

Siva and Kali

(Myths of the Pair)

There are many different deities that can be found in the Hindu tradition, two of which are Siva and Kali. This article will be focusing on these two gods through the discussion of different myths associated with them, primarily dealing with those myths that associate the two of them together. Before getting into the different myths, it may be beneficial to first introduce these two gods a little further. This will provide a better understanding of the various characteristics that are associated with each of the gods, which will be beneficial in the discussion of the different myths presented later in the article.

Siva, whose name when translated means “auspicious”, is primarily identified as the supreme ascetic, or *yogi*. He is depicted with long matted hair that is often tied up in a topknot. He has bracelets of snakes, a trident, and is usually riding a bull (Nandi). Siva is known as “the destroyer,” who is responsible for destroying the cosmos at the end of time. He is also known as “the creator,” who through his ascetic practices stores up his seed, the source of all creation, and is often depicted with an erect phallus known as the *linga*, which is one of the most worshipped symbols in Hindu practice (Rodrigues 296-297). An interesting aspect of Siva is that his persona is often described as embodying a bipolar character (Rodrigues 296). On one hand, Siva is the ideal ascetic (*yogi*) spending all of his time in meditation generating knowledge, and storing his seed preventing creation, while on the other hand he is described as extremely erotic by nature. Stories

found in the Puranas associate Siva with Parvati and provide evidence to his erotic nature. Another interesting note is that Siva has also been described as being confused, or torn, between these two different aspects, at times trying to understand why Parvati appeals to him since he is such a perfect ascetic (O'Flaherty 4-7).

Kali, whose name can be translated to mean "dark time," symbolizes the destruction that time brings to all things (Rodrigues 319-320). She is described as being dark skinned and wild looking, with her tongue sticking out. She is usually naked wearing only a belt of severed arms, a necklace of human heads, serpent bracelets, and the bodies of children as earrings. She is frequently found on a battlefield with weapons and a severed head in her hands, usually drunk on the blood of her enemies, and engaged in a furious rampage (McDermott and Kripal 26). The origin of Kali varies in different myths, some of which will be discussed later. Many of the myths involve her being brought into being during times of battle, which result from the transformation of different female goddesses such as Durga, Parvati, Sati, and Sita (McDermott and Kripal 24-26).

There are many different myths in Hinduism that show an association between the two deities, Siva and Kali. The exact degree of this association is under debate, with many claims identifying Kali as a consort of Siva (McDermott and Kripal 23). One story supporting the consort theory can be found in the *Mahabhagavata Purana*. In this story Kali and Sati are identified as the same being. Kali, as the Great Goddess, creates Brahma, Visnu, and Siva. They are then each required to fulfill a test for the honor to win her as their wife. For this test she appears before them in a horrible form that actually made Brahma, and Visnu both turn away from fear. Siva, being the only one

that did not turn away, won the right to marry her after her birth as Sati, the daughter of Daksa (McDermott and Kripal 47).

Another story that supports the consort theory of Kali and Siva involves the creation, and death of Ganesa. Ganesa was created as a son to Siva and Durga, while Siva was away. Because Siva was gone, Durga ordered Ganesa to guard the door while she took a bath. When Siva came back he discovered this young man guarding his door. Siva was not aware that this young man was his son, as he had been away at the time of Ganesa's creation. After trying to get into the house, and being stopped by Ganesa, Siva chopped off the head of Ganesa (which the gods later replaced with an elephant's head in an attempt to calm Durga). Upon discovering what had happened to her son, and after being unable to find Ganesa's head, Durga became enraged, turning black. She then started to kill men, and drink their blood, and the gods started to call her Kali Ma (McDaniel 236-237).

As is shown by the story of Ganesa, many of the stories about the origins of Kali actually have her being created through the anger, or grief of other goddesses. The goddesses, through their emotions (usually anger), are transformed into Kali. Another example, also involving Durga, occurs during the battle with the demon Mahisasura. Durga was created by the gods to destroy Mahisasura who, due to a boon given to him by the gods, would only be able to be killed by a naked female. Durga had gone into the battle without knowing this condition. Eventually she was notified of this boon, and after stripping noticed that Mahisasura would stare at her *yoni*, providing her the opportunity to finally defeat him. After Durga had destroyed Mahisasura, she became so embarrassed and enraged by this boon the demon had, that she turned into Kali and set about trying to

destroy the world. Kali (Durga) felt that a world with such gods should not be in existence. The gods then, out of fear, turned to the ascetic Siva to try to calm her down. Siva, seeing the world was in danger, lay down in front of Kali, so that while she was dancing in her fit of destruction she would step on him. The moment Kali stepped on Siva she stopped her dance out of shame and embarrassment for having stepped on her husband, and turned back into Durga (McDermott and Kripal 84-85). Another interpretation of this story actually suggests that Siva was sent to have sex with Kali to calm her down. By her dancing on top of him, his *linga* actually entered her, and she stopped her dance of destruction calming down and turning back into Durga (McDaniel 238).

The *Linga-purana* portrays Kali as a result of the transformation of Parvati. In this story Parvati is summoned to destroy Daruka as he, like the demon Mahisasura, can only be destroyed by a female. Parvati then enters into Siva's body, transforming herself from the poison in his throat, into the blackened, bloodthirsty goddess Kali. Once she has transformed, and with the help of some flesh eating spirits (*pisacas*), she is then able to destroy Daruka, and his army. Following the battle, Kali then becomes enraged and more bloodthirsty, threatening to destroy the world prematurely, until Siva again comes along, and is able to calm her down (McDermott and Kripal 25)

As most of the stories seem to indicate, in many situations involving Siva and Kali, Siva appears to play a large role in the calming, and controlling Kali. Kali is usually portrayed as a bloodthirsty goddess who is often found on a battlefield in some kind of rampage. Kali's behavior is also often described as erratic, causing her to be easily angered. Siva has been known to use different techniques to control Kali,

including the laying in front of her after the battle with Mahisasura. During another similar rampage, Siva appeared on the battlefield as an infant, and is able to calm Kali by drawing out her motherly emotions (McDermott and Kripal 36). In another story Kali and Siva engage in a dance contest in the forest (Smith 145). In this story, Kali, having just defeated Sumbha and Nisumbha, takes up residence in a forest and begins to terrorize its inhabitants. One of these inhabitants is a devotee of Siva, and goes to him for help in ridding the forest of Kali. When Siva shows up he challenges Kali to a dance contest, which he eventually wins by performing his *tandava* dance (McDermott and Kripal 26).

As mentioned before, Siva always takes the role of calming Kali, not the other way around. Some stories, however, indicate that Kali is rather successful at bringing out the wild and destructive side of Siva as well. They both are said to feed off one another's destructive tendencies, which often result in frenzied dances, threatening to destroy the cosmos. One such instance is told in Bhavabhuti's *Malatimadhava*, where Siva and Kali are found dancing madly around Kali's temple, with the destructive nature of the dance frightening all those present, including the goddess Parvati (McDermott and Kripal 26).

The question of who is dominant in the relationship seems to be a major topic of debate in the Hindu tradition. Images that portray the two together almost always show a naked Kali on top of Siva either engaging in sex in the "reverse position," where the female is on top, or just with Kali standing on top of Siva, like in the story of the defeat of Mahisasura (though some argue that the image does not actually represent the location of a battlefield, but actually occurs on a mountaintop). There are also arguments as to whether it was actually Siva's idea to lie in front of Kali, or if Kali had actually been able to throw him to the ground during his attempt to stop her rampage (McDermott and

Kripal 82-85). Kali is also shown to be sticking her tongue out which has been widely interpreted as representing her embarrassment and shame (*lajya*) for stepping on her husband. Another interpretation of the image is that Kali is shown dancing on the corpse of the world at the end of time, which is symbolized by her dancing on Siva who is responsible for the destruction of the cosmos (McDaniel 242-243). The *Mahabhagavata* tells a different story where Siva, after having forgotten that his wife Sita was the Supreme Goddess (Kali), sees her transformed appearing as Kali, and asks for the boon to always appear at her feet as a corpse as a sign of devotion (McDermott and Kripal 49-50). Many also identify the image as portraying the relationship between *purusa* and *prakrti*, where Siva is the inert *purusa*, and Kali represents the creative and active aspect of *prakrti* (McDermott and Kripal 53).

There are many different stories and images that include Siva and Kali. As should have been made evident in this article, there is also a lot of controversy over the interpretation of these many sources. These interpretations, especially those dealing with the proposed dominance of one god over the other, seem to depend largely on the degree to which each god is being worshipped. Those that focus their worship on Siva, such as many ascetics do, would argue that he is above Kali on the hierarchy, which would be in contrast to those worshiping Kali, or that of the divine female power (McDermott and Kripal 86).

References and Further Recommended Reading

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Related Topics for Further Investigation

Kali

Siva

Sati

Sita

Ravana

Deviahatmya

Durga

Parvati

Ganesa

Daruka

Camunda

Linga-purana

Mahabhagavata

Canda

Munda

Raktabija

Sumbha

Nisumbha

Daksa

Candika

Noteworthy Websites

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

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

<http://www.goddess.ws/kali.html>

<http://www.kriyayoga.org/devi/Kali100.jpeg>

<http://www.mahavidya.ca/>

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