

Goddess and Women: The Phenomenon of Possession

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Abstract

This study explores the link between women, goddess-centered spirituality, and the social and psychological elements of possession-like religious experiences via field visits to Varanasi. The study focuses on how women's religious expression is influenced by cultural norms, gender inequity, social marginalization, and emotional discomfort. The study investigates how women interact with spirituality in various social circumstances via qualitative techniques including participation in ritual places, informal interviews, and observation.

The results show that strong devotional and altered religious experiences are more common among women from disadvantaged and lower socioeconomic backgrounds. In patriarchal family arrangements, many of these women experience social repression, financial reliance, emotional distress, and restricted decision-making authority. Spirituality and goddess worship became significant sources of social recognition, emotional alleviation, and symbolic empowerment in these situations.

The study also shows that religious settings give underprivileged women access to possibilities for communal engagement, emotional expression, and temporary power that might not be available in their daily life. Women use goddess rites, ceremonies, and devotional activities as socially acceptable venues to express their identities, resiliency, sorrow, and hope. Women's spiritual experiences and possession-related behaviours in Varanasi are greatly influenced by temple-centered devotional culture.

The study makes the case that possession-related religious experiences should be seen as societal manifestations of inequity, emotional turmoil, and gendered marginalization rather than only as supernatural or pathological phenomena. In the end, the research advances our knowledge of how religion, gender, spirituality, and social power interact in modern Indian culture.

Keywords: Varanasi, Goddess Worship, Divine Possession, Shakti, Women and Spirituality, Gender and Religion, Patriarchal Society, Religious Rituals, Sociocultural Marginalization, Feminine Power, Hindu Traditions, Possession Phenomenon, Symbolic Empowerment, Emotional Expression, Feminist Perspective, Ritual Practices, Spiritual Authority, Social Inequality, Women's Religious Experiences, Devotional Culture.

1. Introduction

People turn to religion during uncertain times, using its rites and teachings to cope with unfairness and misfortune. Shared rituals and beliefs increase the emotional bonds between believers. According to Durkheim, people who have had conversations with God or other supernatural beings claim to have gained togetherness, solidarity, and the inner and physical fortitude to face and conquer life's obstacles.[1]

Every religion seeks to elevate individuals above themselves in order to enhance their social behaviour and quality of life. It suggests norms of proper conduct that are relevant to day-to-day existence. Customs, culture, and values that are passed down from one generation to the next are maintained and preserved by religious convictions. When they violate the code of behaviour, devotees are driven to apologize because they feel awful and regretful. It prevents people from developing antisocial tendencies. In addition to reducing individual worries, uncertainties, and fears, rituals help to forge and reinforce social links and bind individuals to communities. Religion acts as a calming force in times of great social upheaval and abrupt change.[2]

It satisfies societal and individual demands. Durkheim concluded that everything that is classified as religious, such as gods, rituals, sacred artifacts, etc., is the result of human construction and that society is what people worship. This functionalist perspective so often overemphasizes the benefits of religion's unifying, bonding, and consoling role. Talcott Parson asserts that religions explicitly socialized people into common values that were often established by the faith.[3]

The functionalist viewpoint can also be used to understand the rise of goddesses in Hinduism, which could serve to unite traditional Hindu culture. Nonetheless, gender roles continue to exist in Hindu society's divine domain. The three facets of religion—philosophy, rituals, and mythology—are essential to its continued existence. Mythology and ritual performance have an impact on subaltern groups, such as women and lower castes. They are actually the ones who pass on the traditions from one generation to the next. As is frequently stated, Indian society is predominantly patriarchal, yet the situation is far more nuanced when it comes to religion.[4]

1.1 Background of the Study

The conflict perspective of Marx regarding religion is that how religion turns people's attention away from social and economic inequality. Marx believed that, "Religion was the most human feature of an inhuman world and that it arose from the tragedies and injustices of human experience." [5] He conceptualized religion as an ideology that justifies the status quo, rationalizing existing inequities. Marx said, "Religion is analogous to a sedative." He also states that religion is a source of "false consciousness". This legitimating function is reflected in Hindu religion also. Even the divine realm may be the construction of Hindu society, but the male is the maker and enforcer of that religious perspective.[6]

1.2 Equation between Goddess and woman

Hindu goddess imagery reflects the ideals of women. Many goddesses are seen as role models for women, including Parvati/Sati, Sita, and Lakshmi. Social beliefs, practices, norms, and social paradigms—in which Hindu women have been socialized for generations—reflect their characteristics. Women are encouraged to emulate Sita, Lakshmi, or Parvati/Sati in their own life. However, it is demonstrated that many goddesses are not subject to male authority.[7] In one way or another, they prefer to control them. Certain goddesses, particularly the Mahavidyas and the Matrikas, appear to make fun of the "Pativrata" ideal and offer a societal model that is nearly the exact opposite. These goddesses, if they allow males, their presence at all, demand to be served by them. Kali, Tara, Dhumavati, Matangi, Jyestha and Baglamukhi are Goddesses who are associated with marginality, inauspicious qualities, pollution and death. They are termed as anti-models by David Kinsley.[8] A critical analysis of goddesshood models indicates a range of models, from deviant to conformist. According to Durkheim, "deviance" refers to behaviors that go against societal norms and expectations.[9]

Parvati is seen to be charming, caring, sympathetic, and creative. Shiva is the deity of extremes, both ascetic and sexual, whereas Parvati is the modulator. She stands for the ideal of controlled sex—married sex—as a representation of the householder ideal, which is in opposition to both sensuality and asceticism.[10] Shakti, Prakriti, and Maya are even personified deities. However, it appears that gods are in charge of goddesses' inherent uncontrollable nature. The Dharamshastras also highlight how women have become the "pivot" of society due to their ability to procreate. Women's sexuality should be protected for the sake of patrilineal succession, patriarchy, and Brahmin supremacy. The notion of "motherhood," which limits women's mobility and places a weight on them to raise and care for their children, is propagated by patriarchal societies. Women's social duties and responsibilities are connected to the biological reality of having children.[11]

The "Anti-model" or deviant Goddesses (Kali) are at one extremity of the spectrum, while the god consorts (Lakshmi, Parvati/Sati, Sita, etc.) who act as role models for femininity are at the other [please refer to Figure 1]. Durga is in the middle of this spectrum since she has both characteristics. She is close to Parvati/Sati, Lakshmi, because of her beauty, motherhood, nurturing, caring, fertility, and association with Prakriti, yet she is closer to Kali as a warrior goddess because of her fearsome and violent nature.

Figure 1: Societal Perspective for Goddess

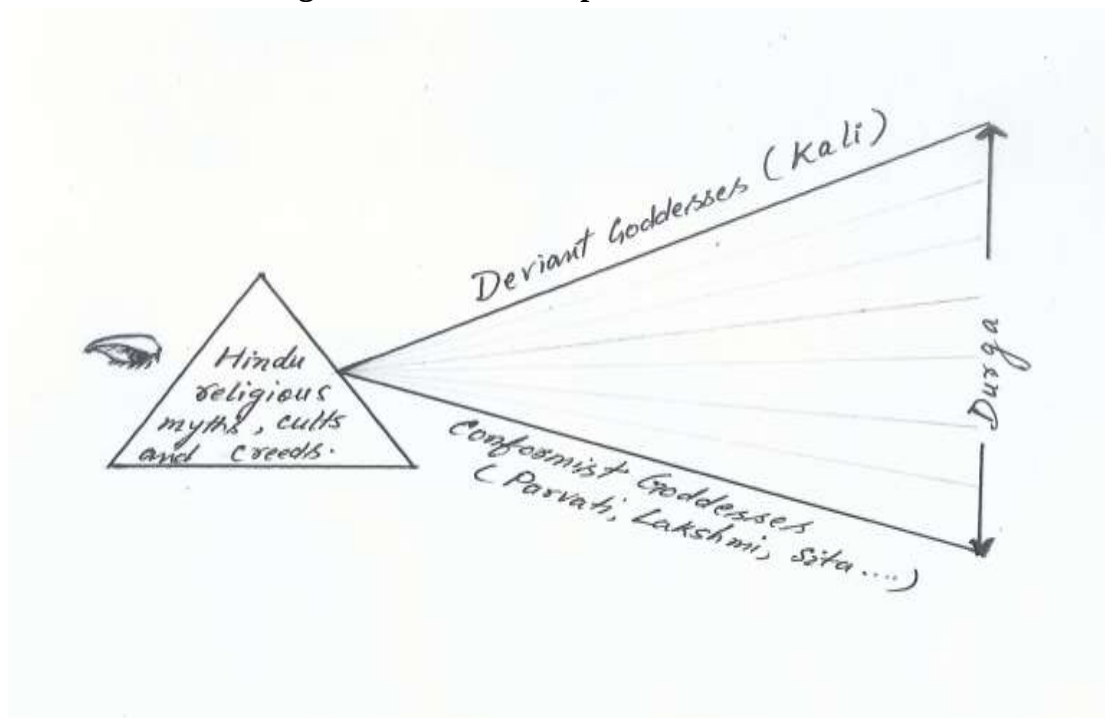
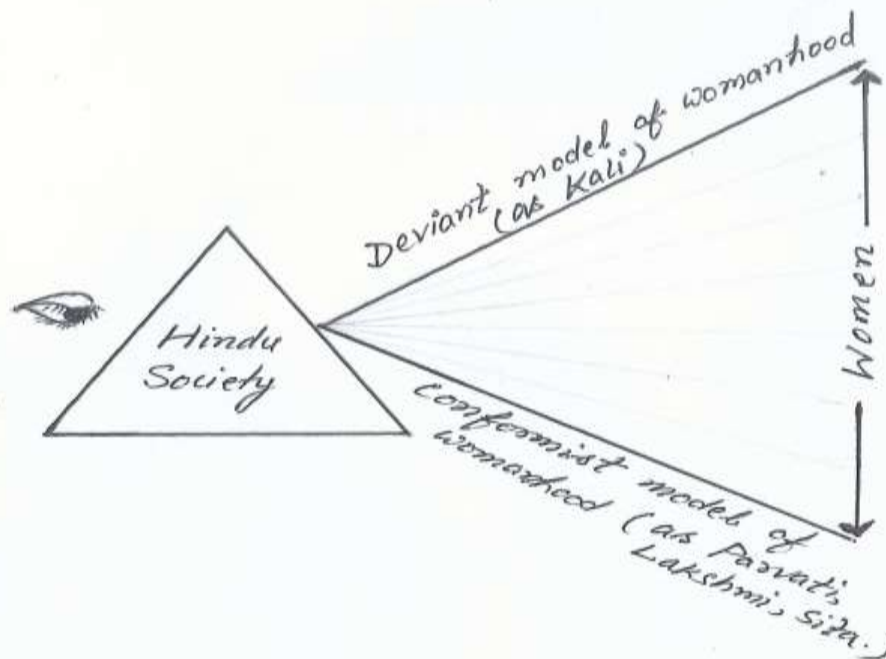


Figure 2: Societal Perspective for Women



Here the term ‘deviant’ is used to show the deviation from approved social normative structure and believes.

For generations, goddess models—from conformist to deviant—seem to have served as role models for Indian womanhood. According to Weber, the conformist model of goddesses is the ideal kind for women; despite changes in time and space, women still exhibit both traits. [Figure 2]

Women's capacity for reproduction and the essence of motherhood are unalterable traits. There are no such deities that could act as human role models. Conformity and divergence also define the range from great to terrible. [12]

1.3 Concept of Spirit Possession

Possession: A broad range of circumstances are defined by anthropologists, psychologists, and psychiatrists under the word "possession." A state of possession occurs when a person's personality is taken over by a spirit, heavenly force, or other external entity. [13] It is easier to comprehend possession in terms of a psychological process connected to the idea of "trance." A trance is an altered state of consciousness in which a person is neither fully awake nor fully asleep. Walking between the conscious and subconscious minds is essentially what the trance state entails.[14] “Psychophysiological altered states of consciousness known as trance constitute something fundamentally different from cultural beliefs and practices concerning possession.” [15]

The level of trance varies. There is a spectrum of trance, ranging from light to deep. While in a very light trance, the individual becomes more conscious of his ideas, actions, feelings, and physical sensations. The practice of meditation may be the cause. Excessive television watching, book reading, or online gaming might cause someone in a slight trance to lose themselves in "day dreams" or fantasies. A loss of awareness of one's own body, time, and environment characterizes the subsequent stage of trance, also referred to as

medium trance or flow state. Deep trance, which precedes ordinary sleep, is the next stage of trance.[16] People in this stage experience a rare and fleeting level of consciousness prior to falling asleep, as their conscious mind starts to shut down. During that time, a person may have tactile or auditory hallucinations, bizarre sights, and unusual stories playing out in their minds. In the last stage, a person goes into a deep, dreamless sleep or becomes completely unconscious. Not all trances have anything to do with cultural interpretation. Deep trance is similar to possession, according to some cultural beliefs. Some scholars blended the ideas of trance and possession. "Trance-possession" suggests, as have many other scholars and laypeople, that the two ideas are essentially interchangeable.[17]

Lewis highlights that while "possession by an external agency or spirit may be one explanation of trance, it does not follow that all conditions in which spirit possession is postulated necessarily involve trance." The assumption that these two states are always and inevitably equivalent leads to a great deal of confusion in the literature on spirit possession.[18] Daniel had done his study on Afro-Brazilian practitioners and suggests that "possession and trance are not identical and the complex phenomena of ritual possession must be grounded in a firm understanding of the difference between these two terms/concepts." [19] According to Prince and Gellhorn and Kiely [20] trance denotes a psycho-physiological transformation probably involving changes in brain-body chemistry and functioning, during altered state of consciousness. Conversely, possession encompasses cultural-religious ideas that are established by common rituals and ideologies. Turner, who studied with the Ndembu people in Zambia and took part in Ihamba healing rites in early 1950 and 1985, contends that for the majority of participants, the core of possession ceremonies is being taken over by the spirit rather than "entering" a trance.[21] In his later use of the term "Trance-Possession," Rouget implies that all (culturally labelled) possession takes place when the religious medium is actually in a (psychophysiologicaly altered) trance state, notwithstanding his initial failure to distinguish between trance and possession. [22]

According to Judith Becker's research on "Music and Trance," trance is a mental state marked by intense concentration, a loss of a strong sense of self, and access to experiences and knowledge that are not possible in non-trance states. [23] Bourguignon defines possession as referring to states in which alterations of behaviour and self-presentation are interpreted by the subject and others as due to the presence of another entity, or personality. [24] Possession may be of an Individual or Group as a whole, it may be of malevolent or benevolent in nature, Possession may be voluntary or involuntary and it may be considered to have beneficial or detrimental effects.

The episodes of Goddess possession can be heard about throughout India. Kathleen M. Erndl,[25] in her essay 'Sheranvali: The Mother who Possesses' based on her field work in Punjab, talks about this phenomenon. Sarah Caldwell wrote about the possession of Bhagvati in Kerala. [26] Perhaps the most common religious expression among Hindus in northwest India is the worship of Devi, often known as the Grate Goddess or Durga. There are numerous pilgrimage sites in the area that are connected to goddesses including Vaishno Devi, Jwala Mukhi, Vindhyavasini, Mahiyar Devi, and many more. The one all-pervasive divine energy known as "Shakti" is claimed to manifest in each of these goddesses, each of whom has a unique personality, iconography, and story cycle.

Shakti's goddesses are portrayed as separate beings. They are not exactly like the domesticated or subservient female consorts frequently portrayed in patriarchal religious traditions, despite the possibility of an indirect relationship with male deities. However, at a deeper theological level, all Goddesses are frequently seen as expressions of a single, ultimate feminine divine force. Considering the several Goddesses connected to Sheranvali as distinct entities rather than just as complimentary figures to male

gods is one approach to comprehend this intricate relationship.[27] These goddesses symbolize feminine power in its independent and dynamic form by embodying strength, protection, destruction, fertility, and spiritual authority. The acknowledgment of women and feminine energy as sacred, strong, and able to transcend traditional social boundaries is reflected in their devotion.

2. Hypothesis

This study's hypothesis is that because deviant or non-conforming goddesses represent defiance of social and patriarchal standards, they are more often linked to possession phenomena. In traditional Hindu patriarchal society, possession ceremonies involving such Goddesses offer women a socially acceptable and culturally protected space to release repressed emotions, frustrations, fears, and concerns. Women are momentarily able to transcend traditional gender norms and express sensations that might otherwise go unspoken through the condition of possession. Therefore, possession can be understood as a psychological and social mechanism for emotional release, identity assertion, and symbolic empowerment in addition to being a religious or spiritual act.

3. Objectives of the Study

This study intends to explore the relationship between goddesses and women through the incidence of divine possession in Varanasi, specifically how possession rituals represent the relationship between feminine spirituality, power, and social identity. The study also looks at how women use possession practices to represent divine power and how these experiences affect their social roles. In order to determine whether elements like class, education, occupation, caste, and economic circumstances influence involvement in possession rituals and impact the social perception of possessed women, the research also looks at the socioeconomic situation of possessed people.

4. Sources and Method

Both primary and secondary sources were used in the study's investigation. Priests, worshipers of the Goddess shrines in Varanasi, and oral conversations with possessed women were among the major sources. The many academic books and research papers on the subject that were published in journals were among the secondary sources. The researcher employed observation in addition to oral interviews as a means of investigating the possession phenomenon. Purposive sampling is the technique used to select responders. The research approach is exploratory. The 'Goddess' is studied using a broadly feminist approach with predetermined goals.

5. The Locale of Study:

Varanasi, the study location, is thought to be among the world's oldest cities still in existence. People from all around the world are drawn to its spiritual glory. Varanasi has been praised in Hindu literature in ways that are unimaginable for a simple city. They have repeatedly declared, "Na tadrisham hi gagane na bhoomyam na rasatale," that Varanasi is unmatched in this world and all others.[28]

In Hindu tradition, Varanasi has great religious significance and is regarded as the sacred city of Lord Shiva. The city serves as a spiritual hub where the main Indian pilgrimage customs come together. Varanasi is a unique hub of goddess worship and ritual activities, with replicas and representations of several goddesses and their temples from around the nation. For goddess possession to occur, these temples offer a significant cultural and religious setting. Particularly during festivals and ceremonial

events, rituals related to possession are carried out with a great deal of commitment, zeal, and group participation. Through possession rituals, women can experience and express spiritual authority in a setting that reflects the deeply ingrained belief in divine feminine power.

6. Limitations of the Study

6.1. Limited Geographical Area

Field trips in Varanasi served as the study's main source of information. The results cannot be applied to other parts of India, where women's spiritual practices and goddess worship may vary culturally and socially, because the study only looked at a few specific areas.[29]

6.2. Small and Qualitative Sample

The study mostly used qualitative techniques including fieldwork, informal interviews, and observation. The results are interpretative in nature and cannot be regarded as statistically representative due to the small sample size.

6.3. Cultural and Language Barriers

During fieldwork, contact with local women and community members was occasionally hampered by regional linguistic and cultural barriers. This could have reduced the breadth and precision of the data gathered.[30]

6.4. Subjective Interpretation

Interpreting women's experiences, emotional expressions, and religious practices within certain cultural contexts was part of the study. As a result, both the participants' answers and the researcher's interpretations may contain some subjectivity.[31]

6.5. Social Stigma and Hesitation

Because they were afraid of being judged and stigmatized by society, many women were reluctant to openly disclose personal issues, family disputes, emotional suffering, or religious experiences. This could have had an impact on how thorough and transparent the answers were.[32]

6.6. Time Constraints During Field Visits

Opportunities for long-term observation of rituals, seasonal festivals, and communal practices that may have offered deeper insights into women's spiritual experiences were limited by the field trips' short duration.

6.7. Lack of Comparative Quantitative Data

Large-scale quantitative surveys, psychological evaluations, and statistical analysis were not included in the study. Because of this, the results are still mostly descriptive and interpretative rather than quantifiable by science.[33]

6.8. Influence of Local Belief Systems

Religious experiences and devotional practices are deeply influenced by local traditions and belief systems. Distinguishing between cultural customs, emotional experiences, and social influences was sometimes challenging during the research process.[34]

6.9. Changing Social Contexts

Women's social roles and religious engagement are gradually changing due to rapid industrialization, urbanization, education, and media impact. As a result, the results are representative of a particular historical and societal environment.[35]

6.10. Researcher Presence During Observation

The presence of the researcher in ritual spaces and during social interactions may have influenced particip-

ants' behaviour, responses, or reactions during the fieldwork process.

7. Field work:

Field Visit Findings: Varanasi

Field trips were carried out in Varanasi to comprehend the connections between women, spirituality, social inequity, and goddess-centered religious rituals. The city offered crucial insights on how women use religion as a form of identity, symbolic empowerment, emotional support, and social recognition, especially those from marginalized and economically challenged backgrounds. [36]The study investigates how, within a patriarchal social system, goddess worship and possession-related behaviours establish culturally acceptable venues where women can vent repressed emotions, negotiate social injustices, and enjoy transient spiritual power.

7.1. Goddess and Women: Gender Inequality and Spiritual Expression

The field observations in Varanasi showed that patriarchal societal institutions and gender inequality had a significant impact on women's spiritual expression. Many of the women who participated in religious activities were from lower socioeconomic groups and had little social power in their homes and communities. Financial reliance, household duties, a lack of education, and limited decision-making authority all influenced their daily lives.

Religious places like temples, ghats, and devotional events developed into significant venues for women to express their feelings and become more visible in society. Women expressed emotions that were otherwise repressed in day-to-day life through bhajans, fasting customs, prayer rites, and goddess worship. They were able to communicate pain, worry, hope, and inner strength in ways that were acceptable to their culture through spiritual engagement.

According to the study, women who were typically quiet in social and familial contexts become more outspoken and emotionally expressive at religious events. In this way, spirituality served as a substitute medium for self-expression in a culture that frequently suppressed or disregarded the voices of women.

7.2. Religion as Emotional Support for Marginalized Women

The Varanasi field study showed that religion was a significant factor in giving impoverished women emotional support. Religious devotion was a common source of consolation and psychological solace for women dealing with poverty, personal strife, societal neglect, widowhood, or mental stress. Temple visits and spiritual activities were regarded by many women as times of serenity and inner strength. Despite their challenging living circumstances, ritual participation gave them a feeling of purpose and optimism. By viewing adversity as a part of spiritual destiny or divine testing, religious belief also assisted women in enduring suffering.

Worshiping goddesses gave some women a sense of emotional stability and maternal protection. Particularly for women who were not supported by family or social institutions, the divine feminine was seen as a source of justice, compassion, and power.

7.3. Symbolic Empowerment Through Goddess Worship

The symbolic empowerment of women through goddess worship was one of the main discoveries in Varanasi. Despite the fact that many women had subservient roles in society, their devotion to strong female deities like Durga, Kali, and Annapurna produced symbolic connotations with authority, strength, and protection. Women briefly held positions of spiritual significance and social prestige during religious ceremonies and festivals. They gained notoriety and self-assurance in the community by engaging in

spiritual activities. Women who worshipped goddesses were able to envision feminine power in contrast to the oppression and inequity they encountered on a daily basis.

The field visit showed that many women emotionally identified with the goddess's image, which frequently symbolized an ideal of bravery and independence. Women communicated their desires for respect, dignity, and inner strength through ritual involvement.

7.4. Conclusion of field visit

The intimate connection between women's lived experiences, spirituality, and gender inequity was highlighted by the field excursions to Varanasi. Religion arose as a crucial emotional and social support system for marginalized women who faced economic hardship, emotional suppression, and limited social authority.

The results showed that via spiritual expression and goddess worship, women gained momentary social acknowledgment, emotional relief, and symbolic empowerment. The study shows how women frequently use spirituality to deal with hardship, maintain their identities, and develop inner strength in the face of unfair societal institutions.[37] Devotional activities and rituals based around goddesses offer socially acceptable venues for women to express their feelings, look for support, and overcome social obstacles. The study thereby advances our knowledge of how religion and goddess-centered customs influence women's identities, experiences, and social roles in modern Indian culture.

8. Observations

The Goddesses, who are at the "deviant" end of the spectrum, were found to be most likely to have human cars. People are never known to be possessed by consort goddesses like Parvati and Lakshmi. Both transcendent and immanent, the goddesses Durga and Kali serve a variety of purposes, from cosmic issues like the universe's creation, preservation, and destruction to human issues like healing illnesses, assisting those in need, and providing joy. She functions as the universe's dynamic force. According to Shakta theology, Shakti, who is associated with the Great Goddess as the ultimate reality and the entirety of all beings, takes on both furious (raudra) forms like Kali and peaceful (saumya) forms like Vaisno Devi. In the lives of her followers, the Goddess is both an immediate presence and a transcendent ideal.

At pilgrimage sites, ritual performances, and domestic shrines, the Goddess is revered in a variety of settings and forms, including stone, flame, and icon. However, the Goddess' ownership of human, typically female, vehicles is the most dramatic method that followers encounter her. Humanity's divine ownership is always seen as a sign of grace and is thought to be a gift from Goddess rather than an affliction. As the Goddess' preferred means of bestowing onto her followers a sacred vision (darshan).[38] There are many other kinds of unwanted possessions by malevolent or mischievous spirit, Ghost or ancestors". Susan Wadley writing about Uttar Pradesh, [39]John Stanley, writing about Maharastra, [40]and Gananath Obeyesekere, writing about Sri Lanka, [41]all refer to differences between affliction or demonic spirit and invited or divine spirit. Even if it isn't initially requested, possession by a kind god is fostered and supported in South Asian civilization, particularly in North West India. While possession by the Goddess is regarded as a blessing, a sign of grace, a positive but amazing look, possession by a demonic spirit is viewed as a calamity or punishment. It is evident that possession encompasses cultural interpretation, which may differ depending on the situation and location. "Possession" is frequently used in Hindi and Punjabi to refer to the Goddess's manifestation, which is thought to take the shape of playing and wind.

It is believed that when a woman is possessed, the Goddess (Mata) enters and plays within her in a "wind form." Glazed eyes, a shift in voice, and a spinning head with loose hair are all signs of possession. Women's hair should traditionally be braided and knotted up. It must be left hanging.)[42]

Goddess occasionally takes on the form of the wind without getting into a human vehicle. The Goddess adopts this shape, which is defined by breath and movement, to show her strength or to travel from one location to another without fully emerging. The phrase "playing" describes the Goddess' wind form, Savari (vehicle), which enters a person and takes possession of her, causing her to move her head and body erratically.[43] Here, "Savari" refers to the lady that the Goddess rides on or inhabits after taking on a specific form, via which she communicates and makes herself known.

It is believed and often described in reading about South Asia, that normally, possession along with related ecstatic behaviour, belongs to the "Little tradition", and thus largely confined to the lower castes, poor and uneducated in rural areas.

But Kathleen M. Erndl emphasized in her essay, "*Sheranvali : The Mother who Possesses*", that possession not only happen in little tradition, but Goddess possession can be seen in both village and urban setting, among low and high castes (including Brahmins), the poor and the rich, the uneducated and the educated, Sikhs as well Hindus. As far as gender is concerned, possession by the Goddess through occurring in both sexes is more frequent among women. [44]

Possession is frequently observed to be planned and controlled in a performance setting like Jagrata. Sometimes, in a non-ritual setting, unplanned, uncontrolled possession takes place. Occasionally, a woman may begin to experience possession on a certain day of the week, like Tuesday or Sunday, or during Navaratra. The ladies, who are frequently possessed, are referred to as "Mata" and exhibit recognizable religious impressions.

Similar to the Great Goddess (Durga or Sheranvali), devotees of the male gods Vishnu and Shiva are never observed to be possessed. However, certain minor male deities, such as Baba Balak Nath, do possess. His vehicle is male and it can be considered to be an exception. The general consensus is that the Goddess appears far more frequently than the male deities, and that she talks through and plays in humans to assist her devotees and show her Shakti. The question arises as to why women are possessed more frequently than men and that why the Goddesses on the deviant sides of the spectrum are more likely to possess their devotees (women).

For the aforementioned question, psychological explanations might be used. This may be aided by Carl G. Jung's research on the synchronistic relationship between the individual and the universe as well as the "active imagination" process. The casual connecting principle that unites a person with the universe is called synchronicity. One way to integrate aware and unconscious psychological contents is through active imagination. [45] When archetypal projections or pictures from the collective consciousness arise in imaginative situations like dreams, the unconscious and conscious parts of an individual's mind enter a dynamic connection. According to "Jung," when active imagination creates the archetype of the self as a result of the unrestricted integration of unconscious contents into conscious awareness, psychic wholeness is indicated. Women are oppressed, subjugated, and viewed as second sex in patriarchal societies.

Norms and values have historically continuously limited and governed her. Women are required to live and behave in accordance with the conformist ideal of womanhood, such as Lakshmi and Parvati. However, some women may have an innate desire to break free from the constraints of patriarchal tradition, which they may not put into practice. Women are drawn to the aberrant models of womanhood, such as Kali and Durga, and they accumulate in their collective unconsciousness. Possession is one way

that this could manifest as "active imagination." By portraying themselves as Goddess (Deviant), women transcend normal bondage, and the goddesses on the deviant end of the spectrum allow women's servile desires to be expressed through possession.[46]

9. Conclusion

The phenomena of possession in regard to goddesses and women represents a complex interplay of religion, culture, gender, spirituality, and social identity. Throughout history, possession has been seen as a social and symbolic manifestation of feminine strength, resistance, and emotional experience in addition to being a supernatural phenomenon. Women who become goddess mediums hold a special social status in many traditional cultures, where they are granted temporary spiritual power and social respect that they may not otherwise have in daily life.[47]

This study emphasizes how, in addition to fulfilling religious responsibilities, possession rituals serve as cultural venues where women vent repressed emotions, social suffering, personal goals, and group worries. The possessed female body becomes a hallowed conduit for the transmission of divine power, healing, societal critique, and communal guidance. Goddess ownership gives marginalized women respect, symbolic power, and transient social authority in a number of cultural situations.

The dual character of possession is also revealed by the study. Possession may be a source of emancipation, empowerment, and emotional release, but it can also perpetuate patriarchal systems by restricting women's power to ceremonial or transient contexts. As a result, possession continues to be both a transformational spiritual experience and a socially controlled phenomena influenced by cultural expectations, gender conventions, and religious beliefs.[48]

In summary, the phenomena of goddess possession illustrates the intimate connection between gender and spirituality. It illustrates how communities use religious rituals and holy symbolism to interpret women's voices, feelings, and bodies. Therefore, comprehending possession provides important insights into the larger dynamics of religion, culture, gender relations, social inequality, and the human experience in modern society.

10. Future Scope of the Study

The current study creates a number of opportunities for further investigation into the spiritual experiences and goddess possession of women. Comparative studies may be carried out to look at parallels and contrasts between various cultural settings and kinds of goddess worship because possession practices varies throughout groups, geographies, and religious traditions. A more comprehensive knowledge of how possession rituals operate in many social and religious contexts may result from such study.[49]

The psychological and mental health aspects of possession experiences, namely the connection between trauma, emotional expressiveness, stress, and altered states of consciousness, may potentially be investigated by future researchers. A more thorough understanding of the phenomena can be achieved through interdisciplinary approaches that include anthropology, psychology, sociology, religion studies, and gender studies.[50]

Future studies should focus on how media, technology, urbanization, and globalization affect women's devotional activities and possession customs. Traditional religious rites and public attitudes of possessed women are increasingly altering due to modern communication platforms and shifting socioeconomic situations, which merits further scholarly investigation.

Possession behaviours of marginalized groups, such as rural women, lower caste groups, indigenous people, and economically challenged segments of society, may be further studied by researchers. These kinds of studies can help explain how religious rituals and spirituality become places for emotional expression, identity development, social bargaining, and resistance.[51]

In order to determine if these rituals continue to empower women in current culture or whether they are being reinterpreted within shifting patriarchal and societal frameworks, future research may also concentrate on modern feminist interpretations of possession. All things considered, the study of goddess possession is still a rich and developing topic that presents many chances for further investigation into spirituality, gender, culture, religion, social injustice, and human awareness.

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