

## The Dark Goddess of Time : Kaali

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### **Abstract**

Hindu mythology portrays Kali as the ruler of time which is the essence of all existence similar to the elixir of life. Along with Lord Shiva the destroyer, goddess Kaali rules over the realms of death, evolution and power. Kali has various manifestations and different authors have interpreted her presence in different ways. She is the frightening warrior who slays the demons but she is also the mother who protects her children. Her dark colour emphasis her power and her lolling tongue her valour. She is the epitome of modern femininity, untamed and at times raw.

**Keywords** –Ruler of Time, elixir of life, destructor, Mother and Modern femininity.

### **Introduction**

According to Hindu mythology Kali is considered as the Goddess of time, death, change, creation, destruction and power. Kali is portrayed as being fierce, queen of the battles, chopping off demons heads and a benevolent mother. The male gods will be rendered inanimate without the presence of goddess Kali. Kali represents the cycle of time commencing from the stillness of cosmic void. The name Kali means ‘she who is death/ the force of the time’.

Goddess Kali is referred as the un-bodied flow of the energy of Lord Shiva's demolishing forces. Goddess Kali and Lord Shiva represent the dualistic and exuberance nature of the world. Kali is the epitome of the universal power. The name Kali is also derived from the word kaal meaning time. She holds the time which devours all existence; she is the power of time and eternity. She indicates the mortality of all things; that is why she wears a garland of skulls. Yet she also has the supreme transforming power of time, which transcends devotees from death to immortality. Along with endless time, Kali is also unbound space and the limitless void. Kali cannot exist without Shiva and Shiva cannot be ecstatic without Kali. It is believed that Kali is the expression of Shiva's energy and power.

According to poet, Rachel Fell Mc. Dermott Shiva is portrayed as:

“the devotee who falls at Kali's feet in devotion, in the surrender of his ego or in hope of gaining moksh by her touch”. (*Encountering Kali: In the Margins, at the Center, in the West, p.55*)

Her unbound energy transforms devotee's deepest darkness to their highest light.

### **The Origins and Representation of Goddess Kali**

Goddess Kali represents the energy form which can germinate and spring within the devotee's. The earliest appearances of Kali have emerged from Lord Shiva. She is the prime source of energy (*shakti*) and the divine mother of all living beings and creatures. She is worshipped as the divine protector to attain moksh or liberation. Kali is said to be the form of *Parvati*, the one who have the supreme powers and therefore she is also called as *Adi-shakti*. She symbolises the energy of Shiva. It is believed that two demons name Chanda and Munda were killed by Kali according to mythology. When demons Chanda and Munda attacked

goddess Durga, she became furious and her rage turned her dark. She transformed herself into a dark blue colour and immediately defeated the demons. This incarnation of Durga is known as Kali

Hindu mythology tells about the importance of her tongue in a famous story of battle between Kali and demon Raktabija. The incidence goes like; the blasphemy by the demons reached to the ears of the Trinity God; *Lord Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva*. They all became angry, Lord Vishnu emitted terrible light from his forehead, Lord Shiva and Indra also confluences the powerful divine light in the same line as Vishnu. It is believed that, when the terrible light and powerful rays of all the gods collided at a point, it took the shape of a woman. Lord Shiva formed her face, her arms were formed by Vishnu and Yama formed her unbound hairs. The light of the Moon formed the breast of the goddess, Varun and Indra shaped her waist and thighs, Brahma gave the feet to her and Earth formed her hips. The three fearful eyes were formed by the light of fire god, Agni. She was then adorned by different weapons by god like sharp trident by Shiva, Indra presented her a thunderbolt and discus was provided by Vishnu. The beaming ray on her body was given by Sun god. The goddess formed was mighty and powerful. She was welcomed by a sound of conch. The frightening laugh of goddess was enough to wreck the nerves of entire creation of demons and she went to battlefield.

According to the boon, if a single drop of blood of Raktabija touched the ground it will act like a seed to generate duplicates of the demon. Goddess Durga transformed herself into Chandi, she rode upon tiger and then she transformed herself from Chandi to Kali with her out stretched tongue. Kali struck each head of the demon Raktabija and drank the blood of the demon before it can fall on the ground and eventually killed and defeated the demon and then she made the garland of demons many heads and worn that as her adornments.

There is also a belief that tells how Parvati became Kali. It was the time when goddess Parvati, who is represented as a very calm, blissful, balanced, tender and motherly woman asked her son Ganesh to be gateman for her, unless she returns back from taking shower. Like an obedient son, Lord Ganesh did not allow anyone to enter the chamber of his mother, but the entire scenario changed when Lord of the Lords, Shiva tried to cross the line drawn by Ganesh. Lord Ganesh even refused Lord Shiva which made Shiva angry and he chopped the head of Lord Ganesha; ignorant of the fact that Ganesh is his own son created by goddess Parvati. When Goddess Parvati saw the condition of her son she became so furious and her anger turned boundless, the beaming resplendent Gauri (Parvati) howled like anything and threatened the gods and from here it is believed that Gauri turned herself into Kali. The story has a symbolic concept also.

Here, Lord Ganesha is symbolic of human minds. He represents the reasoning capability of human minds. Goddess Parvati represents the nature (Prakriti), who is reasoned, domesticated and submissive. Whereas, Lord Shiva is the representation of *purusha*, the human consciousness. It is inferred that when someone works without human consciousness or thinking capability over the nature, one day nature also settles the scores by destroying humans in any form of calamity. One should not behead the reasoning and should work in synchronisation with the nature, causing no harm to it.

The representation of Kali in Hindu mythology is in contrast to the typical picture of Hindu women. Kali is not portrayed as polite, gentle, and bashful; rather she is portrayed as very fierce and dreadful goddess. She is the one with dark colour, wearing a garland of human head with red eyes symbolising anger. Her hair is always shown unkempt and her torn tongue lolling always. In some pictures or idols she is portrayed as one with four arms and in others as ten arms, named as Mahakali.

Mahakali is the feminine form of Mahakal. It is believed that the Lord of death lives in the south direction (dakshin), even he is terrified from Goddess Kali. So devotees of Kali worship goddess to be fearless and to overcome all mishaps.

The greater form of Kali; Dakshina Kali where dakshina means a gift given with the right hand to the priest who performs any ritual or it is also offered to one's teacher. Dakshina Kali is very famous in West Bengal. She is considered to be a tender hearted goddess, who protects her children from all the misfortunes. The two right hands of goddess Dakshina Kali symbolises the gesture of blessing to his devotees. Dakshina Kali is portrayed with her right foot on the body of Lord Shiva. Some depictions also narrates about VamaKali, the form of Kali in which she is keeping her left foot on Lord Shiva's chest, which looks more fearsome. The non householders usually worship Vamakali.

There is a popular story regarding, why Lord Shiva has to lay down before Goddess Kali. When goddess killed the demons and was rampaging with anger, other god became fearful, even Lord Vishnu tried to stop her and calm her down but unable to do so before the great power of the Kali. She kept on destroying everything which was coming her way. Then Lord Shiva came as a saviour and lay down before her to prevent everyone from the endless destruction. When Kali realised and saw her husband underneath her foot, she was filled with grief for the destruction and also felt that she had gone too far in her anger streak.

Another form of goddess Kali is called *Samhar Kali*, who is considered to be as most powerful and dangerous of all, she is the embodiment of energy and power that can cause extreme destruction. According to the tantrik text she is believed to be the chief goddess of *tantra* (black magic). When Kali is portrayed with her left foot out she is called Samhar Kali. According to *Mahakal Samhita*, Samhar Kali stands on a corpse and in her two armed who is

holding an amputated head and a vessel to store the fresh dripping blood. *Samhar Kali* is popularly worshipped by the followers of tantra.

Around 500 CE, tantrik litterature also started flourishing, which was more interested in alchemy. In tantrik literature, we find goddess like Chamunda, Kali, Chhinnmastika, Tara and Kamakhya. In *purans*, all these goddesses are mentioned, who are associated with *tantra vidya*, which enroutes to the face of sex, violence and un-natural phenomenon. The Other forms of Kali are Bhadrakali, Raksha Kali, Shyam Kali, Kalasankarshini Kali, Siddhi Kali, Smashana Kali, Guhya Kali, Adhravan Bhadrakali, Adya Kali, Sparshmani Kali, Chintamani Kali, Santati Kali, Kamakala Kali and Hamsa. One of the mantra which is chanted to worship Kali is:

*“om jayanti mangala kali bhadrakali kapalini durga kshama shiva dhatri swaha swadha namostute”.*

Author *Elizabeth U. Harding* states:

She is all beauty, this woman nude, terrible and black, who tells the name of god on the skulls of the dead, who creates the bloodshed on which demons fatten, who slays rejoicing and repents not, and blesses him only that lies crushed beneath her feet. Her mass of black hair flows behind her like the wind, or like time, "the drift and passage of things." But to the great third eye even time is one, and that one, God. She is blue almost to blackness, like a mighty shadow, and bare like the dread realities of life and death. (*Kali, The Black Goddess of Dakshineshwar, p.52*)

## Attributes of Kaali

Mythological writer *Devdutt Pattanaik*, says there is something about Kali's tongue that disturbs the viewer, it is a symbol of power or a symbol of shame, wonders writer. He explains it is observed that there are many goddesses like Kali, who are associated with death, anger and blood and are even represented in naked form including Bhairavi, Chamunda, Bhagavathi & Chandi but none of them outstretched their tongue. Also sometimes it is observed that Kali has fangs fulminating from the corners of her mouth. This type of Representation is commonly found in Southern India.

Further, Devdutt Pattanaik tells:

“A Kali without a tongue is called Bhadrakali or the decent Kali who does not reject feminine grace totally. She resides in household shrines and serves as the guardian of family”. (*Times of India, Dec-12, 2011 Ed.*)

Pattanaik finds Kali's tongue sticking out as an expression of embarrassment, when she even not recognises her own husband before her bloodlust. Indeed, this is symbolic to patriarchal interpretation that fashioned in the 19th century. The tongue of Kali is always smeared with blood, which is again a reminder that Mother Nature gives life as well as takes life if not handled properly. Pattanaik says that:

"Kali teases and mocks her devotees, she sees through their social facade and knows the dark desire they try so hard to deny or suppress. She provokes them to delve into their consciousness and confront all those memories they shy away from" (*Times of India, Dec-12, 2011 Ed.*)

Her outstretched tongue, her wildness, anger, nakedness and also the way she is holding a severed head of a demon in one hand and a sword on the other does not represent her as a demon but a victorious warrior goddess, who does not even mind drinking blood to become saviour for all. She is frightening for demons and vulnerable for child like creatures.

The strange part with these fierce attributes is that still she is worshipped as a mother goddess. Since antiquity, the concept and practice of worshipping Kali as divine mother is extant. With her special manifestations she was the Mother of the Virtuous as well as the wicked.

The Goddess Shakti (Durga/ Kali) is worshipped in nine forms. The auspicious time of navratri is widely celebrated particularly in India, which refers about the nine nights leading to vijaydashmi. In navratri devotees worship the nine forms of the Goddess Durga. The nine forms are Shailputri, Brahmacharini, Chandraghanta, Kushmanda, Skandamata, Kaatyayani, Kaalratri, Mahagauri and Siddhidatri. These nine forms represent the nine phases of the life of goddess Durga, Shakti or Kali.

Shailputri is the first stage of goddess Shakti. Shailputri means the daughter of the mountains, who decides to marry the hermit, Shiva. Brahmacharini is her Second form in which she represents herself as a hermit, doing penance like Shiva, but soon she also realised that the creation will be stopped if everyone becomes a hermit. When Lord Shiva agrees to become a householder from a hermit, goddess then takes her third form and becomes Chandraghanta. She becomes Kushmanda gently aroused and radiant like sun in the presence of Shiva. When she becomes mother of *Skand*, she is called as Skanda Mata. The sixth Form of goddess is called as Katyayani, who transforms herself as a warrior and killed Mahishasur. Kaalratri is her seventh name which represents very fierce form. She is the darkest form of all the



goddess. Then she became Mahagauri the eighth form of Goddess Durga, who turned herself very domesticated and calm. She becomes annapurna for her family. Then she reaches to the ultimate role of her life in the final form of Siddhidatri. This is the ninth form of goddess Shakti, who has completed her work and takes half of Shiva's body. This is her highest achievement to complete Shiva by connecting him to the worldly life and explaining him his value and purpose of the life.

The divine mother's magic is ancient as life itself. She exists before gods and mortals and she will exist even after the great dissolution. Mother is pure energy in subtle form, but in times of need or just out of the desire to play, she manifests. Goddess Kali also restates the protecting power of very conventional mother of a Hindu household. From The Spiritual aspect also, women is always considered as mother. In Hindu mythology mother holds the supreme respect.

The Kamakhya temple in Assam is one of the most famous shrines of Kali. It is believed that Sati's organ fell there. The temple is also associated with the tantrik Puja. It is believed that the Goddess undergoes the menstruation cycle in the month of July and August, when the water is seen red in Kamakhya Temple; a great ceremony takes place and this red water becomes symbolic of the menstrual blood of Kali. Historically, great people had believed in the power of the mother. They admit that mother goddess is the supreme force of the universe. The very famous and ardent devotees of goddess Kali are *Sri Aurobindo*, *Ramkrishna Paramhans*, *Maa Sharda*, *Swami Vivekananda* and many more.

### **Devotees of Kaali**

*Shri Ramkrishna Paramhans* is considered as one of the greatest devotees of goddess Kali. He was the priest in the Dakshineswar temple of Kolkata also. He was deeply devoted in the

service of goddess Kali. Although he married *Sharda Moni* (Sharda ma) at the age of 23, but soon he realised the truth of his life and took sanyas. He also regarded his wife as an incarnation of divine mother, addressing her as Sree Maa.

*Swami Vivekananda*, one of the greatest thinker who narrated Hinduism and the message of Supreme Vedant in Chicago's Parliament. The very high minded *Swami Vivekananda* acknowledges mother Kali and expressed his emotions and inner passion for her. In conversation with a group of people, his talk was transcribed like this:

Mother is the first manifestation of power and is considered a higher ideal than Father. The name of mother brings the idea of Shakti, Divine Energy and Omnipotence; the baby believes its mother to be all-powerful, able to do anything. The Divine Mother is the Kundalini sleeping in us; without worshipping her we can never know ourselves. All-merciful, all-powerful, omnipresent—these are attributes of the Divine Mother. She is the sum total of the energy in the universe. Every manifestation of power in the universe is Mother. She is life, she is intelligence, she is love. She is in the universe, yet separate from it. She is a Person and can be seen and known—as Sri Ramakrishna saw and knew her. Established in the idea of Mother, we can do anything. She quickly answers prayer. (*Kali, The Black Goddess of Dakshineswar, p.18*)

*Shri Ram Krishna* also said about the black colour of Kali,

You see her as black because you are far away from her. Go near and you will find her devoid of all colours. The water of a lake appears black from a distance. Go near and take the water in your hand, and you will see that it has

no colour at all. Similarly, the sky looks blue from a distance. But look at the atmosphere near you; it has no colour. The nearer you come to God, the more you will realize that He has neither name nor form. If you move away from the Divine Mother, you will find her blue, like the grass-flower. Is Shyama male or female? A man once saw the image of the Divine Mother wearing a sacred thread. He said to the worshipper: “What? You have put the sacred thread around the Mother’s neck!” The worshipper said: “Brother, I see that you have truly known the Mother. But I have not yet been able to find out whether She is male or female; that is why I have put the sacred thread on her image. (*Kali, The Black Goddess of Dakshineswar, p.62*)

*Krishnananda Agam Vagisha*, was a popular Bengali leader of the 17th century who has written *Tantrasara*. He was the one who attributed in the popularity of Dakshina Kali. He also took his worship of Kali from the cremation grounds to a domestic setting. *Krishnananda Vagisha* was also the teacher of the very famous poet *Ramprasad Sen* who was also the ardent follower of goddess Kali.

## Conclusion

Goddess Kali is summarized as source of germination for birth and re-birth, she is goddess of dynamic power of change, death, the fury of battle, purification and detoxification, anger, fierce love and ecstasy. She is recognized in outbursts of ecstasy, lightning storms and battlefields. She is invoked for awakening the inner energy for transformation and attaining enlightenment and emancipation from bondage of life and death.

Kali is both frightening and awe inspiring. She is beautiful in a different way, which is not pretty in any way. She is neither shallow nor organisable and not even agreeable, unlike Lord

Shiva she is also careless about being liked or not, rather she loves to be wild. She is independent, courageous and ecstatic. As a female, Kali has the power of creation also. She is the expression of the nature. Kali represents the female domination in mythology. The image of Kali stomping upon Lord Shiva narrates the power of the feminity. All these traits of Kali make her feminist icon of the contemporary era. She possesses the complexities and challenges time and live with her own conditions and most importantly unbounded from any cultural limitation. Kali represent the untamed and raw form of female.

All gods and goddesses are some highest form of infinite energy source-o for their devotees. Devotees identify and associate themselves with the respective energy form they relate with and need for certain aspects of their life. Kali is the manifestation of fiercest form of energy which is not for everyone to imbue. The power to imbibe the unbound energy associated with the goddess Kali can only be done by devotees who can cope and survive with the verve.

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