

**Devilinga of Kagajipara: Parvati's Meditative Union with
Siva in Medieval Iconography**

Pubali Ghosh¹

¹Research Scholar

Department of History

University of North Bengal

Darjeeling, West Bengal,India

Email:ghoshpubali22@gmail.com

Abstract:Indian religious sculpture uses syncretism as a visual form of theology to resolve three main issues which include inter-religious disputes and complex philosophical matters and regional cultural conflicts. Artists developed composite deities during the Gupta period and beyond through their creation of Hindu deities which included Harihara and Trimūrti and Ardhanārīśvara and Śiva-Viṣṇu-Lokeśvara. The Devilinga or Apitakuca type stands as the most hidden member of this group. The aniconic liṅga of Śiva functions as the main component of the sculpture while a four-armed goddess bust in *dhyāna-mudrā* emerges from its shaft. The sculpture exists in the Kagajipara artwork which belongs to present-day Bangladesh. The article interprets this image through the *Skanda Purāṇa Arunacalamāhātmya* which depicts Apitakuca-Pārvatī who achieves complete union with her husband through meditation at Arunācala while she simultaneously projects her energy as *Śakti* from the liṅga-mountain. The figure uses *dhyāna-mudrā* and rosary and book to connect with Buddhist tantric goddesses who include *Cundā* and *Prajñāpāramitā* the Devilinga connects Hinduism and Buddhism at the border between two faiths during the late Pāla-Sena period in Bengal. The comparison shows that Ardhanārīśvara shows gender balance through its depiction of a modern human body which contains two distinct sexes but Apitakuca shows mystical powers which flow from the inner part of the liṅga which demonstrates the basic bond between Śiva and Śakti.

Keywords:Apitakuca, Arunacalamāhātmya, Ardhanārīśvara, Devilinga, Śiva-Śakti,etc.

Date of Submission:28.02.2026

Date of Acceptance: 08.03.2026

Introduction

Indian religious sculpture uses syncretism as a visual language that provides a pathway to understand theological matters and sectarian conflicts and regional identity. The Indian sculpture tradition shows its use of syncretism through a visual theology that combines opposing deities to create composite forms which represent intellectual unity among cosmic forces (Bhattacharyya, 1980). The Gupta period saw the start of this practice which spread

Devilinga of Kagajipara: Parvati's Meditative Union with Siva in Medieval Iconography

across different religious traditions that included Saiva and Vaishnava and Sakta and Buddhist and Jaina faiths. The Pala-Sena sculptures of Northern Bengal presented goddess-linga hybrids together with Trimurti (Brahma-Vishnu-Siva) and Harihara (Siva-Vishnu) representations. During dynastic transitions, these forms addressed dualities like Purusha-Prakriti and demonstrated the political diplomacy and cultural tolerance of their monarchs. The interchange of qualities between gods and goddesses is evident in Buddhist pantheons, where Ganesha and Lakshmi were assimilated, Durga wore *sankha-chakra*, and Siva took on Vishnu's conch.

In order to express intricate theological concepts, Indian sculptors created a vast lexicon of composite deities starting in the early and early mediaeval eras. In eastern India, syncretic symbols like Ardhanārīśvara ("Siva-Pārvatī), Harihara (Siva-Viṣṇu), Hariharapitamaha (Brahmā-Viṣṇu-Siva), and Śiva-Lokeśvara or Viṣṇu-Lokeśvara demonstrate how sectarian beliefs clash yet maintain their fundamental unity through their visual representation (Haque, 2006). The images show real historical events which include methods of patronage between two groups and the formation of political partnerships and the requirement to merge opposing religious organizations with existing Brahmanical or Buddhist traditions.

The term Devilinga or female *liṅgas* refers to a contemporary scientific classification of *liṅgas* that have several tiny *Śaktis* connected around the *liṅga* or that depict a goddess or female torso coming from the shaft of the *liṅga*. Devilinga, also known as Apitakuca, is at the extremity of that language, where Buddhist Tantra, *Sakti* theology, and *liṅga* symbolism converge. Dipak Chandra Bhattacharyya identified an image from Kagajipara, in present Bangladesh as Apitakuca, and the study first outlines the mythic background of Arunācala, the fiery pillar of Śiva that became an immobile *liṅga*-mountain (Bhattacharya, 1974). It then looks at how later narrations of Pārvatī's penance and her request for complete union (*śivasāyujya*) support this identification. In contrast with other suggestions, the four-armed goddess in *Dhyāna-mudrā* emerges from a strongly sculpted *liṅga* (Mahamāyā, Tripurābhairavī, Buddhist Cundā), as well as comparable Devilinga instances from eastern India. While the Devilinga keeps the *liṅga* as its main axis and allows *Śakti* to emerge as an emanation from within it, Ardhanārīśvara divides a single anthropomorphic body into male and female parts. The Apitakuca Devilinga is a distinct statement on mystical unity rather than simple gender complementarity because of this difference, which is rooted in the meditative narrative of the Arunacalamāhātmya. The Devilinga from Kagajipara in modern-day Bangladesh, who was reinterpreted by Dipak Chandra Bhattacharyya in the 1970s, is the most well-known Apitakuca contender (Bhattacharyya, 1974).

Devilinga of Kagajipara: Parvati's Meditative Union with Siva in Medieval Iconography

Textual sources for Understanding Devilinga

Purāṇic tale, particularly the *Skanda Purāṇa*, especially the Arunacalamāhātmya parts where Pārvatī practices *tapas* for full union (*śivasāyujya*) and Arunācala is described as a flaming *liṅga*. Although they lack a stable technical term like "Devilinga," Other Purāṇas such as the *Kālikāpurāṇa*, *Varāha Purāṇa*, and *Devī-Bhāgavata* give episodes of goddesses emerging from or intimately associated with *liṅgas*. Śaiva Āgamas and Śākta tantras reiterate that *liṅga* is the combined form of *Paraśiva* and *Paraśakti*. According to *Kamikagama*, *Suprabhedagama*, and *Vishnudharmottara Purana*, Ardhanarishvara is a prime example of intra-religious syncretism, combining Parvati's left half with *karandamukuta*, mirror, and silken garments and Siva's right (masculine) half with *jatamukuta*, *trisula*, and tiger skin. The *Varaha Purana* describes how it came from space: While the Shiva Purana describes Parvati's absorption following her curse on *Bhringi*, Brahma calls Maheshvara's feminine side for creation. The *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad's* bisexual *Atman* is described in *Brhatsamhita* as Sambhu's third eye with Parvati's half. These statues, which are common in Bengali temples, represent the inseparability of Siva and Sakti. Images that blend the classic *liṅga* with an anthropomorphic goddess form create a more obscure and obscure subset of this scene. They combine the powerful, columnar emblem of Śiva with overt displays of Śakti, and are traditionally called "Devilingas" (*liṅgas* with a deity, generally a female, erupting from them). The scarcity of direct sāstric prescriptions and their rarity have led to interpretive discussions in contemporary research. In these discussions, the Apitakuca form which is textually linked to the Arunacalamāhātmya of the *Skanda Purāṇa* has taken center stage.

Textual Background: Arunacalamāhātmya and Apitakuca

The magnificence of Arunācala, the "red mountain" associated with Tiruvannamalai in Tamil Nadu, is described in the *Arunacalamāhātmya*, a portion of the *Mahēśvara khaṇḍa* of the *Skanda Purāṇa*. The earlier *liṅgodbhava* tale is adapted in this way: Śiva appears as an unending pillar of fire to settle a debate between Brahmā and Viṣṇu regarding supremacy. When the two gods are unable to locate its top or bottom, they recognise Śiva's transcendence; at his command, the blazing column shrinks and transforms into the stationary *liṅga*-mountain

Devilinga of Kagajipara: Parvati's Meditative Union with Siva in Medieval Iconography

Arunādri, the “fiery liṅga” that represents his presence forever. The Arunacalamāhātmya then goes on to detail a number of *tīrthas*, ceremonies, and benefits associated with walking around the mountain. Later sections (relied upon by contemporary scholars) describe Pārvatī's tapas to achieve total union with Śiva at Arunācala: following a transgression that upsets cosmic order (traditionally, she covers Śiva's three eyes and plunges the worlds into darkness), she undergoes extreme austerities and meditation practice at Arunācala, seeking forgiveness and total merger (śivasāyujya). In certain recensions, this results in her becoming fully connected with the liṅga of Śiva, rather than just a companion. Underlying the Apitakuca perspective is this narrative complex.

In extant Sanskrit manuscripts, the phrase "Apitakuca" itself is incredibly uncommon. Instead of appearing in the normal iconographic guides, it appears in exegetical debates as the name of the composite form in which Pārvatī has "merged" with the *liṅga* after doing tapas and meditation. Apitakuca is interpreted by Dipak Chandra Bhattacharyya as a shape that arises when the goddess in deep concentration (*dhyāna*) emerges from and concurrently remains one with the *liṅga* (Bhattacharyya, 1980). This interpretation is based on a combination of *Purāṇic* narrative and subsequent commentarial tradition. Scholars have been forced to work backwards because there are no direct *āgamic* prescriptions for this form. Starting with the sculpture (particularly the Kagajipara piece), they have looked for stories in *Purāṇic* and tantric texts that could explain its extremely odd iconography. As a result, the Arunacalamāhātmya's focus on Arunācala as a fiery *liṅga* and the site of Pārvatī's penance has become an essential textual anchor.

Hindu–Buddhist Tantric Interface

The Kagajipara goddess is aligned with Buddhist tantric goddesses like *Cundā* and *Prajñāpāramitā*, whose depictions in eastern India exhibit comparable characteristics, including the employment of *dhyāna*–*mudrā*, rosary, and book. Thus, in this area, Devilinga addresses both a Vajrayāna practitioner (as a meditating *Ācārya* with *dhāraṇī* and text) and a *Śaiva* devotee (as *śakti* of the *liṅga*). Late Pāla-Sena Bengal is a place of shared sacred space that is negotiated through visual "bilingualism." Traditionally, transcendence—even gender transcendence—has been linked to the liṅga. However, it is frequently misinterpreted as solely male. It breaks that stereotype by revealing a feminine bust that demonstrates that although the ultimate reality (*liṅga*) transcends gender, both masculine and feminine parts can emerge from

Devilinga of Kagajipara: Parvati's Meditative Union with Siva in Medieval Iconography

and reappear inside it. Apitakuca, or Devilinga, is more than just a peculiarity in the area. The mystical union attained via *tapas* and meditation (rather than merely metaphysical statement), the inner unity of Śiva and Śakti, and the porous border between the Hindu and Buddhist tantric worlds in eastern India are all topics covered by this profound visual theology.

Define the term Devilinga

These *liṅgas* are obviously *liṅgas* but contain feminine body traits. These representations begin with the *liṅga* as the primary axis and then add Śakti to it instead of dividing a human body. Śakti is already present and emanates from the formless axis of Śiva, according to the message. The article "On Śivaliṅgas with Goddesses and Female *Liṅgas*: The 'Śakti-' or 'Devīliṅgas' and Similar Sculptures" by Gerd J. R. Mevissen, which discusses their types, iconography, and regional distribution, systematizes this information (Mevissen, 2012). A common misconception is that *liṅga* is only associated with men or the phallus. It is emphasized by texts and traditional educators as a representation of the entire universe, the axis that unites the sky and earth, and Siva as pure consciousness that transcends form. A goddess rises from the *liṅga*, and the sculpture makes it clear that Śakti is the innate energy of Śiva rather than an external consort. The unchanging axis (the *liṅga*) is the source of creation and manifestation (the goddess). The goddess is in *dhyāna-mudrā*, according to the *Apitakuca* interpretation, rather than just being present. That's important. In order to achieve complete union, Pārvatī must perform *tapas* at Arunācala, according to the *Arunacalamāhātmya*, which connects the sculpture to this story. Thus, the Kagajipara image represents a mystical process in which Pārvatī becomes entirely one with Śiva's *liṅga* form through meditation and yet emerges from it as his strength. In contrast to straightforward complementarity, this dramatizes absorption and emission, going beyond Ardhanārīśvara's "two halves."

Modern Art-Historical Sources on Devilinga and Apitakuca

One of the first accounts of the Kagajipara artwork (then recently acquired by the Dhaka Museum) was provided by N. K. Bhattasali, who highlighted the image's four-armed goddess emerging from a *liṅga*, with her countenance unusually tranquil and her principal hands in a meditative stance. He emphasized its beauty but was hesitant to give the form a name

Devilinga of Kagajipara: Parvati's Meditative Union with Siva in Medieval Iconography

(Bhattacharya, 1929). The same sculpture, according to R. D. Banerji, is an example of Hindu-Buddhist Tantric syncretism and "*yuganaddha*" (paired) symbolism, suggesting a mixing of Vajrayāna and Śaiva-Śākta concepts (Banerji, 1933). Devilingas are esoteric depictions of the inseparability of Śiva and Śakti, according to J. N. Banerjea, who examined Devilingas more broadly within the development of Śaiva iconography (Banerjea, 1956). Based on a careful examination of the Arunacalamāhātmya story and iconographic features, he contended that this sculpture should be associated with Apitakuca, a special composite form that emerged from Pārvatī's *tapas* at Arunācala, rather than Mahāmāyā or Tripurābhairavī. Additional Devilinga-type *liṅgas* have been traced throughout eastern India in later publications, such as Bhattacharyya's 'Iconology of Composite Images' and regional survey catalogues of Bangladeshi art, which have also improved the typology. These resources come together to form the foundational secondary literature for any study of Apitakuca or Devilinga.

Description of Devilinga

The intricate fusion of anthropomorphic *Sakti* manifestation and *linga* symbolism in the Kagajipara Devilinga, which is done with the extraordinary workmanship typical of Northern Bengal sculpture from the 11th and 12th centuries, calls for careful study. This monumental relief, which is 120 c.m. tall and has a rectangular slab composition with the Sivalinga occupying the central vertical axis in bold, high relief rising prominently from a circular *yonipitha* base suggestive of generative waters, is carved from fine-grained black stone (basalt or chlorotic schist, typical of Pala-Sena workshops). In a three-quarter aspect that highlights her volumetric modeling, the goddess emerges from the upper third of the linga, being shown up to the waist. Invoking classical *Sulvasutra*-derived canons modified for tantric esotericism, her torso has idealized proportions, with a tiny waist that flares to rounded hips and a faint indication of breasts beneath crossed arms.

The upper torso of a four-armed goddess, revealing her waist, emerges from the upper part of this *liṅga*. The female figure and the *liṅga* are positioned by the sculptor to visually represent the dichotomy of identity and difference, with the female figure both emerging from and blending into the *liṅga*. *Dhyāna-mudrā*, a meditation technique most frequently connected to Buddha images or some meditative bodhisattvas, involves holding the goddess's two main hands right below the breasts. The rosary (*akṣamālā*) and book (*pustaka*) in the remaining right and left hands, respectively, clearly imply linkage with scripture knowledge and mantra

Devilinga of Kagajipara: Parvati's Meditative Union with Siva in Medieval Iconography

recitation. Her face, which is framed by a high crown and trailing scarf ends, has exquisitely carved lips and half-closed eyes, giving the impression of deep yogic focus and tranquility (Bhattacharyya,1974). Particularly when contrasted with more active or furious tantric deities, early observers observed that this serene, inward-turned countenance is rare for the time. The cylindrical shaft and base of the *liṅga* are clearly distinguished from one another by the high relief carvings against the slab. Unlike typical *liṅgodbhava* pictures, which show Śiva in anthropomorphic form within a flame *liṅga* and Brahmā and Viṣṇu looking for its extremes, the Kagajipara sculpture only concentrates on the relationship between *liṅga* and goddess; no other deities or narrative markers are shown.

The large, oval face that draws attention has heavy lids to show *laya* (dissolution into meditation) and half-closed eyes (*nimilakshya*) inclined downward in deep yogic absorption. Alam has characterized the figure as having "beautifully carved eyebrows and lips that have invested the image with serene and sublime grace which is hardly met in the sculptures of this century." (Alam, 1985). This calmness coincides with contemplative archetypes and stands in sharp contrast to fierce Tantric prototypes such as Chamunda or *Tripurabhairavi*. Five decreasing crescents form a tiered *kiritamukuta* (jeweled crown) on top, with pearl strands flowing over the shoulders and discoidal *ratna-patta* earrings on either side. With their delicate folds created with artistic undercutting that catches light dramatically, the fluttering scarf ends (*patta*) behind her hands are animated by the wind, indicating divine motion (*kriya-sakti*). *Keyura* (armlets) and *kankana* (bangles) etched with exquisite granulation patterns complement a multi-stranded *hara* (necklace) with focal gem pendants at the clavicles. There is no *yajnopavita*, which favors feminine Sakti over traditional Brahmanical beliefs. The arrangement of four arms exposes multiple meanings. With the palms facing up and the fingers interlaced with the thumbs touching (*padma-mudra* version), the principal hands (lower pair) do dhyana-mudra right below the breasts, creating a perfect triangle that frames the *hrdaya-kamala* (heart lotus). The *dhyananisthaikabradaya* signaled by this motion, which is uncommon in Brahmanical imagery outside of Buddha or Amitabha, directly supports Apitakuca's *Skandapurana* origin, in which Parvati achieves *sivasayujya* through tapas.

The upper pair of secondary hands gently stretch. The left hand grasps the *pustaka* (scriptural book, palm-leaf folio with tied boards), the edges curling realistically, signifying *vidya* (esoteric knowledge) or *prajna* (wisdom consort); the right hand holds the *aksamala* (rosary of 108 rudraksha beads), coiled three times with tassel dangling, signifying japa-meditation and mantra-sadhana. These qualities transcend cultural boundaries; for example,

Devilinga of Kagajipara: Parvati's Meditative Union with Siva in Medieval Iconography

pustaka evokes Buddhist Prajnaparamita or Saiva *Agamas*, whereas *aksamala* is common in *Cunda (Sadhanamala)*. A simple *prabahavali* (halo) with faint lotus-petal lappets that suggest padmasana foundation is carved behind the linga in the bottom register of the slab (Bhattacharyya, 1974). There are no surviving donor inscriptions, *vahanas*, or attendant figures that highlight devotion to the linga-Sakti dyad.

Literary Interpretations of Apitakuca from Skandapurana

Dipak Chandra Bhattacharyya's Apitakuca identification, which illuminates Parvati's metamorphosis from transgression to sublime union, grounds the Kagajipara Devilinga in an engaging *Skandapurana* story from the *Arunacalamahatmya* part of the *Mahesvarakunda khanda*. The story reaches its most intense moment when Parvati blocks Siva's three eyes which represent the sun and moon and fire with her hands during their playful romantic moment on Mount Kailasa. The three worlds enter complete darkness because the protective fires of agni extinguish and the solar cycles stop and the lunar tides stop. Cosmic order breaks down because there is no prana-sustaining light, which causes rivers to stagnate and plants to die and countless living things to perish. Siva establishes Prayascitta as an expiatory penance when he functions as Lokakarta protector of the world. Parvati is required to perform tapascaranam, which entails severe austerities such as fasting, silence, and Himalayan vigil.

She enters *dhyananisthaikabradaya* (unwavering meditation absorption) after emerging purified, her body reduced to skeletal emaciation but dazzling with *tapas-shakti*. Parvati asks for *sivasayujya*, or total, irreversible fusion with Siva's essence, in this exalted samadhi. According to the narrative, she emerges from the Sivalinga itself in the shape of Apitakuca, which means "breastless" or "austere-formed," denoting a rejection of physicality. Now active, the *linga* appears in high relief as her four-armed form, exactly matching the daring carving of Kagajipara (Bhattacharyya, 1974). The sculpture's *dhyana-mudra* is properly explained by this interpretation: thumbs touching in padma-mudra evokes lotus-birth from penance, while palms upward beneath breasts symbolise hrdaya-kamala meditation. He emphasises: "This interpretation is supported by literary account of the divine episode of Parvati's merging in meditation with the Siva linga, and her assumption of the Apitakuca form" (Bhattacharyya, 1974). In order to resolve the Purusha-Prakriti contradiction, the high-relief linga represents sthana (static Siva), while the emergent goddess represents kriya (dynamic Sakti).

Devilinga of Kagajipara: Parvati's Meditative Union with Siva in Medieval Iconography

Critique of Alternative Brahmanical Identifications

Bhattacharyya breaks out opposing theories in a methodical manner. Mahamaya (Kalikapurana) has Devi emerging from linga atop the sitapretasana (white corpse throne), armed with a sword, rosary, and varada/abhaya mudras—none of which are shown here. No three Siva faces show up; there is no ferocity. Triple Siva forms, kapala/skull-cup, and a frightful face are required by Tripurabhairavi, which is inconsistent with calm dhyana. Esotericism is reduced to sexuality in R.D. Banerji's Parvati in coitus with phallus (*yuganaddha*), which misses the contemplative environment. In line with Bhagavati's *Aditya-Sakti* (*Markandeyapurana*: "Tameva cadyam purusam prapadye") and Kalidasa's *Parvati-Paramesvara* (*Raghuvamsha*), J.N. Banerjea promotes sublime symbolism: "The esoteric symbolism underlying this fine sculpture is of sublime character" (Banerjea, 1956). *Sakti* emerges as yogic realisation (darshana), while high-relief mulalinga is mirrored in Skandapurana's fire-linga (Arunachala). At the same time, Cunda, Vajrayana's benevolent Tantric goddess—Buddhist rendition of Brahmanical *Candi* (Uma/Durga/Parvati)—whose cult flourished under Pala patronage (8th–12th CE) and whose imagery resonates deeply with Kagajipara. *Astasahasrikaprajnaparamita* texts and eastern Indian bronzes provide several sculptural/painting precedents, even though *Sadhanamala* and *Nispannayogavali* do not provide precise descriptions.

Devilinga as Syncretic Icon

At the most fundamental level, they combine an explicit anthropomorphic representation of *Śakti* with *linga* symbolism ("Siva as formless, vertical, infinite axis). The goddess in this instance does not only stand next to or make up half of Śiva's body, as is the case with distinct Śiva–Pārvatī couples or Ardhanārīśvara. Instead, she arises from within his *linga* form, implying that *Śakti* is the very energy that is latent in and emanates from Śiva's quiescent nature. The coexistence of *Vajrayāna* Buddhism, Śaivism, and Śāktism in eastern India promoted crossover. Supposedly Brahmanical representations are adorned with rosaries, books, meditation movements, and other items connected with tantric bodhisattvas and goddesses (e.g., Cundā, Prajñāpāramitā, or Tārā). One of the best examples is the Kagajipara Devilinga, which has *dhyāna-mudrā* and Cundā-like qualities. Although it may be considered Apitakuca, its form speaks a "visual language" that is equally understandable in a Buddhist tantric context.

Devilinga of Kagajipara: Parvati's Meditative Union with Siva in Medieval Iconography

Devilinga artwork arranges a meeting between *nirguṇa* and *sagūṇa*, between abstract principle and personal god, by putting a fully sculpted human torso inside or on top of an iconic *liṅga*. It asks followers to consider how the transcendent, ineffable Brahman and the approachable mother-goddess who hears prayers may coexist in the column of stone or fire portrayed in Purāṇic texts. According to the Kagajipara Devilinga, Apitakuca is not only a local curiosity but a complex theological construction in all three respects.

A Comparative View between Ardhanārīśvara and Apitakuca/Devilinga

Although they are both composed of Śiva-Śakti iconography, their structure, focus, and narrative background are very different. Ardhanārīśvara divides a single anthropomorphic body in a vertical fashion, with the left half being Pārvatī (with *karanda-mukūṭa*, mirror, feminine draperies) and the right half being Śiva (with *jaṭā-mukūṭa*, *triśūla*, tiger hide, etc.). The two parts stand or sit in a balanced position and share a spine. The principal vertical axis of Devilinga/Apitakuca is still the *liṅga*, from which the goddess emerges as a bust or upper body. Subsumed into the *liṅga*, the lower body of Śakti is indicated rather than revealed. The emphasis of Ardhanārīśvara is on equality and complementarity. It is common to understand Śiva and Śakti as the simultaneous presence of male and female principles, or as two equal parts of a single reality, *puruṣa* (awareness) and *prakṛti* (nature). Apitakuca emphasises unification through *tapas* and meditation, especially when connected to the Arunacalamāhātmya. As a result of Pārvatī's own agency (penance, longing for total union), she eventually becomes indistinguishable from Śiva's *liṅga*-form. This interiorized process is encoded in the *dhyāna-mudrā* at Kagajipara, where Apitakuca dramatizes mystical absorption and Ardhanārīśvara dramatizes balance. A common feature of many Śaiva-Śākta temples, Ardhanārīśvara statues are deeply rooted in *āgamic* and *Purāṇic* regulations. In contrast, Devilinga paintings are less standardized in terms of content and geography (with a large concentration in eastern India). Rather than being results of pan-Indian canonical programs, they appear to be creations of specific local milieus, particularly those where tantric Buddhism and Buddhism overlapped. For these reasons, Apitakuca/Devilinga cannot be reduced to a variation of Ardhanārīśvara, even if both types are "syncretic." It is a different line of Śiva-Sakti theory that is more concerned with the experience aspect of union and *liṅga* mysticism.

Conclusion

Devilinga of Kagajipara: Parvati's Meditative Union with Siva in Medieval Iconography

The Apitakuca form, or Devilinga images in particular, provide an invaluable window into how medieval Indian theologians and artists addressed issues of gender, divine unity, and interreligious engagement. At the heart of this discussion is the Kagajipara Devilinga, which formally combines the concepts of *liṅga* and goddess in a way that emphasizes meditation and interiority; contextually, it comes from an area where late Buddhism and Brahmanism were engaged in a heated debate; and textually, it invites reading in opposition to the Arunacalamāhātmya's description of Pārvatī's penance at the flaming liṅga mountain. Although conclusive textual recommendations for Apitakuca are still elusive, the identification of Kagajipara as Apitakuca is both heuristically successful and credible due to the combination of iconographic study, Purāṇic narrative, and regional comparables. In the midst of Bengal's cultural crossroads, Kagajipara survives as a testament to religious tolerance made evident as competing pantheons, rather than colliding, create a higher synthesis. Representing the religious ecumene of medieval Bengal, where Saiva Agamas, Sakta Puranas, and Vajrayana sadhanas came together in stone, the Kagajipara Devilinga goes beyond simple identification. Apitakuca's *Skandapurana* story of Parvati's penitential emergence is anchored by its uncommon dhyana-mudra in Hindu imagery, while Cunda's Tantric compassion is well aligned with *aksamala* or *pustaka*, demonstrating a shared samadhi-shakti across traditions. In addition to representing the shifting religious boundaries of medieval Bengal, Kagajipara Devilinga also exemplifies Hindu-Buddhist communication by combining Apitakuca's meditative fusion with Cunda's Tantric calm. It highlights Northern Bengal's significance in intra- and inter-religious assimilation by bridging yogic transcendence across traditions through its *dhyana-mudra*. While present evidence supports syncretic artwork amid cultural conflict, future epigraphic discoveries may shed light on patronage.

Notes and References

- Alam, A.K.M. Shamssul, *Sculptural Art of Bangladesh Pre-Muslim Period*, Dhaka, 1985.
Banerjea, J. N., *The Development of Hindu Iconography*, 2nd ed., Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1956.
Banerji, R. D., *History of Orissa*, Vol. 1, Calcutta: Indian Culture, 1930.
Bhattacharyya, Benoytosh, *The Indian Buddhist Iconography*, Calcutta: Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1924.
Bhattacharyya, Benoytosh, *A Study of the Buddhist Sādhanamālā*, Calcutta: Firma KLM, 1974.
Bhattacharyya, Dipak Chandra, *Iconology of Composite Images*, Calcutta: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1980.
Bhattacharyya, Dipak Chandra, *Aparajita: History of an Archetype*, New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, 2008.
Das, H. C., *Iconography of Śākta Divinities*, Vols. 1–2, Delhi: Aryan Books International, 1997.
Haque, Enamul, *Bangladesh Sculptures: A Catalogue of Selected Stone and Bronze Images in the Bangladesh National Museum*, Dhaka: Bangladesh National Museum, 1992.

Devilinga of Kagajipara: Parvati's Meditative Union with Siva in Medieval Iconography

- Haque, Enamul, and A. J. Gail, *Sculpture in Bangladesh: Terracotta, Stone and Metal*, Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 2006.
- Indian Museum, Calcutta, *Catalogue of Antiquities from Bengal in the Indian Museum*, Calcutta: Indian Museum, 1965.
- Kinsley, David, *Hindu Goddesses: Visions of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Tradition*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1986.
- Majumdar, R. C. (ed.), *The History of Bengal*, Vol. 1, Dacca: University of Dacca, 1971.
- Mevisse, Gerd J. R., and Mallar Mitra, *Pāla–Sena Sculpture in Northern Bengal and Bangladesh*, Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 2017.
- Rao, T. A. Gopinatha, *Elements of Hindu Iconography*, Vol. 1, Pt. 1, Madras: Law Printing House, 1914.
- Sarkar, H., *Architectural Surveys of Bengal*, Part 13: Sculptures, Calcutta: Indian Museum, 1978.
- Singh, N. K., *Śiva Liṅga*, New Delhi: Global Religious Vision, 2021.
- Varendra Research Museum, *Stone Sculptures: Varendra Research Museum*, Catalogue No. 3, Rajshahi: Varendra Research Museum, 1997.
- Banerji, R. D., “Blending of Hindu Tantricism,” in A. B. M. Habibullah (ed.), *Nalinikanta Bhattasali Commemoration Volume*, Dacca: Dacca Museum, 1966, pp. 153–160.
- Bhattacharyya, Dipak Chandra, “An Apitakuca Image from Kagajipara, Bangladesh,” *Artibus Asiae*, Vol. 36, No. 1–2, 1974, pp. 90–93.
- Haque, Enamul, “Four Śakti-Liṅgas from Bangladesh,” *Bangladesh Archaeological Review*, Vol. 4, 1989, pp. 1–12.
- Mevisse, Gerd J. R., “Viṣṇu-Avataras of the Past and the Future in Bangladesh,” *South Asian Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 1, 2009, pp. 43–58.
- Mevisse, Gerd J. R., “Ardhanārīśvara Images of Bengal: Iconography and Chronology,” *Artibus Asiae*, Vol. 72, No. 2, 2012, pp. 234–267.
- Mevisse, Gerd J. R., “Jaina Tīrthānkara Images from Bangladesh,” *Jaina Journal*, Vol. 56, No. 3, 2021, pp. 15–32.
- Mevisse, Gerd J. R., “On Śivaliṅgas with Goddesses and Female Liṅgas: The ‘Śakti-’ or ‘Devīliṅgas’ and Similar Sculptures,” in Gerd J. R. Mevisse and Klaus Bruhn (eds.), *Vanamālā: Festschrift A. J. Gail*, Berlin: Weidler, 2006, pp. 48–53.
- Dhaka Museum, *Catalogue of Stone Sculptures*, Dhaka: Dhaka Museum, 1980.
- Archaeological Survey of India, *Annual Report on Indian Epigraphy*, Calcutta: Archaeological Survey of India, 1928.
- Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. 28, *Pāla–Sena Inscriptions from Bengal*, New Delhi: Government of India, 1950.
- Agni Purāṇa*, Anandasrama Sanskrit Series, No. 28, Poona: Anandasrama Press, 1882.
- Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*, various manuscripts, cited through Benoytosh Bhattacharyya, *The Indian Buddhist Iconography*, Calcutta, 1924.
- Kālikā Purāṇa*, ed. Panchanan Tarkaratna, Calcutta: Navabharat Publishers, n.d. *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, Poona: Anandasrama Press, 1910.
- Rūpamaṇḍana*, Gaekwad’s Oriental Series, Baroda: Gaekwad Oriental Series, 1924.
- Kāmikāgama–Suprabhedāgama*, Pt. 2, Trivandrum Sanskrit Series, Trivandrum, 1934.
- Skanda Purāṇa: Mahēśvara-khaṇḍa*, Arunacalamāhātmya, in *The Skanda Purana*, Part 3: Ancient Indian Tradition and Mythology (English translation), Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2016.
- Varāha Purāṇa*, Anandasrama Sanskrit Series, Poona: Venkatesvara Press, 1910.
- Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*, Pt. 3, Poona: Anandasrama Press, 1912.
- Sādhnamālā*, ed. Benoytosh Bhattacharyya, 2 vols., Baroda: Gaekwad’s Oriental Series, 1925–1928.