

Title of Thesis

**Mahavidya Tara and Sadhaka Bamkhepa (1830's?-1911) of Tarapeeth:  
A Study Tracing History of the Tantric Cult in Modern Bengal**

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**Summary**

This thesis traces the development of sacred pilgrim sites associated with the famous goddess cult of Tara in the cultural region of Bengal in the modern period meaning 19th and 20th centuries. The study situates the worship of Tara with the general idea of the *Shakti pithas*. Focusing on the religious tradition of Tara worship in Birbhum, the study analyses various historical moments which formed the catalyst for the evolution and development of Tara worship in modern Bengal, especially with the personality and contribution of one of the most famous *sadhakas* of Tarapitha, Bamakhyapa. The thesis analyses the complex relationship between historical processes, mythical contexts, priestly tradition and religious iconography and attempts to demonstrate the ways in which a *Shakti pitha* has evolved and attributed sanctity to a place with the construction of a temple. The significant aspect of the study is that *Shakti pithas* associated with goddess Tara in Birbhum in Bengal and Mahishi in Bihar selected for analysis are not listed in any of the several normative texts. Yet the sakta-tantric goddess cult of Tara became popular in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and remain so till day. The study is divided into five chapters and of a regional/micro history kind.