

Siva has been recognized as an omnipotent creator deity, the Lord of the Dance, a deity of destruction and the maintainer of the universe. Part of the Hindu trinity, Siva is accompanied by Brahma and Visnu; however, Siva's true devotees view him as the supreme Lord who creates, maintains and destroys the cosmos (Flood 150). Siva "...contains all opposites within him and is even described as being half male and half female (*ardhanarisvara*)" (Flood 151). An example of these opposing virtues is that he is the destroyer and the regenerator of life, he is also claimed to be a great ascetic but also the symbol of sensuality (Ghosh 17). Siva's physical appearance is rather interesting, his naked body is smeared with ash, and he is usually depicted with four arms. Siva's nudity is particularly important because it exposes the *linga*. Many sages were upset by this exposure and spoke words that made Siva's *linga* fall to the ground. Consequently, the three worlds were dishevelled, until Devi took the form of the *yoni* to hold the *linga*. Siva has three eyes, two eyes which witness the past, present, and future; the third eye, the inner eye, "...is responsible for higher perception, turning transcendental" (Ghosh 18). This eye is believed to have been the result of Parvati carelessly covering Siva's two eyes. Siva wears a garland of skulls and necklace of snakes; this combined with the ashes on his forehead and body, represent detachment (Merchant 1). Siva is known to hold a trident in his hand; this trident represents the Hindu trinity. It also represents the nature of each person (creation, preservation, and destruction) (Ghosh 19). Matted hair and a crescent moon on his head top off the appearance of Siva, the crescent moon is said to represent perfect mind control (Ghosh 18). Siva possesses characteristics of three gods: Rudra, Indra, and Agni. Rudra is the god of destruction, and it is that destructive aspect which Siva takes on from Rudra. Siva is sometimes referred to as Rudra in the Puranas. Indra passes on to Siva "his phallic and adulterous character" (O'Flaherty 83). A

similar characteristic between Indra and Siva is that they both have three eyes. From Agni, the God of fire, stems the intensity of asceticism and passion (O'Flaherty 83). He is worshipped and iconographically depicted typically in four main forms. The first depiction, The Lord of Yoga, touches on the appearance previously discussed as he mediates atop Mount Kailasa (or Kailash) in the Himalayas. The second depicts Siva as family oriented, with Pavarti and their two sons at his side. Siva's third form is represented as a *linga* and the last depiction is of Siva Nataraja, the Lord of Dance (Flood 151).

In western society Nataraja is the best known form of Siva. Nataraja translates to 'King of Dancers'. "Nataraja dances, his right foot supported by a crouching figure, his left foot elegantly raised. Of his four arms, one swings downwards, pointing to the raised foot; another with palm held up signals, 'Do not Fear!' In his other hands he holds aloft a drum and a flame. The river Ganga sits in his hair. A cobra uncoils from his lower right forearm, and the crescent moon and a skull are on his crest. He dances within an arch of flames." (Smith 1) This dance is the Dance of Bliss (*anandatandava*). This dance is of particular importance to Siva devotees because it is viewed as eternal, that is, having no beginning or end (Smith 1). The Cidambaram temple is considered by some the most important of all Siva temples. Cidambaram is said to be where the dance originated. Other temples dedicated to Siva always have a Nataraja shrine, or image next to the Siva *linga* shrine (Smith 1). It is said that Nataraja's left foot is raised so those can bow before it, he grants all wishes, and is said to free one from rebirth if worshipped (Smith 2).

Parvati is Siva's wife and the mother of his sons Ganesa and Skanda. Siva did not want a son nor did he need one as he never dies. Despite Siva's opposition, Parvati insisted on having a child, explaining that she would take care of the son and Siva could be a yogi as he wished. This

desperation further complicated Siva's roles as an ascetic and householder, conflicting roles which some say make Siva a poor husband (O'Flaherty 211). Siva did not give into Parvati's demands; however *Ganesa* was born from the unnaturally shed seed of the yogi (O'Flaherty 212). Parvati and Siva's relationship is often contrasted to that of Rama and Sita in the *Ramayana* (Caughran 514). Rama and Sita are known for their love and devotion to one another, a mutual respect. Parvati, on the other hand commonly interrupts Siva's meditation, she also argues and mocks him; however, Siva does not kill her as promised, though he does occasionally abandon her (O'Flaherty 211). Parvati questioned why she loved such an unusual god, one who indulged in activities that may repulse some such as the consumption of hemp. However, despite this, she not only loves him she is obsessed with him (O'Flaherty 236). As previously stated, Siva and Parvati's dysfunctional marriage is often compared with Rama and Sita's marriage. Siva and Parvati, however, allow one to reconsider Rama and Sita's marriage as being ideal. The renowned quarrels between Siva and Parvati may enhance their sexual relationship, and their distance from one another can also be seen as strengthening their love (O'Flaherty 233).

Saivism is a faith based on the teachings of Siva; followers worship Siva or sometimes his consort Sakti. It was in India and Europe that symbols pertinent to Saivism first appeared. Symbols included the bull, the phallus, the ram, the snake and the Lady of the Mountains (Danielou 32). Although there was a wide spread of these symbols across the Asia and Persia, India is the only place to maintain traditions of Saivism. There are six branches of Saivism: Kalamukhas, Kapalikas, Kashmiri Saivism, Pasupata Cult, Saivasiddhanta, and Virasaivism (Ghosh 73). Kalamukhas and Kapalikas worship the destructiveness of Siva; they are known for their odd cult practice which is thought to draw on the descriptions of Rudra. They wore garlands made of human skulls, and their practices of cannibalism horrified some (Ghosh 75). The

Kalamukhas were powerful during 700 AD – 1200 AD, and the Kapalikas during the seventh century. The opposite of the previous two branches Kashmir Saivism was Saivism at its finest. Its followers are monotheistic, viewing Lord Siva as the supreme and only reality. This branch is credited with being very scientific and logical (Ghosh 75). The fourth branch is the Pasupata Cult which state Siva “is without beginning or *anadi*, and cause of creation, sustenance, and dissolution of the world. He is both transcendent as well as immanent” (Ghosh 77). Saivasiddhanta is similar to the Pasupata Cult in regards to philosophy; the only difference is that the Pasupata Cult accepts thirty-six basic principles of the evolution of the world whereas Saivasiddhanta accepts only twenty-five. The last branch, Virasaivism, is characterized by its emphasis on the worship of Siva Linga (Ghosh 78). “*Lingayata* signifies the religion that considers the *linga* as the prime support or basis” (Ghosh 78).

Siva is without a doubt one of the main components of the Hindu tradition. He is a very complex god, exemplified by his multitude of forms. One main form of particular importance is the Nataraja, the dancing Siva. His struggle between asceticism and householder, resulting in conflicting values, furthers this complexion. His wife Parvati is completely in love with Siva, but this does not stop him from abandoning her occasionally in his pursuit of becoming a yogi. A highly developed creed developed around Siva, and cumulated in the monotheistic worship of Siva as the High God. Siva has been everlastingly worshipped and will continue to be worshipped by many.

REFERENCES AND FURTHER RECOMMENDED READING

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<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shiva>

<http://www.templenet.com/beliefs/allaboutshiva.htm>

<http://www.pantheon.org/articles/s/shiva.html>

<http://www.lotussculpture.com/sival.htm>

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