

The goddess Parvati is worshiped in the Hindu tradition for her affection and beauty. Her name denotes “she who dwells in the mountains.” (Kinsley 41). Parvati is one of the many consorts of Siva, a powerful Hindu god who resides in the mountains. There are many different identities depicted of the goddess. People who view Parvati as the auspicious goddess, call her “Sarvamanagala” (Smith 50). Parvati is also represented as “Ambika”, which refers to her role as a mother, and as “Girija”, the daughter of the Himalayan mountain deity. She is also referred to as Kali, a goddess who is known as “the dark one”. This is because Parvati has a dark complexion (Kinsley 42). As well as the diverse names that describe Parvati, there are many songs, stories, stone carvings, and Pahadi paintings of the goddess.

The mythology of Parvati is largely based on her relationship with Siva. Her association with Siva is described as essential in order for cosmic reproduction to occur, which entails the preservation of the world (Kinsley 41). Sanskritic manifestations derive from the Vedas, which are developed in the Puranas. Dravidian manifestations draw from Tamil country origins, which describe distinct characteristics of the mythology of Parvati. Lastly, autochthonous tradition, also known as the folk tradition, includes legends and folk stories about Parvati (Dehejia 12). Although diverse, together, these traditions formulate a good interpretation of the goddess and describe Parvati as a “dedicated and loving wife.” (Dehejia 39).

In the Sanskritic tradition, as described in the Puranas, Parvati is a reincarnation of Sati (Kinsley 37). The goddess Sati was the first wife of Siva who takes her own life in a *yajna* sacrifice. The gods were concerned with Siva’s state of isolation from others. Thus, they felt that Parvati was destined to marry Siva (Dehejia 16). Himalaya, the father of Parvati, stated that in order for Parvati to become the wife of Siva, she must complete penance. However, Parvati had difficulty performing penance which led to her father asking Kama, the God of love, for

assistance. Kama shot arrows at Siva, which in return, angered him. Siva burned Kama to ashes and this deeply hurt Parvati. Parvati escaped to the mountains where she performed austerities (Dehejia 19). These austerities were so frequent and intense that Siva became allured by Parvati's physical appearance. The marriage of Siva and Parvati is subsequently arranged. Their marriage and family status is described as peaceful and pleasant. Siva and Parvati spent their time sitting on Mount Kailasa, while conversing about Hindu philosophy and engaging in sexual activity (289). However, there were times when the marriage was a challenging endeavor. Parvati and Siva would quarrel and offend each other. At times, Siva behaved so poorly that Parvati would leave him. Siva would often make comments about Parvati's dark skin, and gave her the nickname "blackie". Parvati removed herself from the household and settled in the forest, where she performed austerities (Kinsley 44). The legend, the *Varaha Purana*, states that the *devi* did this until Brahma granted her wish of changing her complexion from dark to golden.

Regarding the family life of Parvati and Siva, Parvati wanted and eventually gained a son to protect her from intruders coming into her apartment (Kinsley 44). At one point, however, her son would not let Siva enter the apartment. This angered Siva, who spoke of the lack of auspiciousness in Saturn, which led to the beheading of the child. The child's head was later replaced with the head of an elephant and was named Ganesha. Parvati had two more children, Kartikaya and Andhaka. In the Sanskrit tradition, Parvati is described as being a devoted wife and mother to her sons (Dehejia 25).

Parvati, in the Tamil tradition, is similar to the Sanskrit tradition because it places an emphasis on the bond between Parvati and Siva. In the 4th century, the Tamil region was ruled by Jains, and the Hindu tradition arose in the 5th century (Dehejia 26). This mythology is largely derived from the *Silappadikaram* and *Manimekalai* epics from Sangam literature. Like the

Sanskritic tradition, the marriage between Siva and Parvati is an important component in both traditions; however, Tamil mythology is mainly based on Parvati and her manifestations. In the Sanskrit tradition, Siva is characterized as being a powerful figure and Parvati is known as his loyal consort (Dehejia 28). In the Tamil tradition, Parvati has a split personality. There is the southern goddess, who is depicted as being dark and violent, and then there is the northern version of the *devi*, who is romantic and quiet (Dehejia 34).

The folk tradition includes the *adivasis* group. This tradition includes characteristics of Sanskrit and Tamil, but still possesses some differences. For example, instead of worshipping one particular god, the folk worship Parvati as a mixture of the 4 other consorts of Siva. Thus, the folk tradition views one goddess as having many notable features, such as affection, power, and beauty. According to the folk tradition, Khandoba and his consort Mahalsa are the equivalent to Siva and Parvati in the Sanskrit tradition. Khandoba is a deity known as the “killer of demons” and like Siva, this god is associated with the mountains (Dehejia 35). Mahalsa is a reincarnation of Mohini, whom Khandoba was deeply drawn to.

Parvati is adored by painters, poets, and musicians for her divine beauty. The goddess is worshiped in images both with and without Siva (Smith 52). Literature such as the Puranas is known to be one of the earliest and most popular depictions of Parvati. In this script, her life and relationship to Siva are expressed (Dehejia 43). The poet Kalidasa wrote *Kumarasambhava*, which describes the alluring *devi*. Along with literature, there are many songs written about Parvati that are mainly sung by women (Dehejia 57). Many women sing about the time in her life when the goddess left the home she was born in to her home in Kailasa. Along with literature and songs written about Parvati, there are also many images depicted of the goddess that are highly valued pieces of work. Temple images of Parvati and her consort Siva are worshipped

four times a day (Smith 51). There exists special festivals in honor of Parvati. For example, in a temple once a year, the marriage of Siva and Parvati is re-enacted (Smith 52). The most popular marriage re-enactment occurs during the Caitra month (April-May). Another festival that honors the goddess occurs throughout nine days. This gathering, known as Navaratri, occurs in Asvayuja (October-November), and is said to be “her” time (Smith 51).

There are various images depicted of Parvati. Many images express the bond between Parvati and Siva. Some icons portray Siva as the possessor of Sakti (cosmic power), known as *saktiman* and Parvati as Sakti. One well known image of Parvati and Siva is the Ardhanarisvara. This image was developed in the 10th century and is made of sandstone (Dehejia 73). It depicts a half male and half female being, which accentuates the interdependent relationship between the goddess and her consort (Kinsley 50). Another icon of Parvati and Siva is known as the Wedding of Siva and Parvati, which was created in the 17th century and is made of ivory (Dehejia 82). In the image, Parvati is offering her right hand to Siva during their wedding ceremony. This icon represents the feelings of bliss and anticipation that were experienced during this festive day. Along with the many images depicted of Parvati and her unification with Siva, other illustrations relate to stories and songs in the Puranas, the Hindu culture, and other festivals and rituals (Dehejia 62).

Although Parvati has little responsibilities as a goddess, she has gained respect and adoration throughout India. The *devi* is a devoted mother and wife. She is worshiped for her exquisite charm and the love she shares with others (Kinsley 41). Thus, Parvati deserves recognition for representing all that beautiful, both physically and spiritually.

REFERENCES AND FURTHER RECOMMENDED READING

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- <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parvati>
- <http://www.exoticindiaart.com/article/parvati/>
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- <http://www.goddessgift.com/goddess-myths/hindu-goddess-parvati.htm>
- <http://www.kamat.com/kalranga/hindu/uma.htm>

<http://www.nationmaster.com/encyclopedia/Parvati>

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