

A PROTECTIVE ARMLET DEPICTING PURANIC-MYTHICAL SCENE

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A sacred land like India naturally believes in the omnipotence of 'Shakti', the solitary universal Female Principle, governing the whole existence, both mundane and divine. She manifests herself in the event of eternal external crisis facing the whole universe. She is said to be the embodiment of all that is the best in the whole creation and cosmos. She is invincible and capable of dispelling and destroying all evil forces of darkness that try to engulf the whole creation.

The seers and sages have, since time immemorial, sung paeans in her prize and bowed their heads to her feet for her blessings, benediction and, above all, for their own personal safety and well-being. To amuse themselves of guaranteed safety and protection they devised certain rites and rituals, 'Yantra-Mantra', amulets embossed with the figures of their honoured deities. Even the Supreme Lord Indra also wore amulets. One such copper armlet, now-a-days a veritable rarity, came to my notice quite recently from Chaparghata (Bhognipur) near Musanagar, Distt. Kanpur in Uttar Pradesh.

The details of the copper amulet are given below:-

Length	-	cm 10 Approx
Breadth	-	cm 13 Approx
Shape	-	Slightly semi-circular now made flat by beating.
Metal	-	Copper
Technique	-	Embossing to show the figures in bas-relief, two holes with rings on both the ends for fastening on the arm. (Plate 1)
Location	-	(Long. 26° N and Lat. 79° 49 E) Chaparghata near Musanagar, Distt. Kanpur.



The site named Chaparghata is the most important town and battlefield on the bank of river Sengur that joins with the river Yamuna it self at Chaparghata nearby Musanagar, which is described as Musika Nagar in the ancient literature. The site is about 68 Kms South East from Kanpur on the modern Mughal Road. Thus, it appears to be a very important place from strategic point of view as it approachable from road and riverine trade routes both. In the late medieval period Chaparghata appears to have been a scene of a pitched battle between Bengal Sultan Mohammed Shah and local ruler Mohammed Adil Shah Sur. The Bengal ruler Sultan Mohammed Shah was defeated in December 1555 AD by Adil Shah Sur at the battlefield at Chaparghata and his allies comprising of local suzerains. Thereafter 1556 as the entire Bengal was captured by Adil Shah Sur. This episode in the history of Doab is quite significant as it presupposes the critical political situation prevailing in this vast fertile region. The frequent in roads of Muslims invaders had fallen heavily on the fortunes of the peace loving native Hindu populace which ultimately resigned, at the time of crisis, to the mercy and protection of the great goddess Durga, who had from time immemorial been a saviour of the simple and saintly people of this sacred land. To seek her blessings and benedictions they usually performed sacrifices and indulged in certain rites and rituals and tied protective amulets and thread bands on their arms and writs; and adorned their fore-head with sandal paste and vermilion 'Tilaka' or sacred mark for their security and victory. The aforesaid copper armlet is the reminiscent of that critical period.

ICONOGRAPHIC DETAILS OF THE AMULET

The four-armed goddess Durga, riding on the lion, wields a sword in her upper right hand, and the tails of the lion with lower righthand. There is a trident in her upper left hand and a disc or shield (ढाल) in the lower left hand. She wears a conical shaped gem-studded crown on her head, a tight-fitting 'niska-necklace' on the neck along with a long necklace or garland dangling down her breasts. There are begemmed bracelets on her wrists. An inlaid girdle adorns her waist. Her large wide opened eyes and raised brows manifest her angry mood which obliges the evil demon Mahisasura take to his heels for his own safety. The cruel demon is not an ordinary person. He adorns the outfit of a monarch, but appears to be quite helpless as he is attacked by the lion of the goddess and her attendant, a 'Yogini-Bhairavi' or any one of the 'Matrikas'. The buffalo-faced demon holds a mace in his right hand and some indistinct edible object in his left hand. Probably, he appears to be biting a big crunch of it to renew his energy.

His female figure standing by the side of the goddess is also profusely ornamented as the goddess herself, but wears no crown. Her hairs are parted from the middle. She object in her right hand is not clear, but her left hand seems to be touching the tails end of the Lion.

The border of this copper armlet is adorned with the lotus pattern on to upper and lower sides. A raised border below the aforesaid pattern is also decorated with slanting small strokes. the whole panel represented a veritable vista of the Puranic episode of 'Mahisasura-Vadha' so faithfully narrated in the 'Durga Saptasati' (3.39-42) written by the great sage Markandeya.¹



This copper amulet probably belongs to the 16th - 17th century AD, as such depiction may be observed on the murals or wall- painting of the western Himalayas and especially those of the regions of Chamba and Kullu. (Mira Seth, pp 93-94, Fig. 70).²

The cult of Durga or Mahisasur - Mardani is age old. Even a Harappan tablet showing goddess Durga, slaying the demon Mahisa with Siva seated behind her (T.P. Verma, 2015 : 180-181)³ is a clear example of its antiquity. The divine mother has the universal power to protect her devotees. So the tradition of wearing her figure - bearing amulets for one's safety against enemies and evil powers has continued from the hoary past. This is a very fine example of the same.

REFERENCE:

1. Rig. Veda, 1.10.9.
2. Mira Seth, 1976 : Wall Paintings of the Western Himalayas. Publication Division, Govt. of India, New Delhi.
3. Prof. T.P. Verma, 2015 : Role of Mother Factor in origin of life on Earth. Itihasa Darpan, Vol. XX(2), pp. 180-181.