It is my good fortune to have met Dr. N. P. Joshi several times since 1962—first at the Mathura Museum, then in 1981 at Philadelphia, at the ‘Discourses on Śiva’ Symposium in honour of Dr. Stella Kramrisch. Later almost every year from 1985 to early 1990s I visited Varanasi for research work in the photo-archives of the American Institute of Indian Studies, then situated in Ramnagar. It was then a pleasure to visit Dr. Joshi at his home at Bhonsli Ghat on the bank of the Gāṅgā river. Sitting peacefully, we used to discuss on many aspects of iconography. I had his guidance on identification of various images. While discussing the subject of the Yoginīs, Dr. Joshi informed me about the Causatthī Ghat shrine, which I visited.

To felicitate Dr. N. P. Joshi, I write this article on an unpublished image of the bear-faced Yoginī at Khajurāho. The Yoginīs are manifestations of the Great Goddess Devi, or her companions (sakhī), who help Devī in her battles with various demons. They take various forms—of animals, birds, insects and human females. The cult of the Sixty-four Yoginīs was prevalent in the broad geographical belt from Orissa to Central India, and the main period of the construction of their shrines was between about CE 900 and 1400. Worship of the Yoginīs was widespread in the Candella domain, as evidenced from the find of Yogini images and shrines in several sites such as Khajurāho in Chatarpur district, Rikhiyan and Lokhari in Banda district, Dudahi near Lalitpur, and also Mitauli and Naresar near Gwalior, which were under the Kacchapaghātas, feudatories of the Candellas.

At Khajurāho the sanctuary of Causathya Yoginī (Yogini-pīthā) is situated near the Śivasāgara tank, away from the main group of temples of Viṣṇu, Śiva and Sūrya. Built of rough granite blocks, as distinct from the sandstone temples in elegant Nāgara style of architecture, the Yogini sanctuary is one of the early structures of Khajurāho, assigned to c. 900 CE, though scholars differ on the date. It is an open air sanctuary consisting of 67 cells. In 1864 when Major Alexander Cunningham visited the shrine, the principal larger cell had an image of goddess Durgā-Mahiṣāsuramardinī, inscribed “Hīṅghalāja”, and the two cells flanking it had images of the Māṭkās Brahmāṇī and Māheśvārī. He found only these three images in situ. The rest of the
cells were bereft of icons. Where could these images have disappeared? Did the village people, out of fear of the Yoganis, bury the images?

Recently, I was astonished to see an image of a Yogini, in a local shrine at Beniganj, a suburb of Khajuraho. The goddess has a face of a bear (rkṣa) and sits on a bear mount (Figs. 25, 26). The mount was identified by me with the help of the Bombay Natural History Society. The officer, specialist on animals, saw my photograph, and first looked at me in wonder, and said how could a goddess, a divinity, have a bear face and a bear mount? He confirmed that the animal is a bear. Its claws can be distinctly noticed.

The size of the Rkṣamātā image, 37" x 21.5", is nearer that of the goddess Hīṅghalāja of the Yogini temple. Though carved in light brownish sandstone, the image looks dark in colour because of the oil smeared by villagers during worship. It is a triratha image, with three divisions—the central panel with two side frames. The side frames have vyālas (griffins) and attending female figures. The goddess is seated in lalitāsana with her left leg folded and the right stretched down and supported on the lotus pedestal. Hands of this twelve-armed goddess are mutilated, except for the three that are preserved. In one right hand, she holds a cup (prāṇaśīla), reminding us of the jackal-faced Yogini, now in the Museum für Asiatische Kunst, Berlin, which Dr. N. P. Joshi has described in his article. In her upper left hand the bear-faced goddess holds a shield and with one right hand she takes out an arrow. A broken khaḍga can be seen on the right. The goddess wears a high karaṇḍa-mukūṭa.

Stylistically, the bear-faced Rkṣamātā has much similarity with the Cāmunḍā seated on an owl (45" x 26"), Acc. No. 409, in the Archaeological Museum, Khajuraho (Fig. 27). The halo has a lotus and a star-like cut-out design, similar to that of the image of Cāmunḍā on owl. Two flying Vidyādharas honour both the goddesses above the halo. Both of them wear a single kacā or thick bangle on their hands and thick neck ornaments. There is similarity in their compositions and layout of subsidiary figures—female attending figures and two goddesses near the haloes of figures. Both these images seem to have belonged to the same Yogini complex at Khajuraho.

Two seated Yoginis or goddesses flank the bear-faced Yogini, one of them on the left is animal-faced. Two companions stand with flowers on either side of her. They sport dhāmmila hairstyle, prevalent in Khajurāho up to CE 1030, and hardly seen after that date. Stylistically, the Yogini under discussion seems to be not later than CA 1000.

Though Rkṣamātā or Rkṣānanā, the bear-faced Yogini, is not very commonly seen, another image of such Yogini (Fig. 28) is found in the region around Khajurāho at Lokhari in Banda District. Her vāhana is a bear having paws with sharp nails. She has four arms. Attending figures are not present in contrast to the image of Khajurāho's bear-faced Yogini. Both the figures differ in style and layout.

In the textual tradition there are various nāmāvalis of the Yoginis. In different texts, the names of Yoginis with a bear as a mount are: Rkṣakamī, Līlā, Līlāvatī, Krodhānanā, Rūpāhā, Varapradā. In the inscribed images of Bheraghat Yogini temple, there is Rkṣamātā. The Agni Purāṇa in its Chapter 52 lists 64 Yoginis, starting their position from the east to northeast.
Rkṣakamī is second in the list. Hemādri in his Caturvargacentāmaṇi mentions bear as the vāhana of Rkṣakamī. Bear is a vāhana of Krodhanī also in Hemādri’s list, and of Lilāvatī in the Pratisthā Laksana Sāra Samuccaya (ch. 7). The Kāśi Khaṇḍa of the Skanda Purāṇa gives the name Rkṣaksī, the bear-eyed one, to a Yoginī. In Sarala Dāsa’s list of the Yoginis in 15th century, the animal vāhana mentioned are: swan, Garuḍa, owl, bear and tiger.

As far as the archaeological evidence is concerned, in addition to the bear-faced Yoginis from Khajurāho and Lokhari, there is a possibility of a bear-faced figure among the damaged headless images of the well known Bheraghat Yoginī temple. There is an inscription “Rkṣamātā” on one such image of Yoginī at Bheraghat. Further, there is one more figure at Ranipur Jharial in Orissa. Thomas Donaldson has done massive work on the Sākta cult of Orissa, and listed all the Yoginis with their vāhanas in the temples of Hirapur near Bhubaneswar, and from Ranipur Jharial. At Hirapur only six Yoginis have animal face, but none with a bear face, while Ranipur Jharial has 15 of the surviving Yoginis with animal face, and one of these is bear-faced.

It remains to be proved whether the bear-faced Yogini of Khajurāho under discussion could be one of the missing images of the Causātha Yoginī temple. L. K. Tripathi had noted the image of Cāmunḍā (Fig. 27) as one of the Yoginis, possibly associated with the Causātha Yoginī sanctuary. Recently, while digging the ground for repair work near the 19th century Chatāri or cenotaph of the Chatapur Mahārāja Pratap Singh, an animal-headed, twelve-armed Yoginī, seated on a full-blown lotus has been found (now sheltered in the open-air Archaeological Museum of Khajurāho). Her head is mutilated but hair on her neck (keśāvalī, as on animal-headed goddesses, can be clearly seen (Fig. 29). Her mount, placed on a separate lotus pedestal, which, at first sight, looks like a donkey or mule, is not so, because it has a cleavage in its hooves, while a donkey or mule has solid hooves. It appears to be a boar - its hooves as well as the body structure agree with those of a boar. From the same site earlier in 1864, Cunningham had noted a huge Bhairava image (now under worship near the Varāha temple), which was found while digging the ground for building the cenotaph.

The bear-faced Yoginī of Khajurāho (Benigaṇi) is under worship by local people, who have clad her in red cundari (sāri). Her mount is fully covered and cannot be seen, while her face is partly visible. They do not know that the image is that of a bear-faced Yoginī. They worship her as a goddess and offer fruits, flowers and bilvapatra.

References & Notes
3. I thank Mr. Anurag Shukla, Khajurāho, who showed me the local shrine at Benigaṇi.
4. N. P. Joshi, “The Jackal-faced Śivā/Śivadūti and Allied Problems”, Kalā, Vol. XV, 2009-2010, pp. 5-6, Fig. 1.


Fig. 25: Rksamātā, Bear-faced Yogini, Beniganj village, Khajuraho

Fig. 26: Detail of the bear vāhana

Fig. 27: Cāmuṇḍā, Archaeological Museum, Khajuraho

Fig. 28: Bear-faced Yogini, Lokhari
Fig. 29: Animal-headed Yogini recently found from the compound of the Chatari of Chatarpur
Maharaja Pratap Singh, Khajuraho
BILVAPATRA
TREASURES OF INDIAN ART
Dr. N. P. Joshi Felicitation Volume

Editors
Prof. M. N. P. Tiwari
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Research India Press
New Delhi
2013
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