

**The Tantric Cult of the Sixty-four Yogiṇīs and Rajpūt Warfare:
Glimpses from Pre-modern Rājasthānī Literature**



Plate 1. Sixty-four Yogiṇī Temple at Hirapur, Orissa.

The din of the battle was deafening. Many bodies rose without heads and fled at their adversaries with a rush. The bowels of the slain were scattered all around and drawn hither and thither by the greedy vultures. The wounded, made desperate by the deep scars on their bodies, began to rave. The Joginis filled their cups with blood and feasted on flesh, and the Bhairavs danced with mirth, eating the hearts of the fallen. The infidel heroes were taken to heaven by the black-eyed Houris and the Hindu by the Apsaras. The goddess Kali opened wide her jaws and laughed, grinning at the Muhammadans.... Heaps upon heaps of the slain lay scattered on the field—a dreadful spectacle!—on which vultures sat and feasted. The jackals licked the blood, and the she-devils filled their vessels, danced and sang with merriment. They wished for such another battle. They took pieces of flesh and bone into their bloody

mouths, drained their cups, sucked their clothes steeped in blood and searched for more flesh. JR, pp. 234-235.

As Norman Ziegler pointed out very well some years ago in his dissertation chapter discussing Rajpūt *dharma*, the duties of a warrior included fighting and dying before the face of one's master (*svāmī/sāmī*) and avenging one's father's murder. It is also apparent that a perceived function, if not a specified duty, of a Rajpūt warrior was the provision of heads, skulls, flesh, and corpses for yogiṇīs, dākinīs, śākiṇīs, bhairavs, and other "flesh-eating beings" (*paḷacara*) who were thought to follow Rajpūts unto the battlefield. Rajpūt martial poetry and, to a lesser extent, Rajpūt chronicles make it clear that the connection between the ancient cult of the sixty-four yogiṇīs, their fearful companions, and Rajpūts was significant in Rājasthān during the period 1500-1750. Yogiṇīs were closely connected with what Alexis Sanderson has called the "[tantric] culture of the cremation ground," but it seems evident that they also were considered participants of a sort in Rajpūt warfare. Whereas most of the research on yogiṇīs has involved the study of Sanskrit texts and the investigation of yogiṇī temples, thus far there has been little research done on the vast body of Rājasthānī and Ḍiṅgaḷ literature, both pre-modern and modern, which discusses these yogiṇīs. An exception has been the work of Janet Kamphorst, who analyzed a few Ḍiṅgaḷ verse texts and came up with some valuable insights. Unfortunately, her endeavor is at times marred by factual errors and textual misunderstandings.

In the pages that follow, I have used these texts, other Ḍiṅgaḷ documents, and some Rājasthānī prose texts to explore further the connection between the cult of the sixty-four yogiṇīs and the Rajpūts in pre-modern India. The results, though limited, may suggest a fruitful line of research for future study of this cult.

The Sixty-four Yogiṇīs

(To be continued)