which the goddess thrusts into Mahiṣa is mentioned in seven verses. Two verses depict her as placing her foot on Mahiṣa and as wielding a trident. The demon Mahiṣa seems to assume the buffalo shape during the battle at all times, although that shape was not regarded as his genuine one. A lion is mentioned in a single verse, in which the goddess is said to rest her foot on the lion’s

64 The text on which Mahārāṇa Kumbhakarṇa, who is well known as the author of the Saṃgītarāja and commentator of the Gītagovinda, and another anonymous commentator in Bāhurā’s ed. commented consists of a 101, which seems to have been the original version. The Kavyamālā Ed. adds one verse, the 102nd, at the end. There is another version that contains two more verses just before the 102nd verse, which results in 104 verses (p. 30f of Prāstāvikā Paricaya in Bāhurā’s ed.; the extra two verses are quoted on p. 31). In the following, quotations of verses of the Caṇḍīśatāka are from the Kavyamālā Ed.

65 Caṇḍīśatāka 32 and 79:

66 The expressions that indicate the demon’s buffalo shape are mahiṣitavapus (18, 52, 74, 101), mahiṣavapus (36, 38), mahiṣatanubhṛt (73, 82), and dhṛtamahiṣitānu (76), all of which mean ‘the one who takes the buffalo shape’. The idea that his buffalo shape is not genuine but disguised is attested from the following words: kaitabhiṣikṛtānamiḥ (53, 75); chalamahiṣitānu (86); miṣamahiṣitānu (95). His horn, or a pair of his horns, is also mentioned in many verses.
All these elements indicate that the version of the myth the author had in mind was related to the Gupta iconic type, although the foot the goddess placed on the buffalo’s head is the left rather than the right in the Gupta type. The number of her arms is not specified, but her arms are mentioned in the plural in verse 39. She is also depicted as having three eyes in three verses (39, 40, 51), a feature shared with Vindhyavāsini in the Kauśikī cycle, but which deviates from the standard iconography of the Gupta type. Compared to the simple story of the same myth found in the Kauśikī cycle, Bāṇa seems to have known a more complicated one. Many verses suggest that the duel between the goddess and Mahiṣa was preceded by the war between the gods and the demons, as well as Mahiṣa’s victory over the gods; Jayā and Vijayā attend on her, she wields not only a trident but also a bow with arrows and a sword.

As mentioned above, the myth of the goddess killing the demon Mahiṣa is the theme in all the verses except for three. These three verses (25, 45 and 54) describe the Vindhyavāsini myth known in the Harivaṃśa. Of them, verses 25 and 45 depict the scene in which the goddess ascended to heaven, when she was dashed on a rock by Kamsa, and verse 54 the scene in which she, ascending to heaven from Kamsa’s hand, roared with laughter and threatened him. In verse 45, rocks on a peak in the Vindhya mountains are regarded as her future abode (āgāṃvinḍhācaḷāśikharāśilāvāsā). This juxtaposition of the Vindhyavāsini myth and the Mahiṣāsuramardini one shows, as in the Kauśikī cycle, that Vindhyavāsini and Mahiṣāsuramardini were considered to be one and the same goddess, although the two myths had

---

67 Čauḍīśiṭakaṭaka 43:  
dattvā sāḥpātṛamālāśalīvighasahasradhasmarapradakṣāntam  
kāṭiyānyayātmanamāvāvātraṇamahādūtyadṛṣṭiprādahāram  
viśrāntyiśāṃ tuṣyāṃ kṣanām upari dṛṣṭam kesarikṣandhabhittān  
bibhṛat tākteśarānilaṁ hitakarāranānānāpurāṁ pūdapaṃram ||

68 The goddess’s left foot is praised in verses 10, 42, 47, 74, 82, 89, 93, 94 and 101, of which all but one (42) denote the left foot in the term vāma. As Quakenbos suggests in note 6 on verse 10 in his translation of this work, vāma, in addition to ‘left’, means ‘adverse’ (e.g. to the buffalo demon) and ‘charming’ and is used as a pun connoting these two meanings.

69 For Jayā and Vijayā, see n. 89 in 4.3.2.

70 Čauḍīśiṭakaṭaka 25, 45, and 54:  
spardhāvārhtavitvindhayādurbaraharāharavastād vihāgastalāṃ  
hastād utpātā prasādayatu vah kṛtyāni kāṭiyāyanī |  
yāṃ śaśām iva devadārūgahatiśām skandhehi mohāṅdaḥdaḥhir  
vadhyoddevam aṣeṣabandhavakuladhaṃśaya kṣanāḥ ‘nayaḥ || 25 ||  
abhaṃtesu niyamānā bharaviḥadhārajaḥprasamaḥbhajāṃśaya  
kāṁṣeṇaṅgāṃ sā vo hariḥ hariyāsaḥpurṣanāyā kṣamāpi |  
prāk prāyaṃ asaṣa nāvyad gaganam udapataḥ gocarṇaḥ yā śilāyāḥ  
sampṛṣṭābhāṇavīndhācaḷāśikharāśilāvāsāyogodyateva || 45 ||  
hastād utpātā yāṅtyā gaganam asyaśādhaṅgovīrāvāvepam  
vaṅkṣyecēva pāṇḍupatyām aditīsūtāsīm āpadānyantāḥ |  
darpāṇapāṭhāśadsvaṣaṇatarasātikā saṭapalokājanāṃ |  
tarjāṇyā jayantādyo naktaruciṣṭatayā saṇāyantāya jayanti || 54 ||.
not yet been integrated. In this respect, the second verse may be noteworthy because it describes the goddess, called Śivā, as the one ‘whose foot, which was planted on Mahiṣa’s shoulder comparable to a touch-stone, because of her mistaking it for the Vindhyā mountain, deprived him of his life through mere ignorance (i.e. as a result of her mistake’). The description suggests that the goddess killed Mahiṣa in the Vindhyā mountains. Although we cannot conclude from only one verse that this myth was set in the Vindhyā mountains in the version known by Bāṇa, if that were the case, Mahiṣāsura-mardini and Vindhyavāsini would have merged into the goddess who lives in the Vindhyā mountains and kills the demon Mahiṣa there.

Finally, the relationship of the goddess with Pārvatī should be commented on briefly. In this poem, the goddess Caṇḍī is not a separate manifestation of Pārvatī but equated with her. In many verses, Śiva is referred to as her husband and their conjugal affection is depicted. Guha (i.e. Skanda) and Kuṇjājendrāna (‘One who has the face of a chief elephant’, i.e. Viṇāyaka) appear in verse 67 as her sons and, together with Nandin, a chief of Śiva’s Gaṇas, are referred to in some other verses. Furthermore, some of her epithets, Umā, Pārvatī, Haimavatī, Gaurī, and ones meaning Śiva’s wife, such as Rudrāṇi, clearly denote Pārvatī. On the other hand, it is evident that the main subject of praise is the goddess as Mahiṣāsura-mardini assimilated to Vindhyavāsini, as discussed above. Therefore, unlike the case in the Kauśikī cycle, the intention behind equating this goddess with Pārvatī in this work was probably to elevate her to the state of Pārvatī, Śiva’s consort, rather than to incorporate her into Pārvatī. This is also true of Anantavarman’s inscription. There Kāṭyāyānī is also called Bhavānī so as to be identified with Pārvatī. However, the fact that the goddess is described in the first stanza as Mahiṣāsura-mardini and that she was represented by an image with the Mahiṣāsura-mardini iconography suggests that the object of worship was primarily the goddess as Mahiṣāsura-mardini and, therefore, her identifica-

---

71 Canḍīśataka 2: hāṃkāre nyākṣyātodanvati mahatī jite śūnjitair nūpurasya ślisyaicchṛṅgakṣate ’pi kṣaradasyjī niyālaktakabhṛāntibhājī | skandhe vindhyādribuddhyā nikaṣati mahiṣāsyaḥīto ’sūn ahāryid ayaṇād eva yaṣyaś carana iti śivaḥ sa śīvaḥ vah karotu ||

The translated part is from skandhe in pada c to carana in pada d. The translation of nikaṣati as ‘comparable to a touch-stone’ follows Kumbhakarṇa’s interpretation. According to him, the black shoulder of Mahiṣa with a streak of blood dripping from the goddess’s foot injured by Mahiṣa’s horn, which is depicted in pada b, is compared to a touch-stone with a streak of gold (nīkaṣa samaṇvaratīti nikaṣati, nikaṣatīti nikaṣan tasmin nikaṣati | kīm uktam bhavati, mahiṣaśasya kśye skandhe ruktiavasūn nikaṣapānāḥ | on p. 18 of Bahūrū’s ed.).

72 If Bāṇa knew the Śaiva version of the Vindhyavāsini myth in one form or another, this may have been one of the reasons why Bāṇa used the Bhāgavata version of the Vindhyavāsini myth rather than the Śaiva version, in spite of the distinct Śaiva affiliation of this poem. It is uncertain whether the Skandapurāṇa precedes the Canḍīśataka and whether Bāṇa knew a version of the Vindhyavāsini myth similar to that found in the Kauśikī cycle.
tion with Pārvatī would have been made to make her as authoritative as Pārvatī.

Of the various epithets of the goddess used in this work, the epithets other than those clearly signifying Pārvatī are Caṇḍī (71), Caṇḍikā (46, 49, 102), Ambikā (12, 48, 51, 75, 86, 96, 99), Āryā (3, 55), Śivā (2, 6, 23, 30, 32), Durgā (8), Kātyāyani (14, 25, 43), Kāli (11, 26, 61), Bhadrakāli (22, 76, 89) and Kālaratri (53). Among them, Ambikā may have been another epithet of Pārvatī as it was in the Skandapurāṇa. The other epithets were probably associated with both goddesses united by the time of Bāṇa.

The last source to study is Vākpatirāja’s Gaḍāvaho. Vākpatirāja was a court poet like Bāṇa; he served King Yaśovarman, who reigned from Kanauj, probably in the second quarter of the eighth century. His Gaḍāvaho, a Prakrit poem, describes Yaśovarman’s digvijaya, a nationwide campaign. The work begins with sixty-one verses of benediction that invoke various deities. One of them praises a goddess who kicks Mahiśāsura with her foot, which seems to echo the Gupta iconic type of Mahiśāsuramardini.

According to this poem, when King Yaśovarman embarked on his digvijaya, the first hostile king he attacked was the Magadha king; on the way, he paid homage to ‘the blessed lady who lives in the cave of the Vindhya mountain’. The eulogy he dedicated to the goddess encompasses fifty-three verses (285–337), in which various types of goddesses are depicted under one and the same goddess addressed as the second person, the sole object of the eulogy. She is described as Mahiśāsuramardini in eight verses, as Pārvatī in eight verses, as Vindhyavāsinī in three verses, and as Nidrā in one verse. It is perfectly clear that the Mahiśāsuramardini myth and the Pārvatī myth are the favourite themes, and the Vindhyavāsinī myth in the Bhāgavata version

---

73These epithets are sometimes exchanged in the texts found in Kumbhakarna’s commentary and a commentary by an anonymous commentator, both edited by Bahurū. 74In the Kādambari, another work by Bāṇa, the following epithets are used for probably the same goddess: Kātyāyani (p. 40, l. 1 and p. 66, l. 1), Caṇḍikā (p. 65, l. 1, p. 462, l. 1 and p. 463, l. 7), Ambikā (p. 68, l. 4 and p. 459 l. 1), and Durgā (p. 69, l. 1, p. 453, l. 2 and p. 460, l. 7). The list of Pārvatī’s epithets in AK 1.1.35cd–36 (36cd–38 in Ramanathan’s ed.) contains the following names: Umā, Kātyāyani, Gaurī, Kāli, Haimavati, Īśvari, Śivā, Bhavāni, Rudrāni, Śarvāni, Sarvamaṅgalā, Aparnā, Pārvatī, Durgā, Mṛdāni, Caṇḍikā and Ambikā.


76Gaḍāvaho 43:
śā jāitī seurilēna jīṭe calanēna tādīa-kkhandaḥo |
abhiṣṇa-ruhira-kavuno jāo mahiśaśanaasū ||.
The quotations from the Gaḍāvaho in this part are from Suru’s edition.

77Gaḍāvaho 338:
ia vimyja-guha-tulayiṇē tammi-dala-sabara-sīṭha-maggāe |
pahuṣa napparāna bhavaśe vsto ūnamakkāro ||.
What did the Gupta Iconic Type Signify?

is also included, though in just two verses, which follows the pattern of the Caṇḍīśataka. On the other hand, there are two features in this eulogy that differ from the Caṇḍīśataka. First, the gruesome descriptions that are usually given to the Cāmuṇḍa-type goddess, such as being decorated with skulls and bones (297 and 302), a tongue lolling with greed for gravy on bones (328) and riding on a dead corpse (333), are attributed to the main goddess. On the other hand, the goddess who has an emaciated body—a definite feature of the Cāmuṇḍa-type goddess—is described in 329 under the name of Revaṇa (Revati) as an attendant of the main goddess.

Second, this eulogy includes many references to the offerings made to the goddess. In addition to the usual items, such as incense, lamps, and flowers, these are blood, animals, swords and daggers, animal or human heads, hair, severed arms, mirrors, and red cloth and banners. Moreover, 319 refers to the women of the Kaula sect who came to see the sacrifice of great animals (mahāpasu), namely human beings, and the site is, in 327, described as a cremation ground (masāṇa) where parts of dead bodies that heroes (vīra, i.e. a practitioner of an intense, esoteric, form of tantric Śaivism) sell at night are hanging on the trees. These verses suggest some influence of the

---

78 Gaūḍavaho 308 and 326: 

Gaūḍavaho 290 refers to Mount Vindhya and Himalaya as the goddess’s abodes: 

Gaūḍavaho 297, 302, 328 and 333: 

Gaūḍavaho 294, 295 (offering of buffalos), 306, 307, 310, 311, 317, 318, 322, 330, 331, 332, 334 and 336. Above all, the image of blood is predominant in many of these verses.

80 Gaūḍavaho 329:

81 Gaūḍavaho 294, 295 (offering of buffalos), 306, 307, 310, 311, 317, 318, 322, 330, 331, 332, 334 and 336. Above all, the image of blood is predominant in many of these verses.

82 Gaūḍavaho 319:

This verse calls to mind the famous scene of the cremation ground in the fifth act of
Tantric practices. Although there is no reference to the mode of rituals in the *Caṇḍīśataka* as the work picks up subjects from the myths, another work by the same poet Bāna, the *Kūdambarī*, alludes to the offerings of animals and blood made to the goddess Caṇḍikā. Also, in the same work, a wretched, degenerate practitioner of the Śaiva Tantras is said to have resorted to a Caṇḍikā shrine as a priest.  

Here attention should be paid to the two verses in the beginning of the eulogy. The first verse (285) describes the arched entrance (*torāṇa-ddāraṇa*) of the cave temple, referring to the goddess killing Mahiśāsura. Then, in the second verse (286), it is said that ‘the head of Mahiśāsura, which was covered with your toenails’ beams, was seen’, which indicates that the goddess’s foot was placed on the buffalo demon and therefore points to the Gupta iconic type of Mahiśāsuramardinī. Because this verse immediately follows the description of the entrance of the cave and begins with *diṭṭhaṃ* (‘[it] was seen’), it may not be too far-fetched to suppose that the main idol in the cave is described in this verse, namely, the Mahiśāsuramardinī image bearing the Gupta-type iconography. Among the other verses related to the Mahiśāsuramardinī myth, 324 refers to her foot planted on Mahiśa’s head, 293 to Mahiśa’s horn that pulled off her anklet and was broken by her, and 305 to three blood-streams flowing from Mahiśa’s body pierced by her trident. They also suggest that the Mahiśāsuramardinī myth the poet had in mind

Bhavabhūti’s *Mālatīmadhava*, contemporary with the Gaṇḍavaḥo.

84 In the description of a general of the śabala army, his arms are said to have had many sword cuts made to offer blood to Caṇḍikā (*caṇḍikārudhirabalipradānāyāsakṛṣṇīśīta-śastrolekkhvisamitasīkhareṇa bhuyagugalenopāsbhitam* on p. 65). For a similar practice referred to in the *Harivamsapuraṇa*, see n. 54 in 3.4. The description of the Caṇḍikā shrine in the woodlands (p. 455, l. 5–p. 463, l. 7) includes several allusions to the offerings of animals and blood; for instance, horns, tongues, eyes and heads of animals sacrificed there (*anyatrārkārōnīma kaitabarhavaisāṅkotikūtāh, pavallavām vam sarasa-jīvācchādaśātāh, kusumirāma madaśhān-sahasrahaṁ, phalirāma maṃdūmanalair upahārāvīṃśān darājantim* on p. 456) and the courtyard that became slippery with the flow of blood (*prabhūtarudhirarudādābhavāmürchappātītenēva pratibimtenastatātārēṇa savitrārātīkti-keśaṃ kṣatajarāvīhātaḥ picchikṛtājirām* on p. 456f). A red banner on the Caṇḍikā shrine is described from p. 454, l. 6 to p. 456, l. 4.

85 Gaṇḍavaḥo 285 and 286:

*bāṇḍīka-mahiśāsura-kula-kaṇṭhavamohiṁ va tumēṃ| maṅkavi ghaṇṭā-dāmehiṁ maṃḍiāṁ torāṇa-ddāraṇa || 285 ||*  

diṭṭhaṃ sāhījārūḍha-tuhiṇa-giri-khaṇḍa-duṇḍa-pidhaṁ va| mahiśāsurasā sasan tuha caḷaṇa-naha-ppāhā-bhariṁ || 286 ||

86 Gaṇḍavaḥo 324, 293 and 305:

*sasamoṃ kau mahiśaṃ kau maraṇāḥ jo hi sampanno| soccia janassa jāo tuha caḷaṇa māṇḍala-tthanām || 324 ||*  

khali taśiṇ rahasukkhita-maṇi-tulā-kodi-kuṇḍalāhariṇo| simyo bhaṇḍa-ṭhāvra-valaṇa-bānḍho vva mahiśaṃsa || 293 ||

samkāntān va roṣavacch-chalaṇa-ppāhā mahiśaṃni| tuha sabari sonśa-siḥ taśla-mareṣa disaṇyō || 305 ||

In addition, 288 refers to a lion as her vehicle. The other verses referring to Mahiṣa are 289 and 316.
What did the Gupta Iconic Type Signify?

was related to the Gupta type. On the other hand, as mentioned earlier, the deity to whom the king paid homage is called ‘the blessed lady who lives in the cave of the Vindhya mountains’ (Vinijjaguhānilayā Bhaava, see n. 77). Therefore, it seems to be likely that the goddess praised by the king was primarily thought to be Mahiṣāsuramardini assimilated to Vindhyavāsini and related to the Gupta iconic type, as may have been the case in the Caṇḍiśataka and Anantavarman’s inscription.

It is well known that Yaśovarman’s campaign described in the Gaūḍava ho is not a historical fact, since he was defeated by King Lalitāditya Muktāpida of Kashmir, possibly in AD 733. However, his conquest of the Magadha king is almost certainly based on historical fact, because an inscription found at Nālandā in Magadha, which records that Mālāda, a son of Yaśovarman’s minister, made a dedication to the Buddhist temple built by a king Bālāditya, praises Yaśovarmadeva as the protector of the world (lokapāla) in the second stanza. Hence, Yaśovarman’s visit to the cave temple of the goddess may also actually have taken place. The location of this temple can be fixed roughly from the sequence of the story around the episode of his visit to the temple, which is as follows: Yaśovarman started his campaign in the autumn (192); he marched out of the city (254); he reached the area around the Son river in winter (276); a description of the marshes (277–279); he reached the Vindhya mountains (280–283) and continued marching (284); he paid homage with a long eulogy to the goddess living in the cave of the Vindhya mountains (285–338); he pondered about death after seeing the dead body (339–347); a description of the forest (348–353); the Magadha king fled without fighting (354); a description of summer (355–363); a description of rainy season (364–413); the Magadha king returned with his allies and the war commenced (414–416); defeating the Magadha king, he continued his campaign to the sea coast (417). This sequence shows that the cave temple in the Vindhya mountains was located somewhere between the Son river and Magadha country.

From these considerations, the temple Yaśovarman may have visited can be identified with one that meets the following three qualifications: situated between the Son river and Magadha country; a cave temple in the Vindhya mountains; and the main idol is a Mahiṣāsuramardini image of the Gupta iconic type. All the three qualifications are fulfilled by the Gopi Cave on the Nāgārjuni Hill where Anantavarman probably installed a

---

87 See Mishra 1977, 67–92. Analyzing the themes and structure of this poem minutely, van Daalen and Bodewitz (1994, 1998) assume that Vākpatirāja was concerned with the representation of a caṇkavratin and say ‘That this caṇkavratin is Yaśovarman hardly seems to be essential’ (Bodewitz & van Daalen 1998, 58).

88 See the references given in n. 75. Mishra, after evaluating the available sources and the preceding studies, concludes that this defeat took place after AD 736 and before AD 748–753 (1977, 102).

89 Sastri 1929–30; Suru’s ed., Introduction, p. liiif.
Mahiṣāsūramardini image of the Gupta iconic type. Therefore, there is a high probability that the goddess’s cave temple in the Vindhyā mountains mentioned in the Gaṇḍavaḥo is the Gopi Cave on the Nāgārjuni Hill.

The above study of the three early textual sources of the Gupta iconic type of Mahiṣāsūramardini, as well as the episode of Kauśīki-Vindhyāvāsinī’s killing of Mahiṣa in the Kauśīki cycle of the Skanda Purāṇa, has revealed that it is very likely that Mahiṣāsūramardini was assimilated to Vindhyāvāsinī in all the sources. Hence, the Gupta iconic type would have signified Mahiṣāsūramardini assimilated to Vindhyāvāsinī during the sixth to the middle of the eighth centuries. In that case, it may be permissible to project this signification of the Gupta iconic type onto the inception of this iconic type. As discussed in the previous chapter (4.2), the proto-myth of Vindhyāvāsinī took shape in a period not much earlier than the composition of the Harivaṃśa, ascribed to around the fourth century, and simultaneously the goddess called Vindhyāvāsinī emerged as a legitimate member of the Hindu pantheon. When Vindhyāvāsinī came to occupy a firm position in the Hindu pantheon, for which the incorporation of her into the Bhāgavata/Vaiṣṇava myth in the Harivaṃśa is a piece of evidence, an iconical representation of her must have become required, especially in order to perform the Hindu ritual of her worship. However, no distinct icon of Vindhyāvāsinī at an early period has yet been found. At that period, Kuśāṇa-type iconic images of Mahiṣāsūramardini, another demon-slaying goddess, were popular in North India. It may be because of the popularity of the Mahiṣāsūramardini icon that Vindhyāvāsinī did not develop her unique iconography but, instead, a new type of the Mahiṣāsūramardini iconography emerged, viz. the Gupta type. As mentioned earlier, the emergence of the Gupta iconic type of Mahiṣāsūramardini probably occurred in the late fourth century, which seems to fit the chronological context of the Hinduization process of Vindhyāvāsinī. Moreover, Vindhyāvāsinī’s representation with the Mahiṣāsūramardini iconography would not have been strange, because the Harivaṃśa attests that she was worshipped with animal sacrifices (p.97 in 4.3) and a buffalo was probably the biggest and most representative animal for sacrifice at that time as it was in a later period. If the Gupta iconic type of Mahiṣāsūramardini had represented Vindhyāvāsinī, this would naturally have resulted in the assimilation of the two goddesses, Mahiṣāsūramardini and Vindhyāvāsinī.

As discussed earlier, the idea that the goddess kills the buffalo demon in the Vindhya mountains can be distilled from a verse of the Caṇḍīsātaka and, in the Kauśīki cycle, Vindhyāvāsinī’s killing of the buffalo demon is likely to have been located in the Vindhya mountains. It may also have been implied

---

90 A reference to her in the Mṛcchakaṭṭika, ascribed to the Gupta period, is another piece. The passage is quoted in n. 48 in 4.2.
91 See n. 98.
92 For the iconography that appeared later than the seventh century, see n. 102 in 4.3.2.
in Kātyāyani’s image dedicated by Anantavarman, which probably had the Gupta-type Mahiṣāsura-mardini iconography and was placed in a cave in the Vindhya mountains. If that were the case, it can be surmized that this idea was the core of the assimilation of Mahiṣāsura-mardini and Vindhyavāsini, although the myths of both goddesses were not entirely integrated in the following centuries.\textsuperscript{93}

5.4 The Rise of ‘the Warrior Goddess’

The Gupta iconic type of Mahiṣāsura-mardini represented not only Vindhyavāsini but also local or regional goddesses in the process of its diffusion. An example is the image of Virājā in the Virājā temple at Jajpur, Cuttak District, Orissa. Virājā was known as a sacred place in the Mahābhārata\textsuperscript{94} and the goddess Virājā is the tutelary deity of the place. In the Virājā temple, the goddess is represented by a Mahiṣāsura-mardini image of the Vindhya subtype of the Gupta-type icon.\textsuperscript{95} Another example is the im-

\footnote{93}The meaning of the Gupta-type iconography is another matter. From the textual material discussed in this section, it is evident that the goddess’s foot placed on the buffalo’s head was the most important feature of this iconic type for her devotees. This posture can be interpreted in three alternative manners: martial, devotional and erotic. The martial interpretation, the goddess’s victory over the buffalo demon, is the most manifest. Furthermore, prostrating oneself and touching a victor’s feet is a typical posture of subjugation. In this regard, the goddess may also have been considered to symbolize a victorious king. As for the second, devotional one, it is needless to say that worshiping the goddess’s foot is a devotional act for her devotee; however, it is not certain that the buffalo demon was regarded as her devotee in this iconography. Verse 6 of the Cauḍiśātaka states that the buffalo demon, though wicked, attained heaven as a result of being killed by her foot. Verse 8 may also suggest the same idea, which becomes clear if we read \textit{svah. stho} for \textit{svastho} in pāda d, cited in Kumbhakarṇa’s commentary as an alternative (it is not rare in old manuscripts that \textit{svah. stho} and \textit{svastho} are not distinguished). So, setting her foot on the buffalo’s head may have been seen as an act of grace from the goddess’s viewpoint. The erotic interpretation may sound strange, but a lady who is angry with her lover’s infidelity and kicks his head when he prostrates himself and apologizes to her for his fault is a popular theme of love quarrels in classical Indian literature. In Cauḍiśātaka 74 and 75, her kicking of the buffalo demon is compared to that of her husband Siva who offended her in a love quarrel. Hardy has pointed out the second and third interpretations in his analysis of the Cauḍiśātaka (1994, 282f and 497).

\footnote{94}MBh 3.83.6-7:
\begin{verbatim}
tato vaiṭar favā gatvā nadiṁ pāpaprāmocanāṁ ||
virajāṁ tirtham āśādya virājati yathā śaśt||
probhavac ca kule puṇye sarvapāpaṁ vāpakati||
gosahasrapalāṁ labdhvā punatī ca kulaṁ na Rath||.
\end{verbatim}

\footnote{95}The present Virājā temple is considered to be a later replacement of the original one, for which Panigrahi states that ‘At Kalasapur, situated about a mile from the present temple of Viraja at Jajpur, which is traditionally known to be the original site of the shrine of that deity, there are still the remains of a small stone temple that may be assigned to the early Gupta period’ (Panigrahi 1981, 370). The Virājā image of Mahiṣāsura-mardini iconography may be an early mediaeval production as the goddess has two arms rather than four, which was a typical feature in the mediaeval Orissan Mahiṣāsura-mardini images.
The Assimilation of Mahiṣāsura-mardini

age of Lakṣaṇā Devī in the Lakṣaṇā Devī temple at Brahmor, Chamba District, HP. This is a Mahiṣāsura-mardini image of the Deccan subtype of the Gupta-type iconography and the inscription on its pedestal records that King Meruvarman had the image of Lakṣaṇā Devī made. The inscription is assigned to the early eighth century on palaeographical grounds.96 Chamba’s Vaṃśavālī, the royal genealogy, also refers to Meruvarman’s dedication of this image, calling it an image of Bhadrakāli.97 During the period in which the Gupta iconic type gradually diffused, there must have been many other cases in which a Gupta-type Mahiṣāsura-mardini image was used to represent the tutelary goddess of a specific locality.98 Conversely speaking, Mahiṣāsura-mardini gradually absorbed these local/regional goddesses into herself through the diffusion of her iconic images. The previous chapter examined the premise that the Vindhyavāsinī myth in the Kauśikī cycle of the Skanda-purāṇa shows that Vindhyavāsinī absorbed local/regional goddesses into herself as her manifestations. In other words, the development of the myth propagated the belief that Vindhyavāsinī was a supra-regional goddess ranking higher than the tutelary goddess in every locality. In the case of Mahiṣāsura-mardini, the diffusion of her Gupta-type iconography promoted a similar idea that each of local/regional goddesses is a manifestation of Mahiṣāsura-mardini. These two processes occurred from the fifth or sixth century on. As discussed in the previous section, the assimilation of Mahiṣāsura-mardini and Vindhyavāsinī may have been commenced concomitant to the emergence of the Gupta iconic type, which was towards the

96 Vogel 1911, 141f, plate X. See note 40.
97 Vogel 1911, 85, Vaṃśavālī 45cd–47ab: devadevaspa sirtschaft murtim naraharer api || 45 || pratisthāpya svagurumā kāśmireṇa mahañmatanā || sūryāṃśau cātmanā bhadrakālinī tatra ganaḥkīpam || 46 || saṃsthāpya vṛṣam asyaḥdhas te alikhad rājaśasanam ||.
98 Eschmann (1978) argues elaborately several patterns of the Hinduization of aboriginal goddesses, based on a variety of examples in Orissa. One of the patterns that occurs on ‘temple level’ of the Hinduization is to use an image of Durgā (viz. Mahiṣāsura-mardini) as an iconic representation of a local goddess in the temple. In this respect, he says ‘Worship at the temple level concentrates on the mūrti. Possession may occasionally occur, but basically the medium of the deity is supposed to be her image in the Hindu sense. It is therefore at this stage mainly, where the performance of pūja is so much intensified, that the need for a “proper” image, at least basically corresponding to Hindu standards, becomes predominant. There are two possibilities to satisfy this need: either a “proper” image—usually an image of Durgā or Cāmunḍā is just added to the symbol and may eventually totally replace it, or the symbol itself is changed in such a way as to look more like an image’ (p. 89). As for the first possibility, he also states ‘The type of Hinduization at temple level, where a popular Hindu image is combined together with the aboriginal symbol, presents the least difficulties. There is no need for a special mythology or for iconographical legends—the close association if not identification of the Hinduized goddess with Durgā is just emphasized by the Durgā image representing her’ (p. 90).
The Rise of ‘the Warrior Goddess’

end of the fourth century. Therefore, the two processes, the integration of local/regional goddesses into Vindhyavāsinī through the development of her myth and that into Mahiṣāsura-mardini through the diffusion of her Gupta-type iconography, continued interacting and enhancing each other in another process of assimilating both goddesses.

Finally, it should be asked which segment of society promoted this development. There are several extant Mahiṣāsura-mardini images of the Gupta iconic type that may well have been produced under royal patronage. The Lākṣaṇa Devī image mentioned above is an indisputable example. It is also highly probable that the Udayagiri relief at Cave 6, the fine fragment from Nagardhan, the famous Badami Cave 1 relief, the earliest piece of the Vindhyā subtype from Nachna, the Vīrajā image, and the lost Kātyāyanī image dedicated by Anantavarman are all royal examples. This suggests that the diffusion of the Gupta iconic type of Mahiṣāsura-mardini was supported by the political ruling class.

Early textual material related to the Gupta type, discussed in detail in the previous section, strengthens this argument. In the Kauśikī cycle, Vindhyavāsinī, to whom the slaughter of the demon Mahiṣa is also attributed, was described as a secondary manifestation of Pārvatī, who is the Mother of the World as the Consort of Śiva, the Lord of the World, in the Skanda-purāṇa. In the other three sources, on the other hand, the goddess into whom Mahiṣāsura-mardini and Vindhyavāsinī were united was probably the primary object of devotion in spite of her being identified with Pārvatī. This difference between the Kauśikī cycle and the other three may have ensued from the difference between the social segments that composed them or caused them to be composed. It is highly probable that the redactors

99 See von Stietencron 1983, 137f, where he argued that the patronage of the warrior class was one of the decisive elements for the popularity of Durgā Mahiṣāsura-mardini. He also pointed out the role this goddess played in the Hinduization process in the early medieval period through the identification of regional goddesses with her.

Royal patronage on Mahiṣāsura-mardini may already have commenced in the late Kuśāṇa period. From this period comes a fragment of a large Kuśāṇa-type Mahiṣāsura-mardini image found in Mathurā and preserved in the Museum für Indische Kunst, Berlin, which was probably used for worship beyond private or domestic confines (Härtel 1992, 85–87, plate 37; Srinivasan 1997, 290, Pl. 20.19). There is also a fragment of a large image belonging to Srinivasan’s Type 1 of ‘the Kuśāṇa Warrior Goddess’ (p. 115 in 4.3.2), which she dates to the fourth century (The Russek Collection, no. 605; Srinivasan 1997, 290f, Pl. 20.22). In this regard, Srinivasan suggests that the lower portion of the female figure found in the Māt shrine in Mathurā was originally an image of her Type 1 and represented a victory goddess, following Fussman’s argument that, on the grounds of similarity between the Māt and the Surkh Kotal temple remains, the Māt shrine may have been a Kuśāṇa dynastic shrine dedicated to the goddess Śrī. As for the Surkh Kotal temple A, Fussman states that it was called ‘the shrine of the Victory (Oanindo) of Kaniṣka’, based on an inscription found there (SK 4), and that Bactorian Oanindo corresponds to the Indian goddess Śrī. See Fussman 1989; Srinivasan 1997, 291, Pls. 20.23 and 24. There is one problem when Fussman’s and Srinivasan’s arguments are put together: it is very unusual for the goddess Śrī to be represented as a warrior-type goddess in the Indian tradition.
The Assimilation of Mahiṣāṣūryamardini

of the Skandapurāṇa were a group of lay Śaiva Brahmins. The three other sources, on the other hand, are all closely connected with kings. The authors of the Caṇḍiśātaka and the Gaṇḍavaho, Bāṇa and Vākpatirāja respectively, were both court poets. The theme of the Gaṇḍavaho is the dvīgvaṭa by King Yaśovarman, so that its close tie with that king, whom Vākpatirāja served, is beyond doubt. As for the Caṇḍiśātaka, although the conditions under which the poem was composed are less clear, Bāṇa is the author of the Harṣacarita, an account of King Harṣavardhana, leading to his accession to the throne, which suggests that he worked under the strong patronage of that king. As regards the third source, Anantavarman’s inscription in the Gopi Cave on the Nāgarjunī Hill, it is obvious that Anantavarman, a chieftain of the Maukharis, caused it to be composed. From this contrast between the Skandapurāṇa and the others, it could be maintained that the devotion to the goddess into whom Mahiṣāṣūryamardini and Vindhyavāsinī were assimilated was supported by the social segment centred on kingship, while Pārvati was of greater value in the Brahmanical Śaiva milieu.

Concerning the worship of Vindhyavāsinī, Daśin’s Daśakumārīcarita, generally ascribed to the sixth to the seventh centuries, provides a few clues for its association with kingship. In the sixth chapter of the work, it is said that King Tuṅgadhanvan of the Suhma country made a wish to Vindhyavāsinī in her shrine at the capital city Dāmalīptā to obtain children and was granted a son and a daughter. Vindhyavāsinī is described as having forgotten her fondness for living in the Vindhya mountains and having lived in the shrine at Dāmalīptā. The eighth chapter refers to her shrine on the river Revā (viz. Narmadā) in the vicinity of Māhiṣmatī. This chapter, which may have been set against the historical background of the fall of the Gupta and the Vākaṭaka dynasties in the second half of the fifth century, is intriguing in the present discussion because Vindhyavāsinī was given a significant role in the stratagem of Viśruta, the hero of this chapter, to regain the Vidarbha kingdom for the legitimate successor. When the king of Aśmaka attacked and conquered the Vidarbha kingdom, the queen with her young son and daughter survived and fled to Māhiṣmatī. There Mitravarman, the king of Māhiṣmatī, made advances to the queen

---

100 Lienhard dated the work ‘on the evidence of style and structure, as a little earlier than Subandhu and Bāṇa, i.e. before the middle of the seventh century’ (1984, 234).
101 Suhmapatis tuṅgadhanvanānāṃapatyāḥ prārthitavān anusmītān ayatane vismṛta-vindhyāvāsarāgaṃ vasantyā vindhyāvāsinyāḥ pādamulāṭ apatyadevayam [(p. 207). On the next page, she is called ‘the goddess who has the moon as a crest-jewel’ (somāpīṭām devīṃ).
102 See Spink 1983, 260–281, in which Spink identifies Viśruta, the hero of this chapter, with Mahārāja Subandhu, who is referred to as a king of Māhiṣmatī in an inscription dated to AD 486. Because the Daśakumārīcarita is in principle a fantastic romance, it seems to be far-fetched to regard this chapter as a sort of record of historical events, as Spink did, although it is not unlikely that the author had the historical events at the fall of the Vākaṭakas in mind when relating the story of this chapter.
The Rise of ‘the Warrior Goddess’

and, when rejected by her, attempted to kill her son, who escaped from the city to the Vindhya mountains. Mitravarman also arranged the marriage of her daughter with Pracanda, a brother of the Malwa king, in order to conciliate the queen. By chance, Viṣrata came to help her son and made the people believe, in the manner of Vindhyavasini’s prediction in the queen’s dream, that Vindhyavasini, taking the shape of a tiger, had protected the surviving prince of Vidarbha and would always protect him as his mother; that Viṣrata would defeat the king of Aśmaka and enthrone the prince as king of Vidarbha.\footnote{According to Viṣrata’s advice, the queen, after killing Mitravarman, told her fabricated dream vision of Vindhyavasini to the chief citizens and ministers of Mahisasuramardini: iśvapne ‘dyā me devyā vindhyavasinyā kṛtaḥ prasādeḥ | “adya caturthe ‘hani pracaṇḍa- 
vārmaḥ marṣyataḥ | paicaime ‘hani revāṭāvarthini maddhavane padaikṣaye vaiṣayaṁ ānuesu 
nirgāteṣu kapaṇam udghātya tvatsutena saka ko ‘pi dvijakumāro nīrīgāyatiḥ | sa rājaṁ 
idad anupāla bālaṁ te pratīṣṭāpayatiḥ | sa khalu bālo maṣyā vyāḍhīrūpaya tirākṣṛtya 
sthāputeḥ | sa cēyaṁ vatsā maṇiḍuvaṇīṁ tasya dvijāṭaraksasya dhārāteṣuiva kalpitāḥ’ iti | 
tad etat atirabhasyaṇaṃ yusmāś eva guptaṃ tiṣṭhatu āvad etat upapatsyate’ (p. 273). On 
the fifth day, Viṣrata in company with the prince came out of Vindhyavasini’s shrine and 
said to the people who had gathered there in order to check on the queen’s dream vision, 
iśtāṃ devī vindhyavasini manmukheṇa yusmān ajñāpayati—”sa eṣa rājaśūnur āpanno 
maṣyā sukṛpayā śārdālāreṇaḥ tirākṣṛtyāya vo dattah | tam enam adyaprabhṛti matputra- 
tasya mandaṁāṭrakṣaḥ iti parīrghantaḥ bhavatāḥ”| api ca dvijahātakatokṣītānaḥpādava- 
prakāśaṁśābhikṣyāṁśārāmakaḥghatgaḥṭanmaṇaṁ máḥā manyadhvan asya roṣṭātaran | 
rakṣāravasā caṣayā saṣyeṣuḥ subhṛ-r abhyāṣajñātā mahyām āryaṁ” (p. 277). Vindhyava- 
vasini is also called Durgā and Ārya (p. 227).}

It is true that Vindhyavasini’s prediction did not actually happen but Viṣrata strategically let the queen tell it and made the people believe it with his trick. However, Viṣrata would have been unable to succeed if there had been no popular belief that Vindhyavasini could help a legitimate prince to recover his kingship.

As discussed in detail in the previous chapter (4.3.2 and 4.3.3), the Vindhyavasini myth in the Kauśikī cycle of the Skanda-purāṇa revealed her characterization as a noble or royal warrior and, furthermore, as a monarch. Although the Skanda-purāṇa was probably composed in the Brahmanical Saiva milieu, it is not necessary to postulate that this Kshatriyaization of Vindhyavasini occurred in the same milieu.\footnote{Some influence of the Brahmanical ideology can also be found in the Vindhyavasini myth in the Kauśikī cycle: for instance, an orthodox or Brahmanical manner of her worship (see p. 98 in 4.3).} Rather, it seems to be more likely, on the grounds of its nature, that her Kshatriyaization was more or less concomitant with the association of her worship with royal patronage and kingship, for which the Daśakumāracarita provided an indication.

The three processes mentioned earlier, local/regional goddesses’ being integrated into Vindhyavasini through the development of her myth, their being integrated into Mahiṣāsurasūrdarśina through the diffusion of her iconography, and the assimilation of both goddesses, in collaboration, would have brought into being a goddess who is not tied to a specific region or a specific demon-slaying myth, in other words, a goddess who is more universal than...
either Vindhyavāsinī, Mahiśāsuramardinī, or a goddess into whom both goddesses are assimilated. Who was this goddess? Because Mahiśāsuramardinī and Vindhyavāsinī formed her nucleus, she must have inherited their significant features: a demon-slaying goddess, analogous to a royal warrior, or further a monarch (cakravartin), and possibly a virgin. Furthermore, she originated from the processes that was probably promoted and supported by the social segment centred on kings and the warrior class. Therefore, the present author calls this goddess ‘the Warrior Goddess’.