
Demoness Hariti: Mythology, Art and Dissemination in South and Southeast Asia

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Abstract: This study explores the multifaceted figure of Hariti within Buddhist tradition, tracing her evolution from a child-devouring demoness to a revered mother goddess. Drawing upon a wide range of textual, artistic, and archaeological sources, the research examines Hariti's mythological narratives, iconography, and cultural significance across different regions and historical periods, with a particular focus on her assimilation into Buddhist pantheons and her role in addressing societal issues such as fertility, smallpox, and women's inclusion in religious practice. The analysis reveals Hariti's transformative journey as a reflection of Buddhism's adaptive assimilation of local deities and its broader engagement with societal dynamics, including the empowerment of marginalized groups. Ultimately, Hariti emerges as a symbol of spiritual transcendence and compassionate enlightenment, embodying the complex interplay between worldly concerns and transcendent ideals within Buddhist belief systems.

Keywords: Hariti, Buddhism, Goddess, Demoness, Fertility, Iconography, Worship

Introduction

The presence and worship of Mother Goddess figures are common in almost all religious pantheons around the world. The same is true in Buddhism, with its ever-widening and expanding pantheon assimilating and converting folk deities, minor deities and even demons within its folds. From the eighth century CE particularly, with the advent of Tantric Buddhism, the process of 'taming' of the malevolent and 'unruly' local deities within Buddhist folds, under the central theme of subjugation of evil through the practice of Buddhist ideals has been popular (Dalton, 2004). Hariti is such a figure in Buddhism.

Hariti, the mother of demons, is well-known throughout Buddhist Asia (Murray, 1981). She was initially popular as the child-devouring demoness and then through the teachings and guidance of Lord Buddha emerged as a Mother Goddess. Hariti, more popularly known as the Goddess of fecundity, is widely known for her ability to produce an abundance of offspring (or new growth) and prevention of smallpox.

Mythology of Hariti

Etymologically, the name 'Hariti' comes from 'hri' or its derivative 'har' meaning to steal or kidnap (Maheswari, 2009). Hence, Hariti stands for her appetite to steal other's children. The most popularly known mythology associated with Hariti in Buddhism is the story of her conversion from a demoness to a goddess. It is believed that in her previous birth, Hariti who was known as *Huanshi*, was pregnant and made to dance in front of people, which caused her miscarriage. This resulted in her vow to take revenge and consume the children of Rajgriha (Maheswari, 2009). In this birth as Hariti, she was the consort of Yaksha Panchika, and they had five hundred children of their own, which led her to be known as *Bhutamata*, or the mother of demons. She kept her vow of revenge and consumed the children of the villagers, thereby getting the name of Hariti (Maheswari, 2009).

It is at this juncture that Buddha, who visited the city, intervenes. Upon hearing the pleas of the villagers, on his way through the city asking for meals, Buddha stopped by Hariti's house and hid her youngest and most beloved son Pingala (also referred to as Priyankara), in his begging bowl and returned to his monastery. On her return, when Hariti did not find her youngest, she was struck with grief and while searching for him came to Lord Buddha for help. Buddha agreed to help her as long as she gave up her cannibalistic habits and showed her how the families of the devoured children would have felt at her actions. She understood her mistakes and remedied her ways, and Buddha gave Pingala back to her. At the end of this story, Hariti is also ordained into the Sangha and asks the monks to send supplies of food to her and her children. In return for the services, Yakshini Hariti and her sons were to become the custodians of Buddhist buildings (Maheswari, 2009).

There are some variations to this story in different texts. In one, Hariti has a thousand sons (Murray, 1981; Maheswari, 2009). But most texts agree that she has 500 sons (Rowan, 2002). In other versions, the name of the village, and the manner of her conversion into Buddhism are different. This has led some scholars to believe that Hariti was a folk deity (Peri, 1917), who was in time assimilated into the pantheon.

Journey from a Demoness to a Mother Goddess

Hariti represents the enduring tenacity of the Pre-Buddhist Yaksha cult. The story of Hariti occurs in detail in *Vinaya Pitaka* of the Sarvastivada school, the Mahavastu, and the Samyukta Ratna sutra of the Chinese Sutrapitaka (Shaw, 2015).

In *Vinayapitaka*, Hariti is referred to by the name of 'Hunashi' meaning joy (Maheswari, 2009). She is the consort of the chief of Kubera, Panchasika, and called the *Mahayakshini*. The *Kriyasamgrahapanjika* chronicle of Hariti too presents her as the consort. She is kept in company with her consort who is referred to as 'Raja', clearly meaning the king of Yakshas (Shaw, 2015). The fifteenth chapter of the *Suvarnaprabhavasottama sutra* (5th century CE) is called a *raksha* or protection extended to the listeners of the sutra by the Yakshas and other Buddhist deities including Hariti

and others like Chanda, Chandika, Chandalika, Danti Kuta. All these deities will convert the entire *Jambudvīpa* into a land of plenty in all respects (Maheswari, 2009).



Figure 1: Hariti, 3rd century CE, Lahore Museum (Courtesy: <https://br.pinterest.com/pin/469289223641803860/>)



Figure 2: Hariti, Peshawar Museum (Courtesy: <https://x.com/IndiaHistorypic/status/956202521852178432>)

The name Hariti acquired sanctity very early. Hiuen Tsang records that there was a stupa in honour of Hariti which is said to have been built by Asoka in Peshawar and the people there offered sacrifices to her to obtain offspring from her. The inscription of a steatite reliquary found inside an old stupa (2nd century B.C.) mentions the relic of Haritiputra, a Buddhist teacher and contemporary of Asoka. It is well known that he constructed a stupa in Peshawar (identified as the Sare-makhe-dheri in Peshawar) (Beal, 2014).

From the Gupta times onwards, she came to be regarded also as a Tantric deity with the power of healing diseases. She was identified with the Sitala personification of smallpox (Shaw, 2015). Hariti is one of the epitome figures of the Buddhist conversion narrative, through which folk deities are appropriated into the Buddhist folds. She is an example of the 'portable local' deity, who on receiving Buddha's teaching changes to benevolence and emerges anew within the Buddhist pantheon (Shaw, 2013). The Hariti Mother Sutra (the first Taisho text), instructs how to worship Hariti (Padma, 2011). The beginning of the text is Hariti herself explaining how to worship

her. She should be worshipped as per Buddhist teachings. Hariti is to be worshipped by only those women who are unable to conceive a child (Padma,2011).

Iconography and Representation of Hariti in Art

Religious text *Sadhanamala* describes Hariti as ‘*Yakshesvari* and ‘*Mahayakshini*’ and in some places as the ‘eliminator of all sins’ (Maheshwari, 2009). The *Chitrakarma* section of the *Kriyasamahgrahpanjika* mentions that Hariti should be depicted on the left side of the entrance. She should be shown in a seated posture (*lalitasana*), adorned in ornaments, with Priyankara in one hand (Shaw, 2015) (Figure 1). The ancient texts, *Sadhanamala* and *Nispannayogavali* portray Hariti as a demon goddess with powers of fertility and abundance. The *Nispannayogavali* (11-12th century CE) describes her iconography as ‘*sa-putra*’, meaning with a son (Shaw, 2015). Hariti is depicted splendidly in sculptural art between the second century BCE and to eleventh-twelfth century CE in Indian art. Her motherly images brought into Buddhist art and Buddhism overall a feminine presence and thereby widened the path to enlightenment (Shaw, 2015). The iconography for Hariti shows her standing, characteristically with at least one child in her arms. She also appears with Panchika, one of the chief ministers of Kubera the lord of the yakshas, seated side by side in a somewhat relaxed manner. Ideally, Hariti is mostly depicted with children, sometimes five in number, symbolic of five hundred (Maheshwari, 2009). In some of her iconic representations, Hariti can be seen without her children (Figure 2).



Figure 3: Hariti in Mathura, Red Sandstone, Ashmolean (Courtesy: Ashmolean Museum Online Catalogue)



Figure 4: Cave 2 Shrine of Yakshas - Simhala and Hariti, Ajanta Caves, Maharashtra (Courtesy: Robert Harding)

Within Gandharan Art

Hariti is popular in the Gandharan visual repertoire and is the single most prevalent female deity found in the archaeological evidence from the region. The depiction of

Hariti, in Buddhism started with the Kushana Empire in India. The Hariti cult seems to have been well established by the Indo-Greek and Kushan times as it is indicated by the archaeology and sculptures of this period and Hariti gained popularity as time passed (Maheswari, 2009). Hariti is depicted with child/children gathered around her and one (Pingala) is frequently shown touching her breast. She is shown often holding a cornucopia. The key part of the iconography of Hariti is a child reaching her left breast (Maheshwari, 2009). The majority of the figures of Hariti in Gandhara art have only one child but also Hariti is seen with more than one child (Zahir, 2016). One of the first portrayals of Hariti is from the Indo-Scythian level from Sirkap in Taxila Valley. This depiction was on a gold pendant dated to 1st century BCE to 1st century CE (Ward, 1954). Therefore, it may be interpreted that this depiction started in the 1st century BCE (Elgood, 2004). This depiction of Hariti is not a later concept but a very early concept in Gandhara art.

Early Indo-Greek, Indo-Scythian and Indo-Parthian coins and sculptures at Gandhara are known to have syncretic iconographies. The Greek and Roman city goddesses like Tyche and Fortuna are often represented with cornucopia, sceptre and crowns (Bellemare, 2014). Tyche is further closely associated with the Iranian goddess Ardoxsho, who in turn is linked closely with the Hindu goddess Sri Lakshmi (Maheswari, 2009). Other popular goddesses like Isis, Nana and Cybele share their traits and iconographies with the other goddesses (Bellemare, 2014). Both Tyche and Hariti, have similar iconographies and this has led scholars to argue that perhaps the iconography of Hariti is more influenced by the Greco-Buddhist traditions (Rowan 2002).

Hariti is also often portrayed with Panchika, who is one of the great generals of Kubera. They are represented as a tutelary couple, similar to that of Iranian Pharro and Ardoxsho, and Hindu Kubera and Sri Lakshmi (Bellemare, 2014). The rending of the deities with their consorts helps in the correct identification of the deities and their position in the retinue (Bellemare, 2014).

In Gandhara, no other female goddess competes with Hariti, other than Ardoxsho, who gradually merges into a singular figure. It can be assumed that the worship of Hariti in the Gandhara region, grew from that of Ardoxsho. The already well-established tradition of goddess worship and cults helped in the acceptance and assimilation of Hariti in this region. The presence of such images and rich visual vocabularies helped in making the unfamiliar identity of Hariti appear familiar to the diverse population. Buddhism, often in such a manner, united its diverse laity through familiar patterns and iconographies, that can be well accepted within and outside the Buddhist culture and society (Bellemare, 2014).

Mathura

It is important to remember that Mathura being the second capital of the Kushans provides numerous images of Hariti. In Mathura School of Art, Hariti loses her

attribute of cornucopia and wine cup (Maheshwari,2009). The cornucopia is replaced by a *bijapuraka* or pomegranate fruit. According to Maheshwari (2009), Hariti was depicted more in a sensuous and voluptuous way in the Mathuran period than in the Gandharan period. Hariti figures in the Mathuran period are barefooted (Maheshwari, 2009). Throughout the Mathuran period, Hariti is portrayed with heavy ornaments. Hariti is represented with jewellery like head ornaments, necklaces and earrings (Maheshwari,2009) (Figure 3).

One of the primary attributes of Hariti is the pomegranate. There are two symbolic meanings of the pomegranate. One is that the seeds of the pomegranate are symbolic of fertility. Two, the crimson colour of the fruit suggests her preference for human flesh, hinting at her previous identity as a child-devouring demon (Maheshwari, 2009). In the case of images with Panchika, he is depicted as being pot-bellied. Hariti is also depicted beside Siva-Mahesvara, Skanda, and some of the highest Buddhist deities (Maheshwari, 2009).

Ajanta

Although the monumental depiction of Panchika and Hariti appears in Ajanta's cave 2 towards the end of the fifth century CE, the persistence of this particular iconography is absorbed and accepted from the Gandhara region where representations devoted to the mother goddess arose during the Kushana period that shows the reformed demoness Hariti (Maheshwari, 2009) (Figure 4). Hariti is depicted at the centre of the monastic space, showcasing her complete inclusion and acceptance within the Buddhist pantheon, as 'an insider', as opposed to the 'local naga' figures who are positioned on the outskirts (Cohen, 1998). Based on this, Cohen describes Hariti as 'a kind of transplanted deity', to highlight the relation between Buddhism and local folk deities in society (Shaw, 2013).

Hariti's Shared Identities and Stories

Hariti once a malevolent ogress who demanded child sacrifices but was converted by the Buddha into a protective mother goddess, shares the imagery and attributes of several ancient mother goddesses as revealed both in texts and in her early depictions. Shaw (2015) highlights the broader cultural phenomenon within and outside Buddhism, of a single figure or idea being presented through multiple figures for its diffusion. Hariti's story can be compared with those of other Indian deities who both protect and steal children, such as Sasthi, Bhima Devi, Revati, Jara, Hyestha, Sitala and Bahuputrika.

Jara

Dr. J.N. Banerjee (1941) has pointed out some similarities between Hariti and Rakshasi Jara of Magadha. Mahabharata mentions the story of Jara, who could take multiple forms and was worshipped by the common people. She was the goddess of the household and her images were painted on the walls to gain her blessing. Those who failed to do so would be cursed with poverty (Banerjee, 1941).

Sitala

Another similar goddess is Sitala, who has a similar iconography as well. Sitala is both a malevolent and benevolent goddess and is most popularly known as the Goddess of Smallpox or the Devi of epidemics like cholera and smallpox. She is known for being both the cause and the saviour of the diseases (Shaw, 2015). Often associated with another Goddess Sasthi, they are worshipped on the sixth day after the birth of a child or the sixth day of the lunar fortnight for blessing the child with good health (Shaw, 2015).

From the Gupta times onwards, she came to be regarded also as a Tantric deity with the power of healing diseases. David Bivar (1970) drew attention to the sudden popularity of Hariti and Sitala sculptures from this period, suggesting that this coincided with the smallpox pestilence of 166 CE that spread through the Roman Empire. Several mother goddesses like Hariti are known to be associated with the disease not only because they can claim children (and others) through the disease but also because it may have been a direct causal factor for her popularity in Gandhara. According to Yijing's text as well, Hariti was the demon of sickness of smallpox (Maheshwari, 2009). According to Bivar, the Kushans were responsible for bringing smallpox to northwestern India (Bivar, 1970).



Figure 5: Mendut Candi, Java

The focus of the infection was in South Asia in the 2nd century CE, during the reign of the Kushana king Kaniska. Smallpox originated in the Han Dynasty in China and spread around the world. The worst affected were the Han Empire (China), the Roman Empire (Italy) and the Parthian Empire (Iran), as a result of the people contacting it through the silk route. Then soon the pandemic travelled to the Kushana Empire (Bivar, 1970). According to Lamotte, Hariti was a smallpox goddess in the Gandhara

region since very early times (Padma,2011). This is a sufficient cause of the expansion of Hariti. An inscription was found on a stupa dedicated to Hariti to take away smallpox into the sky (Padma,2011). He says that Hariti was worshipped as a smallpox goddess in Nepal and this belief is still held by the monks in a Hariti temple adjacent to the famous Svayambhu stupa in Kathmandu. Some smallpox goddesses are human women who have died during their pregnancy or childbirth so it is believed by the local people to make offerings to those or else they would harm their children. Therefore, it could be that Hariti was the same as according to stories in her previous life she died during pregnancy (Padma,2011).



Figure 6: Statue of Hariti at Goa Gadj, Bali (Courtesy: Geoffrey Samuel 1994)

Ambika Devi and Putna

In Jain tradition, we find Hariti being worshipped as Bahuputrika, who is the Queen of Manibhadra. In her malevolent form, she is referred to as a Putna and in her

benevolence as Ambika Devi. Ambika Devi has a similar iconography to Hariti as well, with a small child in one arm and a bijapuraka fruit or cornucopia in the other. Ambika Devi is popularly worshipped by expectant mothers as a fertility goddess who can bless them with a child (Ahuja, 2018).



Figure 7: Barong (left) and Rangda (right): Good and Evil in Balinese Mythology
(Courtesy: <https://www.thenotsoinnocentsabroad.com>)

Erukamma

Erukamma is a goddess who is known to steal children and share Hariti's iconography. In her mythology, she is decapitated by a weaver (Erukala) when she is devouring a child. The villagers afraid of her malevolence even after her death started to worship her to appease her and ask for her protection of the entire village (Padma, 2011). Like Hariti, Erukamma might have originated as a smallpox goddess, capable of devouring children through illness but with protective powers that could be invoked through appropriate propitiation. In the absence of smallpox, her protective function has now come to be extended to familial well-being, especially with her power to produce male offspring. This is probably why she is identified by devotees as a form of Parvati, who is considered an ideal wife and a mother of two sons. There is, however, evidence of amalgamation in narrative and ritual traditions associated with Erukamma, and it is precisely this amalgamation that contributes to her continuing appeal to a diverse congregation (Padma, 2011).

Southeast Asia

I-Tsing described the popularity of Hariti on his travels through the Southeast Asian kingdoms, which provided the basis for later Chinese representations of Hariti. The record can be confirmed by various historical relics of Hariti founded along maritime routes. According to Fa-hsian's record, the maritime routes from India to the Java Sea passed through Sri Lanka (named Simhala in ancient Chinese texts). This can be fully demonstrated by Buddhist remains extant in Ajanta, Sigiriya, and Borobudur (Maheswari. 2009).

Thailand

In Thailand, there is evidence of the presence of Hariti's cult from the 5th century CE to the 15th century CE. Other than these offering statues, Hariti and Panchika were represented as guardians around Buddha decorated on the walls of temples. A typical example is the reliefs in Prasat Hin Phimai, north Thailand.

Indonesia

Among the images of Hariti from Indonesia, the earliest ones were found in Central Java. The stone relief of Hariti in Candi Mendut near Borobudur can be dated back to the early 9th century CE. The image of Hariti guards the entrance to the cellar of the temple, surrounded by her children with curly hair. Opposite her is the stone brief of her partner Jambhala (Pancika) with his offspring (Maheswari, 2009) (Figure 5). On the Island of Bali, an approximately thousand-year-old sculpture of Hariti is still worshipped in the cave temple of Goa Gadia (Figure 6). She is represented as a fertility goddess with one child in her arms and other six children seated around her. The sculpture is similar to another Hariti sculpture in East Java, which is dated to around the 10th century CE. The majority of these sculptures are made out of stone or terracotta.

As Brayut

Both the personalities and identities of Hariti and Panchika have been absorbed into the Indonesian culture, and have their indigenous names of Men Brayut and Pan Brayut. They are represented as two poor parents who have eighteen infants. The term 'Brayut' rightly signifies a 'family burdened with many children', in Java. With the popularity of Buddhism, the Brayut couples were represented in Buddhist literature as Hariti and Panchika.

As Rangda

There is another Balinese mythology around the 10th-11th century CE, about Rangda, a Beyak Queen, who is similar to the personality and idea of Hariti. The story is set in Java during the reign of Airlangga, in the Kediri Kingdom. The myth mentions a wicked widow witch and black magician, called Calon Arang. The long story traces the marriage between King Airlangga and Calon Arang's daughter Ratna Manggali, and how Mpu Bahula a disciple of the King's advisor stole the magical scroll of Calon

Arang after the wedding. Without the scroll, Calon Arang was weakened and defeated by the armies of Mpu Bharadah, the advisor to King Airlangga.

Another similar story appears with the royal family of Mataram Kingdom, and the Princess of Java, Mahendradatta. She was married to King Udayana of Bali and had a son Erlangga and a daughter Ratna Menggali. Later she was abandoned by the King, for her use and knowledge of witchcraft. Unacknowledged as the Queen of Bali, she became the Queen of Demons. Meanwhile, King Udayana remarries and Erlangga does not support his mother against Udayana, betraying her trust. On the other hand, Ratna Menggali, unable to get married because of her mother's deeds, becomes her pupil and a powerful witch herself. The myth ends with the son, Erlangga fighting his mother with the aid of Barong, the King of Spirits. Toeti Heraty characterizes her as the victim of demonization within a patriarchal society, as a critic of a misogynistic culture and discrimination against women (Figure 7).

Discussion and Conclusion

Hariti represents a "whole complex of supernatural females – yaksinis, fever goddesses, demonic mothers and child seizures" (Shaw, 2015). She therefore functions as both a local and translocal deity (Shaw, 2015). Hariti is presented as an independent cult, standing or sitting, by Yijing (Rowan, 2002). She is easily identified by the child sitting on her lap or climbing her shoulders (Rowan, 2002). Elaborating on Cohen's (1998) interpretation of Hariti as a 'transplanted deity', it can be added that she provides a perfect view of Buddhism's mechanisms of assimilating and adopting local deities within its folds and creating narratives to placate the newly encountered entities within its pantheon and narrative (Cohen, 1998). This reaction and interaction of Buddhism with the regional, local deities, helps in understanding the reciprocal relationship that doctrinal Buddhism has with its sangha. The presence of multiple iconographies of Hariti represents this relationship between the deity and her devotees (Rowan, 2002).

Furthermore, in contrast to the canonical representation of Hariti as a child-devouring demoness, artistically she is only represented as a beautiful mother goddess. This is most likely because the artists were more familiar with her identity as a fertility deity and versed in the iconography of a mother goddess, while the texts emphasised her original identity as a demoness and her conversion into a goddess by Buddha's intervention (Padma, 2011). Most scholars stress more on the role of the texts and philosophy in contrast to the archaeological records. The continuous processes of interaction, negotiation and assimilation, between the sangha, the laity, and the doctrines are highlighted in the inclusion of Hariti and her prominent worships within the monastic folds. The adoption of local deities makes Buddhism and its doctrines more relevant to the local communities and thereby attracts more disciples and donors. Although the transformation of spirit-deities into Buddhist devotees was an intentional process conducted through textual, ritual and artistic activity, the relationship between the laity and monastic community was probably far more fluid than traditionally

thought by scholars. This process of domestication and adoption helps explain how Hariti came to enter the Buddhist pantheon and also highlights through her unusual popularity in the sculptural and architectural remains of Gandhara, the preceding practices.

The transformation and introduction of the figure of Hariti in Buddhism is in tandem with a much larger transformation and development within the pantheon. Hariti addresses the importance and popularity of fertility cults and mother-goddess worship within the society, and through her, Buddhism addresses the soteriological question of women and their ability to receive Buddha's teachings. She adds to the Buddhist iconography and repository, the figure of a nurturing mother, and a protector, thereby broadening its appeal and acceptance for the laity. As one of the few feminine presenters initially, she made the androgynous pantheon soft and austere, while at the same time, upholding the powerful narrative of conversion and transformation in canonical Buddhism (Shaw, 2015). Her emergence as an independent and powerful deity of worship testifies to Buddhism's method of addressing the overarching presence and practice of goddess-worshipping traditions in Indian society.

It is important to understand as well that Hariti worship is an important aspect of understanding the relationship between the sangha and the women in society. By introducing a mother-goddess figure, and a narrative of conversion, Hariti welcomes the idea of women practitioners and their conversion and inclusion into the sangha. However, studies show that this development only invited certain sections of women in society, specifically the marginalised and ostracised communities of women. The women who were performing duties such as birth attendants, midwives, healers, caretakers, medicine makers, etc were treated as pollutants and evil in society because of their access to niche knowledge. Particularly, women working to take care of patients suffering from smallpox and other pregnancy and childbirth-related ailments were often accused of witchcraft, black magic and being demons. It was commonly believed that women were vulnerable to being attacked by female demons especially when they were pregnant and young. Due to a lack of medical knowledge and access to facilities, often miscarriages were blamed on the work of demons or possessions. And thus the idea of folk deities who were malevolent and powerful beings, came to be worshipped for being both the cause and protector of the diseases and mishaps. And it was these female practitioners and ostracised victims of society, who first became the devotees of goddesses like Hariti and Sitala, and were later assimilated within Buddhism, irrespective of their low caste status and the 'polluting' works they performed. Hariti's popularity and wider acceptance into society helped to provide these groups of women with an identity and acknowledgement. As Iltis puts it, Hariti would be understood as the deity of the subaltern and marginalised and not just as a local deity being transformed into a mainstream mother goddess (Iltis, 2002).

The Buddhist notion of impermanence empowers individuals to transcend the concept of enduring suffering and adopt a lifestyle centred around alleviating their own and

others' pain. It allows individuals to uplift themselves. The emphasis is on individual responsibility, irrespective of gender, with Buddhism advocating 'right action'. However, recent scholarly perspectives that categorize women and marginalized groups as 'subaltern' or 'peripheral,' and view goddesses as 'wild' or 'untamed,' seem to exclude them from being recognized as positive actors. Instead, these individuals are marginalized or relegated to the status of 'vassals,' subjected to ongoing oppression. Such interpretations take away from their roles and narratives as contributors to society and individuals.

Hariti and her devotees played a role in the growth of the devotional cult within Buddhism. Within the broader context of Mahayana Buddhism, which aims for salvation through good karma and guiding others compassionately towards Nirvana, Hariti stands out as a deity—as a figure of a mortal Arhant. She symbolizes spiritual fulfilment while embodying maternal and nurturing qualities and at the same time being engaged in worldly affairs. Through her inner transformation and the divine grace of the Buddha, she successfully overcame her demonic tendencies, ultimately attaining enlightenment and salvation.

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