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**EMERGENCE OF MOTHER GODDESS CULT AND RELIGIOUS PRACTICES  
FROM PRE HARAPPA TO CHALCOLITHIC PHASE**

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**Abstract**

Man is by nature an artist. A child when is of 5 to 10 years old makes different images in leisure but he makes images of things which had effected his mind or he finds strange. Like the image of snake is often made by the child which becomes a part of his game later on. So this even might have been a case earlier with early men. Venus sculpture from Willendorf looks like the image of a woman holding an embryo in her womb. In early days giving birth might have been a task of great bravery which even might have resulted in high death rate of woman. So probably this made women quite important, owing to their task, that was quite similar to the kind of super natural power of making ones own kind and even satisfying the common desire of man. This might have resulted into the emergence of such a cult.

We see the emergence of the ideas for making female sculptures right from prehistoric age as we have seen in the case of Willendorf and Belan valley, this remains a practice in Proto phases too. The Pre Harappan culture gives significant evidence for mother Goddess cult. Evidences from several sites of Afghanistan and adjoining zone throw ample light over such a cult which was prevalent in this zone. These sites include Mundigak, Morasi Ghundai, Mehargarh, Kili gul Mohammad, Surjangal Periano Ghundai, Kulli etc. The making of femalesculptures even remained a practice in mature Harappan phase which has popularly been interpreted as mother Goddess. We see that the entire religious system of the Harappans was centered around the female principle. Later on we can see such practice in the Chalcolithic cultures too as evident from Zorwe and Malwa culture. The significant sites of these cultures from where female figurines have been discovered are Inamgaon, Navdatoli, Nagda etc. There were other religious practices too prevalent as evident from the discovery of bull sculptures, phallus sculptures etc. Therefore, the present paper is an effort to study the emergence and development of religious practices in Pre Harappa, Mature Harappa and Chalcolithic cultures of past.

## **Introduction:**

The first divine instinct in man (*Homo sapiens*) is love for the mother. Mother, a beautiful creation of nature that creates and nurtures her offspring and synthesises it with life. The whole universe moves around the term 'mother'. It must have been the power to create and nurture in front of whom must have humanity bowed its head. Mother Goddess is a personification of nature, motherhood, fertility, creation, destruction and the supreme power who embodies the bounty of the Earth. The worship of "Mother Goddess" prevailed in ancient world in different forms. She was worshipped as 'great mother', 'Goddess of Earth', 'virgin', 'Goddess of fertility' etc.(Suresh Vasant 1995:301).Mother Goddess was represented as the creative force in all nature, the mother of all things, responsible for the renewal of life(James, E.O).

In India Hinduism adorns Goddess 'Durga' as the divine mother who protects the human kind from all adversities and evils. Mother Goddess is known by different names all over the world i.e. 'Isis' in Egypt, 'Toci' in Aztec mythology, 'Ninsun' in Mesopotamian mythology 'Cybele, Rhea, Juno' in Greek mythology. 'Tellus or Terra mater' in ancient Rome. 'Nerthus' in Germany, 'Mat Zemlya and Mokosh' in Slavic mythology, 'Yen Tanri' in Turkic Siberian, 'Blessed virgin Mary' in Collyridianism Christian sect in Saudi Arabia.

## **Previous work**

### **FIGURINES DISCOVERED OF UPPER PALAEOITHIC AGE**

The worship of Divine Mother can be traced back to prehistoric world. The first Upper Palaeolithic female figurine was discovered in 1864 by Marquis de Vibraye at Laugerie Basse (Dordogne, France),she belongs to Magdalenian culture.In 1894, Edouard Piette discovered another such figurine from Brassempouy.The famous venus of Willendorf was excavated in 1908 from a loess deposit in the Danube Valley, Austria. But the earliest specimen that dates back to 35000 years (C<sup>14</sup>) was recently discovered in 2008 from Hohle Felo. It was 6 cm figurine made up of Mammoth Tusk and belongs to Aurignacian culture of upper Palaeolithic Europe. However,the first upper Palaeolithic evidence of Mother Goddess worship in Indian context came from Newal in the Gariga valley in the form of a stone torso. Another figurine was discovered by G. R. Sharma of Allahabad University from 3<sup>rd</sup> gravel deposit of Lohanda Nala of Belan Valley in Allahabad district. It was made up of bone and

was also interpreted to be a bone harpoon by some scholars. A piece of such evidence emerged in the upper Palaeolithic context at Baghor I, the excavators of Allahabad and Berkeley Universities located a triangular piece of natural stone which dates back to 9000-8000 BC. Such stones are found even today on the top of Kaimur escarpment, placed on rubble platform and worshipped as Shakti (Chakrabarti, Dilip K.,1999.82).The upper Paleolithic engraved core found at Chandravati, Rajasthan supports the symbolic representation of a Mother Goddess and fertility rituals(Shukla, K.S. 2008).The earliest depictions of Mother Goddess icons are found in the rock paintings of Jaora, Madhya Pradesh (Wakankar, V.S. 1992,329).Similar depictions of nude female figurine was seen in the rock paintings of Australia.

### **Worship of goddess earth**

One of the forms of Mother Goddess was ‘Goddess earth’,embodying the fertile earth that has the capacity to nurture life.Earth Goddess is mentioned as ‘Prithvim Matram’ in Taitriya Brahmana.Earth was worshipped as Divine mother by the names of Aditi, Prithvi or Mahimata too in Rig Veda.During the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium B.C , the fertility cult was prevalent in the Indus as well as the trade cities of the Indus valley. Mother Goddess and her male counterpart the Proto Shiva were the divine deities in the Indus Saraswati valley . In Summerian Mythology ‘Ki’ is the earth Goddess ,where as the Summerians from Ur worshipped ‘Inanna’as their fertility Goddess. In Akkadian orthography she has the syllabic values ‘Gi , Qi’ . Later she was given the value of Mother of Life and was called ‘kuabau’ in Akkad and ‘Hepa’ in Hurrian mythology which emerged as Eve(Heva) in Hebrew mythology.

The Upper Palaeolithic Venus figurine have been sometimes explained as depiction of an ‘Earth Goddess’similar to Gaia. H. D. Sankalia postulates the inception of mother Goddess in the portrail of faceless Venus of Willendorf and from the headless Cycladia images from Europe(Sankalia,H.D1960:111-123).

Marshall finds the source of this cult in a female figurine on Harappan seal depicted upside down with the legs stretched and with a plant emerging from her womb, which shows her relation to the fertility cult(Marshall, John,1931,52).

In the Harappan context the worship of the Mother Goddess can be traced back to the Pre-Harappan times. Evidences from several sites of Afganistan, Baluchistan,Sindh throws ample light over the Mother Goddess cult in Pre-Indus age.

## **Mother goddess in pre Harappan age**

The earliest evidence of squatting Goddess was discovered from the first level of Rehman Dheri (early Kot Digi 3200-2800 B.C.) on an ivory pendant that figures a frog, like a squatting woman. The figure is very similar to the one on the sealing of Ur. This posture is similar to the Rigvedic Goddess 'Aditi' in late periods. Mundigak, located on the bank of Arghandab river in Afghanistan was excavated by J.M. Casal. The carbon dating of the site is (4000-3500 B.C.) Mother Goddess have been discovered from period IC. The traces of temple and more figurines of Mother Goddess have been discovered from period IV. The figurine similar to the Zoab Mother Goddess cult have been discovered from Morasi Ghundai located in middle south Afghanistan excavated by Dupri. Mehargarh, on the bank of river Bolan, located in north Baluchistan dated back to 3500 B.C. and was excavated by J. F. Jarridge. Female figurine have been discovered from period IV which resembles the figurine from Namazga III and Kara depe in central Asia and early Rehman Dheri Period V and VI too reveals the female figurines. Kili Gul Mohammad excavated in 1950 by Fairservis revealed female figurines similar to the one found in Mehargarh period VI type. Sur Jangal excavated by Stein and located in North Baluchistan revealed the Zhob Mother Goddess type female figurine. Periano Ghundai was excavated by Stein. A preliminary study here by Fairservis revealed the so called Zhob cult phase. The Mother Goddess here has a particular type of goggled eye and hood. Such figurine have been found at Damb Shadaat III and Mehargarh VI levels Zhob mother Goddess figurine have been reported from Kaudani, Dabar Kot and Damb Shadaat II and III levels too. Kulli is located in the Kolwa tract to the north-west of Bela in south Baluchistan. Here the figurine of Mother Goddess was different kind probably made for religious purpose. The Goddess was decorated by Jewellery all over, which was prepared by terracotta material. The figurine is flat below the waist and her hand have been folded from the elbow. Mehi in Maskai valley of south Baluchistan revealed the Terracotta female figurines with flat base just below the waist. Mother Goddess figurine was discovered by Fairservis from Edith Shahr. Sheri Khan Taraki is located on the bank of Tochi in sedimentary basin of Bannu. The calibrated date range is C.4500 – 3000 BC. Painted female figurine appear occasionally here. Gumla, in Indus-Hakra alluvium plane is near the confluence of Gomal and Indus river. Period II at this site reveals the female figurine with the lower torso stylised into a cone and the seated type with bent legs and pinched facial feature. Dales identified even a proto type of Shiva from Balakot pre-harappan levels which

dates between late fifth millennium (C.4200 BC) and early 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC. The Hindu God was depicted on a painted pot. Probably, bull-cult was also prevalent. The terracotta bull figurine have been discovered from several Pre-Harappan sites i.e. Mundigak, Periano ghundai, Kulli, Rana Ghundai, Nindowari. A large number of clay humped bull were found from period II of Balakot.

### **Worship of mother goddess in harrappan age**

A number of terracotta female figurines have been found in the Harappan cities from Harappa, Mohenjodaro and Banawali. But are absent at Kalibanga and Lothal. The figurines are wearing fan-like headdress, jewellery, armband, necklace, anklet and girdle etc. A cup shape is attached to them with some black residue. These are considered to be related to the religious practices of the Harappans. One of the largest female figurines found at Harappa has a fan shaped pannier headdress, badly broken, with black residue in the cups of the panniers and a forward projecting face. She is heavily ornated with an elaborated choker and two other necklaces, each with three strands and many pendants. Archaeologist Prof. B.B. Lal interprets these figurines to be used by Harappans for lighting purpose for a festival like Dipawali (The earliest civilisation of south Asia 1997). Where as a study conducted by Subhangana Atre identify them as 'Vestal virgins' carrying the sacred fire on their head in Harappan houses. She also links the perforated jars with the same as according to her study, fire was the manifestation of the Mother Goddess cult in harappan culture.

A study conducted by Subhangana Atre shows (1987) how the entire religious system of harappans was centered around the female principle. To what John Marshall gave the adjective of Proto-Shiva, Atre has interpreted as 'Lady of Beast'. She says that the wild animals - a tiger, an elephant, a rhinoceros and a buffalo surrounding the Goddess justify her appellation as "Lady of Beast" and are symbolic of the divine strength of Goddess. She says that fire and water played important role in her cult as the basic prerequisites in the cycle of biological regeneration. She explains as to why the female figurines are absent at Rajasthan and Saurashtra. She says that probably at Kalibangan and Lothal the aspect of Vestal fire assumed a full fledged ritualistic form and so the people started imitating the public ritual of fire worship and thus started building similar fire altars in their houses replacing the custom of offering the terracotta figurines of Vestal Virgins. She says that Virgins played an important role in the fire cult. They tended domestic fire (Hestia vesta) and holded a high position as high priestess. It has even been interpreted that these high

priestess were sacrificed at the end of their term. She talks of two sealings discovered from Mohenjodaro i.e no.DK 6847 and no. B 426 to be an indication for this interpretation. In the first seal the divinity is standing between the branches of a tree while there is another figure kneeling in front of her wearing a headdress similar to the Goddess, behind there is a human faced goat and below are seven female figures as their long plaits would suggest. In the second seal position of the standing female changes and reduces by one. This could be because she was sacrificed to Goddess, as the sacrifice of the high priestess was a common practice in ancient world after their term (Dhavalikar, Atre 1989). A cylindrical seal from Kalibangan shows a horned half human half animal figure. The taller figurines hold spear like weapons in their hands which are crossed above the central figure who has a long plait. It seems as if the female figure in the centre, probably a virgin, is about to be sacrificed to the Goddess (Dhavalikar and Atre 1989).

Amongst other religious practice in Harappa plant worship has been interpreted. The representation of pepal leaf motif on a pottery of Mohenjodaro and Chanhudaro and brick structure enclosure has enabled them to be identified as sacred tree. The discovery of sacrificial altar from Lothal and Kalibanga suggests the practice of animal sacrifice as the bone of cattle and antlers, charred mandible of a bovine, a gold pendant, carnelian bead and three painted pot sherds were found inside an altar. Depiction of Bull seal as well as terracotta bull can also be seen.

### **Religious cult object of late harappans**

When we talk of the Late Harappan culture, we get no terracotta Mother Goddess. But a different kind of cult object was discovered. It is a terracotta object, with bifurcated upper part having three finger tips impressions at the front and the back, it appears at most of the Harappan levels but at Banawali from Pd II representing the Mature phase (Dhavalikar 1997).

### **Worship of mother goddess in chalcolithic age**

When we talk of the evidences related to religious beliefs from the chalcolithic levels we get terracotta female figurines, bulls and evidences of some Proto-Gods though rare. Terracotta female figurines were found at Malwa site of Navdatoli. These were five in number with in articulate features like pinched head, stumpy legs and curved projections for arms ( Sankalia 1971). One example from Navdatoli seems to be very noteworthy. It is an applique figure on a huge storage jar. She is flanked on the right by a female and on the left is a Crocodile, by

the side of which is what looks like a shrine indicated by three concentric arches. Considering the association of lizard with Durga in the historical period, the Mother Goddess can be taken to be a representation of Proto Durga. A fiddle shaped female figurine have been found from Nagda with silt eyes marked by incised lines, protruding arms and breasts. There is an interesting representation on a Malwa ware channel spouted cup from Navdatoli. One of them has been interpreted as male figurine with dishevelled hair and holding a spear in his right hand. The figure is identified as Proto Rudra, as the God is described in Vedic literature having dishevelled hair. A number of baked and unbaked figurines have been found from the sites of Jorwe culture. Several figurines, with head, have been discovered from Nevasa dating back to the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium B.C. The female figurine discovered from Inamgaon are of two types with head and without head. Some figurines are too inarticulate and no attempt was made to show the physical features. One of these bear punched marks around the neck. Some other figurines have flat body. These are two more figurines with large pendant breasts indicative of fertility. An appliqué design on a storage jar found from Late Jorwe at Inamgaon shows a human headed panther. Similar motifs was even found on a jar fragment. The representation is taken to be that of Proto Durga as lion or tiger is associated with her and she was interpreted as a Goddess of fertility. From Inamgaon itself two more female figurine were discovered. They were carefully buried in a small hole of a house floor. An unbaked clay female and bull figurine was found on an oval clay receptacle over a lid. There was another female figurine inside the box which rested on a clay ring used to keep the figurine inside the box in standing position. The female figurine inside the box had pinched head and curved arms but pendant breasts which are indicative of fertility. The female figurine on the box is headless, has a flat body and short curved arms and the lower part seems to be incomplete. A blind hole is found in the abdomen of the figurine as well as the back of the bull. If a stick is inserted in both the Goddess sits on the back of the bull. This can be interpreted to be the beginning of the concept of 'Vahana' in Bramanical Pantheons later on. The headless Goddess stands very parallel to Goddess 'Vishira' ( literally means without head ) who is known to have nurtured child God Kartikeya and thus can be associated with child birth. Two clay figurines of male have been found at Inamgaon in the courtyard of a house near an oven. The figurine has stumpy legs, short curved hands, no prominent facial feature and are unbaked. In the surrounding area of Inamgaon even today figurines are made of wheat flour at some special

occasion before the celebration starts they worshiped the God for success. They call this God Ganesha. Jorwe people even did animal and ancestor worship.

There is no proper idea of the religious beliefs of Aharians except for the probable Bull cult denoted by the stylized and naturalistic bulls found from the excavation at Kayatha cultural strata. Bull figurines were found in great profusion at Kayatha which might be a representation of a bull cult in the Malwa region during the Proto Historic times. Bull has been treated as a sacred animal in India as well as West Asia from time immemorial. About its utility it has been said that the naturalistic figurines might have been used as offerings and the stylized ones may have been used as pendants as the Lingayats were the Shivalinga even today or as votive offerings as even present day tribals offer wooden bull figurines to their Gods as they cannot afford to sacrifice live ones (Dhavalikar, M. K).

### **Result and discussion**

‘Religion is the belief of a commune, on divine, upon which lies the infrastructure of pulsating endeavour of humanity’. We have seen that the humanity have remained snuggled near mother Goddess for last 35,000 years and remains an inseparable part of the world tradition even today. The female figurines outnumbered the male figurine. The abundance of female figurine cannot be ignored. She in some or the other form is worshipped almost all over the world. We see that many of the venus figurine were having the traces of red ocher on them which is seen as the life giving colour and in Indian context too they were related to the religious practices as the figurines reflect. Now, the question rises as to why this cult emerged? And why were these figurines worshipped?

Alan F. Dixon has interpreted it to be related to fertility as well as attractiveness. Helen Benigni says that the consistency in design of their featurless figure with large breasts and often pregnant women figurine represent an archetype of a female supreme creator. It seems people since Upper Palaeolithic age accepted her as a creator who gave birth and thus was manifested in figurines. If we look at the figurines of venus the sense of sensuality cannot be interpreted but it looks more like a figure of a mother. There are no curves and projects no seductive appellation, rather presents the image of a female who has no figure to attract but the physical features to prove her just a mother. But the figurine are not always matronly but even slim. But then as we have learnt from the inferences of Subhangana Atre that virgins too played a vital role in mother goddess cult, so we can say that people started worshipping the female in different form as mother, virgin and even as earth goddess who nourishes and



nurtures the human race from its produce. We can see in the religious practices of Hindu mythology the prevalent practice of virgin worship. In Durga puja on one hand where the Divine majestic idol of Goddess Durga is worshipped there on the other hand the whole celebration is given a completion touch by worshipping the small girls who have not attained the age of 10, popularly known as '*Kumarikas*' or '*Kanjikas*' in north India.

### **Conclusion**

Archaeology as a discipline drags us back and bring to our minds the picture of our rich past culture and changing faces of society.

We have seen that the female figurines are not only the part of today's Hinduism but have remained an inseparable part of human culture as a whole since when the human society was yet in an adolescent stage and was yet developing. The female figurines have been found right from the Upper Palaeolithic to chalcolithic age and then through out the Historical period and we bow our head in front of this divinity even today.

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