

Chamundi Matha – Goddess over a hill

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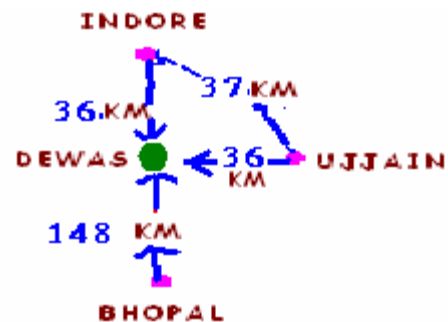
(This is an upgraded version of my original story that appeared in the August '05 issue of Om Saravana Bhava, a Tamil monthly published from Chennai)



Thulja Bhavani

Two pictures of Chamundi matha

Way to the temple



Temple

Temples built in Madhya Pradesh remain famous due to structural beauty and legends. Chamunda Devi's temple built on a tall hill in the district of Dewas which lies in between Indore, Bhopal and

Ujjain is one such beautiful temple one should see. Angered with the insult meted out by his father-in-law Dakshyan and the subsequent death of his wife Parvathi who jumped into the sacred fire, Lord Shiva carried Parvathi's corpse on his shoulders and ran around the world for days. In order to cool down the temper of Lord Shiva , Lord Vishnu threw his Chakrayuda to cut Parvathi's body into pieces, which fell at several places subsequently becoming the Sakthi Peedas. One of the fifty one Sakthi Peedas which came up is believed to be Chamunda Matha Temple in Dewas.

There is a legend on the temple. Vikramaditya was a famous King who ruled Ujjayini. His brother Bhartha Hari, a pious person went to Dewas and sat in a secluded place over the hill and meditated. He belonged to Nath community. Since he was highly learned person every one affectionately called him Nathji (Ji is normally affixed for elderly and respected persons) and visited him to pay their respect and obeisance. An Asura named Natagasura was also staying in that hill and out of jealousy he started terrorizing those who came to visit Nathji. People were afraid to climb the hill. Bharthahari knew that the hill was a Sakthi Peeda. Therefore he prayed to Goddess Parvathi to put an end to the atrocities of Natagasura and ensured that his devotees visited him without fear. When Parvathi was pleased with his prayers and appeared before him , he narrated the atrocities of the asura and requested her to kill Natagasura. Saddened to hear the plight of the devotees Parvathi took the form of Chamundi Matha and killed Natagasura . Therefore people believe that Chamunda matha resided in that hill.

The hill is over 350 feet from the sea level and houses two main devi temples, one for Thulja Bhavani and the other for Chamunda Matha who were sisters. No historical or archeological evidence is available to establish the origin of the temples built there. The image of Chamunda Devi, almost eight feet in height, holding a big sword in her right hand has been carved out in a very big rock inside a cave. The rock form part of the cave in the hill. While no one is able to tell which one of the two devis manifested first, there is a general belief that the temple might have been built by some Maratha rulers who were decedents of Chatrapathi Shivaji since Shivaji Maharaj has established a temple for Thuja Bhavani in the state of Maharashtra in India. Chatrapathi Shivaji was a Marathi, and an ardent devotee of Thulja Bhavani, and his decedent Marathas ruled the city of Dewas and nearby places.

Bhavani means the one who gives mental strength and kind hearted (In Sanskrit it is Karuna). Therefore in the twelfth century she was adored as Karunaswaroopi and worshipped by Chatrapathi Shivaji. In the year 1864 Narayana Powar, one of the decedents of Chatrapathi Shivaji, ruled Dhar, part of Malwa region which included Dewas in the then Central India. He reportedly compiled a verse in praise of Thulja Bhavani calling her Maha Kali, Maha Lakshmi, Maha Saraswathi and Triloka Sundari. Therefore it is believed that the Dhar ruler might have constructed the temple for Thulja Bhavani in the adjacent district of Dewas.

However an interesting myth attributed to the two devis is popularly accepted. Both Thulja Bhavani and Chamunda matha were sisters and initially lived together in the southern part of the hill

in a cave. Over the years on account of a trivial issue, 'Who out of the two be worshipped first by the devotees', separated the sisters to live in two caves away from each other. When the younger sister Chamunda began walking out from her elder sister Thulja Bhavani's cave, Lord Hanuman prevented her from leaving the hill with the plea that she should also continue to stay there to bless her devotees who climbed the hill to visit them. Therefore she made a tunnel in the heart of the mountain, went to the Northern side, and settled in a cave. The elder sister Thulja Bhavani however continued to remain in the cave on the Southern side. One can see the big crack behind the cave in which Thulja Bhavani stays.

The division in the sisters echoed in the family of Dewas Rulers too. The eldest of the two brothers, Thukoji Powar and his subjects started worshipping Chamunda Matha while the Younger brother Jevaji Rao and his subjects continued to worship Thulja Bhavani. Though both the rulers established two separate paths to go to the hill top and laid separate roads and drinking water facilities inside Dewas town which was of course not demarcated with separating wall to show the division, people who went to the hill top worshipped both the devis and jointly chanted 'Jai Matha Ki Jai' to show their solidarity to her.

Picking up the scattered small stones from the hill top, people make a small house like thing in blind belief that they would sooner or later build a house of their own. During nine days of Navarathri festival people from far away places throng the temple by trekking barefooted till they reach the temple. Apart from the

two devis, separate small shrines are also found for Lord Hanuman, Lord Bhairava, Annapoorni, and Kali Devi. On top of the hill is a Durgah of a Muslim Peer which is visited by the Muslim community regularly. The Jain community has also constructed a beautiful monument made of marble in the same hill.

End note: The contents of this article is based on the expressed views of the Pundits (Pujaries) and other devotees whom I met in the temple during my visits. Photos gathered from different sources. In case some one get further information in the temples they visit I shall be glad and thankful if they mail me the story in nrj1945@gmail.com so that updates in the article can be done in future.