

Wadgalaji, Healing Thru Waste

Wadgalaji, also known as Wadgalama, Mariware, is, up to now, an unknown goddess in the worldwide academic scholarship.

The goddess is thought to protect the villages from “infectious” diseases such as smallpox, and also seems invested with some other functions not entirely identified yet.

To request intervention, people from the Scheduled Castes make offerings with old, used, and extremely varied objects (that look like a pile of junk on first glance when seen from a distance), placed at the side of the road adjoining the border of the village.



But, on taking a closer look, it is possible to see a rough *murti* that depicts the goddess



Periodically these objects are moved to the border of another village where they stay for an unknown period. This happens for every subsequent shift as well, where a special *puja* is done on the occasion of their movement across to the border of the next village.

The current research focuses on the temporality and geography of how Wadgalaji is relocated and repositioned vis-à-vis boundaries, periodicity, carriers, procession, puja, arrangements. On her overall functions and their range (with special incidence on the therapeutic ones), on the typology of the offers, of the worship, and of those making these offerings, on her “genealogy” and on the environment that provides her emergence.

To unveil the full amplitude and grounding of the Wadgalaji occurrence is bound to need an exceptionally long-term fieldwork not only because of the scarcity and obscurity of direct available information, but also because of the haphazard periodicity of the displacements, where crucial moments of interaction between her and the devotees, are then “charged” with her *shakti*.

In the meanwhile the purpose of the next field trip is to gather audio and video material (photos, films and interviews) to be treated as epistemological units in order to back and build a visual narrative capable to prompt a kaleidoscope of the Wadgalaji world.