

Svosthani: A Story About Corpse Created Deities Siddhi B Ranjitkar

Every Nevah family reads out the story of Svosthani every day particularly before going to bed for a month starting on the full moon day called Mila-punhi (Poush=December/January) and ending on the full moon day called Si-punhi (Magh=January/February). This is a divine story. The core of the story is about the religious war between two Hindu sects that ends in compromise. The Nevah community believes that telling this story once a year to the family during this month keeps the home and the family members free from the evil spirits.

Originally, the Svosthani Storybook was crafted in the Nevah language. Then, the Sanskrit translation of this incredibly mythical story appeared probably 500 hundred years ago, and then the Nepali translation. Recently, it appeared in the English translation thus making it available to the outside world, too.

Originally, it was only of the Nevah culture and Nevah religion to revere the Svosthani deity and take the month-long Svosthani fasting once a year. Now, it is universally adopted in Nepal. Hundreds of thousands of Nepalese devotees visit Salinadhi River to take a holy dip in the river and then worship the Svosthani deity and Madhav Narayan during a month long religious festival.

The belief is that first, Lord Shiva incarnating as a Mahakal Bhairav told the Svosthani story to Vishnu when Vishnu invoked the most powerful goddess Vajrayogini for finding the way to win over the demon called Mayasur; Mahakal Bhairav advised Vishnu to take the Svosthani fasting for a month to achieve his goal. So, the people in Sakhu still believe that the Svosthani deity is actually Vajrayogini: the most powerful goddess in Sakhu (Shreekrishna Maharjan).

The Nevah people believe that Bhairav is in fact the incarnation of Lord Shiva, and Bhairav is the guardian and protector of the people in general; so, any ruler or monarch or king is believed to be the manifestation of Bhairav. For example, Akash Bhairav is Yelamber: the mythical monarch in Kantipur (Kathmandu). Then, Pratap Malla: one of the most intelligent Mall kings changed the view of any king being the incarnation of Bhairav to the incarnation of Vishnu indicating the shift from Shaivinism to Vaisnavism. He also set the tradition of any king not visiting Jalasaya Narayan popularly known as Budhanilkantha in Kathmandu, as the king being the living incarnation of Vishnu should not visit the Jalasaya Narayan in person. Thus, Pratap Malla switched any incarnated ruler from Shaivinism (Shiva sect) to Vaisnavism (Vishnu sect).

The second story about who told the Svosthani story goes like this: the supreme deity of Hindus Lord Shiva told the Svosthani story to his spouse Parvati at his cosmic adobe called Kailash. This story included the story of Satidevi, and then about a mundane woman called Go-maiju that had suffered from the curse of an ascetic and then how she got emancipated from the worldly sufferings, and her son called Navaraj became the king thanks to she taking the Svosthani fasting for a month. The story is popularly known as the story about Go-maiju (Shreekrishna Maharjan).

Finally, Kumar: one of the two sons of Shiva and Parvati brought the Svosthani story from divinities in the cosmic world to the human world on earth. So, the story finally goes as Kumar is telling an ascetic called Agastaymuni. Obviously, then Agastaymuni took this story to every Nevah home. So, the Svosthani story every family reads in this month says Kumar is telling the story.

After the story of creation of earth and then the life on it, the main story goes how the followers of Shiva fought with the followers of Vishnu. Dacchhay Prajapati was really a proxy for Vishnu. So, he had been deadly critical of Shiva, and attempted to humiliate Shiva at every moment. Satidevi was the proxy for Shiva. Apparently, Shiva and Vishnu tried to bring the two sects of the Hinduism in perfect harmony marrying Satidevi: the daughter of Dacchhay to Shiva. Obviously, that did not work as long as Dacchhay was alive. Satidevi became the first casualty. Then, followers of Shiva fought back ultimately destroying Dacchhay.

The religious war did not end in one sect winning over another; actually, it ended in compromise on Madhav Narayan for Vaisnavis and Svosthani for Shaivists. So, mostly the devotees in saffron robes take a month-long fasting and praying to Madhav Narayan at Salinadi River in Sakhu and elsewhere in Nepal while other devotees worship Svosthani next to the Madhav Narayan shrine in Sakhu, and every family tells the Svosthani story. Thus, the Nevahs have learned to live in perfect religious harmony.

How old the story has been it is hard to tell but the Nevah people believe that it is more than 500-year old but it might be several-century older if we take the Nevah civilization, and the culture they have developed in consideration. However, the record of the handwritten Svosthani storybook in Nepal Bhasa (Nevah language) was of the year 1573 (Nepal Sambat 693) in the Nepal calendar called Nepal Sambat. So, the storybook has been 444-year old at least.

The modern Svosthani storywriters interpret the Svosthani as the local deity literally translating the meaning of Svosthani. Most of the devotees hardly know what the deity really is. In fact, they don't care about it. Devotees simply believe that the Svosthani deity meets any desire if any anybody takes the month-long Svosthani fasting praying to the deity.

The Malla-period-stone Svosthani deity set at Tana Baha (Tarini Bahal) at the Makhan neighborhood is clearly of Lord Shiva and his consort Parvati together. The statue of Bull and Lion next to the stone deity are also there indicating Bull as the steed of Shiva, and Lion as the steed of Bhagavati: the most powerful incarnation of Parvati are there, too proving the Svosthani deity is actually the combined form of Shiva and Parvati. Probably, this stone Svosthani deity is set up at the time of King Pratap Malla around 1654 (Nepal Sambat 774) (Shreekrishna Maharjan).

However, the oldest handwritten Svosthani storybook found in Sakhu has the portrait of the female Svosthani deity sitting at the center of the circle of eight-mother goddesses. The stone Svosthani deity depicted in this portrait is set on the wall of the embankment of Salinadi River in Sakhu. She has three eyes, and four limbs indicating she is the combined form of two deities. The first right hand holds a Khadga (divine sword), the second right hand holds Chho-mo (an animal tail used as a fan), the third left hand holds a rosary, and the last hand is set at a blessing position. (Shreekrishna Maharjan).

Only Lord Shiva and his consort manifested in Bhagavati and Living Goddess Kumari have three eyes. So, the female Svosthani deity encircled by eight-mother goddesses having three eyes clearly must be the Bhagavati with Shiva behind as she has four limbs. The divine sword (khadga) she holds is of Bhagavati, and the symbol of the supreme power, and the rosary of Shiva. So, this is the incarnation of Parvati and Shiva in the form of Bhagavati and Bhairav.

Actually, Svosthani is Sav-sthani means a story about the corpse-created deities. Sav-sthani became Svosthani. It is the story about how one part or another falling from the dead body

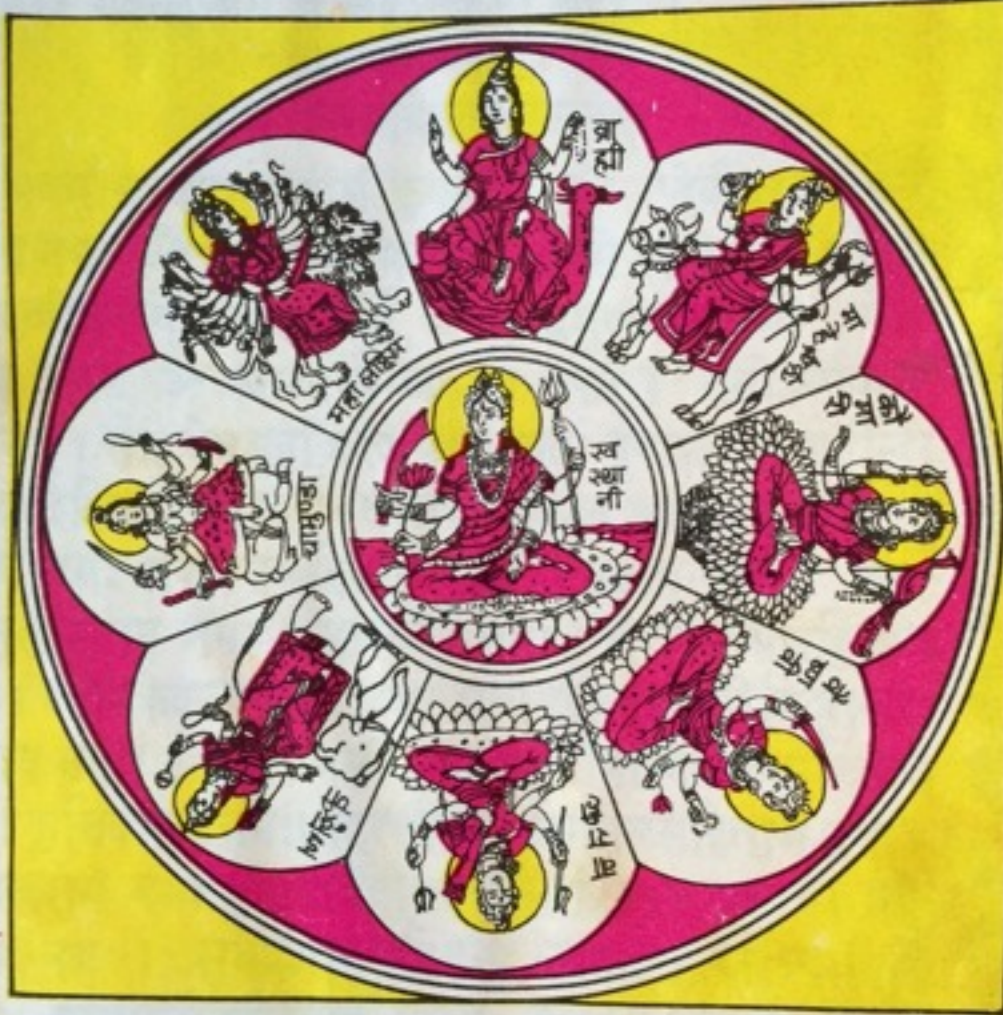
of Satidevi that Shiva carried on his shoulder while mourning the death of Satidevi created one Shaivist deity or another. So, the story is about the creation of various Mahadevs, and Mahadevis, too.

Reference:

1. Shreekrishna Maharjan: Svosthani Chhu kha? Published in Nepal Bhasa in the Naya Nepal Section of 'gorkhapatra' on January 20, 2017 (Magh 7, 2073).
2. Ramprasad Dhital: Svosthani Brata Katha ko Alochna ra Bastabikta published in 'gorkhapatra' on January 21 (Magh 8, 2073). The article says the Svosthani story was first crafted in the Newari language (Nepal Bhasa).

श्री स्वस्थानी व्रत-कथा

श्री स्वस्थानी देवी का आठ स्वरूप



अष्टासु च दलेष्वेव मातृकाष्टस्थितास्तथा ।
खड्गं त्रिशूलं चोर्ध्वञ्च अधश्चाभय मुत्पलम् ॥
चतुर्भुजा त्रिनेत्रा च सर्वालङ्कार-भूषिता ।
सुवर्णवद्विकासाभा स्वस्थानी जगदीश्वरी ॥

Source: The Svosthani Storybook By Buddhi Sagar Parajuli

श्रीस्वस्थानी देवीको आठ स्वरूप



Source: The Svosthani Storybook By Laksmi Prasad Sitaula